The juxtaposition of agentic and communal behaviours of women leaders

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ABSTRACT

There have been significant strides made in the representation of women in the workplace globally and within South Africa, however the representation of women at senior management levels remains a concern. Role congruency theory posits that women in senior management are unfavourably judged owing to the incongruence between the communal role of women versus the agentic role of a leader. Academic literature on role congruency theory has predominantly focused on the barriers to female advancement into leadership roles. Furthermore, these studies have predominantly focused on Western societies. Thus, there is a gap in the literature in terms of exploring the behaviours that aid women leaders in their career advancement in a non-Western society, namely South Africa.

Owing to the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology was used. The sample is made up of 18 women leaders currently at a senior management level in a diverse set of industries and roles. Each female leader was interviewed to explore which agentic, communal, and blending of the two behaviours they used to advance to senior management. The results show that women predominantly lead with communal behaviours, however there were a few who lead with agentic behaviours. The five most commonly occurring behaviours in order were competence (agentic), empathy (communal), connection (communal), assertiveness (agentic) and care (communal). In addition, all leaders in the sample utilised a combination of agentic and communal behaviours made up as follows: balance between communal and agentic; flex between communal and agentic; communal to agentic; and agentic to communal. Critical to their career advancement were a combination of organisational and individual enablers.

This research found that female leaders are indeed blending communion and agency to advance their careers. They do still articulate the gendered expectations exists; however, these are overcome with the use of organisational and individual enablers.

KEYWORDS:

Role congruency theory, agency, communion, female leadership

ACRONYMS

RCT - Role Congruency Theory, EE - Employment Equity, EAP - Economically Active Population, GLOBE - Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness

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 Philosophy in Change Leadership 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: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The gender gap in leadership is an ongoing concern both within the business world and from a role congruency theory perspective. While there has been significant advancement in female representation within the workforce, the slow transformation at leadership levels is an ongoing concern. There has been significant academic research on female representation, but these have predominantly focused on the barrier's female leaders face. There is an opportunity to explore how some women have succeeded in reaching high leadership levels within the organisation, with a specific view on what behaviours they have utilised to advance specifically from middle to senior management. Owing to the myriad of behaviours, this research seeks to focus on agency and communion. The remainder of this chapter sets out to define these terms and sketch the background to the research problem. It also provides insights on both the practical and theoretical aims of this research alongside the need to explore this specifically within the South African context.

1.1 Background to the research problem

Gender gaps within the workforce have improved over time, however, there continues to be an under-representation of women leaders at senior levels within organisations (Giacomin et al., 2022; Offermann et al., 2020). Structural barriers, socio-economic factors and social gender expectations continue to impact the persistence of the gender gap and impede the career advancement of female leaders (World Economic Forum, 2022). Of the 146 countries included in the 17th edition of the gender gap report, no country has achieved full gender parity. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the time horizon to full gender parity increasing from 100 years in the 2020 edition to 131 years in the 2023 edition (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 5).

Bailey et al. (2019) recognise that men have significantly more social power than women and this is seen in their control of media, prominence as authoritative figures and having on average higher salaries than women who perform the same tasks. Even with these barriers, women have made significant strides in joining the workforce and ascending to leadership positions. However, gender parity and representation remain a challenge that organisations grapple with (Ely & Padavic, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023). An ongoing concern for organisations is the retention and advancement of women leaders, especially at the upper echelons of the organisation (Ely & Padavic, 2020). Within the global workforce female participation rates have fallen to under 47% while male participation rates are at 72% (Hougaard et al., 2022).

A report by the Peterson Institute for International Economics found that female leaders bring diverse expertise and perspectives to an organisation. In addition, there is a 6% increase in profits in organisations that have at least 30% female executives and higher margins when top management has female representation (Franczak & Margolis, 2022). Considering that female leaders drive better job performance and team engagement, so resulting in better company financial performance owing to enhanced engagement and productivity, the retention and advancement of women leaders are business critical (Franczak & Margolis, 2022; Hougaard et al., 2022).

Women have been shown to have a positive impact on change management as they foster psychological safety, team cohesion and cooperation even in large, diverse teams and settings (Franczak & Margolis, 2022). Improving the global gender gap not only impacts the outcomes for women but also benefits economies and societies by increasing innovation, growth, and resilience (World Economic Forum, 2023). Broader than the financial impact, Saadia Zahidi, the managing director of the World Economic Forum, called for accelerating gender parity as the "halt in progress towards parity is a catastrophe for the future of our economies, societies, and communities" (World Economic Forum, 2022, p. 4).

1.2 Context: global gender gap

The Global Gender Gap Index framework assesses the gender gap across four components (World Economic Forum, 2023). The two lowest rated index are economic participation and political empowerment, followed by educational attainment and the health and survival components (World Economic Forum, 2023). The 2023 gender gap report notes that it will take 169 years to close the economic participation and opportunity gender gap, 162 years to close the political empowerment gender gap and 16 years to close the educational attainment gap (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 6). Globally, significant progress has been made on constitutional provisions for gender equality, specifically laws that prohibit discrimination against women, noting that it will take 286 years to close gaps in global legal frameworks (United Nations, 2022).

Women make up only one in every three managerial or supervisory roles (United Nations, 2022). The gender gap is expected to widen for 114 countries in comparison to 2019 owing to women's overrepresentation in informal employment and service-type industries, which were the hardest hit industries during and post the pandemic (United Nations, 2015). Female labour-force participation rate has shown a modest recovery as seen in the 2023 report, moving up 1% to 64% (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 7). It is 5% lower than the peak of 2009 and

remains the second lowest rate since inception of the gender parity report, this decline is compounded by the higher unemployment rates for women (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 7). Another contributor to this uplift is four out of five jobs created for women are in the informal economy versus the ratio for men, which is two out of every three jobs (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 7). Even with the constitutional protections, upticks in employment and at the current rate of change, it will take 140 years to achieve gender parity at managerial and supervisory levels (United Nations, 2022).

The overarching gender gap is slightly less pronounced within Sub-Saharan Africa, where it is projected that it will take 102 years to close the gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 24). South Africa is ranked 88th in the sub-indicator of legislators, senior officials and managers (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 327). Within the sub-index of income parity, Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest income parity at 23% (p. 11). However, it is faring well in terms of economic participation and opportunity at 7.4% above the global average of 60.3% (p. 18). Narrowing this lens even further, South Africa is ranked 81st in economic participation and opportunity parity factors (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 327) up from 92nd in 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2022, p. 15).

Women leadership has been increasing since the inception of the gender gap report in 2016 and this is more prominent in organisations with higher female representation. However, there remains an imbalance between the genders, even more so when one applies the lens of legislators, senior officials and managers. The headwinds of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as economic and geopolitical crises - further places strain on the equal representation of women at leadership positions (World Economic Forum, 2023). The gaps in parity, social and economic pressures represent an opportunity for organisations to address how they support and accelerate women in achieving leadership positions both for the betterment of society and business performance (World Economic Forum, 2023).

1.3   Context: South African gender gap

The 23rd Commission for Employment Equity (EE) annual report from the Department of Labour elucidates the need for further research on female representation at leadership levels. The report highlights the continued underrepresentation of females especially at more senior EE occupational levels when compared to the economically active population (EAP) by gender (Department of Labour, 2023). 'EAP' is defined by Statistics South Africa as people within South Africa between the ages of 15 to 64 years old that are employed or unemployed but seeking employment (Department of Labour, 2023). Statistics South Africa (2022, as cited in

Department of Labour, 2023), notes that women make up 45.4% of the EAP (p. 31), however, at the national level - both top and senior management levels - female representation is 26.5% (p. 38) and 37.2% (p. 43). Resulting in a gap between actual female representation and EAP of 18.9% and 8.3% respectively. When focusing specifically on the private sector, at top and senior management levels female representation, is 25.3% (p. 39) and 35.8% (p. 45) , which is 20.0% and 9.5% less than the EAP as well as the professionally qualified level at 42.4% (p. 50) is 2.9% below EAP (Department of Labour, 2023). The imbalance in female representation at a leadership level, as articulated by the World Economic Forum, is mirrored in the South African EE reports. South Africa has an imparity score of 0.787, placing it as the third highest Sub-Saharan country for gender parity and 20th globally (World Economic Forum, 2023, p. 327).

Within the South African context, legislation like the Employment Equity Act of 1998 has been acknowledged as bolstering female representation within organisations, and specifically within leadership roles (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Chinyamurindi, 2016). Even with these changes, women still have less political power and control over their future careers when compared to their male counterparts (Jansen Van Rensburg, 2021). It is, however, acknowledged that female representation remains a going concern and that gender discrimination because of gender stereotypes continues to persist. This adversely impacts women leaders in their career advancement to leadership positions (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Chinyamurindi (2016) and Wanasika et al. (2011) notes that the majority of management theories are based on economic classical sociology, centring on elite white cis-gender males, which often excludes the richness of regional and cultural differences inherent in developing nations and the socio-cultural norms of non-white indigenous people (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017).

South Africa as a region has the added challenges of socio-political complexities owing to tribalism, colonisation, and apartheid which not only impacts the perception of women but also impacts social interactions (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022; Wanasika et al., 2011) . These in turn impact how individuals show up, their inherent identity, and group dynamics (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022; Wanasika et al., 2011). South Africa therefore has the complexity of status and power being originally attributed to age, wealth, and gender pre-colonisation (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022); ethnic rivalries, race, and gender post-colonisation and during apartheid. Post-democracy there continues to be an assortment of factors impacting status and leadership (Wanasika et al., 2011). In the practical sense, views from the 2022 and 2023 gender gap report released by the World Economic Forum, the 2022 UN sustainable development goal

gender snapshot and the 2022 Employment Equity results from the Department of Labour support the need for further research to aid in the advancement of women in management levels within organisations.

1.3.1   Context: South Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa historical context

As the behaviour of female leaders are influenced by the context in which they operate, it is important to understand the specific context of the research population. The varied contexts result in varied and unique challenges being faced by leaders across different geographical spaces. Pre-colonisation, Sub-Saharan Africa was made up of nomadic hunter-gather tribes based predominantly on cooperation (Wanasika et al., 2011). This shifted to hierarchical paternalistic tribes where age, wealth and gender were key tenants of power. Wanasika et al. (2011) credits that power was passed on through the fraternal lineage and age was linked to seniority owing to accumulated wisdom.

In 1910, the Union of South Africa was created, and the pro-Afrikaner National Party (NP) was voted in power in 1948 using the ideology of apartheid (Republic of South Africa: Government Communication and Information System, 2022). The NP introduced more authoritarian and separatist policies which segregated the country across racial and tribal lines where white people were considered the superior race (Bell et al., 2022; Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021). Apartheid (1948-1994) relegated white women to second-class citizens and people of colour - irrespective of gender - below them with African black women being the lowest status group in terms of gender and race (Chinyamurindi, 2016; Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021). This created a system where only white men were able to be leaders while it relegated white women to more feminine-associated careers like nursing and teaching. Unskilled labour was predominately for people of colour with black workers being given the most arduous and dangerous jobs. In the 1980s, owing to international pressure and large-scale national protests, the apartheid government introduced liberal reforms to its policy with the eventual dissolution of apartheid policies and in April 1994 South Africa had its first democratic elections (Republic of South Africa: Government Communication and Information System, 2022).

Post-1994, the government introduced a number of legislative measures to address the institutionalised discrimination of previously disadvantaged groups (Chinyamurindi, 2016; Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021). This included the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, the Labour Relations Act of 1995, and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021).These Acts promote equality in the workplace by advocating for the appointment and promotion of previously disadvantaged groups, promoting

the fair treatment of employees' rights as well as identifying basic conditions of employment to ensure the workplace rights for all employees and employers. These legislative changes have resulted in a number of positive changes. As more women joined the workplace there was an increase in the percentage of females at various levels within organisations. However, female representation is still below the 45.4% EAP (Department of Labour, 2023, p. 31).

Culture is socially constructed and consists of a number of elements, including demographic characteristics, nationality, ethnicity, and status. This results in individuals experiencing the world differently based on their cultural landscape (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). The authors further support the notion that culture both influences leader behaviour and explains leadership behaviours. Where women lack status or do not fit the image of what a leader looks like, they are unfairly biased and face more obstacles than their male counterparts (Wanasika et al., 2011).

In an ethnographic study by Bachnik et al. (2023) it is stated that "South African workplaces require women leaders to challenge patriarchal systems and foster pluralistic leadership cultures that embrace transformation" (Barkhuizen et al., 2022, p. 2). Similar to countries like the Unites States and United Kingdom, South Africa has a history of legitimising the oppression people based on their race and gender together with uplifting the masculine and white narrative (Bachnik et al., 2023; Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Bosak et al., 2018). Thus, this raises the question of whether the experience for women leaders is different in South Africa.

1.4 *Research problem*

There has been extensive research done on the lack of women in leadership across the years, however, these have mostly focused on the barriers to female ascent to top leadership roles (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018; Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022). Within the literature, specifically gender leadership studies, barriers to female career advancement have been well documented under terminology like the glass ceiling, glass cliff, and glass labyrinth (Esposito, 2021; Kulich et al., 2021). Even with the expansive research on female leadership, there continues to be a skewed representation of women in leadership positions when compared to men (Auster & Prasad, 2016; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in further declines in female representation at leadership level. In fact, women in senior management are one of the groups facing the largest negative impact post-pandemic (Franczak & Margolis, 2022). Koburtay et al. (2019) notes that globally there has been an increase in the number of suitably qualified women, however they remain

under-employed in comparison to their male counterparts. Owing to the lack of congruity between the gendered expectations of women and the role expectations of leaders there are notably fewer senior managers who are women than the South Africa EAP (Del Carmen Triana et al., 2024). This raises the question as to how female leaders best equip themselves to attain senior leadership positions.

There are structural, psychological, cultural, and societal barriers to women's career advancement (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023; Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). Factors including the gendered nature of organisations (Bachnik et al., 2023; Rucker et al., 2018), gender power disparity between men and women (Bailey et al., 2019) and local issues, including nationalism as well as self and social identities (Pereira & Malik, 2018). Specifically looking at the societal and psychological lens the notion of how one judges others is considered. Social judgements are impacted by "two independent superordinate factors of personality", namely agency and communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, p. 752). The latter includes attributes of warmth, nurturing, honesty, morality, cooperation, and kindness, while the former includes the attributes of competence, dominance, ambition, efficiency, and self-confidence (Fiske, 2018; Schock et al., 2019).

Agency is viewed as a self-focused trait with the aim of facilitating individualised goals while communion is viewed as others-orientated, focused on fostering a sense of kinship and being a part of a group (Formanowicz et al., 2023). These superordinate attributes of agency and communion impact how people assess and engage individuals and groups (Hsu et al., 2021). As a product of social perception, genders are assumed either to be stereotypically agentic (male) or communal (female). In addition, positions within an organisation like a leader are perceived to be more agentic (Bosak et al., 2018; Hsu et al., 2021). Women taking on leadership roles thus have had to manage the disconnect between the social expectation of their gender and the social masculine perception of leadership (Bosak et al., 2018; Schock et al., 2019). Female leaders thus have had to engage on two extremes of the agency and communion continuum - on one end the societal expectations of being a woman (communion) and the other the expectations of a leader (agency).

A 28-year quasi-longitudinal study on leadership paths for women within North America showed that only agentic orientation was positively correlated with the women in the sample group reaching senior positions within their field (Offermann et al., 2020). Barkhuizen et al. (2022) researched the barriers that female leaders in South Africa face when attempting to ascend to senior leadership. They asked, "What is the prevalence?", "What types of career

obstacles?" and "How can females successfully navigate their career advancement?" (p. 2) within the emerging market context.

The study by Barkhuizen et al. (2022) focuses on a number of barriers experienced, similar to the longitudinal study by Offermann et al. (2020) but with a sample size of nine. It primarily included black African participants. Offermann et al. (2020) expressed that understanding how some women have been able to overcome the glass labyrinth to achieve top leadership positions in the organisation could serve as a guide for other organisations to achieve better female representation. They further propose that this will aid in understanding how organisations can better enable the development of women.

This support similar calls for further research on the career stories and experiences of women who have been able to achieve career advancement and career success in the upper echelons of corporate and entrepreneurial ventures (Bowles, 2012). The author articulates this as an opportunity for theory development. Zheng, Surgevil, et al. (2018) explore the manner in which female top executives in egalitarian countries have used the inherent tensions and disparities in agency – as well as communion - to carry out leadership tasks. The research concentrated on their crucible experiences across various industries of three developed nations: the United States of America, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

1.4.1   Research theoretical problem

The relevance of this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to role incongruency theory with a specific focus on career advancement of women from middle to senior management within the confines of South Africa a developing nation. This focus is supported by Zheng, Surgevil et al. (2018) who articulates the need for future research to hone-in on the agency-communion behavioural mix for women leaders in general and, more specifically, their call for additional research across other cultures. Furthermore, this research shifts the perspective on female leaders' career advancements from a deficient mindset to one of opportunity as past literature within South Africa on agentic and communal behaviours has predominantly focused on the barriers to career advancement (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

1.4.2   Research practical problem

Female leaders have been shown to have a positive effect on company financial performance (Franczak & Margolis, 2022) as they foster psychological safety (Franczak & Margolis, 2022) and empathetic leaders have a positive impact on change management (Arghode et al., 2022). There is thus a need, from a business perspective, to enhance the representation of women

at a senior management level. In addition, global gender parity benefits economies and societies by increasing innovation, growth, and resilience (World Economic Forum, 2023). An understanding of the behaviours practised by women who advance their careers will help organisations better tailor development programmes for female leaders.

In addition to this imbalance, the literature has predominantly centred around developed nations namely North America and Europe (Auster & Prasad, 2016). As such there is an ongoing need to provide the perspective of the emerging markets (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Bosak et al., 2018). Titi Amayah and Haque (2017) note that the literature on non-Western women leaders is scant and even more so when looking at Africa specifically. This lack of literature is of concern as noted by Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) since unequal and equal societies tend to have different normative behaviours and distinct social norms thus making it crucial to understand the normative differences in different societies. This is especially true when researching behaviours and attitudes (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022).

Leadership is impacted by organisational outcomes, which can - and are - impacted by national and cultural differences (Chinyamurindi, 2016; Pereira & Malik, 2018). Furthermore, authors like Chinyamurindi (2016), Eagly et al. (2020), and Hsu et al. (2021) support the call to ensure that the country-level dynamics are considered as their findings show that high country-level gender occupational segregation increases the gender gap in communion. Apart from these gaps shown in the literature, there are also further calls for research that applies a non-Western perspective on female career advancement. *Therefore, there are still pertinent questions regarding the agency and communion behaviours in career advancement of women leaders in an emerging market context.*

1.5 The research aims and boundaries

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of women leaders' communion and agency in their career advancement within for-profit organisations in South Africa. In other words, to understand how women leaders manage the paradoxical nature between agency and communion in their career development and - more specifically – the role each played in their career advancement.

The research seeks to explore the enablers that assist female leaders in advancing to senior management. The elements of barriers related to work-life balance, sexism and other related matters will not be investigated. This research does not look to address the complexity of sex, the biological identifier of male and female, versus gender as the social construct nor does it

aim to address the spectrum nature of gender identity including non-binary or transgender women (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019).

1.6   Research questions

The research topic concerns agentic and communal attributes, which are inclusive of competency and warmth, as well as how the two have been used to aid female leaders to address the biases and barriers to career advancement from middle to senior management. The aim is to explore how women leaders manage the incongruency between socially acceptable female behavioural expectations of communion and the socially expected inherent agentic male traits of leadership.

The literature notes that agency is required to progress as this requires the display of competence and the ability to take charge, both of which are perceived as markers of leadership potential (Schock et al., 2019). Yet a leader needs to drive and motivate the masses and manage the interpersonal demands of peers, requiring a more communal (other-focused) approach (Koburtay et al., 2019). In addition, Cuddy et al. (2011) note that the warmth associated with communion and competence associated with agency judgements are ubiquitous stereotypes that are based on several factors. One of these factors is gender that influences how people are judged – specifically those who are perceived to have high competence and warmth experience active facilitation while those with perceived low competence and low warmth are met with active harm.

1.7   Research purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the impact of communion and agency on the career advancement of female leaders within for-profit organisations in South Africa. Moreover, the aim is to extend the research done by Barkhuizen et al. (2022) offering a more diverse perspective across racial lines, industries, and provinces. This research paper aims to add to the literature on career advancement, female leadership, and agentic and communal behaviour within the context of an emerging market, with a specific focus on enhancing the bridge between middle to senior management. As noted across a number of change literature, leadership with an organisation can drive or limit change. Where there is diversity there tends to be opportunity for discussion and varied perspective enabling change to take on a more strategic platform (Cortis et al., 2022; McLaughlin et al., 2018).

1.8 Conclusion

Female representation at senior leadership levels has an impact that exceeds the boundaries of the organisation. The need to ensure adequate representation of women at senior management is critical for the pipeline to top management and for the overall well-being of the organisation. To understand the impact fully, this research paper first provides a review of the academic literature, it then details the research question and methodology before providing the findings and providing discussion between the findings and literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduced the concept of the leadership gender gap, identifying both the global and local challenges along with business and academic need. This chapter uses role congruency theory as the theoretical base to provide insights into the stereotypical gendered expectation of a women versus the gendered expectations of a leader together with the impact on women's career advancement to senior management. To address the research aim, Role Congruency Theory (RCT) is used to aid in understanding the incongruency between what is socially accepted as female traits and behaviours versus the socially accepted traits and behaviours of a leader.

The literature review provides clarity on the key concepts of RCT, specifically the communal expectations for women and agentic expectations of leaders, resulting in the incongruence between the female gender and the role of leader impacting the advancement of women to senior management roles. It further reviews RCT at the societal and cultural level, organisational and individual level. This chapter ends off with the need for female leaders to manage the tension between agency and communion. It provides a view on the impact of time on leadership and gender expectations.

2.2 Role Congruency Theory (RCT)

RCT posits that groups and individuals are more favourably judged where the behaviours they display are aligned with the social norms of their social group and adversely judged where there is a lack of alignment (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Griffiths et al., 2019). In essence women are judged more favourably when their behaviours are consistent with the societal expectations for them to be communal (Bosak et al., 2018; Giacomin et al., 2022; van Gils et al., 2018). Furthermore, they face prejudice when displaying the agentic trait of a leader that is a behaviour more commonly associated with masculinity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Griffiths et al., 2019; Koburtay et al., 2019) Stereotypes are the enduring beliefs about the behaviours, attributes, and characteristic of a group, e.g. women, resulting in a variety of cognitive and motivational processes and outcomes (Kossek et al., 2017). Thus, the prejudice that female leaders face is because of the stereotypical expectation that social perceivers have of women (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Koburtay et al., 2019)

RCT is an extension of the social role theory that categorises groups' stereotypical traits and behaviours to the typical roles taken on by their members (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koburtay et al., 2019). The gendered aspects of Social Role Theory posits that a combination of biological

and social factors impact the role that men and women have, resulting in sex-typical social roles (Croft et al., 2021; Eckes, 2002; Schock et al., 2019).

Women who have the ability to reproduce and nourish life have been viewed as communal which is associated with friendliness, caring, trustworthiness, expressiveness, empathy, morality, warmth, and being sensitive (Abele et al., 2020; Cuddy et al., 2011; Eckes, 2002). Men generally have a larger physical size and strength associated with instrumentality, assertiveness, intelligence, power, efficacy, competence, and goal attainment (Abele et al., 2020; Cuddy et al., 2011). Communal behaviours are associated with getting along and collectivism while agentic behaviours are associated with getting ahead and individualism (Abele et al., 2020; Bosak et al., 2018; Cuddy et al., 2011). As such, owing to the injunctive behavioural norms men are viewed as the financial provider and protector and - by default - leaders (Bosak et al., 2018).

Gender roles are socially shared views and expectations of the attributes of men and women. This includes both descriptive norms, namely the norms of what is done and injunctive norms, which are the social expectations of what is expected to be done (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). Gender gaps - as outlined in the research problem - persist within leadership positions both globally and specifically in South Africa. These gaps are a function of a mismatch between the leader traits that are predominantly perceived as agentic and the female trait of being more communal (Bosak et al., 2018; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hsu et al., 2021). Conforming to the expected gender norms reinforces the approval and acceptance by others (Hsu et al., 2021) while flouting the gendered norms can result in prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002). There is therefore an incongruence between the organisational role of a leader and the social gendered role of being a woman, which causes biases in the career advancement of women leaders.

For this research, the incongruency will predominantly focus on gender and race. However, it is important to note that RCT looks beyond gender norms (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002). It assesses how gender, sexuality, economic status, occupation, cultural assessments, and race interact with the expectations of leadership (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). As noted, RCT is an expansion of social role identity theory (Bosak et al., 2018; Carli & Eagly, 2001; Croft et al., 2021), which states that an individual's self-concepts are based on their membership in social groups, i.e., nationality, gender, gender, and religion. Within the context of this research, RCT is deemed to show the incongruency between socially acceptable female attributes and females as leaders.

Both historical and nascent research indicates that role incongruency remains a challenge for women in leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; A. H. Eagly & Revelle, 2022; Koburtay et al., 2019). Incongruency is further exacerbated by cultural practices that adversely impact women's ascent up the leadership ladder (Koburtay et al., 2019). Perceived economic inequality impacts the assessment of groups and individuals. In the context of gender, research has shown that it positively correlates to gender equality and as such women in non-egalitarian societies are prejudiced more based on their gender (Moreno-Bella et al., 2019). They are therefore required to display even more gender-congruent behaviour than their female peers in egalitarian countries and would therefore potentially be exposed to more backlash and negative consequences for their incongruent behaviour (Moreno-Bella et al., 2019).

In unequal societies behaviours like trust, solidarity, connection, and generosity are lower than in egalitarian societies (Moreno-Bella et al., 2019; Sprong et al., 2019). These behaviours foster a need for people to maintain their social status and adversely impact cooperation between people and among groups. In addition, how individuals perceive stereotypical groups impacts their emotional and behavioural response to said group (Abele et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2002). This raises the question as to how South African females navigate these requirements, considering the World Bank notes that in "South Africa, the top 10% captures 67% of total national income" and "the bottom 50% captures 5%" (The World Bank, 2022, pp. 32-33).

Broadly speaking, agency (competency) is associated with the accomplishment of tasks and communion (warmth) is associated with forming bonds (Abele et al., 2020). Rucker et al. (2018) propose that affinity for communion or agency is a result of the perceived advantages or disadvantages the individual or group believe they possess. In essence, those with higher social power and - therefore more advantages - are more likely to orientate towards agency than those with less social power (Rucker et al., 2018). This results in different emotional responses. The SCM defines four emotional responses (envy, contempt, pity, and admiration) based on the interplay between warmth and competency judgements as well as four behavioural responses: passive facilitation, active harm, passive harm, and active facilitation (Cuddy et al., 2011; Strinić et al., 2021). Warmth is akin to communal traits like likeability, friendliness, trustworthiness, empathy, and kindness while competency is akin to intelligence, power, efficiency, and skilfulness. The concomitant evaluation of both dimensions creates a double-bind (Bachnik et al., 2023) or backlash (Lee, 2023) as being perceived as high on one

dimension negatively impacts the assessment of the other dimension. As an example, agentic (competent) females are assumed to have lower warmth (Cuddy et al., 2011; Strinić et al., 2021). This results in envy and active harm, which can impact their career advancement by both employees in their engagement with women leaders and the management layer by hampering women's advancement (Bol & Fogel-Yaari, 2022; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). The research done by Bowles et al. (2019) supports the behavioural reaction of active harm as they found that women experience more resistance when negotiating owing to the act of negotiation being perceived as agentic and thus being considered counter stereotypical behaviour.

Even though communion and agency are core personality variables these have gender connotations as outlined above (Grysman & Booker, 2023). Agency and communion are a universal framework for how people see the world (Formanowicz et al., 2023). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), as cited by Koburtay et al. (2019), recognise that there are four levels of analysis required to understand the advancement of women into leadership roles: social, organisational, interpersonal, and individual. At the individual level, they require the ability to display and utilise their skills and abilities to display their leadership potential. At the intrapersonal and organisational levels, they require good relationships with peers, subordinates, and strong strategic networks (Greguletz et al., 2019; Koburtay et al., 2019).

2.3 Agentic expectations of leader

Leadership has traditionally been linked to autonomy, protection, power, and drive to get ahead, which is more likened to the social role of men (Koburtay et al., 2019). Thus, female leaders face two levels of prejudice. Firstly, they are less likely to be viewed as having the traits associated with leadership and are therefore less likely to be placed in leadership roles. Secondly where they do display leadership traits, they are evaluated less favourably than their male counterparts. In literature this is defined as the double bind (Lawson et al., 2022; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018), as well as catch-22 (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018) and backlash (Croft et al., 2021; Ellemers, 2018; Lee, 2023). Furthermore, the role of leadership has historically been associated with more agentic behaviours that are, generally attributed to men (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022; Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018).

When women enter the leadership domain there is an incongruency between their social role and the male-dominated role of a leader (Koburtay et al., 2019; Lee, 2023). Owing to the descriptive and injunctive nature of gender stereotypes, the latter being the ubiquitous

expectations of how a group like women should behave versus the former with ubiquitous expectations of how a group does behave (Eagly et al., 2020; Koburtay et al., 2019).

Within the realm of RCT there are a number of paradigms, three of which have been researched by Koenig et al. (2011): the first is 'think manager–think male', 'agency–communion', and the 'masculinity–femininity' paradigm. The research included academic literature between 1973 to 2008 and was predominantly tested in Europe and United States of America, with article inclusions from China, South Africa, and Egypt (Koenig et al., 2011). All three paradigms showed the consistency of the leader stereotype as predominantly masculine and found that within the "the agency-communion and masculinity-femininity paradigms indicates that conceptions of leadership hardly ever strayed into feminine territory" (Koenig et al., 2011, p. 634).

Delving further into the analysis, Koenig et al. (2011) identify publication year as a moderator. They found that as the publication year increased so too did the shift towards androgynous leadership. Owing to the increasing similarities between leaders and women under the think manager–think male paradigm, the authors postulate that the increase in androgynous leader stereotypes points to the evolution of leadership from masculine to a more balanced perspective encompassing both masculine (agentic) and feminine (communal) traits (Koenig et al., 2011). Trait dominance or assertiveness was considered to be one of the predicators for leadership effectiveness and emergence (Kim et al., 2020). Dominance or assertiveness is associated with an individual being more confident, outspoken, and persuasive. It is also associated with extraversion (Kim et al., 2020).

Within the context of gender, displays of assertiveness or dominance are considered congruent with that of a male but incongruent for a female so resulting in lower levels of leadership emergence and effectiveness (Kim et al., 2020). This results in women who strive for leadership being faced with a dilemma where they attempt to display assertiveness, they are met with negative outcomes because of the incongruence with their gender and when they display communal behaviours, they receive negative outcomes owing to the incongruence with leadership (Kim et al., 2020). In their qualitative study in the United States of America the authors found that dominance (assertiveness) aids men in being perceived as a leader because of the normalcy of dominant men being leaders but perceived dominant females as abnormal (Kim et al., 2020). In contrast to the study by Eaton et al. (2020), the dominant women are not perceived as unlikeable. Rather she is viewed as strange.

Focusing on literature within the last 10 years, there are number of quantitative and qualitative articles that deal with the bias towards female leaders and support the finding of RCT showing that while there has been improvement in representation. This is not adequate enough to address the challenge of female representation at senior management levels. A literature review for the period 2010 to 2018 by Koburtay et al. (2019) using the lens of RCT to determine the congruency between the female gender and leader role confirmed the findings from Eagly and Karau (2002) that stereotypes of women and those of leader were still incongruent. This results in less women emerging as leaders and is supported by studies by Van Veelen and Derks (2022) as well as Eaton et al. (2020). They found that there remains an incongruence between the perception of female academics and the prototypical academic. In general academics are considered to be agentic (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). Lack of fit was found to impact the career advancement of females resulting in career stagnation, impacting career persistency and exit from the industry. Van Veelen and Derks (2022) articulate that the gender gaps experienced by women in academia can result in lower work engagement, inability and barriers to attaining leadership, lack of access to resources both from a funding and salary perspective together with higher turn-over rates.

In organisations where playing politics is important for advancement, women face a strong lack of fit. This supports the findings by Van Veelen and Derks (2022) as playing politics is perceived as more an agentic or masculine trait thus adversely impacting women's career advancement, fit, visibility, and access (Salwender et al., 2023). While Eaton et al. (2020) assess the competence, hireability, and likeability of hypothetical doctoral graduate applying for a post-doctoral position, using the candidates' names to create perceptions of gender and race. They found that female post-doctoral candidates in the physics faculty were evaluated as less competent and hireable than their male counterparts (Eaton et al., 2020). While both the biology and physics faculty showed racial bias, this is of concern for women of colour looking to get into academia (Eaton et al., 2020).

In general, people's implicit leadership protype is one that is more aligned to agency, where a leader is expected to show assertiveness, dominance, and goal orientation (Giacomin et al., 2022). Research by He et al. (2019) found that in addition to the challenges of not being perceived as leadership material, women are further negatively impacted based on occupational stereotypes. Occupations that require employees to evaluate, interpret and scrutinise problems are considered to require more competence than occupations requiring physical exertion or those that emphasise repetitive structure and order (Eagly et al., 2020; He et al., 2019; Strinić et al., 2022). Perceptions of warmth are highly inter-personal and other-

oriented and have been found to overlap with social professions like nursing, teaching, and service orientated roles like waitressing (He et al., 2019). The studies refenced in this chapter have taken place within the last five years, indicating that while there has been a shift in the gender stereotypes the expectation for women to conform to certain occupations and role types persist in today's society.

2.4   Communal expectations of women

The individual-level impact of leadership advancement is nested in the social and cultural context (Hsu et al., 2021; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Women have been expected to display nurturing behaviours because of the division of labour overtime where women primarily took on the domestic chores including child-rearing (Hsu et al., 2021). This expectation continues today owing to both internal and external pressures to maintain the status quo (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Hsu et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2017).

Gender expectations and stereotypes are instilled during childhood and perpetuated throughout one's lifetime (Kossek et al., 2017). "What appear to be women's individual 'choices' are shaped by social context factors in which they are embedded" (Kossek et al., 2017, p. 229). The Kaleidoscope Career Model posits that life stage and gender impacts career decisions as the individual's needs for authenticity, balance and challenge evolve. Women's career pattern in general emphasise balance while men prioritise challenge (Quigley et al., 2023).

Women are not only perceived but are expected to be more communal they need to be modest, considerate, understanding, caring, empathetic, and compassionate especially more so than men (Brescoll, 2016; Hentschel et al., 2018). The expectancy of the gender roles is fostered through expectancy confirmation where there is an anticipation of certain behaviours from women. When these behaviours are seen this reinforces gender expectations (stereotypes), i.e. one expects women to take on the role of nurturer thus when one sees women taking on this role the gender stereotype is reinforced (Hsu et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2017).

Traditionally leaders have been expected to display agentic behaviours focused on delivery irrespective of the people impact. However, in the contemporary organisation leaders need to display communal behaviours like relationship-building, empathy, and compassion (Arghode et al., 2022; Griffiths et al., 2019; Hentschel et al., 2018). Communal leaders may be more effective than agentic leaders owing to their ability to foster collaboration, communication, and

equality, making it the preferred leadership style (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). As employees' needs from leadership move from purely work-orientated and shift to a more holistic approach the need for varied leadership styles and variability in leadership increase and shifts.

Globally there has been a shift to more inclusive leadership styles that create connection and foster collaboration (Shuck et al., 2019). Older styles of leadership that emphasise control and self-interests cause disengagement and apathy (Shuck et al., 2019). Women who are expected to be other focused, instead of self-focused, thus have the potential to fill this shifting need. They generally display a preference for different leadership competencies with a focus on more communal attributes including relationship-building, collaboration, compassion, and teamwork which in turn improves employee motivation and positively impacts employee attrition (Franczak & Margolis, 2022; Shuck et al., 2019).

Female leaders incorporate a participatory decision-making style with an emphasis on contextual and individual considerations (Braun et al., 2018; Franczak & Margolis, 2022). Individualised considerations, coupled with high quality interpersonal relationships between followers and leaders, enhance psychological safety (Clark et al., 2019; Franczak & Margolis, 2022). Communal leadership styles have been found to impact employees' emotional, physical, and cognitive connections positively (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). While there is a need for more communal-orientated leadership style, there remains a need for leaders to be agentic in terms of goal-achievement and assertiveness (Hentschel et al., 2018).

In contrast to early research by Eagly and Karau (2002) and more recent research by Koburtay et al. (2019) who found that women were perceived as less favourable for leadership positions Franczak and Margolis (2022) found that women leaders are effective in implementing a more interpersonal style of leadership and display resilience, courage and risk taking. Bartlett (2024) found that bravery in female leadership is multi-faceted and includes moral courage, authenticity, resilience, and ethical decision-making. The study by Franczak and Margolis (2022) used data from the Great Place to Work® Survey. Bartlett (2024) used narrative analysis while Koburtay et al. (2019) utilised a review of recent literature. In support of the new styles of leadership, and how women can lean into their communal traits, Hentschel et al., 2018 researched the promotability and effectiveness of transformational leadership their study found that transformational leaders - irrespective of gender - were viewed as more effective and more promotable than autocratic leaders (Hentschel et al., 2018). When displaying transformational leadership traits leaders are perceived as more communal and agentic. Surprisingly in this study autocratic female leaders were not evaluated as less effective or

promotable than their male counterparts (Hentschel et al., 2018). This is supported by research by Kulich et al. (2018) who found that the ideal leadership style is high in both agentic and communal dimensions. Even though leaders who display transformational leadership traits are generally more effective and promotable, female transformational leaders experience less career advancement than their male peers who display transformational leadership traits (Hentschel et al., 2018). Thus, male leaders receive additional support when they display counter-stereotypical behaviours, specifically empathy and relationship-building (Hentschel et al., 2018).

In his research on female leaders within the clergy, Ferguson (2018) found that in a communal-type environment communal leaders experience support irrespective of gender. However agentic female clergy experience a lack of fit assessment and backlash. Communal attributes like compassion and empathy positively influence organisational culture owing to its positive effect on employee performance (Arghode et al., 2022). Another leader behaviour that differs from the gendered expectations of leadership is the compassionate leader. Displaying compassion as a leader requires both the acknowledgement of others' situations and an active behavioural response (Shuck et al., 2019). A total of 22 organisations were approached to identify leaders who displayed compassionate-like behaviours and were top achievers. They identified six behaviours of compassionate leaders – presence, integrity, empathy, authenticity, dignity, and accountability (Shuck et al., 2019). Leaders who displayed compassion were able to maintain their integrity even in the face of competing priorities and other pressures (Shuck et al., 2019). They were transparent, consistent and had a strong moral compass. These leaders were able to articulate motivations clearly, manage conflict and shared information in a timely and transparent manner without being passive aggressive (Shuck et al., 2019). Compassionate leaders were described as holding people accountable for their work, setting clear expectations, and ensuring high performance so instilling a sense of ownership within their team (Shuck et al., 2019). These findings were supported by research on female leadership and emotions which found that empathy, trust, and compassion as communal behaviours that have aided women in the workplace (Singh et al., 2023). With the positives outcomes associated with communal behaviours and leadership styles, there remain challenges that women face in the workplace as they attempt to advance to senior management. Women are generally viewed as too emotional. This has been used as a reason why they do not fulfil more senior leadership roles (Brescoll, 2016).

Women receive more scrutiny on their accomplishments, experience shifting criteria, double-bind judgements of competence and likability that women need to be competent and likeable

simultaneously, but this is not placed on their male counterpart (Correll, 2017; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).   Lawson et al. (2022) found that the hiring of a female CEO and the representation of women in executive committees has a positive impact in the gender language with an organisation. The studies used quantitative methods to assess S&P 500 companies across two separate studies. The first study assessed the pre- and post-hiring of female CEOs on the organisation's usage of language and specifically both the positive and negative words associated with agency namely direct versus dominant. The results found the female-agency association increase pre- and post-hiring was significantly larger for those organisations that hired female CEOs. There was no decrease in the male-agency association within female-led organisations and the use of positive agentic words was linked to descriptive and not action words (Lawson et al., 2022). In addition, the associated female-communality showed a minor strengthening, thus there was no trade-off in communion with the increase in agency. The language study was repeated for female representation at executive level for a random selection of 345 former and current S&P 500 companies analysing documentation from 2009 to 2018 using a three-year sliding window resulting in eight estimates per company.

Similarly, to study one there was a significant positive effect on the female-agency association which did not adversely impact communion. This highlights the benefit of representation at the senior level so shifting the language norms and associations with gender. The shift in language is believed to drive a change in the association of agency to women and aid their advancement to senior positions (Lawson et al., 2022). The findings on the benefits of communal feminine leadership behaviours and female leaders shows that "female representation is not merely an end but also a means" and hiring females at the upper echelons of an organisation "may shift the semantic association between what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a leader" (Lawson et al., 2022, p. 11). In addition, when female senior managers are portrayed in positive lights, this creates systemic change in the association of agency to women, so limiting the agency-communion trade-off and removes the requirement for individual level stereotype change to the organisation and potentially society as whole (Lawson et al., 2022).

In a separate study by Cortis et al. (2022), 2 292 employees from a public sector jurisdiction in Australia completed a survey to study gender equality. The survey included questions on agency, leadership performance linked to gender, career advancement opportunities and biographical details (Cortis et al., 2022). In contrast to the study by Lawson et al. (2022), the female leaders in Cortis et al. (2022) were more likely than the general female sample to find the existing masculine-led leadership status quo as acceptable, similar to the male leaders in the sample. This shows an assimilation of female senior managers into the workplace cultures

and does not support the findings from study two by Lawson et al. (2022). This potentially illustrates that either there is a difference between for profit versus non-profit organisation, or there is a difference in perceptions across different countries. It is nearly impossible to assume without repeating the experiments in the other country.

Cultural and gender norms impact not only socially acceptable behaviours and careers associated with women but also impede their aspirations, self-views, and motivations, which in turn limit female career opportunities, career advancement, and earning potential (Bachnik et al., 2023; Croft et al., 2021). Cultural and societal norms do not only impact the individual but impacts the nature, structure, and processes within organisations, which in turn affects the career advancement of female leaders (Bol & Fogel-Yaari, 2022). As such implicit leadership expectations across diverse cultures and geographies are using cultural leadership prototypes alongside ubiquitous leadership prototypes to unpack and explore leadership norms (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023; Wanasika et al., 2011). The societal impact specifically looking at diffuse status is defined as status that is "ascribed to leaders independently of their capabilities and character" owing to stereotypical view of a certain social group as being higher in status in comparison to another, e.g. men having a higher status than women (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022, p. 2). Croft et al. (2021) and Bosak et al. (2018) illustrate the evolving and dynamic nature of gender norms that adjust as society evolves termed dynamic stereotypes. To understand the dynamic stereotypes within the South African context truly, similar to the work done by (Bosak et al.2018), one needs to understand the nature and evolution of the society that is being assessed by reviewing the social, cultural, and historical changes both globally and locally.

2.5   Societal and cultural impacts on female leadership expectations

SRT states that "social perceivers' beliefs about social groups in their society is derived from their experiences with group members in their typical social roles" (Koenig & Eagly, 2014, p. 371). Within the confines of gender differences, this is defined as the perceiver's expectation of a gender, male or female, being derived from experiences with the opposite gender in social settings (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Within the confines of RCT at the macro-level, social and cultural norms therefore impact the socially accepted behaviours and traits associated with women and that of leader thus adversely impacting female leader's career advancement (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Lianidou & Zheng, 2022). Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) note the existence of variable phenomena that impact the prejudice to women leaders, one of which being cultural and sub-cultural variations in gender and leader roles. Owing to this variability, the nature of the culture

and society needs to be understood in order to gain a full appreciation of its impact on gender stereotypes and norms.

The continued under-representation of female leaders in senior management positions highlights the continued organisational gender biases that adversely impact the advancement of women (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Schock et al., 2019). This bias is owing to organisations residing within a social and cultural context that impacts the expectations and perceptions of the genders (Bowles et al., 2022). In addition to the workplace responsibilities women are more likely to take on more household responsibilities (Esposito, 2021) including childcare and domestic chores. This places more strain on female employees as they need to balance work and home commitments (Esposito, 2021). In addition, the majority of organisational models and organisational processes were created for and by men based on the male leadership prototype (Bachnik et al., 2023; Esposito, 2021). Thus, the demographic make-up and organisational culture are frequently male focused which impacts the expectations and perceptions of women in leadership (Bowles et al., 2022).

Titi Amayah and Haque (2017) use a definition of culture as a social construct of "complex phenomenon consisting of both visible and invisible characteristics" (p. 100). Culture consists of demographic and ethnographic characteristics which creates variability in socially acceptable behaviours and traits (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023; Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). The research done by Titi Amayah & Haque (2017) found that "biases in societal and organisational culture, different (higher) expectations for women as compared to men, and perceived incongruency between female gender roles and the leadership role" (p. 123) adversely impacted female representation at the leadership level. This is supported by an analysis of the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) project for five Sub-Saharan African countries which found commonalities in cultural practices across Nigeria, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. All of these countries displayed significant levels of solidarity, with leadership types that were predominantly paternalistic and humane-oriented (Wanasika et al., 2011). In their research on gender stereotypes overtime within the Unites States, it was found that stereotypes respond to changes in group members' social roles (Eagly et al., 2020). Over the last seven decades, there has been an increase in women's communion and competence expectations (Eagly et al., 2020). These recent studies articulate that the difference in expectations at a societal and cultural level show the dynamic nature of stereotypes.

Lonati and Van Vugt (2023) use the terminology 'cultural leadership prototypes' to define the cultural and societal nature of leadership. While scholars like Lianidou and Zheng (2022) seek to understand the impact of status on leadership outcomes, with a focus on diffuse status to present how a resulting status impacts people's perception and attitudes. 'Cultural leadership prototypes' are defined as shared societal and cultural ideals of behaviours and traits that followers expect of their leaders that can vary at a continent, country, and regional levels (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023; Wanasika et al., 2011). Furthermore, Eagly and Karau (2002) note the existence of variable phenomenon that impact the prejudice to women leaders, one of which being cultural and subcultural variations in gender and leader roles. This is supported by Moreno-Bella et al. (2019) who articulate the dynamic nature of societal variables on gender stereotypes – specifically identifying that the economic inequality within a society impacts the perception of agency and communion for men and women. This impacts the degree of gender bias. In addition, it is supported by Sprong et al. (2019) who found that both perceived and objective economic inequality are associated with the preference for a strong leader owing to the increased criminality and lower levels of trust.

An empirical analysis of the impact of a leader's diffuse status on leader emergence, motivation to lead, and perceived effectiveness, found status is positively associated to agency. Thus, a group of people with higher status inherently have higher agency and those with lower status are associated with communion (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022). Status influences people's perceptions and approach towards themselves and others within the confines of leadership. It influences social exchanges by impacting the degree to which an individual self-identifies and is viewed by others as a leader. It impacts the quality of leader-follower membership exchange and legitimises an individual as a leader (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022; Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023). Thus, in cultural and societal settings where men have a higher diffuse status, they are more likely to be perceived as a leader and the cultural leadership prototype is linked to masculine traits and characteristics so impeding the ability of female leaders (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022; Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023).

The patriarchal nature of society in Sub-Saharan Africa resulted in women being viewed as subservient to men (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). The shared societal norm where men were deemed to be financial providers and protectors of their households and women were cast into the role of caring for the household by providing warmth, care, and naturing of all members of the household (Ellemers, 2018; Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023). This basis of man as the provider created an implicit leadership prototype of men as the head of a household, which – over time - translated into men being the implicit prototype of a leader outside the home so casting

women as their submissive followers within the confines of both the home and workplace (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023; Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017).

In terms of a gender hierarchy, white males were at the apex - just above white females - with African black women at base. The implicit leadership prototype of men as leaders is not only confined to the Western World but is consistent within the domain of Sub-Saharan Africa (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). In their study Barkhuizen et al. (2022) articulated the need for research on female leaders in South Africa owing to the dual challenges that women face of "fostering a pluralistic leadership culture that embraces transformation" yet the inherent nature of the society and cultures in South Africa fosters oppressive beliefs that marginalise women (p. 2).

A review of printed media articles from 43 Sub-Saharan countries, spanning a six-month period from January 2014 resulting in 912 articles of which only 24 focused on women leaders and managers, indicates a lack of visibility and poor media coverage (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). Content analysis was used to identify three broad themes: "societal culture, occupational culture (lack of support and sex stereotypes), being held to a higher standard and lack of access education" (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017, p. 108). As a subset of the key themes, the patriarchal nature of the social structures results in women being subservient to a senior man which places women as subordinate to mean (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). The cultural norms perpetuate gender stereotypes of men as the breadwinners and women as the obedient housekeeper (Wanasika et al., 2011). The research quoted several extracts, one of which was in the South African newspaper *Mail and Guardian* which states that being a female politician was a challenge owing to the belief that women cannot be like men, i.e. take charge and have power (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017).

Recent research from Barkhuizen et al. (2022) further supports the ubiquitous ideal that men are the leadership prototype, and the societal expectations and stereotypes of women as nurturing caregivers reinforces the gender roles. The authors note that both Roman-Dutch Law and customary law, within South Africa, classed married women and black women respectively as minors (Barkhuizen et al., 2022) and as part of the findings found that societal gender stereotypes and beliefs are the most frequently appearing barrier to women leaders' advancement.

This notion of men as leaders was touched on six years earlier by Wanasika et al. (2011) who used mixed methods to first qualitatively analyse African media reports and   utilised the

quantitative results from the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) project for five Sub-Saharan African countries which found that while there was a need to seek harmony, the vast majority of these countries maintained patrilineal and patrimonial aspects, such that power, status, and wealth is passed down the male line (Wanasika et al., 2011). In contrast to the Western leadership and social norms, Wanasika et al. (2011) articulates that indigenous nuances include a focus on the collective good over individual performance that is often termed *ubuntu*, respect for elders, teamwork, and service to others.

Sub-Saharan Africa has a preference for humane-orientated leadership which places worth on communal attributes like generosity, compassion, modesty, patience, and considerate and supportive behaviours (Wanasika et al., 2011). Along with value-based leadership and in-group solidarity, placing a preface on leaders with a high degree of integrity and ethics coupled with a loyalty and service to family, clan, tribe, or team reflects the cultural dimension of African leadership.

2.6 Organisational impact on female leadership expectations

Men continue to reside in the majority of places of power both within the organisation and society. Thus, the nature of work, language, power dynamics and impression management is still heavily a masculine prototype (Bachnik et al., 2023; Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023). Eagly and Karau (2002) speak on the two forms of prejudice that women leaders experience, the first being the incongruency between female and leadership stereotype and the second the less favourable assessment of women leaders. Organisational culture is socially created and reinforced by the values, beliefs, and behaviour norms of those within the organisation. Organisational contexts play a significant role in the advancement of female leaders. Research has found the organisations with female representation in the leadership structures have a higher rate of female leaders advancing in their careers (Offermann et al., 2020).

Agency continues to be the preferred qualities associated with leadership (Agut et al., 2022). Women leaders face the double bind that they are perceived as less favourable for leadership positions and are evaluated more stringently than men when taking on leadership roles. Globally, white heterosexual women are the implicit female prototype as such non-white women – or those who identify on the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and/or asexual) – are likely to encounter different stereotypical expectation so resulting in different freedom and different binds (Correll, 2017).

This is supported by research from the Netherlands where women in academia noted the impact of the "subtle psychological process of cognitive lack of fit with a highly agentic 'superhero' standard of success" (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022, p. 760). Agut et al. (2022) specifically assessed a hypothetical recruitment drive for a top leader using four profiles, one agentic with high-value traits like dominance, another agentic with low-value traits like egotistical. This was similarly applied to the communal traits with the high-value trait of understanding versus the low-value trait of submissive with each trait having fictitious female and male candidates in each profile (Agut et al., 2022). The aim was to explore the differences in traits ascribed to a profit-oriented organisation and a civic-minded organisation (Agut et al., 2022).

In the for-profit organisation, both the male and female agentic candidates were significantly preferred. In contrast, for the civic-minded organisation the communal female was identified as significantly more suitable while the agentic male was perceived to be a better fit than the communal man (Agut et al., 2022). The high-value positive traits for communion and agency were perceived as a better fit than the low-value negative traits. However, the candidates with agentic traits were judged as most suitable irrespective of the positive or negative association of the agentic trait. This reinforces the preference for agency when applied to leadership (Agut et al., 2022). In contrast to the research on the agentic leaders, research in Germany on organisation- and job-fit found that the work context, job status and field in the organisation is more influential on perceptions of agency and communion than gender (Dutz et al., 2022). The findings note that there was no impact on competence or likeability where either gender is perceived as counter-stereotypical (Dutz et al., 2022).

Van Veelen and Derks (2022) assessed the lack of fit perception of female academics using trait ratings of self and the prototype academics in Dutch universities. The quantitative research within Dutch universities included a sample size of 3 978 academics including assistants, associates, and professors (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). In general, academics are considered to be agentic (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). Lack of fit was found to impact the career advancement of females resulting in career stagnation so impacting career persistency and exit from the industry. Van Veelen and Derks (2022) state that the gender gaps experienced by women in academia can result in lower work engagement, inability or barriers to attaining leadership, lack of access to resources both from a funding and salary perspective as well as higher turn-over rates.

In organisations where playing politics is important for advancement, women face a strong lack of fit. This supports the findings by Van Veelen and Derks (2022) as playing politics is perceived as more an agentic or masculine trait thus adversely impacting women's career advancement (Salwender et al., 2023). Playing politics includes varied behaviours like self-promotion, creating beneficial networks and relationships as well as managing self-brand with the aim of getting ahead.

To test the lack of fit theory owing to playing politics, Salwender et al. (2023) ran a study in Germany which showed that the correlation of playing politics was associated more so with dominance than competence, morality and warmth and was indeed viewed as a masculine trait. The findings show that women felt a stronger sense of incongruence between their self-concept and skills in organisations where playing politics is critical to advancement versus where competence is. Due to this some researchers are championing for the separation of competency from agency, and for competency to be its own construct (Dutz et al., 2022; Eagly et al., 2020). Within academia and a number of other organisations a keep driver of the ability to succeeded is linked to the ability to create networks that enable growth and advancement (Salwender et al., 2023). The incongruence between the self-concept of women and required behaviour to advance is termed self-concept conflict (Salwender et al., 2023). Self-concept conflict is the mismatch between one's self-concept and the organisations culture, the lack of fit potentially results in self-limiting beliefs (Salwender et al., 2023).

Even though there have been significant shifts in women in the workplace and women taking on more senior leadership roles, the prevailing organisational climate perpetuates gender bias, career inequality and the male implicit leadership prototype (Bachnik et al., 2023; Giacomin et al., 2022; Lonati & van Vugt, 2023). Women's career paths, advancement and retention remains unequal when compared to their male counterparts (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). The gap in female leader career advancement is linked in part to the fact that HR practices and policies are shaped by societal and cultural norms which research shows to still be biased towards cis-gendered white males (Kossek et al., 2017). In organisations competency, judgments have generally taken precedence, however, this has shifted owing to the volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous nature of the external business environment (Bachnik et al., 2023). The need has moved from an autocratic leadership style to a transformational leadership style, which is focused on both agentic and communal attributes like competency and warmth (Bachnik et al., 2023).

2.7 Individual level aspects impacting female leadership expectations

The individual-level impact of leadership advancement is nested in the social and cultural context (Hsu et al., 2021; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). "What appear to be women's individual "choices" are shaped by social context factors in which they are embedded" (Kossek et al., 2017, p. 229). There is a disconnect and ambivalent tension between the social role expectation of females to be caring, helpful, and focused on the welfare of others, in comparison to that of a leader which is to be results-focused, decisive, and self-confident (Bosak et al., 2018; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Even when women leaders who are considered successful and effective at leadership are deemed agentic, they are perceived as being underhanded both in terms of their ability to engage with others in a fair manner and being less logical (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Extending this to similar literature reviews within the current decade, research by Lee (2023) found 41 studies conducted in Western countries (United States of America, Italy, Ireland, Germany, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, Australia, Denmark, and United Kingdom). The lens for the research was workplace backlash across a demographic and ethnic characteristic. It is thus not specific to gender backlash, half of the studies dealt with backlash owing to gender role incongruency as a whole and not specifically within the lens of leadership (Croft et al., 2021; Lee, 2023). Correll (2017) identified four mechanisms that impact the evaluation of women owing to stereotypes: higher bar, extra scrutiny, shifting criteria, and double bind (2017, pp. 729–731). Women are required to attain to a higher standard than their male counterparts so requiring more evidence to be considered on par with a man assuming all things are equal (Correll, 2017). This can result in them receiving less recognition and opportunities owing to the higher standards required. Cumulatively over their working career this would result in their career not accelerating at the same speed as their male counterparts.

The research done by Eaton et al. (2020) included 251 physics and biology professors across eight public universities who were tasked to rate one of eight identical curriculum vitaes for a post-doctoral position using three criteria: competence, hire ability, and likeability. In this study the names were changed to elicit an assumption on race and gender (Eaton et al., 2020). The CVs with masculine-type names were generally more favourably evaluated and this was most evident in the physics faculty. It is important to note that the gender bias in the physics faculty could be impacted by the sample of male physics professes sitting at 90% or the sample versus 65% in the biology department (Eaton et al., 2020). Women were rated favourably across department on the likeability scale (Eaton et al., 2020). This aligns with calls made in the 2022 Inequality Report that female representation fosters more female representation

which is supported by literature from (Bachnik et al., 2023; Correll, 2017; Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018).

In a study to assess whether warmth and gender lead to a career boost or backlash at the interview stage, it was found that men receive a hireability boost when displaying warmth but there is no backlash for female candidates who do not display warmth (Mitchell et al., 2023). It was further found that the boost experience by male candidates was owing to a reduction in relational uncertainty and that the effects were more male-dominated roles (Mitchell et al., 2023). These studies have predominantly focused on the Western World.

Applying an African lens, Titi Amayah and Haque (2017) researched female leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa with a specific focus on their experiences and challenges faced as women leaders on the African continent. This focused on sourcing French and English articles written about African female senior managers during the first half of 2014 from media outlets in Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 912 articles found only 24 were used for analysis. There was a perceived incongruency between female gender roles and the leadership where women were deemed to have a lack of fit for leadership roles which echoes research in the Western nations and within South Africa. Applying a South African lens to incongruence and sub-aspects of lack of fit, a study in the security industry included key themes of lack of fit, incongruence between the role and gender. Specifically, 15 women working across multiple verticals in a security organisation from entry to executive were interviewed using in-depth interviews with a phenomenological frame. The researchers found that women experience slower advancement owing to the gender nature of the security industry which espouses combat, protection, and safety which is attributed to being a man's function.

Similarly, according to research done by Van Veelen and Derks (2022) on academics the industry is still considered to be a masculine domain, however it is even more so biased owing to the lack of communal traits required in security and the assumed physical traits. Additional themes not noted in the research done by Van Veelen and Derks (2022) include rejection, underplayed achievements, work allocation owing to the strength needed in the security industry. Looking specifically at female leadership the finding showed significant incongruence between leadership qualities of "assertiveness, emotional detachment, superiority, task-centeredness, autonomy and independence" and the continued patrial nature of South Africans that resulted in slower advancement opportunities owing to biased and negative perception of female leaders (Jansen Van Rensburg, 2021, p. 7).

Another study focused on similar qualitative study with a singular bank in South Africa on top managers and senior managers (Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021). This supports the findings from Western Worlds and provides specific single organisational perspective of female leaders and the incongruency between their perceived agentic traits versus expected communal traits as well as the backlash they experience when they display incongruent behaviour both in contexts where relationships and awareness of the women exists, i.e. advancement and career opportunities, and in low- to no-relationships like hiring. Zheng, Meister, et al. (2018) found that the way women leaders respond to agency-communion tension drives outcomes. The use of a paradoxical mindset aids in constructive outcomes while a dilemma mindset results in destructive outcomes. Applying a paradoxical mindset allows female leaders to manage the conflicting components of agency and communion, so enabling them to address business problems with a more complex behavioural repertoire. It improves leader-follower identification and leadership effectiveness.

In assessing the dynamic stereotypes over time, Bosak et al. (2018) found that Ghanaian women became more masculine and less feminine in their personality stereotypes so reflecting the global movement of women empowerment. Cultural norms can restrict behaviour and opportunities (Croft et al., 2021). Within the confines of literature around Africa and South Africa, some research has found that female leaders may need to assimilate into the corporate style by being androgenous (Jansen Van Rensburg, 2021).

2.8   Paradoxical tension between agency and communion

Contextual conditions of the organisation and individual traits impact how women leaders need to leverage agency and communion as well as how best to juxtapose the two to ensure a beneficial career outcome (Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018). The ability of female leaders to switch between masculine and feminine competencies is supported by Esser et al. (2018) who investigated the competencies required by female leaders to succeed in male-dominated industries in Germany from the perspective of male leaders.

When women behave contrary to their gender stereotypes, in other words against the cultural and social norm, they are perceived negatively. This bias is justified by the perceiver as an effort to maintain the social status quo (Lee, 2023). The stereotype content model (SCM) – developed by Cuddy et al. (2011) – aids in understanding the how and why women leaders face biases and obstacles when they behave in an overtly communal or agentic manner.

Relations between the two groups, in this case the two sexes, are built on the interplay between power differences and intimate dependence where men generally have the greater structural power but not the reproductive capability. Thus, men are reliant on women for procreation and women are reliant on men for their economic, political, and social power (Eckes, 2002). The SCM further elaborates that people are continuously evaluating others on the premise of warmth and competence, same premise, and that it is a reciprocal process (Cuddy et al., 2011). Communion, specifically warmth, is used to infer an individual's intention to help or harm (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske, 2018). An individual's intention to harm or help is the initial behaviour that is judged before their competency or ability to inflect said harm is judged (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske, 2018). Applying the lens of SCM, where an individual is assumed to be agentic. There is an assumption made that they lack communal behaviours like warmth (Cuddy et al., 2011). According the SCM, low warmth and high competency can lead to envy which results in a behavioural response of active harm. In general, academics are considered to be agentic (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022) resulting in a low warmth assumption and for women a counter stereotypical behaviour causing the active harm in the form of being viewed as less hireable (Eaton et al., 2020).

2.9 Time impact of gender and leadership norms

The social nature of gendered stereotypes is dynamic and these shift over time, place, and context (Bosak et al., 2018). The studies on the dynamic nature of stereotypes, specifically gender, has been studied in detail within the Westernised world. However, the literature gender stereotypes within the confines of Africa are less mature (Bosak et al., 2018). There are ubiquitous elements of gender, namely that men are more agentic, and women are more communal (Bosak et al., 2018; Eagly et al., 2020). As such men are expected to embody, and are awarded for, displaying the characteristics of agency assertiveness, dominance, and competitiveness. Women tend to display the warm, kind, and caring role (Bosak et al., 2018).

Giacomin et al. (2022) note that there is a contrast between gender stereotypes and people's implicit leadership theories, which has the potential to impact the career advancement of female leaders. Owing to the historical perception of men as leaders, there is a cognitive prototype of a leader that is synonymous with the male-gender and thus has the potential to preclude women from advancing up the corporate ladder to senior management. At a societal level there are universals in leaders' variations in follower expectations of leaders and variform universals variation (Lonati & van Vugt, 2023). Variform universals are "leader descriptors that are mirrored across the world but are enacted and interpreted differently across societies" (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023). These are driven by leadership prototypes and societal culture.

To ascertain the level of change in stereotypes, Charlesworth and Banaji (2022) analysed secondary data from the Project Implicit website specifically utilising the implicit association test that assesses the male-career/female-family or male-science/female-art associations. The data utilised spanned from January 2007 to May 2018. The implicit and explicit association of male-career/female-family and male-science/female-art is pervasive across the geographic and demographic groups. These associations weaken, i.e. heading towards neutrality. This movement towards neutrality is forecasted to take 134 years from 2018 to touch neutrality when assessing the implicit male-career/female-family stereotype and between 37 to 74 years for the male-science/female-art (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022).

Both implicit and explicit stereotypes showed a strong stereotypical association, however women had a stronger implicit bias for male-career/female-family than men. Implicit biases have weakened over the study timeframe (12 years). This is most likely owing to the changes found within society where women have taken on more varied roles. The movement in implicit stereotypes for male-career/female-family has moved at a slower rate. The explicit stereotypes have moved to towards neutrality at a consistent rate. Charlesworth and Banaji (2022) found that gender stereotype changes even across social groups and even with this positive movement the drift towards neutrality is still a number of decades away. The research shows that societal-level change is pervasive and the possible levers "include changes in women's representation in science and the workforce (as predicted by social role theory), social media movements like #MeToo, past decreases in pathogen prevalence or loosening of social norms"(Charlesworth & Banaji, 2022, p. 23).

2.10 Summary

There remains a gendered and leadership expectation that favours men as leaders and women as caretakers. The expectations of leaders and women are impacted by societal, cultural, organisational, and individual factors as outlined in this chapter. In addition, the gendered and leadership expectations are dynamic and shift over time. With this shift the agentic expectations of women has increased, however the communal expectations remain intact. Women leaders thus need to display both agentic behaviours to be seen as a leader and communal behaviours to retain their gendered expectations.

Agency and communion are by nature polar opposites with agency being self-focused and communion other focused. For female leaders to advance from middle to senior management they need to display both agency and communion in appropriate mixes based on contextual

factors. Within the confines of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa there is a preference for humane-orientated leadership owing to the collectivist nature of African culture. However, within the same setting it has been shown that countries with high economic inequality favour more traditional leadership types owing to actual and perceived scarcity. This raises the question as to what the expectation is for female leaders within the confines of South Africa where they need to both be humane and authoritative.

Women leaders continue to experience barriers to their career advancement from middle to senior management both within South Africa and globally. This is driven by three broad levels: societal and cultural stereotypes, organisation biases as a function of the power dynamics favouring male leaders over women leaders and individual level barriers. Research on female leaders has predominantly focused on the barriers to entry and less so on the traits and behaviours that give them access and equity. Research has primarily focused on women leaders in Western and developed nations thus there continues to be more research needed focused on developing countries like South Africa. In a country where equity is entrenched in the constitution, across gender, racial, religious, and sexual orientation there is the potential to gain deeper insights into how women leaders can better leverage the legislative advantage as a previous disadvantaged group to turn the dial on female representation at higher occupational levels. The next chapter indicates how the research questions flow from the literature reviewed.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3.1   Research questions

There is a need for women leaders to display and be perceived as both communal and agentic. As such they experience incongruency between the social requirement for a leader to take charge, be confident and action orientated versus the female gender norm of being caring, kind and other focused (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). The study conducted by Offermann et al. (2020) of women leaders showed that female participants with an agentic orientation were more likely to attain senior positions within their field. These dual standard places strain on women leaders as there is an inherent tension between the cognitive, behavioural, and motivational aspects of communal and agentic attributes. To explore this RQ1 and RQ2 need to be addressed.

RQ1: What are the agentic behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

RQ2 What are the communal behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

Agentic females in leadership face workplace backlash owing to their counter-stereotyped agentic behaviour (Koburtay et al., 2019; Lee, 2023). This is articulated as the double bind by Bachnik et al. (2023) who describe this as women leaders who either have agentic traits or adopt agentic behaviours to further their career advancement but are adversely impacted owing to the lack of perceived communal traits. To avoid the double bind there is a need to understand how women leaders can find a suitable fit to display both agentic and communal behaviours.

RQ3: How have female middle managers juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours in their career advancement to senior management?

In the thematic analyses of hindrances in the career advancement of South African women leaders, the core themes include "stereotypes and beliefs; mentoring; corporate culture and practices; leadership identity distortion; work-life balance as well as learning, development, and promotion opportunities" (Barkhuizen et al., 2022, p. 8). Van Veelen and Derks (2022) found that a lack of fit to the agentic qualities within academia impacted women more than men but was moderated by rank. Thus, female professors considered themselves more agentic in comparison to their male peers. Furthermore, females in the early stage of their academic career felt a higher lack of fit owing to the agentic standard. The self-assessment of

high agentic traits of female professors is considered a coping strategy for women looking to advance their careers in a male-dominated environment. For said professor grouping the self-assessment of communal traits decreased as they ascend the ranks. This is not observed in men. The agentic nature of organisational leadership is echoed in studies (Kulich et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1   Choice of methodology

As the study focuses on the social construct of agency and communion as it pertains to female senior managers an interpretivism philosophy was used (Bleiker et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). An interpretivism philosophy enables a variety of perspectives, richness, and depth in insights (Bleiker et al., 2019). Positivism was deemed a poor fit as the purpose of the study was not to produce "law-like generalisations" (Saunders et al., 2019, p.144) or unambiguous and accurate knowledge (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

The research topic was grounded in the social constructs of agency and communion specifically as it pertains to the career advancement of women to senior managers. As such an interpretivism philosophy was considered to be a sound approach (Bleiker et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). The use of an interpretivist philosophy allowed for deeper insights, unique perspectives, and a richness in diversity of experiences (Bleiker et al., 2019; Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2020) and enabled the researcher to delve into the interviews' perspective of how they saw their career trajectory and tools that aided them to succeed (McCracken, 1988). The nature of leadership is broad and varied. As such a positivistic approach was precluded as the overall purpose did not align with law-like generalisations (Saunders et al., 2019) or unambiguous and accurate knowledge (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of qualitative research for theory expansion is of importance within management research (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2020; Singh, 2015).

Leadership and gender dynamics are both complex social dynamics, which are impacted by social norms that exist within the context of the country (Conger, 1998; Cuddy et al., 2011). Owing to the complexity and evolutionary nature of leadership, Conger (1998) and McCracken (1988) promotes the utilisation of qualitative research. As such this research paper utilised a qualitative approach even though the literature on leadership and gender is mature. A number of researchers have noted that quantitative research is ill-suited to compute emerging, dynamic, and multi-level phenomena of leadership (Bansal et al., 2018; Conger, 1998). In contrast, qualitative research enables the expression of individual experiences without compromising on the norms in findings. In essence, it ensures that the isolated voice or perspective is not lost within the sea of norms and averages (Holley & Colyar, 2009; Saunders et al., 2019). A qualitative method encourages the nuanced nature of speech, behaviour, and context to be seen and interpreted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A narrative inquiry method was used as it encourages the researcher to question, critique and deepen the understanding of the subject matter (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Uwe, 2018). A narrative methodology enables the lived experiences of the female senior managers to be shared to gain insights and build theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Holley & Colyar, 2009; Uwe, 2018).

As this study looks to understand various interactions across multiple organisation and interactions a case study methodology was not well-aligned (Creswell et al., 2007). A case study looks at the interaction between the subject and within a define setting so requiring the researcher to "identify, define and gain access to a case study setting" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 198). Similarly, ethnography was excluded as it would require the researcher to be present physically to document the interactions within a group setting. Owing to the manifold and diverse engagements in an individual's career advancement this is not possible (Saunders et al., 2019). Phenomenology was considered as an option owing to the focus on lived experience and recollection of these lived experiences, however the research aimed to gain insights into not only the phenomenon of career advancement but also the chronological aspects of the female senior managers' lived experience (Creswell et al., 2007; Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). Furthermore, the literature on agency and communion has predominantly concentrated on the positivist perspective to substantiate the legitimacy of the stereotype content model and to scrutinise the generalisability across multiple social aspects including -but not limited to - ethnicities, genders, sexual orientation, occupations, and the intersectionality of these (Cuddy et al., 2011; Rosette & Tost, 2010; Van Veelen & Derks, 2022).

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of communion and agency on the career advancement of female senior managers within for-profit organisations in South Africa. As the study focuses on the social construct of agency and communion as it pertains to female senior managers, an interpretivism philosophy was used (Bleiker et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). An interpretivist philosophy enabled a variety of perspectives and richness as well as a depth in insights (Bleiker et al., 2019).

4.2   Population and/or research setting

The population was made up of women at senior management levels within South Africa. Female chief executive officers were excluded but executive members and managing directors of subsidiaries were considered for inclusion. The population was selected owing to calls for more research on women in senior leadership specifically within African countries

(Barkhuizen et al., 2022). In addition, Rosette and Tost (2010) highlight the scarcity of research focusing on the variance in "level of agency associated with the leader role varies by the level of the job position within the organisation" (p. 221). The research setting of South Africa, a developing country, is supported by Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) who showed that countries with high economic inequality had a difference in the assessments of agency and communion for women and men. Thus, there arises a requirement to investigate if there is a need for female senior managers to manage the paradoxical tension between agency and communion specifically within the bounds of developing nations like South Africa.

To gain a variety of insights no limitations were placed on the size or type of the organisations that were deemed eligible for participation so providing a richness of insights from various industries and organisational types. To cater for the broad term of 'leader' and ensure the inclusion of specialist managers or those who follow a specialist track no team size limits were placed on the participants.

4.3 Unit of analysis and level of analysis

The unit of analysis was the selected female senior managers who form part of the population being investigated (Saunders et al., 2019), namely female senior managers in senior management positions.

4.4 Sampling method, sampling frame or criteria, and sample size

As the research aimed to explore the lived experiences within a specific context a non-probability heterogenous purposive sampling technique was used (Johnson et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). The specific focus was on female senior managers with experience in senior management, thus the need to utilise non-probability purposive sampling. The sample size could not be predetermined as noted by Saunders et al. (2019) as such data was collected until data saturation was reached. A total of 18 interviews were scheduled and held.

The criteria required that the selected sample must have worked in a South-African-based organisation for the majority of their careers. Those who did not meet these criteria were excluded. This was to ensure female senior leaders who did not experience the nuances of South Africa were not included while – at the same time - not excluding those who may have spent a period of their careers outside of the borders of South Africa.

A study on career advancement barriers to senior leadership for female senior managers was run by Barkhuizen et al. (2022), however, this study only included nine women and focused

on a plethora of barriers. Furthermore, a significant part of the analysis looked at the external inhibitors to women leader ascension to senior leadership positions. The current study focuses on women leaders with the specific lens on how they utilised agency and communion to advance their careers from middle to senior management. It further aims to gain insights by obtaining feedback from female senior managers across industries, age, and experience level. The non-probability sampling enabled the researcher to find women across racial lines. The variation in sample industry, age, experience, and race enabled variation in sampling, which brought forward varied experiences (Saunders et al., 2019). This is supported by Barkhuizen et al. (2022) who noted the lack of racial diversity as a limitation in their study.

The sample was sourced from the researcher's professional, personal, and academic network. The researcher reached out informally via text and calls to position the study at a high level and obtain verbal consent to continue engagement and set up the interviews. A snowball effect was used after this whereby each participant was asked to identify a female leader who fit the identified sample criteria and would potentially be interested in participating in the research (Johnson et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). The participants served as the conduit for introduction and further engagement was also carried out by text or calls.

4.5 Research interview protocol

Owing to the exploratory nature of the topic, a mono-method narrative inquiry was utilised. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were held with each participant with three taking place in-person and 15 taking place online using MS Teams and via WhatsApp where technical challenges existed with the audio on MS Teams (Saunders et al., 2019). The use of MS Teams and WhatsApp was based on the participant's preference, availability, proximity to the researcher, technology useability as well as overall technology performance during the sessions (Saunders et al., 2019). The individual semi-structured interviews allowed a focus on each of the leaders' lived experiences reshared at specific points as guided by the leader sharing their story. Thus, the time horizon of the data gathering is cross-sectional (Al-Ababneh, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019).

A semi-structured interview enabled the key questions to relate to the topic of agency and communal behaviours but allowed the participant to provide their insights and reflect on their lived experiences. Uwe (2018) notes that the process of narrative question entailed the use of a generative narrative question to create a base of understanding, which served as the base for probing. Owing to the uniqueness of each leader's story, both Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Uwe (2018) articulate the need for emergent design. This enabled the interviewer to

"follow an exploratory and emergent course of action" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 438) to stimulate conversation and insights resulting in deeper probing and customisation of questions for future interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Uwe, 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

De Fina (2021) notes that emergence is a structing element. Re-telling a narrative may commence at a certain point but will evolve or completely change during the interview, when looking at the bottom-up approach to narratives. This enabled the researcher to confirm "the hidden meaning of speech" by probing using the participants own words and attempt to limit directional questions (McCarthy & Milner, 2020, p. 21). Narrative inquiry enabled a review of the story in its totality as dictated by the participant (Bleiker et al., 2019; Langley & Meziani, 2020), which enabled meaning and significance to be applied to the lived experiences of female senior managers (Langley & Meziani, 2020). Owing to participant-led storytelling, each story followed its own trajectory with some participants providing a full career overview, others a more succinct perspective from middle management and a few following a free-form conversational approach (McCarthy & Milner, 2020).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure the validity of the conversation held and to minimise interviewer bias in the recalling of the interview (Creswell et al., 2007; Langley & Meziani, 2020; Saunders et al., 2019). Of the 18 interviews 16 were held with a camera on or in-person with the remainder being purely voice interviews. Thus, for the majority of the interviews the researcher was able to take cognisance of the non-verbal cues of the participants (Bleiker et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019).

A pilot interview was run with one senior manager to assess the interview questions for clarity and understandability so enabling the modification or removal of ambiguous questions (Saunders et al., 2019; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). As there was only one primary question and the remainder were probing no changes were made to the primary narrative question of "Please tell me the story of how you progressed into a senior management position". It did however pick-up a need to allow each participant to start at the point they felt was indicative of their pathway to senior management. In addition, the inclusion of "from middle to senior management" and "behaviours" to the prompting to ensure questions were better understood, for example "How did your personal traits play a role?" became "How did your personal traits and behaviours played a part in your advancement from middle to senior management?". With each session the structure and sequencing of questions varied owing to the emergent nature of narrative inquiry. This is supported by Creswell and Creswell (2018) who stated that the

narrative interview needs to mirror real life which is not a linear cause and effect model "but rather a model of multiple factors interacting in different ways" (p.182).

4.6   Data-gathering process

Participants were identified from the researcher's network and were invited to interviews lasting between 40 minutes to 90-minutes. Each participant was contacted and provided with an overview of the research and request to participate. All participants were requested to sign a consent form before the commencement of each interview, in addition the researcher commenced each interview requesting verbal acceptance of consent. A semi-structured interview protocol was followed, which enabled probing of responses and to build on where clarity was required (Bleiker et al., 2019; Langley & Meziani, 2020).

Where there were technical difficulties during the interview the participant utilised WhatsApp as an alternative. In addition, the researcher kept a log of the interviews and insights gained in a research book. The interviews included both informant and respondent interview interplay so allowing for both the researchers understanding of theory and lived experience as women leader and the participants lived experiences to guide the interview process while enabling the researcher to be cognisant of their biases (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019).

Where the participant and the researcher did not have a relationship preceding the interview a few minutes of introductory conversation were held to create a sense of comfort and security between the researcher and participant (Conger, 1998; Saunders et al., 2019). This opening consisted of asking the participant about themselves and picking up any similarities between the researcher and the participant to create a level of comfort. The researcher served as the primary data collection tool as, according to Bansal et al. (2018) inductive research enables a "lateral shift in knowledge" (p.1190).

As guided by McCracken (1988), the researcher created a sense of formality by ensuring attire was business casual and using a formal teams background but also created a sense of informality by engaging in pre-interview conversation with participants where a relationship pre-dated the interview. Owing to the familiarity between the phenomenon being studied - namely behaviours as it pertains to career advancement as a female senior manager herself - there is lack of distance between the participants and the researcher, with the potential to drive the conversation in a manner that is aligned with the researcher's own personal experiences (McCracken, 1988). Respondents were asked at the end of the interview to confirm their age, race, highest level of education, industry, generic role title, and the province

where they worked, similar to research by Charlesworth and Banaji (2022) and Barkhuizen et al. (2022). These constructs of the research speak to the uniqueness of experience within the South African context. The closeness of the researcher to participants resulted in significant reflection on the part of the researcher and required that some distance be created so each story could be analysed on its own structures and experiences (Conger, 1998; McCracken, 1988). At the end of each week of interviews the researcher reviewed her notes and ensured the quality of the recordings. This resulted in one of the sessions being reschedule owing to quality while the other could not be rescheduled as the participant was unavailable. For the participant with poor audio quality the recordings were still used alongside the notes made by the researcher.

Each interview was transcribed by a third party who signed a non-disclosure agreement. Each participant was informed verbally at the start of the interview and was noted in the consent forms. The recordings were transcribed verbatim ensuring all aspects of the conversation were maintained including speech patterns like long pauses, giggling, and where there was discomfort with a certain point those were noted in the researcher's diary for consideration at the time of analysis (Saunders et al., 2019; Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2022). Where the researcher found that information was missing, for example biographical details, the participant was further engaged with to obtain these details.

All participants were required to sign an informed consent form, which was attached to the meeting invite. Where consent forms were not received before the interviews, verbal confirmation of the consent was obtained. This was followed up by e-mail and WhatsApp requests to complete the consent form and return it to the researcher. With semi-structured interviews, there is an inability to ensure repeatability owing to the transient nature of the experience and subjectivity of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2019).

Raelin (2020) stated that credibility is obtained by using diverse data sources, triangulation, and extensive documentation, while Saunders et al. (2019) argues that credibility comes from clarifying questions and meaningful probing. In alignment with both views, there were standardised questions that were used alongside probing and clarifying questions to obtain richness in detail. With a qualitative study generalisability is not possible owing to the small sample size, however, transferability enables another researcher to utilise the design principles in a different research setting (Saunders et al., 2019).

One-on-one interviews were scheduled with each participant where each was taken through a semi-structured interview protocol, included under appendix 2, so allowing the researcher to probe based on the participant's narratives while enabling the inclusion of key concepts (Saunders et al., 2019). Each audio recording was assigned an alphanumerical name to ensure confidentiality of the participants and where an applicable video recording was transcribed verbatim by either the researcher or a third-party provider it was ensured that both the researcher and participants identity was anonymised.

Each transcript was read for clarity alongside the researcher's journals of post-interview notes. This ensured the authenticity of what was said and understood by the participant and enabled the transcription of non-verbal cues. Accuracy in representation of experience enabled the collection of rich data and provided contextual understanding. This enabled the researcher to have access to a rich data set for analysis as detailed in the next section.

4.7   Data-analysis approach

A narrative analysis approach was used alongside narrative reflexive thematic analysis. As noted by Saunders et al. (2019) and Nasheeda et al. (2019) narrative analysis is not a single methodological approach but rather a collection of approaches used to analyse different components of the participants narrative owing to the dynamic nature of narratives and the uniqueness in each re-telling of the story (Saunders et al., 2019). The narrative analysis method provided insights into the structure and chronology of each narrative and thematic analysis enabled the grouping of codes under themes (Byrne, 2022).

Narrative analysis enabled the "sequential and chronological nature of storied data" to be maintained during analysis providing insights into each participant's experience (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 643). In addition to gaining richer contextual factors, this enabled a deeper review of the contextual variations in experiences as well as how it impacted decisions taken and outcomes of the displays of agency and communion among female senior managers (Nasheeda et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019).

The researcher re-read the transcriptions and listened to the audio to ensure she had a clear understanding of the overall narrative for each participant. During the readings the researcher picked up overall patterns in the narrative structures, which were open coded for each transcript. Nasheeda et al. (2019) called for "maintaining a sense of the whole is an important goal of restorying in narrative analysis" (p. 3). The researcher followed an organic approach to analysis, which included familiarisation with each transcript which incorporated elements of

holistic content reading. According to Herman & Vervaeck (2019) and Nasheeda et al. (2019), reiterative open coding allows the researcher to identify review and reflect on the codes to develop patterns across the interviews and any gaps that may exist (Byrne, 2022; McCracken, 1988); plot the chronology, conflicts, and successes (Byrne, 2022; Herman & Vervaeck, 2019) and the sentiments, languages and beliefs (McCracken, 1988; Nasheeda et al., 2019). Each narrative was analysed individually before searching for commonalities, variances, and unexpected findings across the 18 narratives (De Fina, 2021; McCracken, 1988; Saunders et al., 2019).

Alongside this, using open coding narrative a reflexive thematic analysis was run, which identified themes and patterns in participants' experiences. This highlighted aspects of similarity, differences, and unexpected perspectives (Byrne, 2022; Saunders et al., 2019) and enabled the researcher to work between the theory, the stories, and the codes, which resulted in a researcher-driven interpretation of the patterns, and anomalies within and across the stories (Byrne, 2022; Nasheeda et al., 2019). In addition, this allowed the capturing of the complexity in a lived experience owing to the social and interrelation aspects and interactions, to source commonalities between the stories (McCracken, 1988). Similar to the narrative approach, open coding was used to ensure the organic and flexible development of codes and themes throughout the analytical process and reiterative coding process to identify redundancies and similarities which would be collapsed into a single code or under a category or group of codes (Byrne, 2022; Nasheeda et al., 2019).

During the initial open coding a total of 449 codes were identified, these were reviewed across transcript and pared down to 235 codes by identifying associations and similarity in meaning. These codes were compared to the themes identified in the literature predominantly in the work of Zheng, Surgevil, et al. (2018) and supplemental material in Appendix 3. From the 235 codes these were decreased down to 68 codes and finally these were grouped into a set of six themes: narrative story commencement, narrative chronology, agentic behaviours, communal behaviours, organisational enablers, and individual enablers.

Each theme had between three and up to 10 codes with a total of 41 codes across the six themes and 27 themes made redundant. Refer to Figure 1 for an overview of the process. It was not a linear one and there were times when on review new codes or sub-set of code were identified as further review and analysis of the data codes. Thus, in reality the process was followed but not in a linear manner as guided by McCracken (1988). Prosek and Gibson (2021)

propose a similar process of six-step for narratives which commences with reading and reviewing the transcript.

Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of the data analysis process

Phase 1: Familiarisation	Phase 2: Initial codes	Phase 3: Theme generation
•18 interviews to 18 transcripts •Initial transcript created using Microsoft transcribe •Transcript reviewed by third party •Re-read by researcher, alongside listening to recordings	•Initial sematic coding •Followed by latent coding •Resulting in - 449 codes (read and code each transcript individual) •Reviewed against literature – 235 codes	•Initial themes drafted •Identification of duplicate •Reviewed across data set and pared down to 67 codes

Phase 4: Theme review	Phase 5: Theme renaming and defining	Phase 6: Report
•Themes reviewed to six themes and sub-themes	•Titling reviewed •Identified quotes for inclusion in report	•Themes presented din Chapter 5 •Analysed in Chapter 6

Atlas.ti was used to create codes and do the initial analysis thereafter the codes were moved to Excel for further analysis and categorisation. The interview data was coded utilising a computer-aided/assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), namely atlas.ti. O'Kane et al. (2021) noted that a CAQDAS can increase the transparency and trustworthiness in qualitative research as it enables "drag-and-drop coding, retrieval of coded segments, data organisation, rapid searches of text, creation of an audit trail, and extensive team facilitation capabilities" (O'Kane et al., 2021, p.105).

4.8 Research quality and rigour

As the methodology was a narrative qualitative inquiry, the following aspects impact the research viability. To ensure the dependability of the qualitative research, the researcher maintained a research diary of each interview along with a copy of the virtual interviews and an audio recording of the in-person interviews (Saunders et al., 2019; Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2022).

The dependability of the data was maintained by ensuring notes on the selection process and final participants, along with researcher notes throughout the research processes, were maintained on the researcher's personal cloud drive. Each transcript was anonymised, which included removing reference to the participants' current employer to ensure the participant is not easily identifiable.

In lieu of using the participant's name an alpha-numerical label was used as an identifier (Bleiker et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2019). As an additional anonymisation element generic job titles were used, a two-step process was followed firstly by finding a generic alternative for their job titles during the interview, which was followed by running a Google and LinkedIn search on the job titles to ensure more than a handful of similar job titles were picked up. Where no, or only a few, roles with a similar title were found or the titles looked to be specific to their current employer the titles were re-worded to further ensure confidentiality (Nasheeda et al., 2019).

Within the confirmed qualitative research measure of quality are rigor, validity, and reliability (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2020). Rigor was obtained as the researcher practised in the design and implementation phase of the research project (Johnson et al., 2020). Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that qualitative rigor obtained in adequate sampling and data analysis steps. The use of probing and clarifying questions during the interviews served to enhance the credibility of the narrative qualitative process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). The validity and reliability are owing to the participant having shared their experience in organisations as they progressed from middle to senior management. The narratives that were shared were rooted in the real experience and actions taken (Raelin, 2020; Roth & Mehta, 2002).

The dependability was ensured owing to the use of field notes and verbatim transcripts (Raelin, 2020; Roth & Mehta, 2002). Triangulation of the narratives was sourced by running 18 interviews with female senior managers across racial lines, ages, job functions and industries . This allowed an understanding of "how narratives are constructed around an event or series of events and to be able to compare how accounts differ, such as between departments, occupational groups, genders and/or grades" (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 211).

As part of the interviewing and coding process, the researcher spent time taking notes during the interview to ensure that there was a shared understanding of words. For example, when

Participant D15 said, "I am a servant leader", the interviewer asked for their definition of servant leadership (McCracken, 1988; Saunders et al., 2019; Uwe, 2018) to ensure the credibility in the findings by ensuring the researcher did not infer their own definitions when posed with a statement or observation.

As a snowball effect was used the leader being interviewed served as the first line to show the researcher's credibility, setting the scene and the informed consent set interviewers at ease that what they shared would not be linked back to them. Furthermore, included is the interview framework and transcribed interviews (Saunders et al., 2019), allowing other researchers to repeat this investigation in a different setting.

4.9 Ethical considerations

As the research utilises confidentiality and will not be identifying experiences by organisation name there are limited ethical considerations. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form at the start of the interview. With semi-structured interviews, there was an inability to ensure repeatability owing to the transient nature of the experience and subjectivity inherent in each individual's experience (Saunders et al., 2019). Bleiker et al. (2019) articulates the need to ensure credibility by ensuring the original questions are answered in enough detail to substantiate findings. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that credibility comes from clarifying questions and meaningful probing. In alignment with both views, standardised questions were used alongside probing and requesting clarity on responses. Due to qualitative nature of this study generalisability was not possible owing to the small sample size, however, transferability enables another researcher to utilise the design principles in a different research setting (Saunders et al., 2019).

Owing to the intensive and social aspect of the narrative inquiry as a researcher it was essential to identify biases, values, and personal background which could have impacted the research outcome. The researcher is a women leader herself with experience within the context of South Africa, both as a female and its intersection with race as a woman of colour (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the confidentiality of all participants, information that was deemed potentially sensitive (or identifiable) to the participant - the current or previous employers – were renamed along with position titles specific to the organisation (Uwe, 2018).

4.10 Limitations of the research design and methods

Utilising a narrative approach to understand the impact of agentic competence with communal warmth traits required the interviewed leaders to rely on memory recall that can result in under-

or over-reaction to experiences termed hindsight bias (Langley & Meziani, 2020). Within South Africa, there are additional layers of diversity - termed transformation - owing to the apartheid regime – that could impact the way that various racial and ethnic groups responded to the consideration of agentic competence with communal warmth traits on their career trajectories. Owing to a network that is predominantly within the Human Resource fraternity and predominantly within financial services, there is a somewhat skewed sample that is heavily focused towards financial services. However, there are enough non-human resources participants to provide a diversity of insights. Due to the qualitative nature of this study the results may not be replicable. With the majority of leaders having rich careers, there is an age demographics limitation as none of the leaders interviewed are under 30 years of age. The social experiences of younger female senior managers, those under 30 years of age, are an element that is missing and could be vastly different owing to current global context and pro-female movements.

There are a number of limitations in using interviews for research. These include hindsight bias, identity work where participants display an idealised version of self, moral storytelling where participants attempt to contextualise their behaviour and cultural or political scripts where the interview aims to provide standardised cultural or political points (Langley & Meziani, 2020). The storytelling nature of a narrative review is impacted by power dynamics owing to the social processes and multiplicate relations that take place at various levels (De Fina, 2021).

4.11 Conclusion

Chapter 4 provided granular detail on the research design components by providing detail of the methodology applied both before and after the participant interviews. The choices made under each of the sections are detailed and supported by academic literature to provide the reader with a level of comfort to the rigor used in collating and analysing the data points. The strategies enable future research to apply a similar approach in other countries or to replicate this study. The study adhered to the required ethical approvals before data collection commenced. The next chapter details the findings from the data.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 outlined the research methodology used to obtain the narratives of 18 female senior managers, exploring how they utilised the juxtaposition of agency and communion in the advancement from middle to senior management. This chapter provides an overview of the findings obtained from the interviews using a narrative analysis approach and narrative thematic analysis. These findings explore the nature of career advancement specifically focusing aiding their advancement. The chapter commences with an overview of the participants' information followed by a summary of the narrative structures and thematic analysis structured around the three research questions along with career advancement enablers. The enablers are deemed as meaningful to the study and as such are discussed below and in subsequent chapters.

Based on the findings, a conceptual model is proposed to illustrate how female middle managers can advance to senior management using the juxtaposition of agentic and communal behaviours irrespective of whether they view themselves as agentic or communal. These include four types of juxtaposing agency and communion along with enablers in the individual and organisational enablers.

Figure 2: Conceptual model for female leaders to user behaviours to advance
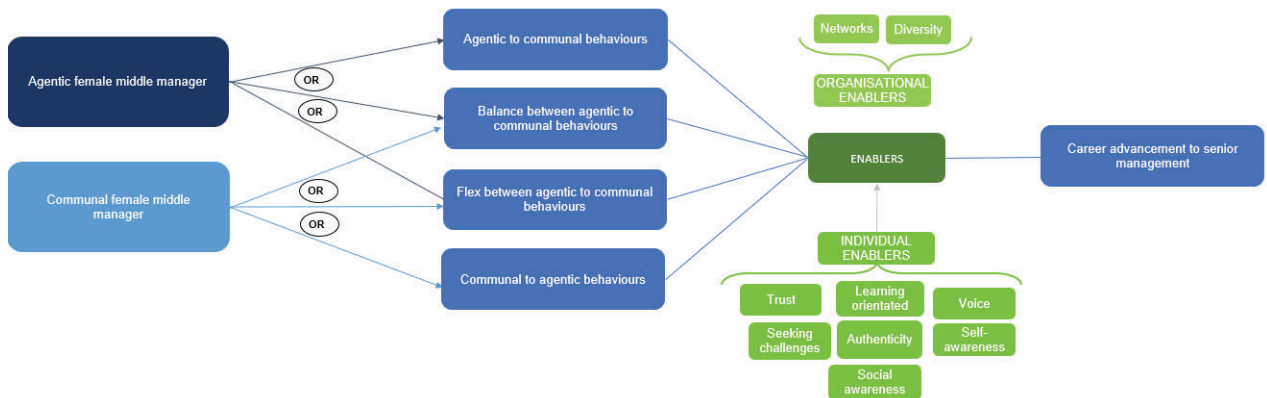
5.1 Participant information

A total of 18 female senior managers participated in this research. Each participant provided the provinces where they had worked in and of the 18, the vast majority (n = 16) have only or predominantly worked in Gauteng with two of the participants having only worked in KwaZulu-Natal and two having worked in different provinces. The average age of the sample is 45 years old. The majority of the female senior managers are in their 40s (n = 11) with four in their 50s and three in their 30s. The sample is predominantly made up of female leaders in business

support functions like Risk, Legal, Human Resources, Corporate Governance and Marketing. While only three are in an operational environment. The sample includes nine African black, four Indian, three coloured, and two white women. The researcher's intention was to ensure representation from all racial groups within South Africa and tried to align with South Africa's EAP such that the majority of the participants were African black females.

Table 1: Participant details

Participant Code	Race	Job title	Age	Province	Qualification	Number of codes	New codes
D1	African black	Executive Risk	45	Gauteng	Honours Degree	28	28
D2	African black	Head of a Product Segment	40	Gauteng	Honours Degree	8	24
D3	African black	Senior Manager Learning and Development	40	Gauteng	Bachelors degree	6	23
D4	African black	Executive Head Transformation	43	Gauteng	Post-graduate Diploma	7	25
D5	Coloured	Head Operations	47	Gauteng	Matric	2	23
D6	Coloured	Head ESG	58	Gauteng	Post-graduate Diploma	3	23
D7	Indian	Senior Manager Communication	47	Gauteng	Honours Degree	2	22
D8	African black	Head Talent	46	Gauteng Western Cape Kwazulu-Natal	Masters degree	5	27
D9	African Black	Head HR	50	Gauteng	Master' degree	3	27
D10	Indian	Head HR	45	Gauteng Kwazulu-Natal	Matric	1	23
D11	White	Marketing Manager	33	Gauteng	Honours Degree	1	26
D12	White	Marketing Director	43	Kwa-Zulu natal	Masters degree	1	22
D13	Indian	Head Strategic Execution - sales	51	Gauteng	Bachelor's degree	1	19
D14	Indian	Senior Brand Manager	38	Kwa-Zulu natal	Honours Degree	1	24
D15	African black	Vice President Shared Services	45	Gauteng Limpopo Kwa-Zulu Natal	Honours Degree	2	28

Participant Code	Race	Job title	Age	Province	Qualification	Number of codes	New codes
D16	Coloured	HR Executive	53	Gauteng	Bachelors degree	0	18
D17	African black	Vice President HR Operations	49	Gauteng	Masters degree	1	25
D18	African Black	Executive Legal	37	Gauteng	Post-graduate Diploma	1	31

The next section provides an overview of the narratives identifying the trends in the entry points of the narratives. This is followed by an overview of key chronological structures used by the participants when narrating their experiences and what structures aided their career advancement to senior management. Data saturation was reached fairly early on with two slight upticks at D8 and D15 and a tapering at 2 new codes. Refer to Figure 3 for the detail.

Figure 3: Data saturation table
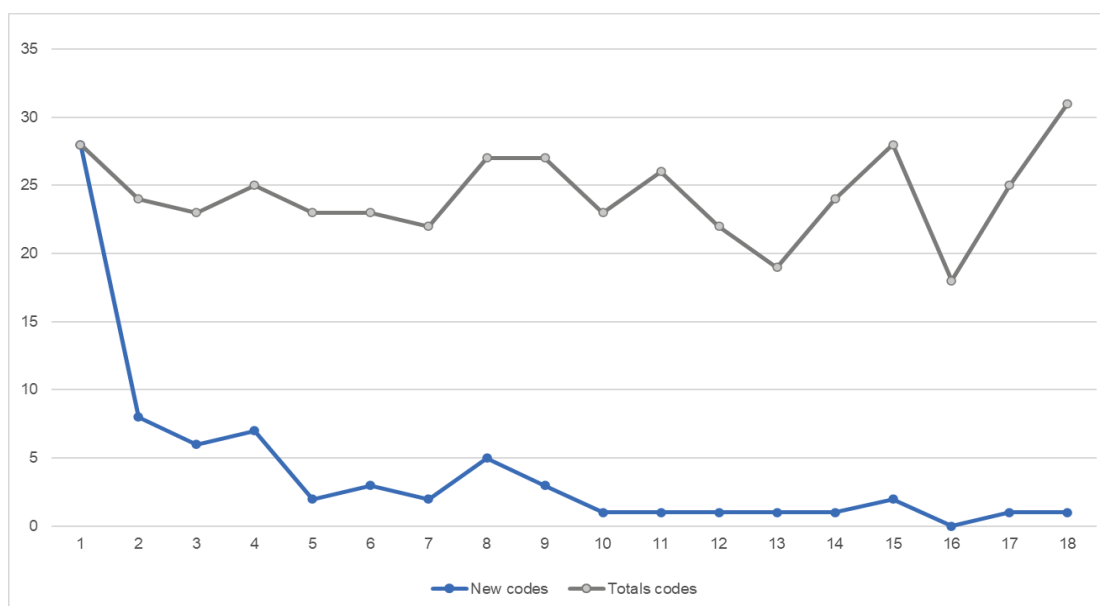
5.2 Overview of the narrative

The participants were asked to provide the story of how they progressed from middle to senior management. This resulted in an assortment of entry points into the narratives, and these were clustered into seven themes with the majority in three key themes first management role, middle management role and first role. Owing to the nature of a narrative, it was anticipated that there would be a richness in the structure of the narrative and the experiences of each female senior manager.

Table 2: Narration starting point

Theme	Quote	Frequency
First management role	*"Okay, so pretty actually. It's an interesting story. I went straight from almost junior management into senior management." (D11)*	4
Middle management	*"So, my progression happened in company Y from a middle manager to a senior manager." (D15)*	4
First role	*".. . after qualifying I had a service obligation and I needed to work in the mines." (D9)*	4
Specialist function	*"Yoh. [Laughs] I, I think it's a non-traditional way of doing it. I've always seen myself as a specialist at heart." (D4)*	2
Overview statement	*"Sure, it's got an interesting journey. Uhm, it just sort of happened. So how I've how I've grown in my career is literally by moving from one place to another." (D18)*	2
Lack of leadership (management) aspiration	*"So, look, I don't think as much as I exhibited leadership capabilities very young in my age. It wasn't like I had set my sights on and becoming a manager or a leader." (D7)*	1
Tertiary education specialisation	*"So, firstly I went into school to study accounting. Purely because my father thought that there was an unsaturated industry." (D1)*	1

There were three distinct chronological flows to the narratives; brief, extended and sporadic. See Figure 4 for detail. Brief is where the participant provided a chronological perspective of their career, but these were often very succinct with limited detail. There were no specific norms that were apparent in who chose to provide the brief chronological overview. There were participants who opted to provide a detailed chronological perspective of their experiences. These were clustered around the participants who provided an entry point that spoke around the start of their careers irrespective of level. While those who provided a sporadic chronology, commenced at a non-specific career point, their narratives tended to be shared around notable events in their career trajectory either from middle to senior or in senior management. Of interest was the general discomfort that women displayed having to share their narratives, which is potentially a contributor to the varied ways of sharing. The slight skewing to a brief chronology could potentially speak to either their normal style of engaging or allude to the fact that they view it as being boastful.

Figure 4: Distribution of the chronology of the narratives
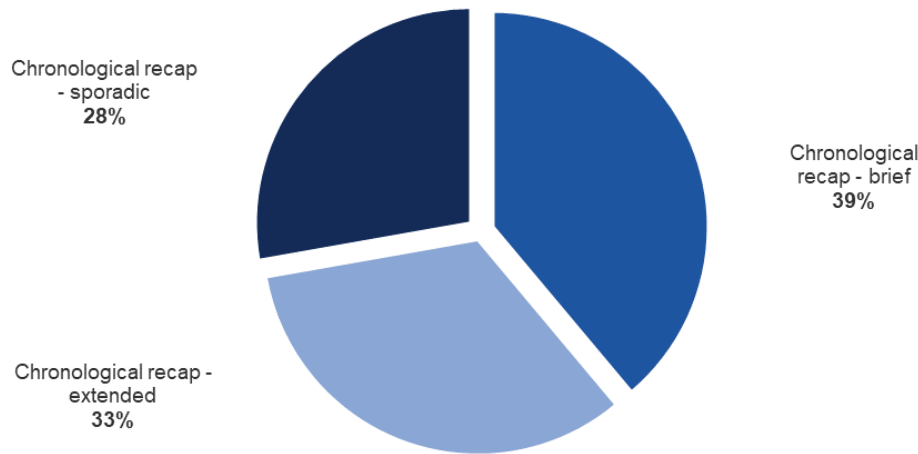
The female senior managers have worked in 22 unique industries with 72% having experience across more than one industry and 28% having experience in a single industry, which may have been across multiple organisations. In the sample the vast majority of female senior managers (67%) have experience in the financial services industry followed by 28% in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). Figure 5 provides the distribution with a grouping of other for all single listed industries.

Figure 5: Distribution of sample industry norms
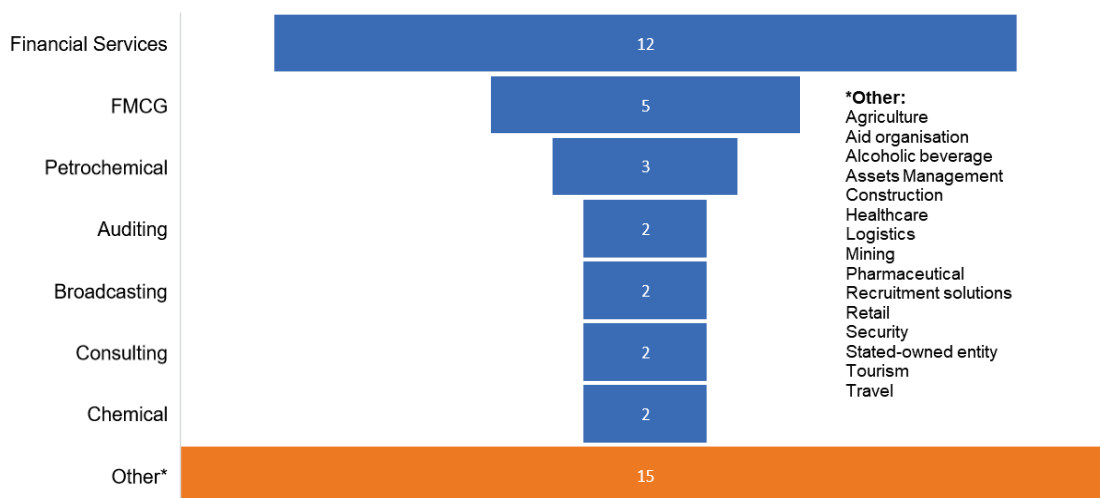
The norm for the sample has been to gain exposure across various industries with just over a quarter of the sample having had experience in a single industry. The next section

details the findings under each of the three research questions. It then elaborates on career advancement enablers.

5.3   *Research question one findings*

What are the agentic behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

The purpose of this research question is to gain insights into the agentic behaviours that aided the participants in their career advancement from middle to senior management. Agency has generally been considered a masculine behaviour and a behaviour associated with leadership. In the past it has limited women's career advancement. The intent is to understand how and if the participants used agentic behaviours, what types of agentic behaviours they used, and if any women identify as agentic (masculine) in their approach to leadership. The analysis includes an overview of the key themes and then delves into a richer analysis inclusive of quotes from participants. The agentic behaviours from the research were consolidated into 10 key themes listed in Figure 6 with arrogant and brave as the two outliers in the data (shown in orange). Competence and assertiveness were the highest two ranked themes, followed by bravery, analytical and competitive. The analysis below only focuses on the top three themes.

Figure 6: Distribution of agentic behaviours
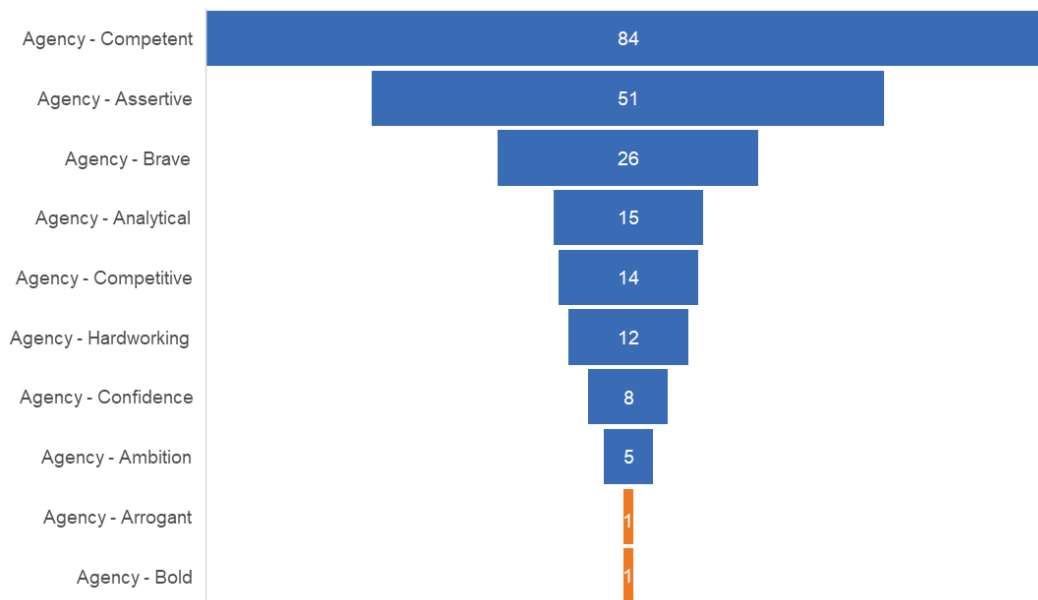
All participants acknowledge the requirement to display agentic behaviours as a senior manager. There were two agentic behaviours that were mentioned by all the participants:

competence and assertiveness. The overall sentiment in agency is that competence supersedes all other agentic behaviours for the female leaders, 40% higher frequency of assertiveness which is the second most frequent.

> "So, there were there were definitely other facets right from a technical perspective, I understood. I, I know my job right. I, I understood my job. I had enough of the experience." (D2)

> "But I think it's also because I have a proven track record. I've shown them what I'm capable of so when a role comes up, it's always been coming to me. So, listen, I've got this role. Are you in?" (D5)

Competence extends beyond the ability to do your job. It entails being aware of what is happening in your function or industry. Having information on trends and expectations at any point in time, enabling the leader to be a subject matter expert on topics relevant to the function or the business.

> You need to be a subject matter expert in your field of expertise. You need to know what is happening. You need to know the trends you need to be the go-to person when there's some uncertainty or questions. Um at any point in time prepared or unprepared, they should be able to call on you and you could give them expert advice you know." (D8) "

The need to display competency was coupled with the continued need to grow that competence and remain relevant. The need to learn and grow is almost near consistent in each narrative. The need to learn often extends beyond functional or technical expertise in their current role but also a need either to learn more outside of their function or to understand all facets of the business deeply.

> "I, I keep aspiring to be more competent, to having a deeper understanding of whatever environment that I'm working in so that you know I understand the operational aspect as well as uhm the legal aspects." (D18)

> "It's my; it's my hunger to want to learn. I always want to learn. I always want more. I never settle." (D5)

There is an awareness for participant D18 that her chosen field is potentially limited in the opportunity to grow owing to the nature of her function law, which generally has a small legal team and as such learning and broadening her skill set beyond the boundaries of her current function was critical to her career advancement.

"In most of the organisations I've worked, I've been the legal department, uhm, been the only person occupying the entire department. [Chuckles] So you're at the top of the department, where else are you're gonna go uhm and and. And in terms of moving into, you know, the more operational senior positions, I can say that it, it's not an easy thing to do. Uhm, with, you know, a legal qualification and a legal background." (D18) You know, you've if you've done legal, you've done contracts, you've got that experience. You know how to do that. Uhm. So, in order to be able to have grown, you need to have, you know, mastered something new. (D18)

When faced with the unknown there is a drive to upskill oneself quickly and to learn more continuously.

"I always said I want to work for an asset manager. So, when I came into this role. I didn't have the experience in asset management. Over the last two years I've had to learn and get myself up to speed. It was a steep learning curve for me, but it's because I don't, hold myself back. I never think that I'm not capable of the role. So, I always come in wanting to learn and I tell you every single day I'm learning something new." (D5)

The need to learn continuously may be driven by individual behaviours but there were women like D17 and D9 who felt the dissonance between their male counterparts' experiences and their perceived competence versus their experience where they had to prove themselves constantly.

"I've got to constantly prove my competence. A guy doesn't have to prove anything just by being he does." (D17)

"So, I do think, and I can say this, probably even to today. I do think that there is definitely still um, uh inherent gender bias around competency, so just like I'm saying to you, I don't like talking about myself." (D9)

In addition to the competence, women needed to create visibility and voice. D3 acknowledges that even though she has the technical skill, being afforded an opportunity to present at a higher forum aided in building her brand and provided her with more visibility to the higher levels in the organisation that she generally would not have access to.

> "It was a bit of an abnormal ask and I attempted to say, look, I'll build the presentation, I'll even take you through it and give you, my narrative. This was to my line leader so that you can take it because I believe she belongs in that forum and not me. She kind of motivated that she doesn't have a handle enough from a tech perspective to be able to deliver the narrative as I would, and also to field any of the questions which there were a lot. I wasn't happy about it initially, but as I reflected on it. I also thought well, the advantages here is to build my brand higher and become heard in a platform that I, I don't necessarily wouldn't naturally have the opportunity to do so." (D3)

Participant D2 acknowledges that she is technically sound and competent. Furthermore, there is a smaller pool of people with experience in her field, yet she was kept at middle management.

> "I think for a lot of times I felt unheard, right. And I yeah, you know I don't I, I don't feel like maybe I got the message through well enough, or you know how it is that maybe you people just don't do stuff for whatever reason I don't know. Maybe I, I just wasn't firm enough. So, I had to learn right. I had to learn to make my voice heard." (D2)

She further elaborates that women are generally results orientated and will get the job done right the first time but that they lack voice and visibility.

> "I think a lot of women struggle to find their voice, right. They struggle to have or make the presence right, because you need to be heard, you need to be seen, we need to be known, we need to have the impact. So, a lot of us probably get stuck in doing what needs to be done and making sure that we get it done right, that's why you will say that you know if you want something done give it to a woman you know, she will do it to the tee" (D2)

Even when they have the voice and the support of line there is a continued need to ensure their brand is maintained even at the sacrifice of self.

"And yeah, I'll use examples like two piece of work recently and my boss was just like how did you get that done in one day, I'm like I busted my arse because I worked really late and like all the time but he wasn't expecting it to be at that level. And for me If it's got my name, then it's going to be the best thing that I give you, you know. Which is personally, very important to me. And often people say that I'm unkind to myself." (D13)

This is supported by D15 who notes that within the South African context as an African black woman one needs to prove consistently that one is not merely an employment equity (diversity) hire.

"I think being a woman, you have to work ten times harder than everybody else because you have to prove yourself that you, you have it. You have to prove that you're competent enough. You're not in employment equity, sort of like given a role because of that's what the company requires. So, you have to, you have to, to do things more than others as a woman because you are judged because of that and you're also conscious yourself that I don't want to be called an employment equity candidate because those are the conversations that are being said in the organisation." (D15)

The second-most re-occurring agentic behaviours was the use of assertiveness, being forthright and honest without the intention of being overbearing or belittling to others. The need for leaders to show up fully as themselves and not be docile in the face of others' opinions. For participant D5, assertiveness is a behaviour that is recognised all the way up to her CEO. She is consistent in the manner that she approaches people and irrespective of level will provide her view, the consistency of her assertive created visibility.

"So, my CEO, said don't mess with this one because she's going to put you in your place. But if she puts you in your place, it's for the right reasons. So, you know where you stand with her at all times. So, I think for me also that's something that has steered me well in my career is; if I don't agree with something, I'm going to push back. I don't care who you are. If I don't agree with it, I'm going to tell you, but in the same breath, I'm going to do it professionally." (D5)

For D18, this was combined with the need to be authentic in all places and spaces. She chooses to display assertiveness in being different and embracing a non-stereotypical way of dressing and being, even when it goes against the norm.

"The thing with me is that I am so, me and so forceful about being me that. Any deterrent or any attempt at deterring that is I mean very moot in my life like I don't even recognise it, as an attempt to do so, because I'm just who I am. You take it as it is. Yeah. OK, that's it so I'm really unaffected by other people's perceptions and other people's views. I am really unaffected by that." (D18)

From an agentic behaviour perspective there is still a discomfort with self-promotion. For these women it creates a sense of dissonance between their values and the need to use self-promotion as a tool to advance.

"I won't promote myself if I feel that it's dissonant with my values of integrity, ethics." (D6)

The third most common agentic behaviour was bravery. This is strongly linked to assertiveness and competence. The female leaders note that they need to stand up and be firm as it pertains to their perspective especially in instances where it goes against the normative perspective. For D4, being brave means being vulnerable and giving her ideas and insights that may seem out of place, as this creates visibility. Being the one to kickstart different ways of being while being aware and reflecting on what did and didn't work.

"I think not being afraid to share my crazy thoughts at times is what gets you noticed. [laughs] Uhm, yeah and, and, I've had some tough lessons where I've had to go yoh, I thought I, I thought I had that one, but I didn't. And I, and I think sitting in those lessons and sitting in those tough moments has geared me up for where I am now." (D4)

This idea of bravery is also something that D5 raises as it pertains to visibility and voice.

"Yeah. So, there's a term that I'm going to use is, I always make sure that I own my seat at the table. So never feel intimidated by anybody. Share your opinion if you want your opinion to be known, but sometimes also know when, to also take in what's being discussed in the meeting, don't always want to also have the last word, or always have an opinion. But always own your seat at the table, especially when you get to senior management, don't be the wallflower that sits in the corner all the time. And when you need to be brave then be brave." (D5)

For D17, bravery speaks to the willingness to take risks and accept the outcomes of what happens. She articulates that ambiguity increases as your progress up the corporate ladder, therefore senior managers need to be willing to make a decision with less certainty. This is irrespective of gender.

> *"From a senior manager to from a senior manager to a VP, to a SVP same, same cup of tea. It's just the level of ambiguity grows issue and your ability to literally still be able to deliver with zero guidance and just a slight end result. Whereas when you're lower down in the organisation, somebody's got to be very clear to you what you're delivering. In this job most days, I don't quite know what I'm delivering. I can't tell you because the business changes every day. I can kind of give you a sense of where we're going and what are the things, I need to focus on but the one thing you can't be is overly sensitive, you can't be a crier, you can't take anything personally. You have to be very comfortable with failure and failing often and not taking things personally." (D17)*

The agentic behaviours most commonly used by female senior managers within this sample are competency and assertiveness. Competency ensures their credibility and respect within the organisation. It better enables them to excel and produce high-quality work with the potential for recognition. While assertiveness enables them to state their opinions and provide their perspectives, which in turn creates and enhances their perceived competence. Assertiveness enables women to step out of their comfort zone and take on new challenges thus enhancing their skillset. Bravery allows the female leader to marry her knowledge (competence) with assertiveness and have her perspective and opinions made known. These behaviours when used in the right contexts can improve a women leader's ability to advance.

Agentic behaviours in isolation create a perspective that the female leader is cold, purely self-focused and this can adversely impact their team's work quality and limit the leader's ability to create relationships. The next section analyses the communal behaviours used by the sample of women to advance to senior management.

5.4 Research question two findings

What are the communal behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

The purpose of this research question is to gain insights into the communal behaviours that aided the participants in their career advancement from middle to senior management. As

noted in the literature review, communality has generally been considered a feminine behaviour and has generally not been associated with leadership. In the past it has limited women's career choices and advancement opportunities. The intent is to understand how and if the participants used communal behaviours, what types of communal behaviours they used, and if any women identify as communal (feminine) in their approach to leadership. The analysis includes an overview of the key themes and then delves into a richer analysis inclusive of quotes from participants.

The communal behaviours from the research were consolidated into eight key themes listed in Figure 7, with helpful and docile as the two outliers in the data (shown in orange). Empathy and connection were the highest two ranked themes followed by care, respect, considerate, and helpful. The analysis below only focuses on the top two themes.

Figure 7: Distribution of communal behaviours

Communal - Empathy	59
Communal - Connection	51
Communal - Care	30
Communal - Respect	14
Communal - Considerate	9
Communal - Expressive	3
Communal - Helpful	1
Communal - Docile	1
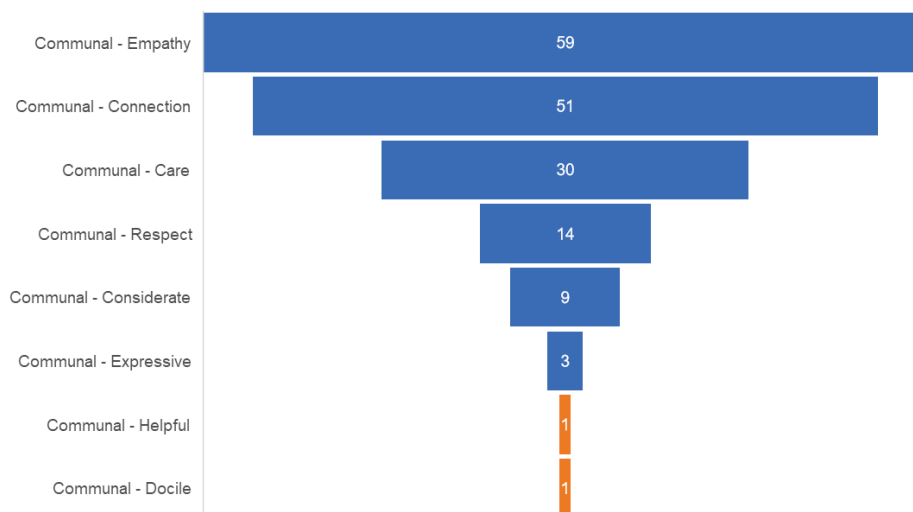
Seventeen of the participants, even those who consider themselves more agentic overall, were discovered to display empathy:

> "It's important to me to feel to create a space where everybody feels that they belong, because I think when they're feeling safer. They are able to bring their best and when the best doesn't work then you fail in a safer space. That for me is the leading … So, I'm extremely invested in people around me, especially those that I think have got less agency than I do or are not as influential or, or those type of things so." (D1)

For some of the leaders, being empathetic is a part of their personality and they lead with a strong sense of understanding for their team and others around them.

> *"I don't know if it's a personality thing. If it's your own warmth, you give off. If it's just who you are, it's your character. Because sometimes it's not deliberate. It's just who you are. And I think it's just who I am sometimes or most of the time I am who I am… I am who I am and I'm a genuine human being and I'm a caring human being."* (D10)

D3 specifically notes that she leads with her heart because of her experiences of leaders who led with heart. These leaders created an environment of motivation and aspiration that she believes bettered the well-being of the team. Even though she has been told that leading with heart is negative she continues to strive to lead with others in mind.

> *"So, I was told once upon a time this is not a good thing, but it's something that I've experienced. I mean, I've had some amazing leaders that have really inspired, motivated, and allowed room for growth even when I left certain organisations for other opportunities. And that has been sort of refreshing and what has made me aspire probably. I mean, I've always been internally a people's person and I care more about the work and the deliverables. I believe that people that are whole in terms of mental wellness, financial wellness um, and having a place where they are heard and they can contribute and they can innovate and challenge my ideas as well, cultivates that sense of belonging."* (D3)

For D12 it is her leadership style that ensures her team not only knows what is expected of them, but she serves as an enabler checking in with them in terms of capacity, needs and struggles to ensure they are actively engaged and able to do the work.

> *"I can't just expect my team to go and just do everything on their own. Uhm so, the way that I do that is, for example, I'll sit with my team, we will go through, listen what is all the work on the go, are we on the same page? Are you comfortable? You know what needs to be done. Then I'll ask questions like how is your capacity? Are you, are you coping? Are you, do you have enough time? I don't want you working after hours. I'm not an advocate of that, that is not healthy. Uhm, are you managing to get through everything of the day or are there things do you think we need to deprioritise off your working of your list? Okay, so then I will send to them and say, okay cool, let's deprioritise it or let's say it's still important but let's, let's kind of put it up, put it aside for*

now. And then I'll say, okay, what can I, what support do you need from me? Where do you need unlock? They've got all the support; they've got everything they need to make their jobs easier and have a good work life balance as well." (D12)

For some women being communal has been a learned aspect of their career journey, where they have had to craft mechanisms to ensure they have a check in with their direct reports before moving onto work outputs. This prevents the female leader from being viewed as cold and encourages more relational engagement.

"When I got the feedback from circle and square, I then made a conscious decision to say listen, not that it will stop me from getting ahead, but I may not be the nicest person to work for, so I need to be conscious of that. So, what I then started doing is making a concerted effort to bring in that inverted commas, that maternal aspect. From a leadership perspective, I always go into a new job and learn about my people; um figure my people out before I can even get myself absorbed into the job. So, I give myself the month and then after that month when I now know who is doing what. I will then constantly have check-ins. But because I have learned that I need to separate work from the person sometimes." (D8)

Connection, the second most frequent code, was attributed to 16 of the 18 participants in the sample. The two female senior managers who did not have connection as a behaviour had a high frequency of empathy. It is important to note that one facet of empathy is connection. For a female leader connection can have cultural contexts that she needs to be made aware of.

D15 had worked predominantly in Gauteng where there were no expectations to dress or behave a certain way. When she started working in the KwaZulu-Natal branch, she has to flex her dress and engagement style to bring about connection.

"For example, in Durban, it was the biggest terminal. When you went there to speak with them, they will start singing. Remember, you are there to deliver a message. If you were nurturing and they believe that you were there for them you, then they will give you that respect ... [Laughs] No, hey it was a culture shock for me as well like, I've never seen this. Sometimes they used to say is this the head of HR GM. This is the child because I went there wearing a jean and a top and tekkies. If I have went there wearing a dress and a doek then they will sort of like relate, but at the end they, they just accepted me, and I also made sure that I speak their language. I smile more ninjani

and I make sure that when I'm there, there's food because they, they, that's how they relate." (D15)

For D10, her ability to foster connection by building relationships aided her in transitioning to a new industry in which she had no experience. This allowed her to create a network and build credibility and foster trust.

"Relationship building was easier for me. It made my transition easier." (D11)

For D5, authenticity enables connection and trust. She views connection and trust as interlinked. Therefore, her belief is that without authenticity one cannot build connection.

"If you lead authentically, you will build connection because if you don't show up as your true self, you're not going to connect with somebody. And for me it's important for me to connect with whoever I engage with because it makes it difficult for me to engage you if are not operating in your true self. It makes it very difficult for me to connect with you, and therefore I cannot build trust with you, because then I don't trust you. So, for me the two are interlinked." (D5)

For D13 fostering connection breaks down silos and enables a shared vision to come to fruition by acting as the middleman bringing the two sides of a team together, in her case sales and product development.

"I definitely think more and more, as you get into the senior leadership, it's, it's less about competence. It's less about SME knowledge. It's less about what you know and it's about, yeah how do you get to the end result working with others. I've also seen where it didn't work and, and actually broke people. There was a sense that someone wasn't willing to work and collaborate and actually you know, left a nasty mark on them. It's hard to let go because then you're not seen as a team player and you're seen as being very much about, you know, my own ambition." (D13)

The communal nature of caring and being focused on others also has negative side where the female leader would place herself under strain to ensure she maintained the nice women narrative. D4 would place her health under strain doing work for others not because there was no trust but merely to not hurt others' feelings.

"The good girl in me wanted to be liked. I didn't want to offend anybody. Uh, I didn't want to make anyone feel bad even if you're doing the crappiest of jobs. In fact, the good girl in me would then do the job herself and fix it. So, as a middle manager I was a crappy delegator. Oh my gosh, I would be up all night doing someone's job instead of giving them feedback." (D4)

For D4, this stems from a need not to repeat the negative experience she had in the past. The negative experience not only pushed her to the polar opposite of being aggressive and toxic into a space where she was overly forgiving, taking on others work and limiting their growth by not providing feedback. She further articulates that gender bias that exists in expressing anger in a public setting.

"So, my career began as an article clerk in a law firm. And there was a, a gentleman, he used to throw files at people. Like if, if you made a mistake, you got a file thrown at you. So, you have to be very, very quick to duck. So those are the things that pain my head right and fairly because then I took her to corporate with me. Nobody in corporate threw a file at me, but at the same time, uhm if I know that in my experience, if a woman lost it in a meeting that will be spoken about for weeks to come. If a guy were to shout in a meeting, everyone would sit quietly, listen, and say, but we understand why that happened. And I want to be very clear that for me it's, it's the energy, not necessarily the gender." (D4)

While for D2 her empathetic nature and need to respect others meant that she would not speak up if she had a point that was not being expressed, she would not assert herself or repeat the point.

"I used to not have you know to, to not be. I've never really been like a yes person. But to know when to say no and to have my, my voice heard, right. And have my opinion acknowledged in a lot of meetings." (D2)

D5 noted she too tried to show empathy and connection. However, this has the potential to create challenges where subordinates and peers believe they are able to push the boundaries and disrespect. Similar to D4 she articulates the need to harmonise the extremes of agency and communion.

"So, I lead empathetically with compassion but also, make sure that your guys know where the line is, because I think the minute you become too soft then people walk all over you. And I don't want to even say that they disrespect you. But that doesn't stop you from leading them empathetically or being compassionate. I think if you show people, if you lead people authentically and you show them who you are. They'll respect you." (D5)

Communion, specifically empathy and connection, were mostly hand-in as communal attributes expressed by the female leaders. Their caring nature was mostly attributed to how they identify in both social and professional settings.

They spent time trying to manage their personal views of engaging with people with the expectation of the corporate world. Almost being apologetic in their initial leadership roles by taking on more, giving extra leeway not to repeat their negative experiences but once they had found the balance for themselves this aided in creating a sense of comfort with themselves and how they lead. The next chapter specifically looks at how the female senior managers juxtaposed agency and communion.

5.5   Research question three findings

How have female middle managers juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours in their career advancement to senior management?

The purpose of this research question is to gain insights into how women have balanced communal and agentic behaviours specifically as it pertains to their career advancement from middle to senior management. Communality has generally been considered a feminine behaviour and has generally not been associated with leadership while agentic behaviours have generally been considered masculine and have been ascribed to leadership. This creates a challenge for women as they need to be viewed aligned to their feminine communal behaviour whilst displaying agentic behaviours to advance. The intent is to understand, how, and if the participants used a combination of agency and communion to progress. The analysis includes an overview of the key themes and then delves into a richer analysis inclusive of quotes from participants.

Research question one and two focused on the use of agentic and communal behaviours in isolation. These behaviours do not happen in a bubble as such there are varied contextual factors that need to be considered in engaging with individuals. As such one looks at the

narratives as a whole and examples that the participants have provided to unpack where they have used both agentic and communal traits. Each female leader's behavioural style reviewed both in terms of their descriptions of themselves and their behaviours and the examples they used.

These were categorised into the four blends of agency and communion detailed in Figure 8, which shows that the female senior managers have generally relied more on communal or juxtaposed behaviours to progress to senior management as there is an equal weighting of 28% for three of the four behaviours namely: communal to agentic behaviours flexing between communal to agentic and balancing communal and agentic behaviours while agentic to communal style of leadership is at 16%. Each of the leaders were only linked to one of the four types of juxtaposition. Each of the four behavioural juxtapositions are reviewed with quotes below.

Figure 8: Overall behaviours used to advance to senior management by female sample
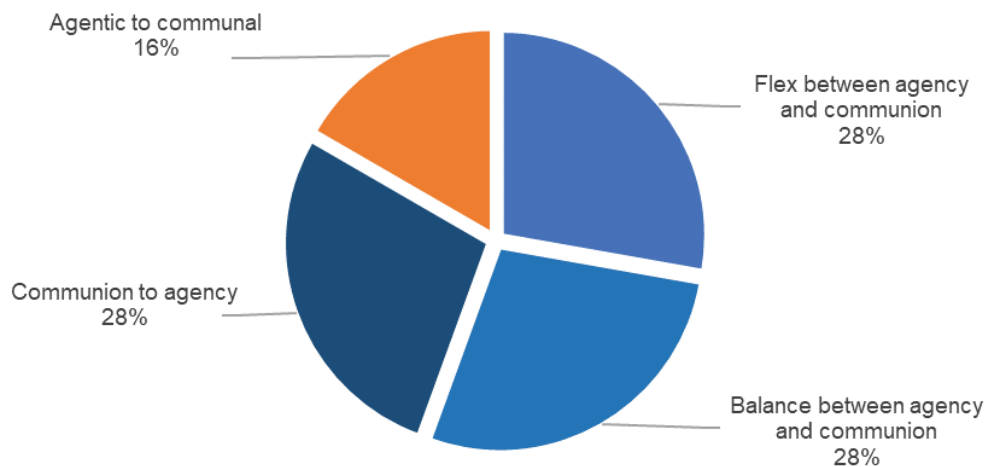
5.5.1   Balance between communion and agency

Balancing is an awareness that humans are dynamic and complex individuals. They are not one dimensional and as such they show up differently at different times. Within the confines of this research, balancing is to show both agency and communion overlapping in each experience as seen by D17 who notes that she works hard but also manage relationships. She goes on to detail how her engagements are about showing her competence but also being comfortable in her relationships and awareness of others.

"Some of it is, a lot of it is a lot of hard work and some of it is just sheer luck. And understanding the importance of relationships. As an example, "One day I rocked up and I don't even think I bothered to put on a suit. I was like whatever. I literally, I rocked up, was sitting in the in the room with my future MD and I decided I wanted a cup of tea, so I stood up and I made cup of tea. And I was like, you want okay, go, and make them all tea, we had a conversation. That's how I got promoted to what would be now senior management." (D17)

For D5 it is about making sure that people feel seen but at the same time know what the boundaries are. It is a seamless manner of engaging where her agentic and communal nature flows and overlaps.

"So, I think like I said and lead empathetically with compassion but also, make sure that your guys know where the line is, because I think the minute you become too soft then people walk all over you. And I don't want to even say that they disrespect you. It's just they'll push the boundaries, so just always know where the boundary is. But that doesn't stop you from leading them empathetically or being compassionate." (D5)

D13 echoes these sentiments that it is about balance knowing you have the some of the technical competence and being able to foster collaboration in matrix structures.

"I think from a, a middle management and again it depends on the role, right and the team size etcetera, but I think at the middle management. I'll call it more micro versus macro and when I say micro, it's probably more about your immediate team and maybe the team surrounding them. It's probably more balanced between competence and collaboration. I'll give you an example. I drove the Salesforce program. In a world of IT, I've never worked in IT, I had to learn very quickly that it as much as I had the skill to actually lead a matrix team or teams. I led six different teams of people uhm, and I had the skill to do that. It, it was just as important to know and be able to have knowledge of the technical stuff. I got myself certified because you have to have a level of people believing you know what they were talking about. So, I think I think at the middle management level, I think yeah, you probably need to be you need to have some of the SME knowledge. Uhm, and more balance." (D13)

5.5.2 Flex between communion and agency

Flexing requires social awareness, being able to switch from one behaviour into the other based on the contextual cues. As D4 states, competence is a given but being socially aware allows one to flex so one's messaging lands in the desired manner across multiple different stakeholders, understanding what their drivers are and shifting your narrative to align.

> *"When I'm at my lower vibrating self as my coach calls it, I would say my competency. When I'm at my half vibrating self, I would say my awareness of others. Most people in the room are competent. Most people in the room actually know, know their job. Most people actually know what they're doing. I think the how is probably what sets me apart … I do think that my, my awareness of how things land on people has, has also meant that I'm very clear that I could deliver the same message. The how speaks depending on my stakeholder because different people hear you differently. What we tend to do as, as people is we say, but I know my stuff, so I'm going to tell you the information. No one is arguing, sure, but what about your audience? Do they actually hear what you say, or do you even?" (D4)*

For participant D3, her self-awareness allows her to be cognisant of how her frame, height, and personality make people assume that she is inexperienced. In this example, reading the room (social awareness), she was able to switch from playful to deep competence and knowledge to prove her ability and gain buy-in.

> *"I was then asked to train some of our relationship managers that sat in the asset management team. This [function] kind of sits at the top because of the clients they service … it was about 80/85% of them were male white and much older than me. I'm a small person uhm, I'm petite because I have a vibrancy, you're thinking, what is this girl going to tell me? That's exactly what I experienced. I walked into the room and one of the guys said to me, so where's the facilitator? I was like okay; how do I handle this? And I just decided to, to be playful and I said yes, the facilitator is coming just now ... Then he suddenly introduced me that we have a facilitator, that the CEO of [Function] has sent to train us, D3. So, I could see literally like the shock on the faces and the technical questions that weren't necessary for this particular intervention started coming out, but obviously I'd sort of prepared myself. And then the penny sort of started to drop and by the time we got to lunchtime, It was like, okay so we can listen to you. You do have something to share. So, there is that always, it feels like I need to prove myself before I can be trusted or acknowledged in terms of what I might be thinking or*

putting on the table, but I suppose for me it's always been. I've viewed it as a challenge and a challenge that I'm going to conquer versus a challenge that's going to cripple my career because it could have, if, if I felt that intimidation." (D3)

5.5.3   Communion to agency

Leading with communion enables the female leader to create a relationship based on understanding. They are able to find congruence with their natural nurturing instinct and how they display as a leader. For D16 her agency is her tenacity and willingness to see work through to the end.

"You get up and you show up every day, that you're consistent in your approach and your behaviours and the willingness to learn and uhm [pause] and still remain human … remain a woman, human woman because I can wear my heart on my sleeve. You know, if someone comes into my office and they're sad I will cry with them, if they come and share joke, I will laugh with them, you know. I think and a lot of the feedback I get from staff, especially in the role that I'm in now is that they're so glad that I have the role because they can come and talk to me … I think and I think part of my personality is that like I said I'm like a dog with a bone, if you give me something to do, I will, I will work it to the detriment of work life balance [laughs]." (D16)

D2 is a highly communal person, who has actively had to work on being more assertive in the work environment, taking a more active role in discussions and creating a network that supports her in building her voice and visibility.

"My empathy, right. Coming down to people's level. Respecting them in their roles. Uhm, assertiveness, right and that's a skill that I've probably had to learn over time. I used to not have you know to, to not be. I've never really been like a yes person. But to know when to say no and to have my, my voice heard, right. And have my opinion acknowledged in, in, in, in a lot of meetings." (D2)

D14 had to shift from getting too heavily invested in her team's personal lives and create some distance. Being too emotionally invested resulted in her team taking advantage of her good nature.

"I had to be a little bit more assertive. So, I've got a, quite a soft side to, to me. So, and I've learned that, you know, people can take advantage of that. So, I used to be like a

little bit too empathetic. I used to support my team, but sometimes too much. I think I used to get more emotionally invested in the personal and the personal capacity. Now as a senior leader I've learned to be supportive, but not get too invested. It's more like I'm here if you need if, if you; if you need help, you can call on me and I will support you to some level." (D14)

5.5.4   Agentic to communal

For female leaders who are agentic there is a need to get on with the work and leave the emotions and awareness behind. This can create tensions in working relationships and potentially limit their career advancement. D11 is aware of her assertive nature and finds that she can be intimidating which in the end creates a barrier for her to partner effectively with the project teams to deliver. She is aware of this limitation and actively works on being conscious to others both their verbal and non-verbal cues.

"I'm more assertive than most of the men are. I, I just can't flip that switch hey [laughs]. The thing is the reason why I have to be attentive and empathetic is because I need to balance that assertiveness. Because otherwise I can be very direct all the time. So, for me specifically, I really need to work on the empathy and the attentive listening, because that doesn't come naturally. I constantly remind myself that I have to put myself in this person's shoes. I have to look at their words and understand what they were saying to me, not just talk over them. Because my natural reaction is to quickly give a response, you know, I've just disregarded the emotions because that really is my natural reaction." (D11)

For D17, the balance is critical. She speaks on the balance between assertiveness and competence and then elaborates that relationship is key.

"Now, if you have this, the level of bravado that I do without the competence, problem. If you have the competence, you don't have the bravado, you can still get to certain places, but you need to understand that every single thing is about relationships in this world; everything. And sometimes you have to get away from yourself." (D17)

Speaking on a specific relationship, she articulates that this individual has strong relationship but lacks competence. However, she needs to have a relationship with the person as they are a potential roadblock to her successful execution.

*"Thing is when you're incompetent and you use the relationships to do your work ...
You need to be able to understand what drives her. So, what drives her is not you
being right. What drives her is the relationships. I figured that one a long time ago. So,
I learned just to work my relationship angle with her so I can get what I want done."*
(D17)

Each of the leaders noted the need to be multi-dimensional in their behaviours whether that entailed self-reflection to learn a different behavioural trait, balancing the engagement, showing snippets of their non-primary behavioural type, or flexing between agentic and communal behaviour. Showing competence, assertiveness and being diligent needs to be coupled with the ability to be empathetic, create connection and foster psychologically safe environments. Agency, communion, and the juxtaposition of the two are not the sole requirement to progress there are a number of enablers needed along with organisational and individual traits as part of leaders' toolkits to advance to senior management.

5.6   Career advancement enablers

Career advancement requires a multifaceted approach that includes organisational and individual enablers which allows the leader to be seen, heard, and considered for career advancement. Figure 9 details the seven individual traits and two organisational traits that enable career advancement for female leaders. The tree diagram in Figure 9 details the two primary enablers and then the subset showing hierarchical view of the codes.

Figure 9: Enablers for career advancement to senior management (tree diagram)
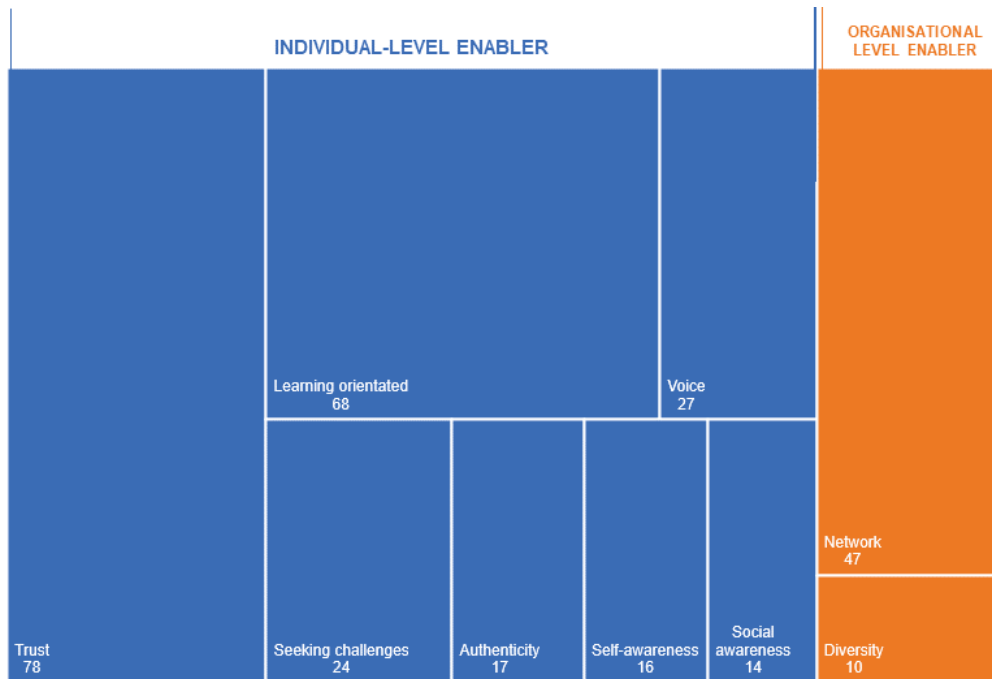
5.6.1 Organisational traits

The organisational traits predominantly centred around networks both formal and informal within their organisation and across other organisations that served as a facilitator to gain visibility and opportunities. Networks for this sample included internal and external networks inclusive of mentors, coaches, and sponsors. The different types of enabling relationships were clustered under networks as the majority of the mentors and sponsors referred to were identified as enablers to the participants career advancement to senior management. In addition, the Employment Equity drive with the introduction of employment equity legislation was another organisational enabler for two of the sample.

Network

In some cases, the organisation encouraged and created platforms for employees to engage in a mentoring relationship. In the case of D14, their perspective on self-advocacy and promotion does not lend itself to gaining visibility. As such she leant into mentors.

> *"So, even though I'm a marketeer and I know how to brand myself and things ... That's not me as a person. I would showcase my brand and say these are the things the brand's doing, but as a person, as an individual, I found it difficult to like, I found it like boastful, right. Uhm and sometimes that might not work in the corporate*

environment, but I think I was fortunate enough I think to have people and mentors and, and leaders that, that, that saw something and saw the difference and saw you know who would guide me." (D14)

Similarly, D6 had a network of senior leaders and executives who opened doors for her that enabled her to progress to senior management. Her discomfort with self-advocacy has more to do with the dissonance between self-advocacy and her values of integrity.

"I can't shake this um, wanting to do the right thing and then I won't compromise and in fact, I won't promote myself if I feel that it's dissonant with my values of integrity, ethics … There were people who used their platforms, in other words, they were more senior. They used their platform to, to notice that I wasn't necessarily going to promote myself, that they gave me the openings." (D4)

For D10, she used relationship-building to aid in her transition into a new industry when she moved to a new organisation. Her ability to foster relationships and build partnerships (networks) allowed her to created ease.

"So, relationship-building is very key, and I think that the relationship-building for me is comes naturally. And that's and that's and that made my transition easier. So even though it was uh a white male-dominant team because relationship-building was easier for me. It made my transition easier, and I was able to overlook the petty because I'm going to call it petty. The petty issues that that came out or came about, whether it was from my team or whether because the minute you let it, get personal, then it, it affects your emotional psyche." (D10)

D9 used her network post a retrenchment event to gain access to potential roles. This specific move was also a crucible experience that has shaped the way she manages her career using networks, visibility, and learning.

"It was a retrenchment that actually triggered my, my career, my career path. Uhm, so, so, what happened then is I then obviously reached out to my networks … So that's literally how I landed in, in the corporate world, through a retrenchment and a particular, the project that the state-owned entity was driving at the time, and I think only then did I then start realising the need, for example, to be deliberate around my next, you know, to be deliberate around which assignments do I participate in, to be deliberate around

expanding my skillset, you know, to be deliberate around making sure that I'm in the right rooms to learn and, you know, understand the business so that that for me I think was a was a pivotal moment in terms of shaping the rest." (D9)

The benefit of relationship-building is that it can foster a strong network both internally and externally as people move around and this creates visibility currency that creates learning opportunities through mentorship and knowledge-sharing.

"I think externally I've had quite a few people where I've actually built in internal relationship, and they've left the business and I've remained in contact with them because they were someone like I said that I had a good relationship with and built. So, I think that that is part one part of the external link with more from a coaching mentoring, probably sounding more sort of thing but then the other piece is more like from a customer agencies building that network." (D12)

"I've also had managers who, who really, uhm, were my champions, you know. Uhm, that I knew sat in a far room, and if there was an opportunity, they would raise my name. So, I've been very, very lucky. I've been very, very lucky in that respect as well." (D13)

Diversity

An interesting organisational perspective is that both D1and D11, one African black and the other white, noted that organisational diversity requirements enabled them to advance. D1 is a 47-year-old African black woman who commenced her career in the auditing industry when companies were heavily focused on employing and advancing previously disadvantaged groups. This shaped her career early on providing her with access to resources, opportunities, and networks that facilitated her career advancement throughout her career.

"They had a transformation business unit so advancement of black people and advancement of women was a big thing then. I guess we had the benefit of being within the firm at the time that all of these were being were being cultivated – the black transformation agenda. They had a thing called partner pairs. It was a programme, so for, for all the new black people, especially us youngsters who came in, they would pair you with a partner." (D1)

While D11 is a 33-year-old white woman who progressed from junior management to senior management after taking a break from corporate. Although her advancement was owing to diversity requirements. This was less so organisational or programme specific but rather a need for both a language and gender requirement. This opportunity was in the pharmacology industry.

> *"It is an interesting story. I went straight from almost junior management into senior management. Then what happened is after six years of being employed with one organisation, I was quite tired. I was feeling demotivated and I just actually resigned and took a one-year break … the position was particularly advertised for a female. And they also wanted an Afrikaans-speaking female." (D11)*

In addition to the positive associated with diversity requirements, two participants noted the adverse impact of being Indian and coloured on their career advancement due to the focus on African black.

> *"I don't think the drive towards coloured female has ever been a thing. It's always been towards the black female and even now it still holds true. If you look at the EAP, coloureds are rated very low when you doing your BEE score card … Uhm, and I think that's partly the reason because you know, if you've got two or three coloureds in your business, you're over represented [laughs]. So, I do think maybe from a BBE perspective but in that aside. I've always held leadership roles or junior or middle management roles in my career." (D16)*

D5, a coloured female in the profit-generating space of her business, does not believe that gender or race has adversely impacted her.

> *"I haven't struggled being a coloured female and the reason why I say that is I need to finish off my degree. All I've done is my matric and my certificate in banking. I don't have a degree, yet I have been able to climb the corporate ladder." (D5)*

The general perception in South Africa is that Employment Equity (diversity) is skewed for people of colour namely, African black, Coloured, and Indian people, often at the detriment of White women. The two narratives on the positive impact of diversity are years apart, yet it alludes to the fact that an individual's race while it can aid career advancement for women there is a requirement for women to be actively scanning for opportunities that align to her experience and affords her a benefit as it pertains to race.

5.6.2   Individual traits

The sample identified a number of individual traits that enabled their career advancement in addition to the communal and agentic behaviours that are the core context within this research.

Trust

Trust was the most frequently used code and found in all 18 of the participants. It was used to describe relationships, the relationship between competence trust, and building strong team dynamics. Participant D3 noted that her ability to deliver and increase her scope was owing to the trust she had built with her line leader.

> *"If I bring it more back to the manager, she could trust me if I say this is the deliverable. This is what we want to achieve. This is the timeframe where I was having challenges or delays, I would always communicate with her so very much an open communication mind … so it's that partnership and trust and I suppose I and I'm very grateful to her because I think she was my stepping stone by firstly, you know, selecting me as a 2IC but also trusting me with those deliverables." (D3)*

For D15, firstly she had to show her ability to assert herself and show competence before she built trust and support from the specialist engineers that she supported from an HR perspective. Once that trust was built, she was able to foster better relationships and take charge in settings without the need to further lean into assertiveness.

> *"They are smarter than support functions because obviously by them being the core of the business, they drive the business so, so the assumption is I'm smarter. So you need a very assertive HR. Who would be able to work with the engineer and the engineer to be able to trust in the capabilities. Once you establish yourself in such a way that they know you're not the weakest link then you survive." (D15)*

This sentiment is shared by D10 who noted that fostering trust enables you to function better especially as a support function.

> *"So, trust is very key and earning that trust. So, once you earn the trust, then it's easy. And that's and that's what I found. And once you earn the trust then? You become a partner. And then your job becomes easier." (D10)*

Coupled with the organisational traits, all of the participants noted the need to learn and grow. This growth was not limited to the pursuit of hard skills but also the pursuit of softer skills like relationship management and emotional intelligence. Two of the examples above mentioned learning either learning or relationship as a key behaviour.

> *"... to be deliberate around expanding my skillset, you know, to be deliberate around making sure that I'm in the right rooms to learn." (D9)*

> *"Senior management, you can't also be shy. You cannot be a wallflower, but then you also can be a ball buster at the same time. I want to share my view, I'm comfortable to share my view. Whereas middle management D5 would read the room and wonder should I, shouldn't I? So, you kind of hold yourself back a bit. And you're not as brave as you are now in a senior management role. But I think it's, it's, it's as you grow into your roles, and you grow as an individual. But I think more importantly, is own. I will keep saying it, own your seat at the table." (D5)*

A combination of organisation and individual traits impact how female middle managers have been able to progress to senior management. Some have used the agentic traits like enhancing their competency, others have leaned into relationship-building to create networks that span organisations and levels while others have scanned the external environment and used diversity (Employment Equity) metrics to gain access and advance.

Voice

Voice enables the participants to create visibility. For D10 voice is about standing her ground even when she feels uncertain and partnering with those who have more voice to amplify her perspective. She narrates an experience where she an Indian female in a support function had to speak to a group of men who were unhappy with their previous HR experience.

> *"I was thrown into a room with 40 Afrikaner white men and all they threw at me is problem after problem after problem. They were just shouting - What are you going to do? What are you going to do? So, I let them talk and I let them talk and they took notes and I let them talk. And then I said we can continue to complain, or we can draw a line in the sand, and we can move on, choice is yours. This is the plan we have made progress, but they were still hung up on the past. Silence in the room and then their*

director said I'm aligned with D10. And you should too. So, I could have at that point,
waffled or gotten scared and lost my voice and shiver and shake." (D10)

Voice is more than the participants' own voice but also to ensure her team has the ability to voice their opinions. Voice for D12 creates a space where she can ascertain how her team is doing by running surveys, enabling her to ensure belonging across her team.

"Leadership role very early on with team with quite big teams, you know, and I've
managed to lead them. You know you; we do surveys with teams. [pause] Culture for
me is a big thing, you know, it's about the culture of the team. How's everyone? Are
we on the same page? People feel like they belong to this team, they feel valued. So,
I think that's definitely a piece, and then obviously, yes, the from a results perspective
delivering on this is the ask the ask is you need to do XYZ. And you it's kind of ticking
both, you know." (D12)

Seeking challenges
Constantly seeking new opportunities to grow and challenge themselves was a theme found in over three quarters of the participants. There was a need to never stagnate and to be moving forward either academically or by virtue of experiences. Participant D8 is clear that when she joins an organisation her goal is to resolve a specific issue, fix it, and move on. The need to grow and tackle new challenges is not limited to herself but she encourages this for her team as well.

"In all the other organisations, I do what I got to do and I leave and I've always said
that my CV is clear. I've always said that I'm here to project, manage something and
there's no reason why you should stay. I've got a person and I said to her, when you
come back from leave, you need to be clear on where you're going. Like, you can't be
sitting and doing the same job not progressing … but change must happen and for me,
because my mind is a thinker and an implementer, once all of that is done. Why do
you still need me here? I'm going to get bored, and I think when I do get bored and
frustrated, I become a rebel nobody wants to deal with that." (D8)

"It's the willingness to learn. It's me giving myself the opportunity to be challenged out
of my comfort zone, right. Because technically, yes, I understand the job, but when you
get to like to my bosses." (D2)

Participants spoke on the need to be authentic in their interactions. This was often a journey to being authentic. The authenticity was around being your true self while being aware of those around you. Critical in authenticity was a strong sense of self-awareness of their strengths, development opportunities and leveraging those around them to fill the gaps. Filling the gaps was around identifying the leaders' gaps and letting their team aid in filling the gaps by allowing them to speak on matters they are well versed in or leveraging the more communal team members by letting them run sessions or engage in general morning greetings and small talk. The leader both enables their teams to lean into their strengths, learns from their team, and will utilise some of those strategies themselves and empowers them. The empowerment comes from the team seeing the leader being authentic, them identifying their shortcomings, and being open to let others take the lead, which fosters trust. Examples of the quotes linked to these codes can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Quotes on authenticity, self-awareness and social awareness

Theme	Quote
Authenticity	*"One of the big reasons why I needed the break to just kind of figure myself out was; there was a part where I thought the next level required me to tap into that masculine energy, but masking is exhausting. it's coming to work and putting on a, a whole costume every single day. You don't know who you are. You don't feel like, even to yourself, you're not authentic. Then how can you possibly be authentic to anyone else." (D4)*
	"I think the more power I got as I went up the ranks, also gave me the flexibility to kind of, tap into who I was, because then I didn't have to conform anymore. I had. I had power to now be me and to bring me to, to work." (D7)
Self-awareness	*"I think for a lot of times I felt unheard, right. And I yeah, you know I don't I, I don't feel like maybe I got the message through well enough, or you know how it is that maybe you people just don't do stuff for whatever reason I don't know. Maybe I, I just wasn't firm enough. So, I had to learn right. I had to learn to make my voice heard. I had to learn to speak what's on my mind." (D2)*
	"What I do is, together with my team members, I come in and I tell them. I don't know this. I'm going to sit with you, and I want you to explain it to me like I'm a five-year-old so that it makes sense to me. I also inadvertently. When we go into sessions, and I need somebody to convey what has happened. I always let them take the lead because they're the ones that know the job inside out. But while they're doing that, I'm learning in the same breath." (D5)
Social awareness	*"So, reading the situation is listening. And you listen not just with your ears, but you listen with your whole being and listen to the words that people are saying. Listen to the body language that that their displaying. Listen to their back story. Even though it's not being presented. But you've got to sort of place yourself where people are coming from. So, you've got a, a, a better understanding of the message they're trying to convey. So, you listen without your own emotions. You listen to not respond you. You listen you know to all the signs and every aspect of communication that is being given to you. So, if you do that then you're able to see OK. This this is what is coming out of their mouth, but the conviction and the is lacking, or this person comes from a situation where." (D18)*

Theme	Quote
	"It was a culture shock for me as well like, I've never seen this. I've never ever seen this before, but very much interesting, but there's drama, there's passion, you know. It's how they, you know, when they do this, Zulu dance and they read and, and it, it's exactly how they are in the way in the workplace, exactly. So, me, sometimes they used to say [the boss], did you bring a child? I think they thought haai this one, and I went there wearing a jean and a top and tekkies. So, haai they could see this is a child. So, maybe if I have went there wearing a dress and a doek then they will sort of like relate, but at the end they, they just accepted me, and I also made sure that I speak their language. I smile more ninjani and I make sure that when I'm there, there's food because they, they, that's how they relate. So, I would make sure that you know things that they like it's there and I speak to them. You had to be part of them with the buy-in." (D15)

5.7   Chapter 5: Summary

Advancing from management to senior management requires female middle managers to leverage both individual and organisational enablers to ensure that they are visible, that they present themselves in a manner that is authentic to who they are but still enables the organisation to see how they would fit into a senior role, even when their personality is not necessarily aligned to the norms of the business. These female leaders need to juxtapose agency and communion in such a manner that they retain their congruency with self and with their organisational persona. They need to show both competence and empathy, assertiveness with connection, and confidence with respect.
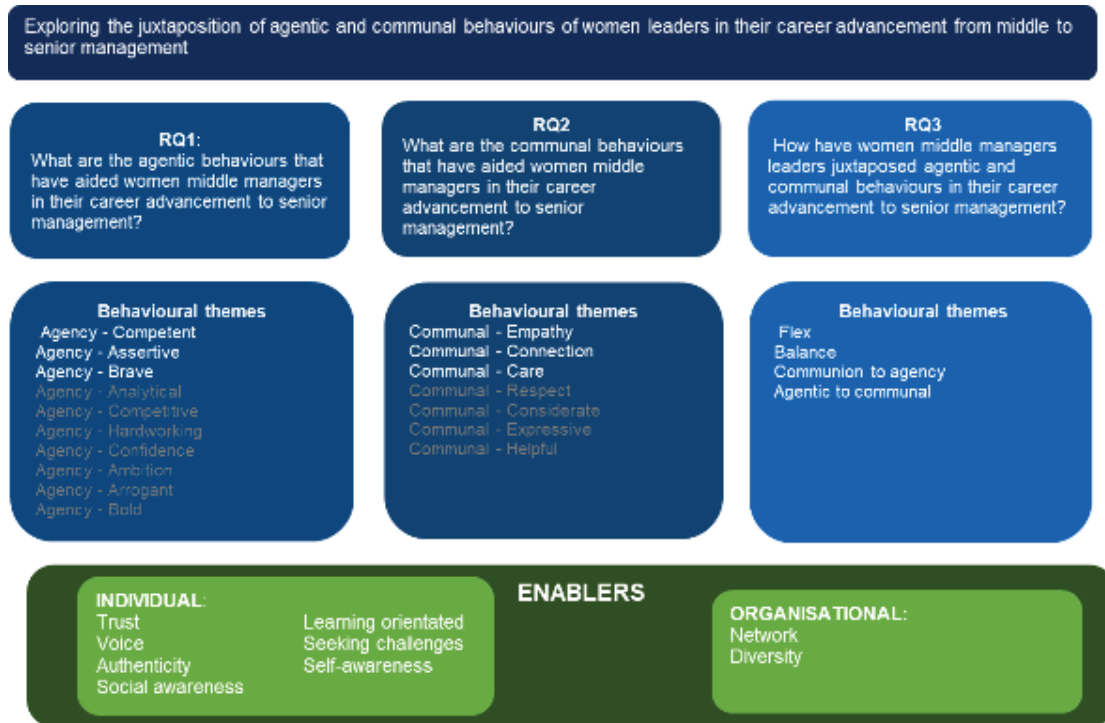
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 analysed the key findings from 18 semi-structured interviews, which were grouped in themes per the three research questions posed in Chapter 3. In addition to this, Chapter 5 provides key themes on individual and organisational enablers female leaders used in their career advancement to senior manager. The findings from Chapter 5 are compared and contrasted to the literature review in Chapter 2 and background to the research in Chapter 1.

Figure 10 provides an overview of the structure of the discussion chapter. The focus on the discussion chapter is on the top three agentic and communal behaviours. For details on the grey-coloured codes in Figure 10 refer to Appendix 4. The career enablers discussed are beyond the scope of this research, however these are deemed meaningful to the study and are included.

Figure 10: Discussion roadmap

Exploring the juxtaposition of agentic and communal behaviours of women leaders in their career advancement from middle to senior management

RQ1:
What are the agentic behaviours that have aided women middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

RQ2
What are the communal behaviours that have aided women middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

RQ3
How have women middle managers leaders juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours in their career advancement to senior management?

Behavioural themes
Agency - Competent
Agency - Assertive
Agency - Brave
Agency - Analytical
Agency - Competitive
Agency - Hardworking
Agency - Confidence
Agency - Ambition
Agency - Arrogant
Agency - Bold

Behavioural themes
Communal - Empathy
Communal - Connection
Communal - Care
Communal - Respect
Communal - Considerate
Communal - Expressive
Communal - Helpful

Behavioural themes
Flex
Balance
Communion to agency
Agentic to communal

ENABLERS

INDIVIDUAL:
Trust
Voice
Authenticity
Social awareness
Learning orientated
Seeking challenges
Self-awareness

ORGANISATIONAL:
Network
Diversity

Codes in grey text will not be discussed in this chapter

The findings from the qualitative narrative interviews clearly show that all of the 18 women in the sample use more than one type of behaviour in their advancement to senior management. Each woman's stories differ as is expected owing to the variance in age, race, location,

industry, and personality. The one constant is that these women have succeeded in advancing their career to senior management across various industries, role functions, and locations.

The purpose of this research was to explore the plethora of behavioural aspects they used to progress as well as to compare and contrast it to literature which is predominantly from the Western World. Finally, to ensure that the narrative of successful women in South Africa is shared and explored owing to the rich historical and contextual nuances. Which is is dissimilar to the Western World owing to the country being a developing country with a fairly recent democratic history.

6.2 Discussion of results for research question one

What are the agentic behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

6.2.1 Introduction

Research has found that perceived social inequality has a psychosocial effect, which impacts not only the social perception and evaluation of members from different social classes but also on gender (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022). Economic inequality leads to a decrease in social cohesion, trust, and cooperation, fostering more individuality than collectivism (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022). Thus, in a country like South Africa with a high level of economic inequality the expectation is that agentic behaviours are anticipated to be high, however Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) notes that women are still perceived to be more communal but the difference between their communal and agentic traits are smaller. In other words, the level of communion decreases so resulting in a smaller gap in behavioural expectations (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022). In addition to economic inequality, Lonati and Van Vugt, (2023) note that the physical and social ecology impacts the leadership style owing to cultural difference. Specifically, where there are resources available and predictability constraints, this fosters a more coercive leadership style as to concentrate resources (Lonati & Van Vugt, 2023). Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) research took place in the Western World, owing to the difference in cultural leadership style this raised the question in a South Africa economically unequal society with limited resources can women lean into agentic behaviours to develop and, if so, which behaviours do they lean into.

The next section unpacks the top three agentic traits that female leaders used to progress from middle to senior management. The focus will be on the top three agentic behaviours that

were mentioned - competence, assertiveness, and bravery. Comparing the results from this study to other studies on female leadership emergence and advancement.

6.2.2   Competence

The most frequently coded agentic behaviour was competence, with all 18 participants making reference to it. It was linked to a learning orientation, the need to display their knowledge constantly to ensure they remain relevant as well as their innate desire to know more. Competence was noted as the entry point into engagements. A women's competence ensures she can have a space at the table, however for advancement she needs to couple this with voice, visibility, and network. It was articulated that everyone is competent so to differentiate yourself there needs to be more added to the mix. Reoccurring points under competency included that pure competency was not sufficient to enable career advancement.

One of the participants (D17) noted that "I think about it honestly, I can pinpoint about six people that have the same level of competence as me." Competence enables women to display their skillset and knowledge to fulfil their leadership role both from a technical competency and strategic leadership perspective. Technical competence was identified as more important as they progressed to middle management. It had some importance at middle management but was less critical to show competence at senior management as the assumption is their team would provide the technical competence and fill the gaps.

For female leaders displays of competence are necessary as women are often perceived as less competent than their male peers. This is an aspect that is more evident in male-dominant industries and functions (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022). In general women are often given less credibility than their male counterparts and need to prove their competence where a man is presumed to be competent (Koburtay et al., 2019; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Women have to gain competency to perform their jobs, but they have the added challenge of needing to prove their competence where men are assumed to be competent. However, female experience negative outcomes when they display high levels of competence as outlined in the SCM model. There is an assumption that they lack warmth (Cuddy et al., 2011; Giacomin et al., 2022). Cuddy et al. (2011) state that individuals who are perceived to have high competence but lack warmth are treated with passive facilitation in the form of envy and jealousy. Envy fosters resentment and hostility resulting in indignation owing to the assumption that the female leader, in this instance, is advanced by illegitimate ways (Cuddy et al., 2011; Giacomin et al., 2022).

Competent without warmth poses a risk as others may perceive them as a threat for economic and social opportunities. For female leaders this may lead to perceptions that they are either heartless or have used their looks to gain access to leadership positions so leading to more envy and jealousy. The perception of female leaders' ineffectiveness and unsuitability for a leadership role arises from perceptions and beliefs about women and not specifically about their competency (Koburtay et al., 2019). Wanasika et al. (2011), in their study on implicit cultural stereotypes, found that the second-most common leadership dimension within Sub-Saharan Africa was the team-orientated one, which includes an aspect of administrative competence. Thus, a key component of leadership emergence and effectiveness within Sub-Saharan Africa is the ability to display competence but this needs to be coupled with other more socially related communal traits (Wanasika et al., 2011).

Without displays of competence, female leaders are unable to climb the corporate ladder to senior management. Unfortunately, where female leaders display self-promotion, they face the challenge of being assumed to be less likeable and warm (Titi Amayah & Haque, 2017). Career advancement is dependent on cumulative skill development to navigate successfully up the corporate ladder (Quigley et al., 2023). A leader requires the ability to apply their skills taking cognisance of the appropriateness of said skill, i.e. a leader needs to be aware of the context in which they are engaging and behave in a manner that is beneficial for the desired outcome (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Women face the challenge of needing to be competent in order to be perceived as a leader but at the same time they face backlash when the promote their competence. With changes in education level among women, the need to extract competency from agentic traits is supported, as all the female leaders irrespective of the preferred leadership style required competence within their prior and current positions to be assessed as effective. This is supported by Dutz et al. (2022); Eagly et al. (2020).

6.2.3   Assertiveness

Assertiveness for the female sample was generally around engagement with broader team or peers. It was articulated as being forthright and honest without being harmful, to have their voice heard and to gain visibility. The participants identified the need for leaders to have their voice even at middle management. At middle management there was more focus on having a say but still having a level of diplomacy to ensure that they were not perceived as arrogant or overbearing. There was a norm that, as they progressed to senior management, the need to assert their opinions became more critical especially when dealing with those who have competing needs at their peer level.

In economically unequal countries, the communal perception of the sexes decreases resulting in a decrease in the differences between the expectations for agency and communion for women (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022). The need for an assertive leader is further supported by research done in 28 countries which found that both objective and subjective economic inequality increases the desire for strong leadership that is dominant (Sprong et al., 2019). This supports the view that the assertiveness of agency is important for women especially within the context of a highly unequal society like South Africa. Furthermore, men in highly unequal societies have lowered their communal expectations potentially resulting in even more agentic men. This results in women having to increase their assertiveness to be heard in a space where men hold even more power (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022). Women are still perceived as communal in unequal societies but the difference in agentic and communal attributes decreases (Eagly et al., 2020). This potentially impacts the backlash owing to incongruence which would then further encourage women to be assertive.

Nascent research found that assertive women are considered as deviating from their social roles and as such experience negative reactions when displaying these behaviours (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This is supported by Koenig et al. (2011); Lonati and Van Vugt (202); Rosette and Tost (2010); and Titi Amayah and Haque (2017). Literature has also show that dominance is linked to leadership perceptions, and this is mediated by normalcy (Kim et al., 2020). The need for an assertive leader in times of economic inequality is concerning as it shows a wish for leaders who are willing to use undemocratic means to achieve their outcomes (Sprong et al., 2019). Studies in Australia found that men are still more strongly associated with assertiveness and credibility than women (Griffiths et al., 2019).

6.2.4   *Bravery*

Bravery for the sample was closely linked to assertiveness. The female leaders acknowledged the need to stand up and have their opinions heard required more than just assertiveness. It is linked to a willingness to be different from the norms in the room as stated by D4 "to share my crazy ideas". The leaders acknowledge that bravery was linked to more visibility owing to the uniqueness of this perspective. Furthermore, the need to display bravery increases as they progressed up the corporate ladder owing to the inherent power in their roles. Taking risks and making decisions in highly ambiguous contexts is an inherent requirement in leadership. Leaders take the facts, apply their experiences and competence, and make decisions (Bartlett, 2024). Bartlett (2024) notes that bravery for female leaders is multifaceted owing to the systemic biases which require women to advocate for inclusive policies. Female

leaders by the nature of their sex and their role are already defying the status quo and as such merely being is an act of bravery.

Female leaders, owing to their gender, are often not assumed to have power. However, as they progress to more senior leadership roles their diffuse power increases (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022) the diffuse power inherent in the status of their role enables them to be display bravery (Lianidou & Zheng, 2022). Within the confines of Sub-Saharan Africa there is a strong power distance relationship owing to the ascribed status of leader and patriarchal nature of the societies that adversely affect women (Wanasika et al., 2011). Authentic and transformational leadership styles require leaders to stand up for their beliefs and values (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020).

6.2.5 Summary

Women leaders used agentic terms for themselves that are generally linked to the more positive agentic traits. It could be that when agentic women tend to be less agentic than men or tend to stay on the "softer side" of agentic traits (assuming that agency is a spectrum from low to high). It was clear in the research that as a female leader progresses from middle to senior management the aspects of technical skill decreases, however their ability to assert themselves increases as they get to senior management owing to the power associated with being a senior leader. Recent literature notes that the agentic behaviours by either of the sexes is based on a multitude of contextual factors ranging from the macro-societal level to the micro-individual level. How women choose to project themselves in an organisation is a function of the organisational norms and their level within the organisation.

6.3 Research question two findings

> What are the communal behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

6.3.1 Introduction

When looking at the top five behaviours, inclusive of agentic and communal, the participants showed a preference for communal behaviours with the second-, third- and fourth-most occurring codes being empathy, connection, and care respectively. Five of the participants identified the need to lead with the heart, ensuring they maximise their teams' strengths and are congruent with who they are as a person. Some felt that the desire and practice of leading with communion had more to do with who they are than their gender, while others believed that being communal was partly owing to gender but also the way they were raised and yet

for others still it was about moving from the masculine ways of work to being true to who they are and being more people-centric in their approach.

The discussion will focus on the top three behaviours in order of importance, along with a review of the literature. As a significant amount of the literature is based on western views and experience, the African experience is of importance to unpack how and if cultural norms impact the way in which female leaders advance. Wanasika et al. (2011) references work by Mbigi (2002) who identified five core values of African leaders: "respect for the dignity of others, group solidarity, teamwork, service to others, and the spirit of harmony and interdependence", with the last being the spirit of ubuntu (Wanasika et al., 2011, p. 235).

The spirit of *ubuntu* loosely means 'I am because we are'. this speaks to the need for kinship, maintaining good relationships, being considerate of follower development and well-being (Wanasika et al., 2011). The practice of *ubuntu* is different to the findings on economic equality where high economic inequality, as within South Africa, leads to more competition, less trust, and a focus on self which results in a preference for a strong and agentic leader (Moreno-Bella et al., 2022; Sprong et al., 2019). Within the confines of South Africa, there is high economic inequality, both perceived and observed, coupled with an African perspective of *ubuntu* which are polar opposites. The next section provides a discussion on the findings as they pertain to the communal traits. The discussion will focus on the top three overall behaviours empathy, connection, and care are rated numbers one, two and three respectively.

6.3.2   Empathy

The most commonly coded communal behaviour was empathy. All of the participants bar one were coded as displaying empathetic behaviours. Empathy spoke to the way that some leaders are in their lives, which is linked to them showing up in the workplace as authentically as possible. While it was linked to being an enabler for their teams it ensured that felt heard and seen, helping them build their strengths, or enabling their work with others. Empathy allowed them to foster trust within their teams and more broadly speaking. It creates a psychologically safe environment, which some or the leaders felt was missing when they were climbing up the ranks. Empathy is both vertically and horizontally relevant in the organisation as they were able to use this to understand their leaders and peers better in other functions.

The need for empathy is supported in the literature. Leadership requirements have moved from purely being task focused to a stronger focus on the needs of people in their team (Esser et al., 2018). Empathy fosters mutual trust, reciprocity, and respect so enhancing camaraderie

and cooperation (Arghode et al., 2022). This requires leaders irrespective of sex to show empathetic understanding, emotional sensitivity as well as the ability listen and be aware of other needs, traits which are generally considered feminine (Esser et al., 2018).

Empathy was identified as one of the competencies female leaders need to display when working in male-dominated fields or industries (Esser et al., 2018). Women are associated with being cooperative, caring, and other focused by providing social support (Bowles et al., 2022; Croft et al., 2021; Esser et al., 2018). The need for empathy is linked to female-dominated workplaces so resulting in a less prejudice assessment of female leaders and enhances their emergence and effectiveness as a leader (Koburtay et al., 2019). In their study on the attributes attributed to the sexes and leadership, it was found that women scored significantly higher in empathy (Griffiths et al., 2019). The need for empathy is thus not purely limited to crisis situations (Koburtay et al., 2019).

The downside of empathy is that the focus on others without appropriate care of self can lead to burnout and poor well-being outcomes (Croft et al., 2021). In the same work it is noted that one aspect of empathy - the helping enhances social connection - satisfies the need for belonging (Croft et al., 2021). Gendered differences in emotional support begin in childhood where girls are expected to be more empathetic and helpful than boys (Croft et al., 2021).

6.3.3   Connection

Female leaders valued connection both within their teams, across their organisation and within their industry. Connection was built over time and by displaying care, empathy, concern and offering to help others. Connection enabled them to build up their networks and empower their team. Connection was used in moving between organisation, across roles, and given promotion opportunities. The need to build and grow relationships was related to creating a professional or personal connection and feeding the growth in the connection with each interaction.

Within the confines of career advancement, connection enabled them to display their competence in spaces where they would not necessarily always have had access especially where connection and competence were present. Competence showed their technical abilities and connection provided them access to others who could potentially open doors to other opportunities. Connection is not limited to those who could advance their careers but also to those who did not necessarily have the power to do so.

In terms of leadership, Shuck et al. (2019) emphasise the need for contextual leadership that is driven by the needs of their followers (Shuck et al., 2019). They note that leaders need to motivate their teams to adopt changes and embrace learning while creating room for creativity (Shuck et al., 2019). Communal leadership styles have a more positive impact on work engagement (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). The communal leader displays a focus on others' well-being and development, so ensuring that employees are treated as individuals and that they feel connection with their job (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). Communal leadership is associated with stronger employee dedication owing to the open and honest nature of their interactions (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). Similar to the differences articulated under empathy, Griffiths et al. (2019) found that women scored significantly higher in collaboration and communication as well as developing others. The high outcome for connection is related two at three studies done in the last five years.

Counter to this research on the benefits of connection, a longitudinal study by Offermann et al., (2020) found that relational orientations were not positively related to middle-age career success. The only relational orientation that did lead to career success was networking, which was associated with both career advancement and satisfaction (Offermann et al., 2020). Female leaders need to rely on more than pure attributes to advance their careers as outlined in the organisational attributes of which networking is one (Offermann et al., 2020).

6.3.4   Care

Care, unlike the other two previous behaviours, had both negative and positive connections for the female leaders. In a positive perspective it is used to create a sense of team, being people-orientated, and showing interest the whole-life of the employee. This enables the female leader to be authentic in her ways of engaging and fosters psychological safety.

Caring was significant for those who identified as leading from the heart. When they engage they are more likely to be employee-focused, they are aware of their team's personal life challenges which could potentially impact their work. On the negative perspective, female leaders have found that there is potentially a cultural and societal requirement to continue to be the 'nice girl' putting others before themselves which impacts their well-being. Furthermore, caring too much can result in the lines between work and life blurring or there being an emotional toll on the leader when they have to follow a disciplinary process and reluctance to do so. The female leaders felt like it was requirement to be caring to be liked but that it was also a way they chose to lead in order to be more humane in their approaches. Literature highlights both the positive and negatives of caring, caring and compassion are considered

the same emotion for purposes of this study. Similar to the findings of the researcher who displays care not so much as a function of being a leader but rather because they view themselves as just being humane (Shuck et al., 2019).

The literature notes that compassion is not a soft issue, or a behaviour used by those avoiding conflict and wanting to maintain the peace. Rather it is about setting standards and ensuring consequences in a manner that is fair and consistent based on the contextual factors (Shuck et al., 2019). Compassionate leaders are self-aware about how their behaviours and thoughts impact them and show social awareness keenly taking cognisance of how their actions affected others not only in their immediate space but in their organisation and community as a whole (Shuck et al., 2019).

Compassion and empathy are interlinked and have been as empathy triggers compassion (Arghode et al., 2022). Leaders play an important role in instilling compassion within the workplace (Shuck et al., 2019). Owing to the highly volatile and polarised cultural and political nature of the world there is a need for leaders to show up in ways that foster belongingness (Shuck et al., 2019). The identified behaviours of a compassionate leader are presence, integrity, empathy, authenticity, dignity, and accountability (Shuck et al., 2019). Contrary to the general view of what compassion is, Shuck et al. (2019) articulates it as "having difficult conversations, holding individuals responsible for their actions, and providing deliberate feedback" (Shuck et al., 2019, p. 549). Compassion thus creates a workplace that enhances connection and relatability (Shuck et al., 2019). In general, communal leaders display a focus on others' well-being and development, ensuring that employees are treated as individuals and that they feel cared for (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023).

Care takes varied shapes and forms as noted in the previous paragraph. When looking at the negatives one looks at caring for others through the lens of advocacy and emotional control. Research has found that female leaders generally advocate for others more so than themselves (Bowles et al., 2022). They experience negative evaluations when they overly self-advocate and if they do not strongly advocate for others (Bowles et al., 2022). In addition, leaders are expected to be level-headed and rational by exerting emotional control (Arghode et al., 2022; Brescoll, 2016). Supporting the negative connotations of emotion, research has found that women can communicate with too much emotion, thus the balance of what is enough emotion potentially needs to be reviewed (Esser et al., 2018).

6.3.5 Summary

The top three communal attributes of empathy, connection and caring are often interlinked as shown both by the participants and in the literature. One such examples is where connection is needed to be empathetic and empathy results in care (compassion). For the sample, being empathetic is central to the manner in which they lead. They foster connection by leaning into communal behaviours that are associated with leadership styles like transformational, inclusive and servant leadership (Arghode et al., 2022; Esser et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2023). Communal leadership styles have a more positive impact on work engagement (Dunlop & Scheepers, 2023). Compassionate leaders encourage their teams to reframe challenges as learning and it is not bound to a role or team but can be displayed vertically and horizontally (Shuck et al., 2019).

6.4 Juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours

RQ3: How have female middle managers juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours in their career advancement to senior management?

6.4.1 Introduction

All of the 18 participants in the sample made reference to using both agentic and communal behaviours in their advancement from middle to senior management and throughout their careers. The women shared narratives on their experiences of past leaders that impacted their resolve to lead differently or identified leaders who they emulated. One of the consistencies is that leadership is a social construct, which requires engaging with, influencing and partnering with others across multiple vertical levels and horizontal functions in the organisation. Owing to the plethora of interactions, displays of leadership are not singular and simple owing to the contextual nature of social interactions as well as the varied personalities of individuals. In the findings, even where participants were identified as more assertive in nature or leading with heart, they articulated the need for contextual awareness of self, others, and the environment.

Research in recent years has shown that leaders benefit from displays of both agentic and communal behaviours irrespective of gender (Grysman & Booker, 2023; Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018; Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). In their research on top-level women, Zheng, Surgevil, et al. (2018) identified four pairs of agentic and communal traits that 64 US female executives in the United States experienced, namely "demanding and caring, authoritative and participative, self-advocating and other serving, and distant and approachable" (p. 633) as well as the five mechanisms used by them to manage the contradiction between the pairs of agentic and communal expectations. This research identified four core themes pertaining to

the juxtaposition of agency and communion: balance between communion and agency, flex between communion and agency, and moving from one behaviour to the other, i.e. from agentic to communal or communal to agentic. Moving from agentic to communal was the outlier with only three participants being identified in these themes and the remainder had five each.

6.4.2   Balance between communal and agentic behaviours

There was a total of five participants mapped to balancing. Within the confines of this research balancing is where female leaders show both agency and communion overlapping and shifting the narrative of what agency and communion is. In balancing their communion with agency, the leaders often made the conscious choice to ensure they first create a sense of trust and connection with others. The need first to lead with care was often owing to their experiences with their leaders or more senior leaders in their organisation. They noted the need to create order, structure, and boundaries but the belief is that this is done secondary or tertiary to the relationship. There focus was on creating empowerment opportunities for those in their teams, serving as barrier-breakers for their team. These leaders often spoke more on the collaborative manner of leading, which was evident even in their time as middle managers. They all shared a deep sense of confidence in their abilities and in the ability to manage teams and engage across various functions of teams.

The shifting between agency and communion is likened to the mechanisms reframing and overlapping (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Reframing is used by female leaders to reconcile the conflicting aspects of agency and communion (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Overlapping is where female leaders recognise instances where agentic and communal behaviours can converge on shared objectives (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). In this approach, female leaders work to establish favourable connections between agency and communion, so replacing the prevalent negative perceptions. As a result, this leads to the creation of fresh cognitive frameworks where agency and communion become interconnected instead of conflicting with each other, and they became mutually embedded rather than remaining distinct (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

Despite the potential conflict between agentic and communal concerns, female leaders actively sought opportunities or even established conditions in which these concerns could overlap, enabling them to address both behaviours simultaneously (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). In the overlapping approach, agency and communion remain distinct concepts but can

be addressed concurrently by identifying common ground between agentic and communal goals (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018).

Overlapping or reframing between agentic and communal behaviours enables female leaders the opportunity to engage from the leadership frame in which they are most comfortable and is linked to their predominant personality (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). For a female leader who identifies as more agentic in terms of getting to the point, she would need reframe the communal traits as enablers to ensure she achieves her desire outcome. This is similar for communal leaders. This ensures that she approaches all interactions from an authenticity frame (Esser et al., 2018). Ensuring authenticity is supported by research on female leadership competencies, in male-dominated industries, from the perspective of male leaders, who noted authenticity as a key consideration (Esser et al., 2018). Authentic leaders are always themselves, but they are able to adapt their behaviour based on contextual factors (Esser et al., 2018). The point on authenticity is applicable to all the remaining themes in section 6.4 and will be repeated.

6.4.3   Flex between communal and agentic behaviours

The researcher identified flexing between agency and communion as a process that is led first and foremost by social awareness. The leader does have a preferred leadership style, but she is able to switch based on her assessment of the situation and contextual cues. One of the examples used in the findings for D3 supports this being a separate type of behaviour. D3 identifies as a communal leader, however in a specific situation detailed under section 5.5.2, she articulates leading with agency (self-confidence) by stating that she is merely setting up for the trainer but once the session commences and she is introduced by the CEO of the function, and she uses his power in the room to validate her. The leaders who assess the situation apply prior learning and adapt accordingly. This is aligned to the research done by Esser et al. (2018) as it maintains their authenticity and aligns to one of the considerations under interpersonal, which is for the female leader not to adapt frantically to masculine behaviours as this may impact their image and influence. The use of social awareness to read the room and determine the most appropriate responses enables the female leader to lean into more feminine or masculine traits and this is to their advantage (Esser et al., 2018).

The need to flex between communal and agentic behaviours is important as women receive negative evaluations when they do not lean into the agentic leadership prototype or the communal female prototype (Kim et al., 2020). The contextual nature of flexing is a fine line that the female leader needs to walk as, in some instances, the display of agentic behaviour

may result in negative outcomes. For example, during interviews if women display self-promotion and self-confidence this "boosts women's competence ratings but lowers their likeability ratings" adversely impacting their hireability (Kim et al., 2020, p. 2).

6.4.4 Communal to agentic behaviour

The female leaders in this grouping predominantly lead with communion and developed or enhanced their agentic traits over time or, alternatively, by finding sponsors or mentors to aid them in their career advancement. The leaders who used communion to agency typically use tenacity and grit along with sponsorship to gain access to senior management. These leaders focused on determination and grit, along with sponsorship to develop to senior management. The earlier a powerful network was created and nurtured the faster their transition to senior management, some of the sample noted their perceived delay in advancement owing to their primary focus on gaining competency and doing the work, for those leaders with a strong preference for relationship there is a need to build an influential network to create visibility.

The use of communion is supported as women are considered to be most effective when remaining authentic to the gender identity and employing a "feminine transformational and participatory leadership style" (Esser et al., 2018, p. 141). In addition, using communion is in part supported as research has found that women's communal has increased over the last seven decades along with their competence but not their agency (Eagly et al., 2020). This has led to women's employment increasing in specific functions like service, education, and health-care industries where the emphasis is on the social skills and social contribution or into more communal variants of these agentic roles (Eagly et al., 2020).

6.4.5 Agentic to communal behaviour

Three participants identify themselves as being more agentic in nature. Of the three, two acknowledge that they have been told they come across as hard or cold. The agentic leaders are dedicated to their craft. They focus on building competence and credibility to get the job done. Participant D6, while not self-identifying as hard or cold, focused on intelligence and ability to deliver, both these attributes were articulated or inferred in the interview with participant D11 and D8. While these leaders were agentic, they acknowledge the need for creating a space where they could interact with their team and others on a more interpersonal level. For D11, her pharmacology industry is heavily academic so enabling her to relate to the organisation better as they have a similar way of engaging on facts.

The agentic female leader acknowledges the need to foster relationships and overtime has had to create strategies to foster connection and ensure that they get buy-in from their team. The strategies have been intentional and structured in such a manner that they can retain the agentic need for delivery while ensuring those in the workplace and their team has the opportunity to connect.

Learning orientation, diversity of skillset and broader industry awareness is of importance to these leaders. This ensures that they are both internally and externally relevant, continue to be subject matter experts, and drives their ability to deliver exceptional pieces of work. The literature speaks to aspects of agency as being critical for leaders but also acknowledges the challenges they face as they face incongruency at both a leadership and gender-level.

Research in Ghana found that dynamic female stereotypes have shown a significant increase in the agentic traits over time (Bosak et al., 2018). This increase was attributed both to masculine personality and cognitive traits coupled with a stability in feminine personality traits. Thus, women can be perceived as more masculine without losing their feminine traits (Bosak et al., 2018). This is of important for women who identify as more agentic especially within Sub-Sharan Africa. In contrast to the findings that agentic traits for women have increased over time, a longitudinal study found that women's communal traits and competence have increased over the last several decades but not their agency (Eagly et al., 2020).

Similarly, Koburtay et al. (2019) found incongruency in their review of the academic literature between 2010 to 2018 regarding the female stereotypes of feminine, caring warm and sensitive persist and that leader stereotypes of assertive, masculine, self-reliant, and forceful still persist as well. These stereotypes lead to incongruence between women and leader so resulting in prejudice against women leader both in terms of emergence and perceived effectiveness (Koburtay et al., 2019). When women are promoted, they are often promoted into positions where they are less likely to succeed owing to the nature of the role or the organisation (Koburtay et al., 2019).

6.4.6   Summary

All the women sampled used a combination of agentic and communal behaviours to advance to senior management. The differences were in the manner in which the juxtaposed the two. The sample average age is 45 years old as the expectation, according to literature, is that the sample should be more agentic. A study by Calvo-Salguero et al. (2008), as noted in Hsu et al. (2021), found that women between 40 and 64 years old displayed more masculine traits

than women aged 20 - 29 years old. In the sample the youngest participant who is in her early 30s self-identified as more agentic both in terms of her general personality and work personality. However, the vast majority of the participants in their late 30s and above identified more with a juxtaposition of communal and agentic approaches to engaging. This is most likely owing to the common theme of humane-orientated leadership found in leaders within Sub-Saharan Africa (Wanasika et al., 2011).

Research by Hsu et al. (2021) found that the gender gap in agency remained "relatively stable across the life span" (2021, p. 1005). Contrary to the relative stability the female leaders generally articulated a change in the ways that they lead over time and a move to a more communal way of engaging and leading. For those who started out communal they have learned more into their communal traits by balancing, flexing, or reframing more agentic-centred ways of engagement into a more people and individual-oriented way of engaging.

6.5   Career advancement enablers

Esser et al. (2018) articulates that communicational, personal, and professional competencies are needed by female leaders to succeed in male-dominated spaces. The three themes under these competencies are empathy, authenticity, and professional expertise (Arghode et al., 2022; Esser et al., 2018). In addition to professional expertise and adaptive capacity the effective use of power was identified as one the most common behaviours associated with advancement to senior management. This coupled with the organisational enablers to the advancement of networks could be linked to the effective use of power as a number of female leaders within confines of this research used networks to progress, inform of mentors, sponsors, or coaches (Bowles et al., 2022; Esser et al., 2018). The enablers of social awareness link back to adaptive capacity – the ability to shift ways of being and working based on contextual cues.

6.5.1   Organisational traits

Networking was the most common theme under the enablers. The vast majority of participants refer to internal and external networks which enabled their career advancement by amplifying their visibility and voice. The use of networks for career advancement is well documented in the literature outlined in the next paragraph. Similar to work by Offermann et al. (2020) the strongest and common predictor of career outcomes is networking. When looking at the relational orientations, networking was identified as the sole relational orientation that predicted career advancement in a longitudinal study of female leaders between 1983 and 2013 (Offermann et al., 2020). This study did not consider mentoring as a subset of networks.

Networking as an organisational factor that can positively impact career advancement was supported by (Griffiths et al., 2019). Strong networks are identified as a pre-requisite for women in bolstering their political skill, especially in male-dominated fields (Esser et al., 2018). One sees this with D1 when she joined the auditing profession. It was predominantly white and male, so both the diversity drive and networks enabled her advancement. The social capital value of networks in providing access to knowledge of others included their ability to lobby others (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Taparia & Lenka, 2022), ability to make one more visible for advancement opportunities (Croft et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2021) so creating strong relationships to drive organisational purpose and values, importance of mentorships (Bachnik et al., 2023; Bol & Fogel-Yaari, 2022) as well as general support from network (Bowles et al., 2022).

Offermann et al. (2020) note that gender discrimination has a negative impact on career advancement and success. Within this body of work the Employment Equity drive within South Africa has aided some women in gaining opportunity to senior management roles. This is true for both and African black and white Afrikaans females. They found opportunities for the African female to gain early access to networks, sponsors, and career opportunity. In comparison to the white female who found an opportunity in her field because of the gender and language needs of the organisation. There were negative outcomes for a Coloured female and an Indian female who believed that the emphasis from an employment equity perspective has predominantly been for African black men and women which was viewed as adversely impacting them.

6.5.2   Individual traits

In their narratives on career advancement to senior management, the female leaders pick on individual enablers that impacted their career advancement, as outline in Figure 9 under section 5.6. There was a total of seven individual enablers in descending order: trust, learning orientation, voice, seeking challenges, authenticity, self-awareness, and social awareness. These enablers are discussed at high-level based on the findings and on the literature. Kossek et al. (2017) note that women's career equity being impacted by fairness, leveraging their strengths and workplace support.

The sample noted the need for trust both at a team, network, and organisational level. The need is a two-way process, both trusting in these structures and these structures trusting in them. Trust has been shown to be advantageous for female leaders as trust fosters stronger

relationship, is foundational in change initiatives, and enables the driving of a shared vision (Bartlett, 2024; Singh et al., 2023).

Leaders are constantly facing challenges both known and ambiguous. Thus, female leaders need to be learning constantly, applying knowledge from various spheres of their experiences to new and ambiguous challenges (Bartlett, 2024). The link between trust and learning orientation was common in the sample. They identified the need to be scanning internal and external environment to ensure they gain experience and knowledge which can be applied in the roles at any level in the organisation. Without showing their vast knowledge and expertise there is a potential for a lack of trust. Though not coded the ability to learn and recover shows a leader's ability to persevere (Bachnik et al., 2023).

Social power in the organisational setting plays a significant role in being provided opportunities for growth and being held back owing to the political nature of organisations (Bachnik et al., 2023). For female leaders in this sample their visibility for opportunity was tied to voice, they could not be visible without having their words heard and their successes shared. Organisations are still predominantly structured around the white male prototype (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Esposito, 2021). Without voice female leaders are left out of networking opportunities and projects that would enable them to enhance their careers to senior management and above especially in profit-generating or critical functions in the business (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Franczak & Margolis, 2022). This ability to use self-awareness to their advantage enables female leaders to both lean into agency for more task and action-oriented leadership work as well as avoid backlash and build relationships be leaning into communal behaviours (Schock et al., 2019).

Esser et al. (2018) note that self-awareness enables a leader to be cognisant of their strengths and limitations and use this to their advantage within the organisational setting. In the same study, Esser et al. (2018) notes social awareness as a determinant of female leaders' ability to succeed. The participants noted that self-awareness enables them to be aware of how they react within a setting and enables them to move between agentic and communal behaviours based on contextual factors. Participants articulated the need to couple self-awareness with social awareness so ensuring that they are able to "read the room" when engaging with other. This is supported in the literature as it is noted that successful leaders are socially aware to "apply skills appropriate at the time to the level and specific context" (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020, p. 2). In general, women's career advancement is more likely to be impeded by

contextual barriers (Barkhuizen et al., 2022), the need for social awareness is further supported by Bartlett (2024).

Career advancement is dependent on cumulative skill development to enable successful navigate up the corporate ladder (Quigley et al., 2023). A leader requires the ability to apply their skills taking cognisance of the appropriateness of said skill, i.e. a leader needs to be aware of the context in which they are engaging and behave in a manner that is beneficial for the desired outcome (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Within the literature on preferential treatment both in hiring, task and project selection and advancement, women and men are treated differently based on the social status of the occupation, job type and task and whether the job and or organisation is male or female dominant (Bol & Fogel-Yaari, 2022; Strinić et al., 2022)

6.6   Conclusion

In some research one finds that women do not experience backlash or adverse impacts when showing role incongruent behaviour, namely being agentic (Griffiths et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2023). Ambition and assertiveness are preferentially associated with men but not with leadership (Griffiths et al., 2019). There have been cultural shifts in both genders and leadership prototypes favouring leadership styles that are both communal and agentic along literature that identifies no competence deficit between women and men (Griffiths et al., 2019; Taparia & Lenka, 2022). The barriers to female career advancement are under-researched in Africa where the blocks to female career advancement are more pronounced (Taparia & Lenka, 2022).

There is limited research on how women combine aspects of agentic and communal traits to respond to the dual and often contradictory nature of the two traits (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Research does not discuss the principles of how women bridge these opposing but often interlinked behaviours (Zheng, Surgevil, et al., 2018). Eagly & Karau (2002) articulate the need for female senior managers to blend agentic and communal traits owing to the component's incongruence between their gendered behavioural expectations and their leadership expectations.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

From a theoretical perspective literature on female representation is matured, however there continues to be opportunity to explore how women can advance their careers to senior management. The significant underrepresentation of female leaders in South Africa in comparison to the EAP is of ongoing concern from a practical perspective as women leaders have been shown to have a positive impact on employees' well-being, organisational financial performance, as well as a positive effect on economies and societies by increasing innovation, growth, and resilience (Franczak & Margolis, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2023). The research on RCT has predominantly focused on the barriers that women face when ascending up the corporate ladder. In addition, the literature has predominantly focused on Western countries.

This research sought to explore the narratives of female leaders within South Africa with a specific focus on juxtaposition of agentic and communal behaviours they use to advance their career from middle to senior management. A total of 18 women leaders were interviewed, with representation across racial lines but aligned to South Africa's EAP. Owing to the different cultural and societal norms within South Africa the use of a qualitative approach enabled the addition to literature. This chapter provides an overview of the research outcomes, the practical and theoretical contributions and also provides suggestions for future research. The career enablers discussed are beyond the scope of this research, however they are deemed meaningful to the study and are included.

7.2 Research question one

What are the agentic behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

The question sought to explore the agentic behaviours that that aided women in their career advancement from middle to senior management. RCT posits that agentic behaviours displayed by women leaders is contrary to their gendered norms of communion and can result in backlash even though there is an expectation that leaders display agentic traits (Koburtay et al., 2019). Contrary to this research all the female leaders in the sample noted agentic behaviours, the majority of these behaviours have positive connotations. A total of 10 agentic behaviours were identified, the most commonly coded being competency, assertiveness, and bravery. Refer to Figure 6 for the full list.

Competency as the most frequently coded agentic behaviour shows that women - even at leadership levels - still need to ensure that they are competent. This is aligned to literature in the West as women leaders are often perceived as less competent than their male counterparts (Van Veelen & Derks, 2022) and as less hireable (Eaton et al., 2020). These negative associations between women and competence are even more pronounced in jobs that require more analytical and abstract cognition, like leadership (He et al., 2019).

In contrast to this, research by Eagly et al. (2020) found that the competency assumption of women has improved overtime while Bosak et al. (2018) found that agentic expectations for women have similarly increased and are presumed to continue to improve over time. In alignment with Eagly et al. (2020) and Bosak et al. (2018), the current research notes that female leaders are required to display agentic behaviours to advance. Eagly et al. (2020) calls for competence to be a separate behavioural component sitting outside of agency and communion. Based on the findings of this research, there is a need to explore if the competency of female leaders in South Africa has changed overtime using qualitative data, similar to the study by Bosak et al. (2018) in Ghana.

Assertiveness is the second-most frequently coded agentic trait and this overall when viewing both agentic and communal behaviours. This is supported by research that assertive leadership in countries where objective and subjective economic inequality are high there is an increased the desire for more dominant leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sprong et al., 2019). In addition, in unequal societies the difference in agentic and communal attributes decreases, which limits back lash and potentially enables female leaders to be more assertive (Eagly et al., 2020). In contrast Kim et al. (2020) found that dominance of female leaders is perceived as abnormal which adversely impacts their leadership perceptions. The literature on assertiveness and dominance may differ based on the perception attached to the word itself, with dominance being more aggressive of a term than assertive.

 The third-most commonly occurring agentic behaviour was bravery, within the sample it was closely linked to assertiveness as some of the participants noted the need to have their voice heard, stand-up and go against the norms within the room. The display of bravery is supported by Wanasika et al. (2011) who noted that the most commonly occurring GLOBE leadership dimension in Sub-Saharan Africa is charismatic/value-based leadership that includes a leader that is self-sacrificial with a high degree of integrity. Furthermore, female leaders often have to advocate for inclusive policies owing to the inherit biases within organisations (Bartlett, 2024). Within the same research, Wanasika et al. (2011) note that the significant power

distance relationship between the genders cand and does adversely impact women leaders. There is an opportunity to understand the bravery element required by female leaders at different phases in their career as this potentially impacts why some women advance and others do not.

Overall female leaders within South Africa do exhibit agentic behaviours, which enable them to set direction, share their views, and encourage change within the organisational setting. RCT notes that women who display masculine behaviours face backlash. Within this sample the female leaders articulate the need to play in the more masculine space owing to their inherent requirements of leadership. Leaders, irrespective of gender, face the challenge within South African to lead in a charismatic/value-based style alongside the need to be humane-orientated (Wanasika et al., 2011). Owing to the perceived and actual economic inequality they need to assertive and agentic (Sprong et al., 2019). It is important to note that while agentic behaviours are required for female leader to advance their careers, this is dependent on the organisational, individual, and contextual factors.

7.3 Research question two

What are the communal behaviours that have aided female middle managers in their career advancement to senior management?

This research question sought to explore the communal behaviours that can aid women in their career advancement from middle to senior management. As noted in the literature review communality has generally been considered a feminine behaviour and which has generally not been associated with leadership. In the past it has limited women's career choices and advancement opportunities. A total of eight communal behaviours were coded. Refer to Figure 7 for the full list. The most commonly occurring are empathy, connection, and care.

The women leaders noted the communal traits of empathy as the second-most occurring behaviour overall, followed by connection and care as the fifth. Typically, leadership has been associated with agentic attributes (Eagly & Karau, 2002) while women have typically been required to display more communal type behaviours like friendliness, caring, trustworthiness, expressiveness, empathy, morality, and warmth (Abele et al., 2020; Cuddy et al., 2011).

According to the RCT women who display communal behaviours have congruence between the gendered expectations and their actual behaviour (Eagly & Karau, 2002), however where they display communal behaviours like warmth there is an assumption made that they have

low competence resulting in passive harm (Fiske, 2018). The pressure to conform to the communal requirement is ever-present (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020; Hsu et al., 2021).

Research on leadership norms in Sub-Saharan Africa found that there is a preference for more humane-orientated leadership, with the core leadership traits of interdependence, solidarity, and service to others (Wanasika et al., 2011). This research supports the notion that African leadership, specifically African female leadership, is more aligned with service to others rather than the Westernised view of agency. There has been a migration from more traditional leadership styles to ones that incorporate communal behaviours of inclusive, servant and transformational leadership (Griffiths et al., 2019).
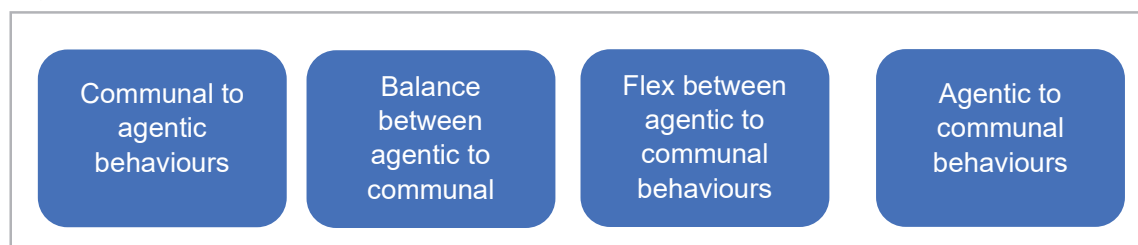
7.4 Research question three

RQ3: How have female middle managers juxtaposed agentic and communal behaviours in their career advancement to senior management?

This question sought to explore how female leaders have balanced communal and agentic behaviours in their career advancement from middle to senior management. As such the first two questions identified which agentic and communal behaviours female middle managers displayed in their advancement to senior management as a base to identify if and how they juxtapositioned the two.

Similar to findings by Zheng, Surgevil, et al. (2018) and Schock et al., (2019), the participants all identified the need to blend agentic and communal behaviours. This research noted that the manner in which the agentic and communal behaviours are blended is dependent on the individual leader and their natural disposition to engaging along with the social contexts. This research identified four blending mechanisms that the sample used in their career advancement to senior management. See Figure 11 for the various types.

Figure 11: The four blended behaviours from sample

Communal to agentic behaviours | Balance between agentic to communal | Flex between agentic to communal behaviours | Agentic to communal behaviours

The most common behaviours were balance, flex and communal to agentic with agentic to communal lagging the three. This shows a preference for communal-led behaviours in comparison to agentic-led behaviours. The preference for communal-led leadership is contrary to research on economic inequality by Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) and Sprong et al. (2019) who both note that in high economic inequality there is a preference for more agentic leadership but aligned to Wanasika et al. (2011) who noted the preference for more humane-oriented leaders in sub-Saharan Africa.

Contextual conditions of the organisation and individual traits impact how female leaders need to leverage agency, and communion as well as how best to juxtapose the two to ensure a beneficial career outcome (Zheng, Meister, et al., 2018). The ability of female leaders to flex between masculine and feminine competencies is supported by Esser et al. (2018) who investigated the competencies required by female leaders to succeed in male-dominated industries in Germany from the perspective of male leaders.

7.5   Career advancement enablers

Organisational and individual enablers were a consistent in all of the narratives. Outside of their behaviours each leader acknowledged that there were organisations enablers that aided their career advancement, namely networks and diversity requirements. Networks included sponsors, mentors, coaches, and professional and personal relationships. Networks enable the female leader to gain visibility both within their organisation and across other organisations (Quigley et al., 2023). In male-orientated spaces a strong network enables the female leader to gain access (Esser et al., 2018).

Networks as a whole are supported in the literature as it is positively associated with career success, career advancement and career satisfaction while some research has found that mentor support can be detrimental to the achievement of top leadership status for female leaders (Offermann et al., 2020). Research in South Africa has shown that a lack of sponsorship has a negative effect on the advancement of female leader to top management specifically within the banking industry (Kobus-Olawale et al., 2021). Organisations play a role in creating supportive environments for career advancement (Offermann et al., 2020).

In addition to networks, some of the female leaders noted both the benefit of diversity targets, while others identified it as a barrier to career advancement. One African black female and a white female articulated the benefits and both acknowledge the need to be vigilant of job market to find these opportunities. Unexpectedly, one Indian and one white female noted that

diversity targets did not benefit them and instead hampered their career advancement. Owing to the Coloured and Indian females only making up 4.4 and 1.0% of the EAP respectively (Department of Labour, 2023, p. 31), white women make up 3.5% and of the two in the sample one noted the benefit of the target and the other did not specifically mention. The benefit of the Employment Equity Act in granting female leaders' equal opportunity has been noted in the literature (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). With women being identified as previously disadvantaged they fall with the ambit of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (Jansen Van Rensburg, 2021).

Organisational enablers alone are not sufficient for women to advance to senior management. There is a need for individual factors. A total of seven individual enablers were identified in this research (see Figure 12 for the list) of these the most commonly occurring were trust and learning-orientation. Trust includes both trust in self and others and trusting the female leader (Esser et al., 2018) as trust fosters stronger relationships. Networks have been shown to drive female leader career success (Bartlett, 2024). Owing to the ambiguous nature of the world, there is a need for leaders to be learning-orientated and have the ability to apply the learnings to different situations (Esser et al., 2018).

Figure 12: Individual enablers that aided women leader in their advancement to senior management
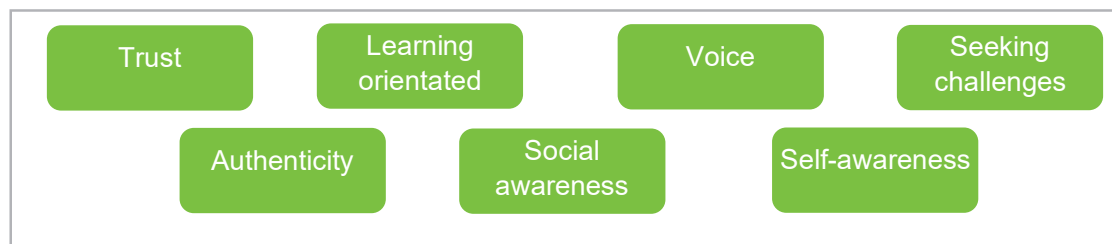
The individual enablers are coded as discrete elements but are displayed in a more compounded manner. Trust is fostered by being authentic and self-aware, showing concern and care for one another, reading the room (social awareness), and leaders using their voice to advocate for their team and their perspectives in general (Esser et al., 2018; Franczak & Margolis, 2022).

The nature of organisations is still predominantly male and white dominated thus women leaders need to ensure they are visible and heard (Bachnik et al., 2023). This needs to be done in a manner that aids their advancement thus female leaders need to be socially aware of when to lean into the different behaviours (Schock et al., 2019). Women leaders' need to

be self-aware to ensure they can lean into others to aid them in their career advancement. This was evident in the research findings (Esser et al., 2018).

7.6 Theoretical contribution

This research adds to the literature on RCT as it provides a specific lens into career advancement to senior management within the confines of a non-Westernised society. The research has found that within South Africa women leaders need to display both agentic and communal behaviours to advance. Female leaders within the sample have been shown to have a preference to communal behaviours as aligned to RCT which states that social role congruent behaviour results in more favourable outcomes, however the women leaders in the sample still used agentic behaviours to advance their careers. In contrast to the literature on economic inequality resulting in more agentic behaviour as noted by Moreno-Bella et al. (2022) and Sprong et al. (2019). This research found a preference for communal behaviour so, highlighting the impact of the cultural and societal impact on leadership preferences (Wanasika et al., 2011).

7.7 Practical contribution

This research found that the career advancement of female leaders is nuanced and impacted by a number of various internal and external factors. Female leaders have migrated from purely trying to fit into the perceived masculine manner of leading to a more individual-congruent manner of leading. The female leaders have acknowledged the need for both organisational enablers and individual enablers to advance their careers. Furthermore, they view leadership as being both a humane-leader with a focus on the needs of their team and a more traditional task-orientated leader where they drive business outcomes. These two leadership types are intermingles based on contextual factors. The need for organisational enablers like networking is a critical part of the success career advancement for female leaders.

7.8 Recommendations for management and/or other stakeholders

To enable the advancement of female leaders, it is critical first to understand the personality of female leaders and encourage them to behave in personality congruent manner while ensuring the organisation creates opportunities for female leaders to create networks and encourages them to build networks both within and outside the organisation. The need to maintain diversity-specific recruitment especially at senior management level provides more opportunities for female leaders to advance. Voice and visibility for female leaders is critical

thus initiatives to drive female representation further encourages female middle managers to drive their careers.

7.9 Limitations of the research

Utilising a narrative approach to understand the impact of agentic competence with communal warmth traits requires the interviewed leaders to rely on memory recall which can result in under- or over-reaction to experiences. Within South Africa, there are additional layers of diversity, termed transformation, owing to the apartheid regime that could impact the way in which various racial and ethnic groups respond to the consideration of agentic competence with communal warmth traits on their career trajectories.

Owing to a network that is predominantly within the Human Resource fraternity and predominantly within financial services, there is the potential for a skewed sample which potentially could impact the diversity of insights. As this is a qualitative study the results may not be replicable within the South African context. With the majority of leaders having rich careers, there is the potential that the age demographics may be a limitation on applicability for upcoming leaders due to the varied social experiences younger females would have in the current global context.

7.10 Suggestions for future research

Future research should run this research using quantitative methods to ensure the generalisability with a more diverse provincial spread. In addition, research on the evolving nature of stereotypes which can be compared and contrasted to similar research in Ghana (Bosak et al., 2018) . The literature would benefit from excluding competency from the evaluation as an agentic trait and focus on other agentic behaviours. A similar analysis run for individual contributor to junior manager, junior manager to middle manager and senior manager to top executive.

7.11 Concluding remarks

Career advancement is dependent on cumulative skill development to navigate up the corporate ladder successfully a leader requires the ability to apply their skills taking cognisance of the appropriateness of said skill, i.e. a leader needs to be aware of the context in which they are engaging and behave in a manner that is beneficial for the desired outcome (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2020). Within the literature on preferential treatment both in hiring, task and project selection and advancement women and men are treated differently based on

the social status of the occupation, job type and task and whether the job and or organisation

is male or female dominant (Bol & Fogel-Yaari, 2022; Strinić et al., 2022)

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APPENDIX 1: CONSENT LETTER

To whom it may concern,

I am conducting a research study entitled **exploring the juxtaposition of agentic and communal behaviours of female leaders in their career advancement from middle to senior management**. Our interview is expected to last **60 minutes** and will help me explore how you have used agency (competency) and communion (warmth) to advance your career from middle to senior management.

- Your participation in this study is **voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty**. By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have given permission for:
- The interview to be recorded.
- The recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement.
- Verbatim quotations from the interview may be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation.
- The data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the examination process has been completed; and
- All data to be reported and stored without identifiers to ensure your **confidentiality**.

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

Researcher Name: Supervisor name:
Email: 22040758@myqibs.co.za   Email:
Phone: Phone:

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL SCRIPT

Interviewee:

Date:

Start time: End time:

In-person meeting: *Yes*   ☐   Location:

                      No   ☐   Virtual meeting details:

Career advancement question:

Please tell me the story of how you progressed into a senior management position.

Potential probing questions:

- How did being a woman play a role in this?
- How did your personal traits and behaviours play a role?
- Please reflect on how gender roles are viewed differently for senior and middle managers in your career.
- Please talk about instances where you've needed to assert your agency, such as making tough decisions or advocating for your ideas, in order to progress in your career?
- How do you navigate the challenge of balancing assertiveness (agency) with empathy and relationship-building (communion) in your leadership role?
- What set you apart from your peers, at middle management, that resulted in your advancement to senior management?

Background and biographical points need to be confirmed

- Racial identity
- Current job title
- Industry
- Province
- Qualifications

APPENDIX 3: AGENCY AND COMMUNION CODES FROM PRIOR RESEARCH

Figure 13: Image of table detailing the list of agentic and communal words used as validation of codes

Source	Agency				Communion		
Bakan, 1966	Strivings to individuate and expand the self and efficiently attain one's goals (self-profitability)				Strivings to integrate the self in a larger social unit through caring for others (other profitability)		
Wiggins, 1995	Dominance/ambition. dominance: voice an opinion, give information, set goals				Nurturance/warmth. submissiveness: wait for others to act, avoid being responsible		
Eagly et al., 2003	-assertive	-instrumentally competent			-concerned with others	-friendly	-unselfish
	-independent	-masterful			-expressive	-kind	
Madera et al., 2009 (* indicates all words sharing the stem)	-achievement	-confident	-independent	-persever*	-accept*	-emotion*	-tender
	-active	-conscientious	-influence*	-power	-affectionate	-feeling*	-tentative*
	-aggress*	-control*	-initiat*	-produce*	-agreeable*	-fond	-tolera*
	-ambitious	-daring	-intellectual	-rational	-assist*	-genial	-union
	-assertive	-direct*	-lead*	-reliable	-care*	-gentle	-warm
	-assiduous	-dominant	-manage	-start*	-caring	-helpful	-worry
	-assurance	-dynamic	-mastery	-strength	-communal	-interpersonal*	-solidarity
	-blunt	-force*	-noetic	-success	-concern*	-intima*	-submissive
	-bold	-forthright	-organize*	-suggest*	-connect*	-kind	-support*
	-candid	-frank	-original*	-sure	-considerate	-likable	-sympath*

Source	Agency	Communion
	-candid -compet* -frank -hardworking -ouiginal* -outspoken -sure	-considerate -cooperate* -likable -likeable -sympath* -tactful
Bem, 1974	-act as a leader -aggressive -ambitious -analytical -assertive -athletic -competitive -defends own beliefs -dominant -forceful -has leadership abilities -independent -individualistic -makes decisions easily -masculine -self-reliant -self-sufficient -strong personality -willing to take a stand -willing to task risks	-affectionate -cheerful -childlike -compassionate -does not use harsh language -eager to sooth hurt feelings -feminine -flatterable -gentle -gullible -likable -likeable -loves children -loyal -sensitive to the needs of others -shy -soft spoken -sympathetic -tender -understanding -warm -yielding
Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011	-active -ambitious -capable -clever -competent -consequent -determined -efficient -persistent -strong-minded -independent -industrious -resolute -self-confident -self-reliant	-affectionate -caring -considerate -empathetic -ethical -faithful -friendly -generous -honest -loving -polite -reliable -sensitive -tolerant -warm

from online supplement for "Dancing on the razor's edge: How top-level women leaders manage the paradoxical tensions between agency and communion" by Zheng, W., Surgevil, O., and Kark, R., 2018, Sex Roles.

APPENDIX 4: CODES FROM TRANSCRIPT

Code	Frequency
Agency - Ambition	5
Agency - Analytical	15
Agency - Arrogant	1
Agency - Assertive	51
Agency - Bold	1
Agency - Brave	26
Agency - Competent	84
Agency - Competitive	14
Agency - Confidence	8
Agency - Hardworking	12
Agency - Skill	5
Communal - Care	30
Communal - Connect	51
Communal - Considerate	9
Communal - Empathy	59
Communal - Expressive	3
Communal - Helpful	1
Communal - Respect	14

Code	Frequency
Network	47
Diversity	10
Trust	78
Learning orientated	68
Voice	27
Seeking challenges	24
Authenticity	17
Self-awareness	16
Social awareness	14
Chronological recap - brief	7
Chronological recap - extended	6
Chronological recap - sporadic	5
Active listening	10
Be conscious & deliberate	7
Be impactful	10
Career - Fast progression	2
Career - multiple org. moves	14
Career - Slow progression	1

Code	Frequency
Functional - limitation	1
Gender stereotype	85
Honesty	22
Identified as potential	9
Impact - culture	1
Impact of society	5
influence	1
Lack of Boundaries	1
Lean too much into communal	1
Lean towards competence not politics	2
Making space for others	1
mindful	3
Opportunity - career developed	36
Ownership of career	2
Perspective change	1
Politics	7
Pressure to fit in	1
Sacrifice	1

Code	Frequency
● Communal - Docile	1
● Flex between communion & agency	5
● Balance between communion & agency	5
● Communion to agency	5
● Agency with communion	3

Code	Frequency
○ Cold	1
○ Contextual awareness	4
○ Corporate Pause (Break)	2
○ Fear	1
○ Functional - advantages	1

Code	Frequency
○ shift from purely agentic to more balance	1
○ Single employer career advancement	5
○ Stuck in diversity narrative	1
○ Voice - unheard	2