

**Exploring the socialisation experiences of female board members**

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## **Abstract**

Gender equality and corporate gender diversity have become a topical issue in the globally. Despite efforts to increase the representation of women on boards in South Africa, women remain underrepresented. The challenges that women face post appointment on boards are documented in literature. The processes, however, that newly appointed female board members undergo to gain the social knowledge and skills to successfully migrate from being outsiders to insiders are not well understood. Organisational socialisation, also known as onboarding, is a process by which newcomers in an organisation adjust to their new role. This study aims to explore the socialisation experiences of female board members to determine whether the process is conducive to ensuring that female board members, as newcomers, are better equipped to navigate the challenges and nuances of the board in a short amount of time.

In order to gain deeper insights, a qualitative exploratory research method was followed. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted from 15 semi-structured interviews with female board members from various industries.

Findings were consistent with the main themes identified in literature, however, given the unique structure of the board – usually consisting of employees and non-employees – several considerations were identified. A conceptual model was developed from the summary of findings for application by organisations and leaders of boards to contribute to the body of knowledge of organisational socialisation.

**Keywords:** Organisational socialisation, onboarding, newcomers, socialisation, female board members

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university. I further submit a declaration that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research

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Shela Mohatla

1 December 2020.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

Women in leadership positions have been a topic of discussion for many years (Joshi, Son & Roh, 2015; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). In academic literature and business forums, focus has been placed on the need and urgency to increase female representation in leadership positions in organisations and in government sectors (Besley, Folke, Persson & Rickne, 2017; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Over the past decade, in particular, corporate board gender diversity has been a topical issue globally, yet women remain grossly underrepresented on boards (Bertrand, Black, Jensen & Lleras-Muney, 2019).

Although studies have been conducted to understand the challenges and relational dynamics that women face post-appointment in leadership positions (Bertrand et al., 2019; Field, Souther & Yore, 2020; Glass & Cook, 2016), few studies have been conducted to understand the experiences of women who serve on corporate boards in South Africa. Even less understood is the organisational socialisation processes (also known as onboarding) that new female board members undergo to acquire the skills and social knowledge required to migrate from being outsiders to insiders. Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein and Gardner (1994) defined organisational socialisation as a "learning content and process by which an individual adjusts to a specific role in an organisation" (p. 730). Studies broadly place emphasis on the importance of organisational socialisation as an element of increasing positive newcomer experiences (Allen, Eby, Chao & Bauer., 2017), yet, little is offered on effective socialisation processes required to achieve success in newcomer experiences of female board members.

Research has indicated that female leaders contribute to increased innovation, stronger corporate governance, stronger corporate social responsibility, more diverse views, increased financial performance as well as increased quality of audit processes within organisations (Glass & Cook, 2016; Lai, Srinidhi, Gul & Tsui, 2017; McGuinness, Vieito & Wang, 2017). Moreover, according to Post and Byron (2015), diversity in board

composition “promotes activities related to boards’ primary responsibilities” (p.27). It has thus been widely accepted that gender diversity enhances board effectiveness (Perrault, 2015). These arguments all contribute to increased organisational performance, which leads to greater value for all shareholders and stakeholders alike.

Although strides have been made to address the under-representation of women on corporate boards around the world, the slow progress of closing the gender gap in corporate boardrooms has resulted in various debates. Some of these debates have been about the role of women in the boardroom, the quota or target system of appointments, the motives behind their appointments in organisations as well as the benefits of increasing women’s representation on corporate boards (Bertrand et al., 2019; Glass & Cook, 2016; Seierstad, Warner-Søderholm, Torchia & Huse, 2017). Differing views, coupled with some level of scepticism, exist around whether this sense of urgency and the means to increase women on boards is beneficial. Key to the argument is whether there is benefit to the overall performance of organisations, to the women themselves or just another way to improve an organisations’ reputational capital (Lai et al., 2017; McGuinness et al., 2017; Post & Byron, 2015). The fields in which these discussions are prominent include women in leadership, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, corporate governance, token theory, social identity theory and role congruity theory (Glass & Cook, 2016).

The South African population is made up of 51% women (Statistics South Africa, 2019). South Africa is considered one of the leaders in its efforts to increase gender diversity on its corporate boards (Eastman, Rallis & Mazzucchelli, 2016). Despite this, Viviers, Mans-Kemp and Fawcett (2017) and the Business Women’s Association of South Africa (2017) noted that South African women serving companies listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) represent approximately one-fifth (20%) of all directors on the JSE.

On a global scale, Norway was the pioneer of ensuring gender diversity by law in 2006 (Seierstad et al., 2017). A few other countries, such as Germany and Spain, followed suit globally (Business Women’s Association of South Africa, 2017). In contrast to

legislation, other countries such as Australia, have relied on voluntary targets to address the issue (Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2015). In South Africa, gender diversity on boards is not regulated, however, companies listed on the JSE are required to comply with the King IV report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). The King IV Report™ (hereafter referred to as King IV) recommends that the board of directors should promote diversity in its composition including race, culture, age and gender. These companies have an obligation to disclose board diversity targets annually and the means of achieving those targets (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). With only a slight increase of women on boards in South Africa, progress of only 20% of all directors on the JSE appears to be slow.

Wide-ranging literature suggests several views on the experiences of female leaders once they have been appointed (Glass & Cook, 2016, Field et al., 2020; Mölders, Brosi, Bekk, Spörrle & Welppe, 2018). Some women have reported experiencing tokenism, invisibility and hypervisibility in the boardroom as a result of underrepresentation (Glass & Cook, 2016; Viviers et al., 2017) and thus have had to work harder to gain credibility (Kakabadse, Figueira, Nicolopoulou, Yang, Kakabadse & Özbilgin, 2015). Other women, however, only overcome being seen as outsiders once there are three or more women representatives on the board (Konrad, Kramer & Erkut, 2008; Torchia, Calabrò & Huse, 2011). Further studies have found the existence of role congruity challenges (Eagly & Karau, 2002), whilst others suggest that female appointments are typically additions to the board as opposed to replacements of male directors, thereby diluting the power and influence of female positions (Viviers & Mans-Kemp, 2019). There was also a view that female board members are scarcely appointed as chairman of committees or in other board leadership positions (Field et al., 2020). Such committees are arguably highly influential and are possibly better measures of company performance (Green & Homroy, 2018).

Given the challenges that women are most likely going to face post-appointment as board members, there appears to be no understanding on the type of organisational socialisation process required upon entry on boards. There is also no comprehension of whether the process followed for these women is effective in addressing newcomer uncertainty, social integration and job satisfaction.

## 1.1. Research problem

Literature supports the benefits of increasing women on corporate boards (Glass & Cook, 2016; Lai, Srinidhi, Gul & Tsui, 2017; McGuinness, Vieito & Wang, 2017; Perrault, 2015; Post & Byron, 2015). Whilst improvements are made to address underrepresentation in South Africa, the pace of increasing women on boards remains a challenge (Viviers et al., 2017). Even with the requirements by King IV and the JSE for board diversity and an increase of women representation, women are still underrepresented on corporate boards in South Africa (Viviers et al., 2017; Business Women's Association of South Africa, 2017). The debates in academia and the business world on the motives by some companies to increase women on their boards further heightens the culture and challenges that women have faced in leadership positions.

According to the South African Companies Act No 71 of 2008 (Republic of South Africa, 2008), a director is anyone who considered to be a member of the board of a company. The board of directors is expected to manage the strategic affairs of the company on behalf of its shareholders (and stakeholders) and is incorporated by South African legislation (Republic of South Africa, 2008). Whilst the minimum number of directors to serve on a board is regulated by the Companies Act No 71 of 2008 (Republic of South Africa, 2008), the diversity of its members in terms of culture, race and gender of the board composition and structure is not regulated (Business Women's Association of South Africa, 2017). Moreover, some board members are employees (executive directors) of the organisation, whilst others are not (non-executive directors). The JSE only requires that companies listed on its stock exchange adhere to the principles of the King IV code which in turn requires that a majority of the board comprise of independent non-executive directors (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016).

Whilst studies have addressed the socialisation experiences of newcomers and managers (Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas & De Hoe, 2015; Korte, Brunhaver and Sheppard, 2015), the research gap is that few, to the researcher's knowledge, have focused on female board members post-appointment. The IoDSA NED Nomination Process Research Report (2020) posited that board members in South Africa were usually

offered a structured and formal process of induction post-appointment. In fact, one of the duties of a company secretary is to ensure that a proper induction is offered to board members upon entry (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). Induction programmes, however, are not to be confused with organisational socialisation. Induction is described as a once-off subsection of organisational socialisation, whereas organisational socialisation as a whole is an all-encompassing process that facilitates newcomer adjustment in the organisation (Coldwell, Williamson & Talbot, 2019).

There thus appears to be no comprehension of the standard against which female board members are socialised to become effective members of the board in the shortest amount of time. However, Glass and Cook (2016) held that there will be obstacles that are unique to female leaders that will affect effective leadership. Therefore, to the researcher's knowledge, most studies do not take into consideration the means to overcome the dynamics, subtleties and behavioural elements experienced by women who are appointed on corporate boards experience.

There is a problem in that women's integration into leadership positions is not defined nor is it understood (Glass & Cook, 2016). Existent research has recognised the importance of organisational socialisation in the process of adjusting newcomers to enhance role clarity, job satisfaction, greater performance and lower turnover (Ellis, Bauer, Mansfield, Erdogan, Truxillo & Simon, 2015; Nasr, El Akremi and Coyle-Shapiro, 2019). However, newcomer integration is relatively explained from the lens of employees in an organisation where there exists a manager and most likely other team members or peers (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2015; Korte et al., 2015). The deviation and reflection on a non-traditional sense of organisational design and structure is largely unexplored in socialisation research.

This study aimed to expand on existing literature by exploring and providing insights into the socialisation experiences of newcomers that are understood to be predisposed to challenges upon entry. Such newcomers do not typically form part of the traditional employer-employee relationship in the organisational structure.

## **1.2. Purpose of research**

This research aimed to provide insights to organisations as well as to contribute to theory relating to the effectiveness of organisational socialisation practices for female board members. To execute this, the researcher aimed to draw conclusions from the similarities and differences in the experiences of female board members who were currently serving as board members in organisations in South Africa.

### **1.2.1. Business need for study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the organisational socialisation experiences of female board members. The intention was to determine whether the socialisation process is conducive to ensuring that female board members, as newcomers, are better equipped to navigate the nuances of the board in a short amount of time. Increasing female representation through targets may well be a short-term solution, however, changing culture may be a longer term solution.

The researcher intended to shift the conversation from a quantitative demonstration of increased female representation to an examination of the necessary change in culture within the board. Understanding the socialisation experiences of female board members in corporate South Africa has the potential to bring about insights that could foster organisational change. Findings of this study can be useful by informing and influencing socialisation processes that support the manoeuvrability and progression of the women that are appointed as corporate board members.

### **1.2.2. Theoretical need for study**

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 advocated for gender equality globally (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). In South Africa, Viviers et al. (2017) posited that the representation of women serving on JSE-listed organisations is approximately one-fifth of all directors on the JSE. The gender inequalities globally,

particularly in the labour market, remain rife – South Africa is no exception to the problem.

This study aimed to expand on the organisational socialisation theoretical process by focusing on female board members in South Africa. The aim was further to explore the effectiveness and value of the process in relation to a group of individuals who are predisposed to challenges upon entry into the organisation.

The research objectives were thus to:

1. Understand the kind of organisational socialisation (onboarding) process that female board members underwent;
2. Investigate the board's criteria, policies and procedures for determining the socialisation processes, and;
3. Explore how female board members found the process in terms of usefulness.

### **1.3. Scope of the research**

The research scope was limited to women serving as board members in companies in South Africa at the time of writing. To draw meaningful conclusions and to gain an understanding of their lived experiences on corporate boards, it was required that the women must have served on these companies for longer than one year. The South African context of the research could lend itself useful to the transferability of insights to other similar markets.

### **1.4. Layout of the research report**

The first chapter sought to give background and overview of the research problem and therefore gives reasons and significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides detail on literature and theory that supported the study and gives context to the research questions. Chapter 3 lists the research questions with the methodology and design of the research discussed in the following chapter. Appendix 3 provides a consistency matrix indicating congruence between the arguments made in chapter 1, the reviewed literature, the research questions and the research methodology and design as



discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4. Appendix 1 indicates the discussion guide or questionnaire for the interviews to be conducted. In chapter 5, the findings of the research are presented while chapter 6 provides a discussion on the findings in relation to the literature provided. Chapter 7 discusses the conclusion of the study. A conceptual model was developed to depict the summary of the findings. of the research together with recommendations are highlighted. Finally, the limitations and suggestions for future research are outlined.

## **CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Literature suggested that female board members are likely to experience significant barriers that may impede effective leadership and success once they are appointed as board members (Glass & Cook, 2016; Field et al., 2020). Significant pressure is also placed on female board members to perform and outperform their male board member counterparts (Glass & Cook, 2016). In addition, an argument was also made that women are only promoted to senior leadership positions in companies which are in crisis and have a higher risks of failure, also known as the glass cliff (Gupta, 2018; Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker & Peters, 2016). This means that women are likely to be blamed when such companies fail. The increased challenges, bias and stereotypes that female board members face can, therefore, lead to higher turnover, job dissatisfaction and a shorter tenure (Glass & Cook, 2016).

Organisational socialisation is a process that is intended to ensure that newcomers in an organisation are well-equipped and prepared to progressively integrate from being outsiders to insiders in the organisation (Chao et al., 1994; Delobbe et al, 2015). Such processes are implemented in order to reduce uncertainty, work anxiety and promote performance in a short period of time (Chao et al., 1994; Ellis et al., 2015). King IV further stated that the board of directors has a responsibility to induct new members for these members to ensure meaningful contribution in the shortest amount of time (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). This chapter presents a two-fold review of current literature. Firstly, empirical research on the significant challenges that female board members are likely to encounter is discussed. This is then followed by the theory underpinning the research problem as well as a review and discussion on organisational socialisation processes and constructs.

## **2.2. Challenges faced by women in leadership positions**

In explaining the process of organisational socialisation for female board members, it is important to expand on challenges that, female leaders are likely to face once they have been appointed. Below is a summary of the salient features of the challenges that women are most likely to face. This includes a view on the amount of pressure placed on women to outperform their male counterparts as well as being placed into positions that are either in crisis or have limited power and influence.

### **2.2.1. Pressure to perform**

Token theory is described by the seminal work of Kanter (1977) who discusses the significance of numerical representation in a group. It is argued that a minority in numbers is often likely to experience increased visibility and undue scrutiny that can lead the minority group feeling excluded (Schwartz-Ziv, 2017). Cook and Glass (2018) suggested that female board members are more likely than their male counterparts to possess higher qualifications due to the challenges they experience on their mobility. Although visibility can be a good thing, it is not always considered so. Sometimes visibility can pose a challenge when it encourages hypervisibility (Settles, Buchanan & Doston, 2019). Hypervisibility refers to the notion of being more scrutinised (Smith, Watkins, Ladge & Carlton, 2019) and yet receiving less recognition (Settles et al., 2019) than others.

Green and Homroy (2018) and Torchia et al. (2011) proposed that the way in which female board members can be seen as insiders and no longer outsiders is through attaining a critical mass status. By applying the critical mass theory, it is argued that one woman on a board has a greater chance of being seen as a token appointment and might experience being treated as either invisible or hypervisible (Konrad et al., 2008). With one woman on a board, it is likely that she will experience hypervisibility, wherein immeasurable scrutiny is placed on everything that she does (Smith et al., 2019). Conversely, these women can also be silenced and experience invisibility and little recognition instead (Settles et al., 2019). This heightens the argument that these women

are constantly expected to perform better than their male counterparts Kanter (1977). Although one woman could be effective in overcoming barriers that are associated with tokenism, researchers argue that three or more women are likely to become catalysts in the change of boardroom dynamics (Cook & Glass, 2018; Schwartz-Ziv, 2017).

Furthermore, from a South African perspective, Viviers and Mans-Kemp (2019) pointed to a unique issue of overboardedness by female board members. It is concerning that in South Africa, the same female board members tend to be appointed on a variety of boards based on their experience causing them to be overextended and thus potentially limiting their ability to perform their duties effectively (Viviers & Mans-Kemp, 2019).

### **2.2.2. Influencing strategy**

The question of influence has a lot to do with authority and power that female directors possess (Glass & Cook, 2016). In the first place, although board diversity continues to be a topical issue, it is argued that the appointment of female directors is sometimes a means of avoiding replacing long serving male directors thereby further undermining the authority of these women (Viviers & Mans-Kemp, 2019). Secondly, a challenge to female directors' authority is said to be found where female chief executive officers (CEOs), for example, lack the support and resources that other board members enjoy (Glass & Cook, 2016). As a result, the influential role that women could play is undermined and compromised. Being appointed as a female board member requires more than just the appointment itself. In this instance, key positions such as committee chairman and CEO are ordinarily occupied by men which reduces the level of influence that female board appointees have towards organisational strategy (Glass & Cook, 2016; Green & Homroy, 2018).

Consistent with the argument for influence, rather than an increase in numbers, it is argued that the more influential a board member, the higher the impact that they are likely to make to key and strategic decision making (Cook & Glass, 2018). In essence, Glass and Cook (2016) put forward that boards that are lacking in female representation

tend to have female CEO's that may have less influence over the entire board than with male CEOs.

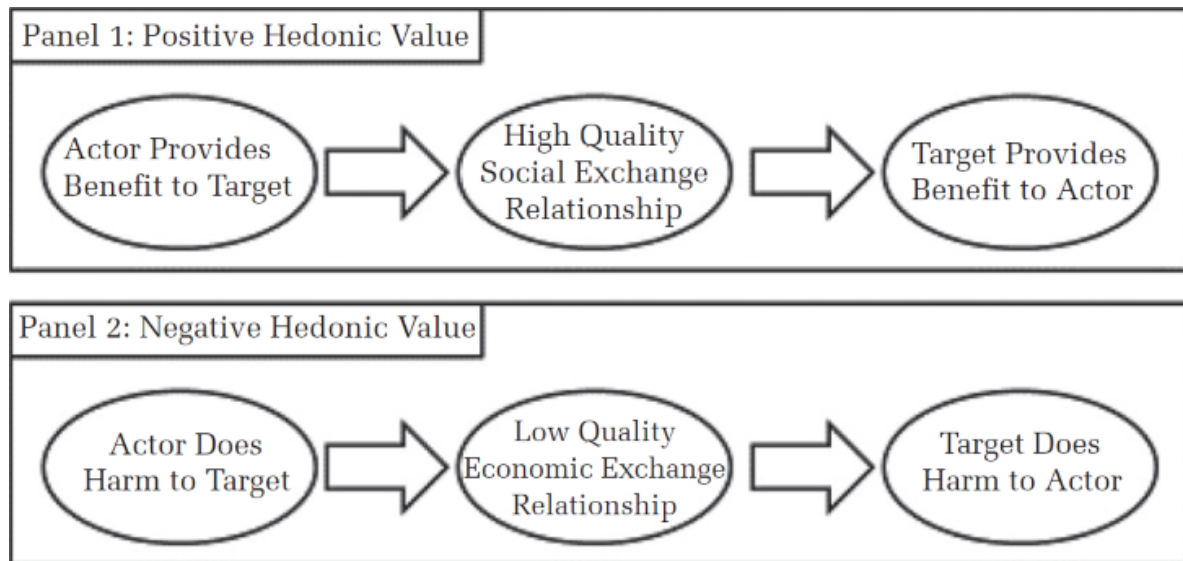
### **2.3. Social exchange theory**

Over the years, organisational socialisation has embedded various frameworks to assist in understanding the phenomenon from different contexts. From belongingness theory (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016) to social learning theory (Liu, Bamberger, Wang, Shi & Bacharach, 2020; Tan, Au, Cooper-Thomas & Aw, 2016), propositions in literature have been formulated by applying various theoretical grounding. More frequently, research studies have found an association of organisational socialisation with that of social learning (Liu et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2016).

Whilst learning is an integral component of newcomer socialisation, another imperative component is that of social exchanges between newcomers and other agents. Some scholars have thus based their assessment of organisational socialisation on the theory underpinning social exchanges to evaluate the value that is perceived in the relationship between the newcomer and other agents (Delobbe et al., 2015; Woodrow & Guest, 2020). This study drew on social exchange theory as a theoretical framework that defines the influence that social exchange relationships have in the process of organisational socialisation. The study aimed to link the value and reciprocation of social exchanges with newcomer experiences. This theory was characterised and described by the seminal work of Homans (1958).

According to Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels and Hall (2017), social exchange theory is broader than a single theoretical framework which has moulded itself from a group of models. The essence of social exchange theory is underpinned by an analysis of costs and benefits where trust, resources, gratitude, obligation (Cropanzano et al., 2017) and more recently, satisfaction (Jeong & Oh, 2017) play an important role in relationships. The notion of obligation thus has meaningful contribution in understanding that doing something for an individual requires some form of return in future, in fact, this return is expected (Delobbe et al., 2015; Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). If the costs of a

relationship are perceived to exceed the benefits and rewards, there could be inequalities in power dynamics and other challenges (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018).



**Figure 1: Generic Model Exchange.**

Source: Cropanzano, R., Anthony, E. L., Daniels, S. R., & Hall, A. V. (2017). Social exchange theory: A critical review with theoretical remedies. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1), 479–516. p. 2

Figure 1 demonstrates the underlying assumption of social exchange theory. Herein, one party acts in a particular manner which sparks a reaction by the other party based on how the initial action is perceived (Cropanzano et al., 2017). The commitment of individuals is thus considered to increase where there exists a social exchange relationship of high quality (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Therefore, it is assumed that the perception of positive behaviour by one party begets positive outcomes and vice versa (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

One of the major criticisms of social exchange theory is related to the applicability and relevance of the theory to workplace behaviour given its wide framework (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017). The second main criticism is that there is an assumption that the absence of something which is deemed

to be positive in the exchange, implies the presence of something else which is negative (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

The social exchange theory was, however, deemed appropriate as the theoretical framework for this study as it generally analyses processes where there exists an organisational actor and a target (Cropanzano et al., 2017). The organisational actor is usually classified, for example, as a supervisor, a co-worker or any other facilitator of socialisation, whereas, the target would be classified as the newcomer in the organisation (Delobbe et al., 2015). Understanding the value of exchanges between the actor and the newcomer in this study made it possible to theoretically expand on the value of relationships given the reciprocal nature of organisational socialisation.

#### **2.4. Employee induction programme**

An induction programme is a concept which has for years been treated interchangeably with the concept of organisational socialisation (Coldwell et al., 2019). There is, however, a distinct difference between these two concepts. An induction programme is considered a sub-section of organisational socialisation in that it is a formal process which is led by the organisation at the very beginning of employment. Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014) held that learning and gaining sufficient experience requires sufficient time. Unlike organisational socialisation which is supposed to be applied for a period of time, an induction programme is not ongoing as a process. Induction usually has a short time span and is regarded as a formal programme by the organisation for the newcomer (Coldwell et al., 2019).

#### **2.5. Organisational socialisation**

Korte and Lin (2013) proposed a generally accepted understanding of the concept of organisational socialisation as a “process by which organisations help newcomers learn about their work and adjust to the workplace” (p. 409). The socialisation process is argued to ensure that newcomers adapt to their new working environment and become effective members of their organisation (Delobbe et al., 2015). It is during this process

that a reciprocal relationship is formed between the employer and employee, formally known as a psychological contract (Delobbe et al., 2015; Smith, Gillespie, Callan, Fitzsimmons & Paulsen, 2017). The psychological contract would, in turn, improve the process of newcomers adjusting to their new environment (Delobbe et al., 2015; Woodrow & Guest, 2020) as socialisation is understood to be a period during which newcomers are faced with great uncertainty and insecurity.

Vital to its definition are models of socialisations that newcomers are to learn to reduce the learning curve, make the adjustment period easier and to fit in with the members of the existing group (Chao et al., 1994). The successful outcomes of the socialisation period are thus intended to increase performance, commitment and job satisfaction of the newcomers. Socialisation processes can therefore either be formal or informal (Nasr et al., 2019).

Various literature that has focused on organisational socialisation has placed emphasis on three key pillars that are of significance in fostering and facilitating newcomer adjustment (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer & Erdogan, 2017). Training facilities (often referred to as organisational tactics) offered by the organisation (Allen et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2015), relational resources by means of managerial and team member support (Ellis et al., 2015) as well as proactive behaviours of newcomers (Ellis et al., 2017) are recognised as important pillars during socialisation. Such pillars have been given attention in exploring the experiences of newcomers in the socialisation process (Nasr et al., 2019). It is further suggested that the exchange that occurs between newcomers and the socialisation facilitators during the socialisation process has an impact on the obligation that is perceived by newcomers towards the organisation (Delobbe et al., 2015). This study employed the social exchange theory to expand on the three key facilitators of organisational socialisation in the context of female board members.



### **2.5.1. Organisational socialisation tactics**

There is a body of literature that considers organisational socialisation tactics through two lenses. On the one hand, socialisation tactics are viewed as those that are formal and synonymous with institutional and standardised organisational socialisation processes such as training facilities (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2015). On the other hand, there is an introduction of individual socialisation tactics which are those considered to demonstrate a more informal and less structured approach of socialising newcomers (Ellis et al., 2015). It is unclear whether the dichotomy and iterations of research on organisational socialisation tactics have brought about the understanding of newcomer experiences in totality. The organisational socialisation tactics that an organisation could utilise to socialise newcomers has evolved over decades with researchers adding numerous constructs to the comprehension of this phenomenon (Allen et al., 2017). Organisational socialisation tactics have, however, been understood to yield positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Allen et al., 2017), and have a direct influence in the newcomer adjustment process (Ellis et al., 2017).

Separate studies have formulated varied conclusions about the socialisation process (Nasr et al., 2019). One such conclusion, which supports that of Ellis et al. (2017) is that socialisation processes require a level of comprehension of the synergy between formal and informal socialisation tactics (Nasr et al., 2019). Formal socialisation processes, such as newcomer training, have been argued to be effective in enhancing role clarity of newcomers which, in turn, leads to higher job satisfaction and performance (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2015; Nasr et al., 2019). These arguments heighten the important role that the organisation plays in the process of integrating newcomers into the organisation.

Trainer, Jones, Pendergraft, Maupin and Carter (2020) placed significant support for standardised and structured organisational socialisation tactics as a conduit for positive newcomer experiences through enhanced newcomer role clarity and team integration. Allen et al. (2017) confirmed this argument by adding that there is a positive relationship between such institutionalised practices and the positive newcomer experiences and

outcomes in the socialisation process. Moreover, Delobbe et al. (2015) found that newcomers generally equate high-quality training with the value that an organisation places on them. This is often referred to as perceived organisational support (Delobbe et al., 2015). Therefore, the higher the quality of training, the more valued newcomers feel about the organisation and the higher the obligation that the newcomer feels towards the organisation. The perception that an organisation cares and values its employees increases the level of trust that employees have towards that organisation (Wayne, Shore & Linden, 1997).

In line with the effectiveness of institutionalised socialisation tactics, Woodrow and Guest (2020) suggested that employers must communicate effectively with newcomers to ensure that newcomers build commitment towards the organisation based on the expectations of the newcomer. This process proposed the importance of strong psychological contracts that can, if fulfilled, result in positive newcomer socialisation experiences (Delobbe et al., 2015; Woodrow & Guest, 2020). Consistent with the support for formalised organisational tactics, researchers found that newcomers were of the view that informal and unstructured socialisation processes were frustrating and somewhat suspiring in the socialisation process (Korte & Lin, 2013).

Although support and consensus have been shown for formal and institutionalised socialisation tactics (Liao, Huang and Xiao, 2017; Nasr et al., 2019), there have been studies that highlighted the importance of informal socialisation tactics as well (Nasr et al., 2019; Nifadkar, 2020). Nasr et al. (2019) argued that a standardised format of socialising newcomers could negatively impact, and even lessen, the team-member role on the social integration of newcomers. Put differently, the argument made is that formal socialisation tactics may indeed reduce newcomer uncertainty, however, this form of socialisation could also potentially lead to unintended consequences by substituting or eliminating the benefits of informal processes (Nasr et al., 2019). Similarly, whereas Liao et al. (2017) agreed with the literature that supported the positive effects of such formal organisational tactics, the authors also offer a contrasting perspective to the benefits of these tactics. The authors held that formal organisational socialisation tactics fail to recognise the individual characteristics of newcomers (Liao et al., 2017). Liao et al. (2017) added that newcomer characteristics are thus assumed to be homogenous

thereby implying that all the variety of newcomer characteristics will not have an impact on the outcome of formal socialisation tactics. A gap was thus found in literature, because to the researcher's knowledge, little is discussed on the different attributes, levels and identities of newcomers.

In an attempt to address this challenge, suggestions have been made for a balance between the use of formal and informal socialisation processes (Nasr et al., 2019; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016; Trainer et al., 2020). To do this, it has been suggested that organisations introduce team members or peers as an informal part of the formal process (Nasr et al., 2019). In a more digital age, Leidner, Gonzalez and Koch (2018) refer to technology use as a means of encouraging interaction with peers and relationship building. Nasr et al. (2019) and Trainer et al. (2020), therefore, argue that the hybrid between the two formats can enhance the synergistic approach and reduce the risk of the opportunity cost of focusing on either one of the elements.

Female board members, as newcomers, are unique in terms of their identity and are considered to be from a high calibre in terms of the hierarchy of structure in the organisation. Liao et al. (2017), supported the argument that factors such as organisational structure and design in literature supporting organisational tactics has been overlooked.

In sum, regardless of the format of organisational socialisation tactics, the role of such tactics – be it positive or negative, formal or informal – is evident from existing literature. Understanding the various aspects and usefulness of such tactics is an organisational imperative.

## **2.5.2. Relational resources**

### **2.5.2.1. Team members**

Expanding on informal organisational socialisation literature, Liu et al. (2020) explored another dimension of organisational socialisation by placing emphasis on vicarious

learning. This relates to newcomer behaviours that occur predominantly as a result of modelling and learning vicariously through peers or other team members and forming stronger bonds with those parties. Ellis et al. (2015) defined this as part of relational resources which are explained as “aspects of the social environment that support positive integration and social acceptance” (p. 18). It is undeniable that relationships formed at work play a significant role in the socialisation process (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018).

Studies have highlighted the significance of experienced team members as agents of socialisation for newcomers (Nasr et al., 2019; Ellis et al., 2015). Newcomers, in this context, are understood to form relationships, particularly with team members, co-workers or peers, that facilitate a better adjustment process through information sharing by team members (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2017). Liu et al. (2020) expanded on this phenomenon by specifying the level of experience of team members as a key role player in the social integration of newcomers which is consistent with research on the importance informal socialisation tactics (Nasr et al., 2019). However, similar to the argument made by Liao et al. (2017), the level of experience of the newcomer is not taken into account, only that of the team member.

Whereas role clarity is heightened by formal organisational socialisation tactics, social integration is arguably increased by formal processes as well as team member support (Nasr et al., 2019; Trainer et al., 2020). It is argued, however, that the quality of the relationship between the newcomer and team member is a key determinant of team member usefulness and value in the socialisation process. Whilst team members may be considered an important positive socialisation tool for newcomers (Delobbe et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2015; Nasr et al., 2019), an opposing view is considered by Liu et al. (2020) which suggested that peers may also act as facilitators for the adoption of poor habits and behaviours of the larger group by newcomers. An argument was made that the adoption of poor habits is even more heightened for newcomers with little experience or those with a high sense of uncertainty. Newcomers, in this instance, are likely to adopt the risky and undesirable behaviours through vicarious learning. Moreover, Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) suggested that the positive experiences of newcomers can therefore be turned to high anxiety and stress where newcomers encounter conflict with team

members in the earlier stages of socialisation. The individual characteristics of team-members and of the individual newcomers themselves, therefore, comes into question.

#### **2.5.2.2. Leader members**

Crucial to the literature on team-members, is the literature on supervisors or what is also referred to as leader members or managers (Delobbe et al., Sluss & Thompson, 2012). More recently, Ellis et al. (2017) and Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) suggested that part of effective organisational socialisation process is the role played by the supervisor of the newcomers. In addition, Delobbe et al. (2015) and Matta and Van Dyne (2020) focused not only the role of this agent but also on the quality of the relationship between the newcomer and the supervisor. It was argued that like the quality of the relationship between newcomers and their peers, the usefulness of supervisors in the socialisation process is only as effective as the quality thereof (Delobbe et al., 2015; Matta and Van Dyne, 2020). This suggests that the higher the quality of the relationship between newcomers and the supervisor or leader member, the better the outcome of the socialisation process (Nasr et al., 2019).

It was thus argued that a transactional relationship is often perceived to be of low quality and would, in turn, reduce commitment and obligation from both parties (Matta & Van Dyne, 2020). Conversely, a high quality social exchanges would increase the trust, loyalty and commitment required to increase the necessary obligation during socialisation (Banks, Batchelor, Seers, O'Boyle Jr, Pollack & Gower, 2014). Unlike team-member exchanges, emphasis is placed on individual relationships (Banks et al., 2014).

A study by Korte et al. (2015) extended this further by linking the reality of the experiences of newcomers and managers with the initial expectations of both parties. The authors expanded by assessing the contrast between reality and expectation as a determinant of the positive or negative outcome of the socialisation process (Korte et al. 2015). Support for the suggestion by Korte et al. (2015) was made in that the perception by managers on newcomers plays a role in the relationship between managers and newcomers (Ellis et al., 2017; Nifadkar, 2020). How managers perceive the commitment

by newcomers is thus argued to be crucial during the socialisation process (Nifadkar, 2020). Therefore, the more commitment that managers perceive from newcomers, the more likely it becomes that the managers will also commit and proactively support newcomers.

There is congruency in the arguments made by Korte et al. (2015) and Ellis et al. (2017) for the role of psychological contracts in the socialisation process. Psychological contracts can therefore not be separated from the relational dynamics aspect of organisational socialisation in that unexpected events can adversely impact newcomers, which in turn may increase newcomer uncertainty and reduces job satisfaction (Korte et al., 2015). This is consistent with Smith et al. (2017) on the effects of psychological contract breaches on the organisational socialisation process. Once newcomers and managers alike perceive a breach in psychological contracts, it is likely that the impact of this perceived breach will impact the socialisation of newcomers negatively (Smith et al., 2017). Moreover, managers may also have expectations of newcomers which can be counterproductive should they be perceived to be misaligned with the reality thereof (Korte et al., 2015). Although Tomprou, Rousseau and Hansen (2015) and Solinger, Hofmans, Bal and Jansen (2016) offered alternatives that could remedy the breach of psychological contracts, the psychological contract and perceived breach thereof is thus likely to influence the usefulness of the relationship between the newcomer and the supervisor (Delobbe et al., 2015).

The association and connection of psychological contracts is not only made between newcomers and team members, but also between newcomers and their managers, supervisors or leader members (Delobbe et al., 2015). Woodrow and Guest (2020) held that there has been an evolution from treating psychological contracts as an outcome of organisational socialisation, but rather as a factor influencing the socialisation process.

There appears to be consensus about the importance of managers and team members in the socialisation and adjustment of newcomers (Ellis et al., 2017; Matta & Van Dyne, 2020; Nifadkar, 2020). It is thus clear from existing literature that team members and managers contribute to the socialisation process of newcomers. The findings from literature are, however, inconclusive about the variations of these relationships that will

heighten newcomer experiences thereby improving newcomer adjustment. Additionally, these forms of relationships have not been tested against non-traditional work relationships such as a board of directors (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Therefore, the agent that is considered a manager or leader member in the context of a board of directors is not fully understood. Moreover, the behaviours that motivate the usefulness of these agents are less clear in the context of newcomers experiences of board members.

### **2.5.3. Newcomer proactive behaviours**

According to Allen et al. (2017) and Trainer et al. (2020), an important element in the success of the organisational socialisation process is that which is influenced by self-regulation of newcomers. Here, an important emphasis is placed on the self-efficacy, individual traits and characteristics of newcomers (Ozyilmaz, Erdogan & Karaeminogullari, 2018; Yu & Davis, 2016). Proactive behaviours demonstrated by newcomers are said to be a critical component for transitioning into active participants in the organisation (Yu & Davis, 2016). Whilst the theme of newcomer characteristics is broad, researchers have found that factors such as newcomer personality, learning, creativity, curiosity as well as prior work experiences have an impact on the organisational socialisation process (Allen et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2016; Trainer et al., 2020).

Moreover, Ellis et al. (2015) and Trainer et al. (2020) posited that personal characteristics and newcomer attributes have a positive effect on the socialisation process. Further, a newcomer with high self-efficacy, for example, is likely to demonstrate proactive behaviours in the socialisation process that will result in job satisfaction and higher job performance (Ellis et al., 2015), particularly when individuals have higher trust in the organisation (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). The argument made here is that the strength of the socialisation process is thus placed on the proactive efforts of newcomers in the process to build relationships and to seek information (Ellis et al., 2015; Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). Organisations must, therefore, make an effort to

understand the reasons for newcomers to engage in proactive behaviours (Yu & Davis, 2016).

Expanding further to this literature is the suggestion that proactive efforts demonstrated by newcomers are associated with the level of support received by newcomers from their managers (Ellis et al., 2017; Fuller, Marler, Hester & Otondo, 2015). In this sense, support is shown for studies that have found managers or leader-members to be an important agent in the socialisation process. It is argued, however, that managers are of significance in the type of proactivity displayed by newcomers in the socialisation process (Ellis et al., 2017). This is to say that the manner in which managers support newcomers may be distorted by the perceptions formed by managers from the onset (Ellis et al., 2017). Ellis et al. (2017) thus made the argument that organisations must consider support by managers regardless of whether newcomers display commitment and other perceived proactive behaviours or not.

Significant to studies that support proactive newcomer behaviours, is the impact of the observations made by newcomers of manager or leader member behaviours (Ellis et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2015). It has been found that how newcomers perceive the behaviours of managers plays a role in how newcomers subsequently form a reality around the socialisation process (Fuller et al., 2015; Nifadkar, 2020). Therefore, the relationship between newcomer proactive behaviours and increased value of the socialisation process is generally accepted. It is suggested, however, that newcomers are more proactive in seeking out information and feedback from managers when there is a perception by the newcomer that the manager has positive attributes, such as competence (Nifadkar, 2020). As with arguments made for the usefulness of a high quality relationship between newcomers and managers in the socialisation process, the proactive newcomer behaviours cannot be understood in isolation. The symbiotic relationship between the perceptions formed by newcomers and those formed by managers seem to be useful during socialisation (Ellis et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2015).

To expand further on the proactive behaviours of newcomers, Delobbe et al. (2015) posited that when newcomers have a high sense of personal obligation towards their manager and/or the organisation, that personal obligation is likely to have a positive



influence on the socialisation process. Therefore, in the case of managers, the quality of the relationship between managers and the newcomer is heightened by the sense of obligation that a newcomer has towards the manager, which in turn, will influence the usefulness and impact of the socialisation process (Ellis et al., 2017). This is consistent with the argument made for the positive effects of formal organisational socialisation tactics as well as role of perceptions in increasing proactive behaviours. There is therefore a connection to personal attributes and psychological contracts (Delobbe et al., 2015).

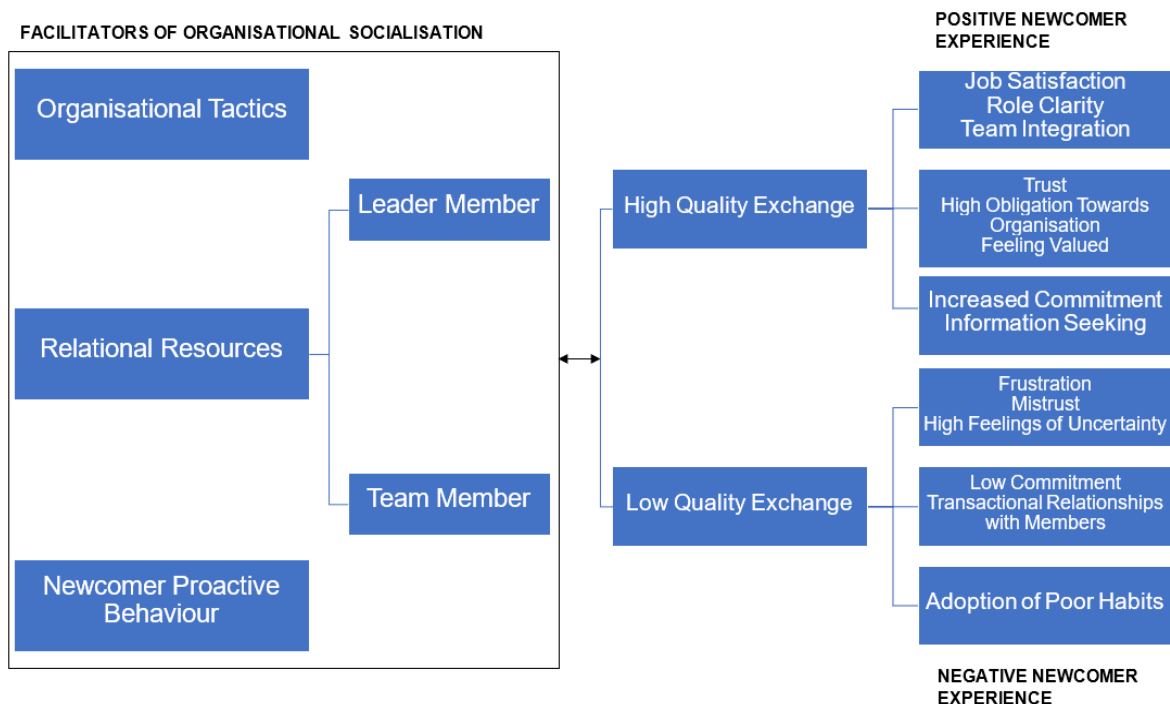
Proactive newcomer behaviours can thus be facilitated and improved by organisations that take into account targeted learning processes for specific objectives and goals (Tan et al., 2016). This can be done by organisations that make concerted efforts to build trust with employees (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018) and organisations that take person-environment fit into consideration during recruitment (Yu & Davis, 2016). In contrast, the ability to seek information by newcomers – a critical aspect of organisational socialisation – is arguably weakened by potential conflict in the relationships that newcomers have in the organisation (Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016). According to Nifadkar and Bauer (2016), therefore, the weight of information seeking, irrespective of the characteristics of newcomers, can thus be influenced negatively by unhealthy and dysfunctional relationships.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

From the study of existing research literature, there is clear evidence that female leaders are bound to face a plethora of challenges once they are appointed in senior positions. It is also apparent that the organisational socialisation process is complex and requires a deeper understanding to explore its value and benefits to female board members post-appointment. The gap in literature is on the effectiveness of organisational socialisation processes to ensure that female board members are successfully integrated to become active participants in organisations and in influencing strategy. That which female board members experience during this process is not clear. There is general consensus on the importance of organisational socialisation in increasing job satisfaction, performance

and tenure of newcomers. What is also unclear are the agents that play a role in the process for female board members, the length of such a process as well as the manner in which success is measured.

Added to the complication of this discussion is that literature defines the socialisation process in the context of a traditional employer-employee relationship, where the general structure would consist of the newcomer, the organisation, the team-member(s) and the manager as agents that are likely to play a role in the process. In this study, a more non-traditional process was explored in the context of social exchanges that exist within three pillars that are described through various research studies. Literature places emphasis on key relationships that act as facilitators during the organisational socialisation process. The organisational tactics during socialisation, the relationship and role of team members and leaders through relational resources, as well as the initiative from newcomers in their own adjustment process are demonstrated in a presumed model in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Literature Review Organisational Socialisation Framework**

**Source:** Author's own

As discussed in Chapter 3, the aim of the research is thus to answer three questions to gain insights into the socialisation experiences of female board members in South African companies as a means to better understand its effectiveness and its role in the subsequent progression of female directors in boardrooms. Whilst the JSE, through King IV, has put disclosure practices in place for women representation on boards, there is a need to understand the socialisation experiences for female board members to inform organisational policy that can ultimately maximise shareholder and stakeholder value.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

There are specific research questions that this study aims to answer. The reviewed literature formed the foundation of the research questions.

### **3.1. Research Question 1: What kind of organisational socialisation processes do female board members undergo?**

The objective of this question was to understand how female board members are socialised in the organisation from their point of view and the period over which the process took place. This is intended to provide insights into who the instrumental role players in the process are and whether the newcomer played a significant role in the process or not. In addition, this research question aimed to identify other actors in the organisational socialisation process that have not been given consideration in literature.

### **3.2. Research Question 2: Which criteria, policy and/or procedures, if any, were present in the conducting of the socialisation process?**

This research question aimed to identify whether there are internal criteria, policies or procedures followed by organisations for determining and conducting the socialisation process. The aim was to ascertain to what the extent to which such criteria, policies and procedures were formal and/or informal and whether their effectiveness is measured.

### **3.3. Research Question 3: How do female board members find/experience the socialisation process in terms of usefulness?**

This question endeavoured to understand both the most and least useful factors in the socialisation process that female board members feel could be focused on in the process. This will assist in providing insights on that which female board members experienced against their expectations of the process to potentially identify gaps and that which is lacking in the process.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology and design which was employed in this research. This study was qualitative and explorative in nature and the rationale for this approach is explained in further detail below. A discussion on the population, data sampling and the data collection process is provided. Additionally, the trustworthiness of the research together with its limitations is given consideration.

### **4.2. Choice of research methodology and design**

A good research study must demonstrate an understanding of the lens within which the researcher developed various assumptions and the comprehension of such assumptions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Because the researcher intended to understand and explore that which was unknown regarding the socialisation process of female board members, a qualitative approach was selected for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the researcher had intended to interpret and draw conclusions based on information provided by participants from their own description of reality and alleged experiences, thus ensuring that the research followed an interpretivist approach (Leitch, Hill & Harrison, 2010).

The evaluation of argument in research is done through either a deductive or an inductive approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research was based on an inductive approach as the researcher was able to make conclusions from data obtained. Unlike a deductive approach, the researcher was not testing theory provided and thus did not have foregoing assumptions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Instead, the researcher was able to create propositions based on an analysis of the data in which participants had made meaning of their personal situation and experiences. This form of approach allowed for flexibility and the ability for the researcher to generate new theory (Patton, 2002).

A mono-method qualitative study was adopted as the researcher was aiming to explore and comprehend the context of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Even though applying a mixed-method approach can allow for flexibility and a variation of views, adopting a mixed-method approach is largely dependent on the completion of one method over the other which can be time-consuming and may create conflicting findings (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2020), which the researcher was guarding against. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews to gain deeper knowledge and understanding on the research topic, which made the research design explorative in nature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In doing so, the researcher was able to analyse data to understand and gain insights into newcomer experiences of female corporate board members which had not yet been explored (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The research method was, therefore, qualitative and exploratory because the study was aimed at entering into a field which was yet to be explained (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher considered this approach appropriate for the study as the intention was to explore the participants' contribution in order to bring about an understanding of similarities and differences in their experiences of organisational socialisation post-appointment as board members.

The research was conducted in a specific time frame, which limited the time in which the report could be completed. As a result, the time horizon for the research was cross-sectional (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). According to Sandelowski (1991), a narrative research strategy speaks to an account of experiences. The aim of this study was to explore and understand the experiences of women at a particular point in time in their lives to assess similarities and differences in their stories in order to draw conclusions. For this reason, the research strategy was of a narrative nature (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Moreover, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews consisting of semi-structured questions as this allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights on the explorative research (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2013). Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the intended face-to-face interviews were replaced with interviews through virtual conferencing facilities, namely; Microsoft Teams or Zoom. All participants were familiar with and fully comfortable with the use of the virtual platforms. Almost all participants

preferred to keep their cameras off during the interviews. This allowed for flow and ease of conversation and a more natural tone to the conversation. Rapport was thus built quickly with these participants as a result of the virtual platform. The interview sessions, however, were guided, with limited control on the conversation from the researcher.

#### **4.3. Population**

The target population for the research was from organisations in South Africa with female board member representation. In South Africa, the measure of corporate board member diversity is usually based on JSE-listed companies because firstly, these organisations have to adhere to the King IV code as part of their JSE listing requirements. Secondly, these organisations have an obligation to disclose board diversity targets annually and means of achieving those targets (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). The population that was useful for this study was, therefore, female board members serving on a board of any organisation in corporate South Africa, irrespective of its legal incorporation requirements or size.

#### **4.4. Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis displays that which is being assessed in the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, JSE listed, state-owned and private companies as well as non-profit companies with female board member representation were chosen and the unit was the female board members from these companies as participants. The board members included both executive and non-executive directors who have served as board members for longer than one year.

#### **4.5. Sampling method and size**

The research was classified as purposive non-probability sampling. Whereas probability sampling dictates that the researcher is selecting a random sample from a population with a full list (Saunders & Lewis, 2018), this particular research, however, did not have a list of the population and was thus not intended to select participants at random.

Moreover, the researcher was certain that the chosen participants would be able to provide the insights and deep information required to draw meaningful conclusions for the study. The participants were chosen because they were expected to be able to answer the research questions. This reflected a purposive sample (Etikan, 2016). Furthermore, given the high profile nature of the participants, the researcher followed a snowball sampling technique to ensure that access to the female board members, most of who served on multiple boards, was obtained.

The researcher set out to study a variety of perspectives from the women in the study. Albeit that age groups, race, industry, qualifications or skills did not play a significant role in the choice of women that were interviewed, the participants were all board members and they were all women. This type of technique is classified as homogeneous purposive sampling technique (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

A sample of 20 participants was targeted for this research based on the researcher's belief that they would have the requisite knowledge for the research questions. The researcher, however, reached saturation after 15 interviews based on the homogeneity of the population and similarity of the questions (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The first transcription of the research generated 60 codes. The researcher noted a significant reduction in codes by the time the eighth interview was being analysed. New codes being generated were less than 10 at that stage. In addition, no new codes and themes were produced as the researcher reached the 12<sup>th</sup> interview. The 15 female board members were from various industries including the financial sector, mining, construction, healthcare, consulting, education and legal fields.

#### **4.6. Measurement instrument**

According to Saunders and Lewis (2018) semi-structured interviews are tools used in research to guide an interview process and to limit the involvement of the researcher in the response process. This type of process allows for data collection which is more rich and in-depth as it allows for probing for more responses and points of clarity from participants, particularly given the conclusions that the researcher sought from the



experiences of the participants. A semi-structured guide (Appendix 1) was prepared with what the researcher believed were clear and unambiguous questions based on the reviewed literature. The researcher formulated key themes from the literature review, which formed the basis of the research questions.

These questions were prepared ahead of time to ensure that all participants would more or less be answering the same questions. To ensure that questions were clear and unambiguous, the interview guide was piloted with two participants outside of the sample to ensure that time allocation and the interview process was well-suited to meet its objectives.

In qualitative research, the notion of trustworthiness is related to the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of the literature (Anney, 2014). The subjective nature of qualitative research makes exposure to bias possible (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). There is a degree of limitation in that interviewer bias may have an impact on the manner in which responses are captured, unlike in a quantitative study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018; Zikmund et al., 2013). The aspects and criteria of trustworthiness are expanded below.

#### **4.7. Data collection process**

The process of data collection only began after ethical clearance approval from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) research ethics committees. The researcher conducted 15 personal semi-structured in-depth interviews with female board members serving on boards in South Africa at the time of writing from a variety of industries. The interviews were conducted over a four-week period, with interviews lasting between 35 and 60 minutes. The questions that were asked to participants were deduced from themes which were prearranged from secondary data as a result of the reviewed literature (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The researcher conducted two pilot interviews to prepare for the interview process and to ensure that the interview questions were clearly understood by participants without researcher intervention. The first pilot interview revealed that the term 'organisational socialisation' was not well understood to

mean 'onboarding'. The researcher thus included the meaning of the term in the consent form signed by participants.

Participants were asked questions from an interview guide which was formulated from the review of literature. All 15 interviews were scheduled telephonically or by email. Disclosure of the recording, the interview process as well as confidentiality were confirmed with participants and reiterated at the beginning of each interview. The researcher stored all records in an electronic format, which were password protected. Because this study was qualitative in nature and because the researcher had the names and contact details of participants, confidentiality was confirmed with participants, not anonymity.

To increase confidentiality, the researcher did not utilise external resources to transcribe. Instead, the Otter.ai software was used for recording and transcribing the recordings into meaningful text. This software was not always 100 percent accurate, however, the researcher made sure to check those errors on text against the recording shortly after each interview. Furthermore, the real names of participants were not documented in the research. The use of participants followed by a numerical classification was utilised instead and translated appropriately in a separate file. The researcher informed participants about the purpose of the study, however, the interview guide questions were not provided to participants prior to the interview. Only one participant requested that the interview guide be provided prior to the interview. The researcher believes that this request did not compromise the quality of the interview. The participant informed the researcher that their initial thought was that the questions would be highly technical as opposed to open-ended.

The aim of the research was to gain insights, therefore, the type of questions contained in the research were specific to the research objectives. Firstly, there was an introductory phase and participants were encouraged to speak freely and to add further insights where they deemed appropriate based on their experiences. Given that all interviews were on a virtual platform, the interviews were professional and in a quiet setting where the participants seemed most comfortable. As a result, the researcher was able to record the interviews and participants were able to apply their minds with little to

no distractions. Secondly, the interviewer utilised open-ended questions to encourage participants to feel open and free to provide full and in-depth disclosure (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, such questions were expected to bring about insights which were unexpected. Finally, the participants were given an opportunity to give any additional information or key insights that they may wish to express to support the research objectives or for future research.

#### **4.8. Analysis approach**

The researcher utilised the ATLAS-ti software to analyse data. The researcher coded and interpreted patterns to assess meaning, not frequency. Common themes were identified from the data which was collected. In essence, an analysis was conducted to generate codes from the responses to build categories based on similarities. This was done several times. Each interview was transcribed verbatim to formulate themes. These themes were subsequently categorised to derive codes that were repeatedly analysed to form various conclusions. The codes and categories were then analysed to generate themes (Appendix 6) which were, in turn, analysed to draw conclusions. A thematic analysis was thus used to arrange data according to patterns and ideas which have been identified repeatedly from the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The researcher realised that as much as rapport was built quickly as a result of using an electronic platform for interviews, some participants may have been distracted and trying to manage multiple things at once, thereby limiting concentration. This could have happened only twice and did not have a huge impact on the quality of the interview, however, it is important to note for future research.

#### **4.9. Quality controls**

Data collected for a qualitative research report should be of sound quality and trustworthiness thereby demonstrating credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To ensure that the research was valid and reliable and to limit bias from

the interviewer and participants, the researcher utilised a standard list of interview questions that formed the basis and guideline of the interviews.

#### **4.9.1. Credibility**

The credibility component of research relates to the extent to which there is truthfulness in the data and findings of the research study. Twining, Heller, Nussbaum and Tsai (2017) posited that transparency in the manner in which data was collected as well as transparency in the process of analysing data are key to ensure that the findings of the research are original and believable. The researcher has outlined the research design as well as the manner in which the data was collected and analysed to increase credibility.

To further enhance credibility, the researcher engaged with all participants prior to conducting interviews to explain the research process and the tools to be applied for the interview. This included explaining that interviews would be recorded and transcribed without identifiers. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the conversation without penalty. Transparency was imperative throughout the data collection process. Due to time constraints, the researcher was only able to allow two participants to review findings and conclusions of the research as a form of member-checking and to minimise bias. The research supervisor reviewed the research, as a means of peer briefing, to further assist in minimising bias.

The researcher's population was classified as homogenous. However, to ensure triangulation of sources (Shenton, 2004) in the form of different perspectives and viewpoints, the researcher interviewed executive and non-executive female board members from publicly listed organisations, state-owned entities, private companies across different sectors, as well as non-profit organisations.

The researcher encouraged participants to treat the interview as conversational. Participants were thus allowed to expand on any question without being interrupted. In turn, the researcher requested that participants elaborate on some responses and the

researcher confirmed meaning from some of what was said by participants to enhance understanding.

#### **4.9.2. Transferability**

The researcher has detailed the rationale for methodological choices as well as the research instruments. When assessing transferability, the goal is to test whether this qualitative study can be transferred to the realities of other participants or other settings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The purposeful nature of the sample was to ensure that the participants were knowledgeable about the topic and would be able to answer the questions posed to them. Because the researcher documented various assumptions of the research and gave context of the interpretation of the lived experiences of participants, this allowed for transferability, albeit limited. The population in this study was limited to female board members and the data collection period was four weeks long, therefore, using the methodology discussed, it is believed that the study can be conducted on other board members or other groups of newcomers in similar markets.

#### **4.9.3. Dependability**

Dependability is described as findings which remain stable over a period of time. All interviews were recorded and documented in full and can therefore be confirmed to enhance dependability. The researcher ensured that coding and recoding using the ATLAS-ti software were conducted systematically and several times as well. In addition, the research supervisor was engaged to discuss results and the approach of the findings reported.

#### **4.9.4. Confirmability**

To ensure that the research can be confirmed by other researchers, the process taken throughout this research has been discussed with the methodological choices, design and data gathering process clearly outlined in detail. Throughout the trustworthiness and quality control section of this research, detail on various aspects of confirmability are

stipulated. Additionally, the use of the ATLAS-ti software allowed for transcripts to be coded in a similar format.

#### **4.10. Ethical considerations**

The researcher took into account a number of considerations where ethics was concerned. In the first instance, the collection of data was subject to clearance by the GIBS research committee, following approval by the research supervisor. Secondly, participants were notified of the process and permission was sought to record all interviews. Moreover, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any stage. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all findings from the data were reported without identifiers as agreed to with participants. Lastly, some respondents were keen to receive the final research report for their own personal insights. This research report will thus be shared with some of the participants, without consent forms and/or other additional material that might be required by GIBS that could compromise the confidentiality of other respondents.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESULTS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The questions which were presented in Chapter 3 formed the basis and layout of this chapter. More importantly, this chapter presents the findings based on the analysis of data from the participants during the interview process. The qualitative nature of the research was useful for the exploratory method of data collection through the use of semi-structured interviews.

The results of this research are first presented by providing an explanation of the preparation of data. Key to the preparing of data is the description of the sample to expand on the attributes of the participants. The codes developed from the data analysis were grouped into sub-categories which assisted in formulating specific themes from which to organise the chapter and give meaning to the research questions.

### **5.2. Description of the sample**

Table 1 below presents a breakdown of the participants together with their specific characteristics and the average number of years they have served on boards. A purposive non-probability sample was chosen for the study as the researcher was of the view that all 15 participants would be able to provide the requisite insights for research objectives. Furthermore, a snowballing sampling technique was utilised to ensure that access to female board members was obtained. The 15 participants had been serving on one board or multiple boards for longer than one year to ensure that their account of the organisational socialisation process was over a period of time.

The sample, therefore, consisted of 15 female board members who were currently serving and previously served on boards from different types of organisations across various industries. The participants had a variety of skills and qualifications and held positions of seniority in their respective careers. They were serving on boards as either executive directors, non-executive directors or a combination of both on. The sample

included participants who had experience as board committee chairmen but none as chairmen of the board of directors. Most participants were between ages 40 and 60 with the youngest age group being between 35 and 40.

**Table 1: Details of participants**

Industry Experience as Board Member	Number of Participants
Banking	3
Consulting	4
Construction	1
Education	3
FMCG	1
Healthcare	1
Legal	3
Mining and Energy	6
Executive and Non-executive director experience	Number of Participants
Executive	7
Non-executive	13
Type of Organisation	Number of Participants
JSE-listed organisation	8
Private company	8
Non-profit organisation	4
State-owned company	7
Trust	3
Participants Years' Experience as Board Member	Number of Participants
0 to 10 years	8
11 to 20 years	5
21 to 30 years	2
Age Distribution	Number of Participants
30 to 39 years	6
40 to 49 years	3
50 to 59 years	5

**Source:** Author's own



### **5.3. Research Question 1: What kind of organisational socialisation processes do female board members undergo?**

The main objective of this question was to understand how female board members were socialised in the organisation from their point of view and the period over which the process took place. Key to this question was to identify role players in the process and those that participants felt were instrumental in the process as well.

#### **5.3.1. Theme: Key role players**

Before explaining the organisational socialisation process that female board members had experienced in their past and current positions, it is critical to ensure that the facilitators of the process are understood and taken into consideration as the first step. Table 2 illustrates the frequency in which role players were identified in the process through the ATLAS-ti software. In this study, the highest number of responses identified in terms of frequency was that of the company secretary. This was followed by the role played by the chairman of the board and that played by CEO.

**Table 2: Key role players in organisational socialisation**

Rank	Constructs	Frequency
1	Company Secretary	22
2	Chairman of the Board	19
3	Chief Executive Officer	14
4	Executive Management	12
5	HR Directors	3

In the analysis of the role played by the company secretary, almost all participants agreed that the company secretary alone was not sufficient in onboarding new board members (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 13). Although the company secretary's importance was accepted by most participants, there was emphasis placed on the collaborative nature in which the organisational socialisation process ought to be viewed by organisations (Participants 3 & 7). Participant 7 stated that "I don't think it is the

company's secretary's responsibility.....It is a collective approach where each person should actually speak to their expertise or their field of responsibility" (Participant 7).

Another participant reinforced this by stating that:

*"I keep coming back to the commitment and collaboration that was in place, the company secretary knows that this induction has to be set up and to arrange and accommodate all the departments to do this and the fact that the departments all know the value of induction is wonderful"* (Participant 3).

Participant 1 made a compelling observation by adding that the strength of the relationship between the company secretary and the chairman of the board was essential to the level of comfort that the participant felt in the process. The participant noted, "...so I've seen many relationships between company secretary and the chair that are not necessarily where they need to be. It does affect the functioning and the tone, the overall tone of a board" (Participant 1).

What was surprising that the observation around the quality of relationships was made regarding the chairman of the board and that of the company secretary, but no mention on the quality of the relationship between the newcomer and the chairman of the board was made.

Even though the chairman of the board was not always actively involved in the socialisation process, some participants felt that the chairman of the board had a bigger role to play in the process (Participants 1, 2, 8, 11, 13 & 15). Two participants made specific reference to how the interaction by newcomers and current board members would be elevated if the board chairman played a more prominent role in the process (Participants 2 and 13). One of the participants expressed that "it does not mean that the chair should physically do everything himself or herself, but definitely you know why? Because it adds gravitas to this thing." (Participant 2).

Another added:

*“...it was useful to have a conversation with the chair of the board of trustees who explained that it is okay for you to come in without knowing anything because you will ask the questions that everybody else may not know...”* (Participant 13).

In line with the role of the chairman of the board was the importance of the board committee chairman to which board members belonged (Participant 4 & 8). Participant 8 expressed gratitude to the support provided by the committee chairman in ensuring successful newcomer integration and taking the time to explain committee processes to them: “I specifically identified the chairman, the CEO and other members of the chairman's committees to socialise the new director because not only has she never been to South Africa, she's never been in a board meeting” (Participant 8).

In addition to this statement, Participant 15 shared that the gender of the committee chairmen made a difference. She observed that female committee chairmen offered more support in their efforts to socialise newcomers, be it male or female newcomers.

*“[...] if you take a look at some of the boards for example, our chairperson for example was female and that induction was completely different, it was very supportive there was a very clear agenda set as to what your responsibilities and duties are...”* (Participant 15).

Consistent with the value placed on gravitas and seniority, further emphasis was placed on the role of the CEO and that of the CFO (Participants 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, & 12). Some participants (Participants 2, 4, & 6), whose process included the CEO and/or CFO, found it easier to connect with the rest of executive management. The participant remarked, “So they will bring the information and they will, even in a formal situation, come and present and engage with the new members. So it's the executives of the company led by the CEO” (Participant 6).

Moreover, Participant 2 added “....then there would be the presentation from the CEO and from the heads of business units irrespective of how the company is structured and it should be given in due regard and due weight”. However,

participants who did not experience any facilitation from the CEO and/or CFO (Participants 4 & 7) expressed the importance of the CEO and/or CFO who, like the board chairman, were considered the leaders of the organisation.

Participants 2 and 4 added a different element and were specific about the need to involve human resource (HR) specialists in the process. These participants highlighted that organisational socialisation processes were a matter of human resources in the organisation and thus a specialist in that field would be key for the success of the process (Participants 2 & 4). Participant 2 expressed that, "HR Directors are not in a bad place to run induction sessions as they are used to working closely with the other directors and as HR directors again they are used to running inductions".

At committee level, Participant 4 stated:

*"Let's look at when I was the HR Director. I made sure that at least once a year, we brought in somebody from Company X or from somewhere else, to do a general overview of remuneration trends for the members of the remuneration committee (REMCO)".*

Furthermore, executive management was offered by most participants as a significant player in their account of the process (Participants 3, 4, & 13). The quality of the encounter differed among participants, with some expressing their disappointment at the level of exchange during the encounter (Participant 2, 6, & 7). The level of engagement with executive management was found to be a tedious, one-directional information session rather than a conversational and personal interaction. One participant held that "It does not need to be Powerpointed to death, but even a two-hour session each etc" (Participant 2). In support of this view, Participant 7 added "I have heard where board members are given a file and that is that and they are meant to read it".

In reference the quality of information provided by executive management, one participant remarked that "they don't even know that whatever they are dumping you with is still relevant or not. They are giving you something they don't even have knowledge of" (Participant 6).

Conversely, Participant 3, found the interaction with executive management pleasant as it gave the participant an opportunity to put faces to the people in charge of the various business units, making it helpful to know to whom to pose specific questions in future when necessary. The value of this exchange was described as something which would allow board members an opportunity to ask questions later and know who to direct those questions to (Participant 3). In support of this view, Participant 4 cited executive sponsors as an integral part of the process.

*“There are certain things that I think work well. One of them is having an executive sponsor for each chairperson of the subcommittee..... What I found was that, that board member had somebody besides the chief executive that they could call to ask for additional information and it allowed, in my opinion, for deeper discussion”*  
(Participant 4).

The role played by retired board members, the nomination committee and office administrators were not highlighted as part of the main constructs, however, but were cited as useful (Participants 13 &15).

Participant 4 suggested legal experts to be considered in the process. Of particular interest, is that some participants referred to the importance of keeping abreast with legislation and corporate governance standards (Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, & 10). However, only Participant 4 referred to the role legal experts could play in the entire process. This could be because reliance is placed on the company secretary to keep abreast of legislative requirements or that the connection between the two was not made at the time. It could also be because of the emphasis placed on the need for continuous training and development.

In assessing key role players, what was prominent, was that there was consensus that the process of socialising board members cannot be seen as a one-time approach, nor can it be viewed in a silo. It is something which has to be taken as a multi-pronged approach and requires formal measurement of its effectiveness. It was surprising that focus was placed on the relationship between the chairman of the board and the company

secretary, but no mention of the relationship between the newcomer and the chairman of the board was made.

### 5.3.2. Theme: Newcomer considerations

When unpacking the key role players that participants found effective and those that they suggested as instrumental in the process, there were a lot of insights pointing to the importance of the role played by the newcomers themselves. Not only was finding comfort in the relationships with other newcomers highlighted but also finding comfort in reliance on self. Table 3 presents the responses demonstrated when a question was posed around other role players and whether newcomers themselves played a role in their own socialisation experience.

**Table 3: Newcomer considerations**

Rank	Constructs	Frequency
1	Reliance on self	19
2	Reliance on other sources	1
3	Holding organisation accountable	1
4	Redesigning the process for the benefit of other newcomers	3

Three participants explained that being onboarded as a group was somewhat helpful in that there was a level of camaraderie with someone they would consider a “peer” (Participants 5, 6, & 7). Moreover, Participant 6 explained how a group process yielded positive results in that their socialisation process further heightened the reliance on self and ones’ own initiatives to integrate into the large group.

*“I don't think it benefits anyone just to have a session for one person. So normally, where I am the only one, they just leave the file so that you can raise the questions with the relevant executives. But if it's three people, three or four, it's a formal session. So with the other board members who have joined, we all participate in that session”* (Participant 6).

Participants frequently mentioned that the onus was placed on them to ensure that they were successfully integrated irrespective of whether the organisation was actively involved in the process or not (Participants 1, 4, 13, 11, 14, & 15). Participants 2, 4, and 12 insisted that they had to acclimate themselves for the success of their progress and performance in the organisation.

In addition, Participant 14 noted that she felt that being relatively inexperienced as a board member dented her self-confidence as she was expected to know what she was doing. This statement was supported by some participants who highlighted two main issues with being inexperienced. Firstly, participants felt that there was a general assumption that they knew what to do in order to function as effective board members (Participants 1, 4, 13, 14, & 15). They felt that the expectation was that women of their calibre should know what they are doing (Participants 1, 4, 13, 14, & 15). This not only affected the confidence of these participants but it further enforced their need to take charge of their own socialisation process (Participant 14). Participant 4 agreed by emphasising "...because one just assumes that people know these things, and they don't, they don't know...".

Moreover, Participant 15 added:

*"The experience is a lot of sink or swim kind of environment, so you are kind of given very little around how you are supposed to act as a trustee or an executive director or what your responsibilities are or what your duties are, you are sort of thrown with requests really"* (Participant 15).

Secondly, some Participants 2 and 4 felt strongly that the duty was indeed on the newcomer to "empower" themselves by showing up ready and having investigated the organisation, its board structures and anything else that might be of use to the newcomers' contribution.

*"I am deeply aware, maybe irritatingly so, of the risks involved being in that position and of the opportunity to make a difference and to make decision that*

*actively contributes to sustainability but equally so, if I don't do my job properly and thoroughly, there can be huge drama" (Participant 2).*

One participant took a different approach and expressed how adamant she was about holding the organisation accountable for the process (Participant 8). She too conceded that the onus was on newcomers to become au fait with the way things are done, however, she insisted that the organisation could not absolve itself from the process (Participant 8).

*"I pushed and I pushed and I pushed.....if you look at your board composition, not everybody is from the sector. So, I strongly suggest that there must be sector specific training done or induction done for non-sector directors because the reason you want directors that come from other sectors is for the diversity of thought they bring to the board right? However, if you do not bring them up to speed with the sector, you are actually doing them an injustice" (Participant 8).*

Interestingly, participants generally found that they were presented with information, either in writing or in person with little explanation or context provided about the organisation and how the board was operated (Participants 1, 3, 5, & 15). What was further insightful was that factors such as board jargon or board culture, for example, were overlooked, something which inexperienced board members explicitly found challenging.

*"Here is this young black girl, you are sitting on a board with white males who are obviously seasoned board members. I think the assumption was that I knew, you know what it takes. I mean, I remember my first meeting and everybody's like through you "through you chairman" and I'm like? Through what?" (Participant 1).*

Participant 11 added that the importance of organisational socialisation was further diluted by some organisations which did not offer any form of induction or socialisation process at all. This, however, led to participants displaying initiatives of influencing a change in the process for other newcomers (Participants 6, 8, 11, & 12). One participant reasoned that "I was actually the one who redesigned the nature and substance of the



induction programme for CompanyX, because I said you do not have enough” (Participant 8).

This was echoed by Participant 11:

*“Yeah, I think the fact that I was vocal about having some form of a formal process has played a huge role in how the subsequent board members after me have experienced the process. Had I not been vocal who knows, it may have still been the same”.*

In essence, results indicated that female board members, as newcomers, were actively involved in their own socialisation process. They took it upon themselves to fill in the missing gaps where they felt the organisation could have done more and also stipulated that they believed that it was their duty to make sure that the process worked. This could be because of the pressure they felt to perform or perhaps because of the expectation placed on their level of seniority in the organisation.

Moreover, the socialisation experiences of female board members was described as a one-dimensional approach with little participation expected in the process from the newcomer except when the newcomer took proactive steps to make of the process what they would have liked or expected.

### **5.3.3. Theme: Time considerations**

Several participants highlighted that the socialisation of board members had significantly improved over the years (Participants 1, 2, 11, 12, & 13). With time, participants noted that progress and a concerted effort were made to increase the level of seriousness and consciousness with which organisations had taken towards the process. Participant 2 noted that “I suppose in my ten years it has gone from non-existent to pockets of fabulous”. Table 4 presents the considerations of time which have been of significance to the experiences of participants.

**Table 4: Time considerations**

Rank	Constructs	Frequency
1	Improvement of process over time	9
2	Lack of sufficient time spent	13
3	Importance of continuous learning	17

When questions relating to time arose, participants generally used the term “induction” and “organisational socialisation” interchangeably. What was clear from the majority of responses was that there was an expectation that the process would be something which was ongoing. For the majority of participants, however, the reality of the process on some boards was described as a one-time event generally taking place over one or two days and never revisited again (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 10). Specifically, Participant 4 commented “I think it should be a continuous process in the same way that I believe that there needs to be ongoing and that kind of cyclical education of directors”.

Participant 6 commented:

*“It depends on the organisation. Most of them I can say, it is assumed that once that one-day session is held, as the meetings are held and as strategic sessions are held, you will pick up the speed”.*

Given the amount of information provided upon entry of newcomers, participants were of the view that they could have derived more value out of the process if it was structured in a way that would be conducted over a period of time with periodic reviews and feedback sessions to test whether newcomers were finding the process useful and where there was room for improvement. It was further mentioned that the process needed to be iterative.

**5.4. Research Question 2: Which criteria, policy and/or procedures, if any, were present in the conducting the socialisation process?**

As the process of organisational socialisation of board members is seen to be the responsibility of organisations, the aim of this question was to investigate whether there were internal criteria, policies or procedures followed by organisations in determining and conducting the socialisation process. The aim was to ascertain the extent to which these were formalised and/or informal and whether their effectiveness was measured.

**5.4.1. Theme: Organisational considerations**

With respect to the type of socialisation processes that organisations followed, most participants found a dichotomy of categories, with the first being formalised processes and the second being informal processes, as summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5: Summary of formal and informal processes**

Formal Processes	Policies and procedures
	Legal requirements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legislation</li> <li>- Corporate governance</li> <li>- Industry knowledge</li> <li>- Institutional knowledge</li> </ul>
	Training and development
Informal Processes	One-on-one meetings
	Peers (insiders)
	Site visits

**Source:** Author's own

**5.4.1.1. Formal processes**

In terms of frequency, most participants found that there were processes in place as to how the socialisation process was to be conducted (Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14,

& 15) and confirmed that they were aware of internal procedures and governance guidelines that were followed in terms of King IV and other governance structures.

It was noted, however, that organisations did not do enough beyond the internal guidelines and that more was needed than what was given (Participant 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 & 7). Some participants felt that the formal process was treated as a compliance factor with one participant referring to the process as a “tick-box-exercise” (Participants 1 & 3). Though participants appreciated the structured approach offered by some organisations, they were of the view that enough time was not allocated to the overall process and that the outcome did not provide adequate role clarity and information pertaining to the functioning of the board (Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, & 15).

*“...I think from the company’s perspective they also just want to tick off that they have done it. It is just one of those tasks, they have got to do it every year and it is probably a bit frustrating if whenever there is a new director that joins, because for the company it seems a repetitive exercise but obviously for the board member it is a new learning”* (Participant 7).

As far as legal considerations were concerned, participants were appreciative of the structured and formalised process offered by organisations and placed emphasis on the legal and industry knowledge required of directors (Participants 3, 4, 8, & 10). Participants who received formal training found value in the amount of industry information and legal considerations offered during the process.

Participant 5 further stressed the importance of education and training of newcomers and current members of the legislative requirements of board members and the significance of ensuring that the process of education was ongoing.

*“There has to be training on some pertinent issues....That is the one good thing that I noted about the Company X process and it has not happened on all the other boards that I am in, that there is a conscious and proactive decision to update and keep the members updated on pertinent issues”* (Participant 5).

Whilst there was consensus on the value of the formal processes offered by organisations, two participants felt that the main disadvantage with that approach was that there would be a missed opportunity to engage informally with the larger group (Participants 2 & 5). Participant 2 added that the need for organisations to comply by providing a formal process can cause them to overlook the aspect of “care” in the process.

#### **5.4.1.2. Informal processes**

There was evidence found of informal processes and procedures that organisations offered to respondents, however, as one Participant 15 stated, these were not necessarily documented. Informal processes included one-on-one meetings, site visits and support from peers.

Participants considered one-on-one meetings as a practice which was valuable to their contextualisation of the organisation and the board (Participants 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, & 15). Some participants specifically cited informal meetings as a key tool that assisted them through the process to get to know individuals on a personal level but also to gain insights on the personalities and dynamics of the board prior to attending board meetings. Participant 11 highlighted that “the lunches are nice, it is nice to have a lunch with your fellow board members before the board meeting to meet them in person, to socialise with them and get a sense of who they are, for me that is an add on”.

Participant 5 had a similar account and found value in the informal process:

*“The informal gathering happened after my appointment. That is also a way of inducting people into an organisation because that is more like a workshop part that I spoke about earlier, where you are away from the office in a more relaxed environment and dealing with serious issues pertaining to the organisation. People really engage with you. It was a family welcoming spirit.... where people could unwind and get to know each other [it] and made you see the human side of people and made it easier to relate to them”.*

Support for the notion of informal meetings was given with a general appreciation of one-on-one meeting. Participant 11 added that one-on-one meetings with what was considered an “insider” assisted in relaxing and reassuring the participant.

Participants reflected on various aspects of the question relating to other factors that were considered by the organisation. Participants 3, 11 and 14, highlighted the significance of other board members in the process. Not only did they comment on the value of insiders in the form of peers, but they added that the role that they too played as peers to other newcomers was instrumental, in their view, of the socialisation process. Conversely, one participant did not necessarily receive support from other members serving on the board (Participant 10). Although some help was offered to newcomers here and there, there was no specific instance where newcomers felt resounding assistance from their peers, except when the newcomers themselves particularly requested it (Participant 6).

Having reflected on the lack of peer assistance, Participant 5 advocated for formalising mentorship by existing board members to newcomers to allow for a formalised process of an informal exchange between peers. Mentorship offered by peers, through the board process, was considered by the participant as a way in which the informal process could be formalised.

Participant 2 offered a different perspective to the advantages of the informal process mentioned by other participants. The participant noted that:

*“The danger is that it is all so fluid and all over the place and if you have a brand new director they would not know what to ask and would not necessarily engage and then it all comes down to the experiential learning which we all have to have in the first year of being on the board”* (Participant 2).

In addition to one-on-one meetings, three participants added that they found site visits particularly meaningful in gauging the operational aspects of the organisation, thereby fast-tracking their institutional knowledge (Participants 2, 4, & 8).

#### **5.4.2. Theme: Measure of success**

Relevant to the interventions provided by organisations for the successful integration of female board members into the organisation is the question of whether and how success was measured. When the question was posed to participants, some grappled with whether this measurement did or did not take place and what the meaning of that measurement was (Participants 1, 3, 6, 10, 11 & 12). Participant 5 considered the overall evaluation of the board as an opportunity where the question of onboarding was posed.

Other participants, on the other hand, were specific that there was no measure of success or even a review of the topic once the process was considered complete (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, & 13). One participant added that the question in itself was never posed to her since she had been serving as a board member on several boards (Participant 1).

*“And I think that’s exactly where we are. The problem probably sits there. From what I have seen, there actually are no criteria for success. Which goes back to the argument I made that it’s an event, it’s a tick box, it’s done.... I can’t recall ever being asked, subsequent to an onboarding, because you receive the information and that’s it”* (Participant 1).

#### **5.5. Research Question 3: How do female board members find/experience the socialisation process in terms of usefulness?**

When female board members were asked what they found the most and least useful about the organisational socialisation process which they had undergone, the aim was to identify that which was of specific value in their experiences and that which was not. Participants surprisingly recounted various aspects of the board characteristics in relation to the usefulness (if at all) of the process.

Overall, the majority of participants found that albeit lacking various aspects, their socialisation process was useful (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, & 14). Participant 14 went as far as stating that having examined the difference in designing

ones' own socialisation process, the importance of socialising board members is a mechanism which cannot be overlooked by organisations.

During the interviews, there were key constructs that emerged when assessing usefulness of the organisational socialisation of female board members that gave new insights into the study as presented below.

### **5.5.1. Theme: Technology**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Participants 3 and 4 had to undergo their socialisation process digitally. Surprisingly, both participants explained that this was never introduced in the organisations with which they had served as board members previously (Participants 3 & 4). According to Participant 3, the utilisation of technology was extremely useful in the socialisation process in comparison to the other processes conducted by other organisations. The participant recounted her experience as pleasant when provided with a digital platform to view information from a formal process point of view and to meet the executives of that particular organisation (Participant 3).

Not only did Participant 3 find that there was a better utilisation of time by avoiding time spent traveling, she also found that relationships with executive management and other board members were built quickly. The participant added that unlike being given a hard copy of a file that was unlikely to be used, the utilisation of a digital platform made searching for information easier and making reference to certain useful sections quicker (Participant 3).

*“What COVID-19 has given us is the opportunity to actually attend the Zoom meetings and to be introduced and to spend the time discussing the business as we are spending less time travelling and rushing to and from meetings, we are giving the full hour to a meeting” (Participant 3).*



### 5.5.2. Theme: Characteristics of the board

What was expected from this study was that board demographics such as race, age and gender would have a significant impact on the relational dynamics of newcomers and existing members. The role of other female board members was expected to have some form significance in the socialisation process of female board members as newcomers.

What was unexpected in this study, however, was the level of emphasis placed on the dynamics of the personality traits and power dynamics of other board members. Participant 4, in particular, commented on the egos that could affect the relational aspects of socialising newcomers. The overbearing personalities of some existing board members were explained as something which could impeded on the level of comfort that newcomers felt upon entry (Participant 4).

*“There is that fourth leg, which is never in existence but is so amazing, is the EQ stuff, the actual socialising stuff, because it talks to board culture, board dynamics. The more important stuff is how you engage, what you engage, why you engage, what type of board this is”* (Participant 4).

It is worth noting that there were comments made by Participants 2 and 15 on the level of experience of newcomers. The less experienced the newcomers were, the more likely they were to be affected by the power dynamics amongst existing members (Participants 2 & 15).

*“I think that a part of it is experience. Obviously education helps with board members, but I would say that women should always remember that it’s OK to be women on the board. They do not have to act like men, because not everything that men have done on boards has been particularly productive”* (Participant 15).

According to Participants 4, 5, 10, 12, 14 and 15, the number of women represented on the board made a difference in building rapport with others quickly. It was considered useful to have female board members represented on the board as it allowed for some

form of freedom to express oneself without feeling intimidated as a newcomer. Participant 5 agreed by emphasising “That is the other part, the fact that there are other females within the board and we are playing key roles and helping a person to quickly become part of the team and to be at their best”.

Some participants expressed that they found that women, particularly as newcomers, were generally treated differently (Participants 2, 4, & 15). Participant 4 relayed how there was often an expectation that, as a female newcomer, one would not ask questions nor would they participate actively in the boardroom. In addition, Participant 12 added that race, gender, age and inexperience made it even more challenging in that the expectations and pressure to perform was high, making the need for adequate socialisation more prominent, “...there are silent expectations that one needs to meet, or one believes they need to meet” (Participant 12). Participant 14 shared the same view and called for more role clarity by adding “sometimes you think you know what is expected but it helps when people are clear as to what they require from you”.

What became quite clear is that based on the varying experiences that participants had undergone as a result of their socialisation processes (or lack thereof), most participants took it upon themselves to play an active role in the socialisation of other newcomers on the board (Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, & 15).

### 5.5.3. Theme: Type of organisation

The size of the organisation was given thought by some participants (Participant 2, 3, 9 & 11). Table 6 depicts the frequency in which organisational size, in particular, was discussed.

**Table 6: Type of organisation**

Rank	Constructs	Frequency
1	Skills	1
2	Size of organisation	7

According to Participant 11, smaller organisations were far less structured in their approach as opposed to larger organisations. The element of size seemed to have been categorised into the kind of approach taken by organisations in their socialisation of newcomers (Participants 3, 2, 9, & 11). The flexible, unstructured and informal approach was closely linked to organisations which were either managed by the shareholder or those that were particularly small (Participants 11 & 15).

Whereas, for larger organisations, participants found that there was a more structured process that was prepared in advance with an original intent.

*“I had both. The more mature organisations definitely follow a fairly formal path and there is structure to it because that also introduces some uniformity and standardisation”* (Participant 2).

What was of interest was that the larger organisations, whose processes were lauded by some participants for their structure and standardisation, still had no measure of success. Although the experience of participants differed in terms of the size and the type of legal incorporation of the organisation, be it listed on the JSE or not, the organisational socialisation process was found to be useful.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

In summary, participants found that the organisational socialisation process was more of a compliance checklist than it was an integrative tool to bring newcomers up to speed in terms of role clarity and team integration as newcomers had expected. In reality, particularly for less experienced newcomers, the experience was overwhelming, something which participants found surprising. For more experienced newcomers, this format of the socialisation process was almost expected that the organisation would do very little in terms of their expectation.

Participants were asked questions from an interview guide which was formulated from the review of literature. The 15 participants were selected from a variety of industries,

all of whom were all currently serving as board members. The constructs that informed the themes in this chapter were developed from the in-depth interviews with the 15 participants. A discussion on the findings from this chapter in relation to the findings from the literature review in chapter 2 will be detailed in chapter 6 in order to draw conclusions on the experiences of female board members during organisational socialising.

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, a discussion on the findings from the literature review will be presented comparatively with the insights gathered from the interview process. The aim of this research was to explore the organisational socialisation experiences of female board members. The objective was view to gain insights and ascertain whether their account of the socialisation process was conducive to ensuring that they were prepared to navigate the nuances of the board sooner for the benefit of the newcomer and for organisational performance. The study was qualitative in approach and 15 interviews with female board members from various industries were conducted.

The findings of this study provided further insights into the organisational socialisation process, particularly of newcomers who are predisposed to specific challenges. The connection of the results from the interviews conducted and the reviewed literature of this study are discussed below.

### **6.2. Research Question 1: What kind of organisational socialisation processes do female board members undergo?**

Question 1 was the primary question for this study and was intended to provide insights on the organisational socialisation processes that female board members undergo in lieu of a formal employer-employee relationship that exists in the traditional model of employment. The question also sought to identify key role players in the process for female board members.

#### **6.2.1. Theme: Key role players**

Of the key role players in the organisational socialisation process, two distinct roles were identified from the results. The first being the role of the company secretary and the second being that which is considered a “leader” in the context of the board of directors.

One of the key functions of the company secretary in South African legislation is to ensure that directors are informed and keep abreast of legislation, their duties as well as their responsibilities (Companies Act no 71 of 2008). A key factor that emerged from the constructs during the analysis of the interviews, was the role of the company secretary. This role was deemed a common factor in the experience of most participants (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, & 13). Not only was the company secretary identified as a facilitator of the organisational socialisation process from an organisational point of view, but also as a collaborator and enabler of the process. The company secretary, as a facilitator, therefore formed part of the organisational socialisation tactics offered by organisations to socialise newcomers in an effort to facilitate the newcomer adjustment process.

Strictly put, the company secretary was viewed by the majority of participants as a facilitator of both the formal and informal organisational socialisation tactics. According to Woodrow and Guest (2020), effective communication during the socialisation process with newcomers has an impact on the level of commitment that newcomers perceive from the organisation. This, in turn, builds commitment by newcomers towards the organisation (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). There is congruency between the argument made and that of the findings. Participants commented that there was significant reliance on the company secretary to communicate and facilitate the entire process, albeit that it was not enough.

Moreover, Ellis et al. (2017) and Nasr et al. (2019) posited that the socialisation process requires an element of formal and informal socialisation tactics. Consistent with the hybrid model of incorporating formal and informal organisational socialisation tactics (Nasr et al., 2019), participants suggested that the company secretary alone was not satisfactory for their socialisation process. A collaborative, multipronged approach was noted as a missing key factor from participants. Expanding on the suggestion, participants commented that it would be ideal for the organisation to offer formal processes such as industry and legal training as well as offering other informal mechanisms that participants could use to make the process easier.

A second component considered as a key role player by participants was that of the leader member. The complexity of a leader in the context of the board of directors is that the chairman of the board may be considered a leader. However, the CEO (sometimes even the CFO) can equally be of the same ranking as the chairman from the perspective of board members. The board of directors in the South African landscape is made up of executive (employee) and non-executive (non-employee) directors making the understanding of the leader consideration subjective. To add to this complexity, the chairmen of board sub-committees to which board members belong can further play a role which is considered a leader.

According to Delobbe et al. (2015) and Matta and Van Dyne (2020), the quality of the relationship between newcomer and their leaders is as a key determinant of the success of the outcome of the socialisation process. The commitment and effort given by both parties in the socialisation process is said to be as a result of the quality of this relationship. Findings indicated the importance of the “leader” as an agent of socialisation (Ellis et al., 2017; Nifadkar & Bauer, 2016), however, whether the quality of the relationship between the leader and the newcomer had any significance was found to be inconclusive. This could be as a result of one of two reasons. The first is that the chairman (or any other leader-equivalent) only played a role insofar as an agent would in the process. In some instances, they provided information, like the company secretary would, and took the process as a one-time event (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 10). The other reason could be that where the chairman did not play a role at all. This is not to say the relationship between the newcomer and the leader was transactional, rather that it did not exist.

The findings, therefore, confirm the importance of the leader member in the socialisation process. One participant referred to the active involvement of the board chairman in socialising new board members as something which places “gravitas” on the entire process (Participant 2). The perception formed by newcomers is that there is value in the socialisation process when the leader takes control of the process as opposed to leaving it to only be dealt with by the company secretary. In essence, the board chairman and committee chairmen have a direct impact on the outcome of the socialisation process of newcomers. Where participants had leaders, such as committee chairmen

and CEOs involved, the socialisation process was found to be more valued by the newcomer. In all instances where this took place, board members expressed how pleasant and how quickly they acclimatised to the organisation.

The claims made by Korte et al. (2015) about the level of commitment perceived by managers became challenging to compare as the sample of the study was limited to the newcomers and not those that could be considered leaders in the process. Interestingly, findings indicated an emphasis on the quality of relationship that the company secretary had with the chairman of the board as a determinant of the value gained by one participant from the socialisation process.

### **6.2.2. Theme: Newcomer considerations**

An element which was considered extremely important during the socialisation process was that of proactive behaviours by newcomers to seek information and integrate into the larger group (Allen et al., 2017; Trainer et al., 2020). It is asserted that the success of socialising newcomers has a great deal to do with the characteristics and individual attributes that the newcomers possess. The findings from the interviews with participants confirmed this assertion (Participants 1, 2, 4, 13, 11, 12, 14, & 15). With each participant, where the process of socialisation was found lacking or dissatisfactory, participants found ways to navigate the situation and to ensure that they carve their own way in making a success of the process.

In addition, Allen et al. (2017), Tan et al. (2016) and Trainer et al. (2020) offered that the personality of newcomers, previous work experience and other factors such as learning and curiosity were the reasons for proactive behaviours by newcomers. There were mixed responses to this construct, some in contradiction and others confirming the argument.

Findings suggested two positions. Firstly, unlike the personality or experience of board members, participants seemed determined to make the socialisation process work because they felt that there was an expectation that they knew and understood what



they were doing. In fact, some participants felt that it was not their self-efficacy, but rather their lack of self-confidence that propelled them to taking proactive steps in their own socialisation process. This finding, therefore, was in contradiction of the literature. It is likely that self-efficacy played a role in the promotion of proactive behaviours as suggested by Ellis et al. (2015). However, this study found that the main source of proactive behaviours demonstrated by participants was the pressure to succeed and to perform at the highest level in the organisation as an expectation from the organisation and existing board members. Participant 12 specifically referred to this as “silent pressures”. This finding is particularly consistent with the feeling of hypervisibility that women are inclined to feel in senior positions (Settles et al., 2019).

Secondly, learning and curiosity were highlighted as another factor that heightened proactive behaviours by newcomers (Allen et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2016; Trainer et al., 2020). Findings in the regard were consistent with the literature. Some participants viewed organisational socialisation as a duty that came with the work of being a board member. In this sense, participants viewed learning and curiosity as a standard item when seeking to be socialised as a newcomer; the two were not viewed as mutually exclusive and could therefore not be separated from one another.

Similarly, one participant placed emphasis on the need to hold the organisation accountable for the manner in which board members were socialised (Participant 8). This in itself is a form of information seeking. In addition, other participants took it upon themselves to ensure that they turned the process around and redesigned it once appointed for the benefit of other incoming board members.

### **6.2.3. Theme: Time considerations**

Throughout the interview process, participants used the words “induction” and “organisational socialisation” interchangeably. Coldwell et al. (2019) endorsed a clear distinction between the two terms, being that of time. According to Coldwell et al. (2019), the notion of organisational socialisation is described as a process and not a one-time event as with induction. In the South African context, board members should and are

usually offered an induction session following their appointment as directors of the board (The Institute of Directors South Africa, 2020). It is widely understood that the company secretary of an organisation is the key facilitator of the induction process.

Participants predominantly described what they understood to be their organisational socialisation process as a “one-time event” which was never revisited after the session or few sessions had taken place (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 10). This implies that what participants viewed as organisational socialisation was in fact an induction process, a subsection of organisational socialisation (Coldwell et al., 2019). In turn, the board of directors themselves have seemingly viewed the process of newcomer integration as organisational socialisation.

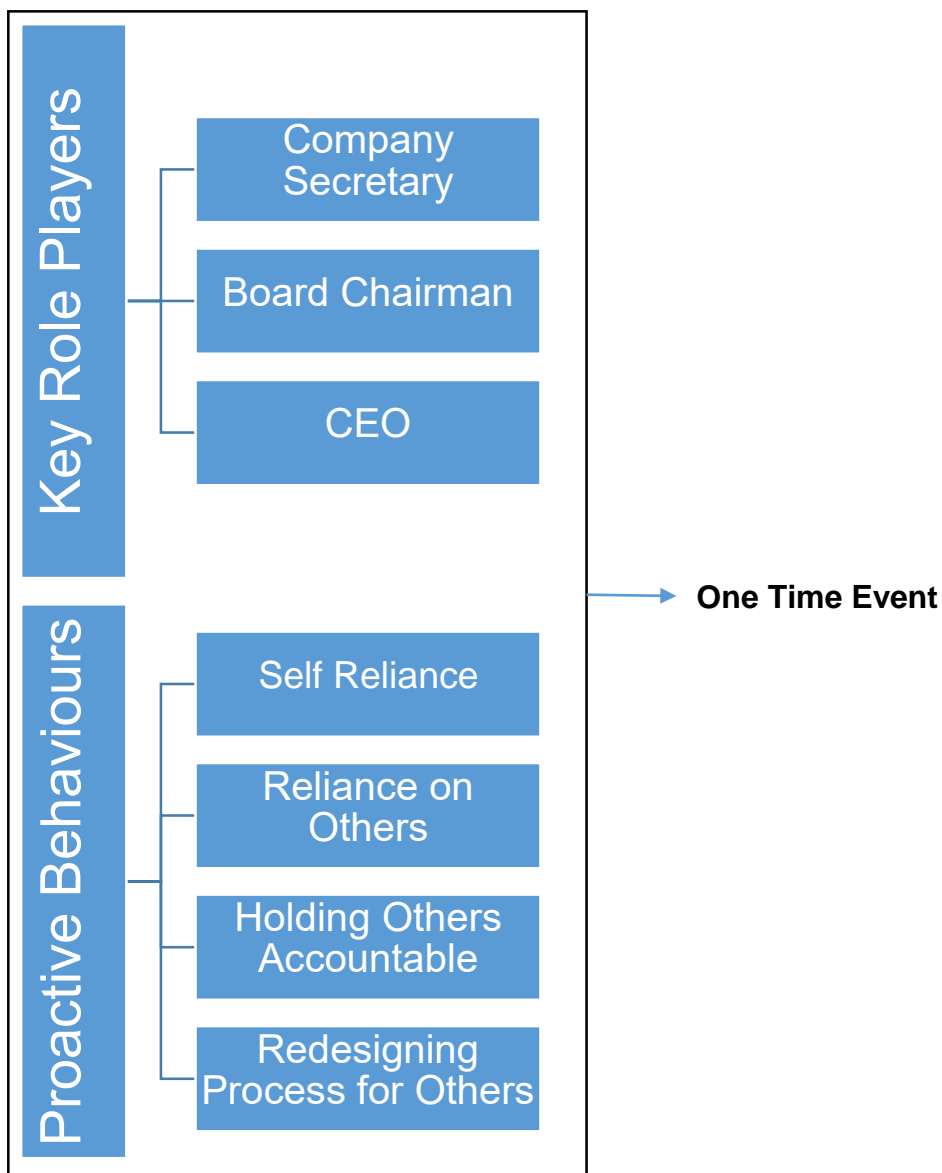
The fact that participants expressed their desire to have an ongoing, consciously thought-out process confirms the misunderstanding by organisations and participants alike of what was required by newcomers in relation to that which was offered. Woodrow and Guest (2020) highlighted the element of expectations from newcomers against reality, which can result in negative newcomer experiences. What was clear, however, was that participants felt that there had been a vast improvement in the manner in which the process was conducted over time.

#### **6.2.4. Summary of findings for Research Question 1**

Findings from research question 1 highlighted the importance of various agents and facilitators in the socialisation of female board members. Key to the findings was the role played by the chairman of the board, the company secretary, the committee chairman as well as the CEO and/or CFO. Indications were that female board members expected the company secretary to play a key role in their socialisation process, however, they also required the involvement of a leader member as suggested by Ellis et al. (2017) and Nifadkar and Bauer (2016).

The expectations and pressure placed on women in leadership and senior positions (Settles et al., 2019) pushed female board members to take charge of their own

socialisation process through proactive newcomer behaviours to ensure success. Additionally, the process was not effectively a process, but rather a one-time engagement taking place over one or two sessions. Figure 3 is a graphical presentation of the summary.



**Figure 3: Summary of Research Question 1**

**Source:** Author's own.

### **6.3. Research Question 2: Which criteria, policy and/or procedures, if any, were present in the conducting the socialisation process?**

Research question 2 sought to identify whether organisations followed specific criteria, policies and procedures in their determination of the socialisation process for board members. The interview questions further sought to understand the extent to which this process was formal or informal, and whether there was a measurement of success.

#### **6.3.1. Theme: Organisational considerations**

Institutionalised and standardised organisational socialisation tactics are viewed as formal (Delobbe et al., 2015). The less structured and fluid form of socialisation is seen as informal.

##### **6.3.1.1. Formal processes**

The findings confirmed the use of standardised and structured organisational socialisation tactics as an enhancer of positive experiences by newcomers as suggested in literature (Trainer et al., 2020). Participants mostly appreciated efforts made by the organisation to enhance their industry, legal and corporate governance knowledge through mechanisms such as training and development programmes. The limited time in which the information was offered was, however, found to be inadequate. This supported the quality of organisational socialisation tactics as a determinant of the perceived organisational support that Delobbe et al. (2015) mentioned. Participants were specific that the absence of quality training due to time constraints suggested to them that the organisation viewed the socialisation process as a tick-box exercise for compliances purposes. This finding further substantiated the argument that institutionalised practices ought to enhance positive newcomer experiences (Allen et al., 2017).

15 participants of different ages, from different industries and with varying levels of experience were interviewed. Contrary to the conclusions made by Liao et al. (2017), formal organisational socialisation tactics were appreciated by all participants irrespective of their characteristics and attributes. All participants welcomed and appreciated the formalised and structured process offered to them by the organisation because it allowed them to gain further legal and industry knowledge. There was further confirmation of Nasr et al. (2019) in the results as some participants agreed that a formal approach had an opportunity cost of building relationships with other board members on an informal or a more personal level.

Participants commented on the approach in which information was imparted upon them. The standardised and structured socialisation process was appreciated, but the quality of the information came into question. Referred to by some participants as an “information dump” or “death by Powerpoint” (Participants 2, 6, & 7). It was evident that the quality of the information, or at least the manner in which it was shared with newcomers, had an impact on the positive or negative outcome of the process as described by Delobbe et al. (2015). Since the information shared was not taken seriously and viewed as a tick box exercise, participants did not find the formal process useful.

#### **6.3.1.2. Informal processes**

Consistent with the notion that formalised organisational processes are at risk of missing the advantages of team members or peers in the socialisation process (Nasr et al., 2019), participants stressed the importance of peer support to the extent that “peer mentorship” (Participant 5) was suggested as a consideration by the board to enhance the level of comfort and integration of members. The informal component of the socialisation process was thus confirmed by the need for participants to have site visits to familiarise themselves with the environment within which they would be operating. Moreover, one-on-one meetings with key members of the board and executive managers were highlighted by participants as crucial.

Ellis et al. (2015) discussed the importance of relational resources in the integration and social acceptance of newcomers. Furthermore, Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu (2018) reasoned that the relationships that newcomers form at the workplace are of significance in the progression of their socialisation experience. Emphasis is thus placed on the important role that team members, co-workers or peers play in the adjustment process of newcomers as part of an informal process which newcomers can benefit from (Delobbe et al.).

The findings concurred with literature. Participants felt that there was merit and value in the involvement of other board members in their socialisation processes, often referring to such members as “peers” and “insiders” (Participant 2 & 3). Participants that did not receive any support or active participation of peers during the socialisation process confirmed the findings made by Ellis et al. (2015) that there was indeed a missed opportunity.

Consistent with literature, newcomers’ level of experience in the exchange between team members and newcomers is relevant. Liu et al. (2020) state that team members’ experiences also play a role in the manner and value in which newcomers are socialised in the organisation. This however, unlike the argument made in relation to the level of experience of newcomers, was not taken into account. Liao et al. (2017) found that the level of experience of newcomers was indeed the factor that played a role in the quality of relationship between team members and newcomers. This was confirmed in cases where participants with more experience placed reliance on self and further heightened their involvement in the socialisation process of other members, as a result of team members not offering assistance to newcomers.

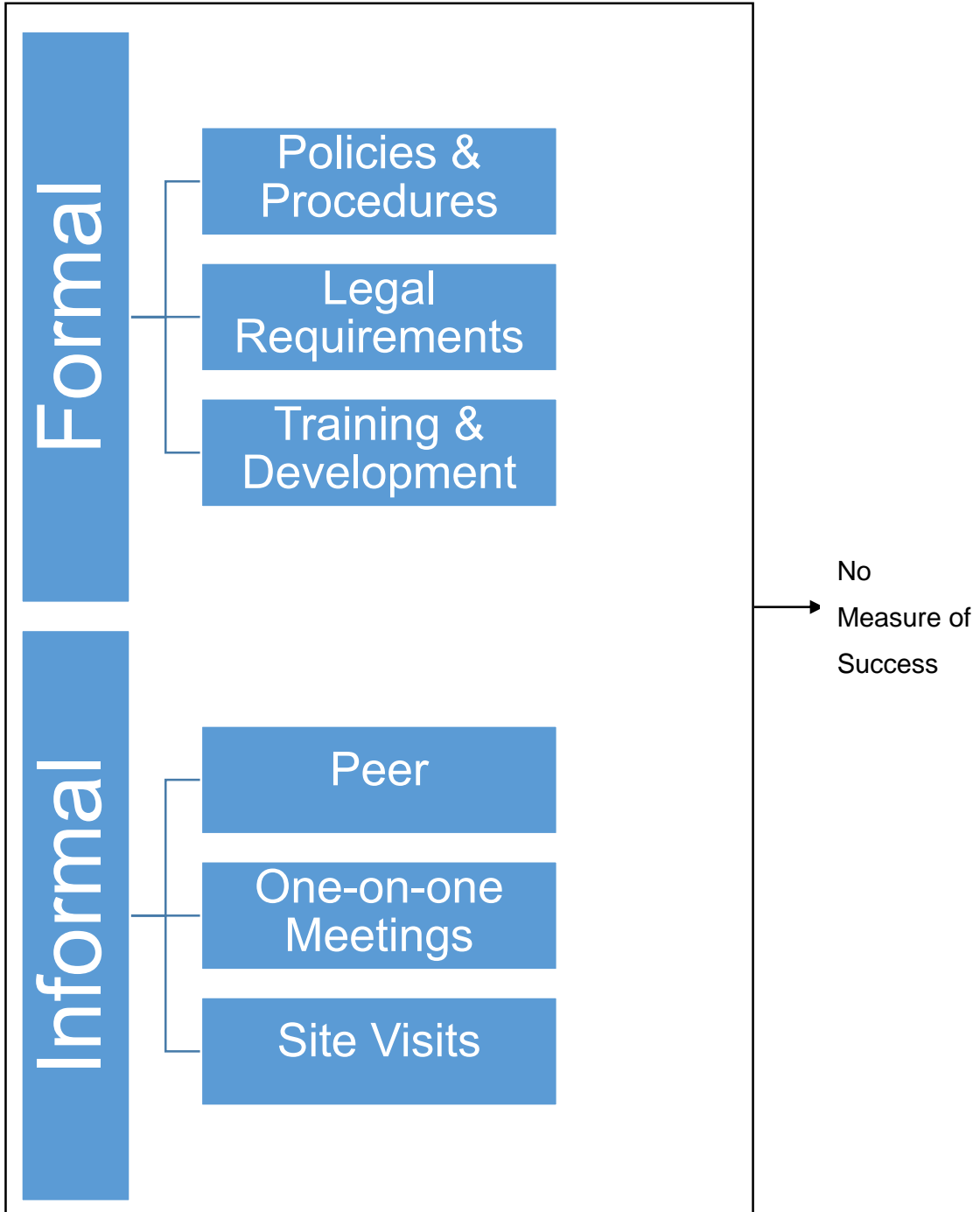
This study did not find anything conclusive on the adoption of poor habits by newcomers from the larger group as suggested by Liu et al. (2020). This could be because the calibre of board members is that of seniority, therefore the level of influence subjected to others through vicarious learning could be moot.

### **6.3.2. Theme: Measurement of success**

The main goal of the organisational socialisation process is to successfully integrate newcomers in the shortest amount of time to adjust to their new roles in the organisation. Given that the majority of newcomers described the process as a short session which was not continuously monitored, success factors of whether the participants achieved what was intended by the process was unknown. There was, therefore, no formal evaluation of whether the socialisation process had benefited female board members or not.

### **6.3.3. Summary of findings for Research Question 2**

Findings from research question 2, as summarised on Figure 4, confirmed congruence between literature and the results from the interviews formal and informal organisational socialisation tactics were essential for board members. More importantly, findings indicated that the structured and procedural approach of socialisation was appreciated, but also that relational resources were equally valued for the process. What was surprising about these findings was that none of the participants had a solid measure of what it meant to be successfully integrated into the organisation. Even more surprising was that organisations themselves did not proactively measure whether the intended objective of the process was achieved.



**Figure 4: Summary of Research Question 2**

**Source:** Author's own.



#### **6.4. Research Question 3: How do female board members find/experience the socialisation process in terms of usefulness?**

Research question 3 sought to provide insights into that which female board members valued the most and that which they valued the least in terms of the socialisation process. These insights can prove useful in informing organisational policy to promote the usefulness of the process to the female board members.

Findings from the interviews contributed to the identification of three key themes that were of specific value to female board members. Technology, board characteristics as well as organisational characteristics were evident as elements that ought to be given consideration in the process.

##### **6.4.1. Theme: Technology**

Another surprising factor that emerged from the findings was that technology was not brought up as something which played a factor in the facilitation of the socialisation process of board members. Only two participants indicated the use of technology in their organisations and further clarified that technology was only used as a consequence of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, not necessarily as a practice that was commonplace for organisations (Participants 3 & 4). The use of technology was, therefore, not deliberate. Leidner et al. (2018) highlighted the use of technology, particularly through social media, as a form of informal processes that organisations have applied as a way of socialising newcomers with their peers.

There are positive and negative effects to utilising technology (Leidner et al., 2018), although findings based on the two participants supported only the positive effects. The effective utilisation of time and ease of discussions with team members and leader members were things which participants found very useful. Furthermore, the ease of reference and engagement with the material offered by the organisation were heightened by the digital platform offered.

#### **6.4.2. Theme: Characteristics of the board**

Some participants made mention of the egos and personality traits of their fellow board members (Participants 2, 4, & 15). This was discussed in relation to the culture of the board and the characteristics of its members. Liao et al. (2017) held that not much is discussed in literature on the characteristics of newcomers, but rather of peers as an element that may or may not have an impact on the socialisation process. The poor habits that could be adopted by newcomers in the process of socialisation through vicarious learning from team members are also discussed (Liu et al., 2020). In addition, Nifadkar and Bauer (2016) extrapolated on how a dysfunctional and toxic relationship between a newcomer and a peer or leader could also impact negatively on the socialisation process of newcomers. Unexpectedly, only one participant brought about the notion of interpersonal relationships in relation to its impact on the process. This observation was based on the quality of relationship between the company secretary and the chairman of the board.

The role of other women on the board was also given significant attention. According to Kanter (1977), in the context of women in senior positions, there is a critical mass that in the level of comfort that women feel as newcomers on the board. Three women on a board of directors are considered sufficient to build the level of influence that is required for women to feel less like outsiders to insiders (Torchia et al., 2011). Findings from participants demonstrated agreement with the literature. Not only was emphasis placed on the importance of female representation as a key component of the socialisation process for female newcomers, but the representation was heightened where female support was coming from women in positions of influence (Glass & Cook, 2016), such as committee chairmen. Although no mention was made for female representation as board chairmen, findings confirmed that support was more visible in the socialisation of newcomers where committee chairmen were female. This was consistent with the gravitas that one participant referred to as well as the notion of influence and position of power of women (Viviers & Mans-Kemp, 2019). Findings therefore supported the level of influence that women possess as a strong socialising factor.

It is important to note that none of the women that participants identified as support systems were serving as board chairmen, only committee chairmen. This could add to the argument made in literature which states that female board members are rarely appointed as board chairmen or positions of influence (Viviers & Mans-Kemp, 2019).

#### **6.4.3. Theme: Characteristics of the organisation**

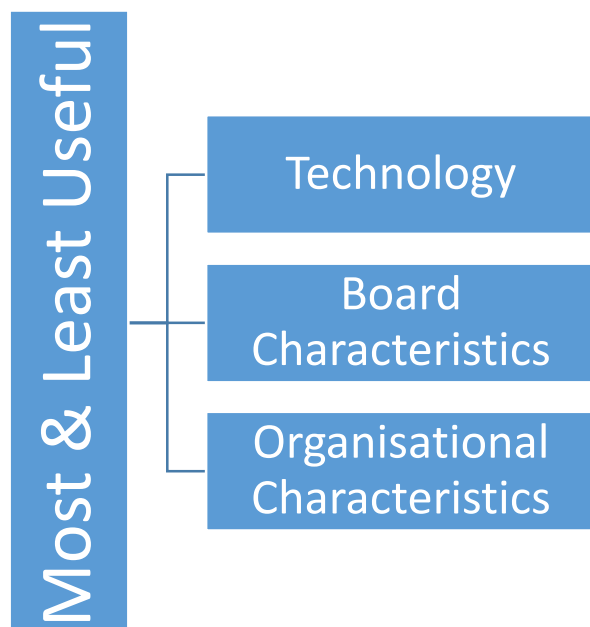
Part of the requirements of organisations listed on the JSE is that such organisations comply with King IV (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). The promotion of diversity in the composition of South African boards in terms of race, culture, age and gender is a King IV imperative. Organisations listed on the JSE, which are usually large in size, have to publicly account to shareholders on their progression of promoting diversity within their board of directors.

Findings highlighted the significant difference in the manners in which female board members were socialised in relation to the size of the organisation. Participants indicated that the informal and unstructured process was more likely to take place in smaller organisations, while the formalised and standardised socialisation process typically took place in larger organisations. This could be because of the compliance factor attached to larger organisations, which further explains the view of some participants that organisational socialisation felt to them like a tick-box-exercise that organisations used merely to comply with regulatory requirements.

#### **6.4.4. Summary of findings for Research Question 3**

When what participants found most and least useful, not much was found not to be useful, other than the approach followed. Even in its imperfect state, almost all participants found some kind of value in their socialisation process (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, & 14). What participants considered most useful, however, varied between the use of technology, the representation of women on the board and the type of organisation. This was said to have an impact on the kind of socialisation process that

participants would receive, thereby increasing or decreasing the usefulness of the process to newcomers.



**Figure 5: Summary of Research Question 3**

**Source:** Author's own.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

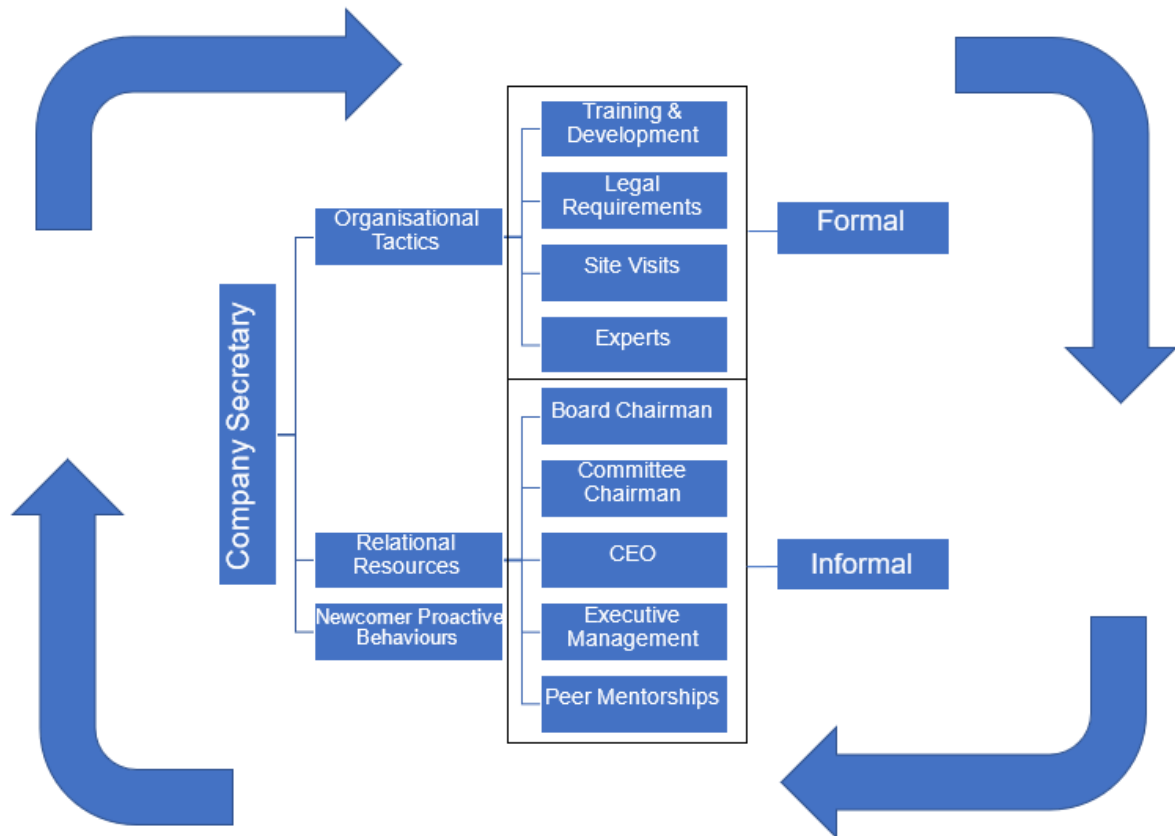
### **7.1. Introduction**

This study followed an inductive, qualitative approach to explore the organisational socialisation experiences of female board members in South Africa. Organisations are increasingly becoming aggressive about diversity in the representation of their workforce. Gender equality is a topical issue on a global scale, with the JSE enforcing increased gender representation in the composition of the board of directors. The objective was thus to understand how female board members were socialised in an environment in which they would be exposed to challenges.

A conceptual model was thus developed based on the review of literature as presented in chapter 2, as well as the results as presented and discussed in chapter 5 and chapter 6. This conceptual model was developed to interpret the research findings to inform recommendations for leaders of boards that are presented in this chapter. Limitations of the research and recommendations for future research are further discussed in the latter part of the chapter.

### **7.2. Implications for boards**

Based on the findings emanating from the literature review and interviews with 15 participants, a conceptual model was developed as illustrated in figure 6 below. The conceptual model is aimed at expanding and synthesising findings from the interviews with the reviewed literature to inform proposed concepts which can be of use to the board of organisations. The key proposed concepts of the model are explained below.



**Figure 6: Conceptual Framework Based on Findings**

**Source:** Author's own.

### 7.2.1. The company secretary

Although participants referred to the process which they underwent as organisational socialisation, a clear distinction needs to be made between organisational socialisation and the concept of induction. The company secretary was mostly highlighted as a key component in the facilitation of the socialisation (or induction) process of board members. Key to the role played by the company secretary is the realisation by organisations that the process ought to be a deliberate, carefully constructed and a collective of multiple factors. In the strictest sense, the company secretary is the custodian of corporate governance and legal duties of directors (Companies Act no 71 of 2008). The role played by the company secretary in this regard requires other factors

to complete the process successfully. To this effect, the company secretary is considered an integral part of the socialisation process.

### **7.2.2. Organisational socialisation tactics**

As illustrated in figure 7.1., the socialisation support mechanisms offered by the organisation should form part of the formalised, structured and standardised socialisation process tools. The assumption that board members are at a specific level and should therefore know everything about the organisation and its industry is a notion that should be reconsidered. Board members are like other newcomers in any organisation. They are appointed from different industries with different levels of experience. Assuming that organisations have little to contribute to the socialisation process of board members, particularly those of female board members, must be addressed. This is a strategic imperative not only because women are said to be inclined to facing various challenges upon entry as board members (Glass & Cook, 2016) but also because the representation of women on boards is still lagging behind in South Africa (Viviers et al., 2017).

Organisational socialisation tactics are described as tools offered by an organisation in the socialisation process to ensure that newcomers acclimate as quickly as possible to their new environment. Participants concurred with findings by Delobbe et al. (2015) that the support offered by the organisation is paramount to the perception formed by new female board members about the value that the organisation places on them.

Organisations must therefore carefully consider organisational socialisation tactics such as adequate training and development programmes for newcomers. In addition, careful consideration of the legal requirements of directors, the organisation, the industry as well as the macro environment must form part of the support offered to directors. A key consideration should be the use of subject matter experts to support the company secretary in the dissemination of information. Additionally, priority also needs to be given to site visits whereby board members

are given a “walkabout” experience of the operational management of the organisation. Even with the proposed formal organisational socialisation tactics being implemented, what is key is the manner in which the information is made available to board members. The value of organisational efforts is thus placed on the seriousness and thought given to the information shared with newcomers (Woodrow & Guest, 2020).

### **7.2.3. Relational resources**

Relational resources are described as less formal efforts that include the involvement and support offered by team members and leader members in the process of socialisation (Ellis et al., 2015). There is a need to assess which of the relational resources are of value to board members. Unlike the traditional employer-employee relationship, various actors are considered leaders in an organisations’ board. In other words, the most influential actors, the leader members, on the board should formally become part of the informal aspect of the socialisation process. Team members, also referred to as peers, share a responsibility to not only inform but to also play a key role in the process.

The model proposes that leader members such as the chairman of the board, the chairmen of the board committees and the CEO, have an opportunity to improve the experience of board members if they were to become actively involved in the process. The quality of this relationship is said to have an impact on the experiences of newcomers (Delobbe et al., 2015; Matta & Van Dyne, 2020). Participants expressed their appreciation of leader member and team member support in an informal setting as it demonstrated a level of care and gravitas to the process, thereby increasing a sense of belonging. Moreover, participants proposed that peer mentorships be introduced as part of the process. This means that from the beginning of board member appointment, there be someone that can address concerns and bring the newcomer up to speed with the nuances of the board. Relational dynamics are considered a key force in the integration of female board members. The proposed way forward can also lend itself useful where



existing boards members have strong personalities or where board cultures do not readily embrace diversity.

#### **7.2.4. Newcomer proactive behaviours**

The most cited of the organisational socialisation tools by participants was the proactive steps taken by the female board members themselves to ensure success as newcomers in the organisation. Irrespective of the individual attributes of the participants, there was still a strong demonstration of taking charge of the process by self-teaching and committing to changing the processes for the benefit of others. The promotion of information-seeking behaviours is paramount. This can be done firstly by consciously communicating the expected efforts required of newcomers in the early part of recruitment. Secondly, support must come from leader members and team members as suggested by Ellis et al. (2017) to increase commitment by the board member newcomers to the organisation.

#### **7.2.5. Measurement tool**

There must be a way in which the organisational socialisation process is reassessed and measured to ascertain whether the process was beneficial to newcomer and the board. It is imperative to understand that the process should be holistic and collaborative. The key is to understand that it is indeed a complex process and not a one-time event. The process must thus be measured against the strategic intent of the process. It is not only to ensure that the promotion of diversity is upheld in the composition of the board, but it is to promote the success of those being appointed.

One participant indicated that a board evaluation questionnaire was the only opportunity to give feedback on their socialisation process. Even then, the specific questions on areas of improvement were not discussed. Implementing deliberate measurement tools to address the process provides an opportunity to give and receive feedback from newcomers, as well as to attend to areas of improvement. More importantly, the cyclical

arrows in the model further suggest that this process be iterative for at least one year to ensure that board members are fully versed in the organisation and the board.

### **7.3. Research limitations**

This research was bound to have limitations due to various uncertainties and factors that the researcher cannot control. Qualitative research is exposed to a certain degree of bias from the interviewer, the participants, as well as the interpreter because it is subjective in nature (Shenton, 2004). There are several other limitations and drawbacks to this study. Firstly, the researcher, as an interviewer, was a novice at conducting interviews. Albeit that the researcher conducted pilot interviews to test the flow of interview questions, the lack of expertise in interviewing skills might have compromised the findings of the research.

Secondly, the time allocation for the research was limited, thereby reducing the amount of time for data collection. Thirdly, the fact that the lived experiences of the participants was recorded at a specific point in time, the perspective of the participants may be somewhat distorted. Fourthly, due to the sample size of the research, findings cannot be generalised and assumed to be a representative of the entire population. A larger sample may be useful in ensuring that the findings of the research are more robust. Fifthly, the research excluded male board members as well as other minority groups which could, if included, contribute to further insights on the research topic. There was bias therefore towards female board members. Sixthly, the size of the board and that of the organisation was not taken into account. Size may have a significant impact on the type of organisational socialisation practices in an organisation. Lastly, some of the board members hold high profiles in publicly listed organisations and state-owned entities. Some might have withheld some key information due to the public nature of the research, albeit confidential.

## **7.4. Recommendations for future research**

Below are the recommendations for future researchers:

- 7.1.1. The first recommendation would be a study on the organisational socialisation experiences of organisations that do not have a company secretary to determine whether the process followed the findings similar to those stipulated in this research.
- 7.1.2. Future research could further explore whether there is a difference in the socialisation experiences of male board members or other minority groups.
- 7.1.3. This study focused on all female board members, it could be fruitful to examine the socialisation experiences of executive directors in relation to those of non-executive directors.
- 7.1.4. Understanding the expectation versus the reality of leader members and team members, as opposed to newcomers could be useful to get a holistic picture of the process.
- 7.1.5. Technology has already had an impact on the manner in which work is conducted with consistent advancements and breakthroughs made (Allen et al., 2017). A study on the effects of technological advancements in socialisation research could be explore further.
- 7.1.6. Exploring mentorship in relation to organisational socialisation.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

The board of directors is made up of a non-traditional structure that encompasses both employees (executive) and non-employees (non-executive) of the organisation. In addition, King IV requires that the board of directors be composed of a majority of independent non-executive directors (Institute of Directors, South Africa, 2016). This means that the socialisation of newcomers on the board of directors is not typical to the traditional structure where there exists a manager, team members and day-to-day involvement in the organisation.

As such, there is a need for the board to reassess how it performs its organisational socialisation to achieve the intended outcome out of the process. This is for the benefit of the board, the newcomers and ultimately the shareholders of the organisation. Such a process needs to be strategic, deliberate and collaborative in approach to maximise the performance of the board itself as developed from the findings of the research. Further attention needs to be paid to newcomers who are typically predisposed to challenges in a system which has had a lack of diversity for decades. As calls for greater gender equality are heightened in the workplace globally, so too must actions be taken to ensure success in this plight for the benefit of women and other stakeholders alike. It is hoped that using the proposed conceptual model for the socialisation of board members, this report can lend itself useful to leaders and consultants who are involved in the socialisation of newcomers within non-traditional organisational structures.

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# **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix 1: Semi-structured questionnaire**

### **Introductory and Background Questions:**

1. Please introduce yourself and share a bit about yourself.
2. How many boards do you currently sit on and how long have you served on each one?

### **Research Question 1: Please describe the socialisation process of the board(s)?**

- 1.1. Who conducted the process and what kind of process was it?
- 1.2. What role did you play in the process?
- 1.3. Did anyone else play a key role in the process?
- 1.4. Was it a continuous process or limited to a specific period?

### **Research Question 2: Was there criteria, policy and/or procedure for conducting the socialisation process?**

- 2.1. Please describe it.
- 2.2. What other factors were considered?
- 2.3. How was success measured?

### **Research Question 3: How did you find the socialisation process in terms of usefulness?**

- 3.1. What did you find most useful? Please elaborate.
- 3.2. What did you find least useful? Please elaborate.
- 3.3. What surprised you?
- 3.4. Was there anything you believe was lacking in the process?

### **Other:**

- 4.1. Since you have been on the board, have you played a role in socialising a new member or members?
- 4.2. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

## Appendix 2: Consent form

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

**Title - Exploring the socialisation experiences of female board members**

**Dear**

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and completing my research in partial fulfilment of my MBA.

I am conducting exploratory research on the socialisation experiences (also known as onboarding) of female board members. This research aims to explore newcomer experiences of female board members to determine whether the board socialisation process is effective and successful in ensuring that female newcomers are better equipped to understand the board nuances sooner for the benefit of female board members and for organisational performance.

Our interview is expected to last about **60 minutes**, and will help us expand our understanding of the subject further. **Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.** All data will be reported without identifiers.

I further request your permission to record the interview. The recording will be used for accurate description and analysis of the results of our interview. It is likely that I will use some quotations from the interview in the findings portion of the research, however, those quotations will be anonymised.

The information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. If you have any concerns, please contact myself or my supervisor. Our details are as follows:

<b>Researcher:</b> <i>Shela Mohatla</i>	<b>Research Supervisor:</b> <i>Dr Mark Bussin</i>
0715724249	0829010055
23325772@mygibs.co.za	<a href="mailto:drbussin@mweb.co.za">drbussin@mweb.co.za</a>

Please sign the form to indicate that:

You have read and understood the information provided above.

You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

*Signature of participant:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Signature of researcher:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_



### Appendix 3: Consistency matrix

#### Title: Exploring the socialisation experiences of female board members

QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
<p><b>Research Question 1</b></p> <p>What kind of organisational socialisation processes do female board members undergo?</p>	<p>Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas and De Hoe (2015)</p> <p>Ellis, Bauer, Mansfield, Erdogan, Truxillo and Simon (2015)</p> <p>Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer and Erdogan (2017)</p> <p>Nifadkar and Bauer (2016)</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology – semi-structured interview with female board members.</p> <p>Questions 1 and 2 in questionnaire</p>	<p>Thematic analysis - ATLAS-ti</p>
<p><b>Research Question 2</b></p> <p>Which criteria, policy and/or procedures, if any, were present in the conducting of the socialisation process?</p>	<p>Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas and De Hoe (2015)</p> <p>Nasr, Akremi and Coyle-Shapiro (2019)</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology – semi-structured interview with female board members.</p> <p>Questions 2 and 4 in questionnaire</p>	<p>Thematic analysis - ATLAS-ti</p>

<p><b>Research Question 3</b></p> <p>How do female board members find/experience the socialisation process in terms of usefulness?</p>	<p>Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas &amp; De Hoe (2015)</p> <p>Korte, Brunhaver and Sheppard (2015)</p> <p>Smith, Gillespie, Callan, Fitzsimmons and Paulsen (2017)</p>	<p>Qualitative methodology – semi-structured interview with female board members.</p> <p>Question 2.2, 2.3 and 3 in questionnaire</p>	<p>Thematic analysis - ATLAS-ti</p>
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## Appendix 4: Ethical clearance letter

MastersResearch2020 <MBAResearch2020@gibssa.mail.conmicrosoft.com>

Sat, 29  
Aug,  
15:21

to me

### Ethical Clearance Approved

Dear Shela Mohatla,

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

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

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

[Ethical\\_Clearance\\_Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

## Appendix 5: Data analysis codes and constructs

Objectives	Themes	Constructs	Codes
Objective 1	Key role players	Company secretary	Company secretaries play a very big role
			File that was eventually given to me from the company secretary
			My experience has been that it is driven from the company's secretariat
			You cannot lay it at the foot of the company secretary
			The company Secretary coordinated the induction process
			On both the whole on-boarding was undertaken by the company secretary
			Often organises by the company secretary
			Of the company secretary's responsibilities - and it shouldn't be her or his sole responsibility
			Cosec I'd say plays play's an instrumental role
			Board chairman
		Our chairperson for example was female and that induction was completely different	
		I specifically identified the Chairman	
		Would have been really nice to meet the chair	
		Useful to have a conversation with the chair of the board	
		The chairperson was instrumental	
		Starting with the chairperson	
		The chairperson of the board	
		I sat with the chair	
		It should come from the CEO's office or even the chairman.	
		Chief executive officer	It is an encouragement from the chair to say, be curious
It should come from the CEO's office or even the chairman			
CEO had arranged a lunch			
			Both boards, both processes were really dealt with by the CEO

Objective 1			There would be the presentation from the CEO
			It should be the chief executive
			The company led by the CEO
			Chairperson alongside with the CEO
		Executive management	I wonder is why the executive heads of departments or divisions did not make the time to come and meet me
			Meetings with executives
			The head of social investment
			Full day-and-a-half session in their corporate head office
			Executive colleagues inside the company
			The management presented on the organisation
			It's the executives of the company
			The executive team had to do the on-boarding for the new directors
	HR directors	HR Directors as well, they must be involved	
		HR directors again they are used to running inductions	
		Leverage marketing and human resources as resources because	
	Newcomer considerations	Proactive newcomer behaviours	I prepared governance now for the board
			During the process of my adjusting, asking questions, reviewing documents
			The socialisation the was more our own we designed our own induction programme
			I play an active role in my own on-boarding and make suggestions if I see any gaps
			I would have been more active than most people simply because of my previous experience with on-boarding executives
Indirectly in terms of trying to find other information elsewhere that could not have been made available			
Be present and attend and ask questions			
It's your responsibility as a board member to actually make sure you keep yourself updated			

			I also think it is not only the company's responsibility		
			I took it upon myself to just proactively attend board of director training		
			The less structured I felt that I needed to do more		
	Time considerations	Improvement of process over time		In my ten years it has gone from non-existent to pockets of fabulous	
				Accountabilities have definitely increased a lot more	
				Things have changed now things work differently now	
		Importance of continuous learning			How do you ensure that they are keeping abreast of what's going on in that sector
					When you join a new company - until you have done the full 365 days in the year it is continuous learning
					If you were to ask the Company secretary if there was a budget for NED development, they would tell you nothing is put aside
					How do you not continuously educate your board
					Have continuous professional development
	Formal processes			First induction, and a continuous training development program	
				Things keep on changing	
				It was formalised in just the sense of scheduling of the meetings	
Paper, having proper record keeping you know so eventually they did get that right					
There was a very clear agenda set as to what your responsibilities and duties are we tried as the board members to try and formalise everything					
The on-boarding process was formally structured					
You will find training and development policies in organizations or departments					
It was a lot more deliberate in terms of the on-boarding process					
			One on one meetings with executives		
			CompanyA one was more informal		
			It was informal		

Objective 2	Organisational considerations	Informal processes	The lunches are nice, it's nice to have a lunch with your fellow board members
			I certainly didn't know of any policy or procedure, even now
			Think it wasn't formal at the time
			It was pretty chaotic to be honest
			I have also interestingly enough had very deep and interesting induction session which have been very informal
			Where you are away from the office in a more relaxed environment
			You're lucky that it happens before you have your first meeting
			There are the events if I can call it that which is the initial on-boarding
			It was less formalised
			It was informal there was some kind of appreciation that there are new members
			I could improve my business mind by visiting these sites
			Walk about of the site visit
			To do a site visit to some of their operations so that I could get more up to speed
	Measure of success	No measure	I can't recall ever being asked
			You participated in reading the materials and asking the questions if needed
			I mean I can't say I was successfully onboarded
			Not at all I will be honest
			Not as defined
			Think the success of induction is never measured
			I'm not aware of any metrics that they're applying
There is no formal way of saying it was successful or not.			
Measurement	Measurement	I cannot remember that we had to rate the process itself	
		I think because we have a formal evaluation process, that is one way were it is evaluate	

Objective 3	Technology		What COVID has given us is the opportunity to actually attend the Zoom meetings	
			online accommodates home aspects of being a female , a mother , a wife	
	Characteristics of the board	Race, age, gender		They were all white males
				The only black person actually on the board
				It was more like an old boys club
				I was too young
				Gender equity on a board is a direct reflection of gender equity in the work place
				As a young black women there is something to be said about over preparing
				Expectations are much higher for females than males
				When I started out and my very first board appointment I was the only woman
		To some extent we're overcoming the race issue		
	Type of organisation	Skills		We have a lot of CA's and a lot of generalists
		Size of organisation		Quite a unique NPO board
				It depends on the context, nature, complexity size of the organisation and industry
				Mature organisations definitely follow a fairly formal
Board culture			Board dynamics	