

Women in manufacturing South Africa: Perceptions of the glass ceiling as they progress in their careers towards top management positions.

By

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of women in many organisations has been highly recorded in research. While much progress has been noted, organisations continue to lag behind in women representation in top management positions. The manufacturing sector, being a male-dominated industry is one of the lagging industries when it comes to representation of women in top management positions. The manufacturing sector in South Africa contributes 11% to the GDP and employs 14% of the employed population in the country. The manufacturing sector is set to be an industry that countries can lean on for economic growth. It is therefore imperative for women to be included proportionally as part of the workforce. The glass ceiling concept continues to persist in the manufacturing sector. The research sought to understand the perceptions of the glass ceiling by the women in the manufacturing sector in South Africa. The research developed a conceptual framework that organisations can implement in overcoming the glass ceiling.

Keywords

Women, career progression, glass ceiling, barriers.

Plagiarism Declaration

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

05 March 2024

Contents

ABSTRACT.....	II
KEYWORDS	III
PLAGIARISM DECLARATION	IV
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VIII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH	2
1.2.1 <i>Emerging Markets Context</i>	3
1.2.2 <i>South African Context</i>	3
1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	5
1.5 RESEARCH SCOPE.....	6
2. CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	7
2.2 WOMEN IN TOP MANAGEMENT IN MANUFACTURING	7
2.2.1 <i>Manufacturing Industry</i>	7
2.2.2 <i>Women Representation in Manufacturing</i>	8
2.2.4 <i>Gender parity and representation in the South African manufacturing context</i>	9
2.3 AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE GLASS CEILING CONCEPT.....	10
2.3.1 <i>Definitions of the glass ceiling</i>	10
2.3.2 <i>Glass Ceiling Barriers</i>	12
2.3.3 <i>Organisational Barriers</i>	16
2.3.4 <i>Strategies to Overcome the Glass Ceiling</i>	21
2.4 THEORIES AND FRAMEWORKS.....	25
2.4.1 <i>Role congruity theory</i>	25
2.4.2 <i>System Justification theory</i>	26
2.4.3 <i>Social role theory</i>	26
2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	26
3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	28

4.	CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	29
4.1	CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN.....	29
4.2	UNIVERSE.....	30
4.3	UNIT OF ANALYSIS.....	31
4.4	SAMPLING.....	31
4.4	MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT.....	32
4.5	DATA COLLECTION TOOL.....	32
4.6	DATA ANALYSIS.....	33
4.7	RESEARCH QUALITY CONTROLS.....	33
4.8	LIMITATIONS.....	34
	4.8.1 Researcher Bias.....	34
	4.8.2 Language Barriers.....	34
	4.8.3 Time Horizon.....	34
	4.8.4 Gender.....	35
5.	CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	36
5.1	DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE.....	36
	5.1.2 Educational Background.....	37
5.2	CAREER ASPIRATIONS.....	39
5.3	RESEARCH QUESTION ONE FINDINGS.....	42
	5.3.1 Early Career Themes.....	43
	5.3.2 Defining the Glass Ceiling.....	52
	5.3.3 Organisational Themes.....	54
	5.3.4 Summary of Findings for Research Question One.....	66
5.4	RESEARCH QUESTION TWO FINDINGS.....	68
	5.3.4 Strategies employed to break the glass ceiling.....	68
5.4	SUMMARY OF RESULTS.....	74
6.	CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	76
6.1	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE.....	76
	6.1.1 Early career and development.....	76
	6.1.2 Family and children.....	77
	6.1.3 Marriage.....	78
	6.1.4 Work-life Balance and Manufacturing Hours.....	78
	6.1.5 Race and Culture.....	78
	6.1.7 Competence and Capability.....	80

6.1.8 <i>Organisational Barriers</i>	81
6.1.8 <i>Summary of Discussion of Research Question One</i>	82
6.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION TWO	87
6.2.1 <i>Defining the glass ceiling</i>	83
6.2.2 <i>Strategies to Overcome the Glass Ceiling</i>	87
6.2.3 <i>Summary of discussion of research questions 2</i>	91
7. CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	92
7.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH QUESTION FINDINGS.....	93
7.1.1 <i>What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?</i>	93
7.1.2 <i>What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?</i>	95
7.2 CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT	96
7.3 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS	96
7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS	97
7.5 CONCLUSIONS	97
REFERENCES	99
APPENDIX 1: CONSISTENCY MATRIX	112
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE	113
TARGET POPULATION.....	113
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	113
APPENDIX 3: LIST OF CODES	115

List of Figures

Figure 1: Industry Representation of Women, by Seniority Level	2
Figure 2: Conceptual Framework	27
Figure 3: Research Onion	30
Figure 4: Educational Background	37
Figure 5: Current Position Level	39
Figure 6: Educational Level	41
Figure 7: Glass Ceiling Barriers	53

List of Tables

Table 1 Descriptions of Participants	37
Table 2 Career Aspirations	40
Table 4 Consistency Matrix	112

1. Chapter One: Introduction

“We do not talk of women’s emancipation as an act of charity or out of a surge of human compassion” – Thomas Sankara

The composition of top management leadership has changed significantly on a global scale. In addition, much headway has been achieved in promoting women to management positions, however, men and women still face unequal opportunities in career progression. UN (2022) further suggests that the increase in women in managerial positions is notable in sectors where they were already in the majority, whereas historically male-dominated industries continue to maintain the status quo. This research explores the perceptions of the glass ceiling as women in manufacturing progress in their careers. A phenomenological approach was adopted for this research to capture the unique lived experience of the participants in the manufacturing sector and the barriers they may have encountered due to the perception of the glass ceiling. The existing body of research primarily examines women in management positions within the American context, with limited attention given to developing and African nations.

1.1 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to understand how the underrepresentation of women in top management positions in the manufacturing sector is perceived and to identify the barriers that hinder women from progressing in their careers. This research further aims to improve our understanding of the glass ceiling in the South African (SA) manufacturing context and hopes to contribute to the growing literature in the sector.

Cohen et al. (2020) argue that there is a negative impression created through perceptions of the glass ceiling by women which result in a lack of job satisfaction and commitment, consequently increasing employee turnover. Bertrand et al. (2019) further argue that while policies that mandate for gender quotas in managerial positions can increase diversity and show promise in breaking the *old boys’ club* networks, there has been inadequate evidence of beneficial impacts in other organisational domains.

1.2 Context of the Research

The manufacturing sector in SA contributed 12% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employees about 14% of the overall employees in SA (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). As evidenced by its contribution to the GDP and resistance to economic disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, the manufacturing sector is crucial to economic expansion, according to research (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020; Saira et al., 2020). Globally, 25.6% of women are represented in managerial positions in the manufacturing sector (WEF, 2023). For quite some time, multiple studies have consistently revealed the underrepresentation of women in various industries (Cohen et al., 2020; Manzi & Heilman, 2021b; Nelson & Burke, 2000; Yates & Skinner, 2021). In the manufacturing sector worldwide, one sees a significant decline in the representation of women as you move up the higher ranks of management, this is represented in figure 1 below.

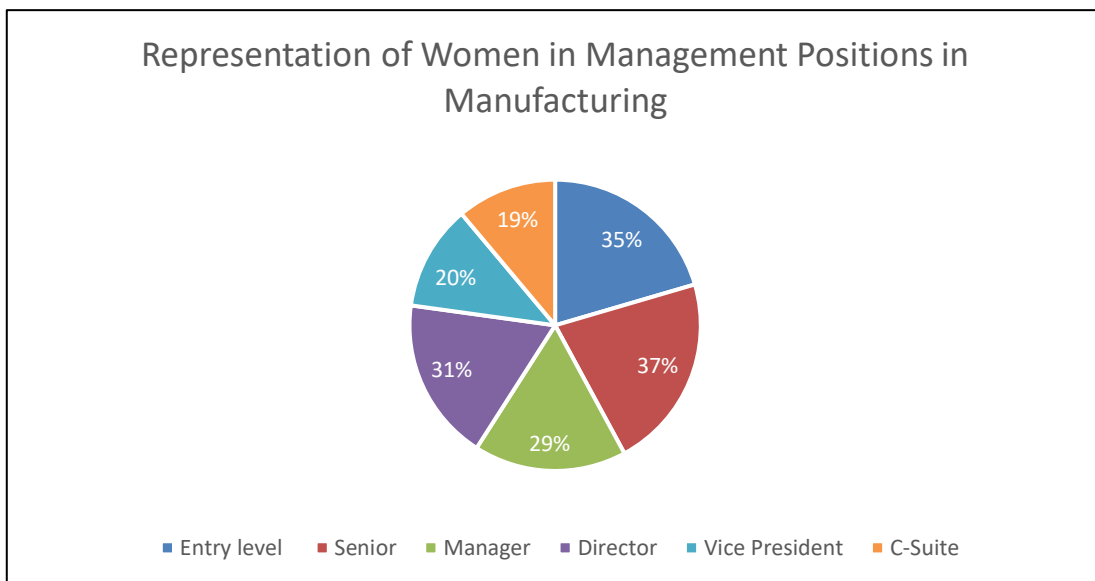


Figure 1: Industry Representation of Women, by Seniority Level

Source: (WEF, 2023)

To adequately assist women in their career aspirations within the manufacturing sector in South Africa, it is crucial to take into account their unique requirements for career progression, which may be influenced by their perceptions. The purpose of the research holds a wider significance in deepening our understanding of these experiences and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone (Hoang et al., 2022).

This research is important for contributing to the body of work that aims to assist organisations in understanding how to improve their diverse management representation by studying women's perception of the glass ceiling in the South African manufacturing sector. Despite considerable progress in advancing women in managerial positions, there is still a notable underrepresentation of women in top management positions (Bertrand et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Richard et al., 2022).

1.2.1 Emerging Markets Context

Research on this topic has predominantly focused on developed countries, however emerging markets are beginning to contribute to the research. Most recently, in India and Colombia, research has found that women in senior and middle management positions are deemed competent but often perceived as inefficient due to the following reasons: assumed non-work related responsibilities, leading in a male-dominated environment, weakened commitment to the organisation, and increased the likelihood of considering quitting (García et al., 2023; Tiwari et al., 2019). Although progress for women in management positions in some regions in developing countries has been acknowledged, reducing gender inequality in organisations remains slow and uneven, with some areas having stagnated, while remaining high and stable for men in management positions (Klasen, 2018).

1.2.2 South African Context

In the South African context, while the government continues to lead in gender representation in the higher echelons of management, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listed firms continue to straggle behind (BWASA, 2021). With a population that is more than half the country's total population at 51.5%, women only represent 45.5% of the employed workforce, largely in the entry levels of employment (BWASA, 2021). In addition, statistics of more women graduating in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields in South Africa (CHE, 2023), may imply that women will have the same presence as men in

engineering related industries such as the manufacturing sector, however, latest annual report from the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) indicates a severe underrepresentation of women in professional registration (ECSA, 2022). Based on the current pace, it will take more than 102 years to reach gender parity in the Sub-Saharan African region (WEF, 2023). This finding aligns with the report published by the United Nations (UN) , which concluded that the 2030 sustainable development goals for gender equality remain largely unachieved on a global scale (UN, 2022b).

1.3 Problem Statement

According to Barkhuizen et al. (2022), the Southern African Constitution of 1996, which established the principle of societal equality, continues to be an aspirational goal in South Africa due to the persistent underrepresentation of women in professional settings. The manufacturing sector in South Africa plays a significant role in the economy (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). The lack of representation of women in management positions in the manufacturing industry in South Africa is a cause of concern. Studying the topic of the women in leadership can help us to understand the glass ceiling concept and to develop a conceptual framework that could address these barriers (Koburtay et al., 2019).

The manufacturing sector is the fourth largest industry in South Africa, contributing 12% to the nominal GDP (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). Since the manufacturing sector is constantly evolving, skilled individuals who aspire to take on top managerial positions in the industry must start preparing themselves. Even though women who are part of the workforce have better levels of education than men in similar positions, they are still not proportionally represented in managerial positions across various economic sectors, including the manufacturing sector (Department of women, 2015). Due to the high percentage of STEM graduates being women in South Africa, organisations must find approaches to both attract and retain the present pool of talent in the manufacturing sector. This will enable organisations to have access to enough women that can progress into strategic decision-making positions within the sector and give women the opportunity to progress in their careers.

1.4 Significance of the study

The global community has made significant strides towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); however, as 2030 approaches, the feasibility of these objectives continues to be a concern at the present rate of progress. To accomplish the SDGs, we therefore need a broad range of viewpoints and approaches of thinking. Most notable organisations are predominantly led by men; however women are gradually being promoted to key decision-making positions. Research indicate that women tend to offer a distinctive set of approaches to the challenges related to the sustainable development initiatives that the world is confronted with (Patterson et al., 2021). Organisations must reassess the way they currently operate to determine why they still lack representation of women in top management positions in order to make substantial changes and implement sustainable initiatives. The significance of the manufacturing sector in driving national economic growth and providing life-sustaining goods is underscored by the United Nations (UN, 2022a). Developed manufacturing industries enabled countries to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively than their less developed counterparts (UN, 2022a).

Research on gender disparities in the workplace has predominantly concentrated on the barriers that women encounter while trying to progress in their careers, with special emphasis on the perceived influence of the glass ceiling concept (Bertrand et al., 2019; Field et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Russen et al., 2021). Yielding to the notion that women are not capable of top management leadership positions can hurt a company's chances of attracting, and retaining women in management, which can limit the company's overall success from a diversity perspective (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). This research aims to understand the barriers that hinder women from progressing to top managerial positions at a rate comparable to men. Furthermore, the research hopes to understand what strategies have women used to overcome the glass ceiling in the manufacturing sector of South Africa.

Many years have passed since the phrase *glass ceiling* was first published in the March 24, 1986 edition of the Wall Street Journal (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Despite this, the metaphor continues to endure alongside numerous other metaphors that suggest the enduring presence of these barriers, which continue to

permeate diverse industries in various ways (Bertrand, 2018; Field et al, 2020; Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017).

Considering the significant sway that top management in the manufacturing sector has over the implementation of strategies and their consequential influence over the sector's deliverables, it is critical to evaluate the contributions of women and marginalised groups to key top management positions in this sector (Cohen et al., 2020; Field et al, 2020). Male-dominated industries could therefore significantly benefit from the diversity of thinking and possible opportunities derived from including women in top management positions (Lee & Chung, 2022; Zattoni et al., 2023).

1.5 Research Scope

There are several assumptions included in this research. One of the primary assumptions is that the data collected is generalizable after conducting semi-structured interviews with 14 qualified participants who have largely spent their careers in the manufacturing sector.

A second assumption, is that this research is meaningful to members of society, especially to women and is especially important to corporate executives who are interested in diversity, creating strategies that will help to achieve equality and fairness for women in employment at every level of the organization. Another primary assumption, is that the participants view the low representation of women in senior management jobs in automotive manufacturing as a problem.

Following this, the remainder of chapter 1 addresses the problem statement and research objective. Chapter 2's literature and theory review provides an overview of the glass ceiling concept, including its historical context, prevailing perceptions, and pertinent theoretical frameworks that are significant to the research issue at hand. Chapter 3 presents the research questions that have been derived from the literature review and are relevant to the research problem. The research methodology and design, which are detailed in Chapter 4, outline the selected research methodology that will be implemented. The research findings are presented in Section 5 and are subsequently elaborated upon in Chapter 6. In the seventh and final chapter, recommendations and conclusions are presented.

2. Chapter Two: Theory and literature review

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been significant progress made in the pursuit of gender equality and the removal of barriers that have historically hindered the success of women in a variety of professional fields. The purpose of this literature review is to conduct an in-depth investigation of significant issues pertaining to women who hold positions of authority, with a particular focus on the presence of women in the manufacturing sector of South Africa. The research investigates the several aspects of gender parity and representation, delving into the complex problems that lie underneath the concept of the glass ceiling, which commonly hinders the progression of women towards positions of leadership. Furthermore, an examination of the many perspectives of the glass ceiling sheds light on the various perceptions and experiences that have an impact on the working environment for women. To understand and evaluate the complex interaction of influences that impact the presence and progress of women in leadership roles, particularly in the demanding area of manufacturing, the investigation is based on applying the use of a conceptual framework that enables to understand and analyse the complex interaction of these elements.

2.2 Women in top management in manufacturing

2.2.1 Manufacturing Industry

Historically, the manufacturing sector has shown a relatively smaller representation of women in top managerial positions, as compared to some other industries. However, there have been efforts to improve diversity and inclusion in this sector. The growth and competitiveness of the manufacturing sector are closely tied to breakthroughs in STEM fields, emphasising the crucial role of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in encouraging innovation and shaping the future trajectory of manufacturing. Organisations are beginning to recognise the value of women's competencies and insights, which is expected to become a major focus in the coming years (Nelson & Burke, 2000). This recognition will lead to a transformation in workplace dynamics. Particularly in an era characterised by sustainable growth and innovation (Patterson et al., 2021). Although research on women in manufacturing is scarce, it is clear that a diversified new style of thinking is needed to expand economies and address global issues imaginatively. By ensuring a favourable representation of women in top management positions, it

becomes possible to exert influence on strategic decisions while encouraging the desired transformation (Tuggle et al., 2022). The underrepresentation of women in top management positions is indicative of a more extensive disparity among genders prevalent in the sector as a whole.

2.2.2 Women Representation in Manufacturing

Multiple studies have continually demonstrated that the presence of women in top management positions and on corporate boards have failed to demonstrate significant improvement over time (Bertrand et al., 2019; Field et al., 2020; Zattoni et al., 2023) and this trend is particularly evident in manufacturing sector. According to (Yates & Skinner, 2021), women are less likely to be in top management positions in STEM-related industries because men are more likely to receive promotions than women because they are well-known, have higher status, and are the ideal employees in this field. In their study, Matsa and Miller (2011) establish a connection between the effective progression of women in corporate boards and the presence of a female CEO as well as a strong gender parity in the executive teams. This has the potential to result in a strong presence of women in top management positions in organisations (Tuggle et al., 2022).

2.2.3 Gender Parity

Patterson et al. (2021) observations indicate that there is a global lack of progress towards achieving gender parity in top positions in both the public sector and in industry, with women being underrepresented (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014) have previously argued that the continued gender disparity in top management positions, which often favours men, can be attributed to factors that occur before women enter the workforce. These factors can have a significant impact on reducing or overcoming career barriers and increasing the probability of women receiving valuable career progression opportunities. Sherf et al. (2017) recognises that gender disparity is widespread and suggests that increasing the representation of women in the workplace has the ability to address this imbalance and achieve gender parity. However, they advise against undertaking initiatives that exclude males, who will need to carry out the ideas and may be able to contribute to the development of more varied approaches. Research conducted in the USA and other Western countries suggests that women tend to have a lower level of engagement in STEM fields, both in terms of obtaining relevant degrees and

entering associated job opportunities (Patterson et al., 2021; Yates & Skinner, 2021). In SA, women achieve nearly equal levels of tertiary education as men, with an even greater number of graduates produced (CHE, 2023). Additionally, women in SA exhibit greater rates of participation in engineering undergraduate courses compared to males (CHE, 2023). This situation prompts concerns regarding the ongoing underrepresentation of women occupying the top management positions in STEM-related sectors, including manufacturing.

2.2.4 Gender parity and representation in the South African manufacturing context

The South African manufacturing sector plays a crucial role in strengthening the economy, with excellent growth prospects that may improve and uplift the entire economic environment. Habanabakize and Muzindutsi (2018) suggest that if the manufacturing sector is engaged in effectively, it has the capacity to significantly enhance the creation of jobs. The manufacturing sector employs about 14% of the working population in South Africa, with women making up one-third of that workforce (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). There is an increasing demand to understand the reasons behind the disparity in the number of women graduating in STEM-related fields compared to men in the manufacturing sector from a South African perspective (CHE, 2023; ECSA, 2022), and the subsequent trend of women that leave the field to seek non-engineering related jobs (Yates & Skinner, 2021). According to Emmanuel et al. (2018) their research in Nigeria, another African nation, reveals that having a diverse top management team results in manufacturing organisations that actively make responsible decisions about social and environmental matters. Although achieving equal educational opportunities in STEM is commendable, it is crucial to also analyse how this translates into the employment sector with a focus on gender representation and parity in the manufacturing sector. Engineering schools promote academic accomplishment, whereas manufacturers value conventional male masculine leadership attributes, according to (McIlwee & Robinson, 1992). Women engineers face various barriers due to the devaluation of their academic skills in the professional sector (Esser et al., 2018). This insights informs the research significance, and places more context on the broader discussions required to understand the perceptions of the glass ceiling in the manufacturing sector.

Netnou and Strydom (2020) argue that South Africa's apartheid past, which was marked by deep-rooted gender and racial discrimination, continues to influence the composition of top management in the manufacturing sector. They further found that gender bias, lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, and work-life balance issues were major barriers to career progression for women in the manufacturing sector in South Africa. Research reveals that women in positions of leadership have encountered various perceptions of gender discrimination in the workplace, often stemming from the concept of the glass ceiling (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Dryburgh, 1999; Field et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Matsa & Miller, 2011). Cohen et al. (2020) further state that biased stereotypes that continue to persist against women continue to be pervasive in organisations and contribute to the high rate of attrition in women. This further leads to lack of representation of women in top management positions. The lack of substantial male participation in addressing gender disparity issues can be attributed to the vested interest in these matters. Furthermore, the fact that it is not universally applicable may contribute to the persistence of barriers.

2.3 An understanding of the glass ceiling concept

2.3.1 Definitions of the glass ceiling

The phrase “glass ceiling” is a metaphorical phrase that was coined in the 1980s that refers to the invisible barrier that prohibits women from progressing into top leadership positions in their organisations (Bertrand et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2020; Field et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2023; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). Hull and Umansky, (1997) further point out that the glass ceiling has been characterised with the idea of “vertical job segregation” (p. 507), further acknowledging that there are barriers which prevent women from progressing into top management positions due to the glass ceiling. Research also indicates that the current lack of women in top management and leadership positions, particularly in business and politics, is attributable to this glass ceiling (Bertrand et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2020; P. Smith et al., 2012). Although the idea of the impassable barrier through the glass ceiling concept has been largely accepted in academia, it often conjures a single barrier which prevents women from progressing to senior levels of management within organisations. Furthermore, it fails to acknowledge the numerous other barriers that

women must overcome in order to potentially progress to senior managerial roles (Milliken & Kneeland, 2019).

While a lot of research suggests that there has been considerable progress in closing the gap between women and men leaders in managerial positions, the glass ceiling remains intact for a myriad of industries (Bertrand, 2018; Cohen et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Manzi & Heilman, 2021a; Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Smith et al. (2012) and Cohen et al. (2020) put forward that women who believe in the existence of the glass ceiling are less likely to seek career progression opportunities and thereby compounding the problem. This further exacerbate and compounds the problem as less women may remain to promote into top management positions.

According to (Bertrand, 2018), the glass ceiling serves as both a hindrance to achieving gender equality and a deterrent to economic efficiency and productivity enhancement. (Bertrand, 2018) further points out that the implementation of gender quotas serves as a conspicuous measure to address the underrepresentation of women in top management positions. However, the extent to which they effectively dismantle the barriers that hinder women's career progression and yield larger societal effects remains questionable, since their influence appears to be limited mostly to the immediate beneficiaries who receive board appointments. Field et al. (2020) also confirms that merely increasing the representation of women directors on the board does not seem to reduce the leadership gap. This could be explained by the fact that traditionally, marginalised groups who are appointed on boards, typically do not have an active role in strategic decisions (Knippen et al., 2019; Tuggle et al., 2022).

For companies wishing to mitigate this problem, the evidence indicates that they should implement policies that explicitly promote women and include women directors on the nominating committee (Bertrand, 2018; Bertrand et al., 2019; Field et al., 2020). This is especially true given that while the majority of companies discuss diversity in general, gender and race nominations for director do not explicitly factor into the process (Field et al., 2020). In an effort to promote diverse boards and assure the career progression of women in top management positions, this research must account for the challenge posed by the highlighted research

factors regarding the promotion of women to decision-making management positions.

On the other hand, Powell and Butterfield (2015) argue that we do not need more studies that explain what the glass ceiling concept is, instead we need more scholarly work that examines how to break the glass ceiling and improve on various organisational factors. Mousa et al. (2021) confirm that the majority of research focuses on the perceptible barriers women face, while comparatively little effort is devoted to developing and implementing strategies that aid their progression to top managerial positions. Although there are ongoing debates regarding the existence of the glass ceiling, the vast majority of research supports its existence and concludes that the issue at hand is the inadequate representation of women in top management positions. Arnold and Loughlin (2019) proposed that a structural approach should be adopted to advancing women's careers, as opposed to relying on individuals to overcome these barriers. This strategy involves existing leaders proactively appointing women to top managerial positions with the intention of challenging the prevailing stereotypes that generally prevent women from pursuing such careers. This is a valid view point; the possession of power allows men who are presently in a position of authority and senior leadership to effect change and alter perceptions regarding the nature of women in leadership.

Existing research consistently indicates that gender continues to have an influence on the distribution of rewards and the assignment of leadership positions, notwithstanding the progress made towards merit-based systems in modern society (Yang & Triana, 2019). Career development in organisations may go unnoticed, according to Michael (1988), and this can be attributed to organisational efforts; thus, individual participation and career development must operate in tandem to achieve the desired outcomes. Consistent with the findings of Michael (1988), (Nabi, 1999) defined three factors that are indicative for career success: individual qualities, organisational systems, and behavioural traits. Hence, it is critical that organisational cultures and systems operate effectively and facilitate the progression of women's careers across all spheres.

2.3.2 Glass Ceiling Barriers

Despite advancements made in addressing the glass ceiling within the manufacturing sector, its persistent existence and associated perceptions continue

to adversely affect the population of qualified women and may potentially result in long-lasting barriers for the industry. Cohen et al. (2020) highlight that the glass ceiling, which leads to perceived gender inequity, not only hinders women from seeking senior managerial roles but also holds significance from the standpoint of “workplace equality” (p. 18). Furthermore, women who perceive a glass ceiling are more likely to pursue career opportunities outside of their current organisations, according to research (Cohen et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Manzi & Heilman, 2021).

2.3.2.1 Marriage

Married women may encounter additional barriers in their careers due to the belief that their family obligations associated with marriage may distract them from their professional commitments (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). On the other hand, Cohen et al. (2018) argue that married women contribute to and support an unfair work environment due to male-centric perceptions of gender issues. According to Adams and Funk (2012), institutional support plays a crucial role in enabling women to fulfil their desire or necessity to have more children. This support is also the reason why married women in top management positions are more likely to have larger families compared to those in the United States. The persistent trend however, is that the majority of married women often opt out or choose to leave their organisations as a result of their family obligations and their perceived conflicting loyalties (Hoobler et al., 2009; Nelson & Burke, 2000; Patterson et al., 2021; Zattoni et al., 2023).

2.3.2.2 Children

Research suggests that women have an unfair obligation of being primarily responsible for the caring role of children, which forces them to make a choice between becoming a mother or pursuing a career (Hoobler et al., 2009; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Matsa & Miller, 2011; Patterson et al., 2021; Yang & Triana, 2019; Yates & Skinner, 2021). In contrast, Cohen et al. (2018) argue that men tend to have higher levels of career achievement when they have family obligations, such as taking care of children, as opposed to women. Although this research specifically examines women in the manufacturing sector, it is important to consider that the reason for these seemingly conflicting results may become apparent when analysing the study designs of each separate research. Bertrand et al. (2019) suggests that including women on corporate boards might serve as an

appropriate strategy for developing human resource policies that promote a healthy work-life balance for women, particularly those who bear the primary responsibility for childcare.

2.3.2.3 Race

Historically, boards of directors have commonly been composed of homogeneous groups of people over the course of several years. The prevalence of the *old boys* network has had significant influence on several top management positions within organisations, hence perpetuating and strengthening the homogeneous composition of senior leadership teams (Bertrand et al., 2019; Zattoni et al., 2023).

Research indicates that white males predominantly dominate top managerial positions, whereas white women, black men, and black women remain underrepresented in these roles (Bloch et al., 2021; Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Field et al., 2020). As a result, Triana et al. (2019) put forward that there remains a perception of discrimination based on race and gender. On the other hand, they also recognised that white males may face perceived racial and gender discrimination as a result of organisational policies and practices aimed at promoting the representation of black women in managerial positions. According to (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010), race must be taken into account when gender issues are considered, as our general perceptions are influenced by both. Bell and Nkomo (2021) came to the conclusion that although there are barriers associated to gender for both white and black women, white women have greater rates of career progression than black women given that they appear to face fewer biases due to their race.

In addition, Bertrand et al. (2019) demonstrate that with the enforcement of board quotas in Norway, young women working in corporate sectors believed that reform offered improved opportunities for future career progression and higher earnings. Field et al. (2020) confirm in their findings that a diverse board representation does not lead to a reduction in the managerial leadership gap. Hoang et al. (2022) further point out that policies and programs that advance quotas tend to be perceived as unjust work practices. Again it may be worth noting that the reason for the discrepancy in the research may become apparent when analysing the study designs of each separate research. As a result of perceived discrimination based

on race and gender, gender stereotypes become barriers that hinder women's career progression (Bloch et al., 2021; Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Hoang et al., 2022b; Triana et al., 2019). In contrast, Phillips et al. (2022) argue that while an organisational emphasis on the negative aspects of gender and race inequities may provide short-term relief, it does not provide lasting resolutions. Consequently, it is critical that the research encompass not only the negative effects of gender and race disparities, but also the effective initiatives undertaken by other organisations to eliminate such inequities.

2.3.2.4 Societal roles

Aside from gender and race considerations, the influence of societal roles on the advancement of women's careers is an essential component that forms the stereotypes of the workplace. From a societal perspective, there are certain roles that women and men are preassigned which tend to flow over into the workplace (Hoobler et al., 2009; Triana et al., 2019; Yang & Triana, 2019; Yates & Skinner, 2021), this is further linked to the marriage, children and family obligations which have been highlighted above. According to the social role theory, it is for this reason that women are often seen from a nurturing and societal communal role by their line managers and colleagues which may be the reason the glass ceiling persists in work places (Franke et al., 1997; Hoobler et al., 2009). According to Yang and Triana (2021), the perception that women possess communal characteristics while males possess traditional leadership attributes disadvantages women by undermining their ability to effectively manage a team and pursue greater objectives inside an organisation. Women face an added barrier in progressing in their jobs, requiring both exceptionally good job performance and the ability to overcome stereotypes that might hinder the recognition of their leadership capabilities. The issue is exacerbated by managers who hold the belief that women have more conflict between their family and work obligations, which in turn affects their performance evaluations and determines their eligibility for promotion (Hoobler et al., 2009). However, according to the Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) meta-analysis, there is no discernible difference in the perceived efficacy of leadership between men and women. Therefore, a thorough analysis of women's perspectives on these barriers might provide profound insights into strategies for reducing and effectively addressing these pervasive stereotypes.

2.3.2.5 Mentors and Networks

Higgins and Kram (2001) redefined mentoring in their typology of developmental network structures that integrated social network theories to include a broader range of mentoring approaches to career success. Dunn (2019) further contributed to the typology of developmental network by considering early knowledge creation by graduates to further progress their careers. Dunn maintains that early career developmental networks play a key role in a professional's knowledge creation, as these networks can both propel their careers and facilitate knowledge building. On the other hand, Triana et al. (2019) considers a couple of employee outcomes based on their perceptions in the workplace, and among them is "job-based and relationship-based outcomes" (p.2422) which include the following variables: "professional efficacy, devaluing one's work, job pressure, career success, or supervisor-rated performance" (p.2422) and "supervisor support, leader-member exchange, and felt conflict with one's supervisor" (p.2422).

2.3.3 Organisational Barriers

Organisational barriers have been recognised as major barriers in research, particularly hindering career progression of women and minorities (Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Grangeiro et al., 2022; Heilman, 2012; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Oakley, 2000; Triana et al., 2019). These barriers could appear in a variety of ways and contribute to the sustained existence of the glass ceiling. Triana et al. (2019) define perceived gender bias in the workplace as an individual's belief that they experienced **unequal treatment** at work based on their gender, and differs in this context from sexual harassment, which involves unwelcome sexual advances or content, and does not necessarily revolve around gender related matters. However, Heilman (2012), contends that the **lack of progress of women into top management positions** is due in part to gender bias stemming from gender stereotypes. Heilman (2012) further argues that these gender biases that exist in the workplace lead to gender-based barriers, which ultimately hinders the career progression of women.

Maheshwari and Lenka (2022) contribute to the existing body of research by confirming that gender biases that still prevail in organisational practices, such as the **Think Manager, Think Male** attitude, hinder progress of women to management positions substantially. The phrase *Think Manager Think Male*

originated from Schein's seminal research in 1973 and 1975 (V. E. Schein, 1973, 1975), which was later coined in the V. E. Schein and Davidson, (1993) study on male attitudes among British undergraduate management students, which contribute to the continued barriers faced by women in advancing to top management roles. On the other hand Fitzsimmons et al. (2014), put forward that women face the difficulty of deciding whether to present their masculine or feminine qualities in order to be considered for management positions. While significant efforts have been made to alter bias perceptions regarding the qualities that a manager ought to possess, the majority of biases continue to incline towards the **masculine, stereotypical view** of management that is associated with men, according to Arnold and Loughlin (2019).

The research further indicates that biases directed at women who encounter or perceive bias in the workplace have an impact on their decisions taken and the manner in which organisations address the issue. Although research has been conducted to understand the various factors that influence the barriers that hinder on the career progression for women, few have focused on the personal encounters that these women in the manufacturing sector undergo. Concerningly, according to Singh et al. (2018)'s research, women's **attrition rates** in STEM-related fields have remained high while men's attrition rates have remained unchanged. Understanding the barriers that drive women to leave STEM-related careers, in the manufacturing sector specifically, is thus important to organisations seeking to **retain, recruit and promote women** in these sectors.

Hoobler et al. (2009) added to the rich research on organisational barriers by confirming that women also face **limitations to promotions** to top management due to their manager's perception of them having **family-work conflict**. Furthermore, Weer and Greenhaus (2020) affirm that managers provide progression opportunities to employees whose positive reputations and **behaviours** are interpreted as evidence of outstanding levels of commitment. On the contrary, this discovery contradicts the assertions made by Hoobler et al. (2009) that women who reported experiencing less family-work conflict and, as a result, devoted more time to their work compared to their male counterparts continued to be perceived unfavourably by their managers. In consideration of the contradictory results, it is important to understand how **managers perceive** the

contributions of women, as this may lead to the continued existence of the glass ceiling for women. (Wayne et al., 2022) highlight that manager's subconscious **biases** against their direct underlings can lead to negative impact on the future career progression opportunities of the underlings. Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) further confirm that employees may receive favourable support from their managers due to the ability to social **networking** them in workplace interactions. Since **biases and stereotypes** may affect manager's perceptions of both men and women, it can be assumed that men fair quite well under male managers due to the perceived effective leadership traits being attributed to men.

In addition, Oakley (2000) emphasized the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive workplace by tackling barriers such as **unconscious bias**, stereotypes, and a **lack of support systems** for women. Grangeiro et al. (2022) confirm that women are able to overcome prejudice and underestimation to reach top management positions by surpassing expectations, networking and seeking mentors, however, they still encounter barriers such as limited management experience, insufficient time on the **succession plans**, gender stereotypes and often an unwelcoming corporate culture. Chanland and Murphy (2018) add that diverse leaders should navigate structural challenges and perceived barriers that their "white male counterparts" (p. 113) do not encounter, by adopting a tailored developmental network that will propel them into higher management positions. Further organisational barriers are explored in detail in the following subsections.

2.3.3.1 Tokenism

A significant impediment to progress of women's careers, tokenism may foster an atmosphere in which women are merely marginally represented and not afforded equal opportunities or a substantial input within the organisation. Kanter (2008) define tokenism as a superficial attempt to incorporate individuals from marginalised communities, such as women, to create the illusion of diversity without tackling the underlying factors that hinder real integration.

According to Glass and Cook (2018), the homophily principle suggests that the success of women in achieving their leadership aspirations is directly related to the existence of other women leaders inside the organisation. Homophily is the propensity of individuals in social or organisational settings to be inclined towards

one another (Ertug et al., 2022; Kossinets & Watts, 2009). Hence, being seen as a token is harmful when either integration is difficult or there are no other individuals like you with whom trust may be built. Furthermore, Post et al. (2022) propose that tokenism amplifies the visibility of women leaders, hence subjecting them to heightened expectations to outperform the men as a means to challenge prevailing stereotypes regarding their competence and capabilities. Consequently, Hoang et al. (2022) puts forward that women who regard themselves as token appointments may experience disengagement and minimised confidence, perhaps leading to increased isolation from their colleagues. This research's impasse serves as further evidence to delve deeper into the perspectives of women in the manufacturing sector in order to better understand the impact of tokenism on them and the strategies they have employed to overcome it.

2.3.3.2 Work-Life Balance

According to Sherf et al. (2017), putting work-life balance measures like flexible work hours into practice can increase the number of women in top management positions. This is supported by the findings of Yang and Triana (2019) , who discovered that 37% of the participants in their study started a company and left their organisations to address the issue of work-life balance (p.951). On the other hand, contradictory research suggests that efforts to promote work-life balance may provide difficulties or disadvantages for individuals or organisations. Hoang et al., (2022) argue that although diversity initiatives may foster organisational inclusion and promote an improved work-life balance for marginalised groups, they may be regarded by some employees as unfair work practices.

As argued by Hakim (2006), considerable advancement has been achieved in the area of gender equality; however, discernible gender disparities continue to exist, potentially resulting in women prioritising their familial obligations over their career aspirations; thus, alternative approaches are necessary. Hakim (2006) raises additional concerns regarding the efficacy of family-friendly policies in addressing gender disparity in the workplace. The author suggests that preference theory could serve as a viable alternative solution to this problem. Hakim (2000) formulated preference theory to explain how women in modern societies differentiate between family obligations and career aspirations.

As noted by Ferragina (2019), family-friendly policies and preference theory must account for general perceptions regarding gender roles and expectations, which position women in the centre when deciding between career aspirations and family obligations, and therefore an “integrated approach” (p. 76) should be followed when finding solutions. Considering these divergent perspectives, a further aim of the research will be to compile a broad variety of experiences and opinions on the advantages and drawbacks of work-life balance initiatives, among other things.

2.3.3.3 Perceived Competence and Capability

The perception that the women being promoted could possibly lack competence and capability is, according to research, one of the organisational glass ceiling barriers that hinders women from progressing in their careers (Arnold & Loughlin, 2019; Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Cohen et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2022; Richard et al., 2022b). Cohen et al (2020) further adds that women are often flattered with gendered stereotypes which undermine their competence and confidence in management positions. Arnold and Loughlin (2019) argue that women who display successful productivity results while displaying traditional masculine leadership attributes are penalised because they deviate from the stereotypical qualities associated with women.

According to Chanland and Murphy (2018), women are held to a double standard in which, unlike men, they must either be perceived as competent or likeable in the roles they hold. Additionally, women face a further burden of avoiding failures lest they be exposed as token appointments of perceived incompetence within the organisation, according to Post et al. (2022). On the other hand, Esser et al. (2018) suggest that, in a male-dominated organisation, it is crucial to understand the men's perspective on women's competence in leadership, since in the end, they may be the ones driving change and progressing women's careers. Although the focus of this research is limited to the perceptions of women in the manufacturing sector, the varying perspectives highlight the complexity of comprehending how competency and capability can act as a barrier for women seeking progress in this male-dominated industry in South Africa.

2.3.3.4 Old Boys Club and Networking

Numerous studies have demonstrated that women are disproportionately

disadvantaged in terms of accessing advantageous insights and prospects that are circulated via old boys club networks; this may have repercussions on their career progress (Bell & Nkomo, 2021; Bertrand et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2017; Zattoni et al., 2023). It is noted by Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) that men continue to benefit from the old boys' club, in part, because it facilitates networking with managers in the workplace, an activity that women are unable to partake in due to other obligations. This reinforces the glass ceiling, which hinders women from progressing to top management positions.

Despite advancements in recent years, such as the disbandment of old boys' club networks among board members facilitated by the implementation of gender quota policies, there remains a significant amount of effort needed to eradicate biases associated with token appointments (Bertrand et al., 2019; Zattoni et al. 2023). Choi (2019) finds that social capital gained through formal and informal networks can be beneficial for both men and women since it opens up opportunities to be given career assignments that will increase their probability of being promoted to higher positions. The research also uniquely finds that women will most likely benefit more from social capital than men. Examining these contrasting findings highlights the importance of considering contextual factors in understanding the impact of the old boys' network.

2.3.4 Strategies to Overcome the Glass Ceiling

To overcome the glass ceiling, research indicates that organisations would have to implement and improve systematic initiatives that deal with the barriers highlighted above. Sherf et al. (2017) suggests that organisations should involve employees when coming up with gender parity initiatives such as policy changes to ensure that their contribution is captured in the decision making and solution seeking.

2.3.4.1 Organisation Strategies

a) Mentorship and Sponsorship

The availability of support and guidance through mentoring and sponsorship relationships can potentially assist individuals in navigating their career paths and overcoming barriers that are linked to the glass ceiling (Cohen et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2022b; Knippen et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2022; A. N. Smith et al., 2019; M. Smith & Bititci, 2017). M. Smith and Bititci, (2017) adds that mentorship and

sponsorships in organisations serves as professional support that can help guide and develop women for their next roles.

However, Phillips et al. (2022) point out that as a result of the homophily principle (Ertug et al., 2022; Kossinets & Watts, 2009) and the high proportion of white men in top management positions within some organisations, white men are more likely to receive mentorship and subsequent career progression support. Therefore, Cohen et al (2020) proposes mentorship programs and important assignments guided by organisational policies should be implemented to ensure women are given the same platform as peers to compete on equal footing for career progression. On the other hand, Knippen et al. (2019), highlights due to women being the minority group in top management positions, it may limit their opportunities of getting mentorship guidance due to the biases propagated by the dominant groups in board rooms. This finding further accentuates the need to have guided organisational policies that will guide the mentorship and sponsorship programs to overcome the glass ceiling.

b) Networking Opportunities

Research indicates that men continue to benefit from informal networks within organisations, in part due to the existence of old boys' club network (Bell & Nkomo, 2021; Bertrand et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2017; Zattoni et al., 2023) or from social interactions at the workplace (Choi, 2019; Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2023). To overcome these imbalance networking opportunities, Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) suggest creating gender neutral networking events that allow women to social integrate into networks that they would normally not be exposed to. As additional support is provided by Bertrand et al. (2019), policies mandating the promotion of women to top management positions are necessary to guarantee career progression of women, given that their exclusion from networks may hinder their ability to thrive. Furthermore, women may benefit from formalised networks through the gender quota policies.

c) Family-friendly Policies

The effect of gender-based societal role expectations regarding familial obligations has resulted in an inequitable workload for women, which subsequently hinders their career progress. (Hoobler et al., 2009; Triana et al., 2019; Yang & Triana,

2019; Yates & Skinner, 2021). Ferragina (2019) suggests looking at an integrative approach in addressing women's gender role perceptions and choices within organisations.

d) Succession Planning and Performance Management

The impact of performance evaluations on career progression between genders was a focus for a lot of researchers. According to Hoang et al. (2022) being perceived as a token appointment may lead to unfair performance management processes, due to the perception that token appointments are not merit based. Arnold and Loughlin (2019) further added that performance review biases have the potential to hinder the progress of women and restrict their opportunities to attain management positions. Since performance management and succession planning can lead to unfair evaluations due to biases, Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) confirmed that organisation can reduce the unfair practices by overhauling the promotion systems and putting in place controlled and fair practices for managers. Kim & Beehr, (2017) added that managers can contribute to the career success of employees by instating guided performance feedback and career progression discussions. Sherf et al. (2017) put forward that succession planning is key in ensuring women representation in top management positions. Understanding the gender biases and stereotypes and managers' perception of women in management positions is crucial in organisations navigating the glass ceiling barriers that hinder women's career progression.

e) Representation: Women in Top Management Positions

Arnold and Loughlin (2019) in their meta-analysis proved that fair performance management evaluations for men and women could be curbed by promoting more women in to top management positions. However, Bertrand et al. (2019) found that although mandatory board quotas for women are significant, the limited representation of women on the board does not much impact decisions on organisational policies. This comparison highlights the need for additional research to resolve divergent viewpoints and provides context for the state of the women in top management's present research.

2.3.4.2 Individual Strategies

Although it is critical that organisations facilitate career progression for their employees, it is equally important for the employees to pursue their individual career aspirations (Kim & Beehr, 2017). In an effort to overcome the glass ceiling; similarly, women must develop individual strategies that encourage them to achieve the same result.

a) Self-Improvement

Research showed that it is possible to prevent individuals from being overlooked for opportunities by articulating their contributions and aspirations explicitly. Wayne et al., (2022) and Cohen et al. (2020) argue however, that individuals who are expected to conform to specific behaviours based on established biases and stereotypes would be penalised for deviating from these expectations by expressing their contributions in the workplace. This may be due in part because “self-promotion” and “self-confidence” are management traits that are typically associated with the traditional masculine manager in male dominated industries (Esser et al., 2018).

In contrast, Shinbrot et al. (2019) point out that in order to unlock women’s career progression potential, women should to work on their confidence. The conflicting studies underpin the double standards that women have to face in tackling glass ceiling barriers in the workplace. Netnou and Strydom (2020) highlight that self-driven factors in collaboration with organisationally driven factors such as furthering education to ensure career progression. An increasing body of research has demonstrated that, on average, women possess considerably higher levels of education than men (Field et al., 2020; Glass & Cook, 2018).

b) Education

The advancement of women in attaining a higher level of education has been established through research over time (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; UN, 2022b). Bertrand (2018) argues that although women have exceeded men in education, they are not pursuing the appropriate degrees or applying for the suitable careers

that could contribute to progression into top management positions. In contrast, (Lin et al., 2023) point out that women will still experience the impacts of the glass even with the appropriate degrees.

Globally women remain a minority in terms of STEM graduates (UN, 2022), with the exception of South Africa, which has recorded a higher number of women STEM graduates than men (CHE, 2023). The contrasting research highlight the significant strides that have been achieved from an education level, however the barriers to inclusion in top management positions persist and therefore more efforts in overcoming the impact of the glass ceiling should be considered.

2.4 Theories and Frameworks

This research relies on several theories to develop a conceptual framework for this qualitative research, and these include; role congruity theory (Koburtay et al., 2019; Richard et al., 2022a), system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), relative deprivation theory (Triana et al., 2019), and social role theory (Franke et al., 1997).

2.4.1 Role congruity theory

The role congruity theory suggests that gender-related dogmas form expectations regarding the competence of women and men (Koburtay et al., 2019; Richard et al., 2022). The relative deprivation theory was considered but not applied in this research since it mainly focused on the attitudes of men and women with regards to women being in strategic decision making roles and extended to economic participation in households which was not relevant to this research (Kosec et al., 2021; Triana et al., 2019).

This research sought to focus on the perceptions of the glass ceiling experience of women in manufacturing. Despite differences in their explanations for gender bias, these theories all agreed that women would experience discrimination in considerations for career progression into management positions (Koburtay et al., 2019; Kosec et al., 2021; Richard et al., 2022b; Triana et al., 2019). In addition to this, Diederich et al. (2023) asserts that women are generally compensated more favourably when they display fewer masculine characteristics; this is consistent with the tenets of role congruity theory, which posits that individuals are expected to conform to societal expectations.

2.4.2 System Justification theory

Jost and Banaji (1994) define justification as "... an idea being used to provide legitimacy or support for another idea or for some form of behaviour..." (p. 1). Additionally, they present the concept of system justification theory, a theoretical framework designed to distinguish between the ongoing unfair treatment of particular individuals or groups that results in workplace biases which allow certain individuals or groups progression in their careers advantages over other groups. (Cohen et al., 2020), further adds that system justification theory would favour the resistance of disadvantaged women when dominated by biases perpetuated by men had the overall group of managers comprised of both men and women equally. However, this is not the case due to the persistence of the glass ceiling. The theory was considered for this research as a broader perspective should be established to guide the overall understanding of women's perceptions of the glass ceiling within the manufacturing context. Lyness & Grotto (2018) additionally observed that in order to mitigate the barriers hindering the progression of women in male-dominated organisations, leaders must recognise the "systematic workplace biases" (p.258) that have historically favoured men.

2.4.3 Social role theory

According to Anglin et al. (2022) the perpetuation of gender stereotypes may be attributed to the acceptance of the social role theory, which comprises an accepted set of expectations on the usual and suitable behaviours for individuals of different genders within the workplace. Koenig and Eagly (2014) confirmed that stereotypes in workplaces are reinforced by the continued shared stereotypical beliefs of groups. Further to this, Glass and Cook (2018) assert that women and men get disparate rewards based on social role theory, which posits that they are expected to conform to specific behavioural norms in social and organisational contexts. The research indicates that women are faced with challenges of either conforming to the stereotypes associated with the gender or assimilating to those of men to progress in their careers in male-dominated organisations.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 below is the conceptual framework that was used to seek to qualitatively understand how women in manufacturing view the glass ceiling. The research

examined the perceived barriers that affect women's career progression in manufacturing sector by drawing from the system justification theory, social role theory, and role congruity theory.

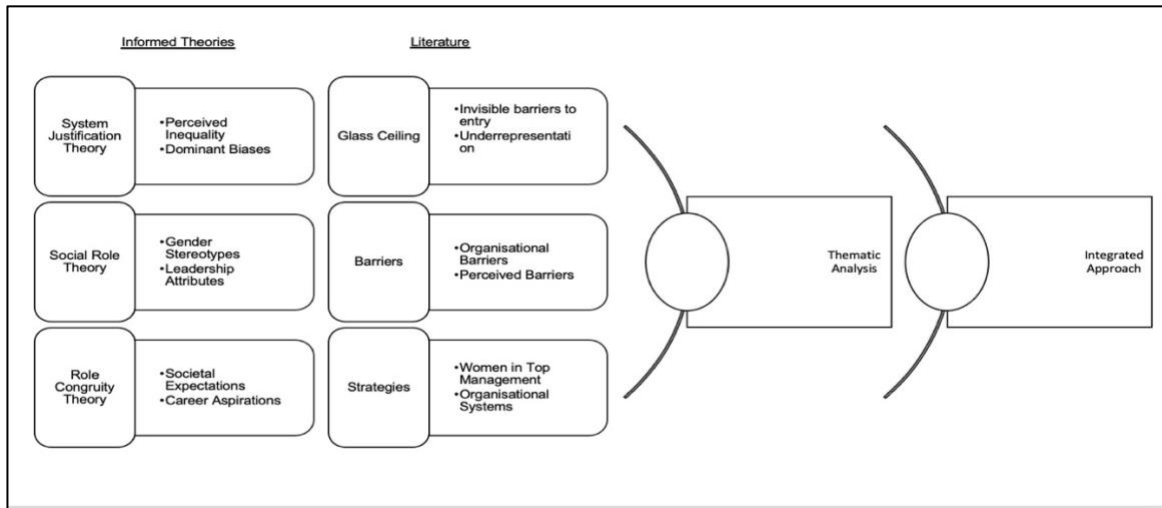


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

3. Chapter Three: Research questions

Based on available research and the research objectives, the research questions below were established. The proposed research questions are aimed at answering some of the literature review questions which have been formulated in chapter 2.

The research questions proposed for the research are as follows:

Question 1: What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?

Question 2: What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?

4. Chapter Four: Research methodology

4.1 Choice of Methodology and Design

A qualitative research approaches is often used when researcher are trying to understand a societal or human problem from an individual or group perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2014). The research sought to understand the perspective of women in manufacturing and their perceptions of the glass ceiling, and therefore a mono-method qualitative research approach was adopted. Insufficient academic research has been undertaken to comprehensively grasp the fundamental nature of the research topic from a South African manufacturing perspective. Furthermore, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) contend that a qualitative research methodology is more appropriate for conducting this kind of study. An interpretive phenomenological analysis was adopted in this research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interpretive phenomenological analysis was a relevant philosophy for this research since it is associated with an individual's experience within a specific context and in relation to their unique experiences (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2007). Although there is considerable research conducted in the glass ceiling experiences, very few focus on the women's in manufacturing South Africa and particularly on their lived experiences. In adopting this philosophy, the author was able to understand the unique experiences of women and give more context to the perceptions of the glass ceiling in the manufacturing sector.

An inductive approach was followed in an effort to identify themes as suggested by the academic literature and new imaging themes based on the unique experiences of the participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The author was able to derive incorporate the new themes into the conceptual model developed in the research.

With limited time constraints governed by the university's research project obligations, a cross-sectional study was followed, with the participants sharing past experiences for context of the current snap-shot moment captured for the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A narrative inquiry strategy was followed, since the author sought to understand how the participants derived meaning from their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

In order to create the interview guide that was used for the open-ended semi-structured interviews, journal articles ranked by the Chartered Association of Business Schools academic journal guide were utilised to develop concepts concerning organisational barriers that women may experience and glass ceiling associated concepts. Figure 3 below shows an outline of the methodology that was followed, based on the study onion model by Saunders and Lewis (2018).

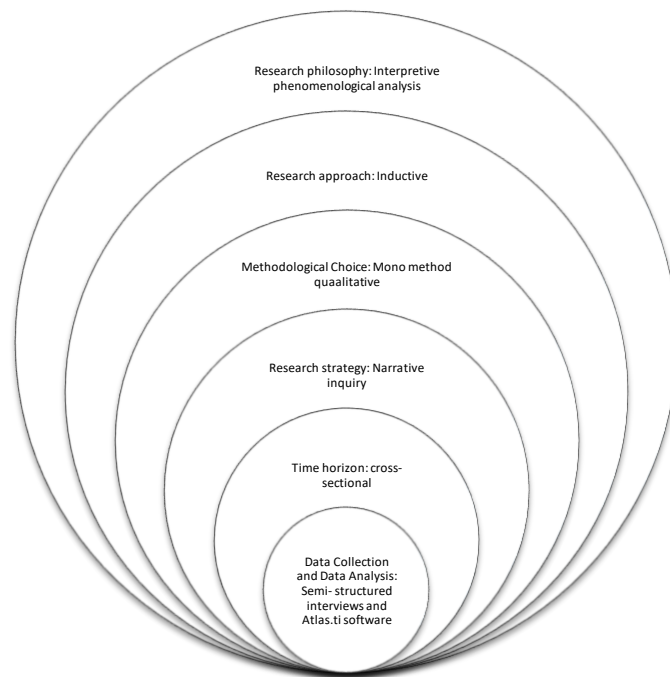


Figure 3: Research Onion

Source: (Saunders & Lewis 2018)

4.2 Universe

The research was aimed at targeting women working in the manufacturing sector with career aspirations to be in top management positions. South Africa's manufacturing industry accounts for 12% of GDP and 14% of the overall employment (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). Manufacturing is key to growing economies, and South Africa has the most women graduating in STEM related fields (CHE, 2023). Academic literature showed that women who experienced the glass ceiling tend to leave male-dominated fields and explore career opportunities in other industries (Cohen et al., 2020). Understanding the barriers and perceptions that women encounter in the manufacturing sector regarding the glass ceiling was

crucial for understanding the reasons behind this concept. Saunders and Lewis (2018) describe a sample as a “sub- group of all group members or the whole population”(p. 138) while a population is described as “the complete set of group members” (p. 138). Given that the author will not be able to interview all the women in the manufacturing sectors, a sample of women will be selected in various manufacturing organisations across South Africa.

4.3 Unit of Analysis

The research was conducted using in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand the individual experiences and perspectives of women working in the manufacturing sector, and therefore the research’s unit of analysis was at an individual level.

4.4 Sampling

The research employed a purposeful sampling method, which aligns with the principles of qualitative research design. Purposeful sampling is a subjective approach where the author used their own’s criterion to select the participants of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The research specifically selected women currently working within the manufacturing sector who are in middle and senior management positions. This research followed the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) recommendation of twelve to sixteen interviews until saturation point was reached (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Data saturation is when the interviewer stops getting new information about a topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Guest et al., 2020). Given the time constraint for completion of the report, 14 interviews were deemed sufficient for the purpose of this research. The participants were selected across the various departments within the manufacturing sector; accountants, engineers, and specialists were among the participants.

4.4 Measurement Instrument

Jacob and Furgerson (2012) point out that through qualitative research the aim is to gather individual stories to capture different facets of the human experience, and the best way to do this, is through conducting interviews. This author as the measurement instrument, conducted semi-structured interviews, and was able to derive themes from following the narrative of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were beneficial in this research, considering that the predetermined concepts and questions were explored (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Due to participants responding to some questions before they were asked, not all questions were asked, instead open-ended questions were adopted (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Appendix 2 presents the interview guide which was used.

4.5 Data Collection Tool

Since a narrative inquiry approach was adopted, the author had to constantly ensure that their interpretations were in line with what the participant was sharing (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Participants were selected through the current network of people that are acquainted with author. This included participants on the author's LinkedIn social network. The participants were given a brief overview of what the research is entails through a consent form, and were further requested to participate on the research by signing the consent form. Scheduled interviews were setup face to face and virtually, depending on the location and convenience of the participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

During the interview, permission was requested to record the interview. To ensure that the author protected the research participants and maintain the trust built, the names of the participants were not included in the analysis of the research and therefore had to be edited out of the transcriptions. A pilot test involves testing the interview guide with a comparable person or group of participants the author wants to interview to check for understanding and repair any errors before the interview (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). A pilot interview was conducted prior to commencing

with the research data collection. The quality of the pilot interview was very good, indicating to the author that there was no ambiguity in the interview guide. One question was added to clarify participants' current management positions.

4.6 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded using two cell phones, this was to ensure that data was secure should any of the devices malfunction. The strategy to use two devices was initiated after the recordings for participant 5 were found to have stalled at 24 minutes. While this did not compromise the overall interview information, it did highlight the risk of using technological devices for obtaining the data. A transcription software tool called Descript was used to transcribe all the interviews. The author relistened to the recorded transcriptions to ensure that the correct transcriptions were created by the software before proceeding to code and categorise it by themes (Creswell, 2014). The transcribed interviews were saved on a Microsoft word document and uploaded onto ATLAS.ti where data where they were separated according to the unique themes and categories in relation to the research questions proposed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). ATLAS.ti is a qualitative analysis tool defined as “computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)” (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 202). Ethical clearance was acquired the GIBS ethics committee prior to conducting the interviews, to ensure that the methodology followed was in line with the rules of the institution.

4.7 Research Quality Controls

Morse et al., (2002) discuss the importance of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, as well as techniques for ensuring rigor and credibility. Credibility means ensuring that the data was accurately transcribed and interpreted precisely (Roulston, 2010). Reliability on the other hand refers to the process of amassing data using the same methods and conditions, and ensuring that the data remains the same (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Roulston, 2010). To guard against unreliable data collection Morse et al., (2002) emphasize the importance of establishing trustworthiness and credibility through the use of multiple verification

methods, such as member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation. The author was conscious of their biases and assumptions and took steps to mitigate against their influence on the research process by constantly reflecting and employing reflexive questions to address any biases the researcher might hold (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The author internationally searched for participants who were different from her from a racial a human experience to ensure a diversity of live experiences was shared.

4.8 Limitations

4.8.1 Researcher Bias

The potential for researcher bias and assumptions was a significant risk in qualitative research, which may influence the outcomes of the research (Morse et al., 2002; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Roulston, 2010). In order to overcome this limitation, the author conducted interviews with participants of various racial backgrounds and experiences.

4.8.2 Language Barriers

South Africa has 11 official languages and for most participants, English was not their first language. To overcome this limitation, the author constantly had to check for understanding. In addition, the author had to help the participants with some words that they were unable to interpret into English.

4.8.3 Time Horizon

Due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, with specific limitations on the data collection period, the author anticipated a limitation in the lack of variation in age and racial diversity. This is because the author plans to use their current network to gather participants, therefore this research might not have a good representation of generational differences in experience of the glass ceiling. As a means of obtaining a greater variety of manufacturing sector experiences, the author suggests that future research investigate quantitative research methodologies and provide a much broader scope.

4.8.4 Gender

Although the primary objective of the study was to gain insight into the perspectives and experiences of women working in the manufacturing sector, it could be beneficial if researchers studied men's perceptions of the glass ceiling concept in the future. This may help researchers understand why the glass ceiling endures.

5. Chapter Five: Research Findings

This chapter shows the results of the detailed semi-structured interviews that particularly address the two research questions the author intends to answer. Using an inductive approach and incorporating the concepts highlighted in the conceptual framework and the academic literature, 14 interviews produced 2255 codes, which grouped into 113 unique codes. Appendix 3 shows a record of the codes generated which were further categorized regardless of their applicability to the research at hand. Unique themes which were not covered in the academic literature were also captured in order to gather the full experience of the participants in relation to the research. A thorough review of women in various management positions in the manufacturing sector has led to the emergence of comprehensive insights. These insights are distinguished by the identification of 113 unique codes spanning a wide variety of experiences reported by the participants.

Respondents, in response to open-ended questions (see Appendix 2) for interview guide), recounted personal experiences about their careers in the manufacturing sector, including barriers encountered in both the initial and progressed phases of their career paths. Using a narrative inquiry method, participants answered open-ended questions, interpreting and articulating their experiences in a way that they considered appropriate. This strategy enabled an examination of the elements that participants deemed significant and necessary to their stories.

5.1 Description of Sample

Table 1 below presents a list of participants along with their current role tenure and overall experience in the manufacturing sector. The researcher employed a purposive sample methodology to choose individuals from their professional network. Each participant has had various positions within the manufacturing sector. The participants were located in Kwa Zulu Natal and Gauteng, the two provinces with the most significant manufacturing sectors in South Africa (Stats SA, 2019).

Table 1 Descriptions of Participants

Participants	Position	Time in Position	Years of experience
1	Plant Manager	Six months	Eight years
2	Production Manager	Three years	Seven years
3	Continuous Improvement Lead	Four years	26 years
4	Continuous Improvement Engineer	Four months	15 years
5	General Manager	Three years	28 years
6	Risk and Environment Sustainability Director	Two years	16 years
7	Project Manager	One year	25 years
8	Head of Business Improvement	Five years	20 years
9	Group Financial Manager	Two years	Eight years
10	Manufacturing Manager	Six months	Six years
11	Food Safety Specialist	Three years	Ten years
12	Supply Chain Operations Manager	One month	Eight years
13	Individual Contributor (Logistics)	Two years	Seven years
14	Environment, Health and Safety Manager	Four months	17 years

5.1.2 Educational Background

Figure 4 below indicates that STEM related fields make up the majority of the participants' academic backgrounds. A significant proportion of the participants of the research began their academic path by pursuing degrees in STEM-related fields.

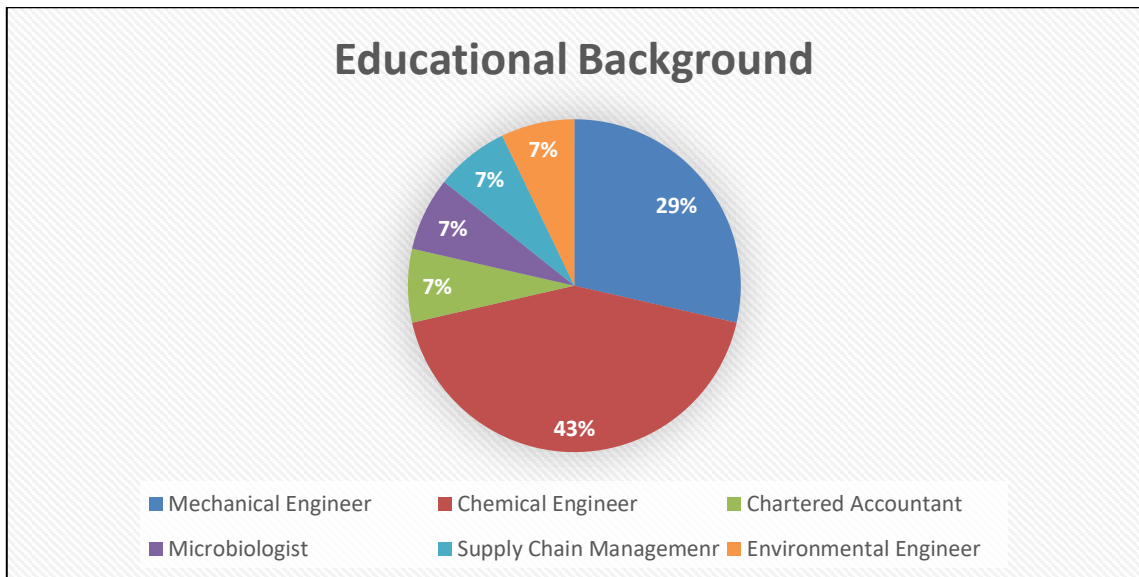


Figure 4: Educational Background

These individuals commenced their careers in various graduate programmes in the manufacturing sector, which demonstrates the complex and diversified nature of STEM-related careers. Throughout their careers, they have exhibited career

progression, ascending through the hierarchy to achieve their present positions. Within this group, it is worth mentioning that some participants have been exposed to and given chances in many areas of professional growth.

“I think because also I was part of, I was in a management program. It was inherent that the business was trying to kind of invest in me and I needed to say to them what would be the end goal. I didn't expect it to come as sooner. But the way that I had then channelled my different stints within the organization enabled me to get to then get to that role.” - Participant 10

However, there was a participant who had a contrasting perspective, expressing that their level of exposure had been severely restricted as a result of being confined to a single function, lacking of opportunity to delve into interests they find rewarding.

“I started off as a trainee. I am an engineer, but I started off in brewing as a trainee. And then I did engineering for quite a few years. I actually got stuck in engineering for a long time, process engineering. So I was in a technical role for a long time and felt quite frustrated eventually with that.” - Participant 12

Figure 5 below depicts the present degree of seniority in the positions they occupy. This advancement emphasises the participants' commitment to their careers, displaying their capacity to negotiate the complexity of career progression within their various departments while contributing extensively in the manufacturing sector.

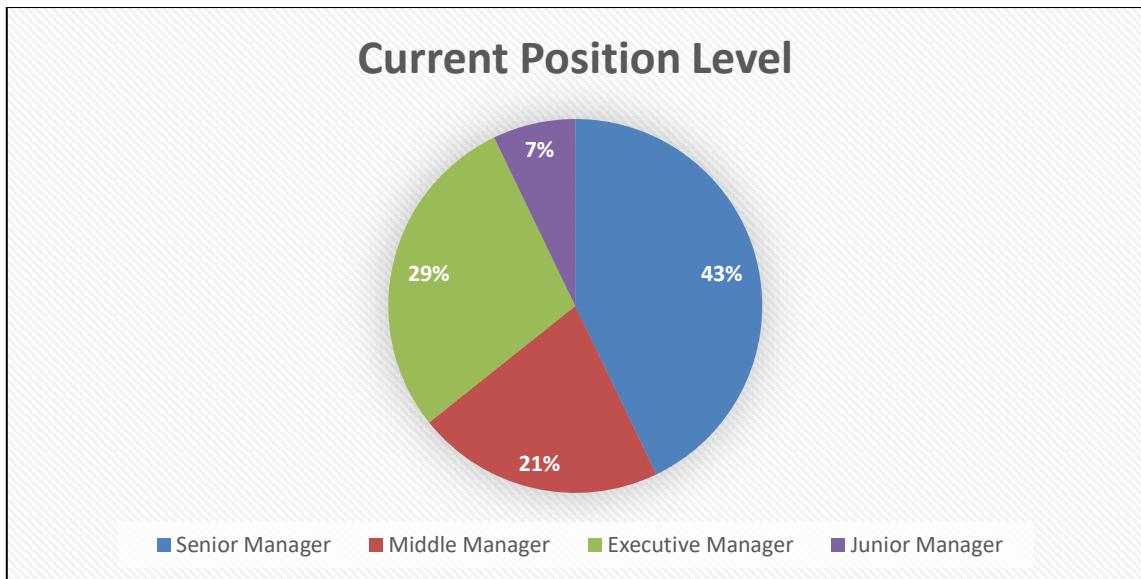


Figure 5: Current Position Level

Although the participants have similar academic backgrounds, their experiences vary in terms of the range of opportunities they have encountered. Some have explored several paths of growth, while others have felt restricted by the few options available to them.

5.2 Career Aspirations

Table 2 below highlights the varied career aspirations shared by the participants. The quotes offer explicit examples of women's career aspirations in top management roles within the manufacturing sector.

Table 2 Career Aspirations

Participants	Aspired Position	Quotes
1	Director position	"What I thoroughly enjoy is, strategy, the formulation, and putting together of systems to be able to realize that strategy. So, to find myself in a position of influence, especially strategic influence, those are my aspirations."
2	Plant Director	"I do have career aspirations. I think I've always been quite a career driven person. And my career aspirations have changed over the years, but I think ever since I started working directly within factories, I've really come to love the factory manufacturing environment."
3	No Aspirations to move further	"I believe I am a bit of an anomaly in, in what a leadership is, I have looked at what the senior roles or career progression going up requires from an individual. And it's like an exponential increase in, how shall I put it, in effort versus what is the benefit of that increase. And I have balanced that with what I would like from life and whether I am willing to make those sacrifices."
4	Operations Director Chief Operations Officer	"...I'm wondering if I should realign my initial aspirations and check if they still are there. I'm just trying to understand if that is the direction I want to take."
5	Vice President	"I definitely would like to earn more money, I definitely would like to have that feeling of, you know, of achievement. I think my career at some point was going in the direction that made me feel like I could achieve it. Sometimes, somehow that flame doesn't seem to be burning as bright as it was a few years or maybe before COVID."
6	Own business	"So for me, mine have evolved a bit differently to what it was initially. So I just want to make a difference. I'm driven by, like, you know, just wanting to make a difference in whatever I do. I'm quite passionate about the issues we've got in our country."
7	Supply Chain Director	"I've been earmarked for an external position, if I'm interested and I'm being mentored for the first time in my whole career life, I have a mentor and I actually have two."
8	Executive/Director level	"You find that it's not easy to move up to those levels because you mainly specializing in a certain field."
9	Executive/C-Suite	"Well, I think at this point in life where I am at sort of testing out the waters, just, you know, in the MBA space. But yeah, I would like to be an executive. I would like to be in C suite at some point."
10	Joining the United Nations	"So I think I'm going through what you call a career midlife crisis. Where I'm trying to find my purpose and my meaning in what I'm doing."
11	Own business	"I want to go into philanthropy. You know, work with the communities, things like that. I also want to maybe do my own manufacturing company."
12	Climb the corporate ladder	"I do aspire to climb the corporate ladder higher, but you know, as a woman, there are, yeah, I think there are limits to how high it can be climbed."
13	Supply Chain Director	"I'm scared to have manufacturing report into me in this long term goal of supply chain director."
14	Strategic decision making role	"I do want to see myself in a more strategic role, as in a more influential decision making strategy."

5.2.1 No Career Aspirations

It is noteworthy that two seasoned participants, each with over 15 years of industry experience, displayed a lack of ambition for upper-level management positions. The one participant was comfortable with how their career has progressed over the years but had not aspirations to move out of their current position.

"I am not willing to sacrifice time with my family, for the sake of a career." –

Participant 3

With one of the participants expressing the aspiration to address issues related to society and the environment that impact South Africans by establishing their own business.

"So for me, mine have evolved a bit differently to what it was initially. So I just want to make a difference. I'm driven by, like, you know, just wanting to make a difference in whatever I do. I'm quite passionate about the issues we've got in our country." – Participant 6

On the other hand, a younger participant conveyed her reluctance to pursue top

management positions due to the perceived presence of harmful elements in the manufacturing industry. She had the idea of shifting into a post with the United Nations.

“I just know at this point in time, if I had the opportunity of joining the United Nations and doing something that is not driven by profits, I would feel like I'm waking up and making a difference in the world.” – Participant 11

However, most participants had career aspirations that varied from becoming directors to becoming COOs, indicating that each member of the cohort had a wide array of career aspirations.

“What I thoroughly enjoy is, strategy, the formulation, and putting together of systems to be able to realize that strategy. So, to find myself in a position of influence, especially strategic influence, those are my aspirations.” – Participant 1

5.2.2 Education Background

The majority of participants exhibited a shared drive for self-enhancement and a competitive advantage in their pursuit of a master's degrees in business administration (MBA). The pie chart presented in Figure 6 illustrates the level of education achieved after obtaining their undergraduate degree.

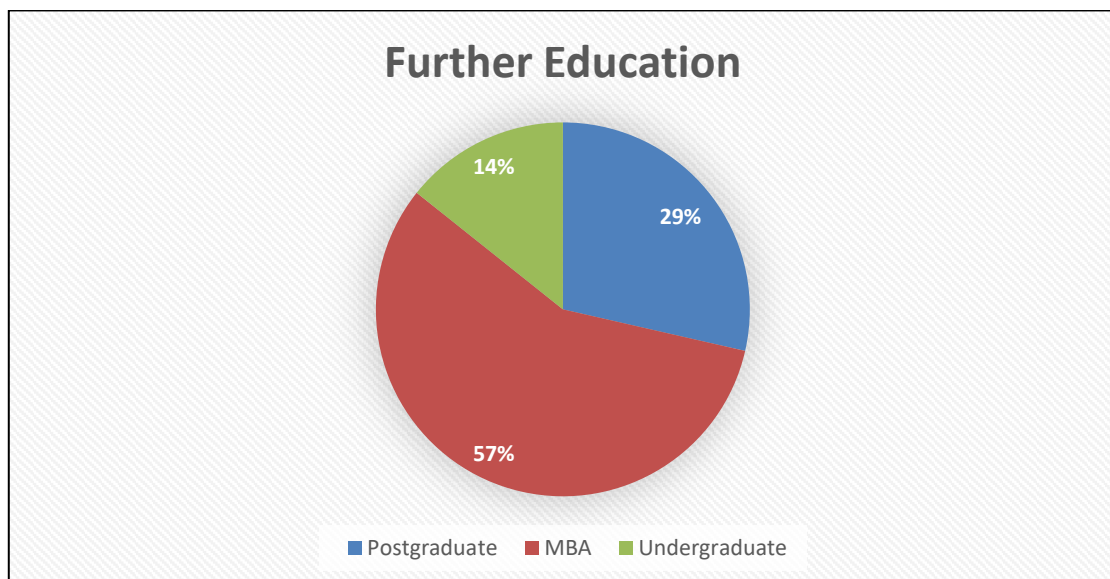


Figure 6: Educational Level

One participant acknowledges that advancing their studies has provided them with a sense of empowerment, while another participant highlights that their educational background has given them a competitive edge over their colleagues.

“For me, the current studies I've been through, have really exposed me to a lot of reflection about myself, how to deal with such situation in the workplace and given me really that platform that, I can really use my voice. My voice is my strength.” -

Participant 9

“I think I went out of my way to become the most educated person in my team. I think, by next year I will probably be with one of the only people in the organization with an MBA.” - Participant 2

5.3 Research Question One Findings

What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?

The primary aim of research question one was to determine what type of barriers did the participants experience while progressing in their careers within the manufacturing sector. Furthermore, the research question sought to find out what perceived barriers of the glass ceiling concept impacted their career progression in the manufacturing sector. The research displayed the barriers faced by the participants, uncovering repeating patterns linked to themes represented in table/figure below: age, competence and capability, gender related biases, family responsibility, work-life balance, and ethnicity.

Table 3: Early Career Themes

Early Career Themes	
Sub-Themes	Primary Theme
Young	Age/Tenure
Expectations: Behaviours - aggressive, soft Leadership style - nurturing vs masculine	Gender role expectations
Being a woman	Gender barriers
Appearance	Representation
Fact check	Competence/Capability
Emotional Too soft Child-bearing age Unconscious bias	Biases and stereotypes
Career break Child-bearing No children Child Care	Children
Marital status Obligations Networking opportunities Married men vs married women	Marriage
Networking Reserved jobs White men	Boys club
Invisible barrier Unspoken barrier Accepted trap Blocked path Career Stagnation	Glass Ceiling
Crisis mode Females of colour	Glass cliff
Black woman Young black woman Zulu men Afrikaans speaking Black men Double make sure	Race and Culture
Philanthropy Community work Environmental issues Making a difference United Nations	Entrepreneurship Leave Manufacturing

5.3.1 Early Career Themes

The participants were asked about their previous in the manufacturing sector, and the process by which they progressed to their current management positions. This was done to provide context for the experiences which were shared with the author. This was followed by participants being asked to identify the type of barriers that they believed may have influenced further career progression.

5.3.1.1 Early Career Development

An observation can be made regarding the participants: although a portion of the participants have been granted access to and been exposed to opportunities for professional development in a variety of domains, there is a divergent viewpoint among others who consider their exposure to be relatively limited. Furthermore, it is

critical to acknowledge that divergent perspectives on career progression schedules emerged among the groups of participants. Some individuals feel they could have achieved their present professional responsibilities sooner in their careers, while others believe they should be further advanced in their career paths than they now are.

“...that shaped my career. Because for me, I feel like if I was a process engineer, I would have ended up at this job earlier than it took, like earlier than it took me to get here.” – Participant 12

“I'm very jealous of them, because I've been here for 28 years, and two of our women VP, well we got just another woman VP, the other two are from outside Toyota, and I feel like, hell no, that could have been me, you know, I feel like I'm the poster child for women in leadership, because I've been here so long, and I think I'm good in the work.” – Participant 5

The views on their career progression timelines provide insights into the participants' aims and expectations, adding a dynamic layer to the entire story of their manufacturing career paths. Various perspectives on the speed of careers progression highlighted the aspect of growth in the manufacturing sector and the personalised aspects that affect how individuals perceive their career paths.

“I was in a management program. It was inherent that the business was trying to kind of invest in me and I needed to say to them what would be the end goal. I didn't expect it to come as sooner. But the way that I had then channelled my different stints within the organization enabled me to get to then get to that role.” – Participant 10

The differences in experiences show the diversity among the participants, emphasising the intricacies in career paths within the manufacturing sector and provided an diverse set of findings for analysing later. Although they had similar academic backgrounds, the participants' experiences varied in terms of exposure. Some explored a wide range of growth opportunities while others were hindered by the limited opportunities available to them. The variety of experiences enriches the research participant's understanding of the factors affecting progression in careers in the manufacturing sector.

“So I think also in the EHS space, a lot of the time, It's also very belittled. It is undermined. Maybe that's a better word. It's undermined in terms of your level of intellect. So I've had to, I felt like I've always had to prove myself.” – Participant 14

5.3.1.2 Family and children

Many of the participants highlighted that having a family, particularly with children, significantly influences career advancement opportunities and can be one of the numerous barriers they confront in the manufacturing the sector.

“I think for me, once I became a mother as well, that came with its own challenges that I don't think even I was ready for, you know, because now there's pick up, there's sick kids, there's school concerts, there's just a lot. There's I must be home at a certain time, and I think in the manufacturing space, there has been a culture that's been set that makes it seem like the later you work, the harder you are, or the better a worker you are.” – Participant 14

“In management positions, if one falls pregnant and has to go on maternity leave, with a lot of women that I've engaged with, there's almost that fear to lose a position, if you were to basically pursue a family life.” – Participant 1

One participant mentioned that the absence of children had been advantageous for her career advancement.

“I think one thing that has led to me being successful in my role is not having a family because people inherently assume that, you know, you've got all of the time to dedicate it to your work profession.” – Participant 2

Another participant expressed concerns about the potential influence of having a child on their future career path.

“One thing about me is I don't have a kid, but I'm worried that when I start making kids, things are going to change.” – Participant 12

In contrast, one more participant indicated that they are not interested in prioritising career aspirations over time dedicated to their families.

"I am not willing to sacrifice time with my family, for the sake of a career." –

Participant 3

Other participants observed that having a family and children is equivalent to another career that requires full-time commitment.

"I think a lot of the time, and this is just in my opinion, a lot of the time because as women, we have this other job at home and the responsibility to raise kids, et cetera, we find that the demands of those roles that we aspire to are not reachable because of those limitations, because you have this other commitment that you still need to be there for your kids and still need to take care of your family and the time that you need to invest in your career. We don't have that luxury." – Participant 8

However, it could be handled if there was flexibility at work.

"I really don't have an issue with when my son sleeps at seven o'clock, switch on my laptop and catch up on whatever, because I've got that flexibility. But at least I'm home at half past three. To help him with his homework..." – Participant 14

Some participants noted that having children could hamper their career advancement since managers may use it as a barrier to promotion.

"I love women. I really do. I really appreciate them, but damn, when they go on maternity leave and when they have babies, it is so tough managing that." –

Participant 4

One participant stated that having a child did not hinder their career advancement because the organisation provided the necessary support to allow them to parent without experiencing negative career-related consequences.

"There's no way where I feel like, Oh, I can't go to a concert. I can't go, I can't do anything. You know, there's no moment where I'm like, yoh, what am I going to say? I'm so scared." – Participant 11

5.3.1.3 Marriage

While not directly questioned about their marital status, a few of the participants pointed out that marriage also carries assumptions regarding one's availability at work, potentially hindering their career advancement. According to one participant, this is especially true because various marriages have different dynamics with obligations that have to be fulfilled.

“Manufacturing works on the clock, 24/7. That prescription can only be written from a male, who's probably married, but they don't have ...responsibilities on the care economy.” – Participant 10

Another participant observes that marriage brings about different expectations for men and women in the workplace, influenced by their responsibilities at home, influencing their availability for work.

“So, men, they don't do much work at home, women do a lot of work at home. And the way that man gets there can only be possible by this woman” – Participant 13

“It's like, there's a picture that always shows the washing line, women running from the same starting point to the men, and then they've got the washing line, the kids, the cooking, and the blah, and we have to push all of that through, to get to the same point.” – Participant 14

As a result another participant believes that women are not understood particularly when it pertains to maintaining a work-life balance.

“Some women are also afraid that companies will not be understanding towards the difference in the work life balance that comes as a result of being, a wife, but a to an extent a wife, but more so, to be a parent.” – Participant 1

Furthermore, a participant has observed that women's roles as wives prevent them from pursuing after-hours networking opportunities within the organisation, which might potentially promote their career advancement.

“Depending on your partner that you have, that can also be a limiting factor if they want certain things from you. It affects your ability to network as well. I think the

networking thing at work is very much like an after-hours thing that typically men get to do more. So there's more relationships built.” – Participant 6

One participant noted that during the interview process for their current role, the interview panel explicitly wanted to find out whether they were married and had children since there is an assumption that they may have other responsibilities that they may need to prioritise.

“In the interview you know, you were asked questions that give a hint of whether you've got kids or whether you're married.” – Participant 12

5.3.1.4 Physical limitations

Although physical appearance and strength was not a predominant consideration in the participants' responses, there were a few references of how it presented as a barrier to working in the manufacturing sector. With one participant noting that some women faced barriers due to their height.

“...but what I have heard was more about physical strength. We had a lady students on site learners that was literally too short to reach to close a cover.” – Participant 3

Additionally, two participants highlighted the potential drawback of their diminutive stature being perceived negatively in the workplace, which could hinder their progress in the industry.

“...being a woman who looks soft and tiny and petite, I think that all plays into perceptions and, yeah, maybe not being an extrovert as well, or being an introvert.” – Participant 9

“I'm a small woman, so a lot of the time there's this overbearing nature of men that wants to overshadow, right?” – Participant 14

5.3.1.5 Race and Culture

a) Race

Many of the participants highlighted race-related barriers as a prominent issue in their career progression. Considering South Africa's past and ongoing efforts to

address the effects of racial segregation, it wasn't surprising that this would be an important element which showed up in the findings. With a considerable number of the participants citing their age and the fact that they were in the minority from a representation perspective, resulted in those factors being barriers of entry.

“I think one of them stems being a young black woman. So like whatever I was coming up with, people would turn it down or overlook and another guy, a man of a different race would say exactly the same thing I'm saying and they get the recognition.” – Participant 7

One of the other participants observed that belonging to a particular race was restrictive because it hindered career progression opportunities.

“I think further to just being a woman, I think being a woman of colour, being a young woman, ... then I think the less you are likely to be given opportunities and invited into the boardroom and the decision making rooms.” – Participant 9

Furthermore, another participant asserted that black women face a double barrier when attempting to advance in an industry dominated by men.

“So making it for a black woman, quite challenging. Because first, you need to overcome the barrier of it being male dominated ,and then secondly, you need to overcome the barrier of it being white dominated.” – Participant 12

To ensure that more black people are afforded opportunities in the future, another participant noted that there is additional pressure to succeed as a black manager.

“And I think that with my current boss, they are still trying to trial it out and it's a very difficult site. So every time that we miss a month, it feels like, uh, we've really failed black people.” – Participant 10

On the other hand, one of the white participants perceived the racial policies initiated by their company as a hindrance for them to further progress in their careers. They highlighted that these policies more divisive than unifying.

“And I felt that this was a bit of a barrier in terms of you felt that, you know, you weren't really sure how people were perceiving you, where you were going to move.” – Participant 2

b) Culture

Participants had varying responses on cultural barriers, with some discussing it from a personal viewpoint and others addressing it from an organisational culture perspective, which will be detailed later in the rest of the results section.

“For me as a black woman, I know the cultural one. I've recognized it in myself, is that I do have that cultural, and maybe because of the way I grew up, you know. Having that patriarchal point of view. I tend to be more respectful, more submissive towards male counterparts.” – Participant 8

In contrast, a white participant expressed that their "strict Afrikaans culture" did not hinder their progress in the course of their careers, instead it fostered a mindset of overcoming any barriers that came in their way.

“I have been raised, even though in a very strict Afrikaans culture where, you know, the male is the head of the household and I have, I was never told that I cannot do it. I was always raised as you can do whatever your mind tells you.” – Participant 3

5.3.1.6 Competence and Capability

As noted by the participants, being a woman in manufacturing requires you to constantly demonstrate your competence and capability to perform your job every day. One participant noted that there is already a belief that you cannot handle the manufacturing environment and therefore you have to prove yourself.

“I think another thing is there's this perception that women can't handle certain roles and as a result we are organizations such as mine are not necessarily hiring maybe the best candidates, because there's just this general perception that a woman might not be able to handle the task.” – Participant 2

Another participant mentioned that there is added pressure when you are in a management position to prove your competence among your team.

“And it's like when you get there in the role, you are there to prove a point that women can do it.” – Participant 10

Additionally, another participant observes that your competence is questioned due to the presumption that you were recruited primarily to fulfil gender quota requirements and not because of merit.

“People will look at it, or perceive it as if you got in just because the company's pushing diversity versus you were the best candidate to be able to be in that position. And so, it's almost an undermining of capability.” – Participant 1

However, a different participant affirms that she has never been one to question her capabilities or herself due to her unique upbringing, which has extended to the workplace.

“So I was never raised with the idea that the female can't do this. So maybe that was what changed my outlook. Maybe that's why I don't, I have not seen any barriers because I, I wasn't raised believing that it exists. I've always been told that I can do whatever I want.” – Participant 3

Lastly, a participant remarked that women need to constantly remind themselves that they are not lacking anything and that their competence and hard work are qualities about themselves that have allowed them to reach this point of their careers.

“You don't get to that without being hard, and without being intelligent and competent and all of these things. So you're not lacking on that.” – Participant 6

5.3.1.7 Age and Tenure

The participants in this study identified age and tenure as barriers of career advancement. There were barriers based on age-related prejudices that presented difficulties for those who felt they were younger than their colleagues.

“What I did find that is also a strong barrier is age. I feel that there is a perception

that you need to work for 15, 20 years in an environment to deserve to progress, all the way to, upper management level.” – Participant 2

Despite professional credentials and achievements, perceptions of youth frequently made it difficult for one of the participants to earn credibility.

“So I sometimes I wonder, you know, do I because I often get people telling me that I look like I'm 22 years old. Which often you might take as a compliment, as a woman or as any person. But sometimes I wonder how is it making me be perceived. Because then it maybe makes me seem inexperienced as well in the workplace.” – Participant 9

Instead of giving precedence to internal promotions, one participant suggests that organisations proactively pursue young, cost-effective talent.

“Let's go for young, cheap talent. And so they always energetic and excited. And so they deliver...” – Participant 6

The association of age and tenure enlightens the intricate barriers encountered by the participants, illustrating that advancement in the manufacturing sector is impacted by a multifaceted interaction of elements that transcends educational qualifications and career achievements.

5.3.1.8 Glass Cliff

While the glass cliff concept was not a specific focus of this research, a few of the participants mentioned it a potential contributing factor of them being appointed in their current management positions.

5.3.2 Defining the Glass Ceiling

Further to sharing the barriers which they have encountered, the participants were given the opportunity to express their personal understandings of the glass ceiling concept. The participants provided diverse and in some instances, similar perspectives on the definition of the glass ceiling.

Several themes related to the experiences and perceptions of the glass ceiling were identified, and these themes are outlined in Figure 7 below. These were then categorized into organisational barriers and the findings are shared in the following subsection

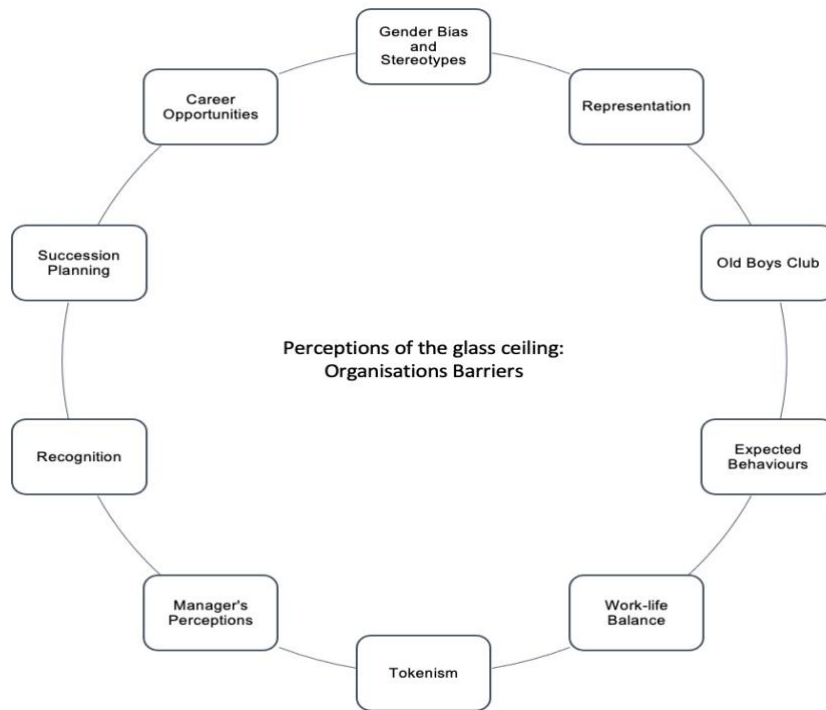


Figure 7: Organisational Themes

A few participants identified the glass ceiling as an barrier that primarily marginalised groups encountered.

“Well, for me, glass ceiling is where minority groups, whether from an ethnicity point of view, whether from a gender point of view, are basically marginalized or discriminated against, and not, therefore not being allowed to progress further, whether in society, whether in a workplace environment.” – Participant 4

“So it's the limit that is imposed, not explicitly, but implied to either a certain race, a certain gender, that it's just there, but it's not imposed.” – Participant 12

Some participants, however, primarily relating the glass ceiling concept exclusively to a women experience.

“So I know a glass ceiling is almost unspoken, but it's barriers to advancements in, the English word is escaping me, professions. But it's more so, applicable to women.” – Participant 1

Another prevalent interpretation suggests that the glass ceiling is an unseen barrier that hinders career advancement to a more top management position.

“So to me, it's like, you are able to see yourself in the next position, but then there's barriers that are blocking you from attaining those positions.” – Participant 7

*“You think it's open, but it's not. You think there's a path there, then you hit something that you can't see. And then you're like, sh**, I thought I could get past this.” – Participant 6*

“Glass ceiling is you can see your glide path or you can see where you can go, but there's something unknown holding you back. Something that you don't necessarily have control over...” – Participant 3

5.3.3 Organisational Themes

Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their organisational experiences and indicate if they had ever perceived themselves to encounter the glass ceiling. The responses were categorised and grouped based on the academic literature from chapter two, with additional new themes introduced during the discussion of the findings.

5.3.3.1 Gender Bias and Stereotypes

Participants noted that distrust, particularly men's reluctance to involve women in their workplace groups, was an important glass ceiling barrier that stemmed from larger gender stereotypes and biases which hindered career advancement.

“I mean, even here, that is very prevalent, right? Strong, strong bias, legacy thinking people who don't know that they stuck where they stuck, you know, that's what causes the biggest problems that we have.” – Participant 6

“Because you could tell that, I have male counterparts in the same room, and they're recognized more than me, and all of a sudden my voice is not as loud as it used to be. And no matter how much or what you do, it's just not going anywhere. And I realized that the only way to grow is just really to get out of here.” –

Participant 8

“A male doesn't understand it, therefore you also don't even bother. You're just like, ah, you know what, maybe not bother bringing him into this picture.” – Participant

14

Participants highlighted the significance of gender stereotypes as a notable theme within the broader issue of biases leading to the glass ceiling. According to one of the participants, they are perceived by their managers as being "too soft" and so incapable of making important decisions.

“So how that got perceived by my boss is that, Oh, I'm too soft to do performance management, right?” – Participant 6

One of the other participants, further adds that associated stereotypes were often used to describe their behaviours and responses at work.

“...but one of the barriers, perception barriers is around women being too emotional to handle a tough environment like manufacturing I've noticed that comes up a lot in the mindsets of those higher than me as well as those lower than me.” –

Participant 2

Interestingly, several of the participants used and accepted stereotypes about themselves in a similar way.

“But because you're empathetic, you know, not because you sympathize. And I think that's an element that women naturally have, or innately have, and we need to be able to capitalize on that and bring that to the workplace.” – Participant 4

“I think women, and I'm biased, I'm a woman, but I do believe women are more naturally inclined to be better planners.” – Participant 14

Additionally, participants noted that unconscious bias in the workplace frequently impacted decisions regarding career advancements, leadership opportunities, and promotions, thereby placing them at a disadvantage.

“Um, and once I got exposed to that, I realized that there was unconscious bias in the workplace and that certain people were getting promoted because they were similar to the people recruiting, you know, and I started to taste that bitter taste for the first time.” – Participant 6

Academic literature revealed that the Think Manager, Think Male mindset is still prevalent in organisations ((Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). This was also one of the findings that the research revealed in correlation to the literature. One of the participants highlighted that men do not see her and think she could be a manager because she is a woman.

*“I don't think any man looked at me and said, hang on, M** is a potential leader.”* – Participant 5

Consequently, in an effort to be recognised, the findings indicate that women model the leadership characteristics that are traditionally attributed to men.

“Being they want, they want to be seen as a man because I don't think they're appreciating the power that they bring as a woman in a leadership position. So they want to role model that.” – Participant 12

One of the participants highlighted that in an effort to conscientize men on their stereotypes, formal training on unconscious bias should be initiated in organisations.

“We almost need to give them some sort of formal training or make them conscious of the fact that when you're accepting a woman to the workplace.” – Participant 4

5.3.3.2 Representation

The findings revealed a recurring theme of representation, which signifies a

collective apprehension among participants regarding the underrepresentation of diverse leaders in top management positions. Participants particularly highlighting that not seeing people that look like them was an indication that there is no room for the in top management positions.

“I haven't seen it in my organization because I haven't really seen any many women given the opportunity in the first place.” – Participant 2

“Cause I think had I not seen women that looked like me, I wouldn't have gotten where I am today. And hopefully, me being where I am, shows young women that enter the manufacturing space to say it is doable... So I think representation matters in that sense.” – Participant 10.

However, two of the participants indicated that gender representation in leadership positions is effective at their organisation. One of the participants emphasised that they consider their organisation to be great due to the significant presence of women in executive roles, particularly within the manufacturing sector.

“... what has been very impressive about Company A is that at Exco level and MD level, we've got a very good gender balance.” – Participant 6

“But, like the company that I work for is really great in, um, what's the word? Women empowerment. Like there's so many women in high positions in management roles, our current, CEO for South Africa and ESA is a woman. My current factory manager is a woman.” – Participant 11

On manufacturing leadership teams, participants invariably expressed a desire for greater representation of individuals who resemble them in critical decision-making positions.

“You can give a lot of credibility to how you rationalize your rejection and all of that, but at the end of the day, it's really that you just don't see people that look like you at a higher level.” – Participant 13

“And we may have people at that table who don't look like you, who don't speak like you, who don't sound like you, that might understand your agenda.” – Participant 1

5.3.3.3 Old Boys Club

The emergence of the *old boys' club* concept as one of the dominant themes in the findings indicates that participants hold a similar perception concerning informal alliances and exclusive networks that contribute to the glass ceiling as highlighted by the literature. The participants particularly highlighting that there is perhaps an existence of the old boys' club which systemically operates on excluding women.

“So yeah, I think sometimes I've been excluded. For what reason? I think I have my assumptions. I don't know for sure, but. Well, I think my assumptions in terms of perhaps, not being important enough to be part of the decision making maybe, not being trusted with information, maybe, you know, I think we have a boys' club here.” – Participant 9

“Then you know that it's a tightly closed knit group. The old white boys club, that they don't even, like, pull my boss in for factory walks. That's how intense it is.” – Participant 10

Additionally, one of the participants highlights that the persistent existence of the old boys' club is as a result of its discreet nature where no one talks about it while keeping it functional.

“For me, that makes me extremely angry knowing that it exists. And other people also know it exists and don't say anything about it.” – Participant 5

Participants noted, among other things, that the boys club network functions as a mechanism for establishing trust via a network of bias and privilege, which can hinder the advancement of those who do not belong to these circles.

“...but I'm being given those opportunities now because I've had to build the trust. It wasn't just granted to me. Whereas with others, males or white males, it's almost as if a given that you're employed today, you're invited into the boardroom tomorrow.” – Participant 9

“Most likely, you know, when the opportunities come, you're going to choose somebody who you can trust, somebody who you know. And, and that's how the club's operating.” – Participant 5

Contrary to most of the consistent findings of the old boys' club, the absence of a boys' club within one of the participant's organisation in favour of a company club that hinders new members was perceived to be another contributing barrier to the career progression.

“So within other companies, when I went to Company B that the glass ceiling was there, but it was not blatant. It was more of a, of a Company B club. You know, they had a club. It was not race or whatever. It was just, yeah, it was just a networking issue, but it was not that we are profiling you and because of your race or your gender, you can't get in here.” – Participant 12

5.3.3.4 Expected Behaviours

The findings indicated that there is a common expectation for women to display traditional leadership traits usually associated with men in order to be perceived as managers. Most of the participants highlighted the pressure of having to "act like a man" to express their authority.

“So women in management positions were not taken seriously. You had to exert characters of being a male for you to be taken seriously.” – Participant 12

“So I found that quite frustrating to find once again, having to adjust how I behave to kind of actually get things done.” – Participant 2

“You get there, the tone and the prescription of what leadership looks like is already prescribed for you.” – Participant 10

The participants noted discrepancies in the behaviours that women expected to display and how they were perceived by their colleagues compared to when a men displayed the same behaviours.

“she copied the approach of the director, and was very hard and fast. The approach is very much respected when observed in him.” – Participant 2

“And I think that in itself brings a lot of conflict for her, but it's funny because her leadership style is so similar to everyone else, within. But because they have this idea, they're just like, this person is so rude, but it's because of their preconceived notion that she's supposed to be something else...” – Participant 6

“So other thing that is used against her because of her behaviour is being more authoritative vs when a man does that.” – Participant 8

One of the participants remarked on the danger of not fulfilling the diversity mandate that can result from being appointed for diversity but behaving like men in managerial positions.

“Like you're defeating the sole purpose of why you're supposed to be there, according to the books. You're supposed to bring diversity, but you are trying to act like a man and be one of them.” – Participant 12

5.3.3.5 Work-life Balance

One of the major themes that emerged on barriers that the participants faced while progressing in their careers was work-life balance which significantly impacted by the manufacturing culture of long work hours, which many of the participants highlighted that there is a huge expectation of a 24/7 commitment from individuals.

“The other one is this expectation of overworking, right? There's an expectation that you must work ridiculous hours or else you're not committed or whatever the case is, right? As you go up the ladder it is 24/7.” – Participant 6

Another participant highlighted that there were negative perceptions associated with requiring to work flexible hours.

“It's like when you start speaking about flexibility, there's a perception that you want to just not work. You want the easy way out, you know, and for me, flexibility actually helps me thrive.” – Participant 14

"I literally sleep with my phone here, you know, right next to my ear. I'm checking the groups every two hours. I literally, I pretty much don't see if I'm on the phone most of the time." – Participant 4

In addition one more participant indicated that the idea of work-life balance is not something which organisations have imbedded into their systems.

"...like organisations don't appreciate the concept of work life balance. They preach it, but they don't exercise it. And the most impacted person is a woman." – Participant 12

On the contrary there was one participant who highlighted that her organisation has embraced a culture of flexibility indicating that "*...my organization right now is great with work life balance.*" – Participant 13

One participant expressed aspirations for a more meaningful life not driven by career aspirations and progression.

"I want a fulfilled work life, but I also want a fulfilled personal life and I don't like to mix the two." – Participant 3

On the other hand, one of the participants mentioned that working long hours was beneficial for their career breakthroughs.

"I threw myself into work, harder than the average person in the company. I was working very late evenings, and I think, that eventually did pay off." – Participant 2

One participant pointed out that women are expected to work as hard as men while having more family obligations, which might make their schedules more demanding due to the time required for these roles.

"So women need to find more time in that 24 hour to go to work and still do women with duties and for your family to understand and your organization to understand..." - Participant 12

“I think in the manufacturing space, there has been a culture that's been set that makes it seem like the later you work, the harder you are, or the better a worker you are.” – Participant 14

5.3.3.6 Tokenism

The findings provide evidence that tokenism misguided perceptions continue to exist in organisations. The participants indicated that they believed there were general perceptions that their appointments were associated with lack of merit and primarily due to organisational gender quota requirements.

“Well, I think first is, it's actually hard to actually get into the room. And when you get into the room, people assume that you are there because of your gender.” – Participant 12

Some participants claim that because people are waiting for you to fail, being seen as the token appointment offers no room to make mistakes.

“Because one of the things that will perpetuate is, see, we told you, it was never going to work, because, we brought this particular person in.” – Participant 1

The findings also suggested that organisations appointed women as an attempt to fulfil diversity Key Performance Indicator (KPIs) goals. Two of the participants note that the organization's efforts to close KPIs was not an genuine endeavour to close diversity gaps of underrepresentation in top management positions.

“... as much as, yes, we've got the quota to achieve, but at least be genuine about it, you know, because these people, these women, their aspirations matter, you know.” – Participant 5

“It's just a number that probably gets reported to say at least we've got black people representation.” – Participant 10

5.3.3.7 Manager's perceptions

Organisational career progression and employee welfare may be substantially hindered by the perception that managers exist as barriers in the workplace

(Hoobler et al., 2009). The findings indicate that in an effort to overcome organisational barriers, they required support from their manager's.

“However, it's important that the leader also plays that role in how they support to progress your development and looking at how do you, you know, build that talent that you want to see in the organization, you know.” – Participant 4

“So it's really just about, um, sharing what you do with your manager and then your manager being armed with the facts to go support you as to how, you know, advocate for you to break that glass ceiling.” – Participant 13

5.3.3.8 Recognition

A common theme that was observed in the findings was the importance that colleagues and management place on women's work contribution. One participant expressed that their efforts are not acknowledged in public spaces, regardless of how hard they work.

“Because behind closed doors, everyone will always say you're doing amazing, you're the best, right? Informal chats, water cooler, informal emails, whatever it is, you will always get a small recognition. You will never get the formalized recognition that you need to progress, right?” - Participant 13

Another participant stated that despite their hardworking efforts, their men in their team receive greater recognition than they do.

“Because you could tell that, I have male counterparts in the same room, and they're recognized more than me, and all of a sudden my voice is not as loud as it used to be. And no matter how much or what you do, it's just not going anywhere. And I realized that the only way to grow is just really to get out of here.” – Participant 8

Furthermore, the findings show that women have to put in more effort to be recognised by their managers. According to one of the participants, even double the work effort, they were merely regarded as an average performer.

“... you having to be doubly good just to be recognised as average.” – Participant 1

One of the other important findings, was that obtaining higher levels of education did not enable women to overcome the glass ceiling. A participant highlighted that they observed a colleague being overlooked for a deserving management position because they are a woman.

“I have another friend who has a triple master's from a master's degree from university, a master's degree in brewing from Nottingham University in the UK and an MBA. And in all the different executive management roles that came up, she was constantly being passed.” – Participant 4

5.3.3.9 Succession planning and Performance Management

Managers and the individuals themselves have a significant impact on ensuring career development discussions happen in order to aid in breaking the glass ceiling.

“I think by talking about succession planning so that I understand where do I stand in this organization. Because, yeah, if that conversation does not happen, I will probably leave pretty soon and find a company that is a bit more open about what they want and a role that I perceive is a step up or is growth for my career.” – Participant 9

As stated by another participant, the absence of such discussions and the inability to envision one's future position leads to a desire to resign in pursuit of more favourable career prospects.

“So when there's no room for what's next and what's next, not necessarily within the role, where you sit and have a conversation and say, where do you see me? And your manager tells you, we are okay with losing you.” – Participant 14

5.3.3.10 Opportunities

The findings of the research imply that women are not offered adequate opportunities to progress in their careers. Many of the participants have identified the perception of limited development opportunities as a substantial barrier.

“I think we are very limited in how far we can get to, and what it, or yeah, we are limited on how far can she get. There are like I said, certain roles that are seen to be, because it will demand more. and as a woman, she will not be able to perform there. There is a lot of perception of that. Especially, like I said, senior, top senior or leadership positions.” – Participant 14

One participant observed that managers recognise their efforts but withhold from awarding them promotions.

“A lot of people are managing my ego to say, your time is coming. We see you, but they're not giving it to me.” – Participant 13

One participant had a contrasting perspective, noting that their company consistently provided them with opportunities for personal growth and new experiences.

“Anytime that I've wanted something or I've wanted to do something, I've gotten to do it. I've even done the philanthropy that I want to do through the company.” – Participant 11

One participant recognised that they had been fortunate to get more opportunities than their mother or grandmother due to the historical absence of opportunities for people of colour in South Africa.

“I must say in my early days, when I first started working, I saw things as very open, a lot of opportunity and I really compared it to what my parents had. And I'm really, very grateful for every little bit that I had when I first started work because I felt like, you know, my mom, my gran, like the woman in my family never had anything close to what I had. I was able to get an engineering job. I was able to, uh, you know, no, I felt like I had a couple of good opportunities.” – Participant 6

Some participants said that the opportunities they are currently receiving should have been given to them much earlier in their careers.

“So, yeah, that being said, I think the opportunities I'm being given now, I was more than capable, I think two, three years ago when I, or four years ago when I joined the company.” – Participant 9

“Because for me, I feel like if I was a process engineer, I would have ended up at this job earlier than it took, like earlier than it took me to get here. I didn't have to go through ops and all of that.” – Participant 12

5.3.4 Summary of Findings for Research Question One

In summary, the responses to research question one unveil a diverse and intricate array of the experiences and barriers encountered by women in the manufacturing sector. The initial findings indicate that the majority of women have aspirations to reach top management positions in the manufacturing sector, with the exception of four participants. One participant is content with their current positions and has no aspirations to progress further in their careers. The second participant has reached an executive management position, however they do not aspire to progress further in their careers, although they do not that even if they had those aspirations, it would be difficult to fulfil them. Instead they hope to open their own business which focuses on sustainable environmental issues. The third participant has had a good career within the manufacturing sector, noting that this is attributed to representation of women in various level of their organisation including in top management positions with strategic decision authority. The participant notes that they were exposed to various departments, and now they have opened their own business.

The main overarching themes from the findings are tabled below:

Table 4: Research Question One Themes

Perceptions of the glass ceiling and barriers		
Early Career Themes	Organisational Themes	Unique Themes
Family and children	Gender biases and stereotypes	Glass cliff
Marriage	Representation	Culture: Tribes
Physical limitations	Old boys club	Representation: "people that look like me"
Race and culture	Expected behaviours	Recognition
Competence and capability	Work-life balance	Opportunities
Age and tenure	Tokenism	New business ventures
Glass cliff	Manager's perceptions	
	Recognition	
	Succession planning and performance management	
	Opportunities	

5.4 Research Question Two Findings

Question 2: What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?

Research question two was aimed at understanding the participants' strategies to overcome barriers to their career progression that they may have employed. This segment of the interviews was established to form part of the integrated approach which will be incorporated on the conceptual framework developed in chapter two.

5.3.4 Strategies employed to break the glass ceiling

The perception of limited progress prospects poses a substantial hinderance to the goal of diversifying leadership teams (Cohen et al., 2020; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Manzi & Heilman, 2021b). The intent for the section of these interviews was to additionally offer any potential insightful information to the current discussion over women in top management positions and the advantages of having them in those positions. Various themes were identified and tabulated and discussed further below in the sub sections of the rest of chapter 5.

Table 5 Research Question Two Themes

Strategies	
Sub-theme	Primary Theme
Key people Look for mentors Lack of mentor or sponsor Mentored for the first time Sponsor in senior management	Mentorship and Sponsorship
Given opportunity to network Making connections Networking after hours Networking for men Network opportunities	Networking
Visibile policies Applicable policies Practical policies Authentic policies	Family-friendly policies
Bigger picture alignment Feedback Career development Career discussions Career options Tick box exercise Vague conversations	Succession Planning and Performance Management
Hope for others Enough women to make a change Outcast Care Balance Family oriented Holistic thinking	Representation: Women in TMP
Self-awareness Self-advocacy Self-reflections Confidence Speak up Outspoken	Self-Improvement
MBA studies More educated than peers Negotiate traaining Edge over peers	Education

5.3.4.1 Mentor and sponsors

The necessity of support networks in overcoming professional limitations can be seen by a common theme that highlighted in the findings where the value of networking and mentors are seen as essential strategies for overcoming these invisible barriers. One of the participants indicated that identifying key individuals who believe in your career development is crucial.

“...identifying people that believe in your success and your capabilities works wonders. Cause then you get to engage, get to see how people navigate through those barriers.” – Participant 7

Additionally, one of the participants highlighted that mentors and sponsors is key to unlocking future roles in the organisation.

“I've noticed that you need one, for example, you need a mentor or a sponsor. If you do not have a mentor or a sponsor, that really, you know, paves the way for you. Yeah. It is difficult to progress in your career.” – Participant 8

Another participant noted that sponsors and mentors can assist in identifying and addressing gaps necessary for career advancement.

“Because a lot of people don't mention, soft skills in the development class, and that's why a sponsor or a mentor is important for you to be able to close up those gaps.” – Participant 1

5.3.4.2 Networking

The findings suggest that opportunities to network in the organisation can assist in overcoming the glass ceiling. One participant suggested that women should seek out networking opportunities where they can showcase their work so that others can become acquainted with it and subsequently support them when opportunities for career progression arise.

“We don't actively want to have that opportunity to speak about our work in forums that we really avail the next role or that next opportunity for us.” – Participant 10

Another participant pointed out that it was through mergers and acquisitions which her company went through, that levelled the playing field and ultimately gave women the opportunity to compete on the same competitive grounds with their male counterparts, and therefore destabilised the networks of boys clubs.

“Now you're starting from a clean slate, right? And that was really bad for the old boys club, right? Because all their networks suddenly got shaken up and it was horrible for them, right? And I didn't, I wasn't happy that that happened to them, right?” – Participant 6

On the other hand, participants put forward that networking opportunities sometimes occur after hours where usually only the men are able to attend.

“I think the networking thing at work is very much like an after-hours thing that typically men get to do more. So there's more relationships built.” – Participant 6

5.3.4.3 Family-friendly Policies

The findings show that family friendly policies that are not guided or instituted correctly, form part of the barriers that hinder women from progressing in their careers. Participants indicated that for organisations barriers are visible in policies that are not created to actually guide organisations which reflects in the effort they put in driving diversity and inclusion.

“I think sometimes it's not being deliberate as a start in terms of your policy, because your policy, it tells you what your stance is as an organization.” – Participant 1

Another participant highlighted that the policies that currently exist, exist to fulfil the business mandate on required policies that have to be in place. Additionally, the policies are not practical in nature

“They've got policies that are just there to secure the business, but they're not practical and applicable in nature.” – Participant 10

One of the participants however, highlighted that their policies actually serve them well because they are visible for everyone to utilise.

“So it's not like something that's just in a policy somewhere where someone has to like, Oh, yeah, it's it now, but no, it's literally, it's visible.” – Participant 11

5.3.4.4 Succession Planning and Performance Management

The findings suggest that succession planning and performance management processes are of significant importance in promoting integrative alignment and delivering constructive feedback for career development and career options. The main findings as highlighted by participants are as follows:

One of the participants expressed frustration with not having performance management discussion to align on organisation goals.

“I found myself frustrated, because I didn't have a defined performance conversation at the beginning of every year. Then since that experience, I've been very deliberate about making sure that those are aligned and I understand how I fit into the, the bigger picture of the business.” – Participant 1

Another participant highlighted that for them to grow, they require feedback during performance management discussions.

“So those are things that give me the feedback, give me the guidance, know my path, know, and then help me along that path.” – Participant 14

Participants further highlight that these discussions are crucial in understanding your future role in the organisation.

“I think the strength there as well is succession planning, which also talks to removal of the, the ceiling.” – Participant 8

“I felt that, my career options have opened up in my organization. It seems that I'm a lot more trusted and that is a view that I will progress.” – Participant 2

5.3.4.5 Representation: More Women in Top Management

The findings indicate that increasing the number of women in top management positions can be a strategic approach that organisations undertake, however, it must be done with enough women. Participants considered that increasing the number of women in top management improves the chances of women being provided with opportunities for advancement.

“I think women bring that, but most importantly in this day and age, it is great to have women in top leadership positions because they give others that are coming up, you know, the hope that it can be done.” – Participant 2

In contrast, a participant observed that organisations' lack of authenticity regarding the presence of women in top management positions explains why such individuals do not truly permeate through to those positions.

“The buy in from upper management and from the greater organization has been a bit, not that sincere, not that engaged. And I feel that it's, it could have been better if more women had been in those positions because it's issues that are affecting women largely that are not being ignored and sit under the carpet because the people in positions are largely male that are not a deal with it, so that's one.” – Participant 2

One of the participants highlighted that, having one women is not sufficient to efficiently drive the change that organisations require, and therefore it is important that more women are in top management positions.

“So I think what's important as a precursor to women in those roles is enough women in those roles first.” – Participant 6

Participants further highlight that women are necessary in top management positions because they bring in care into the work environment and a holistic approach in problem solving.

“I think more understanding because us women have many roles. We don't just have the role of being at work. We have, we are mothers, we are caregivers in our families, we are the primary whatever. So having a woman there, then, if I say, can I please go fetch my son or I will be coming back, then you know, at least the system itself doesn't penalize me for being a woman.” – Participant 11

“There's a lot more holistic thinking that women have, and we've got it naturally from the way we nurture, right? There's a long term view...” – Participant 6

5.3.4.6 Self-Improvement and Self-Advocacy

Participants also highlighted the importance of self-improvement and self-advocacy for the purpose of enabling individuals to proactively determine their professional paths and overcome systemic barriers, with the intention of breaking the glass ceiling.

“If you feel marginalized, you need to get to a space where you can also sell yourself.” – Participant 13

“So I had to be aware of that, and I then started realizing that I needed to then advocate for myself. Because when you're at factory, you need somebody from outside factory who'd be that voice for you.” – Participant 10

5.3.4.7 Education

The findings showed that furthering ones education is important for a competitive edge and part of allocating time to enhance oneself .

“I think I went out of my way to become the most educated person in my team. I think, by next year I will probably be with one of the only people in the organization with an MBA.” – Participant 2

Another participant mentioned that pursuing an MBA was essential to enhance their skills for their career aspirations.

“How can I better support my career aspirations? Well, currently, I've been applying myself toward an MBA...” – Participant 4

5.3.5 Unique Themes

5.3.5.1 Manufacturing environment

Some participants acknowledge that the manufacturing industry might be a barrier for women owing to its setting not being accommodating for them.

“So I don't think manufacturing, yes manufacturing encourages women to actually get into the room and be part of the table, but I don't think the environment itself is conducive enough for women to actually sit at the table.” – Participant 12

Consequently, one participant suggested that educating the workforce, specifically men in manufacturing on unconscious bias should be adopted as an approach to break the glass ceiling.

“I think the third thing is just creating awareness around biases, man. People don't realize how brainwashed they've been and how they perpetuate those concepts to the workplace.” – Participant 12

Another participant discussed explicit policies that effectively initiate transformation without being kept hidden.

“So it's not like something that's just in a policy somewhere where someone has to like, Oh, yeah, it's it now, but no, it's literally, it's visible.” – Participant 11

5.4 Summary of Research Question Two Findings

The findings for research questions two underscore various effective strategic approaches to overcome the glass ceiling by examining both organisational and individual approaches. Strategic recruitment processes from the beginning of graduate careers are important, mentorship and sponsorship relationship building,

networking opportunities, family-friendly policies, more representation of women in top management positions, self-improvement and furthering ones education can be key methods in achieving this objective.

6. Chapter Six: Discussion of Findings

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the research findings derived from the investigation into women's career progression perceptions of the glass ceiling in the South African manufacturing sector. The findings are thoroughly analysed in the discussion in relation to the literature review undertaken in Chapter Two. The literature review played a crucial role in investigating the research questions that were developed in Chapter Three. By applying the codes and themes formulated in Chapter Five, along with the knowledge gained from the literature review, a comprehensive analysis of the research findings can be achieved. Through the utilisation of traditional qualitative thematic analysis and an inductive approach, this discussion is structured around the research questions formulated in Chapter Three and the conceptual framework that was formulated in Chapter Two. In this chapter, each theme that was identified in Chapter Five through the categorised themes will be further expounded upon in connection with particular research questions.

6.1 Discussion of findings for research question one

What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?

The primary objective of the first research question was to ascertain the types of barriers encountered by the participants as they progressed in their manufacturing careers. Additionally, this question aimed to ascertain whether or not participants had encountered the glass ceiling. This was established to determine what barriers exist in the manufacturing sector, particularly for women, given that top management positions in the industry continue to be dominated by men. A comparison was made between the barriers encountered and the findings of the literature review; similarities and differences will be emphasised. The secondary objective was to further understand what perceptions of the glass ceiling were encountered by the participants.

6.1.1 Early Career and Career Aspirations

The majority of participants admitted that there were distinct growth paths and

prospects early on in their graduate programs, with some being granted opportunities to advance to middle management and senior management positions. However, the participants demonstrate an awareness of the barriers to entry as they began to progress to more senior positions. This is consistent with the claims made by Matsa and Miller (2011) that women continue to advance from entry-level to middle management positions, but encounter the glass ceiling when attempting to attain top management positions. Further to that, according to Dunn (2019), in the early stages of an individual's career, developmental networks are vital for assuring growth and success. Therefore, organisations should consider investing in the careers of women early in their graduate stages, and establish specific guidelines for developmental areas. As a result, women's confidence in the organisation's future prospects may be maintained.

6.1.1.1 Family and children

Many of the participants highlighted that having children and family responsibilities negatively impacted the prospects of career progression in the manufacturing industry. With some noting that some of the progress that they have been able to achieve in the careers is as a result of not having children. This is consistent with research which suggests that women still encounter barriers and miss out on progression in their careers chances as a result of being absent for childbirth or being perceived as perpetually devoted to their families ((Hoobler et al., 2009; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Matsa & Miller, 2011; Patterson et al., 2021; Yang & Triana, 2019). An illustration of this can be seen in the finding that while men in the global north appear to have assumed greater domestic family and child responsibilities, women continue to devote a disproportionate amount of time to the same obligations; consequently, women who do not have children have made greater career advancements (Shinbrot et al., 2019). Hoobler et al. (2019), on the other hand, argue that the extent of family and child responsibilities does not hinder progress in one's career; rather, it is the skewed perception of "family-work conflict" (p. 940) held by managers that serves as the true barrier. According to Kim et al. (2017), family friendly policies have the potential to distinguish organisations and demonstrate to women that they are valued and have equal chances for career progression as men. Cohen et al. (2018) further add that women in the accounting profession are more likely to leave the profession due to the increased responsibilities of their family life. It is therefore crucial to find a solution to this so

that women may compete on an equal footing with their male counterparts and not worry about missing out on chances of career progression due to of childbirth (Arnold and Loughlin, 2019).

6.1.1.2 Marriage

A significant number of the participants highlighted the varying gender roles and responsibilities that are expected of married women within the household as an additional factor that might hinder their career progress within their respective organisations. One of the participant's unique viewpoint that barriers to entry persist even during the recruitment process where interviewers' attempts to ascertain marital status in order to anticipate the presence of other obligations beyond work exist, was of concern. The existence of the perceived glass ceiling and the reduced propensity of married women to pursue international career opportunities are attributed to the perceptions of increased domestic responsibilities and family obligations, according to the research analysis by Maheshwari and Lenka (2022). Once more, we are reminded of the importance of policies that support women's ability to pursue a life of marriage and motherhood. This is evident in the Swedish women in top management, who are married and have children, in contrast to their counterparts in the United States who are less likely to be married and have children, as noted by Adams and Funk (2012).

6.1.1.3 Physical Limitations

The findings uniquely identified that sometimes, the physical structure of women can be seen as a barrier within the manufacturing sector. While the literature review did not cover this aspect. The author proposes that this is not actual barrier since your physical ability in managing teams is not a factor.

6.1.1.4 Race and Culture

a) Race

According to Cohen et al. (2020), women of colour are more likely than white women to report a glass ceiling in their organisations. The findings align with prior research that highlight the significant presence of race-related barriers in the progression of their careers, with the majority of participants claiming to be experiencing discrimination twice, once for being black and again for being female.

Numerous studies indicate that racial and gender-based challenges are directly related to the persistent disparities that exist within organisations. For example, Bell and Nkomo (2021) propose that the disparity in progression in careers between black women and white women is attributable to the prolonged time it takes black women to progress from entry-level to managerial positions. Among the 14 interviewed participants, two were white women, one was coloured, three were Indian women, and eight were black women. The experience of all the women of colour was quite similar with all them bringing up the race and gender being a barrier in their effort to grow in their careers. The participants noting that most of the top management in the manufacturing industry is white and male. In considering the representativeness of the sample from a South African context, we can conclude that there is a fair representation with the total population of women in at an average of 81% for black women, 2.5% Indian women, 8.8% coloured women, and 7.7% white women (StatsSA, 2022). This is consistent with research which indicates that most organisations are still largely constituted by white males (Bloch et al., 2021; Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Field et al., 2020). As a result, Triana et al. (2019). Given that the research was not solely focused on racial barriers, there isn't enough evidence to address the success of white women compared to that of black women. This presents an opportunity for future research to further investigate this phenomenon. Between the two white women participants, one had no aspirations to further progress in their career due to the demands required in top management positions and their commitment to their work-life balance, and the other white women highlighted that they experienced racial barriers due to organisational policies which prohibited white and Indian people from progressing further into management positions. This is consistent with research by Hoang et al. (2022), which put forward that explicit policies that address gender and race related barriers can be seen as unfair organizational practices. This further exposes that an integrated approach in solving gender and race related barriers is required in addressing the perceptions of the glass ceiling.

b) Culture

When asked if there were any organisational or cultural issues that made it hard for the participants to progress in their careers, the participants highlighted a couple of cultural issues more than organisational ones, with a most of them inadvertently responding to the organisational barriers in other interview questions. Many

participants, in line with the research findings, identified organisational structural obstacles that played a role in the persistence of the glass ceiling. These barriers included gender biases and stereotypes, difficulties in maintaining a healthy work-life balance, the need to attend to child care and family responsibilities that necessitated absences from work, and the perception of token appointments as potentially incompetent (Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Grangeiro et al., 2022; Heilman, 2012; Oakley, 2000; Triana et al., 2019). A workplace culture that values and acknowledges achievements not only enhances individual job fulfilment but also cultivates a positive and productive ambiance, encouraging employees to surpass expectations and put forth their utmost effort (Bertrand et al., 2019; Hoang et al., 2022b; Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Lyness and Grotto put forward that a lack of cultural fit in organisations in male-dominated industries results in persistent perpetuation of the glass ceiling barriers for women. According to Kosec et al. (2021), women want to be active in strategic decision making positions in organisations which results in better participation in the economy. This findings align with research with participants clearly indicating that they aspire to be in strategic roles that influence decision making processes within the manufacturing sector. The participants also highlighted that it would be a mammoth task since there is currently no women in such a position within their industries.

6.1.1.5 Competence and Capability

Most of the participants highlighted the need to consistent have to prove that they were equally as competent as their peers and to always come prepared with facts since their work was always questioned. Researchers have reached a consensus over time that women continue to face glass ceiling barriers due to the continued perception among their male-counterparts, that they were promoted in their roles possibly without the right competence and capability for that role (Arnold & Loughlin, 2019; Chanland & Murphy, 2018; Phillips et al., 2022; Richard et al., 2022). The findings indicate that women the participants had to prove capability of being able to fill certain senior roles, which was not something that was highlighted in the literature review. Consistent with literature review, participants highlighted that they were under pressure to not make mistakes as this will prove to the male-counterparts that they indeed were not competent and capable for the role that they were appointed for (Post et al., 2022). This implies that it is necessary for

organisations to develop a strategy that educates men about their implicit biases and assists them in unlearning them to the extent that they can stop to perceive women as less competent and capable counterparts (Esser et al., 2018). The research findings indicate that more work still needs to be done for organisations to educate their employees on their biases which may affect how women's competence and capability is perceived in the workplace. Organisations should create an organisational recruitment culture that is based on merit while also addressing the under representation of women in top management positions.

6.1.1.6 Age and Tenure

The findings highlighted that participants were hindered from career progression of opportunities since they were considered to be too young to fill certain roles. The findings further indicated that managers that were currently occupying the top management roles had been in those organisations and in some instances for a couple of years. The author did not cover this aspect of the glass ceiling. Future research can consider looking into the average tenure of top management leaders.

6.1.1.7 Glass Cliff

The findings also uniquely pointed out that some participants feared that they were hired solely because they were there close to a crisis in the organisation. This concept is referred to as the glass cliff concept. This is another metaphor which was not considered for the purpose of this research. The author concluded that it was not relevant to the study since not many women are in top management positions in the manufacturing sector.

6.1.2 Defining the Glass Ceiling

Research has characterised and defined the glass ceiling concept as the invincible barriers that prohibit women from progressing to top management positions (Bertrand et al., 2019; Cohen et al., 2020; Field et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2023; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). The findings indicate that the women have a good understanding of the glass ceiling concept and consistently referred to the glass ceiling as something *invincible* that prevented them from achieving their career aspirations. The participants brought attention to a distinctive aspect by characterising the concept of the glass ceiling as an implied barrier that is recognised but not resolved. The literature review however indicates that the

barriers attributed to the glass ceiling are known and has promoted organisations to enforce gender quota policies that ensure the promotion of women into top management positions (Bertrand, 2018). Furthermore, research studies suggest that the mere appointment of women to executive positions fails to break down the glass ceiling (Field et al., 2020); further measures are necessary to accomplish this change.

6.1.3 Organisational Themes

Organisational environments can function as significant barriers to the career progression of women and thereby influencing their perceptions and experiences of the workplace opportunities. Several themes, similar to the literature review came out in the findings that serve as barriers in the manufacturing sector for women. Cohen et al. (2020) highlights that women who perceive glass ceiling barriers such as “workplace inequalities” (p.18) are more likely to pursue careers outside of their current organisations.

6.1.3.1 Gender Bias and Stereotypes

According to previous research, women are often seen from a nurturing and societal communal role, and this perceptions are held true even in the workplace environment (Hoobler et al., 2009; Triana et al., 2019; Yang & Triana, 2019; Yates & Skinner, 2021). The reinforcement of gender stereotypes creates biased expectations of roles and capabilities of men and women (Hoobler et al., 2018; Koenig & Eagly, 2014) and subsequently limit women’s access to career progress opportunities (Franke et al., 1997; Hoobler et al., 2009). The findings revealed that some of participants found that their managers and colleagues viewed them as “too soft” to make the hard and difficult decisions that a man would make, which meant that they could not be considered for future managerial roles which required people to make the hard and difficult decisions. Given these unfair assessments of women’s decision making capabilities further sustains the existence of the glass ceiling and is confirmed by the literature review. Further to that Yang and Triana (2021), emphasise that associated perceptions of communal attributes for women and stereotypical leadership attributes for men continue to undermine the competence of women to effectively manage a team and therefore limits prospects of career progression.

However, it should be noted that several of the findings also indicated that participants were placed in situations where they were required to exhibit behaviours associated with male manager stereotypes while simultaneously being judged negatively for not behaving as women. The literature reviewed indicated that women are faced with having to decide on their masculine or feminine qualities in order to be considered for management positions. This is consistent with literature reviewed that stated that perceptions of good managers remain largely masculine in nature, which is the stereotypical view of management that is associated with men, according to Arnold and Loughlin (2019). In considering the role congruity theory, Diederich et al. (2023) point out that conforming to the associated gender stereotypes for women can be beneficial for favourable compensation. This research did not focus on the gender pay gap as a barrier, however, Diederich et al. (2023) poses an interesting future research undertaking in the women in manufacturing research scope.

6.1.3.2 Representation

South Africa's apartheid past was characterised by deep-rooted gender and racial discrimination, which continues to influence the composition of top management leadership in the manufacturing sector (Netnou & Strydom, 2020) and many other organisations (BWASA, 2022). Representation of top management leadership should be a good representation of the workforce and the broader demographics of society (reference).

Organisations that lack diverse representation of gender and race may indicate the lack of opportunities for career progression and perpetuate the glass ceiling barriers for women. Bertrand (2018), points out that while implementation of gender quotas serve as notable efforts in addressing underrepresentation of women in top management positions, there is still a lack evidence to indicate if these efforts serve as dismantlers of glass ceiling barriers. The findings showed an interesting perspective where some of the participants observed the lack of female representation and black people representation in the top management positions as a good indication that there was no room for them to occupy such positions. This therefore indicated to them, that if they had career aspirations to reach top management positions they ought to pursue their interest in other industries. While the literature review did not indicate this perspective of representation, it was an

interesting development on how representation is perceived by women in manufacturing in South Africa. Further research is required to verify these assertions and determine if these views are consistent and common perceptions in the manufacturing sector.

6.1.3.4 Old Boys Club

The old boys' club was one of the emergent themes to be observed from an organisational perspective. The findings particularly indicating the continued existence of the old boys' club systematically operates to exclude women at helm. Additionally, the findings indicate that club creates privileged informal networks where trust is build through common biases and stereotypes. This is persistent with the literature review, which indicated women are disproportionately disadvantaged by the continued existence of the old boys' club (Bell & Nkomo, 2021; Bertrand et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2017; Zattoni et al., 2023). It is therefore essential for organisations to dismantle these informal clubs and create formalised networking opportunities that enable women to participately openly and fairly with the men in the organisations and therefore allowing them to have the same access to top management leaders who can assist in propelling the career aspirations.

6.1.3.5 Expected Behaviours

The findings indicated expectations for women to confirm to stereotyped societal roles at the work place are observed. Many of the participants highlighting that there different expectations from a behavioural perspective which requires that to display traditional masculine leadership attributes to express authority. However this expectation backfires on them since there is also an expectation for them to display associate feminine attributes to themselves. This is consistent with the literature review which found that women face the burden of having to disprove the stereotype of only possessing communal attributes while men are assumed to poses traditional male leadership attributes (Yang & Triana, 2021). Organisations may benefit from dispelling underlying biases and stereotypes about gender roles through unconscious bias training.

6.1.3.6 Work-life Balance

In considering the fact that the majority of manufacturing organisations operate

around the clock, a significant number of the participants suggest that they, too, were expected to be available “24/7” hours. Notably, none of the participants expressed a preference for focusing solely on their family obligations; instead, they appear to value flexibility, including the ability to wrap up work early and take time off on weekends and after hours. The data gathered does not clearly indicate why this is the case, however it could be related to the fact that many of the participants had aspiring goals of progressing up the corporate ladder and into top management positions. This finding aligns with the results reported by Ferragina (2019) regarding the effectiveness of an integrative approach in addressing women's gender role perceptions and choices within organisations. The findings are considerably different to the preference theory, as delineated by Hakim (2006), which posits that when given the choice, women are more likely to prioritise family responsibilities over their careers. The results indicate that the observed learnings may be associated with the approaches in which gender roles are imposed, as opposed to systems which provide women the ability to choose their careers and family obligations

6.1.3.7 Tokenism

As evidenced by tokenism, women are frequently not in positions of authority and are promoted only for the intention of creating a perception of diversity (Glass & Cook, 2018; Kanter, 2008; Yang & Triana, 2019). Tokenism may hinder women's career progress by creating an environment where women are marginalised and given little opportunities or input. This is evident in our findings where participants noted that when they were marginalised by male counterparts because it was assumed that they were only in those positions because quota requirements. Due to the homophily principle, individuals gravitate towards other similar individuals in organisational settings, and therefore it becomes increasingly difficult for women who are seen token or quota appointments because integration becomes difficult when there are no other individuals like them. The interview questions did not address homophily, hence the results were inconclusive. The findings indicated that individuals perceived themselves or women in top management positions as token appointments, thus lacking influence in decision-making. This is consistent with the Post et al. (2022) finding which highlight that women in top management have amplified visibility.

One of the unique findings with regards to token or quota appointments, was that affirmative action policies which focused on promoting black and coloured people in one of the organisations created perceptions of exclusion to white and Indian women. Additional research is warranted in this area.

6.1.3.8 Manager's Perception

The influence of managers on the career progressions of those who report to them is critical. Organisational performance and employee satisfaction can be significantly impacted when managers undertake actions to support the career progression of women (Kim & Beehr, 2017). In addition, Hoobler et al. (2009) confirm that women face additional limitations to career progress due to their manager's perceptions of them having family-work conflict. The findings confirm that participants relied heavily on their manager's support and agree that for them to progress in their careers, it will need the backing of their managers. The findings did not shed light on whether there was a perception from the participants managers on family-work conflict. Weer and Greenhouse (2020) put forward that provide career progression opportunities based on employees' positive reputations and behaviours. In contrast, Hoobler et al. (2009) point out that even when women had no family-work conflict and instead displayed positive work outcomes compared to their male counterparts, they continued to be perceived unfavourably by their managers. Further research should be explored focusing on manager's perception on women's contribution in the workplace. Wayne et al. (2022) in support further adds that manager's biases can negatively impact women's future career progress opportunities. Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2023) conclude that employees networking ability with their managers allows them to receive favourable support from their managers. It is evident that biases and stereotypes may affect managers perceptions of their employees, and further research should be explored to understand this phenomena in the manufacturing sector.

6.1.2 Summary of Discussions of Research Question One

The research provides significant contribution to the barriers experienced by women in the manufacturing sector in South Africa. The findings are consistent with

previous research captured in the literature review in chapter 2, and common themes such as marriage and family obligations, gender biases and stereotypes, tokenism, racial and cultural barriers, competence and capability perceptions, and organisational barriers continue to permeate in the manufacturing sector, similar to other industries and therefore the perception of the glass ceiling continues to exist and women have to deal with these barriers to fulfil their top management career aspirations. The research continues to contribute to the underdeveloped research in the developing and African nations on the glass ceiling concept. Mehshwari and Lenka (2022) highlight that stereotypical perceptions of *Think Manager, Think Men* continue to permeate the workplace attitudes and contribute to the perpetuation of the glass ceiling barriers for women in male-dominated environments. Further to that, organisational barriers such as the old boys network, informal networking, managers perceptions, and lack of standardised succession planning and performance management processes further extenuate the persistence of the glass ceiling. This further amplifies the need to have an integrated approach which formalises open policies and structure processes for women to succeed in their career aspirations.

6.2 Discussion of Findings for Research Question Two

Question 2: What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?

The second research question sought to ascertain what strategies the participants' employed to overcome the glass ceiling. The secondary aim of research question two was understand if there is benefit in having women in top management positions, from the perspective of the participants. The findings provided were compared to the literature review and further adds to the ongoing discussion concerning women in top managerial positions in the manufacturing sector.

6.2.1 Strategies to Overcome the Glass Ceiling

It has been determined through research that in order organisations to be successful in overcoming the glass ceiling, they are required to establish and strengthen comprehensive strategies that deal with the barriers.

6.2.1.1 Mentorship and Sponsorship

The literature review suggested that mentorship and sponsorship relationships could be the key to unlocking barriers to career progression for women (Cohen et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2022b; Knippen et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2022; A. N. Smith et al., 2019; M. Smith & Bititci, 2017). The research findings highlighted the importance of seeking mentorship opportunities as part of their strategies to overcome the glass ceiling. The research also indicated that to find a mentor or sponsor is not easy and therefore most of the participants are still in the process of finding and identifying potential mentors or sponsors. The literature review further pointed to the ease of finding mentors for white men due to the high proportion of white men in top management positions (Phillipes et al., 2022) and the homophily principle (Ertug et al., 2022; Kossinets & Watts, 2009). The research results align well with the literature review about the portrayal of upper management and the challenges women face in securing mentors or sponsors. This illustrates that organisations have to ensure an equitable allocation of resources among those with career progression aspirations and formalise their sponsorship and mentoring programmes.

6.2.1.2 Networking

The findings indicate that the participants do not have the right avenues for networking in the workplace, for instance, one of the participants highlighted that informal networking events are usually after hours which prohibits them from attending due to them having family obligations at home. This is consistent with the literature review which highlighted that men stand to benefit more from informal network interactions (Choi, 2019; Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2023) or from the perceived continued existence of the *old boys' club* (Bell & Nkomo, 2021; Bertrand et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2017; Zattoni et al., 2023). This can be circumvented through formalised networking events and gender quota policies which ensure the inclusion of women in top management positions (Bertrand et al., 2019; Cullen & Perex-Truglia, 2023).

6.2.1.3 Family-Friendly Policies

The findings suggest more family-friendly policies are required for ease of flexibility. The literature review highlights that policies can boost the work-life balance of individuals, and at the same time align to the generally accepted customs of society (Dryburgh, 1999; Franke et al., 1997; Manzi & Heilman, 2021).

6.2.1.4 Succession planning and Performance Management

Research suggests that organisations can make progress in enabling more women achieve managerial positions and break the glass ceiling through implementing succession planning initiatives that include training for leadership and decision-makers to recognise and address unconscious biases in competence and capability assessments, performance assessments, and promotion decisions (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2023; Kim & Beehr, 2017). The findings revealed that many of the performance evaluations that take place were not formalized and therefore did not happen regularly, and if they were they did not follow a systemic process. Therefore the participants did not see value in them. The findings revealed the need for feedback and guidance from managers is required in affirming the career progression of the participants. The literature review indicated that women depend on their managers for guidance during performance management meetings (Kim & Beehr, 2017). This confirms the assertions made by Sherf et al. (2017), that succession planning and performance management practices are key to ensuring there is representation of women in top management positions. This is important in highlighting that there is a gap in performance management systems which should be used in aiding women in their career progress.

6.2.1.5 Representation of Women in Top Management positions

The literature review highlighted that having more women in top management positions is not an indication of organisations that have overcome the glass ceiling (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). The finding also indicates that indeed to overcome the glass ceiling, organisations have to move away from having too few women in top management. This is consistent with the literature review which indicates that for women in top management to make meaningful changes in strategic decisions they will need to be represented in numbers. Bertrand (2018) however, contends that there is no evidence to indicate that addressing the underrepresentation of women in top management positions such as in board memberships dismantles the glass ceiling. The author contends as well that there is not enough evidence in this

research to make that assertion. Especially from a manufacturing perspective.

6.2.1.6 Self Improvement

When asked if about the strategies they have employed to overcome the glass ceiling, many of the participants highlighted that they are yet to overcome it, however they consistently working on themselves ready themselves for future promotions. Kim and Bheer (2017) confirm that individuals have to work on themselves parallel to organisational processes that initiated to assist women on their career aspirations. The results of the study also indicated that the respondents acknowledged the need to improve their confidence and become more outspoken in order to avoid being relegated to the background. Some participants noted that exhibiting the same level of toughness and confidence as their male counterparts was met with disapproval from their teams. Research shows that women are often expected to be more vocal and confident in their contributions (Shinbrot et al., 2019), yet they may incur penalties for being perceived as too confident (Cohen et al., 2020; Esser et al., 2018; Warne et al., 2022).

6.2.1.7 Education

The research findings indicated that most of the participants graduated from STEM-related fields. Which is consistent with the assertions made in chapter one of the research. The findings also revealed that a number of the participants had furthered their studies with many of the having completed their Master's in Business Administration degree or in the process of completing it. Some of participants highlighted that they were studying to better prepare themselves for future roles and to give themselves a competitive edge. The finding was also consistent with the literature review, which stated that advancing women's studies can assist in career progression over (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; UN, 2022b). Contrary to this, Bertrand (2018) argues that although women have exceeded men in education, they were not pursuing degrees which are meant to assist them in their career aspirations. The findings however found this not to be true. The research finding further highlight that even with the highest degrees, women still face barriers to achieve their career aspirations.

6.2.2 Summary of Discussion of Findings of Research Question two

Organisations have a long way in overcoming the barriers which hinder women from progressing into top management positions. This is due in part because of the multifaceted barriers that continue to persist and disguise themselves in a myriad of ways. However, when organisations collaborate with employees, it has the potential to foster a more diverse working environment, and this further gives hope to women that there are opportunities in organisations to progress in their careers. Relooking at the current old and inapplicable policies and generating new ones can be a step in overcoming these barriers. This is because many of the strategies that were suggested both from the literature review and from the research findings require standardised policies that are live and that organisations can use to hold their teams accountable on.

7. Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

Africa is one of the fastest growing continents in the world. It has the youngest population and the biggest opportunity to grow, both from an agricultural and industrial point of view (Stats SA, 2019). South Africa is the second biggest economy in Africa and has the biggest manufacturing industry in Africa. However it is still plagued with poverty and high unemployment rates (UN, 2022). A country with a good manufacturing value added is said to be able to improve the GDP, therefore it is imperative for South Africa to continue to invest in the manufacturing sector and to ensure that it is able to expand its footprint in the rest of the country (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). Currently Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal are the most densely populated from a manufacturing industry standpoint. The consistent growth and expansion of the manufacturing industry will require a new set of ideas, different views and leaders who are going to challenge the status quo in the global industry (Mnguni & Simbanegavi, 2020). As it stands however, the industry is still very male dominated from blue collar all the way to white collar level. The picture is even more dire in the C-suite of many of the manufacturing industries, with white men predominantly occupying the top management positions. South Africa has a population of about 62 million people, 51,5% of that population is women. The manufacturing industry contributes 13% towards the GDP of South Africa, which is quite a significant amount (BWASA, 2021).

The manufacturing industry is considered to recruit mainly STEM graduates, largely in the engineering sector. South Africa has a unique situation in that most of the STEM graduate's population are women, however the profession field does not reflect it, both from an engineering accreditation point of view and from a representative point of view in top management positions (CHE, 2023; ECSA 2022). The question therefore remains, why is the manufacturing industry unable to attract more women into the industry and when they are in the system why are they not able to retain or promote them into top management positions. The glass ceiling as many researchers have opined, continues to persist in many industries and could be the reason that women are unable to break through into top management positions. Equitable gender representation and parity is required in the manufacturing sector if organisations seek to not only fulfil a South African constitutional mandate and a sustainable goals mandate, but to ensure diverse

thinking and continuous growth in the manufacturing sector is maintained. In trying to understand the barriers that hinder women from progressing in their careers, the research sought to understand what perceived experiences of the glass ceiling barriers did the participants get exposed to and what strategies were implemented to overcome these barriers.

7.1 Summary of Research Question Findings

7.1.1 What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?

The findings highlight that gender biases and stereotypes continue to exist in the manufacturing industry as is consistent with the literature review. The *Think Manager, Think Male* stereotype is prevalent in the expectations of the leadership characteristics in the manufacturing sector (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). However, the findings highlight that women are held to different standards for leadership, for instance, women are penalised for exhibiting traditional masculine traits of leadership, since they're expected to display the attributed traditional female traits which are not associated with leadership.

Marriage and family obligations were also highlighted as perceived barriers in the manufacturing sector, with some participants highlighting that they have held back on both marriage and starting a family as it might have held them from progressing to their current levels of management. The findings also revealed that the women who are married or have children also find it difficult to navigate their responsibilities at home with the requirements of a 24/7 work schedule as required by the long working hours in the manufacturing sector. This is consistent with research which highlights that due to societal role expectations, women still have to exert more effort in their marriage and family obligations while still showing to compete at the same footing as men. On the other hand men benefit from being married, and are compensated even higher for it. The findings also highlighted that women are unable to participate in networking opportunities because they usually occur after hours which becomes a work and family conflict situation.

The homophily principle states that individuals gravitate towards people who look like them, and because of this men tend to benefit more from a mentorship and sponsorship relationship, since the top management consists predominantly of men

(Ertug et al., 2022). Women are unable to participate in the networking activities and therefore unable to build on their social capital which can be used to assist in career progression. The findings reveal that the *old boys' club* is still prevalent in the manufacturing sector, however it is not something which is addressed in the open. Organisations can benefit from formalizing mentorship and sponsorship relationships, and adding neutral networking platforms that will enable all genders to participate fairly and be given an opportunity to build on the career aspirations.

South Africa's apartheid past has had major implications in terms of gender and racial representation in top management positions in many organisations, and the manufacturing sector is not immune to this reality. White men still predominantly hold the top management positions. The findings reveal that many of the participants do not believe that the industry has room for black, young women, and it is represented by the current leadership which does not have black women in strategic leadership positions.

The findings also reveal that women often have the burden of having to prove their competence and capability, as a result of their male counterparts assuming that they were simply appointed as a token of diversity or because of gender quota requirements. The findings also reveal that many of the participants held an MBA degree, above the engineering degrees, and at many of the organisations, they were the most qualified individual among their peers, yet their competence was always at question. Therefore, the participants are always prepared in meetings and they have their facts checked to ensure that they are able to speak out and stand up for themselves in meetings. This is consistent with research which highlights that women are usually more educated than men but however do not hold decision making positions and are often questioned due to the assumption of not being hired on merit. This further points to the need to not only have open recruitment processes but to also further educate men on their unconscious biases which can further hinder women from progressing their careers.

One of the other barriers which was revealed in the research, was that of managers not adequately supporting women in their career aspirations. Manager's bias perceptions continue to prevail in the manufacturing sector, with many of the participants highlighting that they have not had genuine interactions with their managers that were built on career discussions or succession planning for future

roles. Instead performance discussions were mainly “tick box” exercises that were captured on the system for compliance. On the other hand, one of the participants highlighted that they had a great experience with their manager who was a woman, who enabled them to explore their career aspirations and were exposed to various aspects of the business to further grow their knowledge within the sector. The findings also indicated that their company was different because it mainly had women in top management positions and in positions that are traditionally held by men. Future research should consider a case study on this company to verify the validity of this anecdotal experience, and see what other manufacturing organisations can learn from this.

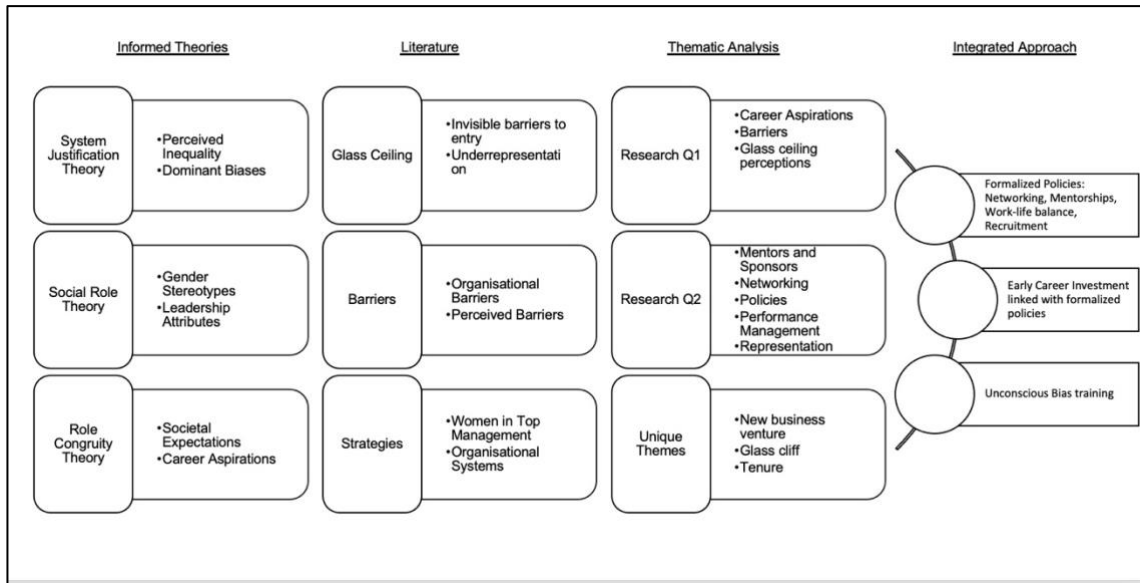
7.1.2 What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?

In trying to understand the strategies that the women employ to overcome the glass ceiling the author sought to first understand if the glass ceiling concept was understood by the participants. The findings indicate that there is a common understanding of what the glass ceiling concept is, with many of the participants explaining the glass ceiling as the “invisible barrier” that exists within their organisations and in organisations that they previously worked in. Owing to this invisible barrier, the participants found themselves in situations where they were unable to progress beyond a certain point in their careers. Many of the participants highlighting that certain managerial roles seem to be reserved for certain types of individuals. The literature review likewise, point out to the glass ceiling being a persistent barrier to the career progression of women. Amplified by the barriers highlighted in the findings of research question 1. It is therefore imperative for organisations to find a solve for this phenomenon especially if organisations are looking for growth and expansion within the industry.

From an organisational perspective, formalized system needs to be in place to ensure gender biases and stereotypes are routed out of the recruitment and promotional processes. An open recruitment process guided by organisational policies should be implemented and unconscious bias trainings should be rolled out to managers to ensure fair processes are followed. Organisational policies need to be refreshed, with the collaboration of both men and women incorporating their ideas into the final decision making processes. The literature review shows that

men do not actively participate in gender bias or gender stereotype eradication initiatives since they do not think it affects them directly, yet they have to be part of the solutions of overcoming the barriers that consistent allow the existence of the glass ceiling concept to exist.

An integrated approach should be considered using the conceptual framework below:



7.2 Contributions and implications for Management

The research seeks to make contribution to the growing academic knowledge of the glass ceiling concept in the larger developing and African nations. Specifically focusing on the South African manufacturing sector which is one of the highest contributors to the national GDP. This important as South Africa aims to grow the economy in an effort to solve for one of the highest unemployment rates in the world. In utilising the conceptual model developed in figure ## organisations will be able to better understand the insights which were gathered and may permeate in their structures and therefore have implications for overcoming the glass ceiling.

7.3 Research Limitations

The research was time-constrained because the researcher had to accommodate participant availability primarily in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, where the majority

of South Africa's manufacturing industries are located. The target demographic comprised women occupying middle and senior managerial roles, with a particular concentration in the manufacturing sector. Online and in-person where permissible, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants in accordance with their availability.

7.4 Future Research Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research a number of possible future research studies are proposed below:

- a) Perceptions of the glass ceiling from the perspective of men
- b) Manager's perception work-family conflict on women
- c) The effect of gender and racial quotas on the employees
- d) Work-life balance and entrepreneurship as a solution

7.5 Conclusions

While progress in women entering the manufacturing sector has been made, the industry still remains largely male dominated. The picture is even worse when you look at the c-suite top management levels which is still largely white male dominated. Women in the manufacturing industry in South Africa still are underrepresented at all levels of management. The findings indicate that many of the women are still the first generation of female managers within the sector. The primary purpose of this study was to understand how the lack of representation in top management positions in the manufacturing sector is perceived and identify the barriers that hinder women from progressing in their careers. Furthermore the research aimed to understand the perception of the glass ceiling concept in the south African manufacturing context and therefore contribute to the growing academic literature on the subject. To understand the perceptions of the glass ceiling barriers, the author used role congruity, social role and the system justification theories of the glass ceiling.

The findings indicate that biases and gender stereotypes as posed by the social role and role congruity theories do impact the career progression of women in the manufacturing sector. The findings further show that various organisational barriers as modelled by the system justification theory continue to also affect women's career progression in the manufacturing sector. The research further displays the

perceptions of women in the manufacturing sector on the glass ceiling concept. The author proposes a conceptual model for organisations to navigate the barriers that affect women, and therefore implement some integrated approaches in circumventing these barriers.

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Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix

Table 6 Consistency Matrix

Research questions	Section in literature review	Data collection tools	Analysis technique
What approaches do women practice to overcome perceived glass ceiling concepts in manufacturing?	2.1 and 2.2	Interview guide (face to face interviews)	Atlas.ti
What barriers have you experienced that may hinder career progression to management positions?	2.1, 2.2	Interview guide (face to face interviews)	Atlas.ti

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Target Population

The researcher intends to interview women in middle management positions, including production managers, operations managers, department heads, and plant managers in manufacturing. The researcher intends to provide an overview of the research project and elaborate on how it seeks to comprehend the understudied experience of the glass ceiling effect in the South African manufacturing industry. Depending on the availability of the interviewee, in-person and online meetings will be utilised for the interviews. Further, these interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis in the research paper. The following interview questions will serve as a foundation for gaining a deeper understanding of the localised problem definition.

Interview Schedule

1. What position do you currently occupy and how long have you been in that role?
2. What level of management is this role? (question added after interview 4)
3. What other roles have you occupied in the manufacturing industry?
4. How many years of experience do you have in the manufacturing industry?
5. Have you worked for the other companies before, if yes why did you leave?
6. What are your career aspirations?
7. What barriers have you faced in reaching your career aspirations? What are these barriers?
8. What are some reasons that other women have for not been pursuing senior Management roles?
9. What organisational or cultural issues make it hard for you to advance in your career?
10. What do you understand by the phrase “glass ceiling”? and have you encountered it before?
11. What observations have you made about the glass ceiling in relation to yourself or other female middle managers? In what form?
12. What strategies have you employed to counteract the glass ceiling?
13. How can your manager better support you career aspirations?

14. Have you left a role in an organisation due to challenges in advancing to the next role? If yes, what were the challenges?
15. What trainings have you been in to help develop you into the next role or future roles?
16. Can you think of any other barriers that are in place that prevent you from progressing in your career?
17. What benefits do you think senior women bring to organizations today?
18. Are performance discussions formalised and focus on your career growth and path? If yes can you expand on the structure

Appendix 3: List of Codes

Table 7: List of Code Groups

Code	Size	Comment
24/7	5	2024/02/05, 16:40, merged with Working Hours
Accommodate	4	
Act like a man	19	
Age	26	
AI	2	
Anomaly	7	
Appearance	9	
Aspirations	31	
Authenticity	23	
Barriers	32	
Behaviours	43	2024/02/07, 18:28, merged with Adjust behaviour and personality 2024/02/07, 18:28, merged with Aggressive/Abrasive
Being a woman	13	
Bias	36	
Boys club	21	
C suite/Top Management	21	
Care	18	
Challenged	2	
Children	45	
Comfort	4	
communication	7	
Community/Philanthropy	9	
Compare	4	
Competence/Capability	39	

Coping mechanism	1	
Culture	36	
Current roles	3	
Decision making	11	
Development	6	
Difficulty	6	
Diversity and Inclusion	28	
Education	8	
Emotional	7	
Emotional Intelligence	12	
Environment	6	
Equal pay/benefits	16	
Equal/Fair	14	
Ergonomics	4	
Expectations	19	
Family	35	
Feedback	6	
Frustration	7	
Gender	22	
Glass ceiling	54	
Glass cliff	3	
Government	2	
Health	4	
Integrity	7	
Jealous	1	
Job Satisfaction	2	
Judge	5	
Language	4	
Limitations	23	
Loyal	3	
Luck	2	
Making a difference	3	
Manager	75	2024/02/07, 20:25, merged with Leadership

Manufacturing	14	
Marginalisation	3	
Marriage	6	
MBA	9	
Men	42	
Mental health	9	
Mentor/Sponsor	24	
Misogynist	1	
Money Driven	4	
Networking	10	
Nicknames	3	
No women	5	
Only woman	14	
Opportunity	32	
Organisation	49	
Own business	6	
Perceptions	25	
Performance management	43	
Policy	6	
Politics	7	
Practical advise for next role not shared	1	
Priority	5	
Promotion	42	
Race	109	
Recognition	18	
Recruitment	8	
Representation	31	
Resigning/Retain	47	
Respect	4	
Sabotage	2	
Same position	7	
Seat at the table	9	

Self-Awareness	21	
Social roles	22	
Soft skills	9	
Speak up	20	
Stereotypes	21	
Strategic	18	
Strategies	67	
Struggle	7	
Succession	14	
Support	11	
Support roles	11	
Sustainability	5	
Talent	1	
Tick box Exercise	3	
Tokenism	20	
Training/Education	6	
Trust	8	
Understanding	14	
Value adding	6	
Women	38	
Women in senior management	46	
Women's day	3	
Work twice as hard	10	
Work-Life Balance	43	
Years of experience	19	