

**Intrinsic motivation in women's leadership advancement- *exploring the
Lesotho's private sector***

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ABSTRACT

There is a persistent gap in women's representation in leadership roles in the private sector of Lesotho, despite the level of educational attainment and demonstrated competence, which reduces leadership diversity, limiting high performance, innovation and engagement. This study explores how Self-Determination Theory (SDT), explains the influence of intrinsic motivation on women's leadership advancement. The study adopted a qualitative interpretivist design. The data were collected from 17 purposively selected women, occupying multi-level managerial positions across six industries, via semi-structured interviews, and were analysed thematically to identify, interpret and synthesise the findings.

The study found that intrinsic motivation drives women's leadership advancement and aspirations while sustaining persistence where organisational support is limited. It further revealed how women utilise intrinsic motivation to circumvent systemic barriers, acknowledging the significant influence of organisational dynamics to its sustainability, which either supports or suppresses it. Taken together, this set of findings highlights that intrinsic motivation is a potent yet fragile resource, this means that a culture of organisation needs to promote psychological safety as a strategy to retain human talent. Theoretically, the study extends SDT by proposing the cycle of the self-determined growth model, which enhances the static existing theory with evolving organisational and interpersonal contexts.

KEYWORDS

Intrinsic motivation, Women's leadership advancement, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Gender equity, Internal psychological drivers

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.

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1. CHAPTER 1: Research Problem and Purpose

1.1. Introduction

Leadership is not something one attains, but a process that is marked by purpose, tenacity, and intrinsic motivation, making a lasting impact (Yu et al., 2022). Though the literacy rate in Lesotho is high, women are underrepresented in leadership positions in the private sector, making it a great need to uncover influences impacting the integration of competency with representation in leadership positions (UNDP, n.d.). Though various studies had thoroughly investigated the external influences upon women in leadership positions, the internal factors had been given little prominence, hence, this study investigates intrinsic motivation based upon Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020).

Coming from a corporate point of view, underleveraging talented and capable women results in reduced innovation, better decision-making, and overall competitiveness of the organisation (Khushk et al., 2023). Hence, the importance of understanding the concept of intrinsic motivation becomes prevalent in respect to businesses that aim to develop a leadership development framework that retains high potential women and improves overall corporate performance as per the analogy proposed by Kiefner et al. (2022). This also assists in producing relevant perspectives that help in shaping equal leadership development platforms in the context of Lesotho.

As stated by Worthy et al. (2024), the experience of Margaret Thatcher in leadership illustrated that women can lead in the presence of blockers if they are intrinsically motivated, this forming the purpose of this study that sought to evaluate how this weakness can be utilised as a strength in igniting women in the private sector of Lesotho to succeed in the quest of having leadership ambitions. Women across the world continue to face difficulties in ascending to positions of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2018). With this, history is therefore revealing that intrinsic motivation is the core motivating factor for women to aspire to lead, to inspire others, and leave a lasting impact; therefore, a powerful attribute that influences the mindset of women on the leadership process (Xue et al., 2022). It further reveals the psychological enablers of women's leadership aspirations, which uncovered the inner drivers that push women to lead and succeed despite the lack of structural support (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

1.2. Background of the Study

Women's leadership is a global key mandate; however, it is estimated that it will take at least 140 years for women to achieve equal representation in positions of power and leadership against the agenda 2030 target (United Nations, 2023). This emphasises that the advancement of women into leadership roles remains a global challenge, thus highlighting a persistent gap in gender equity. Although the progress is slow, some countries have implemented gender parity goals, quotas, and targeted leadership development programs in line with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), creating a good benchmark to understand women's leadership and their intrinsic motivation (Gardiner et al., 2023). Norway, France, Germany, and Spain are examples of countries with mandatory quotas requiring women's representation on the boards of public and listed companies (Kiefner et al., 2022). Despite such efforts to ensure gender equity through women leadership programs and trainings in Lesotho, they may not be beneficial if they are not focused to address the root of the problem hence the need for this research.

In the African region, there has been an uneven progress on gender parity in leadership. A lot of progress has been done in political leadership by countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya, while a minimal amount of progress has been done in corporate leadership, which is characterized by gender dominance with continued struggles in the implementation process (United Nations, 2023; Grant Thornton SA, 2025; Shariff, 2025). This is also observed in the instance of Lesotho, where despite the introduction of gender quotas in local government elections, the private sector is showing minimal progress, where male dominance in leadership positions is evident with women dominating in technological positions (UNDP, n.d.; Schultheiss, 2021; Naidoo et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the issue of bridging this gap is not only a concern of what hinders women in leadership positions but also what drives women in leading towards those positions despite the barriers, which is what is specifically being investigated in this particular study (García-Sánchez et al., 2023).

1.3. Problem Statement

While there has been global attention given to the gaps in female leadership, focus has mainly been on external factors, overlooking the impact of internal drivers. This can partially address the research gap since this study will be addressing the

psychological motivations of women in leadership in a scenario where the structural support is not in place (Gander et al., 2025). It is observed that the private sector in the Lesotho kingdom is full of well-educated, professionally competent women, but culturally they lack leads over male counterparts (Naidoo et al., 2024). Women in this nation are more literate (88.29%) in comparison to male counterparts (70.07%); however, only 28% of women hold parliament seats, including 20% of women in the parliament seats in the form of a cabinet in Lesotho, reflecting a common scenario in the private sector (UNDP, n.d.). This context reveals an inconsistency between women's educational attainment and leadership representation, motivating a need to explore this research.

The gap between women's literacy and private sector leadership is paradoxical. While in the cases of Rwanda and South Africa, programs of leadership development and gender quota have been used to bridge the gap in the representation of women, Lesotho's private sector is dominantly male (Gierke et al., 2025). Low leadership representation is considered a waste of skilled human capital, a structural and psychological barrier, which reveals that organisations are not maximising opportunities that enhance business performance and innovation (Ciappei et al., 2023). This slight variation implies that women rely on intrinsic drive to sustain their ambitions; hence, this study focuses on the intrinsic motivators of women's leadership ambition and responds to the concern of why they persist in being educated if they are not motivated to lead (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This paradox highlights the fact that we need to question the intrinsic motivators for women to step into leadership despite a hostile environment, which is the first step to framing the leadership gap and finding valuable, actionable solutions.

While external interventions, such as quotas and female leadership training programs, have taken concrete steps toward gender equity, they do not address the internal, psychological process of desiring leadership (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This explains why SDT is important to understand drivers that help women persist on leadership journeys with almost no structural support. Margaret Thatcher demonstrated passion and self-belief, autonomy and competence that reflect intrinsic motivation when she paved her way through male dominated political space inspiring the core of this study. Freudling (2020) further reasserts the need to not just remove the structural barriers but also sustain the internal driver to create sustainable gender equity in leadership. This emphasises the importance of not just removing the

external barriers but also cultivating the internal driver to ensure sustainable gender equity in leadership.

Despite the systemic resistance, it remains a mystery what sustains the women's leadership drive, and this disconnect with the inner and outer driver attests to career stagnation, burnout and uncertainty (Naidoo et al., 2024). Fischer et al. (2019) argue that failure to recognise and harness intrinsic motivation in women results in discouraging their engagement, performance, and innovation, which would be promoted by diverse leadership. This further poses a risk of losing high-potential female talent in decision-making roles and not reinforcing gender equality in the workplace (Eagly & Carli, 2018). While most of the studies focused on the effect of more salient extrinsic factors, it is important to understand the effect of intrinsic motivation on female leadership aspirations and how these two interact with external barriers (Ahmad et al., 2025). By not addressing this gap, organisational and national gender-equity goals are unachievable, leaving intrinsic motivation as the missing link in women's leadership advancement.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to respond to the overarching research question: ***How does intrinsic motivation influence women's advancement into leadership roles within Lesotho's private sector?*** The study examines how autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence women's leadership aspirations in Lesotho's private sector, identifies the organisational conditions that enable or inhibit motivation to aspire to lead, and derives implications for HR practice and gender equity policy; A gap highlighted by Morkevičiūtė, and Endriulaitienė (2020)

The prime focus of this study is to examine how intrinsic motivation helps women advance in leadership within the Lesotho's private sector by understanding how psychological needs help women aspire and persist in their leadership journey. The gap is visible in Lesotho through observation and reports, conversely, Ahmad et al. (2025) found that, despite increased global efforts towards gender equity at workplace, intrinsic motivation driving women's leadership is missing, resulting in leadership development for women being underexplored, especially in developing countries contexts, influencing the need for this study.

The study supports talent retention for organisations through their HR offices, as it highlights the importance of nurturing autonomy, competence, and purpose in women leaders. Schultheiss (2021) suggested that actionable insights are required to aid people management practices and leadership development, which, when successful, will identify the intrinsic drivers that help women to lead, thus, enable organisations to design robust and effective leadership pipelines. Organisations that support women's motivation and engagement get greater innovation and competitiveness because women bring diverse idea creation and decision quality (Gierke et al., 2025).

At the policy level, the study explores how multiple identities impact women's ability to access leadership and enhance the intersectionality theory. It encourages organisations to evaluate their culture for hidden biases and helps in the creation of psychologically safe environments that promote inclusion, which provides evidence-based recommendations on how organisations balance strategies around addressing structural and psychological dimensions of leadership. It eventually offers a framework for policy reforms and changes that support resilience, intrinsically motivated women leaders, and encourage an inclusive and accountable leadership culture. Gander and Sharafizad (2025) advocated for systemic and policy-level changes to progress gender equity in leadership with attention to intersectional experiences proving the need for this study.

The SDT literature in underexplored African markets is underexplored and by focusing on internal drivers instead of external factors in the corporate space of Lesotho complements the motivation theories already established (Ahmad et al., 2025). This, therefore, opens for leadership theory extension by emphasising the role intrinsic motivation plays in helping women to navigate structural and societal barriers. The study aligns with the key literature emphasising the importance of empowering women advancing in leadership and encouraging motivation through supportive policies, as justified by Schultheiss (2021).

1.5. Scope of the Research

This research explored how intrinsic motivation enable women in the private sector of Lesotho to advance into leadership positions focusing on middle-to-senior management. It is conceptually anchored by SDT with intrinsic motivation as its primary construct. It excludes political and public sector leadership, the extrinsic

motivators, and longitudinal tracking of leadership progression, to maintain clarity and manageability. It is a qualitative design applying a semi-structured approach to obtain narrative data that captures authentic experiences in the realm of women in leadership in the private sector, as proposed by Rashid et al. (2019). This qualitative approach allows discussion that yields important information with respect to learnings, experiences, and internal motivations that lead to the identification of the psychological factors that inhibit leadership ambitions (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

1.6. Significance of the Study

From a managerial viewpoint, leadership diversity is increasingly regarded as a competitive advantage. Ely et al. (2011) noted that, organisations that create an inclusive and psychologically safe culture have higher innovation, higher engagement and higher resilience, confirmed by Grant Thornton SA (2025) report on women leadership. Understanding the levers by which women are intrinsically motivated as leaders, business leaders can capitalise on the return on investment in leadership development.

For corporate executives and HR practitioners, the findings provide evidence-based guidance for designing leadership pipeline and talent retention strategies that go beyond compliance to promote authentic inclusion and intrinsic engagement. By aligning the motivational enablers with the organisational strategy, companies can improve decision quality, innovation capability and overall performance in alignment with Khushk et al. (2023)'s viewpoint. In this vein, Gierke et al. (2025) argued that policymakers and HR practitioners require insights to formulate frameworks that support gender equity practices toward sustainability in productivity and national competitiveness in organisations which this study provides in Lesotho's private sector context.

Academically, the study contributes to a combination of SDT and leadership performance literature, especially within developing countries like in Lesotho, which also extends the understanding on how SDT dimensions function as internal drivers of women's leadership ambition, resilience and performance. In doing so, the study not only closes the theoretical gap in motivation and gender-leadership research but also delivers actionable knowledge for evidence-based management within the Lesotho's private sector and comparable economies. With this perspective, Lesotho is well placed to be a relevant and unique research setting for this study, where there

is high female literacy, but lower leadership representation derived from UNDP (n.d.). While the expectation would be that higher literacy correlates with higher leadership representation, Gander and Sharafizad (2025) noted that education alone does not guarantee leadership eligibility. Therefore, results of this study shed light on how HR practitioners and policymakers can design leadership development programs that psychologically empower women, thereby contributing to gender equity and talent retention in the private sector of Lesotho.

In conclusion, this study examines the role of intrinsic motivation in enhancing women's aspirations towards overcoming external constraints in the private sector in Lesotho. The implications of this particular study will benefit various individuals, including corporate executives, human resource personnel, as well as policymakers who, through the identification of psychological enablers that promote leadership aspiration, are able to develop effective strategies that not only comply with standards but promote inclusion in a genuine manner. Moreover, the innovation of a policy that is underpinned by the concept of intrinsic motivation enables a setting where women in particular, are not only encouraged to lead, but where they are also able to excel.

1.7. Structure of the Report

The report structure ensures alignment between the research problem, the literature review, the methodology, and the research questions. Chapter One lays the foundation for the research as it introduces the research context, problem statement, research objectives, scope and its significance. The literature review presented in Chapter Two provides key themes and theories on intrinsic motivation and women's leadership drawn from previous studies, highlighting the knowledge gaps that inform the research questions in Chapter Three, leading to a high-level discussion on how to address the gaps. Chapter Four presents the research design and methodology, that is, how the data were collected and what was done with the data to answer the research questions. Chapter Five presents the findings from the interviews with the sampled women. Subsequently, the interpretations and discussion of the findings in line with the literature and theory are presented in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven concludes the study and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

In summary, this study is conceptually grounded on the SDT, supported by

transformational and gendered leadership theories as a lens to explain the interplay of intrinsic motivation and organisational and societal barriers among women leaders. Overall, this Chapter is anchored on the research problem, objectives, and significance of the study, directing attention to the relationship between intrinsic motivation and women's leadership journey. The following Chapter reviews global and regional literature on women in leadership and SDT to position the study within existing academic debates and to identify the specific theoretical gaps this research seeks to close. Thus, the study positions intrinsic motivation as the psychological mechanism connecting women's aspirations to organisational systems.

2. CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1. Literature Review Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to identify existing knowledge and contextualise the research problem, identify theories and empirical insights aligning with the phenomenon, highlight the gaps that the current study seeks to address, and provide the importance of addressing those gaps (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The review was structured thematically, entailing multiple factors that affect women intrinsic motivation. The concepts highlighted in this study included intrinsic motivation, leadership advancement, and the Lesotho's private sector, which helped to establish the foundation for understanding how intrinsic motivation influences women's aspirations, choices, and success in leadership, as well as breaking the structural and cultural barriers that persist in the business environment.

According to Ryan & Deci (2020), intrinsic motivation refers to the internal drive an individual must perform the set tasks satisfactorily; the motive is inherent satisfaction and personal fulfilment, not because of the rewards or punishment. At its heart is the SDT, which significantly contributes to persistence, being creative, and instilling the drive to high performance at the workplace, characterised by three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022). Leadership advancement, taken as a key construct in this study, focuses on women's upward mobility in the corporate ladder to reach the top position, which involves the processes, opportunities, and challenges associated with positions of power, responsibility, and influence (Khan et al., 2022). The private sector includes businesses and organisations that are privately owned and are meant to generate profit, they are not part of the government or public services. The private sector in most developing countries, like Lesotho, plays a critical role in driving economic growth and employment, thus serving as the critical context to understand the gender dynamics in leadership (United Nations, 2023).

2.2. Global Perspectives on Women in Leadership

Kapoor et al. (2021) highlighted that while women are gradually making initial progress in entering the managerial pipeline, there is a significant gap in women's upward internal mobility to advance into executive decision-making seat. This section critically reviewed the historical evolution of leadership metaphors, current

debates on representation and empowerment, and regional contrasts, such as those between Western and African contexts, to situate Lesotho's private sector within the broader global context (Gierke et al., 2025). More importantly, it introduced SDT in order to explore the interplay of intrinsic motivation within these global dynamics.

2.2.1. Historical Evolution of Leadership Metaphors and Barriers

Eagly and Karau (2002) adopted the concept of tokenism, which showed how women in male-dominated organisations are often treated as symbolic representatives rather than valued experts. The framing shifted from individual deficits to organisational structures with the reproduction of inequality. The concept of tokenism remains relevant today in contexts where there is a massive influx of women with limited influence in organisations' decision-making platforms (Ahmad et al., 2025). This affects women's sense of relatedness, the third dimension of SDT.

Subsequent metaphors, such as the glass ceiling and the pipeline problem, explained why women do not advance in numbers to top leadership positions despite their necessary qualifications (Kapoor et al., 2021). While on it, Kark and Buengeler (2024) argued that while these metaphors led to policy changes, they somehow overemphasise the supply side and underplay the psychological fallout of continually being excluded thus neglect emotional depletion.

There are further arguments that the glass ceiling no longer exists and that symbolic inclusion of women in leadership roles creates a false sense of progress, yet the decision-making power remains male-dominated (Ciappei et al., 2023). This indicates that women experience invisible barriers that erode their sense of competence and autonomy, leading to career disengagement or stagnation, proving that the pipeline problem focuses on the numbers of women in managerial succession with limited attention given to the psychological drivers that sustain their motivation.

Eagly and Carli (2018) responded to the inadequacy of the metaphors with the labyrinth metaphor, proposing that the nature of women's leadership journeys is a non-linear, obstacle-laden path. Furtado and Henriques (2025) agreed that this is a perfect metaphor to SDT dimensions as it rests on internal psychological agents of action, because women who emerge successful in the labyrinth situation are successful not because of external rewards but due to a sense of purpose and a

belief in their ability to thrive, the two main components of intrinsic motivation.

2.2.2. Recent Debates on Representation vs. Substantive Empowerment

Recent debates also shifted from the number of representations to substantive empowerment of women leaders, where Ibarra et al. (2013) proposed to move from asking how many women are in leadership roles to whether they can influence and transform environments through their leadership. This is called the representation vs. empowerment paradox, where the challenge is that women's representation in leadership positions could be considered tokenism as well as a means of encouraging male-dominated leadership positions. Establishing quotas seems to be effective in terms of quantity, but there seems to be a challenge in determining if women are effectively empowered as a result of these quotas. As identified by Gander & Sharafizad (2025), eliminating tokenism is only possible if these quota systems are backed by a cultural transformation in terms of values of autonomy and compliance.

Eagly and Karau (2002) demonstrated that women appointed to positions via quotas are perceived as less legitimate leaders due to societal expectations about gender roles, as explained by Role Congruity Theory, and hence undermine women's autonomy and sense of competence. However, Gierke et al. (2025) argued that the quota may create a cultural shift, and converting quota-based entry points into long-term empowerment opens spaces previously closed for women, allowing intrinsic motivation to evolve.

In Africa, however, the picture is a little more mixed; Rwanda has, in recent years, brought high numbers of women into political power through a constitutional quota system, whereas South Africa and Kenya have achieved gender equality through deliberate reforms (UNDP n.d.; Shariff, 2025; Grant Thornton SA, 2025). Conversely, women are systemically excluded from leadership in the private sector because of social and cultural expectations and due to a lack of mentors (Naidoo et al., 2024). This highlights challenges in the adequacy of structural intervention in the absence of addressing internal psychological drivers of women's leadership ambition.

2.2.3. Gendered Norms of Leadership and the Double Bind

Leadership is considered as masculine in many societies, placing women in a double

bind where assertiveness is labelled unfeminine and empathy as being weak (Ely et al., 2011). These contradictions have an impact on women's sense of competence and relatedness, and the tenacity of intrinsic motivation in hostile environments is difficult to sustain as highlighted by Kark and Buengeler (2024). From an SDT point of view, any context that fails to support psychological needs discourages sustained motivation. On the contrary, Yu et al. (2022) argued that women need to nurture internal resilience and position leadership styles to align with their values in order to succeed in these types of environments, instead of conforming to external expectations. This justified the need to build organisational climates that value alternative expressions of leadership and support psychological empowerment because diversity is proved to lead better decision making and improved financial performance.

2.2.4. Regional Reflections: Nordic and Sub-Saharan African Contexts

African feminist scholarship calls attention to the intersection of gender, culture and colonial legacies in women's leadership trajectories and reviews challenges women face in leadership (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Naidoo et al. (2024) identified that structures continue to be seen through the lens of patriarchy and women's ambitions continue to be contested. However, African women have been able to navigate structural constraints to show their prowess as resourceful beings (Kiefner et al., 2022). In Lesotho, it is demonstrated that disconnection between literacy levels and leadership representation remains, raising questions on the internal drivers of leadership ambition for women (UNDP n.d).

On the contrary, structural barriers are slowly being dismantled but women continue to struggle to attain leadership roles, a challenge that can be solved by strong internal drivers of leadership ambition, including, personal purpose, serving the community, and self-belief (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Therefore, this suggests that understanding intrinsic drivers of ambition is an important consideration for building more women-friendly leadership development programs that go beyond quotas and compliance.

2.2.5. Reframing the Global Lens through SDT

Global lenses locate women's leadership barriers within structural, cultural, and psychological contexts. While the studies highlight the structural and cultural barriers at length, they fail to recognise individual motivational forces driving women's persistence (Eagly, 2018). Incorporating SDT into the conversation around women's

leadership moves the discussion from leadership as a structural and cultural challenge to a psychological one, centred on autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This global view sets the stage for a closer look at the Lesotho's private sector, where women's leadership is a journey resisted by the environment but driven by the internal motivators. The following theoretical foundations explore how global perspectives around women's leadership translate to the regional context, and how that intrinsic motivation might be leveraged for women's leadership.

2.3. Theoretical Foundations

The purpose of the theories and frameworks applied in this study helped to understand the psychological and contextual dynamics influencing women in their leadership advancement. Motivational and leadership theories selected assist with the understanding the relationship between intrinsic motivation, organisational structures, cultural expectations and leadership pathways for women in the private sector in Lesotho. The theories underpinning this study include SDT, a core lens for understanding intrinsic motivation in women's leadership advancement, motivational theories supporting the SDT, and leadership theories with gendered perspectives.

2.3.1. A Framework to Understand Women's Leadership Motivation

SDT is one of the most well-documented and empirically supported theories to explain human motivation in organisational and leadership contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2020). SDT identifies intrinsic motivation or motivation driven by internal satisfaction and rewards, and extrinsic motivation, or motivation driven by external rewards and pressures. Intrinsic motivation is realised when three universal psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy (feeling of volition and self-direction), competence (feeling of effectiveness), and relatedness (feeling of connection and belonging) (Freudling, 2020). This framework was helpful to understand what sustains women in leadership roles, especially in an environment such as Lesotho's private sector, where structural supports may be lacking and internal motivation may be the primary sustaining factor.

SDT is also well fitted to the leadership context since it explains from where and why people make active choices about being a leader and how leaders persist in leadership in the face of low structural support. Badura et al. (2020) indicated that intrinsic motivation is a distal predictor of continuing leadership behaviour when

contextual support is low. Likewise, Fischer et al. (2019) found intrinsic motivation to positively affect creativity and problem-solving which are vital skills of leadership. Correspondingly, Xue et al. (2022) recognised how relevant SDT is in navigating the issues around women leadership advancement, by illustrating the need for intrinsic motivation as the strongest predictor of leadership outcomes in diverse organisational settings. These studies therefore present SDT's applicability as an explanatory theory of leadership effectiveness, making it a relevant theory to study the extent to which women in Lesotho's private sector seek leadership roles in the face of limited structural support.

From a gendered perspective, SDT is argued to fit as an explanation for how women pursue leadership in male-dominated contexts since they do not have access to extrinsic motivators like sponsorship, promotion, or equal pay, which SDT says can be substituted by intrinsic motivators (Schultheiss, 2021). which SDT argues can be replaced by intrinsic motivators. Because leadership is often normatively gendered as masculine, women may rely more heavily on intrinsic motives to maintain their ambition and resilience (Eagly & Carli, 2018). Morkevičiūtė and Endriulaitienė (2020) argue that transformational leadership behaviours, which focus on empowerment, vision, and relational development, are positively associated with female employees' motivation and correspond strongly with SDT's psychological needs. These leadership behaviours positively impact female motivation. This indicates that SDT is not just theoretical, but is aligned with female leadership experience and help explain how women endure and thrive in exclusionary environments.

However, Kark and Buengeler (2024) provided a different perspective which criticises the SDT with an argument that it overemphasises women's agency and underplays the structural limits that impact women in leadership. On the contrary, Paustian-Underdahl et al (2014) confirmed that women are as effective as men in leadership though they receive lower evaluations due to bias. This demonstrated that in male-dominated corporate hierarchies, autonomy may be stifled by rigid norms, competence maybe undervalued, and exclusive networks may undermine relatedness (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022). This critique requires a focus not just on whether women are intrinsically motivated but also on whether their organisations enable or stifle it, hence keeping the focal question of this study.

The problem is prevalent in developing countries such as Lesotho where private-

sector organisations lack formal gender equity policies, mentoring or inclusive leadership pipelines (UNDP Lesotho, n.d.). In such environments, women may rely disproportionately on intrinsic motivation to pursue leadership roles. Nevertheless, this reliance is risky because without structural reinforcement, intrinsic motivation may be eroded by persistent cultural and institutional barriers. The studies outlined that women appointed to risky positions and be set-up for failure affects their long term motivation and other aspirations (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This makes it critical to explore how intrinsic motivation can be catalytic as a driver of ambition or a fragile resource under systemic resistance in Lesotho's private sector.

This research applies SDT not just as a model, but as a lens to uncover how the support or frustration of women's basic psychological needs is experienced in organisational contexts. It therefore analyses how women's autonomy, competence and relatedness needs interact with exterior barriers to create patterns of women's leadership structure. It uses SDT to consider motivation not as a personal trait, but as a relational and contextual construct. This means that SDT is a useful theory for investigating women's leadership advancement in Lesotho.

2.3.2. Complementary Motivational Theories and Women's Leadership

Building on the foundation of SDT, classical motivational theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory are utilised to complement an understanding of how women experience motivation in organisational contexts. These theories also support why intrinsic motivation alone may not be enough to sustain leadership ambition when the structural barriers remain (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

Maslow (1943) argued that achieving self-actualisation (realising potential, growth, and creativity) is the most fundamental form of motivation. For women aspiring to lead, this translates to realising one's potential and making a contribution, to lead with a purpose, and to lead with values, however, organisational bias interrupts that ambition. On the contrary, Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) indicated that women are often denied freedom to just be themselves and to freely manifest their competence at work because leadership remains normatively masculine. This denial of self-actualisation underlines SDT's argument that intrinsic motivation cannot flourish when autonomy and competence are structurally denied (Singh et al., 2023). The connection between Maslow and SDT, therefore presents the fundamental

consideration that women's leadership ambition is driven not only by internal drive but the organisational climate's ability to validate and enable that drive.

Herzberg's two-factor theory distinguishes between hygiene conditions, such as pay, mentoreship and policy (extrinsic), and motivation conditions, such as recognition and growth (intrinsic) (Alshmemri et al., 2017). For women in leadership pipelines, deficiencies in hygienic conditions, directly destroys motivation (Schultheiss, 2021; Naidoo et al., 2024), whereas their motivation conditions are also undermined, because their achievements are undervalued (Kapoor et al., 2021). The simultaneous reduction of both extrinsic and intrinsic enablers explains the underrepresentation of qualified women in leadership roles. Herzberg's framework further extends SDT, because the intrinsic motivation to lead is at risk if not extrinsically supported and intrinsically recognised, indicating the hierarchical nature of leadership exclusion.

Together, Maslow and Herzberg help develop SDT for the argument that intrinsic motivation is necessary but not sufficient to support women's leadership ambitions. This aligns with Fischer et al. (2019) argument that intrinsic drivers only function when external environments reinforce rather than inhibit them. This is a particular issue for women in the private sector in Lesotho where lack of gender equity policy and a weak pipelines are revealed (UNDP Lesotho, n.d.). This suggests that women overly rely on intrinsic motivation to climb the ladder while being subject to persistent structural inequalities. This theory intersection leads to disclosure of how intrinsic motivation sustains women's leadership ambitions when systemic barriers undermine both extrinsic and intrinsic enablers.

2.3.3. Leadership Theories through a Gender Lens

These theories provide a powerful lens through which to conceptualise how intrinsic motivation functions within gendered organisational contexts. Through SDT, an individual's psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are either supported or suppressed by leadership paradigms (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Considered through a gender lens, not only do these theories offer a window into the motivational opportunities afforded to women within organisations, but also how these systems may be reinforced by leadership theories.

Transformational leadership appears to support intrinsic motivation through its

emphasis on empowerment and relationality (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2020). However, Singh et al. (2023) pointed out that the emotional labor required by this style disproportionately burdens women, thereby undermining their autonomy. This paradox challenges the unthinking application of transformational leadership as empowering across the board and calls for a gender sensitive re-examination of its motivational effects. Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) argued that transformational leadership fits women's interpersonal strengths, and represents a promising prospect for women in leadership. However, this type of emotional labour disproportionately affects women, where they are expected to be more relational and empathetic (Eagly & Carli, 2018). Though transformational leadership appears to support women's intrinsic motivation, paradoxically, it can deplete it under unequal expectations likely to cause burnout and lack of autonomy, which drains the very motivational gains that it is supposed to promote. This suggests the need to interrogate not only the leadership style, but the gendered expectations that underlie it.

On the contrary, transactional leadership is focused on control, performance and extrinsic rewards which traditionally links to masculine norms, not autonomy and purpose as aspects of intrinsic motivation (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė 2020). Women who adapt transactional leadership behaviours may accrue short-term legitimacy but are later punished for violating gender norms. Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasised that role congruity theory underpins this double bind, in which assertiveness is punished for violating femininity, and communal behaviour is dismissed as being weak. This paradox constrains women from acting authentically, undermining their autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Singh et al., 2023). This implies that the transactional leadership model is not likely to inspire intrinsic motivation but places women into the opposite of the norms.

Authentic leadership which is based on transparency, ethics and personal values is more inclusive, encourages wellbeing and competence and is considered to be aligned with SDT based purpose and growth (Khan et al., 2022). However, it is argued that this is not gender neutral leadership model as women over-perform authenticity in order to counter incompetence stereotypes and so experience authenticity strain and autonomy deprivation (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). This therefore shows how leadership can be burdensome even when it appears enabling especially when inflected with gendered expectations. On that note, intrinsic

motivation is a function of not just leadership but of what leadership means socially.

Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that gendered theories of leadership, including role congruity, and other metaphors mentioned earlier demonstrate the systematic suppression of motivation. The argument outlined why women are often placed into precarious leadership roles, that can bring high profile but reduce the prospects for longer-term viability, especially in times of crises, (Morgenroth et al., 2020). This labyrinth captures the on-going challenge of navigating male dominated cultures, unconscious bias, and lack of mentoring (Eagly & Carli, 2018). This emotional dissonance from the contradictions reflected erodes intrinsic motivation thus justifies that women's intrinsic motivation is not just jeopardised by style but is also tested by leadership journey itself.

In Lesotho's private sector these dynamics are worsened by institutional deficits that Naidoo et al. (2024) pointed out about how ambivalent sexism in boardrooms can fail to challenge masculine norms of authority. Equally so, UNDP Lesotho (n.d.) also indicated the lack of gender equity policies in private organisations in Lesotho as one of the key factors that explain ignorance about motivation drivers for women to attain and occupy leadership positions. This demonstrated that although women may possess intrinsic motivation to lead, the organisational culture often suppresses it (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022). Therefore, the Lesotho context illustrates how leadership paradigms and institutional deficits interact to frustrate women's motivation and thus warrant further interrogation of how intrinsic motivation works within these conditions.

Notably, these leadership theories converge on a critical insight demonstrating that intrinsic motivation is not a self-sufficient resource because its exercise is mediated by leadership paradigms and distorted by gendered expectations (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2020). This also fits with the central interest of this study aiming to understand the interaction between these conditions and intrinsic motivation specifically in developing economy contexts (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022). This study therefore detailed how these leadership paradigms interact with how women sustain their intrinsic motivation across their career despite limited leadership opportunities, and the support they offer which help in establishing organisational culture that improve psychological safety amongst women in leadership.

2.3.4. Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety

Organisational culture is not neutral but can either strengthen or halt intrinsic motivation, especially for women in male-dominated environments. Perhaps even more so, psychological safety is often seen as a soft cultural ideal, when in fact it is a strategic lever that promotes SDT dimensions (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief that suggest the interpersonal safety of people at workplace which in practice means feeling free to speak up, challenge the status quo and take a contrary view without fear of being humiliated or punished. This safety is frequently compromised for women in particular. This is in agreement with Gierke et al. (2025), where women in male-led leadership pathways experience threats to identity, micro-aggressions, and shadow exclusion from networks that reduce belief in a sense of belonging. This shows that the issue is not a random act of behavior but a sign of unhealthy cultures that neglect the acceptance of varied forms of leadership.

In the Lesotho's private sector where gender equity policies are poor to non-existent, psychological safety is fragile or conditional (UNDP Lesotho, n.d.). Women can be tolerated in leadership but not wholly accepted thus resulting in emotional dissonance and motivational depletion (Singh et al., 2023). This undercuts the argument that intrinsic motivation only flows when psychological needs are met because without freedom to live authentically, capability, connectedness and motivation are not possible. Kark and Buengeler (2024) illustrated how women leaders have to over-performatively act authentically to avoid stereotyping, and this also reduces self-assertiveness. This indicates that cultures that reward conformity to masculine leadership norms are implicitly punitive of women leaders who lead differently, hence, psychological safety is not about being made comfortable with one another but about having one's diverse leadership identity validated.

Organisations need to create inclusive leadership practices, transparent feedback mechanisms, and diverse role model recognition systems (Yu et al., 2022). It is a demonstration that they need to architect leadership development strategies that move beyond structural fixes to target the cultural climates that enable intrinsic motivation. These are not HR fixes, but strategic imperatives for talent retention, innovation and performance as makes clear (Badura et al., 2020). Psychological safety is not a cultural luxury, but a motivational necessity and when women feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to take initiative, persist in the face of

adversity, and mentor others, which are hallmarks of transformational leadership and organisational growth (Fischer et al., 2019). For women in Lesotho's private sector, lack of psychological safety is not only demoralising, but it is also exclusive, hence the need to understand their intrinsic motivation and the need for role models in powering their ambitions.

2.3.5. Social Learning and Power of Role Modelling

According to Bandura (1977), people learn by observing other people, especially the ones they identify with, through Social learning theory, which holds that, in a social space dominated by males like in the Lesotho's private sector, there is a limitation of women leaders becoming the main motivational factors for others to also grow into leadership. Ryan and Deci (2020) argued that role models are significant and central to intrinsic motivation, especially for women, because they maintain women's sense of leadership by reinforcing SDT dimensions. Lack of visible women leaders sends the opposite message that women are not capable of being leaders, and thus they feel less belonging with limited perceived control affecting their psychological being and structural perceptions. Nonetheless, Boerner et al. (2025) argued that the presence of women in leadership is transformative only if an inclusive culture is developed, which indicates that it is not necessarily that women are not natural leaders, but cultural norms are blocking them from excelling in leadership.

According to Ciappei et al. (2023) tokenism reinforces exclusion even though exposure to authentic, resilient female role models is regarded as a motivator, which indicates that role modelling is about empowerment, not just symbolic inclusion. Role modelling is argued to encourage structural change, formal mentoring, sponsorship pipeline, intentional visibility, and diverse leadership styles; key elements of building strong leadership for organisations to thrive (Evans, 2014). While mentorship advises, sponsorship legitimises women's access to leadership, however, this is lacking in private sector in Lesotho. Conversely, if such mechanisms were to exist, they would function to strengthen motivational drivers and allow ownership of leadership for women. The absence of these mechanisms remains a symbol, not a change agent, even with the availability of an inspiring role triggering the target for this study (Gierke et al., 2025).

2.4. Barriers and Enablers to Women's Leadership Advancement

A significant body of research highlighted several external and internal barriers that impede women's leadership advancement. To provide a foundation for this study, Singh et al. (2023) emphasised that women are underrepresented in leadership roles across various industries despite global efforts to promote gender parity in leadership roles. Schultheiss (2021) qualified this statement by further stating that women do not occupy leadership positions because there are numerous barriers that block them from growing into those positions, not because they are incapable. While this study focused on intrinsic motivation, it was equally important to discuss the external barriers and enablers, as they are both intertwined for effective leadership.

2.4.1. Cultural and Societal norms

Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) highlighted that cultural and societal factors result in women doubting their leadership potential, impacting their self-advocacy and ambitions, which limits their opportunities in leadership or taking risky projects in the workplace. Cultural norms among the members of the society were highlighted by Naidoo et al. (2024) underlining the belief that leadership is not for women, where often they are judged more for exerting assertive traits and behaviour while same traits are acceptable and praised when applied by men. This belief is not only applied by male but also by women who are socially conditioned to accept male dominance in positions of power, influence and decision making.

2.4.2. Structural and Institutional Barriers

Singh et al. (2023) emphasised that women are underrepresented, highlighting various structural and institutional barriers emanating from situations like discriminatory recruitment, work-life balance, practices, lack of mentorship, and limited access to leadership pipelines. One of the barriers is gender pay disparity within the workplace, which has been known but the impact on women's intrinsic motivation has not been highlighted (Schultheiss, 2021). Unequal pay for work of equal value not only violates the equity principle, but also erodes the motivation required to develop women into leaders. Herzberg highlighted that if hygiene is not fair, then motivation driven by intrinsic motivators would be limited (Alshmemri et al., 2017). In the private sector, Lesotho may be experiencing a double-edged sword of extrinsic and intrinsic enablers erosion that might explain the underdevelopment and

underrepresentation of women in leadership.

However, SDT suggested that intrinsic motivation may enable women to persist in the pursuit of their leadership goals despite the barriers (Ryan and Deci, 2020). The pressure between external realities and psychological factors highlighted why intrinsic motivation should be investigated in a leadership setting. Furthermore, senior women leaders are more prone to burnout compared to men leaders due to conflicting demands of work and family, and they downshift or exit from their career, thus they impact leadership growth and the workplace talent pool (Khan et al., 2022). Lack of family supportive policies in various sectors escalates this situation (Schultheiss, 2021). This therefore indicates that, while structural and institutional barriers restrict women from accessing leadership roles, internal barriers like imposter syndrome further reduce women's confidence and desire to be in leadership. On that note SDT dimensions suggested that intrinsically motivated women keep moving and growing regardless of this external forces.

2.4.3. Internal barriers

Naidoo et al. (2024) argued that women with low self-efficacy may not seek or take up leadership positions, even if qualified, which is an indicator of the imposter syndrome that high achieving women suffer from. Despite high level education in women, self-efficacy and imposter syndrome therefore lead to doubting one's own abilities despite evidence of such competency (Boerner et al., 2025). This indicates that internal psychological barriers override objective indicators of readiness, which highlighted the importance of exploring self-efficacy and competence to unpack how intrinsic motivation could buffer limiting self-perceptions. Scrutiny of an individual's capabilities is important when deciding who should take the leadership role regardless of gender. While other studies emphasised on external barriers, internal barriers were overlooked yet they play a big part in women leadership trajectory, how women view their leadership capability and respond to external barriers (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023).

2.5. Intrinsic Motivation and SDT Dimensions in Leadership Advancement

2.5.1. Dimensions of intrinsic motivation

Jnaneswar & Ranjit (2022) pointed out that in the realm of professionalism, leadership capability traits such as taking proactive solutions, taking initiatives and

excellence in pursuit reflects intrinsic motivation, as the intrinsically motivated person depicts persistence, resilience and involvement at workplaces. This therefore supported the argument of Naidoo et al. (2024) in that leadership advancement is promoted and encouraged by internal enablers, pinpointing the intrinsic motivation as the core of these enablers. This validated the point that the drive is not because of rewards but rather natural, underpinned by personal satisfaction and internal goals, which are also aligned with SDT principle of autonomy underscored in this study (Fischer et al., 2019). This concept is therefore essential for transformational leadership, preferred in effective workplaces, however it suggested that limited intrinsic motivation on individuals retard the performance and discourage the desire to grow, which in the context of this study hinders leadership advancement.

2.5.2. The role of intrinsic motivation in leadership advancement

The intrinsic motivation drivers align well with the transformational leadership traits, which leans more to higher level of team performance and organisational innovation (Singh et al., 2023). In the context of this study, intrinsically motivated women are more likely to have psychological fuel to persist their leadership goals despite discouragement by the external barriers. Furthermore, understanding women reactions in settings where recognition and advancement may be unevenly distributed is essential for this study as Fischer et al. (2019) highlighted that intrinsic motivation fosters sustained growth and authentic leadership while extrinsic motivation often leads to short-term engagement thus this distinction is critical to understand women reactions in settings where recognition and advancement may be unevenly distributed.

Firstly, as indicated by Ryan & Deci (2020), intrinsically motivated people are expected to look for leadership positions to make a difference rather than where they can gain honour and money, as a result, they will implement purposeful change as they mentor others. Conversely, Jnaneswar & Ranjit (2022) indicated that as intrinsically motivated people, they are taking charge of developing themselves in their heart of hearts, looking for difficult tasks and not giving up even if they face difficulties. This therefore demonstrate that intrinsic motivation is a mechanism women use to defeat external barriers in their leadership journey, powered by self-directed growth while chasing the meaningful value of their leadership.

It is further highlighted that men are readily promotable and publicly recognised than

women, and men tend to be rewarded more than women in the same positions (Schultheiss, 2021). Therefore, reliance on extrinsic motivators can limit women's ambition; conversely, women driven by intrinsic motivators would pursue leadership goals despite those disparities (Fischer et al., 2019). The focus would be on impact, empowerment, and alignment to personal goals and values. It is therefore crucial to understand the relationship between intrinsic motivation and women's leadership advancement amid all the barriers, which by far remain underexplored, justifying the research gap identified by this study.

2.5.3. Motivation Across Career Stages

Intrinsic motivation doesn't stay constant throughout a career transition but grows through personal growth, organisational exposure and evolving aspirations (Freudling, 2020). First time managers may be driven by ambition and purpose, mid-career professionals by recognition, influence and impact, while senior leaders by legacy and mentorship (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This dynamic evolution challenges the notion of a singular, uniform motive, suggesting that leadership development necessitates an understanding of career trajectories to create effective programs.

Badura et al (2020) suggested that intrinsic drive is not a sign but a consequence of enduring leadership behaviour despite a lack of structural facilitators, however, it is prone to erosion as summarised in many barrier studies. Empirical study of African private contacts also showed that women suffer from disproportionate effects despite expertise or educational qualifications (Grant Thornton SA, 2025; Ahmad et al., 2025). This justified that mid-career female professionals are vulnerable to experiencing the broken rung, a phenomenon reflecting the first missed opportunity for promotion, making it harder for women to climb higher, faster, creating ambiguity and stagnation, which softens the intrinsic motivation.

Conversely, SDT explained the lack of structure and how it undercuts the psychological needs that weaken motivation and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When women do not perceive a plausible future, their intrinsic drive reduces and quickly gets replaced by resignation or disengagement, which means that the organisations get exposed to loss of high-potential talent (Ibarra et al., 2013; Gierke et al., 2025).

Furtado and Henriques (2025) explained that tactics involving pondering, peer

support, and value alignment reinforce a person's motivation in a professional plateau, especially for women, as they align with the pillars of SDT. These dimensions validated that motivation fluctuates with career stage rather than remaining constant (Fischer et al., 2019). Freudling (2020) concurred with this by stating that early-career women need role models and development, mid-career women need recognition and sponsorship, and senior women need to make impact. These needs are however not always met in Lesotho's private sector because the structural support is weak. This lack of support puts the motivational burden on individuals, hence, the strength and strain are intertwined. Therefore, development must be intentionally staged and intersectionally informed in line with women's shifting motivational needs to transform resilience into empowerment.

2.6. Intersectionality in Leadership

While intersectionality is applauded for exposing systems of overlapping oppressions, it is not about merely revealing complexity but divulging the inadequacy of gendered approaches to empowerment as well (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). In Lesotho, where female literacy did not result in leadership equity, intersectionality shows how class and cultural hierarchies mitigate dominance by unconsciously neutralising educational gains (UNDP, n.d.). Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) denoted that intersectionality risks theoretical dilution, however, in practice, ignoring its insights allows exclusive, gender reforms that favour only privileged women. Therefore, intersectionality must be understood not as an abstract theory but as a strategy for redesigning organisational cultures that sustain patriarchal legitimacy.

Intersectionality also assists conceptualising the intrinsic motivation by revealing how internal drive intersects with external systems of recognition and exclusion. While SDT perceives autonomy, competence, and relatedness as motivators, they are however not met equally across intersecting identities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This observation is exposed in Lesotho's private sector where gender equity frameworks remain fragile and cultural sexism persists, impacting on women's psychological empowerment, which depends on organisational validation of their multiple identities (Naidoo et al., 2024). This justifies how ignoring intersectional realities reduces intrinsic motivation to an individual trait and negates that class-based elitism, racial hierarchies, or rural–urban divides influence perceptions of competence, relatedness and belongingness.

Subsequently, if women are constantly facing repressive constraints, the argument was that, the motivation changes to emotional labour leading to exhaustion and avoidance instead of inspiration (Ely et al., 2011). Therefore, intersectionality is not an add-on, but an amendment to motivation theory, reflecting that intrinsic motivation can only persist bearing conditions that embrace diversity as strength, not a failure, (Kark & Buengeler, 2024). Lesotho's private sector landscape therefore is required to reconceptualise leadership pipelines and mentorship frameworks to accommodate the diverse social identities of women in order to transform intersectionality from a descriptive model into a catalyst for real change.

2.7. A Comparative Perspective of Leadership in Private and Public Sectors

Although Lesotho's public sector has made small steps towards gender equity with quotas and regulatory reform, the private sector remains for the most part male-dominated, with informal norms continually marginalising women from leadership roles (UNDP Lesotho, n.d.). However, despite being weak, the public sector shows the institutional character that allows women to have a route to leadership that the SDT expects to see, with purpose and relatedness as civic responsibility and public influence (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

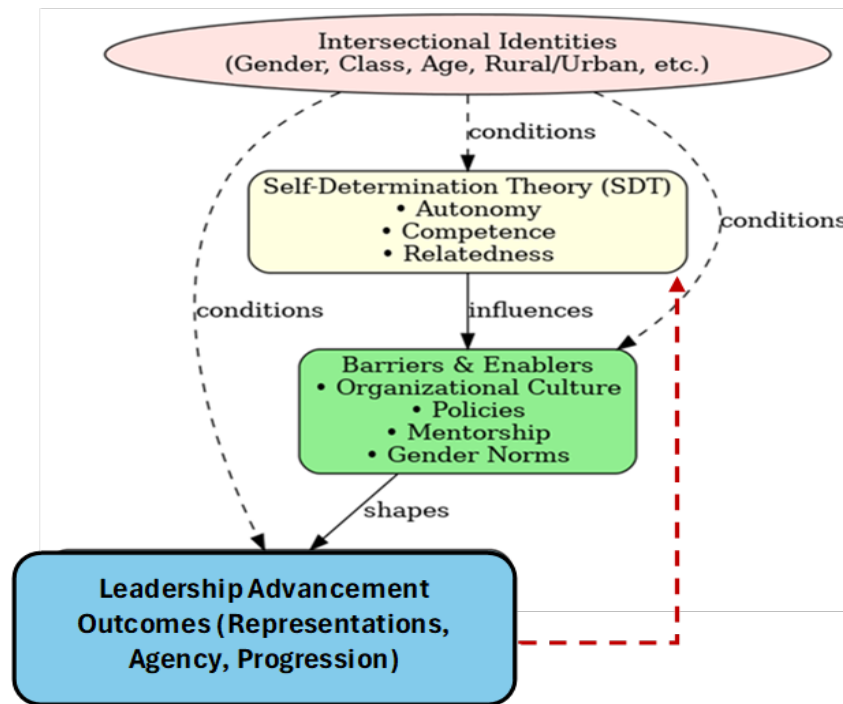
In contrast, the performance-led culture of the private sector sits in the motivational void, leaving women with no choice but to overly rely on internal motivation to navigate ambiguous promotion processes and limited spaces for mentorship. Singh et al. (2023) also demonstrated that reliance on internal motivation for too long without support from the institution trigger burn out and disengagement. In this comparison, intrinsic motivation is emphasised to be a pathway to women's success in Lesotho's private sector, yet the most vulnerable. For intrinsic motivation to become progressive, it needs to be respected and reciprocated by institutions, where there is transparency of progression and a framework of mentorship.

2.8. The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 2.1 visually integrates key constructs in the literature review positioned around SDT as the central theorisation of women's leadership advancement. This framework suggested how the SDT dimensions converge to respond to organisational barriers or enablers, such as exclusionary cultures, lack of mentorship or inclusive leadership. These organisational factors in

turn determine whether motivation is sustained or eroded in women leadership advancement.

Figure 2.1
The Conceptual Framework Derived from the Literature review



Note. Conceptual framework illustrating the interaction of SDT dimensions, organisational barriers/enablers, and intersectional identities in shaping women's leadership advancement in Lesotho's private sector.

The intersectional identities (including gender, class, and ethnicity) condition the contexts in which motivation is experienced. These identities construct access to opportunity, recognition, and psychological safety, such that intrinsic motivation is a deeply contextual and a personal resource. This framework shows that SDT needs experiences are affected by intersectional identities including gender, while organisational culture and practices mediate and reinforces them, ultimately, shaping women's leadership advancement in Lesotho's private sector through the influence of psychological and structural elements

The conditions and influences feedback loops in the framework demonstrate that

motivation is not static, but it is shaped by organisational realities and lived experiences, thus a continuous interaction between individuals and the environment. The feedback loop from leadership advancement to SDT is the demonstration that successful advancement powers back and enhance SDT constructs creating a recursive motivational effect, while advancement failure may affect the same motivational factors. This framework sets the foundation for the research questions in Chapter Three and underlines the importance of leadership development strategies that are more than structural fixes to motivational ecosystems where women can thrive.

2.9. Research Gaps and Future Research Direction

Intrinsically motivated individuals motivated by themselves rather than external factors which is regarded as a key ingredient for employees to perform their duties thus intrinsic motivation directly linked to high performance (Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022). However, the literature overlooked the relationship between intrinsic motivation and women's leadership advancement especially in developing countries like Lesotho. While the phenomenon of glass cliff highlights precarious leadership appointments for women, this research aims to focus on intrinsic motivation as a proactive enabler of leadership advancement for women (Morgenroth et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there is limited research on how the interplay between women's natural drive and external barriers affect their ability to become leaders and justification why competent experienced women often lack inspirations to explore leadership roles (Singh et al., 2023). This demonstrates limited understanding of how women's pull factors can be used or developed to overcome these external barriers (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to explore and address how intrinsic motivation outline and shape women's leadership advancement. On that note, future research direction looks towards understanding how intrinsic motivation can be refined and sustained in female professionals, and to understand the societal norms around leadership and drivers halting and accelerating adaptation to change. The belief that women lack the agentic traits needed for leadership is persistent, but it is necessary to assess which agentic traits are lacking or discouraged for aspiring female leaders. Lastly, further research needs to examine the means by which organisations can reframe leadership environments that accommodate diverse leadership roles.

2.10. Literature Review Conclusion

The literature review underscores the complex analysis of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles where there are identified barriers at both structural and cultural levels. The literature highlighted how intrinsic motivation and its influence on women's leadership advancement are significant gaps in research (Ciappei et al., 2023). This gap directly informs the research questions intended for this study which seeks to address and uncover how intrinsic motivation shapes women's leadership aspirations, resilience and ability to navigate external barriers in their leadership journey. It further informs organisations to be more inclusive in understanding women leadership potential, provide strategies to ignite women empowerment to rise with confidence into leadership roles despite barriers uncovered.

3. CHAPTER 3: Research Questions

3.1. Introduction

This Chapter presents the research questions that guides the inquiry about how intrinsic motivation facilitates women's progress into leadership positions in the Lesotho's private sector. The questions emerged from the gaps identified in the literature review, particularly the under-researched role of motivation's internal psychological drivers (autonomy, competence and relatedness) as prescribed by SDT. The questions seek to understand how women navigate their leadership aspirations when they lack evident support and how intrinsic motivation supports their resilience and ambition. The research questions follow the qualitative, exploratory nature, thus, provides rich, narrative data from the semi-structured interviews undertaken. Each question aligns with the SDT dimensions and is related to the literature, therefore ensuring that the questions are relevant and acceptably aligned to theory.

3.2. Overarching Research Question

Based on the literature, women who show high intrinsic motivation are more likely to progress into leadership roles and excel despite external barriers. Also, the depth of how external barriers impact women in leadership roles is likely to reduce when they are intrinsically motivated, enhancing their performance, innovation and advancement in their career journey (Khushk et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2019). Therefore, the overarching research question of this study is, **how does intrinsic motivation influence the advancement of women into leadership roles?** The following questions will therefore be addressed to show and understand intrinsic motivation in women's leadership advancement.

3.3. Research Questions

RQ-1. How does intrinsic motivation influence women's aspirations to pursue leadership roles in Lesotho's private sector? The intention of the question is to provide perspective and understanding towards psychological factors that influence women's aspirations to pursue leadership roles and mitigate the challenges they face. This is in line with the SDT dimension of autonomy and purpose, with the theoretical link that female would aspire for leadership roles when they feel in control because they will be choosing their own path and aligning with their own internal goals (Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2020). As autonomy is an important

determinant of intrinsic motivation, women feel empowered to make career decisions and therefore likely to pursue leadership roles amid barriers (Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022). This question therefore aims to gain insight and input with regard to early leadership aspirations, beliefs and intrinsic motivation linked to self-belief as a trigger for women leadership journeys.

RQ-2. How do women sustain intrinsic motivation in them throughout their career journey despite limited leadership opportunities? This question investigates the mechanisms through which women maintain motivation over time, especially when faced with systemic barriers. It aligns with competence and autonomy dimensions of SDT as sustained motivation is driven by feeling capable and autonomous in the professional environment, which shows how women perceive their effectiveness and maintain control over their professional growth. The question will help to examine and evaluate how women maintain their motivation and psychological resilience during their leadership journey (Khan et al., 2022; Naidoo et al., 2024). Sustained motivation is linked to feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Khan et al., 2022). Understanding how women maintain their motivation even in the face of setbacks is thus important when designing supportive leadership development. This study is expected to bring to light stories of perseverance, strategies, and internal sources of strength that help keep women on the path to leadership.

RQ-3. How do intrinsically motivated women overcome external barriers to advance in leadership? This question addresses the interaction of internal motivation with external challenges such as gender, cultural and organisational barriers. This question is linked to the autonomy and competence dimensions and explores how intrinsic motivation allows proactive behaviour and resilience. (Fischer et al., 2019; Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). This research shows that intrinsic motivation can buffer the negative effects of external barriers (Fischer et al., 2019). Women who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to persist and innovate in the face of adversity (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). This, therefore, will provide a broader view on overcoming discrimination, navigating male-dominated environments, and leveraging inner drive to push through systemic resistance.

RQ-4. How do organisational dynamics support or hinder women's intrinsic motivation for taking on leadership roles? The question is meant to help

understand organisational dynamics that can either support or hinder women's intrinsic motivation to take on leadership roles. The question is to help understand how organisational culture, policies, and relationships support or hinder intrinsic motivation. It is also to understand motivation through inclusion, recognition, and growing and feeling valued, which are key to the relatedness and competence dimensions of SDT (Schultheiss, 2021; Singh et al., 2023). The question is important because of the role organisational environments play in women's motivation (Schultheiss, 2021). It is therefore expected that women will speak to organisational inclusion, mentorship, recognition, and how organisational dynamics influence motivation and career progression.

3.4. Conclusion

The research questions presented in this Chapter are designed to reveal the complexities of women lived experiences in pursuit of leadership in the private sector in Lesotho. By examining the intrinsic motivational experience through the lens of SDT, the study may yield robust as well as actionable insights. These research questions have been designed to guide the data collection and analysis and ensure that the final findings add to the literature on gender, leadership, and motivation in developing economies. In response to the research questions, this study employs a qualitative phenomenological design to gain in-depth insights into women leaders' intrinsic motivational experiences in the Lesotho's private sector. To explore this questions, Chapter Four outlines the qualitative research methodology used to capture lived experiences of women about their leadership journey in Lesotho's private sector.

4. CHAPTER 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Choice of Research Design

4.1.1. Purpose of research design

To respond to the research questions, this study adopted a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach. The aim was to investigate problems or situations where limited research is identified, by seeking new insights and asking new questions (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This was relevant in this study because the focus was to capture women's experiences and perspectives in an area that has limited research and unknown aspects. This approach was therefore helpful in gaining a broad understanding of the context or background of a phenomenon, which provided insights into conditions and factors affecting the subject of the study (Mortelmans, 2024). The approach further allowed the identification of patterns, themes and insights that formed the basis of what entities need to consider for their women leadership programs and policies refinements.

4.1.2. Philosophy

The study employed the interpretivist philosophy because it is grounded in subjective human experiences and interactions, which enabled the researcher to view issues through the participants' lens (Rashid et al., 2019). The aim was to explore and gain deep insights from women's opinions, focusing on understanding what encourages or discourages their aspirations to advance into leadership roles. This philosophy enabled the capture of detailed and context-specific information (Mortelmans, 2024). The philosophy was necessary to understand the interplay between intrinsic motivation and other barriers, and it further helped to interpret the meanings that women assign and attach to their experiences and inner drive, aligning with the aim of this study.

4.1.3. Approach selected.

Ductive approach is data-driven and starts with specific observations or data to find patterns or themes that allow for the generation of new theories and hypotheses (Mortelmans, 2024). Therefore, this study followed an inductive approach, as there were limited predefined theories combining the intrinsic motivation construct and women's leadership advancement construct at the time of this research. The aim was to explore new perspectives and to understand the findings in an area where there

is limited research. Rashid et al. (2019) highlighted that the inductive approach helps to develop theoretical frameworks based on the findings, allows flexibility in exploring unexpected findings, and finds emerging themes; hence, this approach was selected as suitable to examine the experiences of the women who participated in this study.

4.1.4. Methodological choices

The study employed the mono method which involved the use of a single qualitative data collection (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The mono method was considered appropriate for this study because using semi-structured interviews provides immediate explanations of subjective opinions and experiences. This allowed for refined analysis of intrinsic motivation and women's leadership, which would not have been captured adequately when using other methods. Mono-method also keeps the research focused on narratives that provide deep and rich insights rather than statistical generalisations. It also considers the time limit to complete the research; other methods would have been resource-intensive and time consuming (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005)

4.1.5. Strategy

The study adopted a narrative inquiry strategy, which involved collecting data and analysing the participants' stories to understand the meaning attached to them and their experiences (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Using this strategy provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through discovering the intrinsic motivators that influence women's leadership advancement. The strategy allowed participants to share their motivations, challenges and aspirations in their own words and helped discover patterns that shape their career progression and how they overcome barriers.

4.1.6. Time horizon

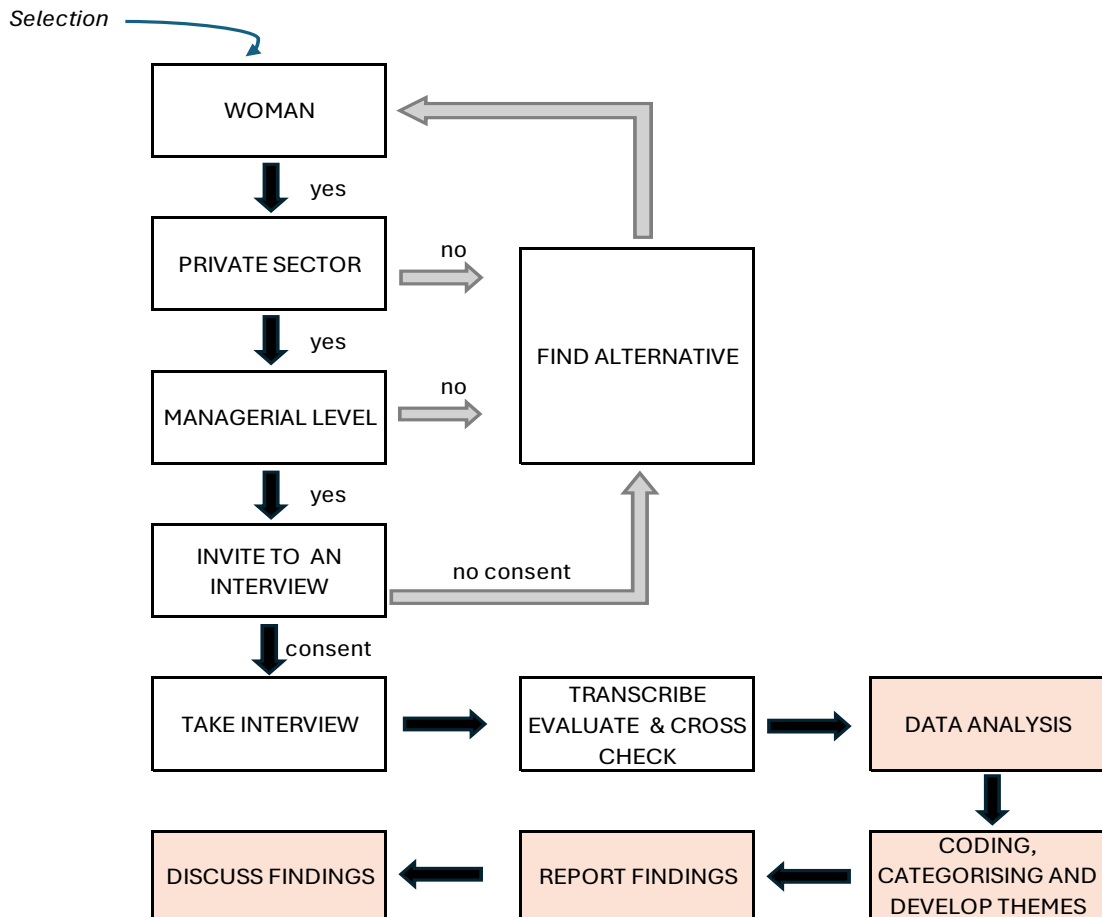
The time horizon for this study employed a cross-sectional design, which means that data collection occurred at a single point in time rather than over an extended period (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The study aims to review and analyse the current experiences and perceptions without the need to track changes over time. It was therefore practical to use a cross-sectional design, which further aligned with the exploratory nature of this study

4.2. Research Methodology

shows the summary of the data collection process and analysis flow.

Figure 4.1

Data Collection Process and Analysis Flow



Procedural steps followed from participants recruitment to final theme generation and consolidation ensuring methodological transparency.

In this study data were collected from 17 women holding managerial positions in the private sector of Lesotho, selected from six major industries. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide, and interviews were conducted between 28th August and 27th September 2025. All interviews were conducted professionally; fourteen virtually on Teams and three face-to-face in Maseru. Interviews took 30 minutes to one hour and were all audio-recorded, with the participant's permission and later transcribed verbatim using Teams transcribing feature and later transcribed using smart noter for validation and consistency. The ethical considerations outlined

in Chapter Four were strictly adhered to for each interview held, and participants were assured anonymity and confidentiality throughout. Participants were also given the freedom to reflect on their own experiences and exposure while ensuring both depth and consistency across all interviews.

4.2.1. Population

A complete set of participants from where the data were collected is referred to as population in this study (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). It consists of women in middle to senior management of private entities in Lesotho which helped to capture experiences and perspectives from women who are advancing in leadership, challenges they face in their journey, and what sustains or hinders them from attaining desired goals. Focusing on private entities allowed for evaluations of corporate structures and how they facilitate or hinder women's progress in leadership. It further provided diverse representations that will help understand the broader context of intrinsic motivation and leadership advancement among women in Lesotho.

4.2.2. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was individual women working in the private sector in Lesotho holding middle to senior management positions drawn from Saunders and Lewis (2018) definition and emphasis. The study aimed to understand the individual experiences, motivations, and perceived barriers to leadership advancement. Therefore, the narrative from these individuals allowed a detailed exploration factors in question.

4.2.3. Sampling method and size

The sampling frame guided by Saunders and Lewis (2018), consisted of women in middle to senior management roles, in the private sector in Lesotho as a subset of all women working in the sector, aiming to gather rich stories about the motivations that sustain them and how such motivators enable or deter them from overcoming the challenges in the corporate structures. The data were collected from seven primary industries within the private sector in Lesotho, being banking, construction, fast-moving-consumer-goods (FMCG), hospitality, insurance, mining, and telecommunications, to ensure diverse perspectives enhancing transferability and

credibility supported by Mortelmans (2024). Participants were sampled using non-probability sampling, which required the researcher's judgement on the nature of the entities to get diverse participants and the forward-looking quality of data collected (Sim et al., 2018).

A purposive sampling method was utilised which achieved 17 interviews, representing six industries out of seven that was planned, however the sample was sufficient for this study. This sample ensured sectoral and role diversity and allowed a mix of considerations, like current positions and the assessment of their abilities, to reflect on the phenomenon of this study (Alam, 2021). Sim et al. (2018) suggested that a rule of thumb applies to get the right sample size in a qualitative study and it varies from author to author; however, 10 to 18 interviews are ideal to reach saturation, supporting the selection of 17 interviews. In this study thematic saturation was achieved, where no new themes emerged from the twelfth participant, supporting the transferability of insights detailed in Chapter Five.

The sample was identified by accessing participants through professional networks and platforms, such as LinkedIn, as well as corporate contacts and the human resources offices (HROs) of selected entities within the private sector, supported by Saunders and Lewis (2018). This helped to establish a database of women in managerial structures of selected corporations. Snowball sampling was also used as a supplementary technique, where the initial participants recommended other participants from their acquaintances or professional networks (Sim et al., 2018). The method was beneficial to access further participants who met the set criteria, but could not be easily identified through formal networks, yet they had lived experiences to contribute to this study.

To enhance response rate, the invitations to participate were communicated via direct calls, LinkedIn messaging, WhatsApp messaging and calls, formalised through email invitations as recommended by Saunders and Lewis (2018). For ethical transparency, inquiries regarding the permissions required for these interviews were requested from the participants or HROs to ensure that all participants were compliant with their respective company policies (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The interviews were subsequently conducted virtually on Teams or in person at the time agreed with participants.

4.2.4. Data Collection (Measurement) Instrument

A Semi-structured interview guide was used as the measurement instrument in this study to enable open-ended responses, allowing participants to express their views in depth (Alam, 2021). It facilitated detailed and meaningful responses, flexibility in exploring the participants' opinions, and ensured the key research themes were consistently covered. Rashid et al. (2019) emphasised that the development of the interview guide is based on insights from the literature review; therefore, this study focused on leadership advancement, intrinsic motivation, and the barriers women face in their leadership journey.

The supervisor assigned to this study, as an expert in leadership and gender studies, was consulted to ensure the guide was appropriate, valid, and relevant as a best practice to establish credibility and dependability (Mortelmans, 2024). The same guide was shared with the research committee to acquire ethical clearance, thus received approval as there were no concerns raised at that stage, supported by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023). To enhance data quality, a small group of women was selected from the target population for pilot testing, which helped to ensure questions were clear, where needed, were revised accordingly based on the feedback (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The interview guide included twelve questions which were designed to enable in-depth details, responding clearly to the four research questions following guidance from Rashid et al. (2019). The process started by introducing and explaining the purpose of this study to each participant, provided an overview of the interview structure to ensure each participant understood and was comfortable contributing their views in this study, which ensured data validity and ethical integrity (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Participants were further informed about the confidentiality and anonymity clause as the key element of ethical consideration ensuring their privacy, dignity and safety unlocking rich data collection (Mortelmans, 2024). Therefore, this study received consent from all the participants (*See sample- Appendix 2*). It was followed by collecting demographic information, including the participants' age, current role and responsibilities, career history and progression, as well as their educational background, which ensured validity and reliability of the data collected (Morse et al., 2002).

Saldaña (2021) emphasised how well-structured instruments produce rich and

codable material; therefore, an in-depth discussion on intrinsic motivation and a review of leadership experiences were conducted through a structured interview. This section gathered data on the motivations to pursue leadership roles, descriptions of personal goals and values that drive career advancement, and how the participants stay motivated in the face of challenges and systemic barriers. The second section delved into the participants' career journey, their challenges and how they navigated through the barriers to achieve their desired goals. The final section examined the support systems that enabled or hindered their leadership progress. It also gathered insights on how organisations can enhance women's leadership opportunities in the workplace to promote the intrinsic motivation that supports leadership aspirations. In closing, participants were allowed to provide additional comments and insights not covered by the guide, yet instrumental for the study.

4.2.5. Data gathering process.

To allow participants to share their lived experiences and diverse perspectives yet while maintaining focus to the main topic and constructs of the study, semi-structured interview questions were used for data collection (Alam, 2021). Eligible participants were identified through the HROs, professional networks, and referrals, and invitations were sent via direct calls, emails, and LinkedIn, detailing the purpose of the study and requirements for participation as supported by Rashid et al. (2019). Consent forms were also sent to the participants who agreed to be interviewed, which contained details about the goals of the study, confidentiality measures, and voluntary participation, so that the interview sessions could focus on interviews only, not the administrative part, to save time (Mortelmans, 2024). This also included the consent to record the interview session to ensure accurate data capturing, thereby enhancing the quality of the analysis.

Braun & Clarke (2022) advocated for flexibility in qualitative data collection; thus, interviews were scheduled according to participants' preferences in terms of time, location, and mode of interview. Therefore, they were held face-to-face or virtually according to participants' preferences, and each interview was set to last for a maximum of one hour following the set interview guide as detailed in the measurement instrument section. Participants were encouraged and allowed to express their opinions on intrinsic motivations, leadership advancement, and factors that inspire or hinder their advancement into leadership roles.

There were follow-up questions to probe and delve deeper into specific areas of interest to ensure a comprehensive data collection. Post the interviews, the collected data were transcribed verbatim to allow for analysis, and participants were allowed to review and confirm their responses following the guidance from Saldaña (2021). Data are stored in the researcher's hard drive to ensure restricted access limited to the researcher only, which guarantees proper security, confidentiality, and anonymity, as participants' identities are hidden in transcripts to protect their privacy, guided by Rashid et al. (2019).

4.2.6. Analysis approach

Data Analysis proceeded iteratively in ATLAS.ti starting with open coding where initial labels were assigned to the meaningful segments of the text. Next, axial grouping, which involved clustering related codes into broader categories, and finally, the selective consolidation, where final themes were finalised and aligned with the research questions. This software helped to organise, code, and retrieve data systematically, enabling a transparent audit trail that links the raw data with the analytical outcomes in section 5.5. Coding was both deductive and inductive as the SDT framework guided it and allowed emergent sub-themes that came from participants' stories to enrich the theoretical structure. The study employed the thematic analysis technique to analyse the data collected which enabled identification of patterns, their analysis, and interpretations, justifying its suitability for this exploratory study based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis framework unfolding through six phases as follows.

i. Familiarisation with the data.

The researcher went through the data and transcribed the transcripts verbatim, the data were read and re-read multiple times to allow for a foundational understanding and robust subsequent analysis. At this stage, the researcher was immersed deeply in the dataset, noted initial ideas, and identified potential patterns and meanings.

ii. Generating initial codes.

The coding process began by examining each transcript line by line to generate initial codes by identifying phrases and patterns relating to motivation, leadership challenges and organisational experiences. Initial coding was primarily inductive

allowing for codes to emerge from participants' narratives. The coding book was developed to comprehensively cover all the critical aspects in this study (See *Appendix 4*), including the organisational barriers, enablers, and intersectional identities in women leadership progress, supported by *ATLAS.ti* software for efficient data management (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). Approximately 200 initial codes were generated and later refined to focused codes during search for themes phase.

iii. Searching for themes.

At this stage, the literature review was considered in identifying and aligning the patterns established to ensure validity of the information used to develop the themes, and ensuring clear information for robust responses to the research questions as guided by Saldaña (2021). Themes were searched by grouping codes into candidate themes to identify similar patterns resulting in identifying 20 overarching themes representing the conceptual categories aligned to SDT constructs, detailed analysis of these themes is in Chapter Five, section 5.4. This process enhanced interpretation and helped to form an analytical framework used for results presentation, further allowing the emergent categories to be interpreted through SDT lens, with autonomy, competence and relatedness serving as interpretive anchors.

iv. Reviewing themes.

The initial themes were then reviewed to inform the interpretation and validation of the analysis, which were later refined to ensure coherence, theoretical alignment, and a distinct, accurate representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

v. Defining and naming themes.

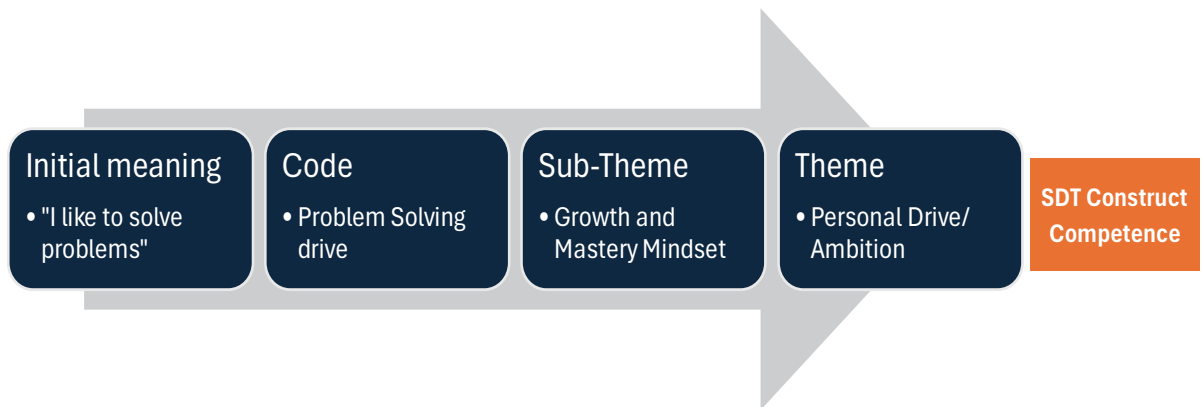
Themes were defined and named to ensure clarity and logic of the research design. This was achieved by double-checking the themes against the data collected to ensure they captured the sentiments of the respondents. Data were cross-checked against the literature, strengthening the quality and reliability of the themes.

Figure 4.2 shows an example of the workflow that demonstrates how data moved from initial meaning units to final themes. First, open coding was applied in each transcript to ensure capturing of relevant meaning segments, then, related codes were clustered into sub-themes, looking at their similarity of idea (axial coding).

These sub-themes were later merged into main themes addressing each research question directly (selective coding).

Figure 4.2.

Illustration of Data Analysis Workflow



Note. Coding chain from initial meaning units to final theme development clarifying open, axial and selective sequence.

vi. **Producing final report.**

Writing up the narrative report of the findings as detailed in Chapter five considered career stage differences and the impact of psychological safety, role models, and social learning on intrinsic motivation and leadership advancement. The coding and theme development processes formed the foundation for the thematic findings presented in Chapter five which ensured the consistency between methodological design and analytical presentation while ensuring that quality measures detailed in the next section are maintained.

4.2.7. Quality controls

To maintain the integrity of this research, quality control measures were implemented, aligning with qualitative research standards by ensuring dependability, credibility, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Morse et al., 2002). Triangulation was also included, as a strategy that supports confirmability and credibility across qualitative data perspectives (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Table 4.1 shows the summary of quality control mechanisms employed in producing this report which aligns with the requirement pointed out by Morse et al. (2002).

Table 4.1
Summary of Quality Control Measures

Control Criterion	Quality Control Mechanism
Credibility	Data and method triangulation across participants, memos, and documents
Dependability	Systematic ATLAS.ti coding log and version control
Confirmability	Audit trail and peer/supervisor debriefing
Authenticity	Verbatim quotations and reflexive awareness of researcher influence
Transferability	Rich contextual description of industry and role diversity
Triangulation	Data triangulation across industries and roles; methodological triangulation through interviews, memos, and contextual documents

Note. Adapted from Morse et al. (2002) with the addition of authenticity and triangulation dimensions reflecting the contemporary qualitative standards.

To strengthen **credibility**, the study used diverse participants across different industries in the private sector of which six main industries within the private sector were selected, and the study explored comparison with the literature (Morse et al., 2002). The interviews were engaging, enhancing the quality of data collection by stimulating deep and meaningful discussions, ensuring saturation, which enhanced the credibility of the research (Saldaña, 2021). Participants were also allowed to review and confirm their interview transcripts to ensure their perspectives were captured accurately. In order to enhance analytical credibility, Code-recode reliability was assessed five days after the initial analysis by re-coding two randomly selected transcripts to check for coding consistency. Peer debriefing sessions were held with the supervisor and an expert in SDT and gender studies to validate the coherence of theme clustering.

To ensure **dependability**, pilot testing of the interview guide was conducted before its full rollout which allowed for refinement of the questions to ensure clarity and consistency, and it was consistently used throughout all interviews to aid uniformity in data collection as guided by Morse et al. (2002). Transparency of the audit trail was maintained through the retention of codebook, memos, code-theme matrices,

summary sheets, and saturation analysis, thereby ensuring dependability and confirmability.

To enhance **confirmability**, transparency was ensured by maintaining an audit trail where the research process was recorded and documented accordingly, comprising an interview guide, the raw data collected, decisions on coding, coding frameworks, and steps taken to analyse data (Mortelmans, 2024). Debriefing sessions were also held at three key stages (initial coding, during theme refinement and before final report writeup) with the supervisor and peers familiar with qualitative research to review the preliminary codes and themes definitions. These sessions served as an external check that challenged the potential bias, refined theme boundaries, and confirmed the logic and traceability within the audit trail.

For **authenticity**, the inclusive sampling comprised a variety of perspectives coming from participants in different industries, career levels, and backgrounds, thus ensuring a well-rounded approach guided by Mortelmans (2024). The participants' viewpoints were fairly captured, with all records stored in a safe location to ensure a reliable reference point and to manage personal biases, reinforced by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023). Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout data collection and analysis via memo-writing and supervisory debriefs to identify and mitigate any potential risks enhancing credibility and confirmability (Saunders et al., 2018).

To support the principle of **transferability**, the study captured and described participants lived experiences and perspectives to assist external readers' understanding and clarified how the findings can be used in other settings, supported by Braun and Clarke (2022). The sampling further included participants from diverse industries as per Table 5.1 to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5., this signals transferability to various environments, therefore, the findings from this study can be transferable and valid for external use (Morse et al., 2002).

Ultimately, **triangulation** was achieved through the inclusion of multiple participant perspectives from different organisations and leadership levels and was cross referenced with existing literature and supervisor feedback, which allowed for comparison and confirmation of recurring patterns in the data, improving completeness and confirmability (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). The interview insights were further compared with the researcher's memos to verify and validate that recurring motivational patterns were reflected in organisational narratives and

professional practices. Memo writing was used throughout to record interpretive decisions and reflections on the part of potential researcher bias. These memos were used as a reflective audit trail, allowing interpretations to be linked back to empirical data. Verbatim quotations represented critical insights to present the genuine voices of the participants.

4.2.8. Ethical Considerations

The process started by obtaining ethical clearance from the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) research committee; thereafter, the potential participants were invited (*See Appendix 1*) and received a brief overview of the purpose of the study, the interview process and their rights throughout the process as guided by Saunders and Lewis (2018). The participation in this study was purely voluntary with guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity, and participants were allowed to withdraw at any point without consequences (Rashid et al., 2019). Consent was received before the interviews, and all data, including interview recordings and transcripts, are stored securely in a password-protected device accessible by the researcher only. Identities and identifiers were removed from all the data when providing the research output, therefore, this study aligned fully with the ethical principles of qualitative research supported by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005).

In summary, this Chapter has outlined the qualitative phenomenological design adopted to explore women leaders' intrinsic motivational experiences. The rationale for the paradigm, participant selection, data-collection, and analytical procedures was presented, together with strategies to ensure research trustworthiness and ethical integrity. The findings emerging from this analysis are presented in Chapter five, structured around the core themes identified through the thematic analysis.

4.2.9. Limitations

While the methodology covered all necessary processes to ensure quality and reliability, the inherent limitations existed, thus acknowledged as an essential part of the research to maintain ethical transparency and confirmability as guided by Morse et al. (2002). However, this methodology used ensured that these limitations identified do not weaken the findings of this study but was used to suggest future research direction.

This study relied on a small sample size, with 23 participants initially planned from

seven major industries within the private sector in Lesotho. However, only 17 participated, with the construction industry not represented, posing the limitation of generalisability to the broader population (Saunders et al., 2018). This is an indication that findings may not represent all women in Lesotho's private sector or may be unapplicable to other geographical areas or cultural contexts, as supported by Alam (2021). However, the risk was minimised by ensuring that interviewed participants were relevant to the study through a rigorous analysis of the leadership aspirations, experience, and professional context, hence the use of a purposive sampling technique.

Access to suitable participants was challenging as it depended on their availability and willingness to participate. This, therefore, introduced a selection bias confining the interview to only accessible participants; a practical reality noted by Mortelmans (2024). The other limitation was the probability that participants understated or overstated the state of their intrinsic motivation and leadership challenges due to the reliance on semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Because the questions included discussions specific to workplace experiences, participants may decide to withhold honest insights, given the sensitivity of discussing workplace barriers and leadership challenges. However, they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage open discussion environment.

An interpretivist philosophy was used, which was subjective to human experiences, thus likely to introduce interpretation bias; both the participant and researcher may have personal perspectives that influence data analysis (Mortelmans, 2024). This was minimised by requesting participants to confirm their responses and ensuring safe storage for the data collected for the audit trail.

The cross-sectional approach used posed a temporal bias as the data were captured at a single point in time and did not track changes in intrinsic motivation or leadership aspiration over time, yet these paradigms may evolve as participants advance in their careers and encounter new experiences, as guided by Saunders and Lewis (2018). Therefore, this created a temporal limitation that could be addressed by employing a longitudinal design; however, outside the scope of this study's requirements, considering the time limit for completion (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Singh et al. (2023) proved the significance of external influences on women's leadership advancement and the interplay between these factors and intrinsic

motivation which created a somewhat complex analysis to isolate the impact of intrinsic motivation as a standalone issue. The interview guide (*See Appendix 3*) was designed to allow an in-depth data collection during the interviews, using probing techniques to explore deeply the key themes, thereby minimising this limitation. While qualitative depth provides rich insights, findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable.

4.2.10. Reflexivity

As the researcher, I acknowledge that my professional experiences, positionality and influence on this research could play a role in shaping how I interpret participants' accounts. While the limitations were fully acknowledged, audit trail, peer debriefing and triangulation were maintained to ensure interpretations remained credible and founded on participants narratives, which enhanced overall trustworthiness of this research.

To report coherent, theory-informed findings, the final thematic map was developed with supporting quotations and aligned with the SDT constructs addressing four research questions. The following Chapter presents the themes detailed in the above systematic analytic process.

5. CHAPTER 5: Results Presentation

5.1. Introduction to the results

This Chapter outlines the qualitative results derived from 17 semi-structured interviews carried out with women holding middle to executive management positions in Lesotho's private sector. These interviews provide rich, first-hand narratives of leadership aspirations and motivational processes within diverse organisational contexts, offering insights into how internal drivers interact with structural and organisational environment. The findings are organised around four research questions (RQ1–RQ4), each addressing a distinct dimension of intrinsic motivation, stretching from aspiration formation to sustaining motivation, navigating barriers, and organisational influences. Within each research question, themes are presented in a structured format and illustrated with anonymised verbatim quotations to preserve authenticity while ensuring confidentiality. Each theme is accompanied by interpretations explaining the meaning behind patterns and how they align with SDT constructs, being autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

These results are supported by methodological foundations comprising sampling, interview procedures, and coding workflow as detailed in Chapter Four. Therefore, it follows the analytic sequence in ATLAS.ti starting with open coding, axial grouping, and theme consolidation. This Chapter consists of an overview of participants' attributes, data collection and analysis, saturation, and presentation of the results while broader theoretical discussion and analytical implications follow in Chapter Six. Themes are presented by research question and in order of the most dominant while frequency for each theme is noted both in Table 5.3. and referenced in the narrative, reflecting the saturation strength. This structure is preferred because it facilitates theoretical coherence supporting the integration of findings in Chapter Six.

5.2. Sample Overview

The sample composition and demographics serve the purpose of this study by exploring how intrinsically motivated women navigate leadership trajectories despite the external barriers. It ensured results offering profound insights into the psychological aspects of leadership inspiration, along with organisational and societal factors shaping the professional growth of women in Lesotho's private sector.

Table 5.1 illustrates the demographic profile of the participants, demonstrating that the sample was sufficiently diverse and suitable for cross-cutting themes related to the key SDT dimensions within the private sector leadership landscape.

Table 5.1
Participant Demographics and Sampling Details

Participant Code	Age Range	Industry	Leadership Level	Educational Background	Highest Qualification	Interview Mode	Sampling Method
P01	40+	FMCG	Executive	Communications	MSc	Virtual	Purposive
P02	35–40	Banking	Senior	Economics	MBA	Virtual	Purposive
P03	31–35	Telecoms	Executive	Economics	PGDip	Virtual	Purposive
P04	31–35	FMCG	Executive	Human Resources	Hon	Virtual	Purposive
P05	40+	Hospitality	Middle	Public Relations	Associate degree	In Person	Snowball
P06	31–35	Telecoms	Senior	Accounting	CA	Virtual	Purposive
P07	40+	Insurance	Executive	Law	BA	Virtual	Purposive
P08	35–40	Mining	Middle	Geology	BSc	Virtual	Snowball
P09	40+	Mining	Executive	Industrial Psychology	BCom	Virtual	Purposive
P10	31–35	Banking	Senior	Accounting	CA	Virtual	Purposive
P11	40+	Banking	Middle	Risk Management	MBA	Virtual	Purposive
P12	40+	Insurance	Senior	Marketing	MBA	Virtual	Purposive
P13	40+	FMCG	Senior	Accounting	BCom	In Person	Purposive
P14	35–40	Telecoms	Executive	Law/Compliance	PGDip	In Person	Snowball
P15	31–35	FMCG	Middle	Accounting	CA	Virtual	Purposive
P16	40+	Hospitality	Executive	Accountant	CA	Virtual	Purposive
P17	40+	Insurance	Middle	Insurance Sales	MBA	Virtual	Purposive

Note. FMCG = Fast-Moving Consumer Goods; Telecoms= Telecommunication Industry; PGDip = Postgraduate Diploma; Hon = Honours; CA = Chartered Accountant; MBA = Master of Business Administration. Age ranges are in years.

The study utilised a heterogeneous sample of 17 female participants employed at managerial level across six major industries within Lesotho's private sector: Banking (3), FMCG (4), Hospitality (2), Insurance (3), Mining (2) and Telecommunications (3). This ensured representation of the organisational context and was deliberate to accommodate diverse motivational experiences and leadership patterns across industries. This confirmed that motivational patterns were not industry-bound but reflected different operating landscapes, rather than focusing on a narrow organisational culture. Participants working in FMCG and telecommunications drew comparisons between fast-paced and competitive cultures, while those drawn from the banking and insurance sectors referred to the regulatory network and client-based demands. Mining and hospitality respondents brought contextual issues of gendered prescriptions and flexibility of the work-life balance, broadening the thematic description.

Including participants with different hierarchical positions: executives (7), senior (5), and middle (5), ensured a wide range of perspectives and portrayed varying motivational dynamics across career stages. Autonomy and strategic influence were the most frequently mentioned by executives, while the middle managers mentioned competence-building and visibility campaigns. Senior managers most often inhabited the transition zones, balancing delivery of the operational agenda with leadership growth, and this provided refined insight into maintaining motivation under constraints of structure.

The age profile revealed a predominance of mid- to late-career participants, which aligns well with the focus of leadership development. Women aged 40 and older tended to consider legacy and mentoring as the motivational cornerstones, while those of younger ages cited aspiration and self-initiated upskilling. This shift indicates the way intrinsic motivation shifts through the maturity and stage of the career.

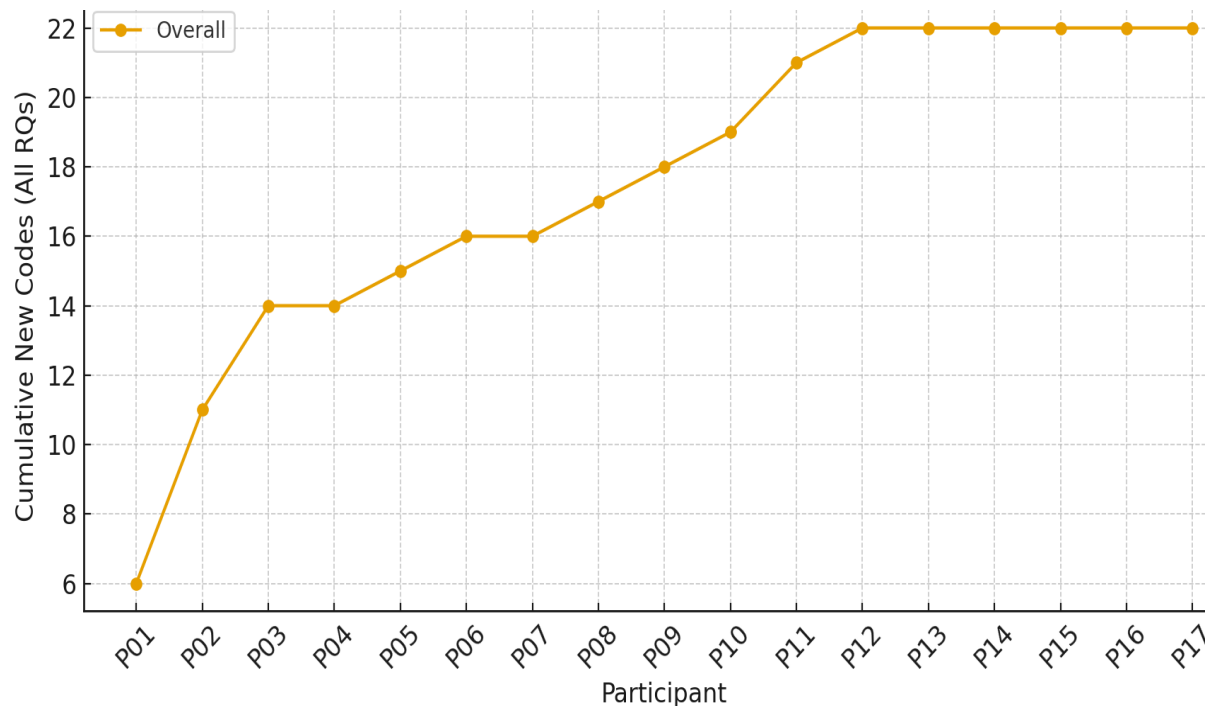
All participants are educationally advanced, considering the level of expertise they have demonstrated by their professional qualifications. The prevalence of MBAs, Chartered Accountant (CA) and other highly rated degrees shows an extensive orientation towards formal leadership training and competence. The educational profiles strengthened the case that structural barriers restrict women's advancement, not capabilities. Overall, this group of participants was satisfactorily heterogeneous and assisted creating a firm grounding of the constructs of this study, strengthening

the transferability and credibility of the findings.

5.3. Overall Data Saturation

Figure 5.1 illustrates the overall saturation curve for all research questions combined thereby substantiating the achievement of thematic completeness from the dataset, minimising the risk of omitting substantial patterns. To confirm the sufficiency of the dataset, saturation was evaluated by monitoring the emergence of new codes throughout the 17 interviews. To display the aggregate new codes by participant (P01–P17), an overall saturation curve was produced. After interviewing P12, the curve plateaued, indicating that the interviews were no longer producing new insights, interviews thereafter confirmed what had already been gathered without adding new perspectives. Thus, saturation analysis is important for this study because it informs the completeness of the information used, thereby enhancing credibility and trustworthiness of this report. It further enhances the confidence in the depth, conceptual richness and assurance that the data were analytically sound.

Figure 5.1
Overall Saturation Curve — All Research Questions Combined



Note. Plateau after P12, indicating that no new codes emerged beyond this point, confirming the attainment of thematic saturation.

Table 5.2 summarises the saturation by research question, showing that saturation

points for RQ1 and RQ2 stopped generating new themes at P11, RQ3 at P12, and RQ4 at P09. New codes emerged frequently in the first three interviews, indicating the discovery nature of early interviews. The rate of new codes significantly reduced after P04 and after P12 no new codes emerged. This plateau confirms the attainment of thematic saturation, thereby ensuring credibility and completeness of the findings. This saturation pattern across research questions further confirms that the SDT constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness were sufficiently represented in the dataset indicating the attainment of theoretical saturation alongside thematic completeness.

Table 5.2
Saturation Summary by Research Question

Participants	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
P01	X	X	X	X
P02	X	X	X	X
P03	X	X	X	
P04				
P05			X	
P06				X
P07				
P08				X
P09				X
P10		X		
P11	X	X		
P12			X	
P13				
P14				
P15				
P16				
P17				
Saturation_Reached_(Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Saturation_Point_(Participant)	P11	P11	P12	P09

Note. *The saturation points of the research question ensuring that comprehensive coverage of each SDT construct was achieved.*

5.4. Thematic results

Table 5.3 presents the consolidated summary of themes derived from the thematic analysis across the four RQs. This section addresses each RQ sequentially (RQ1-RQ4) through thematic presentation. Each theme shows its frequency retrieved from the ATLAS.ti code document table, representing the number of unique participants who referenced it, and maps each theme to the most relevant SDT construct. This

overview reinforces the theoretical grounding of this study, showing how emergent themes align with the SDT framework. It integrates the frequency data and theoretical mapping, highlighting the most dominant motivational drivers throughout the study. Therefore, Table 5.3 presents a concise visual synthesis that strengthens the credibility, dependability, and theoretical coherence of the findings and bridges the analytical process to the detailed thematic narratives that follow in Section 5.4.1.

Table 5.3
Themes, Frequencies and SDT Mapping.

RQ	Theme	Count	Participants_List	SDT_Mapping_ (A/C/R)
RQ1	Personal Drive/Ambition	7	P03, P04, P08, P09, P13, Competence P14, P17	
RQ1	Impact/Purpose	7	P01, P02, P03, P08, P12, Relatedness P13, P16	
RQ1	Values: Integrity/Ethics	6	P07, P08, P09, P11, P12, Autonomy P15	
RQ1	Autonomy/Independence	5	P02, P03, P06, P10, P17	Autonomy
RQ1	Challenge/Growth	5	P03, P05, P10, P12, P15	Competence
RQ2	Self-Awareness/Emotional Control	7	P03, P06, P09, P10, P11, Autonomy P14, P17	
RQ2	Persistence/Goal Focus	6	P01, P02, P07, P08, P16, Autonomy P17	
RQ2	Reframing Setbacks (Learning)	6	P05, P07, P08, P10, P11, Competence P13	
RQ2	Proactive Upskilling	4	P06, P09, P11, P12	Competence
RQ2	Spiritual/Faith Anchor	4	P02, P07, P08, P09	Relatedness
RQ3	Bias/Discrimination	7	P01, P03, P06, P09, P12, Relatedness P13, P17	
RQ3	Fighting for Visibility	6	P01, P03, P12, P13, P14, Competence P17	
RQ3	Triple Burden Management	6	P01, P05, P08, P09, P15, Autonomy P16	
RQ3	Strategic Networking/Sponsorship	6	P02, P03, P06, P08, P13, Relatedness P14	
RQ3	Boundary Setting/Vocalisation	4	P06, P08, P09, P13	Autonomy
RQ4	Organisational Support/Enablers	5	P01, P02, P03, P14, P15	Competence
RQ4	Organisational Hindrances/Barriers	5	P02, P03, P12, P15, P17	Autonomy

RQ4	Organisational Culture (Mixed/Cosmetic)	4	P02, P08, P12, P13	Relatedness
RQ4	Relational Dynamics (Silos/Toxicity)	4	P01, P02, P07, P10	Relatedness
RQ4	Focus on Learning/Development	3	P02, P08, P14	Competence

Note: Overview of dominant themes and theoretical alignment to SDT construct

5.4.1. RQ1: Drivers of Leadership Aspirations

This section presents findings for RQ1, which are interpreted in relation to how intrinsic motivation shapes leadership aspirations among women in Lesotho's private sector. The analysis draws on participants' narratives, where codes relating to personal growth, internal satisfaction, and purposeful engagement were clustered in conceptual categories. The resulting themes were then linked to the corresponding SDT constructs of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. For RQ1, the themes and their frequencies entail personal drive and ambition (7), Impact and purpose (7), values (integrity and ethics) (6), autonomy and independence (5), and challenge and growth (5). These themes will therefore be presented in order of dominance and analytical significance.

Table 5.4. summarises the themes, provides the brief descriptors and exemplar quotation and a brief link between the evidence and SDT alignment that provides thematic interpretations.

Table 5.4:
Themes, brief descriptors and exemplar quotes for RQ1

Theme	SDT Construct	Example Quote (short)	Codes / Notes
Personal Drive / Ambition	Competence	"I like to solve problems... I don't like stagnation." [P03] / "I need to always prove to myself that I can do it." [P14]	Achievement orientation; mastery; fear of mediocrity, self-belief

Impact / Purpose	Relatedness	"I love making positive change in people's lives." [P01] / "I'm raising three girls, and I want them to know everything is possible." [P12]	Family/community influence; desire for legacy, meaningful contribution
Values: Integrity / Ethics	Autonomy	"Personally, I believe integrity and accountability are at the heart of effective leadership." [P15]/ "Transparency and honesty are something important to me." [P12]	Credibility; ethics, moral authenticity
Autonomy / Independence	Autonomy	"I like being able to utilise what influence I have in an organisation to make impactful decisions." [P06]/ "I want to be able to stand firm on setting decisions." [P10]	Decision latitude; Self-direction, freedom from external limits
Challenge / Growth	Competence	"I like to solve problems... I don't like stagnation." [P03]/ "Give me a chance to fail and I'll show you what I can do." [P05] / "We fear, we doubt ourselves... but it is intrinsic motivation that drives us." [P12]	Learning; stretch roles; self-doubt as growth signal

RQ1: Theme 1- Personal Drive and Ambition

Seven participants reflected personal drive and ambition as the key theme influencing their leadership aspirations. Throughout the dataset, leadership aspiration comes through as an integration of competence and purpose, rooted in the intrinsic desire to grow, serve, and operate independently. Participants

consistently connected motivation to personal mastery and significant impact, rather than position promotion. They noted a desire to master and achieve excellent results as follows.

"I am solution-based, and I always want to win in everything that I do. So, I go to the root cause of everything that I am doing. [P17]"

"I need to always prove to myself that I can do it right [P14]"

These statements illustrate that leadership ambition is anchored in self-definition of the excellence standards rather than external validation. Motivation is driven by intrinsic benchmarks of achievement and excellence, where success is measured by personal growth and mastery. Participants describe to be motivated by natural desires for achievement, excellence, and proving their capability, often linked to personal roles or self-imposed standards. This theme reflects SDT construct of competence as fulfilment arises from productive interaction with challenges and satisfaction of achieving self-set goals, slightly touching on autonomy by reflecting on the desire to be free to act authentically and defining one's goals. In summary, the personal drive and ambition reflect women's self-initiated pursuit of mastery and growth. The next theme explores how this internal drive connects with purpose and broader social impact.

RQ1: Theme 2- Impact and Purpose

Seven participants highlighted impact and purpose as another notable theme that influence their aspirations to advance in leadership. This theme reflect motivation grounded in creating positive change and serving as a role model for family and community. It is captured as wanting to make a positive change or being an inspiration to future generations. For many women, leadership was not seen as desire for power but was described as means to create impact beyond one 'self as two participants described:

"I always want to do more, not necessarily more as an advance to the next level, but more so to have an impact on where I am. So, I'm motivated by solving for clients and providing solutions [P02]"

"If we couldn't do it for us, let's do it for the next generation. Because those who come after us will remember us for the impact and change you planted, I want to leave that

legacy to be known for the type of the manager who broke the boundaries. [P13]”

With these statements, participants describe leadership as not dominance but responsibility towards other people, where aspiration to lead is deeply rooted in a sense of meaning and contribution, frequently framed through stories of community betterment and inheritance. Purpose served as not only the emotional driver but as a sustaining force that preserved motivation, with fulfilment derived from seeing tangible change in others and their environment. This sense of impact appeared to sustain participants motivations reinforcing long-term commitment to leadership goals.

This theme highlights the desire for significant relatedness, showing that motivation is centred on belonging, contribution of self, and purpose, which extends beyond personal gain to societal change or organisational longevity. Leaders demonstrated that their drive to lead was anchored in leaving a positive legacy and contributing to a greater mission. Linking the personal satisfaction to collective progress enhances intrinsic motivation thereby fulfilling the SDT construct of relatedness. The next theme builds on this sense of purpose by assessing how values of integrity and ethical conduct ground women's leadership aspirations.

RQ1: Theme 3- Values (Integrity and ethics)

Six of the participants echoed values of integrity and ethical conduct as a theme that responds to their leadership aspirations. The theme acts as the leadership foundation and shows internalised moral commitment, guiding behaviour while reinforcing authenticity. This aligns with how the participants described the theme's impact in their leadership aspiration.

“Personally, I believe integrity and accountability are at the heart of effective leadership [P15]”

“Transparency and honesty are something important to me, to be as transparent as possible in companies, and ensuring I abide by the rules [P12]”

These values not only define how participants lead but also why they see ethical integrity as an attribute that gives leadership its legitimacy and purpose. Moral principles (honesty, integrity, respect, accountability) underpin credible, trustworthy leadership. Adherence to personal and professional values supports the internal

belief structure necessary for SDT construct of autonomy. These values serve as intrinsic guides, validating the leader's choices and actions as authentic and morally acceptable. To build on this moral foundation, autonomy and independence emerge as essential for women to consistently align with their values.

RQ1: Theme 4- Autonomy and Independence

Five participants referenced the autonomy and independence to be playing a role in their leadership aspirations. Autonomy and independence denote a desire for decision latitude, influence, and control over how work is delivered. This theme therefore emerges as the connecting logic among all themes. Participants emphasised decision latitude and moral independence, which reflects that autonomy is not merely the freedom to act, but the freedom to act authentically within one's ethical frame as expressed by participants.

"I like being able to utilise what influence I have in an organisation to make impactful decisions [P06]"

"I want to be able to stand firm on setting decisions and not allow to be coerced into making certain decisions [P10]"

This directly addresses the fundamental SDT need for autonomy, manifesting as a deep need for self-direction, influence over decisions, and freedom from external limitations or control, especially those imposed by gender or societal norms. Leadership was described as the space where they make independent, value driven decisions and exerting meaningful influence. Continuous challenge and learning further strengthen women's confidence and perceived competence as leaders, reinforcing the sense of autonomy.

RQ1: Theme 5- Challenge and Growth

Five of the participants emphasised the challenge and growth as significant influences in their leadership aspirations. They actively sought stretch roles and complex tasks to avoid stagnation while sustaining their learning. These combined patterns imply women's leadership aspiration in Lesotho's private sector to be self-initiated, value-oriented, and meaning-based supported by participants statements.

"I think it's just fear. It's just women being fearful and not allowing ourselves to grab those opportunities" [P12]

"I like to solve problems. I don't like stagnation, so, in everything that I do, I will try to ensure that I produce the best result there is. [P03]"

These reflections suggest that growth does not emerge only from external challenges but from overcoming internal barriers like self-doubt and fear of failure. Participants' reflections show that aspiration is sustained when competence (mastery), autonomy (self-direction), and relatedness (impact) operate in harmony, which aligns with SDT's proposition that intrinsic motivation flourishes when psychological needs are simultaneously met. This theme is closely linked to competence, highlighting the internal motivation derived from tackling difficult situations, achieving mastery (excellence), and recognising internal barriers (fear, self-doubt) that must be overcome to demonstrate capability.

RQ1 Summary of findings

Taken together, the five themes illustrate that leadership aspiration is internally powered, not externally driven, and denote that women's motivation to lead arises from self-defined goals of mastery and excellence, aligning with the SDT construct of competence. The motivation also emerges from contribution women make to others and the society supporting SDT construct of relatedness and freedom to make authentic and autonomous decisions reflecting SDT construct of autonomy. These themes combined describe leadership aspiration as an activity deeply personal and values-based, thereby illustrating that intrinsic motivation strongly shape women's leadership aspirations in Lesotho's private sector through connecting the psychological need of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The next section describes how women sustain their intrinsic motivation.

5.4.2. RQ2: Sustaining Intrinsic Motivation

This section presents findings for RQ2, analysing strategies women use to sustain intrinsic motivation in context where leadership access is limited. The analysis draws on participants' narratives, reflecting mechanisms of resilience and self-regulation that help women maintain engagement and purpose. Five major themes aligned with SDT constructs emerged: Self-awareness and emotional control (7), persistence and goal focus, (6) reframing setbacks (6), proactive upskilling (4), and spiritual and faith anchor (4). These themes will therefore be presented in order of dominance and analytical significance.

Table 5.5. summarises the themes, provides brief descriptors and exemplar quotation and outlines their alignment with SDT guiding the thematic interpretations that follow.

Table 5.5.
A Summary of themes and quotes for RQ2

Theme	SDT Construct	Example Quote (short)	Codes / Notes
Self-Awareness / Emotional Control	Autonomy	“I’m not afraid to be vulnerable.” [P06] / “I try to reflect on my decisions objectively.” [P10] “Go and breathe.” [P10]	Emotional regulation; Reflection, Boundary setting
Persistence / Goal Focus	Autonomy	“Focus on the bigger picture... someone is always watching.” [P01] / “I still go back to believing that I will win at the end.” [P02]	Discipline; long-term view, Purposeful Resilience
Reframing Setbacks (Learning)	Competence	“The setback can be so bad... it’s self-doubt, not capability.” [P10] “Use it as a lesson learned... as your reason to achieve more.” [P13] /	Learning mindset, psychological resilience, internal locus of control
Proactive Upskilling	Competence	“I did the MBA after feedback.” [P11] / “I take teachability into every workspace.” [P06]	Education; continuous development, readiness
Spiritual / Faith Anchor	Relatedness	“I leave it to God... what lesson are you teaching me?” [P08]/ “Praying in between... that’s one of my weapons to sustain me.” [P07]	Purpose in uncertainty, Meaning based on faith, spiritual coping

RQ2: Theme 1- Self-Awareness and Emotional Control

Seven participants outlined the self-awareness and emotional control as primary drivers that influence how they sustain their motivation considering limited leadership opportunities. This theme is described as a deliberate regulation of emotions to maintain objectivity and credibility. At the same time, participants signalled vulnerability while remaining goal directed which maintains psychological balance and healthy relationships, both autonomously and relatedly.

"I am not afraid to be vulnerable. Yes, I am really not afraid to be vulnerable. [P06]"

"I am objective and sometimes I make emotional decisions, but I try to reflect on them. The key thing is self-awareness so that I'm aware... Now you're getting emotional, go and breathe. [P10]"

High self-awareness supports both autonomy and relatedness, through choosing actions based on personal fit and managing interactions carefully. Emotion regulation maintains performance objectivity while emotional maturity allows participants to remain self-directed and composed, which reflects the fulfilment of intrinsic psychological needs across SDT constructs, thereby strengthening internal regulation and reinforcing self-efficacy for persistence. This emphasises internal psychological boundaries and reflection as keys to sustainable intrinsic motivation. While emotional control stabilises motivation internally, persistence and goal focus illustrate how women translate that stability into sustained action toward their leadership goals which is the next theme to focus on.

RQ2: Theme 2- Persistence and Goal Focus

Six participants identified persistence and goal focus as primary drivers influencing strategies that sustain their motivation despite limited leadership opportunities. The theme is defined as long-term commitment to goals despite setbacks, focusing on the bigger picture. Participants described it as a combination of self-regulation, learning orientation, and meaning-making practices that protect internal drive amid constrained advancement environments. This is emphasised in participants statements.

"I still go back to that, believing that I will win at the end, the competitiveness and the positivity still tell me that even if this doesn't work out now, eventually it will. [P02]"

"I stand to my ground, make sure that. ... You do your work as you're supposed to, so that there are no mistakes to which they can come back and punish you. [P07]"

These statements illustrate that women's motivation is powered by deploying adaptive psychological strategies that reinforces autonomy, not necessarily from favourable external conditions but for self-fulfilment. Persistence is sustained through internal commitment despite setbacks, by viewing long-term goals as achievable while humility and routine checks show an objective focused on performance metrics essential for maintaining the drive toward mastery even when external validation is limited. This theme evidences the SDT constructs of autonomy and competence, as participants described it as a driver that sustain their internal commitment to stay goal focused despite setbacks. Building on this, the next theme explores how women interpret these setbacks as opportunities for learning and growth.

RQ2: Theme 3- Reframing Setback (Learning)

Six participants described experiencing setbacks as part of learning which reframes challenges from being a negative driver to a positive driver that help women sustain their intrinsic motivation. The theme reflects interpreting negative outcomes as information for development and strategy. Participants thus emphasised experiencing failure as a process that transforms their outlook and deliberately redefine that to be a motivation driver. This is emphasised in their statements as follows.

"The setback can be so bad. Because of self-doubt and not because of your capability to do the job. [P10]"

"We have so many responsibilities as women, we are running households, we do have setbacks but call it something that is going to help. Use it as notes for your next encounter, use it as a lesson learned, use it as a spiritual growth, use it as your reason to achieve more and pursue more. [P13]"

These statements illustrate that participants maintain internal control over their self-worth and motivation by reframing setbacks as external systemic constraints or essential learning steps. In so doing, they view challenges as part of a necessary growth process that protects their sense of competence. This cognitive reframing reinforces the SDT construct of competence by transforming challenges from

defeating experiences into developmental information. This learning mindset fosters a desire for proactive upskilling, which is explored as the next key theme.

RQ2: Theme 4- Proactive Upskilling

Four of the participants emphasised initiating own education and continuous development as key concepts that ensures their readiness for future roles, signifying the positive mindset of proactive upskilling. The theme is described as self-initiated learning to close capability gaps, involving actively seeking new knowledge and improving skills to ensure readiness for future roles, rather than waiting for external mandates. Following statements emphasise the idea.

"I went straight to the MBA and this is where I am and it gave me confidence that I can stand in front of people, I can manage people [P11]"

"I saw that as an opportunity to then expand my learning from an ...to then understanding the ... portfolio. So, I asked my manager if I could look after ... [P09]"

Learning behaviour appears equally central in what sustains women's intrinsic motivations despite limited opportunities. They are fulfilled by their own choices in upskilling their capabilities to enhance their readiness and confidence which is a behaviour driven by the pursuit of competence thus exemplifies competence-oriented motivation. This illustrates that women take ownership of growth even without organisational prompting, thus self-initiated skill acquisition to close gaps is directly linked to SDT construct of competence.

RQ2: Theme 5- Spiritual and Faith Anchor

Four participants brought in element of spirituality and faith anchor as a significant driver to sustain motivation even when opportunities are absent primarily reflecting the SDT construct of relatedness. This theme reflects relying on faith to accept uncertainty and sustain purpose when control is limited. Participants described spirituality as a stabilising anchor that reconnects them to purpose beyond workplace limitations.

"Praying in between. That is one of my weapons that sustain me, to say, you know what, my dear God, you know the truth here. You know what happened, you will fight for me. And he always does. [P07]"

"I can't be an example of God's goodness if I am just ordinary and I think that is my biggest drive [P09]"

These statements illustrate that faith anchors motivation by providing a higher-order source of relatedness and support, especially in the face of workplace injustices. It allows participants to re-centre emotionally transforming adversity into acceptance and reinforcing autonomy through inner peace. This anchor helps maintain autonomy by externalising control of outcomes to a trusted spiritual power thereby preserving internal locus for uncontrollable contexts.

RQ2 Summary of Findings

Collectively, these five themes show that sustained motivation rests on the women's ability to integrate self-discipline, learning, and belief systems that keep their internal drive intact. In the absence of systemic support, they construct a self-sustaining motivational ecology which is anchored in autonomy, expanded by competence, and spiritually reinforced through relatedness.

5.4.3. RQ3: Navigating External Barriers

The results in this section relate to how intrinsically motivated women navigate external barriers to achieve their leadership goals addressing the RQ3. The analysis draws on participants' narratives, highlighting women leaders experience around long-lasting structural and cultural limitations due to gender bias, limited visibility, conflicting homeland tasks, and exclusionary professional networks. These experiences have an active negotiation between external limitations and internal push. The resulting themes were then linked to the corresponding SDT constructs of autonomy, competence, or relatedness. Table 5.6 provides a summary the themes identified which are bias and discrimination (7), fighting for visibility (6), strategic networking and sponsorship (6), triple burden management (5), and boundary setting and vocalisation (4). These themes will therefore be presented in order of dominance and analytical significance.

Table 5.6*A Summary of themes and quotes for RQ3*

Theme	SDT Construct	Example Quote (short)	Codes / Notes
Bias / Discrimination	Relatedness	“Are you at baby-making age?” [P01] / “You have to do it three times more than what a man does.” [P17]	Gender/age bias, validation struggles
Fighting for Visibility	Competence	“You have to fight a lot more to exert your stand.” [P01] / “They do not like fully, fully believe in you. You have to prove beyond reasonable doubt.” [P17]	Recognition struggles; legitimacy; confidence
Triple Burden Management	Autonomy	“I’ve got three jobs... wife, mother, employee.” [P08] / “I try to set my weekends for family... that’s my husband and my kids.” [P15]	Work–life balance; boundary balance; role integration
Strategic Networking / Sponsorship	Relatedness	“It’s not about capability... it’s about who is behind you.” [P03] / “Hard work gets you promotion, but pair it with relationships you build.” [P08]	Mentorship ; alliances; visibility
Boundary Setting / Vocalisation	Autonomy	“I am very vocal... I don’t want to rush.” [P08] / “I would rather have the difficult discussion and then move on with clarity.” [P09]	Assertiveness; pacing, psychological safety; emotional boundaries

RQ3: Theme 1- Bias and Discrimination

Seven participants expressed experiences of explicit bias and invisibility which challenged their confidence, which formed the theme of bias and discrimination. It is defined as factors like gender bias and ageism undermining fair evaluation and belonging. Across the participants, overcoming these barriers required assertiveness and flexibility, underpinned by an intrinsic motivation to be consistently productive beyond balanced systems. They reflected this through the following statements.

"The bigger thing I have faced is ages in. ... of the sexism or genderism where young people are not trusted with leadership and power. "[P01]

"You have to do it three times more than what a man does to be recognised." [P17]

These statements illustrate how women's intrinsic motivation operates as a protective mechanism against systemic invalidation by reinforcing autonomy and competence through self-validation. Bias and discrimination are unsaid external threats that accelerate exclusion and unfairness undermining a sense of belonging directly linked to relatedness. Women employed adaptive efforts to reclaim visibility and agency to mitigate this lack of recognition forming the next theme of fighting for visibility.

RQ3: Theme 2- Fighting for Visibility

Six participants highlighted the strategies they employed to fight for recognition and visibility identifying this as a primary theme for navigating the structural barriers. The theme is defined as having to prove capability repeatedly to gain recognition in male-dominated forums. To counter this, participants engaged in visibility and legitimacy work as their statement shows.

"I have to fight a lot more to exert my stand to gain visibility on decision making tables..."[P01]

"They do not like fully, fully believe in you. You have to prove beyond a reasonable doubt." [P17]

These remarks are evidence of an underlying urgency to demonstrate competence, where expertise and credibility are tools of survival in male-dominated worlds constraining autonomy. This theme directly concerns the struggle for recognition of

competence and relatedness, described as demand for women to provide extra proof of capability to counter bias. This struggle to prove competence is described as a coping and motivational strategy to sustain intrinsic motivation through self-worth reaffirmation and competence validation. While they fight for this visibility, they stated how they also navigate through triple burden phenomenon of balancing professional, domestic and social expectations to be explored next.

RQ3: Theme 3- Triple Burden Management

Six participants emphasised the challenges of triple burden phenomenon. This theme reflects the intersection of balancing professional, domestic, and maternal roles. Participants denoted awareness and strategies they employ to ensure they serve all domains to strike work-life balance, setting strategic boundaries and integrating all the roles in their routines to restore autonomy. Following statements emphasised awareness and how they manage this triple burden.

"Unfortunately, as a woman, I've got three jobs... wife, mother, employee." [P08]

"I try to set my weekends for family... that's my husband and my kids." [P15]

This illustrates that women navigate the triple burden through rigorous planning, leveraging communication and reframing career disruptions or business maturity to regain control over their life, demonstrating self-regulatory competence. The triple burden constraint severely restricts autonomy and strain relatedness (family connection) as participants underscored the challenges of regulating choices and dividing time to manage overload. As women navigate these intersecting burdens, they highlighted how they use strategic networks and sponsorship as a strategy to mitigate external forces, next to be assessed as a key theme responding to RQ3.

RQ3: Theme 4- Strategic Networking and Sponsorship

Six of the participants highlighted the power of networks and sponsorships as the navigation strategy to advance in corporate space. This refers to building influential relationships for advocacy and access. strategic networking and sponsorship were adaptive mechanisms of connectedness. Participants underpinned the strategic networks and sponsorship as a powerful means to navigate through structural stagnations indicating that capability alone is not enough.

"It is not about capability... it is about who is behind you" P03

"Hard work gets you promotion, but pair it with networks and relationships you build."
P08

These observations reveal an acute awareness that ability alone is insufficient, it requires to be powered by strong networks, which legitimise that visibility need to be socially brokered. Strategic networking is described as a crucial method for fulfilling relatedness needs within the professional domain, turning alliances into career currency (sponsorship, referrals, visibility). This is recognised as essential when merit alone is insufficient but require relational access and endorsement to advance. While networks are important participants further elaborated on the need to be vocal and be able to set boundaries representing autonomy as a crucial theme next to be assessed.

RQ3: Theme 5- Boundary Setting and Vocalisation

Four participants reflected on their ability to be vocal and setting boundaries as a means to navigate through external barriers. This theme of boundary setting and vocalisation was therefore defined as asserting limits, asking for help, and pacing career moves. Participants affirmed that vocalisation and assertive communication are among the most significant approaches towards exercising agency through statements that follow.

"I am very vocal... I don't want to rush," [P08]

"I would rather have the tricky conversation and then be done and clear." [P09]

These remarks illustrate how women sustain independence by setting boundaries and not internalising discrimination. Boundary setting and vocalisation maintain the individual's autonomy and secure their relatedness (respect). This assertive behaviour establishes a clear personal brand, rejecting the traditional passive role often imposed on women leaders. While acknowledging all the barriers in place, participants emphasised self-awareness and mechanisms they employ to navigate through their leadership challenges.

Summary of Findings for RQ3

These results shows that the intrinsic motivation of women does not come down to

passive tolerance but active negotiation. They maintain self-determination by intertwining personal mastery and relational intelligence, thus handling bias and overload by conscious strategies, keeping their independence, ability, and sense of affiliation alive.

5.4.4. RQ4: Organisational Dynamics

Organisational cultures and structures were revealed to construct intrinsic motivation by facilitating or limiting women's relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Participants outlined situations where organisational formal initiatives fostered growth, but also shared systems of favouritism, superficial inclusion, and fragmentation of relationships, which worked to destroy motivation.

Table 5.7.

A Summary of themes and quotes for RQ4

Theme	SDT Construct	Example Quote (short)	Codes / Notes
Organisational Support / Enablers	Competence	"Leadership growth scholarships... women enabled to apply." [P01] "...If you want to grow, it is very easy for you to grow in protocol." [P03].	Programmes; development; enabling systems
Organisational Hindrances / Barriers	Autonomy	"Favouritism... lack of psychological safety." [P02] "...undermining others, creating a very toxic environment" [P17]	Opaque systems; micromanagement; limited voice
Organisational Culture (Mixed/Cosmetic)	Relatedness	"It's been done for cosmetics... we feel it." [P13] "The culture that ...does not have enough respect for women ..." [P08]	Tokenism; policy–practice gap

Relational Dynamics (Silos/Toxicity)	Relatedness	“Silos... you’re battling this alone.” [P01] “... corporate politics and alliances are more important than fairness and objectivity” [P10]	Isolation; toxicity
Learning & Succession Focus	Competence	“I underwent a development programme... ready for that position.” [P02] “...we can all connect with each other. and then get the support from learning and development” [P14]	Succession; skills growth

RQ4: Theme 1- Organisational Support and Enablers

Organisational support and enablers refer to structures that enable advancement (scholarships, development pathways). This theme was identified by five participants, and the emphasis has been that organisational enablers and barriers coexisted, creating uneven motivational climates. Where supportive structures existed including training scholarships or leadership programmes, participants expressed renewed confidence because of them and a stronger sense of competence.

“Organisational culture regarding leadership growth for women exist where the... offers scholarships. We get to meet more often and hear each other's stories.” [P01]

“My environment is very enabling for people that want to grow. If you want to grow, it is very easy for you to grow in protocol.” [P03].

These views show how institutional investment advances mastery and self-efficacy. Correspondingly, education-oriented initiatives afforded women defined developmental paths, embedding personal aspirations within organisational potential. This environment enhance confidence, building on the competence and autonomy. Building on these varying experiences, the next theme explores organisational barriers and hinderances that undermine the intrinsic motivation.

RQ4: Theme 2- Organisational Hinderances and Barriers

Participants highlighted barriers and hinderances affecting their intrinsic motivation. This theme of organisational hinderances and barriers is referred to as internal practices like favouritism, micromanagement, limiting voices and unclear systems that demotivate and block women leadership progress. Participants narrate stories along hindrance and barriers influencing their inner drive.

"Lack of psychological safety...the number one issue that people raised was like lack of psychological safety. And this was across the... in every single department."[P02]

"There were some elements of favouritism coupled with undermining others creating a very toxic environment" [P17]

These experiences summarise how unclear promotion systems and penalty-based supervision quash initiative and intrinsic drive. By comparison, favouritism and micromanagement destroy autonomy and relatedness by undermining fairness and psychological safety resulting in people feeling less appreciated, while limiting voices and unclear systems result in self-doubt affecting individuals' sense of competence. All these dynamics directly influence organisational culture, a key theme to follow, which also shape how women justify their internal drive.

RQ4: Theme 3- Organisational Culture (Mixed//Cosmetic)

Four participants highlighted the organisational culture as one strong dynamic for supporting or hindering intrinsic motivation in women. The theme is defined as the superficial inclusion of efforts that do not shift executive-level power but erodes trust and belonging. Participants narrated that diversity initiatives are frequently felt as superficial.

"They trust that the men will drive, So, programs, policies and advancement initiatives in place are done for cosmetics and unfortunately, we feel it." [P13]

"The culture that we have... a male dominated that does not have enough respect for women and that is why women..." [P08]

A cosmetic culture undermines autonomy by creating an environment where formal policies mask a lack of genuine change. This gap between words and action displays tokenism and fosters scepticism, thus destroying relatedness, fostering distrust and

detachment. This environment forces women to operate assertively because the fundamental need for respect (relatedness) is not guaranteed. When trust is broken, individuals withdraw, weakening relational dynamics, a key theme explored next.

RQ4: Theme 4- Relational Dynamics (Silos/Toxicity)

Four participants denoted relational dynamics as a key theme that has a clear link to intrinsic motivation. This theme is defined as experiences of isolation, low trust, and siloed collaboration that undermine motivation and reduce belonging. Participants reflected relational breakdowns within teams and the way competitive or sceptical cultures erode interconnection and mutual support essential for internal drive.

“My relationship with my boss is definitely demoralising because we have very different ways of leading” [P02]

“At this level, I got to understand or observe that sometimes corporate politics and alliances are more important than fairness and objectivity” [P10]

These statements suggest how the lack of healthy relationships affects the internal drive of relatedness, as a sense of belonging is cultivated by how individuals connect. Toxic environments create a space where individuals are withdrawn and isolated, affecting autonomy. Inconsistent political culture limits open expression, thereby reducing confidence due to lack of trust, impacting competence. While issues around relationships at the workplace are complex barriers hindering women's intrinsic motivation, their focus on learning and development support it, balancing the impact.

RQ4: Theme 5- Focus on Learning and Development

Three participants reflected on focus on learning and development as a key theme supporting intrinsic their motivation. The theme is defined as the targeted initiatives to prepare women for executive succession roles. Participant stated that where opportunities for mentoring or collaborative learning are present, they experience greater morale and confidence in their performance. The following statement reiterate.

“It is something that is there, that exists, that we can all connect with each other. and then get the support from learning and development” [P14]

“My workplace literally helped me grow immensely, and it's still helping me grow to

the point where I am very confident to say... through trainings.” [P8].

These statements show that companies invest in skills growth to facilitate for successions thereby enhancing competence. These further boosts morale and influence individuals' motivation, where people can grow to a level of decision-making power.

Summary of Findings for RQ4

These results illustrate that intrinsic motivation is fostered through growth, honoured through open systems, and sheer inclusion, while the environment of control, tokenism, or isolation erodes these psychological needs. These dynamics foreshadow Chapter Six, where the possibilities of transforming such learnings into usable strategies for leadership development and equity-based culture transformation are examined. In response to RQ4, participants highlighted the availability of programmes and leadership development programmes enabling them to grow, yet the behaviour of tokenism, favouritism and micromanagement still exists, impacting their internally driven efforts and creating silos and toxic environments.

5.5. Summary of Key Findings

Below are key takeaways from the findings from the interviews conducted to respond to how intrinsic motivation influences women's leadership advancement in Lesotho's private sector as follows

- i. Aspirations are foundational to and are rooted in autocracy and great power, where independence to make decisions and influence organisational direction is key. Participants demonstrated the strength of their internal desire for achievement, mastery orientation and self-validation fulfilment. This desire is explained not to be fuelled by external factors like rewards but by a need to make a meaningful contribution with integrity underpinning credible and effective leadership. It creates a legacy and being an inspiration to others, demonstrating the connection between competence, relatedness and autonomy.
- ii. Motivation is maintained through reframing, emotional management, and proactive growth. Participants demonstrated how they use the autonomy construct to boost their ability to regulate their emotions and apply reflective

practices, which result in developing a long-term vision and applying resilience to stay committed even when challenges and setbacks occur. Failure is inherent but interpreting it as a learning and growth opportunity is a key highlight for how women reinforce their sense of competence, which is also enhanced by continuous self-initiated learning and development anchored in spiritual and faith beliefs to strengthen the emotions and sense of purpose.

- iii. Momentum demands prominence and sponsorship amidst bias and overload. Participants acknowledged the barriers they face, however illustrated how they leverage the relatedness construct to navigate through, mentioning proactive relationship building and creating alliances. They further demonstrated proactive strategies they put in place to balance professional and social expectations by being assertive, communicating clearly and setting boundaries representing autonomy.
- iv. The organisational supports are available but compromised where the psychological safety is poor. Most participants mentioned that leadership development programmes and inclusive policies are active in their workplace. However, a different perspective came to play where others interpret their existence as just cosmetic as far as favouritism, tokenism and limited psychological safety are still at play, undermining their level of autonomy and relatedness. This behaviour creates a toxic environment, erodes trust and a sense of belonging, and reduces motivation.
- v. Mismatch of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is critical to sustainable leadership pipelines.

5.6. Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure the quality and integrity of the results, data gathering and data analysis were framed along the lines of the classical measures of credibility and rigor. Measures were employed throughout all stages of data collection and data analysis to ensure validity, reliability, and confirmability reflecting to section 4.2.7 (Quality controls). **Credibility** was ensured through methodological triangulation, using multiple data sources and iterative coding within ATLAS.ti. and maintaining reflexive journal throughout the analysis. To ensure **transferability**, contextual, det

ailed assessment of industries and participants was conducted. Participants drawn from different industries add to the possibilities of transferability to comparable professional sites and the depth of saturation further reinforced data adequacy and analytical completeness.

Dependability was established by maintaining an audit trail of coding processes, memos, and data management decisions ensuring that coding decisions were rational, transparent, and repeatable. **Confirmability** was realised through documentation and reflexivity where personal assumptions; professional background and positionality were acknowledged to reduce bias. Overall, the process taken in this study ensured that the study met the standards of qualitative research excellence and enhance confidence that the results present a reliable basis for the theoretical and practical contributions: findings are authentic, traceable, and theoretically sound.

5.7. Conclusion

These findings provide how significant SDT is through the interplay of triad constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness, and it was clear based on how they crosscut across all the themes. The study uncovered the root of women's motivation, ranging from personal ambition and personal drive to navigating systemic barriers and organisational constraints, showing resilience, self-awareness and emotional regulation, while at the same time demonstrating the power of proactive learning and leveraging on strategic networking. These findings signal that intrinsic motivation is not the only source of aspiration, but it is also a strategy to navigate through challenges and sustain commitment. However, while this is such a powerful lever, it is vulnerable and prone to being distracted by the environments around it. These findings, therefore, laid a solid conceptual foundation to deliberate and debate the existing literature and theoretical frameworks through integrated interpretations to be discussed in the next Chapter.

6. CHAPTER 6: Discussion of Results

6.1. Introduction

While Chapter Five provided a description of what emerged from participants' experiences, this Chapter explains what those findings are, what they mean and how they contribute to the core of this study, which is understanding the intrinsic motivation influencing women's leadership advancement in Lesotho's private sector. It focuses on linking the objectives, theoretical foundations and literature introduced in Chapter Two, to respond to this overarching research question. Therefore, the discussion is guided by SDT, considering the interplay between core constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to understand how women's motivation shapes their aspirations to lead, how they persist in environments where there are limited opportunities and how they navigate and interact with organisational culture, structural enablers or barriers and expectations at the workplace and in general life.

Main findings from Chapter Five are revisited and discussions organised by research questions interpreted using SDT framework beginning by exploring how autonomy and inner purpose influence women's aspirations to pursue leadership roles responding to RQ1, how competence sustains women's motivation where opportunities are constraint addressing RQ2, followed by analysing intrinsic motivation drivers that enable women to navigate structural and cultural barriers for RQ3, and finally, assessing the role of organisational environments supporting or undermining women's motivation and desire to lead responding to RQ4.

In doing so, the discussion positions the findings within contemporary debates on women's leadership and motivation, comparing areas of convergence and divergence with global and regional literature. This synthesis provides a cohesive understanding of how intrinsic motivation operates as both a sustaining and vulnerable resource for women leaders in Lesotho's private sector. The following sections, therefore, interpret the results by research question, progressively building toward an integrated theoretical and practical synthesis. This integrative insight lays the groundwork for this Chapter, where developing leadership, reforming policy, and gender-inclusive organisational practice are outlined.

6.2. Discussion Framed through SDT

This section discusses the findings in relation to each research question, drawing from the SDT framework which emphasise that human motivation becomes optimal when psychological needs are fulfilled as elaborated by Deci and Ryan (2020). It is further integrated with other relevant leadership theories to assess the interplay between motivation and leadership advancement. The intention is to interpret how the voices of the participants reveal the operation of intrinsic motivation within their leadership experiences. The discussion integrates the psychological dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with organisational and cultural contexts shaping women's leadership in Lesotho's private sector.

Classic SDT framework differentiated between intrinsic motivation which is doing an activity because of its inherent internal satisfaction and internalised forms of extrinsic motivation including identified or integrated regulation which relates to doing an activity because of its alignment to individual values and purpose. The finding of this study embodied both and interpreted intrinsic motivation as an integration of both internal satisfaction and interpersonal relations. Many participants in this study described their motivation to lead as value-driven where they emphasised desire to exert positive contributions to others through statements like "I want to make an impact", "I want to open doors for others" which is an indication of high level integration of both leadership goals and personal identities, not merely enjoyment of the leadership role itself.

Bringing this context is crucial in that most participants demonstrated that this motivational process they embody often occurred in limiting and unsupportive work environments. SDT's argument on this is that when triad constructs are frustrated intrinsic motivation automatically declines (Deci & Ryan, 2020). However, the findings of this study demonstrated that under those conditions where structurally women get affected, their intrinsic motivation get restored by self-development, networking, faith and selective engagement which is an indication that SDT is not that linear where support results in outright motivation, however it is a rather more dynamic process where sometimes frustration influence restoration resulting in persistence.

Each research question is therefore discussed and responded to considering the interpretations of the findings and the expanded understanding of SDT where themes

derived in the analysis of participants' narratives consider how the basic needs were expressed, how they were blocked, and what strategies were employed to restore and reactivate them. This SDT frame is setting the tone to delve deep into understanding how intrinsic motivation influences women's aspirations to pursue leadership roles in the private sector of Lesotho.

6.2.1. RQ1: Intrinsic Motivation and Women's Leadership Aspirations

This section addresses RQ1, which explores how intrinsic motivation influences women's aspirations to pursue leadership roles in Lesotho's private sector, in particular autonomy and competence. The findings indicated that the initial motivation for women to pursue leadership roles was purpose driven. They emphasised that they were driven more by their inner position of control and a drive to impact their respective organisations and others. Women leaders felt that they had a deep inner calling to make a meaningful contribution. Therefore, leadership became an important role and path for serving others and proving their own development. It became a self-driven activity for learning and taking up challenging roles, which exhibited ethical leadership.

To sum it up, leadership was thus experienced as a self-endorsed goal and not as something imposed by the organisation. Within SDT terms, this reflects a high level of autonomy where women recognised leadership as something they had chosen willingly, and an anticipation of competence reflecting a desire to exercise and grow their capabilities. This resonates with self-determination studies providing support for an intrinsic, purpose-driven orientation and women's motivation to lead.

The literature examined in Chapter Two supports this analysis in that, Ryan and Deci (2020) and Jnaneswar and Ranjit (2022) suggested that autonomy-based motivation facilitates persistence in limiting situations that share a similar concern for self-initiated activities. Morkevičiūtė and Endriulaitienė, (2020) validate that competence-based satisfaction facilitates persistence for exclusion to persist, implying that skill building is associated with persistence and reinforcing reward. In a similar perspective, Eagly and Carli (2018) underscore leadership as a relationally and ideally focused construct that corresponds to leaders' perception of leadership as a community affair. The key points mentioned above consolidate SDT's applicability in describing women leaders' appearance in leadership roles through internal rather than external facilitating factors. Building on this synthesis, this study delve deep to

understanding how SDT psychological needs operate in resource constrained and male dominated context.

When analysed in the context of the theories of SDT, the need for autonomy and competence has been identified to play an important role in women's need to be leaders. Women leaders in the current narrative conceptualised their own personal need to be leaders in terms of their desired path, in which they wanted to project their meaning and authenticity. On one side, their autonomy generated psychological energy, leading to their desire to continue, even with minimal support in the organisation. On the other side, they wanted competence, meaning learning, mastering tasks, and effective performance, which made them satisfied internally. In accordance with SDT the result was their self-determined behaviour and confirms SDT's argument that self-endorsement of goals protects motivation in the absence of strong extrinsic reinforcers. To appreciate how this translates into leadership capability, evaluation of leadership theories is essential.

While motivation is such an enabling factor, evaluating how participants narrated their stories requires examining motivation alongside leadership theories. When addressing the aspiration to lead, participants described leadership in many ways, including ethical, focusing on others, development oriented which overlaps with the leadership theories of authentic and servant leadership as highlighted by Freudling (2020). These theories put strong emphasis on self-awareness, service to followers and internalised moral perspective, which has been demonstrated by most participants. The difference came forth as temporal since they highlighted existence of these attributes even before they could formally attain those leadership positions. This therefore places intrinsic motivation as an antecedent of leadership identity not as a predictor of performance.

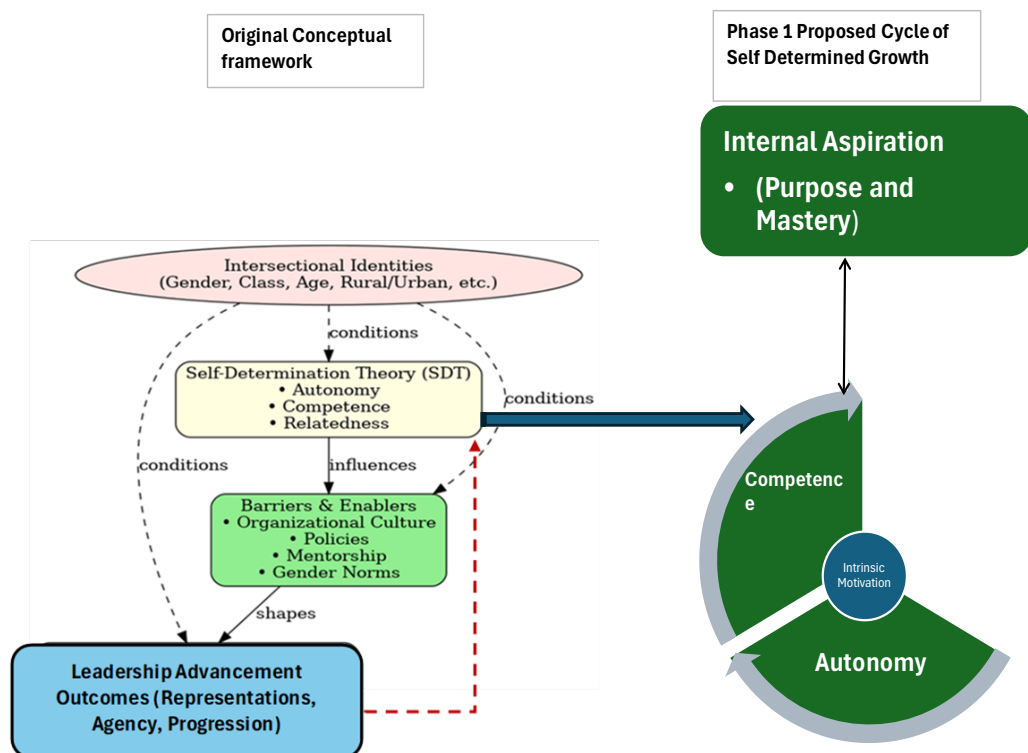
However, a contradiction emerged when comparing these discoveries to those that underscore structural and cultural factors impeding women's autonomy. Eagly and Karau (2002) and Singh et al. (2023) argued that role congruity bias discriminates against autonomous and self-assured women and that autonomy can engender resistance in patriarchal settings. Conversely, a similar study conducted by Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) highlighted that authentic and goal-oriented women are often overwhelmed with blocked autonomy in rigid hierarchical frameworks. The above points to a duality between self-motivation and fragile

parameters that are systemically biased and underappreciated. The Lesotho scenario, therefore, is characteristic of this autonomy paradox that is both enabling and suppressing in an unsupportive organisational context. These insights not only reaffirm the relevance of SDT within individual motivation but also extend its explanatory power, signalling the emergence of a broader process of self-determined growth. This evolution is conceptually illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 depicts how the original conceptual framework, which positioned SDT within broader social and intersectional conditions shaping women's leadership motivation, evolved into the proposed Cycle of Self-Determined Growth. This transformation reflects a shift from theoretical assumptions to empirically grounded psychological processes.

Figure 6.1

The evolution of the Conceptual Framework into Phase 1 of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth



As shown in the figure 6.1, autonomy and competence translate into the first phase of the cycle of internal aspiration which is anchored in purpose and mastery. This phase marks the point where theoretical needs become lived motivational realities.

In summary, RQ1 reveals that autonomy and competence are powerful initiators of leadership aspiration and underlying key factors that enable women to start their leadership journey. Women leverage these two levers and thrive through building psychological momentum out of purpose, ethics, and growth. However, it is a fragile resource where male male-dominated environment, because it can trigger negative social responses, which partly explains why women supplement autonomy with relatedness aspects like mentorship, peer support and spiritual communities; it is because connecting to others cushions them against the costs of being self-driven.

The theoretical significance of this finding is that it not only shifts and refines SDT to a growing country but also shows that endogenous factors can overcome a lack of extrinsic foundations while self-energising. In this fashion, women's value, realisation, and learning orientations provide leadership aspirations' underlying psychological infrastructure which connects authenticity to ambition. The next section continues to develop this argument in response to RQ2.

6.2.2. RQ2: Sustaining Motivation despite Limited Opportunities

The second research question explored how women sustain their motivation despite limited leadership opportunities and the findings revealed that women relied on internal and relational mechanisms to maintain motivation when organisational systems offered little recognition or mobility. Participants described actively enrolling in professional courses, mentoring others, and seeking learning opportunities as self-driven strategies to preserve progress. This findings indicates that many participants turned to self-development, mentoring and faith-based resources as responsive strategies to sustain their feeling of mastery and development which enhances their competence and growth even when advancement opportunities were not realised or slow.

Viewed through SDT lens, these behaviours demonstrate the powerful role of competence satisfaction in sustaining motivation. As a response to a lack of recognition in institutional frameworks for their efforts, women were able to find self-acknowledgement through comparison to self-established goals instead of external

ones. As a result, this self-encouragement proved to have a profound effect of translating frustration into activity. Evidently, in this case, competence proved to have a self-stabilising effect as a self-sustaining energy that replaced the lack of feedback. Under SDT theory, “I am capable” provided a self-stimulus that replaced “You are promoted.” allowing motivation to remain self-renewing rather than contingent.

This aligns with existing studies where Ryan and Deci (2020) specifically emphasise that competence fulfilment is a core component of psychological resilience and persistence even within controlling contexts. (Morkevičiūtė & Endriulaitienė, 2020) support this line of argumentation, emphasising that competence fulfilment serves to compensate for feeling excluded through perceived efficacy and self-esteem maintenance. Additional support for this is provided through Herzberg’s two-factor theory as interpreted by Alshmemri et al. (2017), maintaining that growth and achievement are established as self-sustaining factors within a context where extrinsic reward is eliminated. The basis in literature for the self-development strategies shows that self-achievement compensates for a lack of reinforcement within organisations.

This behaviour can be interpreted as positive resilience; however, looking at these in isolation would be an incomplete analysis. Participants demonstrated that to compensate for organisational shortcomings, they stretched themselves to perform extra and often invisible activities. This indicates persistence from women fixing themselves, where the expectation would be for organisations to fix biased systems. Participants’ demonstration of self-initiated upskilling shows competence-seeking behaviour, which can be interpreted as burdensome because they work twice as much to fit into existing unequal structures defeating the definition of motivation, into a burden. This revealed contradicting theories explored next.

Contradictions from existing studies emerged, where the argument became that women’s motivations are not always sustained but rather become fragile in a more externally controlled and patriarchal setup. Singh et al. (2023) and UNDP Lesotho (n.d.) suggested that a setup where showing more effort and great ability is not appreciated and valued undermines women’s professional self-confidence. Participants confirmed this contradiction; however, they illustrated how they turned limited resources into opportunities for self-learning and networking. There is a critical lesson showing that inability and deficiency are not simply reciprocations but

can be translated into a more innovative and self-made developmental construct.

The significance of relatedness in informal mentorship and networking is not to be underestimated either. The importance of shared encouragement and experience in this regard is evident in how it enhanced their confidence and optimistic general outlook. Eagly and Carli (2018) verified the importance of establishing relationship frameworks to preserve women's leadership aspirations. Conversely, Furtado and Henriques (2025) illustrated how solidarity among peers is a reservoir of resilient motivations. However, in patriarchal organisations, mentorship opportunities are not institutionalised; validated women reasons for self-creating those platforms.

In a similar argumentation developed by Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023), the dual roles of relatedness and resilience pointed to a psychological anchoring of autonomy through shared emotional experience. This aligned to participants applying spirituality as a double-edged pillar, as the source of motivation and form of relatedness. Faith and optimism can be interpreted as a psychological strength that maintained a sense of purpose in spite of stagnation while contrarily, Kapoor et al. (2021) argue it to be a normalised hardship that make women tolerant of unjust organisational conditions in the name of motivation.

However, in this study, faith-based resilience appeared to be the mostly active and agentic anchor helping women to reframe challenges, while acknowledging that having it as a strong anchor is as a result of suppressing organisational culture and practices perpetuating systemic hardship. The strength of spirituality in this context is that it is not passive but a cognitive shift that transforms hardship into a reason for self-actuation. The weakness of spirituality in this context is that it must cope with a comparison with other factors.

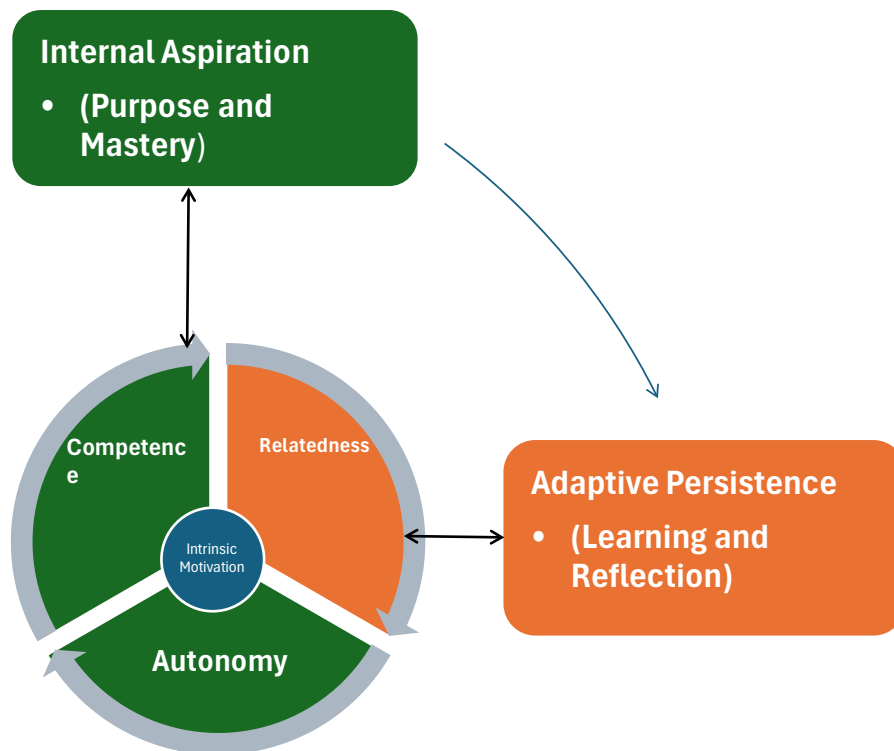
Freudling (2020), explains how effective women adapt and self-regulate their leadership desire, even when autonomy is controlled and externally limited. However, as supported by the study conducted by Eagly and Karau (2002), withdrawal is often perceived as a lack of ambition to perpetuate a bias against females. However, a more complex revelation shows how selective involvement and withdrawal operate as voluntary motive to mitigate toxic dynamics in organisations and sustain motivation.

Figure 6.2 is an illustration of how women intrinsic motivation evolves from “Internal

Aspiration” rooted in purpose and mastery into “Adaptive Persistence” where findings revealed learning, reflection and resilience and key levers. Phase 2 of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth shows how women are influenced by their psychological drivers to persist in maintaining ambitions and how they sustain motivation in the absence of organisational support. This phase extends SDT by showing intrinsic motivation functioning as an adaptive resource in a constrained environment.

Figure 6.2

Phase 2 of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth (Adaptive Persistence)



In summary, RQ2 shows that women experience a reinforcement of motivations through self-development and self-affirmation. The application of SDT theory is therefore supported and expanded. The findings show that not only will competence and relatedness exist together but will interact with a need for autonomy in a fused need for self-determination. This reveals that women sustain their motivation through adaptive processes anchored by competence autonomy and relatedness. As a result, this provided a theoretical basis for testing the response to RQ3 on how then women navigate through systemic and structural barriers.

6.2.3. RQ3: Navigating the External Barriers

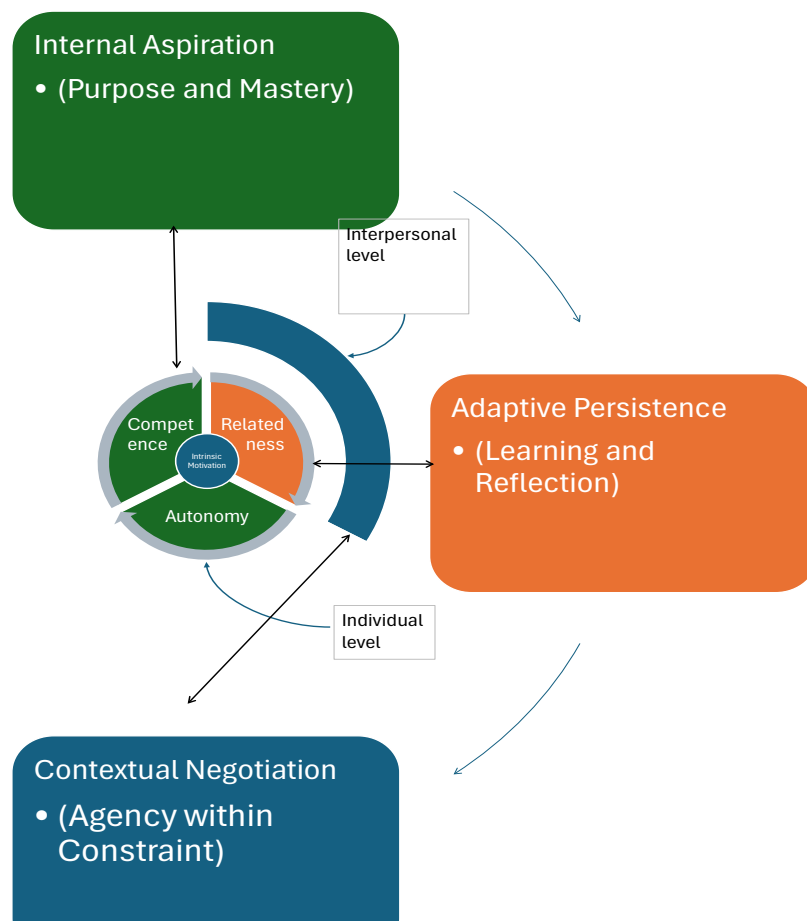
This section responds to RQ3, exploring how women sustain intrinsic motivation to

navigate structural and cultural barriers such as ageism, favouritism, tokenism, gender bias and triple burden. The findings revealed that women are continually subjected to gender bias, tokenism, and exclusion within the organisation, yet they still exhibited self-initiated resilience in chasing their leadership goals. Instead of viewing challenges as restrictions to success and leadership aspirations, they noted that they convert those challenges into opportunities for development and skill acquisition.

Figure 6.3 demonstrate the phase 3 of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth-Contextual Negotiation. This phase captures how intrinsic motivation is presented in constrained environments, where women must continually negotiate their sense of agency within structural and cultural barriers.

Figure 6.3

Phase 3 of the cycle of Self-Determined Growth (Contextual Negotiation)



Contextual Negotiation refers to the behavioural and psychological processes through which women recalibrate autonomy, competence, and relatedness to sustain motivation amid bias and exclusion. It bridges the inwardly driven persistence of Phase 2 (Adaptive Persistence) and the outward, relational resilience that transforms adversity into growth.

This ability to shift perspective and transform challenges to success factors can be interpreted as a profound psychological skill to develop and achieve success in challenging contexts. Many participants indicated that instead of withdrawing, they activate strategic agency to open networks, set boundaries and seek visibility.

Evaluating these findings against SDT, the triad constructs are strongly represented. Setting boundaries and being vocal for self-advocacy are autonomy expressions, while continuously developing skill and seeking visibility are expressing competence and relatedness, being strengthened by cultivating mentoring, sponsorship networks and building strategic networks. This demonstrates that to navigate the organisational barriers and offset the demotivation, all three dimensions need to be pulled together.

Ryan and Deci (2020) emphasised that perseverance is sustained through autonomy and competence in the absence of external reward while Furtado and Henriques (2025) argued that leadership for women is a challenging journey whose solution can be developed through self-confidence, which in this context, can be interpreted well in relation to a labyrinth demonstrating the complexities and challenges women face in leadership journey, yet intrinsic motivation becomes a central point to navigate through. Participants from this study described the setbacks and demotivation they encountered but interpreted the experience as a learning curve signifying translation of obstacles to opportunities.

However, it is important to recognise that not all participants were able to exercise this level of strategic agency to the same extent. Participants in more traditional industries, or lower in organisational hierarchy reported having less room to challenge senior men, or to demand mentoring. This suggests that intrinsic motivation is mediated by intersectional position where age, sector, seniority, and sometimes marital status are key drivers on how women respond to psychological cues. This intersectional unevenness shapes how women express and sustain resilience which can be described as motivational intelligence referring to their ability to regulate emotions and motivation, which ultimately respond to constraints.

In relation to emotional regulation and autonomy, Ryan and Deci (2020) suggested that self-goal alignment is vital for emotion regulation and well-being. However, in connection with self-regulation and emotional aspects associated with perseverance in engagement, Singh et al. (2023) assumed that emotional self-regulation and emotional intelligence are supportive factors in perseverance and resilience. On the contrary, Eagly & Karau (2002) stand in partial tension with much of the gender and leadership studies, which argue with the role congruity theory lens that women exhibiting self-autonomy where structural barriers exist can only be motivated temporarily, after which they get demoralised. Conversely, Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023), pointed out that emotional control can cause burnout when a lack of structure is relied upon for self-regulation.

The findings challenged these perspectives as many participants showcased that in Lesotho, barriers are not automatically translated into disengagement, but they become reasons for motivational reactivation. These findings support the theory of “transformative resilience” emerging from this study, translating resilience as a creative re-purpose of hardship instead of passive endurance. Participants further expressed their experiences on resilience, which proved to be a complex vision of reality, considering that it is not just about enduring hardships but to actively managing emotions and motivation. Most participants highlighted silence, calmness and restraint, which may look like self-denial, yet is self-regulation, which is employed as a strategy to maintain control and motivation. Therefore, this emotional regulation became 'adaptation through persistence', proving that resilience is not a passive but an active experience of autonomy and competence.

One important theme arising from this finding is that most women strategically utilise their relatedness to compensate for exclusion, using peer group networks and other informal relations. This suggests that connecting to information and opportunities is a factor of relatedness, helping them to sustain their intrinsic motivation despite challenges, supported by Eagly and Carli (2018). However, as suggested in a more contemporary and relevant study conducted by Kapoor et al. (2021), relational dependence can sometimes be wrongly interpreted as a lack of relation to patriarchal societies. Most participants in this study refused to have this stereotype applied to their level of dependence and have since used relatedness in order to strategically plan a level of self-determination that maintained their independence.

The role of meaning and purpose in perseverance is highlighted where leadership is not just an aspiration but a deep ethical process, to shine a light and set a good example. Eagly and Carli (2018) pointed out that a meaning-based leadership can provide a solid basis for perseverance through meaning and not through recognition aligning with the principles of intrinsic motivation. While on the other hand, Ryan and Deci (2020) claim that a meaning can improve one's desire. Although Singh et al. (2023) propose that where a long-lasting inequity is involved, meaning can decrease purpose over time, this shows that meaning has a reviving effect on a will to act through its ability to go beyond a situation playing a role of a psychological anchor between autonomy and relatedness.

Finally, RQ3 revealed a form of transformative resilience in which women balanced assertiveness with relational harmony. This interdependence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness demonstrates SDT's holistic applicability in explaining how intrinsic motivation produces adaptive persistence. The ambition to lead has been maintained in this context not through a denial of obstacles but through their reimagination as spaces for learning and agency. The results contribute to SDT theory in that they illustrate how a motive like Intrinsic Motivation is not only a personal disposition but a contextually informed strategy for working within an unjust system. It reframes resilience as an active, relational, and meaning-centered process that empowers women to lead authentically despite structural constraint.

RQ3 therefore shows that intrinsic motivation can function as a **contextually informed strategy** for working within unjust systems. But it also shows its limits: where social power is very low, even strong autonomy and competence cannot fully neutralise entrenched bias. This is the bridge to RQ4, which examines the organisational side of the equation.

6.2.4. RQ4: Interplay of Organisational Dynamics

RQ4 focused on how organisational cultures, practices and leadership style support or hinder women's intrinsic motivation. The findings have shown that a critical factor in influencing a participant's level of motivation is related to social and structural climates. In a positive work environment where leaders were supportive, participants experienced a psychologically safe environment, positive developmental feedback and fair recognition, thus demonstrating greater engagement, self-esteem, and a feeling of belonging. However, when a biased perspective against females existed in

workplace structure, and a lack of policies and strategies in place to address this bias to promote equality, participants demonstrated a decrease in their level of motivation.

Within a foundation inspired by SDT, it is evident that the above findings illustrate that organisational contexts directly impact the fulfilment and frustration of basic psychological needs. This shows that the triad construct of autonomy competence and relatedness is not only inner needs but are delivered or frustrated through social structures. In this study, psychological safety was demonstrated as an expression of relatedness, where development feedback was the organisational expression of competence and trust from managers was an expression of autonomy.

This aspect challenges the current SDT framework and adds a layer of interpersonal and organisational dynamics in the development of a Cycle of Self-Determined Growth, which shows that motivation is not static but an evolving aspect and it is influenced by both the inner needs and outer behaviours. The presence of supportive managers offering recognition and development feedback facilitated competence to improve self-perceived competence and self-esteem. The presence of environments that facilitated cooperation and mutual respect contributed to relatedness to not only achieve but to sustain and promote self-motivation as a human need. In addition, trust and openness in organisational cultures facilitated autonomy to promote volitional and self-driven behaviours in women to achieve self-intuitive goals through roles. Hence, the presence and absence of external reinforcement impact self-driven forces to either thrive and succeed or break and fail.

Contrary to the above interpretation, Gierke et al. (2025) indicated that psychological safety and leadership are critical for engaging and improving well-being in leaders and workers. Herzberg's two-factor theory similarly argued that recognition and achievement are compelling source of intrinsic behaviour when recognised through fair feedback (Alshmemri et al., 2017). However, Naidoo et al. (2024) argued that human behaviour is socially embedded and when leaders recognise effort and provide opportunities in a workplace setting psychological safety improves. This complicates the idea that highly motivated individuals thrive anywhere by showing that even the most self-directed participants highlighted withdrawal, emotional detachment or selective involvement at some point where organisational environments become toxic. This indicates that intrinsic motivation has conditional stability, thus leaders need to draw upon this fundamental theory and apply the

psychological process that underlies innate behaviour.

Existing studies align with the above interpretation on how patriarchal or exclusionary congruity theory demonstrates that masculine leadership cultures marginalise women's relational leadership styles, thereby frustrating SDT needs. Similar observations were made by Singh et al. (2023) and who argued that biased evaluation and feedback systems have contributed to a decrease in capability and autonomy relating to imbalanced recognition.

The lack of mentorship initiatives and policies for gender equity in many firms within the study is indicative of this, as supported by Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023). This also points to an illustration that tokenistic strategies at the workplace may block employees from making greater commitments, suppressing their level of autonomy and independence (Kapoor et al., 2021). Even though women show resilience, that resilience can still be weakened or ignored if organisations don't provide proper structural and systemic support. In other words, resilience alone isn't enough; findings and studies show that it still needs an enabling organisational environment to be sustained. This insight extends SDT by highlighting the organisational environment as an enabling or constraining field for intrinsic motivation, confirming that self-determination cannot be entirely self-contained.

The central insight emerging from these findings is that psychological safety and fair recognition are indeed the organisational expressions of autonomy and competence. The subjects in trust and openness-based environments have recorded higher volition in taking initiatives as proposed by Gierke et al. (2025), where safety is a precondition in innovation and engagement. However, in a fear of bias and exclusion-based environment, subjects were restrained in self-disclosure and aspirations. The above-mentioned point proves that according to SDT theory, environments can either promote and restrict innate human motivations based on how well those needs are met and/or frustrated. Therefore, self-driven people need to have their commitment to those needs validated.

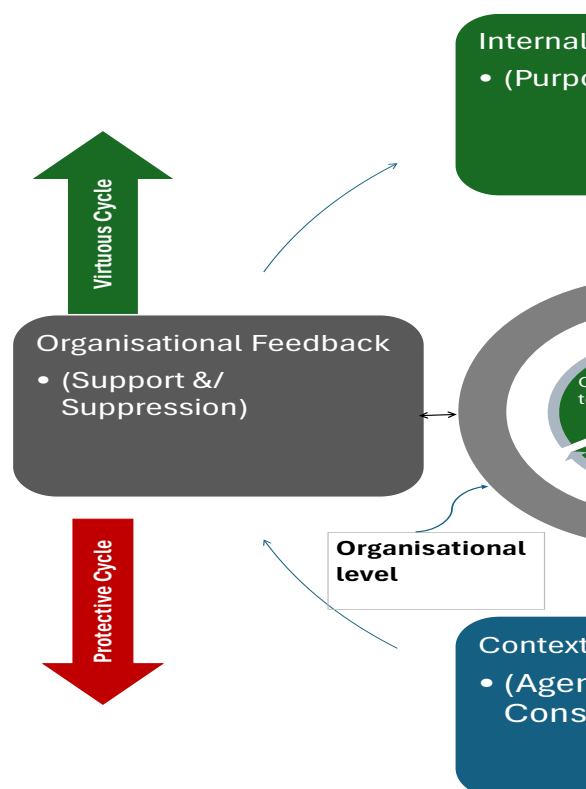
The concept articulated by Ryan and Deci (2020) is particularly relevant here emphasising that, when autonomy, competence, or relatedness are constantly undermined, motivation shifts from intrinsic to defensive. Participants who reported isolation, unfair treatment, or lack of voice often responded with withdrawal or emotional detachment. However, for those in inclusive organisations, a different

description of their motivation emerged as one that is energizing rather than draining. Thus, a difference in two different contexts points to a conditional stability within a context where intrinsic motivation will thrive if and only if it is not challenged externally.

Interlinking the above synthesis and the study shows that organisational dynamics should not be treated as a standalone background variable but should be integrated as part of the motivational cycle adding to the Phase 4 of developing the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth as shown in Figure 6.4. This clearly illustrates that the organisational dynamics can either push women into virtuous cycle of engagement and leadership ambition or down into a protective cycle of self-preservation and reduced visibility. This organisational dimension completes the motivational cycle, where external conditions reciprocally reinforce or erode intrinsic drives established in earlier phases

Figure 6.4

Phase 4 of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth (Organisational Feedback)



In summary, RQ 4 shows that a decisive role for dynamics in organisations is to moderate intra-motivation. The presence of empowering leaders, equity-based

recognition, and emotional security triggers the triad of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in SDT. Lack of equity in opportunities and lack of a presence in decisions and social exchanges undercuts those needs and triggers a deterioration in self-motivation even within intrinsically motivated.

The message here, is that nurturing women leaders cannot treat self-vulnerability as sufficient, despite a need for structural self-awareness. There is a need to develop a context that will validate competence and sustain women voices hence the next section integrates all these findings across four research questions into a solid synthesis that helped develop an integrated cycle of self-determination model.

6.3. Cross Research Questions Synthesis

The cross-synthesis of findings illustrates that women's intrinsic motivation and leadership aspiration arise from an interdependent system of personal agency, relational support, and organisational context. Across all four research questions, the data reveal a consistent motivational logic where women's drive to lead is sustained when they experience autonomy in decision-making, competence through growth and mastery, and relatedness through belonging and meaningful contribution. When these conditions are frustrated, intrinsic motivation declines, and external coping mechanisms like self-regulation, spirituality, or grit are necessitated.

6.3.1. Integration Across Research Questions

RQ1 (Aspiration and Meaning) identified intrinsic motivation as an intrinsically motivated seeking of purpose and self-mastery. Women explained aspiration as desired "making a difference" and "proving my ability," implying competence and autonomy as fundamental needs.

RQ2 (Sustaining Motivation) exemplified the manner in which intrinsic motivation is sustained through intrinsic reinforcement of persistence, reconstruction, and learning. Participants actively transform failures into lessons, retaining the freedom of mindset and competence by self-improvement, while faith and reflection impose the dimension of relatedness by relating effort to broader meaning.

RQ3 (Navigating Barriers) shows how motivation was challenged within limiting systems. Women exercise strategic agency in relation to assertiveness, networking, and boundary-setting that safeguards autonomy and competence but limits overload

and discriminates against others. The strategies demonstrated above illustrate that a motive is not fixed but constantly negotiated in relation to restricting factors.

RQ4 (Organisational Dynamics) revealed the overwhelming controlling impact of structure and culture upon motivation. When leadership climates promote trust, development, and inclusion, women experience higher relatedness and competence; when dominated by favouritism, exclusion, or superficial equity, intrinsic motivation declines sharply.

6.3.2. Thematic Interplay: From individual drive to systemic conditions

Synthesising between RQs identifies a three-level motivational system:

- i. **Individual Level (RQ1–RQ2):** Motivation automatically occurs inherent through purpose, self-confidence, and developmental orientation and results in self-directedness even coercion.
- ii. **Interpersonal Level (RQ3):** Motivation is conditional to interpersonal dynamics. This entails supportive mentors, open peers, or toxic networks which sustain or take down relatedness.
- iii. **Organisational Level (RQ4):** The role of policy, culture, and leadership behaviour is to discourage and encourage motivation in this level. However, autonomy get pressured under political and fixed systems while competence thrives under open systems.

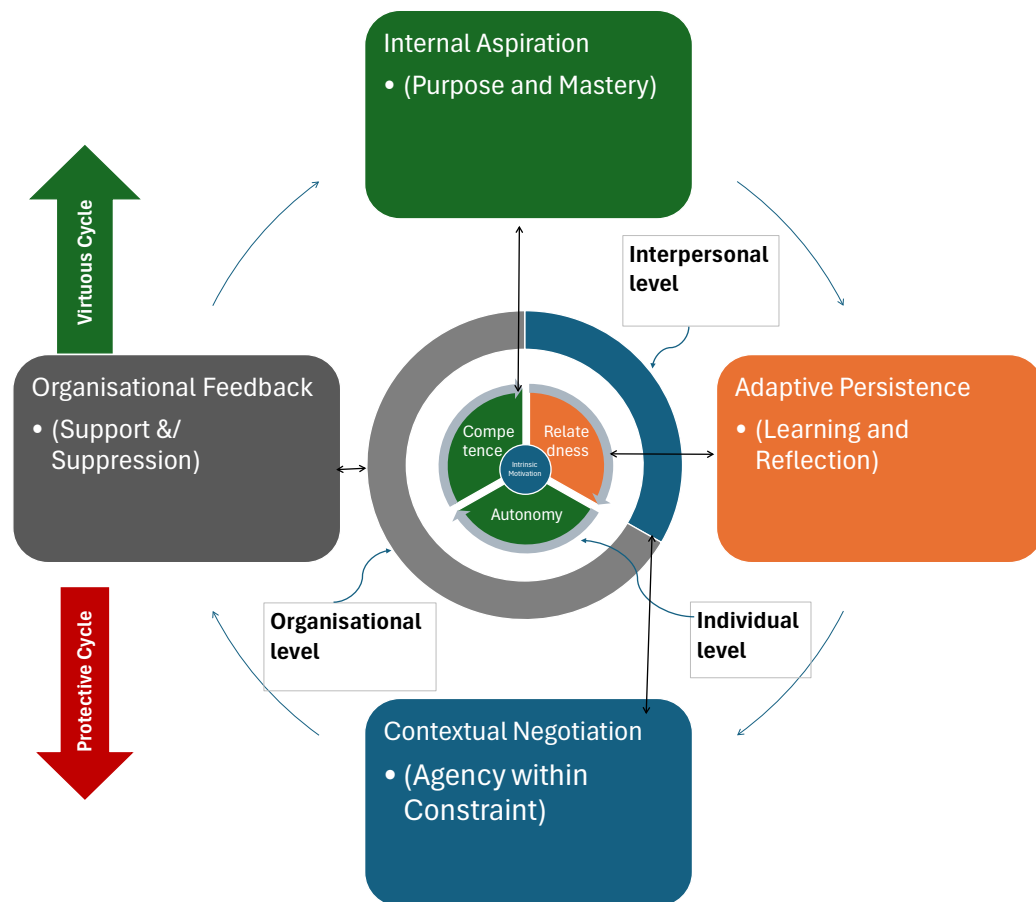
This multi-level structure reveals that intrinsic motivation is both a system-independent resource and an organisational system-dependent result. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are always produced by the interplay between organisational environment and personal agency.

6.3.3. Overarching Analytical Model

Across all themes, the analysis gives how women's leadership motivation in the Lesotho's private sector operates through a "Cycle of Self-Determined Growth", characterised by:

Figure 6.5

Proposed Model – Cycle of Self- Determined Growth



Note: The final proposed Cycle of Self-Determined Growth; At the centre of the model is “Intrinsic motivation”; This the model that refines the classic SDT framework from a simple three construct into a cyclical four pillar inner needs and outer behaviours.

- i. **Internal Aspiration (Purpose and Mastery):** Initiation of intrinsic motivation through self-defined goals and moral authenticity with the intention to establish self-driven autonomy and competence.
- ii. **Adaptive Persistence (Learning and Reflection):** Sustaining the motivation drive by being resilient and adapting to gradual change thereby creating self-regulatory balance.

- iii. **Organisational Feedback (Support and/or Suppression):** Motivation stimulates and encourages desire for women to lead, while demotivation suppresses it, resulting in organisational systems and cultures' effectiveness with outcome of generating transformative resilience.
- iv. **Contextual Negotiation (Agency within Constraint):** Strategic independence formulation that helps to navigate external constraints to sustain the virtuous motivation cycle.

When institutions afford freedom, value competence, and foster belonging, intrinsically oriented female motivation grows, and the virtuous cycle of engagement and leadership ambition occurs. When the needs are frustrated, the cycle goes autonomous and protective, and the result is stagnation or hesitation.

In summary, the cross-synthesis describes the intrinsic motivation of women leaders to be multi-faceted and contextual. It excels where personal purpose, social relatedness, and institutional equity intersect. SDT's constructs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness provide an integrative interpretive lens whereby the experiences converge. With this discussion, the study concludes by integrating the problem with the literature and how research questions were formulated to provide a fully fleshed analysis of women experiences in Lesotho's private sector to conclude on how intrinsic motivation influences their leadership advancement.

7. CHAPTER 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1. Introduction

This study took place in Lesotho, an area underexplored as previous studies focused greater attention on Western leadership theories and gender equality models. This environment offered a unique setting to test the SDT in a collectivist developing economy, revealing that relatedness operates as a foundational need. Applying SDT to Lesotho broadened the theoretical applicability and transferability to this underexplored region. This Chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the key findings elaborated and discussed in Chapters Five and Six. It further outlines the theoretical and practical contributions that inform the recommendations for policy and practice prevailing in the private sector of Lesotho, which can be generalised and transferred to other regions, thus adding value to the body of knowledge. SDT guided this study by assessing its triad constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to understand how intrinsic motivation influences women's leadership advancement within Lesotho's private sector.

7.2. Research Summary

7.2.1. Research aim

The study aimed to understand key internal drivers that shape women to aspire to take on leadership roles and how those drivers help them sustain those aspirations and persistence even in environments where opportunities and support are limited. The study further recognised the external forces that play a role in blocking women's leadership opportunities; however, the focus of this study shifted to exploring how women use their intrinsic motivation to navigate those barriers to advance and remain relevant in the private sector of Lesotho. The literature emphasised the role organisational dynamics play in women's leadership advancement worldwide, which required a close consideration, and to close all the loops, the study went further to exploring how those dynamics support or hinder women's intrinsic motivation to persist in the pursuit of leadership roles.

7.2.2. Purpose of the Study

Prior studies highlighted that women's leadership continues to lag despite all the global initiatives in place to accelerate women into leadership roles, in many

developing countries like Lesotho (Gander & Sharafizad, 2025). It was further noted that organisations focus more on external structures to mitigate these issues, like training and fixing the quotas, yet less attention is given to psychological mechanisms that enable women to thrive even in systemically constrained environments (Furtado & Henriques, 2025). This study closed that gap by adding depth in understanding the human dimension of leadership advancement and motivation through the SDT lens.

Through understanding these levers, the study aimed to support organisations in effectively retaining talent and utilising it where required, for the benefit of the organisational growth in performance, persistence and creativity. The findings are meant to help HR practitioners identify intrinsic drivers in women's leadership, enabling the design of effective leadership pipelines. At the policy level, the study explored how intersectionality impacts women's access to leadership roles by providing evidence-based recommendations advocating for inclusive and psychologically safe organisational cultures, paving the way for women to excel in leadership. It further informs policy reforms that support resilient and motivated women leaders serving strategic empowerment.

7.2.3. Summary of Methodology

This study was conducted using a qualitative, interpretivist research approach, where 17 women working in six diverse industries within the private sector in Lesotho were interviewed using the semi-structured interview guide. The SDT constructs formed the conceptual framework on which the themes were anchored, allowing for interpretation of participants' experiences in leadership to centre around autonomy, competence and relatedness; hence, the data were analysed thematically. This design was appropriate for this study as it captured lived experiences, unlocking the ability to gather rich, subtle psychological and contextual information that a quantitative approach would have overlooked.

7.3. Research Findings

This study revealed that women's leadership aspirations are driven by personal purpose grounded in values and ethics, where the goal is not recognition or reward but a desire to leave an impact. This shows a self-directed growth, a desire for mastery and meaningful impact, reflecting the fulfilment of SDT constructs of autonomy, where participants made choices and willingly endorsed their behaviour.

Competence is illustrated by experience of being effective in their activities and relatedness fulfilled by contribution and connectedness with others. This demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is a foundational driver of leadership aspirations.

It was further found that women use setbacks as learning opportunities instead of allowing them to demotivate them; they self-initiate their formal learning and development without being forced by the systems to do so or expecting to get rewarded for learning. When asked about where they draw their strength, many of them indicated faith and purpose as their spiritual anchor. This behaviour indicates that women sustain their leadership aspiration and motivation through a proactive mindset, the emotional regulation ability and purpose-centred persistence, reflecting competence by portraying upskilling and resilience, autonomy through self-regulation and goal focus and relatedness through spiritual anchoring and community relations.

Persistent barriers that women face in leadership encompassing intersectional identities are acknowledged, which include gender discrimination, agism, triple burden and visibility struggle. However, the interest was more in how women navigate through these struggles. The findings revealed the importance of intrinsic motivation in navigating these challenges, where participants illustrated how they leverage strategic networks, assertiveness and setting visible boundaries. This behaviour reflects autonomy through vocalisation and self-regulations resembling competence, where women consistently work to prove capability and directly seek recognition, and relatedness, emphasising mentorships and sponsorship as key strategies. They are therefore empowered by intrinsic motivation to navigate structural and cultural barriers through self-directed initiatives and activations that reinforce autonomy, competence and relational support.

The findings depict that intrinsic motivation is not purely internal and individual-oriented; however, other aspects influence it directly. This study, therefore, took note of that and went to explore how organisational dynamics support or hinder intrinsic motivation. Where participants experience supportive environments, they demonstrated competence enhancement and confidence over those who experience toxic cultures, favouritism and superficial inclusion, who in turn demonstrated autonomy, relatedness and psychological safety destruction. In this instance, growth opportunities foster competence while micromanagement and lack of voice

undermine autonomy and relatedness and are compromised by isolation and tokenistic behaviour.

However, organisational dynamics play a role in either enabling or suppressing this motivation driven by how organisations support women's psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The fulfilment of all these needs results in intrinsic motivation becoming a powerful catalyst for leadership advancement despite limited opportunities. This narrative, therefore, informed an extension of SDT. Triad constructs alone are not enough to influence intrinsic motivation, but interpersonal and organisational aspects play a role in building on the contributions this study provided to the existing theory.

7.4. Theoretical Contributions

7.4.1. Contextual and Cultural Perspectives

SDT is a global theory which, when applied in the Lesotho context, brought in new aspects; It is a developing collectivist country rooted in cultural and traditional dynamics, with leadership being male dominated. It shows that relatedness is not only a self-actualisation need as per (Schultheiss, 2021) but foundational, which serves as a leadership survival strategy and a motivational resource for women.

7.4.2. Intrinsic Motivation over Extrinsic Motivation

The study is unique and rare in African markets, contributing to the addition of new perspectives on how invisible forces within individuals, like intrinsic motivation, are the strongest levers to sustain leadership effort, especially in this era where people are obsessed with incentives and external rewards. This study flipped the usual lens by shifting the story from shortfalls to resilience and agency, moving the focus from the external barriers to motivation, responding to what keeps women going despite all these systemic barriers. In this study, women are reframed as psychological agents navigating constraints instead of victims of structure, bringing into play the energising original angle.

7.4.3. Organisational Dynamics Integration

This study shows that motivation operates as a cycle where autonomy initiates action, competence stabilises effort, and relatedness provides a renewed energy

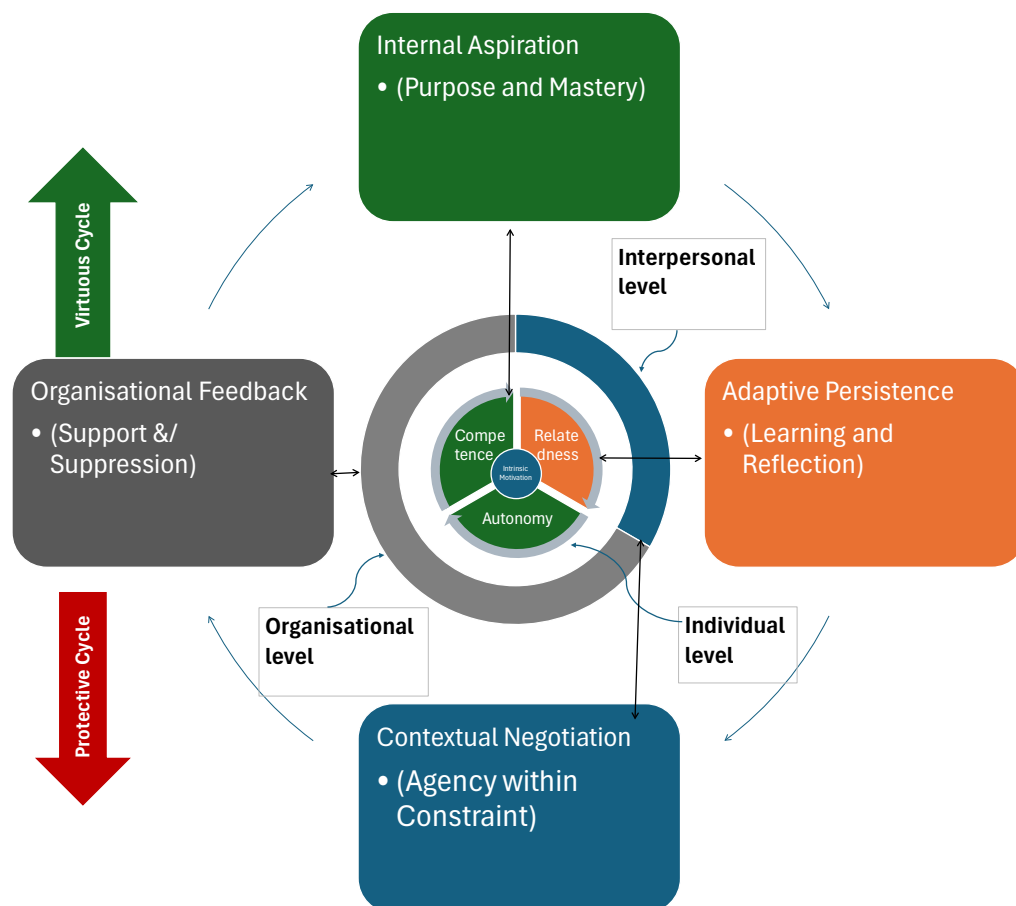
and confidence. However, organisational dynamics as detailed in section 7.3 (Findings). This study reframes SDT from being just an individual-oriented theory to integrating it with organisational dynamics, developing a consolidated process.

7.4.4. Proposal of the Cycle of Self-Determined Growth Model

The study brought in the proposal of a Cycle of Self-Determined Growth model shown in Figure 7.1, which provides a map on how to design environments that fuel intrinsic motivation, extending the SDT theory by showcasing the interplay and interconnectedness of SDT constructs with organisational environment and interpersonal behaviours.

Figure 7.1

Proposed Model- Cycle of Self-Determined Growth



Note: The final proposed Cycle of Self-Determined Growth; At the centre of the model is “Intrinsic motivation”; This the model that refines the classic SDT framework from a simple three construct into a cyclical four pillar inner needs and outer

behaviours.

This model shows that motivation is not static but moves with time, hence an ongoing growth cycle, it resembles a cyclical and regenerative look, moving from a fixed triad to a moving cycle, a unique perspective from what had been studied before.

This cycle demonstrates that women do not just stay motivated despite barriers, but at some point, they convert the challenges into self-determination fuel. This is interpreted as follows: achieving competence makes autonomy strong, autonomy deepens relatedness through mentorships, and relatedness restores confidence and drives new growth. This model is translational, not just academic, which implies that it can be deployed instantly in leadership development context, adding to the practicality of this study.

While this model serves the theoretical refinement of SDT, it is also serving as the pragmatic framework for women's leadership advancement in Lesotho by influencing policies and leadership practices that recognise women's competence, developmental feedback and legitimising adaptive learning behaviours that foster sustained intrinsic motivation. The model identifies leverage points through which organisations can strengthen a virtuous motivational cycle and monitor suppressive climates that triggers protective cycle, limiting both individual and organisational growth. This therefore informs the practical implications detailed in the next section.

7.5. Practical Implications

This study offers practical takeaways for HROs, Managers and policymakers who are still looking for strategies to employ to accelerate women into leadership, which in turn will contribute to the SDG5. This study proposes strategies that actively support environments that nurture psychological safety beyond structural compliance. Aligning organisational culture and practices with these psychological needs will not only motivate women to persist in their leadership ambition but also improve talent retention, promote innovation, encourage resilience and unleash creativity.

7.5.1. Recommendations for Policy Makers

Currently, the policies around gender balance at the workplace are seen in political and public spaces, and nothing has been set for the private sector yet. While it is understandable that private companies have their own rules of operations and engagements, they still need to comply with the overall national guidelines. The policy makers are therefore recommended to establish policies that incentivise organisations that cultivate intrinsic motivation, which moves it from being numerical targets to being a value-added initiative where frameworks embedded can be sustainable and growth measurable. These initiatives can include effective implementation of mentorship programs, women leadership programs and rounded inclusive practices. It can extend to partnerships between the public sector and private sector to provide a shared leadership academy for start-up female employees for early cultivation of intrinsic motivation that boosts confidence, psychological safety, unleashes purpose and encourages continuous upskilling and leadership readiness. The Incentives can be in the form of tax rebates.

7.5.2. Recommendations for Managers and Organisational Leaders

The participants in this study highlighted that the system does not trust their inputs, offer flexibility and recognition through statements like “As a woman, I have to work twice as much to be recognised for the same effort a man gives”. This study therefore recommends leaders to adopt autonomy-supporting management styles that empower women to initiate and make decisions and focus on constructive feedback and visible recognition of their contribution to encourage emotional resilience and self-awareness (competence and autonomy). This practice will enhance competence, and the result is talent retention and leveraging excellent, innovative and growing performance.

The construct of relatedness came across as a powerful resource, also, which is also used by women not only for belonging but for strategic networks and creating relationships that assist in navigating the systemic barriers. This study therefore recommends that leaders and managers build a psychologically safe and inclusive culture where all voices are heard and respected, to unlock engagement across teams. This can be achieved by consistent town halls where women's contributions get embraced, being invited to decision-making tables and being acknowledged publicly; all these can transform intrinsic motivation.

7.5.3. Recommendation for HROs

HR departments are responsible for establishing systems and guidelines that support the effective management of people. This study recommends a review of the recruitment, promotion, and performance management processes to ensure transparency and fairness in all aspects. Participants indicated how favouritism, tokenism and genderism play in organisations, impacting their motivation. It is through these offices that women can start trusting the process because of the transparency and fair play exerted in that department.

It is acknowledged that training and development programmes are in place in most organisations; however, HROs are recommended to restructure these programmes to move from focusing on technical competence to include even the capabilities that enhance self-efficacy and confidence. Participants further highlighted the power of mentorship and sponsorship as a form of relationship to enhance their relatedness. It is therefore recommended that HROs establish formal mentorship programs and sponsorship initiatives connecting early career women with experienced mentors to address relatedness needs and provide role models for future leaders to see that leadership is attainable and valuable.

7.6. Limitations and Future Research

This study provided in-depth, rich and valuable insights; however, several limitations were identified and acknowledged. Nonetheless, these limitations do not weaken the findings in this study but form an informative direction for future research.

7.6.1. Limitations

The study explored a qualitative interpretivist research approach with multiple inherent biases and subjectivity that may affect the generalisability of the results. Detailed research limitations were explored as follows:

- The geographic scope confines the study to Lesotho and may not apply beyond Lesotho. The study further focused on women in the private sector, where the results may not fully represent the experiences of women in other sectors like public institutions, parastatals and Not-For-Profit organisations (NGOs). The organisational cultures and sector variations, and dynamics could influence the difference on how autonomy, competence and relatedness are viewed.

- Generalisability may be limited by the sample employed; The sample size of 17 women may be regarded as a relatively small sample, even though studies defend a sample size of 12 to 18 as sufficient for a qualitative study (Sim et al., 2018). Furthermore, the participants were selected by the researcher, which may represent women who already have intrinsic motivation, self-aware and are visibly advancing in leadership, potentially excluding those who are stagnant and disengaged from leadership aspirations. In addition, male perceptions of the same constructs were excluded.
- Six industries may not fully represent all the other industries that were not included, like farming, textiles and construction, where targeted participants failed to honour the invitations for interviews. They may be experiencing intrinsic motivation and organisational dynamics differently.
- Intrinsic motivation is not static but an evolving concept; the data collected at a single point in time limits the objectivity of how the experience of the same aspect may change over time creating a temporal limitation.
- The study relied on participants' narratives, giving self-reported data, which may have introduced selective recall or bias, resulting in withholding some experiences. This could have been the case in some topics that have organisational implications or were regarded as sensitive, like discrimination, how organisations suppress motivation and demotivating aspects at the workplace.
- The study focused on a single theory (SDT), excluding other motivational theories like social identity theory, role congruity theory, resilience theory and feminist organisational theory, which may have provided diverse interpretations on data collected and a deep understanding of how identity and systemic power relations interact with motivation. While the SDT was an effective theory for this study, the integration of other theories may have brought in some more interesting aspects of intrinsic motivation, thereby creating a theoretical limitation.

7.6.2. Suggestions for Future Research

While the limitations above do not weaken the results of this study, they inform

recommendations for future research, which could add significant value to the existing literature. Based on the insights derived from this research, the following are suggestions for potential future research focus:

- The cross-sector (Public, parastatal, NGOs) or countries comparative research on the same aspects can be conducted to test the transferability of the Cycle of Self-Determined growth model identified in the study.
- Intrinsic motivation as an evolving phenomenon can be explored through a longitudinal study to assess how motivation changes across career stages and organisational shifts.
- A mixed method or Quantitative method can be applied in future to capture experiences and patterns on a broader scope and test the model proposed in this study across a larger population to validate its effectiveness.
- The future research could include the male leaders to assess how they perceive the interplay between intrinsic motivation in women and their leadership advancement progress. This viewpoint will inform a more balanced and systemic organisational strategy on gender balance policies and practice.
- Future research is recommended to look at intersectional identities beyond gender, like age, rural-urban and class and explore how they interact with intrinsic motivation and leadership access.
- Future research should consider multiple theories and intersectional approaches to explore the interplay of motivational aspects and leadership progression integrated in diverse theories and how the outlook is through multiple lenses.

7.7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates women's drive to lead through intrinsic motivation. It shows that drive is not dependent upon structurally provided opportunities but is instead derived from internal purpose, internal competence and internal connection. This validated the SDT proposition that when autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, the result is enhanced motivation, engagement and persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2020). It further confirmed that inner purpose and self-belief are key aspects of

sustaining women's leadership ambition rather than external incentives (Jnaneswar & Ranjit, 2022). However, while intrinsic motivation is the invisible engine for women's leadership progress beyond systemic issues, it can work as a substitute but cannot replace structural support. It temporarily compensates for weak systems, but if they persist, psychological safety gets lost. This study, therefore, reaffirmed that supportive environments strengthen and amplify intrinsic motivation through psychological safety and fair feedback.

This study challenged the studies that emphasised autonomy as the primary driver and dominant motivational need, and those that viewed competence as a self-sufficient lever to sustain motivation. This study contrarily revealed that relatedness played a more pivotal role in sustaining motivation within the collectivist culture of Lesotho, likewise, revealing that while personal mastery reinforced motivation, without organisational validation and relational affirmation, women's motivation becomes vulnerable to collapse.

To respond to how intrinsic motivation influences women's leadership advancement, this study proposed a cycle of the self-determined growth model, which recontextualises SDT, by illustrating that motivation is a continuous and interactive process, not a static, isolated need. Where autonomy initiates aspiration, competence sustains the effort, and relatedness renews motivation, the cycle continues, however organisational dynamics play a role to encourage or suppress it. This study validates that women's leadership potential is not created by opportunity, reframing that it is rather creating opportunities where autonomy, competence and relatedness are combined, nurtured and supported.

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9. Appendices:

Appendix 1: Invitation to Participate



Dear ~~MsXXX~~

I hope this message finds you well.

My name is XX, an MBA student at Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), a business school of the University of Pretoria. I request some of your time to take part in my research titled ***Intrinsic Motivation in Women's Leadership Advancement, in the Lesotho private sector.***

The purpose of the research is to understand what drives and motivates women to pursue leadership and succeed in those positions, regardless of the challenges they might be facing, other than external motivators. The research is focused on internal motivators, values, and experiences that influence their leadership journey

You have been identified because your leadership advancement and experience are crucial in determining the purpose of this research. Your story is valued and matters, and I would be honoured to learn from you. I am inspired by the work that you are doing in the private sector, and more so, your experience as a woman in leadership in the private sector makes your story significant.

Please be kind to accept a 30-minute to 1-hour one-on-one interview at a time and format that is convenient for you. The interview will cover your career journey, motivations, values, challenges, and aspirations. Rest assured, there is no harm or loss in participating.

By sharing your experience, you may help contribute to a greater understanding of how women navigate, sustain, and overcome barriers to advancement to leadership. Your voice can help to shape inclusive leadership development practices and inspire the next generation of women leaders in the Lesotho private sector.

If you are willing to participate, please contact me at XXX or XXX. I would like to thank you in advance for considering my request.

Warm Regards,

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent Statement

The title of this study is Intrinsic Motivation in Women's Leadership Advancement, exploring the Lesotho's private sector.

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the intrinsic motivation of women in pursuing and advancing into leadership roles to understand the internal drivers, values, and experiences that shape their leadership journeys.
2. **Questions:** You will be asked questions about your personal and professional experiences, including your motivations, values, challenges, and the organisational environment in which you work, which means the interview will focus on your leadership aspirations and the factors that influence your motivation.
3. **Benefit(s):** By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your leadership journey and contribute to a deeper understanding of how women experience and sustain motivation in leadership contexts; therefore, the insights drawn from your contributions may help inform more inclusive leadership development practices and policies within the private sector in Lesotho.
4. **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is entirely voluntary, which allows you to decide to withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences or need to provide a reason.
5. **Confidentiality:** Your identity will be kept secret, and the audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and used only for this research.
6. **Interview Duration:** The interview is estimated to take approximately 30 minutes to one hour.
7. **Compensation:** There is no financial compensation for participating in this study; however, your contributions are valuable and appreciated.

Further questions or concerns can be referred to the researcher Mapeete Ntjana on the following contact details: Email: xxx@mygibs.co.za , Phone: +266 5881**** or alternatively her supervisor XX XX on [xxx](tel:xxx)

I have read and understood this informed consent statement and agree to participate.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Interview Guide



INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you very much for meeting me today. I really appreciate your time and input in this research.

The research aims to understand how women push through to leadership roles in Lesotho's private sector, and what drives them along the way. The story of your journey, what you learned, and what you experienced will help this study gain a broader perspective of the drivers, challenges, and opportunities that women face in their leadership journey.

To adequately capture your story, I will guide this conversation with a set of questions, and I thank you in advance for your reflective response based on your career journey.

#	Interview Questions	RQ
1	Please take me through your career journey, from where you started to where you are today? What motivates you to have a desire to move up the leadership ladder?	RQ1
2	What internal values or beliefs do you hold that motivate you to take a leadership role?	RQ1
3	If you look back on your career, when did you first think, you would want to take a leadership role, and what was influencing you in that thinking?	RQ1
4	What personal qualities or inner strengths help you stay motivated even when faced with challenges in your leadership journey?	RQ2
5	In your opinion, would you say women face limited leadership opportunities? Have you ever been motivated or demotivated because of the outcome? If demotivated, how did you regain your motivation?	RQ2
6	Have you ever felt like at some point you were not progressing or that you were blocked? What was it that kept you motivated to keep pushing through that?	RQ2

7	How does the inner drive get you through those obstacles in society and/ or organisation?	RQ3
8	What kinds of challenges or barriers have you faced along the way for that leadership role, and how were you impacted?	RQ3
9	What helped you keep going to overcome that major setback you encountered in your career journey?	RQ3
10	In what ways is your workplace supporting or hindering your motivation to pursue leadership roles?	RQ4
11	Are there specific practices, policies, or relationships at work that are either energising you or demotivating you?	RQ4
12	How would you describe the organisational culture in your workplace regarding leadership opportunities for women?	RQ4

Appendix 4: Comprehensive Qualitative Codebook

How to use this codebook

- Unit of coding: sentence/short passage describing motivation, barriers, support, or outcomes.
- Double-coding is allowed where a passage legitimately maps to multiple SDT domains.
- Apply Inclusion/Exclusion cues to maintain reliability; track verbatim evidence.
- SDT domains: Autonomy (choice and control), Competence (effectiveness/mastery), Relatedness (belonging/connection).

RQ	Code	SDT Domain	Definition	Inclusion cues	Exclusion cues
RQ1	Personal Drive/Ambition	Competence	Mastery orientation and pursuit of excellence.	Mentions striving for excellence, mastery, and stretch goals.	General job satisfaction without growth emphasis.
RQ1	Impact/Purpose	Relatedness	Motivation grounded in contribution to others and role-modelling.	References helping others, role-modelling, and broader purpose.	Personal gain without social contribution.
RQ1	Autonomy/Independence	Autonomy	Desire for decision latitude and control over work.	Statements about control, decision latitude, and saying no.	Following instructions without preference/choice.
RQ1	Values: Integrity/Ethics	Autonomy	Integrity underpins credible, effective leadership.	Talk of honesty, ethical standards guiding leadership.	Generic professionalism with no ethics reference.
RQ1	Challenge/Growth	Competence	Deliberate stretch and learning orientation.	Seeking stretch tasks, learning new responsibilities.	Routine comfort or avoidance of challenge.
RQ2	Persistence/Goal Focus	Autonomy	Sustained internal commitment despite obstacles.	Keeping commitments despite setbacks.	Short-term enthusiasm only.
RQ2	Reframing Setbacks (Learning)	Competence	Convert failure into developmental information.	Turning failures into lessons, reflection after mistakes.	Blame without learning.
RQ2	Self-Awareness/Emotional Control	Autonomy	Emotion regulation maintains performance objectivity.	Regulating emotions; recognising triggers; staying objective.	Venting without self-reflection.
RQ2	Proactive Upskilling	Competence	Self-initiated skill acquisition to close gaps.	Self-initiated courses, certifications, deliberate practice.	Training is mandated by the employer only.
RQ2	Spiritual/Faith Anchor	Relatedness	Internal locus for uncontrollable contexts.	Faith/locus of control framing	Secular motivation

RQ3	Bias/Discrimination	Relatedness	Exclusion and unfairness undermine belonging.	resilience or acceptance. Experiences of exclusion, unfairness, and prejudice.	without spiritual framing. Performance feedback unrelated to identity.
RQ3	Fighting for Visibility	Competence	Extra proof of capability to counter bias.	Over-preparing, needing extra proof to be recognised.	Routine recognition without additional effort.
RQ3	Triple Burden Management	Autonomy	Constrained choice/time from role overload.	Work–family–community or multiple role overload.	Ordinary workload complaints.
RQ3	Strategic Networking/Sponsorship	Relatedness	Relational access/endorsement to advance.	Leveraging mentors, sponsors, and influential ties.	Casual socialising without advancement aims.
RQ3	Boundary Setting/Vocalisation	Autonomy	Assertion of limits and pace.	Statements about control, decision latitude, and saying no.	Following instructions without preference/choice.
RQ4	Organisational Support/Enablers	Competence	Formal development/scholarship pipelines.	Pipelines, scholarships, and formal development support.	Ad-hoc help from peers only.
RQ4	Organisational Hindrances/Barriers	Autonomy	Structures that limit fair control and action.	Policies/processes limiting control/equity.	Temporary resource shortages.
RQ4	Organisational Culture (Mixed/Cosmetic)	Relatedness	Superficial inclusion erodes trust and belonging.	Performative inclusion; diversity theatre.	Substantive inclusion with clear outcomes.
RQ4	Relational Dynamics (Silos/Toxicity)	Relatedness	Isolation and low trust.	Silos, toxicity, and low trust between units/people.	Task conflict with healthy collaboration.
RQ4	Focus on Learning/Development	Competence	Structured readiness for executive transitions.	Plans for courses, rotations, and leadership readiness.	Unstructured, ad-hoc learning mentions.

Appendix: 5 Proposed Cycle of Self-Determined Growth Model

