

**Exploring Male Attitudes Toward Women's Participation in Executive Leadership
in the South African Logistics Industry**

Student Number: 24093999

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Change Leadership).

24 November 2025

i. Abstract

Despite increasing discourse on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), women remain significantly underrepresented in the South African logistics sector. Anchored in Social Role Theory, this qualitative study explores male executives' attitudes toward women's executive leadership participation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 20 senior professionals, complemented by document analysis. The findings reveal that entrenched masculine norms and unconscious biases function as mechanisms of informal exclusion. Specifically, male executives frequently utilise meritocratic narratives to mask bias, while organisational culture and work-family assumptions act as gatekeeping mechanisms that frame women as less suitable for senior roles. Consequently, informal exclusion persists despite formal policy frameworks. By extending Social Role Theory into the Global South, this study demonstrates how attitudes function as structural barriers. The research provides policymakers and executives with evidence-based insights to align leadership development with South Africa's transformation agenda.

ii. Keywords

Social Role Theory: A theoretical framework positing that historically established gender roles shape societal expectations, often creating a perceived incongruence between female gender roles and the agentic qualities typically associated with executive leadership.

Informal Exclusion: The subtle, interpersonal, and cultural barriers, such as unconscious bias, exclusion from networks, and conditional support, that hinder women's advancement despite the existence of formal equity policies.

Meritocracy Myth: The strategic use of "merit" as a rhetorical device to obscure structural advantages for men, allowing executives to justify the status quo and deny the influence of systemic bias in hiring and promotion.

Logistics Industry: the heartbeat and a critical enabler of the South African economy. Transportation and warehousing play a critical role in the logistics industry.

Male executives: the core and fundamental area on which the study focuses. Men are a critical part of the logistics industry, as they dominate and hold authority.

Gender Diversity and Inclusion: refers to the situation where workplaces are prepared through practices for the representation, participation and treatment of everyone, irrespective of their gender

iii. Declaration

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

24 November 2025

iv. List of Abbreviations

Broad-Based Economic Empowerment	BBBEE
Commission for Employment Equity	CEE
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	DEI
Employment Equity Act	EE Act
Europe	EU
Main Research Question	MRO
Proposition	Prop
Primary Research Questions	PRQ
Role Congruency Theory	RCT
Social Role Theory	SRT
Study Participants	SP
United States	US

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Diversity at the leadership level has become a defining measure of organisational legitimacy and competitiveness in the twenty-first century. Recent global research shows that organisations with gender-diverse leadership teams consistently outperform their peers on profitability, innovation, and governance outcomes (Kroes et al., 2025; Green & Boso, 2024). Although global awareness of gender inequality has grown and targeted interventions have increased, gender parity remains elusive in many sectors.

Regardless of the institutionalisation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), women continue to be disproportionately underrepresented in executive leadership, particularly within areas where men are the majority in industries such as logistics. Contemporary empirical studies emphasise that gender diversity is not merely a moral or social imperative but a substantive driver of business performance and organisational resilience. Recent international literature reinforces the idea that gender-diverse leadership correlates positively with organisational performance and innovation (Utami, 2023). However, within the logistics and supply chain sector, gender diversity remains under-researched and insufficiently addressed, suggesting that the industry's persistent male-majority structure continues to impede progress (Yang, 2024).

Even where modest progress is observable at the board level, regression elsewhere indicates deeply rooted barriers still exist, providing more reasons for this study. For instance, female representation among JSE Top 40 companies declined from 25% in 2023 to 23% in 2024 (Just Share NPC, 2024). This downward shift underscores the enduring influence of informal norms, exclusionary leadership cultures and entrenched gender expectations that remain resistant to policy reform.

These global patterns are reflected in South Africa, where women's persistent underrepresentation in logistics reflects historical practices and cultural norms that constrain women's access to leadership (Mazwi, 2024). Importantly, this underrepresentation persists not only because of structural or procedural obstacles but also because of entrenched attitudinal barriers that shape perceptions of leadership suitability. According to the World Economic Forum, at current global rates of change, it will take approximately 123 years to achieve gender parity across key indicators of leadership and economic participation (World Economic Forum, 2025). This sobering projection highlights the urgency of interrogating the attitudinal, cultural, and

organisational drivers that sustain inequality. The three are the main pillars that drive change in many organisations around the world, and leaders set the tone for the rest of the organisation to follow.

Recent international literature reinforces the idea that gender-diverse leadership correlates positively with organisational performance and innovation (Utami,2023). In the logistics and supply chain sector specifically, gender diversity has emerged as a hidden problem due to the industry's scale, complexity and strategic importance to national competitiveness (Yang, 2024).

In South Africa, this challenge persists even with companies' constitutional commitments to equality and transformation, as well as legislative frameworks such as the Employment Equity Act of 1998 (EE Act) and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (BBBEE Act). These instruments support the objectives of the National Development Plan 2030, which positions inclusive growth and equitable participation as national priorities (Republic of South Africa, 2012). The logistics sector, which employs almost 480000 people nationally (Department of Employment and Labour, 2024; Mazwi, 2024), represents a crucial component of the economy. However, leadership within the sector remains overwhelmingly masculine, with limited female representation in senior decision-making positions.

Although DEI frameworks aim to advance equity and inclusion, their effectiveness is often undermined by informal power dynamics, implicit biases, and persistent gender-based stereotypes. Benevolent sexism, which appears supportive while reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies, continues to undermine women's authority, credibility, and leadership identity (Naidoo & Maré,2024). Much of the existing scholarship has emphasised structural barriers such as limited mentorship, exclusion from leadership networks, and patriarchal pipelines (Evenly & Maley, 2021; Dahl et al., 2021; Olsen et al., 2021). However, relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the influence of male executives' attitudes, beliefs, and interpretations of women's leadership. These attitudes, particularly in industries led by men, wield significant influence over leadership opportunities, organisational culture, and promotion decisions.

Understanding how male executives interpret women's participation in leadership is therefore central to bridging the gap between policy commitments and lived organisational realities. Their attitudes shape whether gender equality initiatives are embraced, resisted, or implemented symbolically. As a result, examining male executives' perceptions becomes critical to understanding the persistent leadership inequalities that characterise

South Africa's logistics sector. The use of SRT to test this narrative in the South African logistics industry is a necessary study.

1.2. Theoretical relevance to the research problem

The study is grounded in SRT, which explains how gendered expectations become normalised and embedded in organisational cultures, influencing perceptions of leadership suitability (Koenig, 2021). RCTs strengthen this understanding by demonstrating how women experience prejudice when their leadership behaviours are perceived as incongruent with socially constructed expectations of femininity (Anglin et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory and Implicit Bias Theory further deepen the analysis by explaining how in-groups, often shaped by areas dominated by men, organisational cultures, maintain their advantage through subtle exclusionary practices (Ng et al., 2025). The latter two frameworks are used sparingly and often referred to. Together, these theories provide a robust analytical foundation for examining attitudinal, cultural, and structural barriers that influence women's participation in senior leadership roles.

1.3. The research question and propositions

1.3.1. Primary research question (PRQ):

How do male executives in the South African logistics industry perceive and influence women's participation in executive leadership?

1.3.2. Sub questions:

- 1.3.2.1. How do male executives conceptualise leadership effectiveness in relation to gender?
- 1.3.2.2. What underlying attitudes or biases do male executives hold that may influence women's access to executive leadership?
- 1.3.2.3. In what ways do the organisational cultures shaped by male executives facilitate or inhibit women's participation in executive leadership?

These questions guide the propositions on the influence of gendered expectations, cultural norms, and implicit bias on the leadership pathways available to women.

1.4. The aim of the research

The overarching aim of this research is to explore and interpret male executives' attitudes toward women's participation in senior leadership positions in the South African logistics industry. The study seeks to understand how gendered perceptions, social norms and

organisational cultures shape leadership inclusion in a sector historically defined by male domination and authority structures.

The specific objectives are to examine how male executives conceptualise leadership effectiveness in relation to gender, to explore the alignment or misalignment between male executives' attitudes and DEI or transformation objectives, to investigate how organisational culture and implicit bias influence women's leadership opportunities, and to generate sector-specific insights to inform inclusive leadership development and policy reform. Through these objectives, the study connects theory and practice, demonstrating how male attitudes both reflect and reproduce broader societal and organisational power.

1.5. The research contribution

The research contributes theoretically, empirically, practically, and in policy relevance:

- It strengthens the application of SRT and RCT in a South African logistics context, part of the Global South, where they have not been tested enough.
- Contributes empirical evidence from an under-researched industry.
- It provides practical insights for logistics organisations to strengthen gender equity, leadership development, and DEI interventions.
- It informs Employment Equity (EE) and transformation discourse by providing a deeper understanding of attitudinal barriers in male-dominated leadership environments.

1.6. The scope of the study

The study focuses on executive and senior leadership (with decision-making authority) within South Africa's logistics and supply chain industry. Participants include male and female executives and DEI specialists from organisations operating in South Africa, both large and medium. This is the study of foreign-owned logistics organisations operating in South Africa, headquartered in Europe (EU) and the United States (US) and one locally owned. The study explores attitudes, beliefs, biases, and perceptions rather than numerical workforce statistics and uses a qualitative, interpretivist design.

1.7. Structure of the report

This dissertation is organised into seven chapters to provide a theoretical framework for the empirical findings and their implications. Chapter 1 introduces the study by outlining its context, rationale, theoretical framework, research questions and objectives. Chapter 2 provides a critical literature review that synthesises global and local research on gendered leadership, male attitudes, and organisational culture, while expanding the

theoretical discussion initiated here. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and explains the qualitative interpretivist design, sampling strategy, and data-collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 reports the empirical findings organised by emergent themes and supported by participant quotations. Chapter 5 analyses and interprets these findings and spells out what the data says. Chapter 6 is a discussion chapter that compares the findings with existing literature, outlines theoretical, managerial, and policy implications and recommends strategies for organisational change. Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarising its contributions, limitations, and recommendations for the future.

The preceding chapter outlined the purpose, significance, and the study's contextual foundation. It highlighted the ongoing insufficient representation of women in executive leadership positions in the South African logistics industry, despite persistent organisational commitments to DEI. The central research problem is introduced: how executives' attitudes, expectations, and interpretations of leadership influence women's participation in senior roles. To understand these attitudes in a gendered and theoretically grounded way, it is necessary to examine the scholarly work that explains how gendered expectations are formed, reinforced, and legitimised in organisational settings.

Next is Chapter 2, which reviews the relevant, emotional, and theoretical literature that informs the study. It draws on SRT and is supported by an RCT to highlight how gender, power, and organisational culture shape leadership perceptions. This review provides the conceptual foundations that guide the research questions, the methodology choices, and the latter interpretation of the findings.

2. CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 1 outlined the study's focus on understanding how male executives' attitudes shape women's participation in executive leadership within the South African logistics industry. Building on that foundation, this chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on how gendered expectations, organisational cultures, and leadership norms develop and persist. The purpose of this review is to establish the conceptual grounding for the study and to clarify the frameworks that guide the research design and interpretation of findings.

This chapter (Chapter 2) reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on the intersection of gender, leadership, and organisational culture in male-dominated industries, with a specific focus on the logistics and supply chain sector. It aims to understand how executives shape women's participation in executive leadership in South Africa. Anchored by SRT, the chapter explores how socially constructed gender expectations influence perceptions of leadership competence and legitimacy. These theoretical insights are then connected to empirical findings that reveal the persistence of bias, structural barriers, and cultural norms that hinder women's advancement in executive roles (Evans & Maley, 2021; Just Share NPC, 2024).

This chapter begins by establishing the theoretical foundations of the study, drawing primarily on SRT as the central analytical lens, supported by RCT, which together explain the persistence of gendered expectations in leadership contexts (Dahlerup, 2006; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020). It then reviews empirical research that examines male executive attitudes, organisational gatekeeping, and symbolic inclusion in male-dominated environments, highlighting how unconscious bias and cultural reproduction sustain masculine leadership norms (Anglin et al., 2022; Gloor et al., 2018; Naidoo & Maré, 2024).

The discussion contextualises these insights within the South African logistics sector, incorporating case analyses of leading companies, and situating them within national transformation frameworks such as the EE Act and the BBBEE Act (Just Share NPC, 2024; Bosch, 2025). The chapter further considers global policy headwinds, including the rollback of DEI commitments in the US since the beginning of President Trump's second term, and examines their potential ripple effects on multinational subsidiaries operating in South Africa's logistics industry (White House, 2025a; 2025b; Wallace, 2025). It concludes by synthesising theoretical and empirical gaps and by establishing the rationale for this study's interpretivist, qualitative research design, which is developed in Chapter 4.

Building on these foundations, the chapter incorporates some superficial work of Critical Mass Theory (CMT) (Dahlerup, 2006), the Social Identity Model of Leadership (SIMOL) (Hogg, 2001), and Feminist Ethics (FE) (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020) to provide a comprehensive understanding of gendered leadership dynamics. These frameworks together reveal that women's lack of presence in executive roles stems not from performance deficits but from structural barriers, organisational culture, and attitudinal bias that define who is considered "leadership material."

Globally, the persistence of these barriers has been documented across diverse contexts, including logistics, manufacturing, and supply-chain management, where leadership remains symbolically and operationally male (Evans & Maley, 2021; Kroes et al., 2025). Recent evidence shows that even where women achieve educational parity and leadership competence, cultural norms and executive attitudes continue to hinder equitable progression (Anglin et al., 2022; Gloor et al., 2018). Within South Africa, these challenges intersect with transformation imperatives under the EE Act and the B-BBEE Act, creating a complex environment in which progress depends heavily on leadership attitudes and sustained corporate accountability (Just Share NPC, 2024).

2.2. SRT and the gendering of leadership norms

SRT provides one of the most enduring explanations for why gender disparities persist in leadership despite formal equality frameworks. The theory argues that societies organise men and women into distinct social roles that prescribe behavioural expectations and capabilities (Koenig, 2021). Over time, these expectations become internalised stereotypes: men are associated with agentic traits such as assertiveness, independence, and control, while women are associated with communal traits such as empathy, nurturance, and collaboration (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Hentschel et al., 2019). Because executive leadership is historically defined through agentic attributes, cultural norms have constructed leadership as a masculine domain, positioning women as less naturally suited for senior roles (Schneider & Bos, 2019).

In professional settings such as logistics, which are operationally intensive and historically male-dominated, these gendered expectations translate into unequal assessments of competence and potential (Schollmeier & Scott, 2024). Women aspiring to leadership are often judged against male behavioural norms, as leadership in many organisations continues to be defined through masculine-coded expectations such as assertiveness, dominance, and constant availability. As a result, women's performance and potential are measured against standards constructed by men many years ago, which literally reinforce biased perceptions of women's competence (Hentschel, 2020). At the same time, the

communal strengths that women exhibit, such as team cohesion and relational problem-solving, are undervalued in formal performance systems (Anglin et al., 2022). Such bias contributes to the perception that women's leadership styles are inconsistent with the demands of the logistics sector, reinforcing occupational segregation and limiting access to high-visibility projects or profit-centre roles that serve as gateways to executive promotion (Coleman, 2020).

Empirical evidence consistently supports SRT's core proposition that gendered socialisation influences perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Koenig, 2021). Research shows that women in senior management are rated lower on "decisiveness" and "strategic control," even when they outperform men on relational metrics and organisational climate indicators (Kroes et al., 2025). These findings highlight that leadership evaluations are often guided more by expectations associated with than by objective outcomes. The persistence of this bias is particularly evident in male-dominated industries such as logistics and supply-chain management, where long working hours, physical presence, and mobility are culturally framed as masculine indicators of commitment (Evans & Maley, 2021).

Within South Africa, the gendering of leadership roles has been shaped by both colonial labour patterns and post-apartheid transformation discourses (Mohammed et al., 2024). Patriarchal workplace cultures inherited from the industrial and transport sectors continue to acknowledge command-and-control leadership styles associated with men. At the same time, relational or collaborative approaches, more commonly attributed to women, are perceived as secondary (Oosthuizen et al., 2019). These perceptions are reinforced through informal organisational networks, where male executives sponsor and promote those who mirror their own leadership image, a process described as homosocial reproduction (Gloor et al., 2018). SRT thus provides a critical framework for understanding how these dynamics are reproduced through daily organisational interactions and decision-making routines.

Importantly, SRT also helps explain the double bind facing women who seek leadership in masculinised contexts. When women exhibit communal behaviour, they are viewed as pleasant but weak; when they display agentic behaviour, they are judged competent but unlikable, a contradiction that penalises both conformity and deviation from gender expectations (Vial & Cowgill, 2022). In logistics, this tension is evident in how female managers are expected to maintain collegiality while delivering hard operational outcomes under tight schedules. The result is that women leaders often need to perform extra emotional labour to maintain legitimacy within teams dominated by men (Naidoo & Maré, 2024).

From a South African perspective, SRT aligns closely with transformation goals embedded in national policy. The EE Act and B-BBEE Codes aim to change not only representation statistics but also the underlying distribution of roles between men and women within organisations. By challenging the assumption that leadership competence is inherently masculine, these frameworks implicitly aim to reshape the social roles that sustain inequality (Green & Boso, 2024). However, policy change without attitudinal change has a limited effect (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022). The persistence of male-centred leadership norms across South Africa's logistics companies suggests that altering structural access points must be accompanied by a redefinition of role expectations at the executive level.

SRT, therefore, underpins the conceptual foundation of this study. It frames male executives' perceptions not as isolated opinions but as reflections of internalised social roles that assign meaning to leadership behaviour. Understanding these role-based assumptions is essential to interpreting how decision-makers assess women's suitability for executive positions and how these assessments reproduce systemic exclusion in the sector (Hlongwane, 2025). The SRT explanatory power lies in revealing that gender inequality in leadership is less a matter of individual prejudice and more a product of deeply embedded societal scripts that continue to shape organisational practice (Vial & Cowgill, 2022).

2.3. RCT and related perspectives

While SRT explains how social expectations shape gendered divisions of labour, RCT expands this argument by analysing how incongruence between gender stereotypes and leadership expectations produces systematic bias against women in positions of authority (Sanchez & Brown, 2023). RCT proposes that individuals are evaluated more positively when their characteristics align with the traits considered typical of their social group and the role they occupy. Because leadership continues to be defined through agentic traits such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and dominance, women who display communal traits are perceived as less competent leaders (Hentshel, 2020). In contrast, those who display agentic behaviour are viewed as violating feminine norms (Vial & Cowgill, 2022). This incongruity manifests as both descriptive biases, the belief that women lack leadership attributes, and prescriptive biases, the belief that women should not behave assertively, both of which reinforce the lack of presence in senior decision-making positions.

Empirical evidence across multiple industries demonstrates that women leaders face evaluative penalties when their behaviour deviates from gendered expectations.

Research shows that women executives are often criticised for being "too aggressive" or "not warm enough," even when their behaviours are identical to those of their male counterparts (Schneider & Bos, 2019). These double standards create what has been termed the leadership penalty gap, where women must outperform men to be perceived as equally competent. Within the logistics and transport sector, this penalty is amplified by operational cultures that equate authority with physical endurance, decisiveness under pressure, and continuous availability, attributes culturally coded as masculine (Evans & Maley, 2021).

RCT also clarifies why women's advancement frequently stalls at the middle-management level. When women achieve seniority, they are often evaluated against masculine prototypes of success that marginalise alternative leadership styles. This pattern is consistent with findings by Gloor et al., (2018), who observed that, even in gender-diverse teams, evaluators tend to ascribe organisational success to male leaders and failure to female leaders, regardless of objective performance outcomes. Such evaluation bias reproduces patriarchal authority norms, particularly in male-dominated environments such as logistics, manufacturing, and supply-chain management (Kroes et al., 2025).

A further contribution of RCT lies in explaining the persistence of subtle, often unconscious, forms of discrimination. Bias rarely manifests as overt exclusion but rather through interpretive processes that frame women's leadership as exceptional or conditional. These perceptions reinforce organisational myths that women are less stable, less available, or more emotional, justifying decisions that exclude them from profit-critical or operationally demanding portfolios (Anglin et al., 2022). Consequently, women remain concentrated in staff or support roles rather than in line-management functions that serve as stepping stones to executive positions.

Beyond RCT, complementary theoretical perspectives offer additional nuance to understanding leadership bias. The Social Identity Model of Leadership (SIMOL) (Hogg, 2001) suggests that leadership acceptance depends on the perceived similarity between a leader's attributes and the group's prototypical identity. In male-dominated industries, the "ideal leader" prototype often reflects masculine norms of control, authority, and rationality. Women, therefore, appear less prototypical and may be judged as outsiders within their own organisations. This framework explains why women leaders often struggle to gain followership or legitimacy even after achieving formal promotion.

Critical Mass Theory (CMT) (Dahlerup, 2006) complements RCT by emphasising the quantitative dimension of cultural change. It puts forward that women's presence must reach a threshold, often estimated at around 30% of decision-making bodies, before their

influence becomes transformative. Below that threshold, women's contributions are frequently dismissed as individual or tokenistic, a phenomenon widely observed in logistics leadership teams, where female representation typically remains in single digits (Just Share NPC, 2024).

Table 1: Framework comparison. Source: Author's Analysis

Theory	Core Benefit	Relevance to the study	Usage (%)
SRT	Explains how gendered expectations shape leadership perceptions.	Primary framework guiding the entire chapter's interpretation.	70%
RCT	RCT explains evaluative penalties and bias in leadership assessments.	Used sparingly to support micro-level analysis.	20%
Critical Mass Theory (CMT)	Explains representation thresholds, mainly in EU policy.	Used briefly for EU comparison only.	10%

Finally, Feminist Ethics (FE) (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020) challenges the masculine rationality embedded in conventional leadership models by valuing relationality, care, and interdependence. FE argues that ethical leadership requires empathy and contextual sensitivity, qualities long associated with feminine leadership but historically undervalued in executive environments. Integrating FE into the gender-leadership discourse offers a transformative lens that moves beyond assimilation into male-defined norms toward redefining what constitutes effective leadership.

Together, RCT, SIMOL, CMT, and FE enrich SRT by demonstrating that gender inequality in leadership is sustained through overlapping cognitive, structural, and cultural mechanisms. They collectively highlight that the barriers women face are not due to individual incompetence but rather a systemic misalignment between prevailing leadership prototypes and the social roles historically assigned to women. Understanding these interconnected frameworks provides the theoretical base for analysing how male executives in South Africa's logistics sector interpret women's leadership potential and make decisions that either perpetuate or challenge the status quo.

2.4. Male resistance, gatekeeping and symbolic inclusion

A growing body of research shows that even when formal gender-equality frameworks exist, informal power relations maintained by male executives act as powerful gatekeepers, slowing or blocking women's advancement (Naidoo & Mare, 2024; Schollmeier & Scott, 2024). Male resistance is seldom overt; instead, it operates through subtle, culturally sanctioned practices that reproduce masculine dominance in

organisational hierarchies (Evans & Maley, 2021). These include preferential sponsorship of men, selective mentoring, biased performance evaluations, and the informal exclusion of women from critical networks where strategic information and promotion opportunities circulate (Oosthuizen et al., 2019).

The concept of homosocial reproduction provides a valuable lens for understanding this behaviour. It describes the tendency of men in power to promote and socialise successors who resemble themselves in gender, temperament, and worldview (Gloor et al., 2018). This preference sustains male-dominated leadership pipelines and legitimises the belief that effective leadership is intrinsically masculine. In logistics organisations, where operational authority and decisiveness are celebrated as core competencies, male executives often equate similarity in management style with competence, reinforcing gender homogeneity at the top (Kroes et al., 2025).

Resistance also manifests through benevolent sexism, a subtle form of bias that portrays women as in need of protection while limiting their autonomy and decision-making authority (Naidoo & Maré, 2024). Within this logic, male executives may express admiration for female colleagues' dedication or empathy, yet still exclude them from demanding assignments under the pretext of shielding them from stress or travel. Although such attitudes appear supportive, they reinforce stereotypes that women are less suited to the physical and emotional rigours of executive work. The outcome is a cycle of symbolic inclusion, where women are present in leadership structures but lack substantive influence over strategic or operational decisions (Yang et al., 2024).

These dynamics are not confined to South Africa. Global evidence indicates that male-dominated teams systematically rate male leaders more favourably than female ones, even when objective performance indicators are identical (Gloor et al., 2018). However, when gender balance within teams improves, evaluative bias diminishes, suggesting that representation and culture are interdependent. This finding resonates with Critical Mass Theory, which contends that meaningful change occurs only when women reach sufficient numbers to normalise their presence in decision-making spaces (Dahlerup, 2006).

In South Africa's logistics and transport sectors, cultural expectations of male authority intersect with historical legacies of patriarchal labour relations. Oosthuizen et al., (2019) found that male executives frequently view employment equity compliance as a bureaucratic exercise rather than a transformative commitment. Some managers express defensive resistance, viewing gender targets as threats to meritocracy or as reverse discrimination. Others engage in passive resistance, complying formally with equity requirements while maintaining informal selection norms that privilege men. Such

attitudes dilute the intent of transformation policies and perpetuate token representation rather than substantive equality.

Symbolic inclusion often arises when organisations elevate women to visible leadership roles without altering the underlying power structures that shape decision-making. Women leaders may be showcased in marketing campaigns or diversity reports yet remain excluded from core operational or financial portfolios that determine strategic direction (Yang et al., 2024). This disconnect between representation and influence illustrates what scholars call the illusion of inclusion, a state in which organisations appear diverse but maintain patriarchal authority through subtle forms of exclusion. These expectations reinforce gender assumptions about who is suited to a demanding leadership role, even in environments with equality policies (Green & Boso, 2024). In logistics, this illusion is reinforced by the sector's emphasis on performance metrics that reward continuous availability and mobility, attributes still culturally associated with men (Evans & Maley, 2021).

The persistence of male resistance and symbolic inclusion underscores the limits of policy-driven transformation when unaccompanied by cultural change. While legislative frameworks such as the Employment Equity Act establish formal obligations, the attitudes of male executives ultimately determine whether women experience genuine empowerment or surface-level participation. Understanding these attitudinal mechanisms is therefore critical to explaining why gender parity remains elusive in South Africa's logistics leadership. This insight also justifies the interpretivist focus of the present study, which seeks to explore how male executives' lived perceptions and daily practices sustain or challenge gendered power relations within their organisations.

2.5. Challenges to SRT and signs of progress

While SRT and RCT provide strong explanatory power for gender inequality in leadership, both frameworks have been critiqued for their Western origins and limited capacity to capture the socio-historical and culturally specificities of non-Western contexts (Green & Boso, 2024). Several scholars argue that these theories risk essentialising gender differences by over-emphasising binary conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Hoyt & Murphy, 2021; Sanchez & Brown, 2023). This potentially overlooks how race, class, culture, and colonial histories shape women's leadership opportunities in diverse societies (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020).

Research in African and Middle Eastern contexts demonstrates that women's exclusion from leadership cannot be fully understood through gendered social roles alone. In Nigeria, for instance, colonial labour systems and post-colonial industrialisation

entrenched gendered occupational hierarchies that continue to influence contemporary logistics organisations (Mohammed et al., 2024). Their study, drawing on African feminist and postcolonial perspectives, shows that Western managerial norms, often embedded in multinational companies, prioritise rational, individualistic leadership traits that marginalise relational and collective forms of leadership. Applying SRT and RCT without recognising these socio-historical influences risks underestimating the role of local power structures in mediating gendered leadership outcomes.

Similar findings have emerged in the Middle East, where leadership legitimacy is closely tied to cultural and religious narratives that define women's public roles as secondary to men's (Proff & Musalam, 2025). In these contexts, male executives often adopt paternalistic attitudes that frame women's exclusion as protective rather than discriminatory, thereby normalising their absence from strategic decision-making. This pattern of benevolent patriarchy mirrors forms of benevolent sexism in South African organisations, illustrating how cultural rationalisations of protection can reinforce structural inequality (Naidoo Maré, 2024).

Another limitation of traditional role theories is their inadequate engagement with the coexistence of supportive rhetoric and exclusionary practice. Many executives publicly endorse diversity yet resist structural change that would alter the gendered distribution of power (Oosthuizen et al., 2019). This paradox is best captured by the concept of ambivalent sexism, which suggests that positive and negative attitudes toward women coexist within the same individuals and organisations (Naidoo & Maré, 2024). Such ambivalence explains why organisations may implement mentorship programs or awareness campaigns while maintaining promotion criteria that privilege masculine-coded behaviours like assertiveness and competitiveness.

The universality of SRT has also been questioned because it assumes relatively stable gender roles, whereas contemporary societies exhibit dynamic role negotiation influenced by education, technology, and globalisation (Schneider & Bos, 2019). Women in logistics increasingly occupy operational and technical positions previously deemed masculine, challenging the stereotypes that once constrained them. However, the persistence of bias despite women's growing participation suggests that cognitive stereotypes adapt more slowly than structural change (Anglin et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, empirical evidence points to gradual progress where organisations intentionally disrupt gendered expectations. In global supply-chain management, companies that have institutionalised inclusive leadership training and transparent promotion systems have achieved measurable improvements in women's representation

at senior levels. (Kroes et al., 2025). These results affirm SRT's proposition that altering role visibility can reshape cultural expectations. Similarly, studies within South African logistics indicate that structured development pathways, mentorship, and visible female leadership correlate with positive attitudinal shifts among male executives (Just Share NPC, 2024).

Critics of SRT and RCT have also proposed complementary frameworks to account for moral and relational dimensions of leadership. Feminist Ethics (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020) advocates a redefinition of leadership grounded in empathy, care, and interdependence rather than control or dominance. This perspective reframes gender parity not merely as a numerical goal but as a transformation of organisational ethics and values. By valuing collaboration and relational intelligence as core leadership capabilities, organisations can transcend the binary logic of masculine versus feminine traits and move toward inclusive cultures that legitimise diverse forms of leadership.

Collectively, these critiques and emerging adaptations of role theories highlight the need for contextual sensitivity and theoretical pluralism when analysing gender and leadership. They suggest that while SRT and RCT remain powerful, they must be integrated with culturally situated perspectives that recognise the intersection of gender with other dimensions of identity and power. For South Africa's logistics industry, where historical legacies of exclusion intersect with global corporate norms, such integration is essential. Understanding how global theories interact with local realities enables a more nuanced

2.6 Critical Mass and Structural Interventions (for European comparison only)

2.6. Critical Mass and structural interventions (for European comparison only)

Critical Mass Theory is not a central theoretical framework in this study, but it provides valuable context for understanding how representation dynamics differ across global regions. Evidence from the European Union, where strong gender quota policies have been implemented over the last decade, demonstrates that women begin to influence organisational culture only after they reach a certain representation threshold, often estimated at around thirty per cent (Dahlerup, 2006).

In male-dominated industries such as logistics and supply chain management, women's representation at executive levels continues to fall far short of this critical mass. Empirical studies indicate that when female representation in top management teams remains below fifteen per cent, gendered norms persist largely unchallenged, and women are often tokenised in leadership structures (Gloor et al., 2018). In such contexts, women's voices are marginalised not because they lack competence but because organisational cultures normalise male perspectives as default. As a result, female leaders frequently experience

isolation, limited access to informal networks, and heightened visibility that subjects them to intensified scrutiny and pressure to perform (Kroes et al., 2025).

Reaching a critical mass is therefore not simply a numerical exercise but a structural and cultural imperative. When women's representation increases to a level where they can support one another, challenge gendered assumptions, and influence strategic decisions, organisational behaviour begins to shift. This threshold is achieved, gender inclusivity moves from being perceived as an exception to a norm, thereby altering the symbolic meaning of leadership itself (Dahlerup, 2006). In logistics, such a transformation could normalise women's authority in operational and technical roles traditionally reserved for men, thereby expanding the range of leadership prototypes that executives consider legitimate.

Structural interventions play a vital role in achieving this transformation. Transparent recruitment and promotion processes, formal mentorship programs, and leadership development pipelines can mitigate the effects of informal male gatekeeping described in earlier sections (Evans & Maley, 2021). When these structures are institutionalised, managers are forced to rely on subjective assessments of "fit," which are often influenced by gender stereotypes (Anglin et al., 2022). For example, the introduction of competency-based performance evaluations and anonymised shortlisting processes has been shown to narrow gender gaps in executive appointments across multiple industries (Mohammed et al., 2024).

However, structural interventions alone cannot guarantee cultural transformation. As SRT suggests, gendered expectations are deeply embedded in organisational cognition and require continuous reinforcement through visible leadership examples (Eagly & Wood, 2012). When women occupy senior roles and are seen exercising authority effectively, they disrupt prevailing stereotypes that equate leadership with masculinity. This visibility effect not only inspires aspiring female leaders but also challenges male executives to recalibrate their perceptions of competence (Schneider & Bos, 2019).

The interaction between structural interventions and attitudinal change underscores the importance of leadership accountability. Organisations that link diversity targets to executive performance metrics tend to show more sustainable progress (Just Share NPC, 2024). This approach aligns with both Critical Mass Theory and RCT, as it combines quantitative representation with the qualitative transformation of leadership prototypes. Such dual strategies have been effective in organisations where DEI objectives are integrated into core business planning rather than treated as peripheral human resources initiatives (Kroes et al., 2025).

In South Africa, the legislative framework supports this integrated approach through the EE Act and BBBEE Act Codes, which mandate measurable progress toward equitable representation. Nevertheless, compliance often remains procedural rather than transformative. Many logistics companies report incremental increases in women's representation without corresponding changes in power distribution or organisational culture (Oosthuizen et al., 2019). This discrepancy highlights the continuing need for structural interventions that go beyond compliance to address underlying norms.

CMT, therefore, bridges the conceptual and practical dimensions of gender transformation. It translates theoretical insights from SRT and RCT into measurable organisational goals and underscores the need for both policy enforcement and visible female leadership. As Dahlerup (2006) observes, the transition from token representation to genuine influence occurs when women's presence becomes self-reinforcing, creating a virtuous cycle of empowerment. For South Africa's logistics industry, achieving this threshold requires deliberate investment in mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development, coupled with active male allyship at the executive level. The following section examines how these principles are reflected in the gender transformation initiatives of leading logistics organisations in South Africa.

2.7. Organisational interventions in the South African logistics sector

Organisational transformation in male-dominated industries such as logistics requires deliberate interventions that address both structural barriers and cultural attitudes. These interventions often combine formal policy commitments, visible leadership advocacy, and developmental programmes that operationalise gender equity. Within South Africa's logistics sector, these companies have launched targeted initiatives to align their corporate strategies with the country's transformation imperatives under the EE Act and the BBBEE Act.

These interventions reflect the interaction of SRT and RCT, demonstrating how changing the distribution of roles and the visibility of women in leadership can challenge gendered stereotypes and reshape perceptions of competence. They also resonate with CMT, as representation in senior leadership roles can generate cultural tipping points that normalise female authority within organisational hierarchies (Dahlerup, 2006).

2.7.1. DPD South Africa

DPD South Africa provides a clear example of how leadership commitment and structured developmental pathways can shift entrenched gender norms. The company's 2025 Women's Month campaign profiled female executives across key business portfolios, including compliance, finance, fleet operations, sales, and international logistics sectors

historically dominated by men (DPD South Africa, 2025). By showcasing women in operationally intensive and strategic roles, DPD directly challenges the stereotype that women are best suited for supportive or administrative functions.

Beyond visibility, DPD has invested in learnerships, mentorship, study assistance, and talent management programmes that create structured progression pathways for women. These interventions align with SRT's proposition that changing role occupancy can gradually transform cultural expectations about leadership suitability (Eagly, 1987; Koenig, 2021). They also reflect RCT's focus on reducing prejudice by aligning opportunity structures with demonstrated competence (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The emphasis on high-visibility leadership roles reinforces CMT by normalising women's presence in technical and operational domains (Kroes et al., 2025). Importantly, DPD's strategy integrates gender mix with business performance by linking leadership development to succession planning, suggesting that inclusion is treated as a core organisational objective rather than a symbolic gesture. This model demonstrates how deliberate representation, supported by developmental infrastructure, can challenge male-dominated leadership pipelines in logistics.

2.7.2. DHL South Africa

DHL South Africa represents another benchmark in integrating gender transformation into corporate strategy. Through its Women at the Wheel initiative, DHL has placed women in senior roles across supply chain management, commercial operations, and human resources, aligning with both local equity legislation and the company's global diversity goals (DHL, 2024).

This initiative operationalises SRT by expanding women's visibility in traditionally masculine roles, thereby challenging occupational stereotypes (Koenig, 2021). It also embodies RCT's principle of congruity by linking leadership appointments to evidence of competence rather than gendered expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The company's structured mentorship and sponsorship schemes demonstrate how social capital can be redistributed within leadership networks, mitigating homosocial reproduction (Gloor et al., 2018).

In line with Critical Mass Theory, DHL has integrated gender balance metrics into executive performance reviews and business objectives, creating accountability at the highest levels of management. By embedding gender targets into key performance indicators, the company ensures that diversity outcomes are tied to leadership evaluation and reward structures (Just Share NPC, 2024). This institutionalisation of accountability marks a significant shift from symbolic inclusion to substantive transformation, positioning

DHL as a leader in aligning gender equity with business strategy. Ced analysis of how male executives construct and justify women's roles in leadership, providing a conceptual bridge to the examination of organisational interventions discussed in the next section.

2.7.3. DSV South Africa

DSV South Africa's transformation agenda demonstrates how multinational logistics companies can localise global DEI principles to align with national regulatory frameworks. The company's DEI policy, anchored in the South African Constitution and labour legislation, includes targeted initiatives in women's development, recruitment equity, anti-retaliation protections, and inclusive leadership training (DSV, 2025).

DSV's approach exemplifies the intersection of SRT and RCT by simultaneously addressing perceptions of competence and structural access barriers. Its mentorship programmes, leadership-development pathways, and policy linkages to operational outcomes reinforce the notion that diversity is both a moral imperative and a strategic enabler. These measures also correspond with Dahlerup's (2006) call for achieving a critical mass of women in decision-making roles to catalyse broader cultural change.

By embedding DEI objectives into its strategic framework, DSV reframes transformation as integral to business performance rather than compliance. The company's integration of transformation objectives into operational scorecards also reflects institutional accountability and long-term commitment. Moreover, by publicly reporting on gender representation, DSV strengthens transparency and signals to stakeholders that inclusivity is a measurable business goal. These practices collectively demonstrate how multinational corporations can localise global commitments while remaining responsive to South Africa's transformation agenda.

2.7.4. Bidvest Prestige

While operating primarily in facilities management, Bidvest Prestige offers transferable insights for the logistics and transport sectors, given the similarities in operational hierarchies and workforce demographics, as highlighted by the company's 2025 Empowered Women initiative. Empowering Prestige: A New Era of Leadership campaign profiled senior women leaders across finance, transformation, and operations, highlighting pathways from internal promotion to executive leadership (Bidvest Prestige, 2025).

This initiative aligns with SRT by showcasing women in leadership positions across functional and technical domains, challenging entrenched gender stereotypes about capability (Eagly, 1987). It also reflects RCT's emphasis on mentorship and sponsorship as mechanisms for equalising access to advancement opportunities (Eagly & Karau,

2002). The campaign's focus on integrating leadership with family life narratives, such as motherhood and work-life balance, broadens societal conceptions of what executive leadership can look like, thereby humanising and normalising women's dual identities.

The company's commitment to embedding empowerment as a year-round organisational ethos, rather than limiting it to symbolic observances, illustrates a shift from awareness to systemic integration. This approach aligns with Feminist Ethics, which values relationality and care as legitimate leadership attributes (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020). Bidvest's model demonstrates how local ownership and strategic independence from global corporate pressures can create greater flexibility in aligning with South Africa's transformation imperatives.

At an industry level, Just Share NPC's (2024) Gender Equity in the JSE Top 40 report reinforces the importance of such examples. The report found that only Bidvest achieved gender parity at both board and executive levels, with women representing 64 per cent of board members and 58 per cent of executives. In contrast, most logistics and transport companies continue to fall short of parity thresholds, underscoring the gap between policy ambition and lived reality: The Bidvest case and compliance-driven models.

These case examples collectively illustrate that sustainable transformation in logistics requires an integrated approach combining visibility, structural reform, and cultural change. While organisations such as DPD, DHL, and DSV demonstrate the institutionalisation of gender equity within multinational frameworks, Bidvest shows that local autonomy and cultural ownership can produce equally powerful results. Together, they demonstrate the practical application of SRT, RCT, and CMT within South Africa's policy environment and underscore the central role of executive attitudes in enabling or constraining transformation outcomes.

2.8. Beyond gender alone: Structural and institutional factors

While gender remains a central lens for analysing leadership inequality, recent scholarship emphasises that structural and institutional factors intersect with gendered attitudes to sustain barriers to women's advancement. These include organisational design, labour-market segmentation, and operational expectations that privilege continuous availability and physical presence, conditions often incompatible with caregiving responsibilities, which are still disproportionately carried by women (Schollmeier & Scott, 2024).

Within logistics, the nature of work reinforces these structural challenges. The sector is characterised by irregular working hours, high mobility requirements, and physically

demanding work environments. These norms influence male executives' perceptions of who is "fit" for leadership. As SRT suggests, when organisational roles are associated with traits always associated with men's behaviours, such as assertiveness, physical endurance, and risk-taking, women who display collaborative or empathetic traits may be perceived as less aligned with leadership expectations (Eagly, 1987; Georgeac & Pattan, 2023). This creates a cycle in which structural and attitudinal biases reinforce one another: the design of work roles privileges men, and male leaders interpret this design as evidence that women are less suited to leadership (Mthethwa & Masondo, 2023).

While there is no significant gender pay gap among senior supply-chain executives, disparities persist in representation and influence (Kroes et al., 2025). This indicates that inequity in logistics leadership is not primarily economic but cultural and structural, rooted in who controls decision-making and defines organisational success. Transformation efforts focused exclusively on gender targets often fail to address underlying institutional barriers such as rigid scheduling, inflexible promotion criteria, and limited access to mentoring networks (Schollmeier & Scott, 2024). These findings challenge the assumption that equity can be achieved on its own.

Structural and institutional conditions also influence retention. Research shows that women in logistics cite inflexible work arrangements, lack of developmental opportunities, and limited visibility in succession planning as primary reasons for attrition (Panerati et al., 2025). These barriers are compounded by male executives' assumptions about women's long-term availability, particularly during childbearing years. Such assumptions perpetuate what scholars describe as a "motherhood penalty", where women's competence and commitment are undervalued relative to male counterparts with identical performance profiles. The penalty is not rooted in policy alone but in the everyday interpretive frameworks that executives apply when making promotion or allocation decisions (Evans & Maley, 2021).

On the other hand, supportive male leadership can act as a transformative force within these institutional structures. Male executives who actively advocate for flexible scheduling, hybrid work models, and competency-based promotion criteria demonstrate how attitudes can reconfigure structural conditions to enable inclusion. This aligns with RCTs, which show that reducing perceived incongruity between female traits and leadership expectations requires not only attitudinal openness but also structural redesign (Eagly & Karau, 2002). When organisational systems are recalibrated to reward collaboration, strategic empathy, and cross-functional leadership, traits often associated with women's gender mix become self-reinforcing.

The South African context underscores the dual influence of policy and culture in shaping these dynamics. Legislative frameworks such as the Employment Equity Act and B-BBEE provide structural levers for inclusion. However, implementing these frameworks depends largely on executive attitudes and corporate will. In many logistics companies, employment equity reporting is treated as a procedural obligation rather than a strategic driver (Oosthuizen et al., 2019). As a result, structural reform is often superficial, with gender transformation limited to administrative roles rather than core operational functions.

Furthermore, the intersection of gender with other dimensions of inequality, including race and socioeconomic status, complicates the landscape of transformation. Black women in logistics, for instance, face compounded barriers stemming from both racial and gendered stereotypes. Transformation policies often prioritise racial equity without adequately addressing gendered power dynamics, resulting in the advancement of men of colour rather than structural inclusion of women (Mohammed et al., 2024). This suggests that sustainable transformation must account for intersectionality, integrating gender, race, and class considerations into leadership development strategies.

Overall, these findings reinforce that gender transformation in logistics cannot be isolated from broader institutional reform. Attitudinal change among male executives must be matched by redesigning work systems, evaluation criteria, and organisational cultures that historically valorised masculine-coded leadership. The following section explores how these local challenges intersect with global policy headwinds, particularly the rollback of DEI frameworks in the United States, and how such developments may indirectly influence South Africa's logistics sector.

2.9. Global policy headwinds: The U.S. DEI rollback and implications for South Africa's logistics industry

Recent political and policy developments in the United States have introduced new complexities to global DEI efforts. The 2025 rollback of DEI commitments during President Trump's second term signalled a significant shift away from institutional equity frameworks, undermining years of progress toward inclusive workplace cultures. The federal government rescinded DEI-focused initiatives through Executive Orders 14151, Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferences, and 14173, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (White House, 2025a, 2025b). These orders directed federal agencies to eliminate diversity-related programmes, reverse funding allocations, and prioritise meritocratic criteria interpreted narrowly through traditional hiring and promotion models. Although parts of these orders

were later contested in federal courts, the resulting uncertainty has created a chilling effect across corporate America and among multinational companies under U.S. regulatory and political influence (U.S. District Court, 2025).

The rollback coincides with an alarming labour trend known as the "she-cession", in which women, particularly mothers and Black women, are leaving the U.S. workforce at record rates. Nearly 455,000 women exited the labour market between January and August 2025, marking one of the highest withdrawals since the pandemic (Wallace, 2025). Economists warn that this exodus threatens not only gender parity but also national productivity, as women's participation has been a key driver of post-pandemic economic recovery. The causes of this decline include rising childcare costs, the erosion of flexible work arrangements, and renewed emphasis on traditional family roles. Scholars attribute this trend partly to the socio-political rhetoric surrounding the DEI rollback, which valorises "home and hearth" narratives and implicitly discourages women's professional engagement.

The implications of these policy reversals extend well beyond the U.S. economy. Global corporations headquartered in the United States are recalibrating DEI strategies to avoid potential political or legal backlash. Corporate boards have begun reviewing diversity language in policy documents, curtailing DEI budgets, and shifting emphasis from measurable inclusion outcomes to vague commitments around "culture" and "merit" (Brennan Centre for Justice, 2025). These shifts are likely to influence multinational subsidiaries across regions, including South Africa, where many logistics companies, such as FedEx, DSV, DHL, and UPS, operate under U.S. or European parent companies.

For multinational logistics companies, the U.S. rollback has produced three primary effects. First, corporate compliance departments are tightening governance frameworks, removing explicit DEI terminology from public communications to mitigate reputational or political risk (Cohen, 2025). Second, funding allocations to equity and inclusion initiatives have been reduced or redirected toward general leadership programmes, narrowing the pipeline for women's advancement. Third, the symbolic power of the U.S. retreat has emboldened anti-DEI sentiment globally, legitimising arguments that diversity initiatives are politically motivated rather than economically strategic.

These developments have tangible implications for South Africa's logistics sector. Policy harmonisation pressures may lead local subsidiaries of U.S.-based companies to scale back DEI activities to align with global headquarters' directives (White House, 2025b). Companies reliant on U.S. trade or defence contracts face funding uncertainties that could affect training and leadership development programmes for women. Additionally, as

investor sentiment in the United States cools toward DEI, South African investors and regulatory bodies continue to demand demonstrable transformation outcomes, creating a tension between global compliance and local accountability (Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2024; Financial Sector Conduct Authority, 2025; Just Share NPC, 2024).

The ripple effects of U.S. policy also intersect with the EU's shifting DEI climate. Some unconfirmed news filtering from the EU stated that corporate reports (anecdotal) suggest that several European multinationals scaled down public Pride and inclusion campaigns in 2025, reflecting uncertainty about political and market reactions following U.S. policy reversals. This remains anecdotal at this stage, as no literature or secondary sources are available. However, the fear of reputational risk discourages public diversity advocacy across regions once considered progressive (Brennan Centre for Justice, 2025). This transnational spread effect reveals how global political shifts can constrain even locally mandated transformation efforts.

For South Africa, these global developments pose both risks and opportunities. On one hand, the retrenchment of DEI in the global North could weaken the moral and financial support structures that once reinforced corporate transformation initiatives. On the other hand, South Africa's strong legislative environment, anchored in EE and B-BBEE frameworks, provides resilience against global reversals (Mthethwa & Masondo, 2023). Domestic policy instruments create a unique counterforce that compels compliance and offers leverage to maintain inclusionary practices even when multinational headquarters deprioritise them (Cohen, 2025; Oosthuizen et al., 2019).

The cumulative outcome is likely to be a quiet but noticeable retraction of DEI ambition within multinational logistics companies operating in South Africa. Such retrenchment may manifest as leadership development cycles and a shift from transformation-driven initiatives to procedural compliance. Without deliberate local safeguards, these changes risk reinforcing symbolic inclusion, where women remain visible but marginalised in strategic decision-making.

The she-cession and the U.S. DEI rollback, therefore, represent interconnected phenomena within the global political economy of gender. Both underscore how macro-level policy decisions can cascade into micro-level organisational cultures across borders. For South Africa's logistics sector, these external pressures amplify the need for locally embedded DEI strategies that are resilient to global policy volatility. The sustainability of gender transformation will depend on whether male executives interpret inclusion as a compliance requirement or as a strategic imperative central to competitiveness, innovation, and organisational resilience.

2.10. Critical analysis of the literature

The reviewed body of literature provides a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding gendered leadership inequality, yet several gaps remain that justify this study. Collectively, the evidence underscores that while structural barriers and organisational cultures are well documented, the attitudes and perceptions of male executives, particularly in the South African logistics sector, remain critically underexplored. The analysis below identifies four significant limitations in existing scholarship and establishes the conceptual and empirical rationale for the present research.

2.10.1. Limited focus on male executive attitudes

A consistent weakness in the literature is the peripheral treatment of male executives' beliefs as secondary or contextual factors rather than as the primary object of inquiry. Most studies emphasise women's experiences of discrimination or the effectiveness of formal policies while neglecting how men's interpretations of leadership and gender influence organisational outcomes (Evans & Maley, 2021). Even when male perspectives are included, they are typically examined through surveys that quantify attitudes without exploring the deeper cognitive, emotional, and cultural mechanisms that sustain bias. This limitation leaves a critical knowledge gap: understanding how male executives rationalise, normalise, or challenge the gendered hierarchies embedded within their organisations.

In South Africa's logistics sector, where leadership is overwhelmingly male, such attitudes are pivotal in shaping women's access to executive opportunities. As SRT (Eagly, 1987) predicts, when leadership is socially coded as masculine, male leaders often act as informal gatekeepers who define the standards of competence and suitability. Qualitative inquiry is therefore essential to uncover how these interpretations manifest in practice, an area that remains largely unexamined in African logistics research.

2.10.2. Over-reliance on structural and quantitative analyses

Existing research has primarily approached gender inequality through structural indicators such as representation percentages, wage gaps, and policy compliance (Just Share NPC, 2024; Kroes et al., 2025). While valuable, these approaches inadequately capture the cultural and interpersonal dimensions of gender dynamics that influence leadership selection. Quantitative surveys rarely explain why bias persists despite legal and policy interventions. Moreover, most studies conflate gender representation with transformation, assuming that in leadership equates to substantive influence.

The empirical record from the South African logistics industry reveals the limits of this assumption. Although companies such as DPD, DHL, DSV, and Bidvest have adopted visible gender-equity programmes, there is little evidence that these initiatives alter male executives' attitudes or decision-making frameworks. The resulting ambiguity highlights the need for qualitative, interpretivist approaches that highlight how transformation policies translate, or fail to translate, into daily leadership practice.

2.10.3. Insufficient contextualisation within global policy shifts

The global rollback of DEI commitments, particularly in the United States, introduces new external variables that few studies have yet considered. The 2025 Executive Orders dismantling federal DEI programmes (White House, 2025a, 2025b) have created ripple effects across multinational corporations, influencing how equity and inclusion are perceived and operationalised abroad. Parallel to this, the "she-cession" has revealed how macro-level policy reversals and cultural rhetoric can directly shape women's workforce participation (Wallace, 2025).

Despite these developments, current gender-leadership scholarship seldom investigates how global policy climates influence local organisational behaviour in the Global South. South African logistics companies, many of which are subsidiaries of U.S. or European companies, operate under competing pressures: global headquarters may temper DEI rhetoric to align with shifting political climates, while domestic law requires visible transformation. The tension between these forces has not been empirically examined, leaving a theoretical and practical blind spot that this study aims to address.

2.10.4. Theoretical narrowness and limited Africanisation of frameworks

Although SRT and RCT remain central to understanding gendered leadership perceptions, their predominantly Western epistemology limits their explanatory reach in postcolonial contexts. African scholars have begun to challenge these frameworks for failing to account for intersectionality, communal leadership traditions, and the legacy of colonial labour structures (Mohammed et al., 2024). Without contextual adaptation, SRT and RCT risk portraying gender inequality as a static phenomenon rather than a historically and culturally situated process.

By applying these theories within South Africa's logistics sector, the current study contributes to their localisation and theoretical enrichment. The integration of complementary frameworks, such as CMT (Dahlerup, 2006) and Feminist Ethics (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020), involves the moral and relational dimensions of leadership. The synthesis of these perspectives strengthens the conceptual foundation for examining attitudinal and structural change simultaneously.

2.10.5. Synthesis of identified gaps

Taken together, these gaps illustrate a disjunction between formal transformation rhetoric and the lived realities of organisational culture. The persistence of symbolic inclusion, the limited understanding of male executives' influence, and the absence of context-sensitive theory collectively justify the present research focus. The logistics industry provides a particularly revealing case because it sits at the nexus of operational masculinity, global corporate governance, and national transformation policy.

By interrogating how male executives interpret and enact leadership within this environment, the study extends existing literature in three ways:

- It foregrounds male attitudes as the central unit of analysis rather than treating them as a contextual variable.
- It situates South African organisational behaviour within the global political economy of DEI.
- It tests and refines SRT and RCT through culturally grounded, qualitative evidence.

These objectives directly inform the methodological choices outlined in the next chapter. The interpretivist design, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis framework operationalise the theoretical constructs identified here, translating abstract concepts such as role incongruity, symbolic inclusion, and attitudinal gatekeeping into empirical questions. The literature reviewed in this chapter, therefore, establishes both the conceptual grounding and the analytical need for the inquiry undertaken in Chapter 4: Research Methodology.

2.11. Non-Academic reports and sectoral evidence

Non-academic literature provides essential contextual grounding for understanding how gender representation and inclusion unfold within South Africa's corporate landscape. Although these reports are not peer-reviewed, they complement academic research by supplying real-world data on board composition, workforce demographics, and diversity practices. Taken collectively, they illustrate the persistent gap between policy commitment and lived experience, highlighting the structural and attitudinal tensions that shape women's leadership trajectories in the South African logistics sector.

The Stellenbosch Business School Women's Report (2025) underscores the slow pace of gender transformation at the executive level across South Africa's corporate sphere. Women occupy only 19.1 per cent of directorships in Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE)-listed companies, a figure that has improved by less than two percentage points in

5 years. The report attributes this stagnation to entrenched patriarchal norms, risk-averse board cultures, and limited enforcement of transformation targets. Practices such as 'femwashing', where companies superficially promote gender equality without altering decision-making power, and over-boarding, where the same small cohort of women serve on multiple boards for reputational purposes, perpetuate token representation rather than systemic change. These patterns resonate with RCT, which links persistent male bias to organisational cultures that privilege traditional, masculine-coded leadership traits (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The Working Women in South Africa Report (RecruitMyMom, 2025) provides further evidence that the issue lies not in a lack of qualified female talent but in restrictive workplace design and leadership attitudes. Based on responses from more than 3,700 women, the report reveals that 84 per cent aspire to career progression and 72 per cent hold tertiary qualifications. However, barriers such as rigid work schedules, opaque promotion pathways, and limited mentorship persist. Flexibility emerges as the most valued factor influencing retention and advancement, with many respondents identifying senior male leaders' reluctance to accommodate hybrid work as a key deterrent to career continuity. These findings echo the concept of the she-cession discussed earlier, illustrating how structural inflexibility and gendered expectations drive highly skilled women out of the labour market (Wallace, 2025).

At the governance level, the JSE's Ring the Bell for Gender Equality campaign (2025) showcases a public commitment to diversity and inclusion. The JSE reports that women constitute 55 per cent of its board and 78 per cent of its executive committee, demonstrating that transformation is achievable when leadership accountability and transparent metrics are institutionalised. However, the campaign also exposes the symbolic nature of many corporate initiatives. While the JSE. However, requiring listed companies to disclose their diversity policies, there is limited evidence that these disclosures translate into measurable progress in industries such as logistics, where male-dominated operational cultures persist. This gap between representation and substantive inclusion mirrors the earlier discussion of symbolic inclusion and the illusion of progress (Yang et al., 2024).

The Just Share NPC (2025) Gender Pay Gap and Disclosure Report adds a further dimension by revealing that most JSE Top 40 companies fail to disclose gender pay gap data unless required by foreign regulations. The lack of transparency, combined with weak enforcement mechanisms, suggests organisational reluctance to confront underlying inequities. Only Bidvest demonstrates consistent gender parity across both board and executive levels, with women comprising 64 per cent of board members and 58 per cent

of executives (Just Share NPC, 2024). This achievement reinforces the value of local ownership and leadership autonomy, as Bidvest's independence from global policy harmonisation pressures enables a more substantial alignment with South Africa's transformation agenda.

Across these reports, a common theme emerges whereby organisations tend to approach gender equity as a compliance requirement rather than a strategic enabler. While public commitments and symbolic campaigns proliferate, internal cultures and male executive attitudes often remain unchanged. The disconnect between formal diversity structures and substantive empowerment outcomes aligns with the theoretical critiques presented in earlier sections. Moreover, these reports highlight the urgency of exploring the attitudinal dimensions of transformation, as quantitative indicators alone cannot explain why progress remains slow despite the availability of skilled women.

In summary, the non-academic evidence corroborates the academic findings that structural compliance, absent attitudinal change, yields only superficial transformation. The data reinforce the argument that male executives' perceptions and behaviours are decisive in determining whether gender-equity initiatives produce authentic inclusion or symbolic representation. This insight further substantiates the need for an interpretivist approach that examines the lived experiences, beliefs, and rationalisations of male executives within South Africa's logistics industry. The synthesis of these findings provides a strong empirical bridge to Chapter 4, which outlines the research methodology for exploring these attitudinal dynamics in depth.

2.12. Concluding synthesis

The literature, spanning theoretical, empirical, and non-academic sources, provides a comprehensive yet incomplete picture of gendered leadership in male-dominated sectors such as logistics. Theoretical frameworks, including Social Role Theory, RCT, Critical Mass Theory, and Feminist Ethics, collectively explain how socially constructed gender roles, leadership prototypes, and organisational cultures interact to sustain inequities. Empirical evidence from global and South African studies demonstrates that despite progress in representation, structural and attitudinal barriers continue to limit women's participation in executive leadership.

The synthesis reveals several persistent tensions. At a global level, the rollback of DEI commitments in the United States and the associated she-cession have demonstrated how macro-political decisions can trigger transnational effects that influence corporate behaviour beyond national borders (Wallace, 2025; White House, 2025a, 2025b). In South Africa, these global dynamics intersect with a domestic transformation landscape that is

simultaneously progressive and constrained. While legislation such as the Employment Equity Act and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment framework compels formal compliance, organisational cultures shaped largely by male executives determine whether transformation translates into substantive empowerment.

A central insight emerging from the review is that male executives' attitudes function as both gatekeepers and enablers. When executives interpret diversity targets as bureaucratic obligations, gender transformation stagnates. When they internalise equity as a strategic and ethical imperative, transformation becomes self-reinforcing through visible leadership, flexible work design, and inclusive decision-making. The South African case examples of DPD, DHL, DSV, and Bidvest illustrate that progress is achievable when leadership accountability and cultural change converge. However, these successes remain uneven, often constrained by multinational compliance pressures or localised cultural inertia.

The review also exposes a deeper intersectional gap: transformation initiatives frequently benefit women with pre-existing social or economic privilege, leaving Black African and working-class women marginalised within the very systems designed to empower them. This oversight reinforces the need for gender strategies that account for multiple, overlapping forms of exclusion and for leaders who can recognise and address these layered inequities (Mohammed et al., 2024).

Another gap lies in the imbalance between quantitative compliance and qualitative inclusion. Corporate reports, while rich in numerical data, reveal little about how attitudes and beliefs shape women's actual leadership experiences. This shortfall underscores the need for interpretivist inquiry that examines how male executives make sense of equity policies, justify leadership decisions, and negotiate their identities within a transforming sector. The qualitative methodology outlined in the following chapter directly addresses this need by exploring how male leaders in South Africa's logistics industry interpret and enact social role expectations, perceived role congruity, and organisational culture.

In summary, the literature establishes three overarching conclusions that justify the present study:

Structural and policy reforms have advanced gender representation but not necessarily cultural transformation.

Male executives' attitudes remain a critical, under-investigated determinant of women's leadership outcomes.

Contextual and intersectional adaptations of global theories are necessary to capture the lived realities of South African organisations.

Moreover, the literature demonstrates that leadership expectations, organisational culture and deeply embedded stereotypes continue to shape the professional experiences of women in male-dominated sectors such as logistics. Although organisational policies increasingly promote equity, the evidence shows that structural, relational, and perceptual barriers persist. The theoretical frameworks reviewed, particularly SRT as the primary lens, were supported only sparingly by the RCT. This review establishes the conceptual foundations for examining these male attitudes in depth.

3. CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROPOSITIONS

3.1. Introduction

Building on the conceptual insights developed in the preceding chapter. Chapter 3 outlines the research questions and propositions that guide this study. It specifies how the theoretical framework shapes the inquiry and clarifies the investigation's focus on how male executives understand, interpret, and influence women's participation in executive leadership roles. Together, these questions provide the analytical direction for the methodological choices discussed in Chapter 4.

The preceding chapter identified theoretical and empirical gaps in the literature on gender and leadership within the South African logistics industry. While global research underscores the persistence of gendered stereotypes, implicit bias, and male-dominated organisational cultures, limited attention has been paid to how male executives themselves perceive and influence women's participation in leadership. The study positions SRT as the dominant framework for understanding how societal expectations about gender inform perceptions of leadership suitability, drawing on contemporary research demonstrating the continued influence of gendered socialisation on leadership norms (Koenig, 2021). RCT is employed in a supplementary capacity, supported by recent scholarship showing prejudice arises when women's behaviour is perceived as not in tandem with masculine leadership stereotypes (Ng et al, 2025)

This chapter formulates the research questions and propositions that flow directly from the theoretical framing and the literature review. In doing so, it operationalises abstract theoretical constructs into empirically researchable prompts. These questions and propositions serve as the scaffolding for the methodological approach as outlined in Chapter 4.

3.2. Research Questions (RQ)

Guided by the theoretical framework and the gaps highlighted in Chapter 2, the study poses the following research questions:

3.2.1. Main Research Question (MRQ):

How do male executives in the South African logistics industry perceive and influence women's participation in executive leadership?

3.2.2. Sub-questions:

3.2.2.1 How do male executives conceptualise leadership effectiveness in relation to gender?

3.2.2.2 What underlying attitudes or biases do male executives hold that may influence women's access to executive leadership roles?

3.2.2.3 In what ways do the organisational cultures shaped by male executives facilitate or inhibit women's participation in executive leadership?

These PRQ seeks to understand how male executives in the South African logistics industry perceive and influence women's participation in executive leadership. There are two dimensions the study would like to connect: male executive perceptions of women leaders and the influence they exert on their progression. It recognises ways of shaping leadership pathways in a male-dominated environment. RQ1 establishes a perceptual lens through which women leaders are evaluated. RQ2 identifies psychological and cultural traits that may support or hinder women's access to executive roles, and RQ3 examines how the culture established by men continues to perpetuate and shape women's participation.

3.3. Propositions

To ensure analytical precision, each research question is aligned with propositions derived from SRT and RCT, as well as the critical insights from the literature.

- **Proposition 1:** Male executives' perceptions of leadership capability are influenced by gendered societal expectations that privilege traits stereotypically associated with men (SRT).
- **Proposition 2:** Implicit and explicit biases held by male executives limit women's access to leadership roles, irrespective of formal DEI policies (SRT, RCT).
- **Proposition 3:** Organisational cultures shaped predominantly by male executives reinforce role incongruence, making leadership environments less conducive to women's advancement (SRT, RCT).
- **Proposition 4:** Justifications for the current representation of women in leadership often invoke meritocratic narratives that obscure structural and attitudinal barriers (RCT).

These propositions transform theoretical claims into testable assumptions, guiding both the empirical analysis and the subsequent interpretation of findings in Chapter 5. In addition to SRT and RCT, the Social Identity Model of Leadership (Hogg, 2001) is briefly introduced as a supplementary lens. This model complements SRT by emphasising the role of identity-based prototypes in leadership acceptance. Including this perspective strengthens the theoretical grounding of the study by demonstrating that gendered

leadership resistance is not only about societal role expectations but also about the extent to which individuals align with internalised group-based prototypes of leadership.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has translated theoretical insights into research questions and propositions that will guide the study. The questions address perceptions, biases, organisational culture, and rationalisation, while the propositions anchor these inquiries in SRT and RCT. Together, they provide the conceptual link between theory and empirical investigation.

The next chapter details the methodological approach employed to explore these questions and propositions. The research questions and propositions outlined in Chapter 3 establish the conceptual scaffolding for this study, linking SRT and RCT to the lived realities of leadership in the South African logistics industry. To address these questions, the study adopts a qualitative research design that prioritises depth of understanding over generalisability. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological choices that underpin this design, including its philosophical orientation, case study strategy, data collection methods, sampling approach, and analytical procedures. In doing so, it operationalises the theoretical and conceptual foundations presented thus far into a coherent plan for generating empirical evidence that directly responds to the propositions advanced in this chapter.

Chapter 3 outlined the research questions and propositions that guide this study. The next chapter explains how the research design, methodological choices, and data collection procedures were developed to rigorously and systematically address these questions.

4. CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research approach and philosophical orientation

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate male executives' attitudes toward women's participation in executive leadership in the South African logistics industry. Building on the research questions and propositions established in Chapter 3, the methodology translated the theoretical framework into an empirical strategy that explored how male executives' attitudes were formed, enacted, and sustained within organisational contexts. The chapter first situated the study within its philosophical orientation and research approach, then outlined the research design, sampling strategy, and data-collection methods. It also described the analytical procedures and detailed the measures taken to ensure methodological rigour, ethical compliance, and the credibility of findings.

The study explored how male executives' perceptions influenced women's participation in leadership. It examined the perspectives of female executives and DEI specialists to provide a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. The primary research question guiding the study was: How do male executives' attitudes influence women's participation in executive leadership roles in the South African logistics industry? Supporting sub-questions examined the lived experiences of female executives navigating male-dominated environments and the professional insights of DEI experts into systemic and cultural barriers shaping leadership opportunities.

Qualitative research was defined as research occurring when "researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Phillips et al., 2024, p. 14). The interpretivist paradigm was therefore appropriate, as it sought to uncover the subjective meanings individuals assigned to their experiences and actions. A qualitative approach grounded in interpretivism was selected to capture the depth and nuance of participants' perspectives and to highlight how personal beliefs, values, and organisational norms shape leadership perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2023).

The study was anchored in SRT (SRT), supplemented by RCT, which together explained how socially prescribed gender roles and perceived incongruence between women and leadership stereotypes shaped evaluative biases. SRT provided the dominant interpretive lens for examining how gender norms influenced leadership perceptions. At the same time, RCTs highlighted the prejudice that arises when feminine attributes are viewed as misaligned with the characteristics expected of leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Engaging male executives, female executives, and DEI specialists from leading logistics organisations ensured a rich, triangulated dataset that integrated insider viewpoints and expert insights. This multi-stakeholder strategy enhanced the validity, credibility, and transferability of findings by reflecting multiple vantage points within the same industry context.

4.2. Research design

A qualitative multiple-case-study design (Yin, 2018; Saunders et al., 2023) was employed to explore male executives' attitudes across different organisational contexts. Each case represented a logistics company operating in South Africa, while the unit of analysis was the individual executive. This design allowed both within-case and cross-case analysis, facilitating identification of patterns and divergences in how attitudes were formed, enacted, and sustained.

The design operationalised the propositions developed in Chapter 3 by examining how social-role expectations (as predicted by SRT) and perceptions of leadership incongruity (as proposed by RCT) manifested within different organisational cases. Integrating SRT and RCT ensured a layered analysis: SRT informed the macro-level focus on societal and organisational norms that shaped attitudes, whereas RCT guided the micro-level examination of how those attitudes affected evaluations of women's leadership "fit."

The multiple-case-study design strengthened triangulation by enabling comparison of qualitative interview data with organisational documentation, improving analytical depth and the credibility of interpretations. This approach was particularly appropriate for a sector such as logistics, characterised by complexity, hierarchy, and historically masculine cultures. By comparing multiple firms that differed in ownership structure, scale, and international exposure, the design ensured contextual richness and supported the transferability of insights across the industry.

4.3. Sampling strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was applied to identify participants directly relevant to the research aims, focusing on male executives occupying senior decision-making roles and DEI specialists in leading logistics organisations. The purposive approach ensured inclusion of individuals with the authority and experience to provide meaningful insights into executive attitudes and organisational culture.

Snowball sampling complemented this process by leveraging professional networks to access additional participants through peer referral. The final sample comprised 20 participants: 12 male executives, six female executives, and 2 DEI specialists. These participants represented a diversity of organisational types, including multinational logistics providers, large South African transport and warehousing firms, and a state-owned freight enterprise. The organisations were deliberately selected for their industry prominence and diverse operational models, enabling a comparative examination across cases.

Sampling continued until thematic saturation was reached, meaning that additional interviews yielded no new themes or insights (Guest et al., 2020; Saunders et al., 2023). This ensured that data collection was both comprehensive and efficient.

4.4. Data collection methods

Primary data were collected through 20 semi-structured interviews that elicited rich and detailed accounts of participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of gender and leadership. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility to probe emerging themes while maintaining consistency with the research objectives. The interview guide was developed primarily from SRT, with questions addressing societal expectations of gender roles, and refined using RCT to examine how participants assessed the "fit" between women's perceived attributes and executive leadership roles. This structure enabled exploration of both normative assumptions (SRT) and evaluative judgements (RCT).

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online platforms, at the participants' preference. Each session lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and stored securely.

Secondary data were collected from organisational documents, including DEI policies, transformation reports, and annual statements, to contextualise interview insights and assess alignment between policy and practice. The use of secondary data provided a complementary lens that enriched the primary dataset and enabled triangulation, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2023).

4.5. Pilot interview

A pilot interview was conducted with a senior executive to refine the interview process and ensure clarity of questions. The pilot enabled assessment of sequencing, pacing, and tone, and identified effective probing strategies that elicited more reflective responses. Preliminary analysis of the pilot transcript offered early insights into emerging themes and

informed minor revisions to the interview guide. This iterative refinement improved the quality and reliability of subsequent interviews, and the pilot data were not used in the study.

4.6. Data analysis

The analytical process was guided by the research questions and propositions outlined in Chapter 3, ensuring that each emergent theme addressed the study's theoretical commitments concerning gendered attitudes, social-role expectations, and perceptions of leadership fit.

Data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The process began with familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts, followed by systematic coding that combined inductive reasoning (to capture participant-driven insights) and deductive reasoning (to maintain theoretical alignment with SRT and RCT). Codes were collated into potential themes, which were reviewed for internal coherence and external distinctiveness.

Themes were then defined and named to ensure conceptual clarity and alignment with the study's theoretical lens. SRT guided identification of themes reflecting gender-role expectations, while RCT informed those relating to perceptions of role congruity or incongruity. The final stage involved producing an analytic narrative that integrated theoretical interpretation with direct quotations to preserve participants' authentic voices.

NVivo 12 software was used to manage and verify coding structures, facilitating systematic data retrieval and improving transparency. This dual-software approach allowed triangulation of coding outputs, further enhancing analytical rigour and dependability.

4.7. Researcher positionality

The researcher had over 30 years of professional experience, of which 25 were in the logistics sector, including a decade at Transnet, a parastatal logistics company. The final twelve years were spent in senior management and executive roles, with active involvement in employer bodies and Sector Education and Training Authorities. This insider experience provided valuable contextual understanding and facilitated access to senior participants.

However, proximity to the field also required reflexive awareness of potential bias. To mitigate this, the researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the study, documenting assumptions, decisions, and emotional responses. This reflexive practice

contributed to confirmability and transparency by making the researcher's influence on data collection and interpretation explicit.

4.8. Ensuring methodological rigour

Methodological rigour was achieved by applying Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where participants reviewed (this was extended to all, but only three out of twenty accepted the challenge) emergent findings for accuracy and resonance, and through data triangulation between interviews and documentary evidence. Dependability was ensured by maintaining an audit trail of methodological decisions, coding schemes, and analytical memos, allowing the research process to be traced and verified. Confirmability was achieved through continuous reflexivity, documenting how personal values and experiences were monitored to reduce interpretive bias. Transferability was facilitated by providing a thick description of the research context, organisational settings, and participant demographics, enabling readers to determine the relevance of findings to other contexts.

These combined strategies ensured that findings were trustworthy, theoretically grounded, and authentically reflective of participants' lived experiences.

4.9. Ethical considerations

Ethical integrity was upheld throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from the Gordon Institute of Business Science Research Ethics Committee, and all participants received an information sheet outlining the study's objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature. Written informed consent was secured prior to participation, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifiable details. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice guided every stage of the process. The study also complied with the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act of 2013, ensuring alignment with national data-protection regulations.

4.10. Limitations

While the multiple-case-study design yielded rich, contextually grounded insights, several limitations were acknowledged. The qualitative nature of the research meant that findings were not statistically generalisable beyond the logistics sector. The reliance on self-

reported narratives may have introduced social desirability bias, particularly regarding attitudes toward gender and leadership. However, the use of triangulation, assurance of anonymity, and reflexivity mitigated this risk.

The research captured attitudes at a single point in time, without longitudinal tracking of potential shifts. Additionally, the researcher's insider status, while advantageous for access, carried inherent bias; this was addressed through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing. Despite these constraints, the methodological design achieved its purpose of providing credible, theory-aligned insights into male executives' attitudes and their implications for gender equity in leadership.

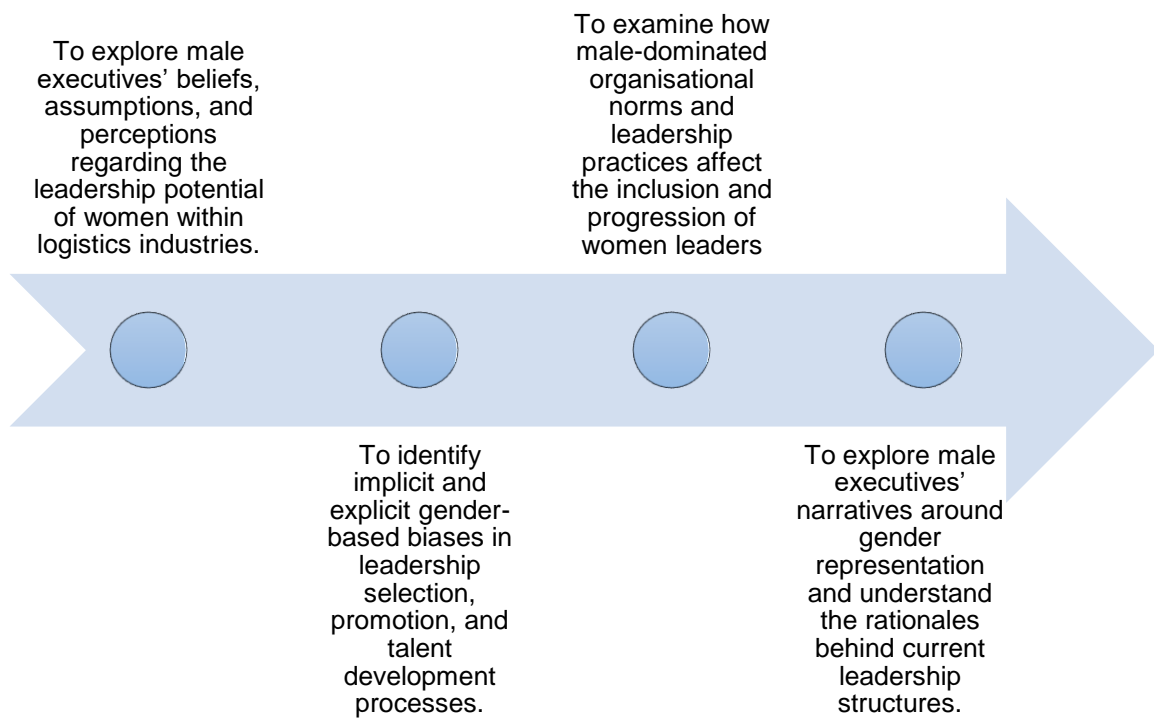
In summary, this chapter detailed the methodological framework that operationalised the research questions and propositions formulated in Chapter 3 by integrating Social Role Theory. The qualitative multiple-case design and systematic data-analysis procedures established a coherent pathway from theoretical formulation to empirical exploration. The next chapter presents the findings that emerged from this process. It interprets participants' narratives through the theoretical lenses introduced earlier, addressing each research question and proposition and illustrating how male executives' attitudes influence women's participation in executive leadership within South Africa's logistics industry.

5. CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 5 details the key themes that emerged from the data, serving as the foundation for Chapter 6, which interprets these findings through the study's theoretical frameworks and existing literature. In this chapter, the researcher presents and discusses the study's empirical results, addressing the research question regarding male attitudes toward women's participation in executive leadership in the South African logistics industry. The findings are presented through tables, figures, and direct excerpts from participants to provide depth, context, and insight into the lived experiences and perspectives shared during the interviews.

The chapter is organised around the four research objectives, which guided the analysis and interpretation of the data. The four objectives are as follows:



Section 5.2 includes the demographic information of the study participants, the presentation of the outcomes, outcomes related to the study objectives, and the conclusion.

5.2. Sample

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study. Consistent with the principles of qualitative research, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to recruit information-rich participants who could offer deep, contextually grounded insights into gendered leadership dynamics in the South African logistics industry. Purposive sampling is widely recognised as suitable for studies that seek to explore complex social phenomena through the perspectives of individuals with relevant expertise and lived experience.

Participants were selected based on three key criteria: 1. Seniority within the respective organisations, 2. Length of service in the logistics industry and 3. Demonstrable involvement in or exposure to executive-level decision-making processes. These criteria ensured that individuals interviewed possessed substantive insight into leadership practices, organisational culture, and gendered expectations that shape executive-level participation, issues central to the theoretical framing of this study.

Roles that did not provide direct authority, influence or meaningful involvement in executive-level decision-making were deliberately excluded as the study required participants who could speak from substantive experience in shaping leadership practices and organisational culture.

The inclusion of senior decision-makers further aligns with the study's theoretical foundations in SRT and the supplementary framework, RCT, which both emphasise how leadership norms generate expectations and how socially constructed roles are shaped and reinforced by individuals occupying positions of influence. Engaging executives with the authority to shape leadership pipelines was therefore critical to understanding how to shape executives' perceptions and enactments of gendered leadership norms in practice.

A total of 20 participants were interviewed. To protect confidentiality and uphold ethical research standards, each participant was anonymised and assigned a unique reference number (e.g., Study Participant 1-20, SP). These identifiers are used consistently throughout the presentation and discussions of the findings. Although women are underrepresented in the logistics industry, the researcher deliberately included a higher proportion of female participants to enable a more meaningful comparison of gendered perceptions across leadership levels.

Table 2: Demographic profile of the study participants

Study Participant (SP) Identifier	Role	Gender	Race	Years of Experience in the Logistics Industry
SP1	Chief Executive Officer	Male	White	20 years and above
SP2	Managing Director	Male	Indian	15 to 20 years
SP3	Chief Financial Officer	Male	Coloured	15 to 20 years
SP4	Chief Operating Officer	Male	White	25 years and above
SP5	Chief Executive Officer	Male	White	10 to 15 years
SP6	Chief Operating Officer	Male	White	5 to 10 years
SP7	Director	Male	White	20 years and above
SP8	Senior Director	Male	White	30 years and above
SP9	Managing Director	Male	White	10 years and above
SP10	General Manager	Male	African	15 years and above
SP11	General Manager	Male	African	10 years and above
SP12	Chief Executive Officer	Male	White	10 years and above
SP13	Senior Director	Female	White	5 to 10 years
SP14	Director	Female	White	20 years and above
SP15	Director	Female	Coloured	15 to 20 years
SP16	Director	Female	White	15 to 20 years
SP17	Senior Director	Female	African	5 to 10 years
SP18	Senior Commercial Director	Female	Indian	10 to 15 years
SP19	Director (DEI Specialist)	Female	Coloured	10 to 15 years

SP20	Director (DEI Specialist)	Female	White	5 to 10 years
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Table 2 above provides the primary list, detailing each individual's role, gender, race, and experience. The figures that follow present a visual disaggregation of this information, enabling a more straightforward interpretation of overarching patterns across the sample. It shows how gender, race, seniority, and experience intersect within leadership structures. Analysis of these shapes the leadership pathways and the broader environment within which attitudes toward women's participation in executive roles are formed.

As shown in Table 2, the sample comprised senior leaders with varied demographic characteristics. Table 3 complements this by illustrating how the interview questions aligned with the literature review and how the resulting themes emerged from that alignment. The integration of Tables 2 and 3, therefore, offers a transparent chain of evidence connecting the participants' characteristics, data collection and thematic development.

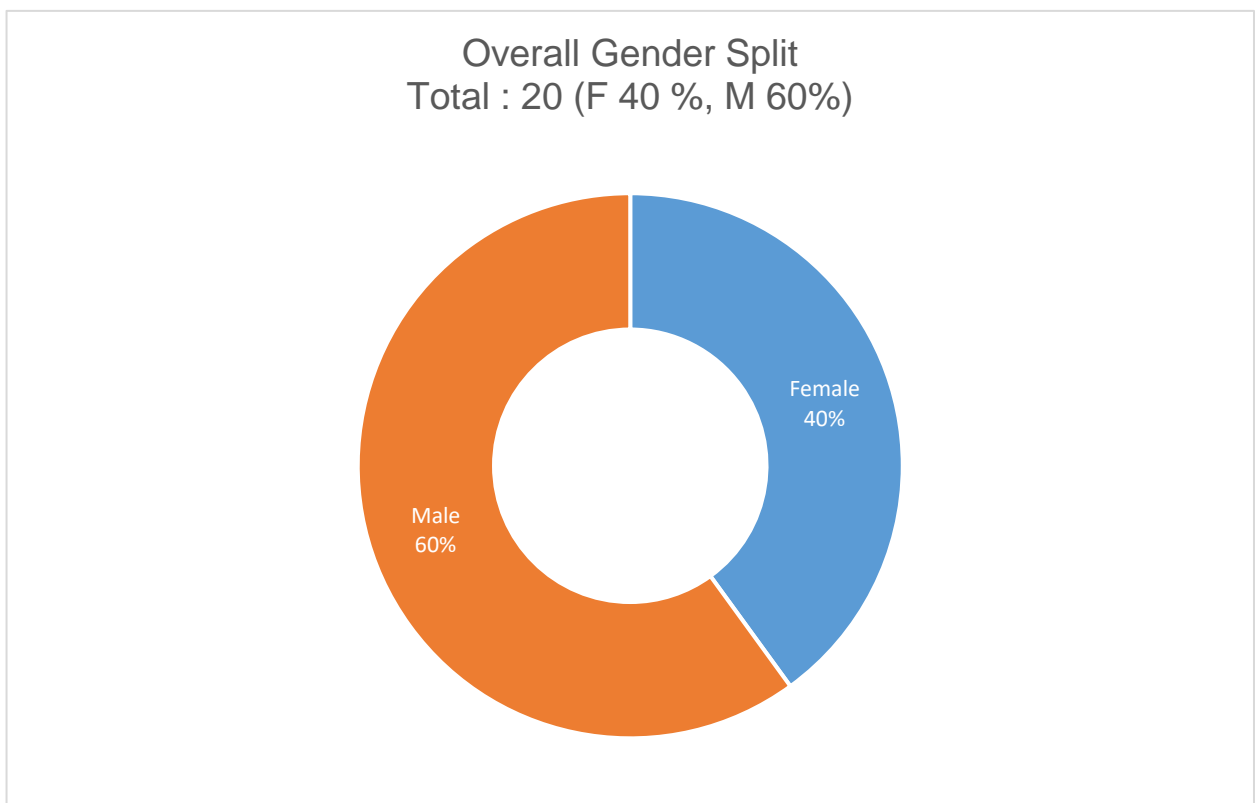


Figure 1: Overall Gender Split. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Figure 1 above reflects the broader gender imbalances commonly reported within South Africa's logistics leadership landscape. Of the 20 participants, 60 per cent were male and 40 per cent were female. Although the inclusion of eight women (including two specialists) strengthens the diversity of perspectives represented, the overrepresentation of men mirrors structural patterns in which senior leaders remain predominantly male. The imbalance aligns with Social Role Theory, which argues that gendered expectations embedded in society shape occupational sorting and sustain male dominance and control over authority positions.

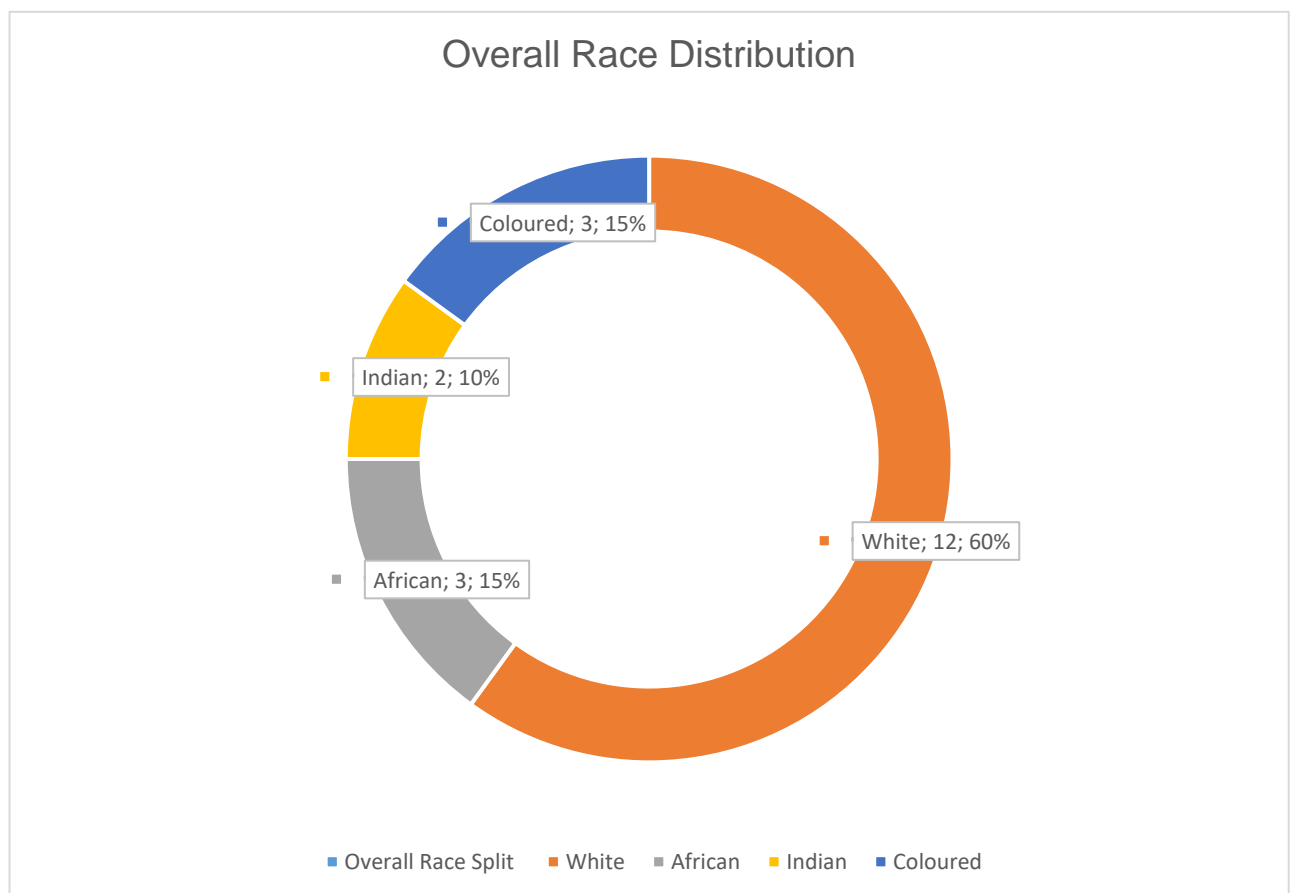


Figure 2: Overall Race Distribution. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Figure 2 above shows that White participants make up the majority (60 percent), followed by African (15 percent), Coloured (15 percent), and Indian (10 percent). The pattern aligns clearly with the National Employment Equity Commission's 2024 report, which indicates that White employees continue to hold a disproportionate share of senior and top management roles across multiple sectors. The presence of participants from other racial groups enhances the diversity of perspectives captured. The domination of White participants reflects ongoing transformational challenges within the logistics industry.

These demographics provide critical context for interpreting attitudes towards leadership, transformation, and gender equity.

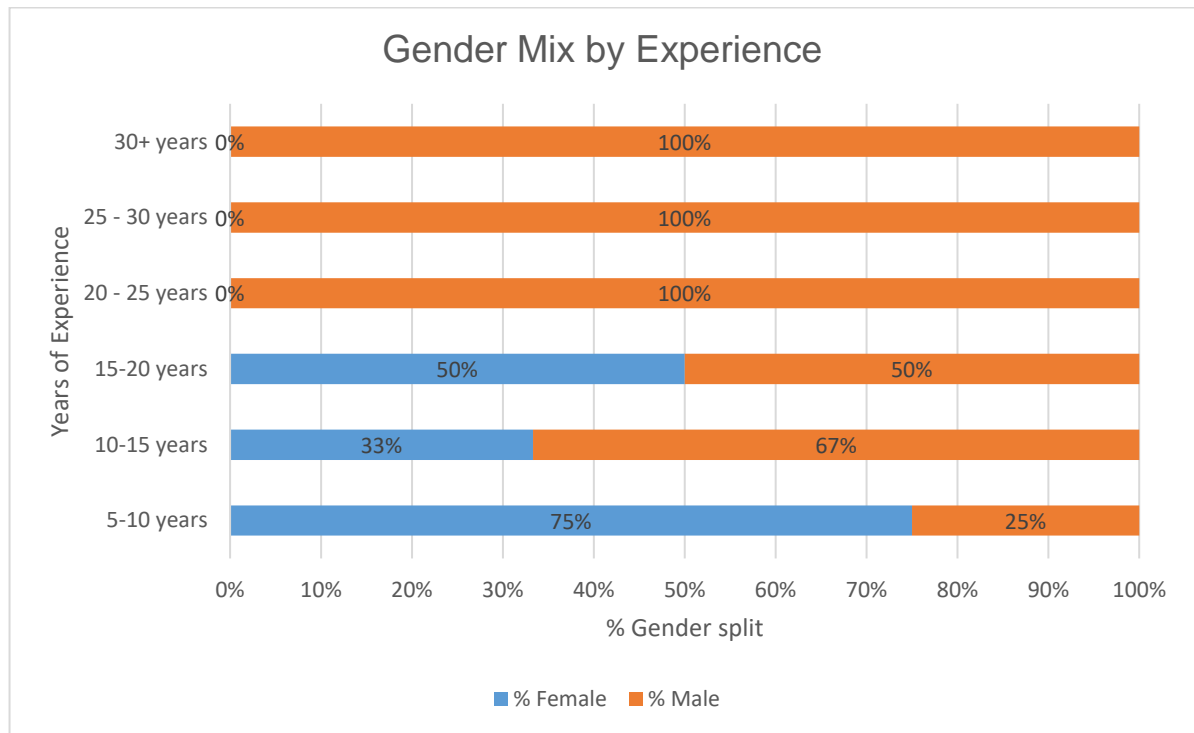


Figure 3: Gender Count by Seniority. Source: Author's Own (2025)

Figure 3 above provides deeper insights into the gendered stratification of executive roles. Men dominate the C-suite, holding six of the seven roles at this level. This is an illustration of longstanding barriers to women's progression. Women feature more prominently at director levels, indicating participation in leadership pipelines, but they remain underrepresented as roles become more senior. This trend supports both SRT and RCT, which highlight stereotypes and restrictive norms women go through when seeking entry into male-dominated spaces.

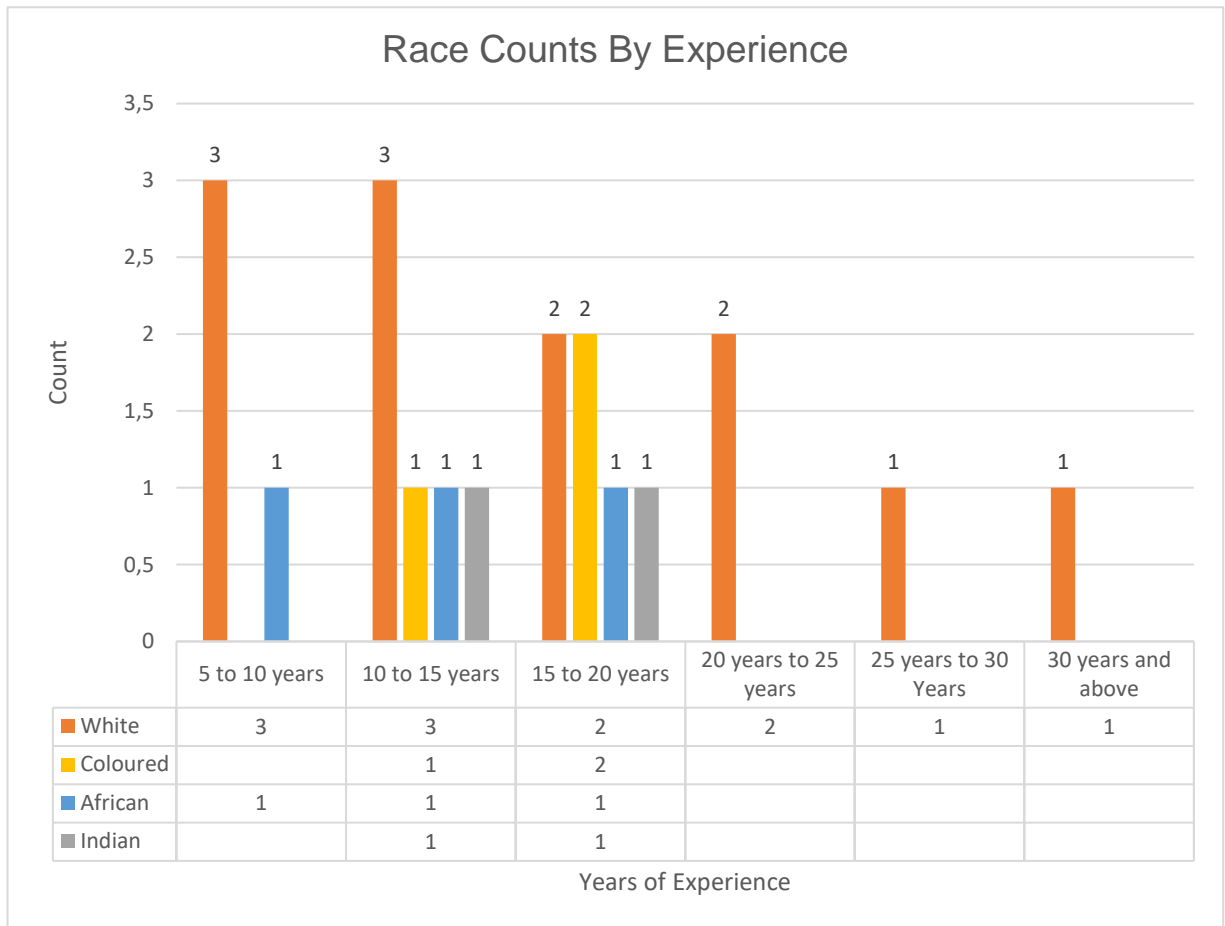


Figure 4: Race Counts by Experience. Source: Author's Own (2025)

Figure 4 above reflects the historical and structural inequalities that have shaped not only logistics but also the broader South African labour market. White participants dominate the higher experience categories, particularly those aged 20 or older. This demonstrates the legacy of unequal access to senior-level career opportunities during the pre-1994 period. African, Coloured, and Indian participants appear to be more frequently in the 5-15-year experience range. This indicates a more recent but growing presence of diverse leadership within the sector. This is consistent with national employment equity trends and highlights how race intersects to influence leadership trajectories in the logistics industry.

5.2.1. Analysis

1. *Gender & Cohort Size – 20 participants:*
 - 8 females (40%) and 12 males (60%).
2. *Racial distribution: 12 white, three black, three coloured, and 2 Indian.*
3. *Experience Bands:*
 - 4 in 5-10 years,
 - 6 in 10-15 years,

- 6 in 15-20 years,
- 2 in 20-25 years,
- 1 in 25-30 years, and
- 1 in 30+ years.

4. *Gender and Experience:*

Approximately 75 per cent of females were found to be within the 5-10 years' experience range, and 50/50 were found for the 15-20 years; all 20+ experience bands were male-dominated.

5. *Gender and Seniority*

- *C-suite (CEO/CFO/COO): 6 males and zero females*
- *Senior Directors have an approximate 2:1 ratio of females to males.*
- *Directors, in general, have a higher percentage of females (5F, 1M).*
- *Managing Director & General Manager positions had no females, only males, in this study.*

6. *Experience, Race, and Gender*

White persons represent a high number across the various bands; African and persons of colour are represented in the 10-20 years range and are predominantly male in this sample; the one Indian participant was represented as one female in the 10-15 years band and one male in the 15-20 years band.

As shown in Table 2, the study participants had substantial work experience in the logistics industry, ranging from 5 to 20 years or more. There are exceptions where some candidates have 5 years of work experience, but this may not be considered substantial. Also, the study participants were all in senior positions, including various Director and C-level roles within their respective organisations. Hence, the extensive years of work experience and the senior positions held by the study participants suggest that their knowledge could be valuable for exploring the male attitudes towards women's participation in executive leadership in the South African logistics industry. Notwithstanding this, Table 2 shows that the study participants comprised both males and females, and were White, African, Indian, and Coloured executives. Therefore, the gender and racial groups of the study participants may have led to diverse responses during the interviews, even though the racial composition will also inform another future study.

5.3. Presentation of the outcomes

This sub-section presents the outcomes of the Thematic analysis conducted and explains how the coding framework was realised.

5.3.1. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data, particularly interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It enables researchers to identify meaningful relationships within unstructured data and transform them into coherent, analytically relevant themes (Thomas, 2006). Recent applications demonstrate how thematic analysis supports deeper interpretation of attitudinal, cultural, and organisational meanings embedded in participants' responses (Ahmed et al., 2025). Table 3 shows the alignment between the research objectives, interview questions, literature review topics, and emergent themes derived through this analytical process.

Table 3: Interview questions, literature review topics, and emergent themes.

Source: Author's Analysis

Research Objective (RO)	Interview question	Literature review topic	Emergent theme
RO1: To explore male executives' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries.	Q1) In your experience, how do women compare to their male counterparts in leadership roles and styles?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Acceptance of Male Superiority b) Doubt of Discrimination c) Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities d) Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier e) Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches
	Q2) What beliefs do you think exist among male executives that can influence the promotion or appointment of women in executive roles?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Acceptance of Male Superiority b) Doubt of Discrimination c) Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities d) Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier e) Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches

	Q3) In what ways does the organisational culture at the executive level hinder women's progression into executive roles?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Acceptance of Male Superiority b) Doubt of Discrimination c) Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities d) Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier e) Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches
	Q4) How do you personally explain how women are represented at the executive level in your organisation?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Acceptance of Male Superiority b) Doubt of Discrimination c) Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities d) Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier e) Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches
	Q5) What advice would you give to aspiring women in your organisation?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Acceptance of Male Superiority b) Doubt of Discrimination c) Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities d) Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier e) Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches
RO2: To identify implicit and explicit gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent	Q1) In your experience, how do women compare to their male counterparts in leadership roles and styles?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives.	a) Explicit Gender-Based Biases b) Implicit Gender-Based Biases

development processes.	Q2) What beliefs do you think exist among male executives that can influence the promotion or Appointment of women in executive roles?	3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Explicit Gender-Based Biases b) Implicit Gender-Based Biases
	Q3) In what ways does the organisational culture at the executive level hinder women's progression into executive roles?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Explicit Gender-Based Biases b) Implicit Gender-Based Biases
	Q4) How do you personally explain how women are represented at the executive level in your organisation?	1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.	a) Explicit Gender-Based Biases b) Implicit Gender-Based Biases
	Q5) What advice would you give to aspiring women in your organisation?	1) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions. 2) Organisational Interventions in the South African Logistics Sector.	a) Explicit Gender-Based Biases b) Implicit Gender-Based Biases

<p>RO3: To examine how male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices affect the inclusion and progression of women leaders.</p>	<p>Q3) In what ways does the organisational culture at the executive level hinder women's progression into executive roles?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) The Impact of Male-Domination b) Gender Bias c) Lack of Mentorship Limited Opportunities for Women d) Pay Discrimination</p>
<p>RO4: To explore male executives' narratives around gender representation and understand the rationales behind current leadership structures.</p>	<p>Q1) In your experience, how do women compare to their male counterparts in leadership roles and styles?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) Male Executives' Narratives b) Gender Representation c) The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures</p>
	<p>Q2) What beliefs do you think exist among male executives that can influence the promotion or appointment of women in executive roles?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) Male Executives' Narratives b) Gender Representation c) The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures</p>

	<p>Q3) In what ways does the organisational culture at the executive level hinder women's progression into executive roles?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) Male Executives' Narratives b) Gender Representation c) The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures</p>
	<p>Q4) How do you personally explain how women are represented at the executive level in your organisation?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) Male Executives' Narratives b) Gender Representation c) The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures</p>
	<p>Q5) What advice would you give to aspiring women in your organisation?</p>	<p>1) SRT and the Gendering of Leadership Norms. 2) RCT and Related Perspectives. 3) Male Resistance, Gatekeeping and Symbolic Inclusion. 4) Challenges to Role Theory and Signs of Progress. 5) Critical Mass and Structural Interventions.</p>	<p>a) Male Executives' Narratives b) Gender Representation c) The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures</p>

As noted in Table 3, all the interview questions yielded emergent themes. Additionally, the interview questions are aligned with the study's research objectives and are theoretically

anchored in SRT. This ensured that each question contributed meaningfully to addressing the main and sub-research questions as presented in Chapter 3.

5.3.2. Evidence of thematic saturation across 20 interviews

Figure 5 below illustrates the evidence of data saturation across 20 semi-structured interviews. The bar graph shows the number of new emergent themes identified at each interview. The decline in new themes after Interview 10 and the complete plateauing from Interview 12 onwards demonstrate that thematic saturation was achieved. No new patterns emerged despite continued data collection, indicating that the core constructs, such as male superiority, implicit bias, and structural barriers, had been fully captured. (Ahmed et al., 2025; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

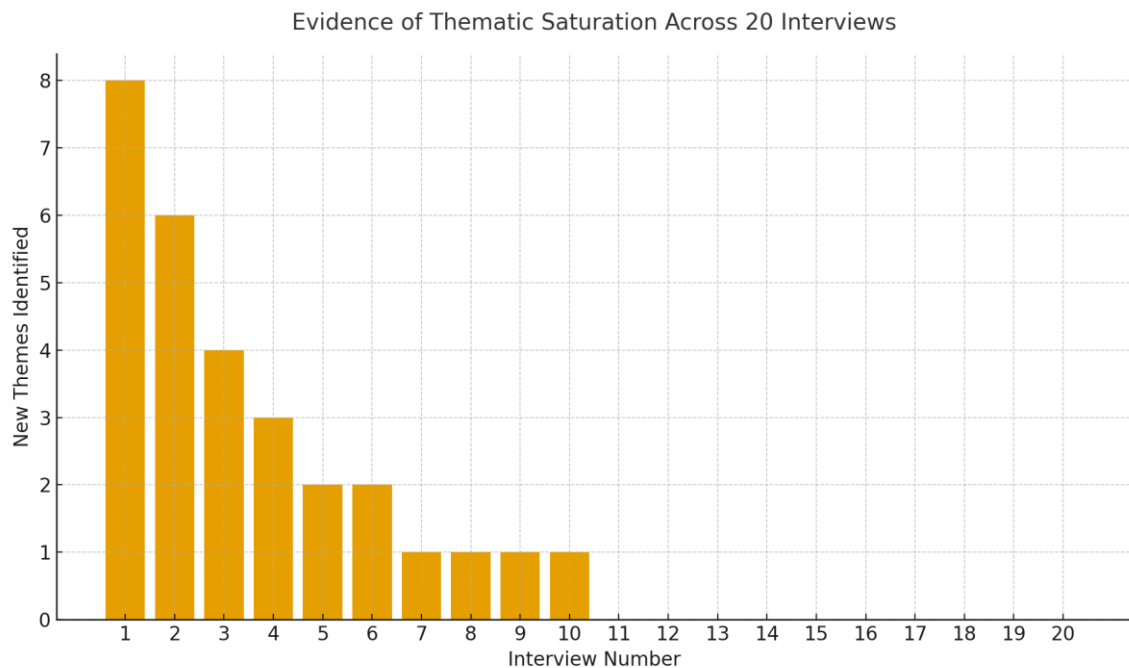


Figure 5: Evidence of Thematic Saturation Across 20 Interviews. The plateau of new emergent themes from Interview 12 onward confirms data saturation in the qualitative dataset. Source: Author’s own (2025)

5.3.3. The coding framework

Figure 6 below displays the coding framework that originated from the data analysis process. In Figure 6, the data were coded into 17 nodes (themes). Also, the sources in Figure 6 show the number of study participants who contributed to a specific theme, and the references indicate the total number of statements about that theme made by each participant. The codebook in Annexure D recapitulates the qualitative data analysis process. For Figure 5.6, the codebook includes the number of sources and references.

Additionally, the codebook consists of a description of each of the 17 themes derived from the qualitative data analysis.

The interview transcripts in “Word” format were imported into the NVivo programme, a widely used qualitative data analysis software (NVivo, 2025). Thereafter, the researcher reviewed each interview transcript several times while coding all important phrases and statements into themes, which are also known as nodes in the NVivo software programme interface.

Name	Sources	References	Created On
The Impact of Male-Domination		19	58 14/10/25 17:49
Limited Opportunities for Women		9	18 08/11/25 03:42
Gender Bias		9	18 08/11/25 03:45
Pay Discrimination		9	25 08/11/25 03:47
Lack of Mentorship		13	28 08/11/25 03:48
Male Executives' Narratives		18	72 14/10/25 17:54
Gender Representation		18	73 08/11/25 02:56
The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures		18	55 08/11/25 02:59
Male Executives' Perceptions		19	73 14/10/25 17:43
Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier		17	63 07/11/25 22:29
Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches		16	64 07/11/25 22:31
Acceptance of Male Superiority		15	62 07/11/25 22:34
Doubt of Discrimination		17	134 07/11/25 22:39
Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities		18	76 07/11/25 22:42
Gender-Based Biases		20	395 14/10/25 17:45
Implicit Gender-Based Biases		20	423 14/10/25 17:47
Explicit Gender-Based Biases		20	401 14/10/25 17:47

Figure 6: The coding framework. Source: NVivo (2025)

The following sub-sections report the study's outcomes with respect to the study objectives. To achieve this, the outcomes were substantiated with direct quotations from the study participants.

5.4. Male Executives' Perceptions

5.4.1. To explore male executives' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries

Male executives' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions of women's leadership potential in the logistics industry emerge strongly during the interviews. Participants described a variety of perceptions that shape women in leadership roles. These included an acceptance of male superiority, doubt about the existence of or extent of discrimination, limited recognition of women's capabilities, the belief that family responsibilities remain the primary barrier to women's advancement, and differing views about women's

competence and leadership approaches. These findings are presented in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following quotations reinforce these perceptions.

Table 4: Theme 1: Acceptance of male seniority. Source: Author’s Analysis (2025)

Study Participants (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP6	<i>“And by default, the stigmatisation associated with that is that it had to be a man who carry a box or who could use a pallet jack or who could drive a truck and load a car”</i>
SP8	<i>“This is the man’s world. Well, I think the belief is that males are better equipped physically to deal with some of the functions”</i>
SP15	<i>“So, when you look at it over three decades of me being in the company...it was a totally male-dominated industry...rare to find a female in management positions”</i>
SP16	<i>“Because it is a female-dominated...the females ask me, ‘Please bring in a male, ’ and in our industry, we are short of males, referring to the travel industry”</i>
<p>The above account reveals that acceptance of male superiority stems from a male executive’s perception of women’s leadership potential in the logistics industry. As SP6 explained, there has been a stigma that the logistics industry is a man’s world, given the physical strength required in operations. SP 8 and SP 15, respectively, support this view. However, SP 16 explained that some sectors of the logistics industry, such as travel, are predominantly female.</p>	

Table 5: Theme 2: Doubt of discrimination. Source: Author’s Analysis (2025)

Study Participants (SP)	Verbatim response
SP3	<i>“Not many females make it into the executive positions, and that is a sad thing, and I think it is something that we must continue to work on. I do not honestly believe it is necessarily a discrimination issue. I think women’s priorities are slightly different from ours. They are more family-oriented”</i>
SP 11	<i>“In fact, my entire team, my team, that reports to me is actually women, my leadership team”</i>
SP12	<i>“So think we have a nice mix, but actually, notoriously, we have always had quite a female-strong environment in our team”</i>

SP20	<i>“Top Management is pretty OK. I would say 60:40 male-to-female. However, of course, your middle and junior management will be moving up. So, I do not see it as male-dominated, funny enough”</i>
<p>The above evidence reveals that scepticism or doubt discrimination is a male executive’s perception of women’s leadership potential in the logistics industry. SP3 explained that fewer women reach the top echelons of management in the logistics industry. However, SP3 honestly believes this is not necessarily a discrimination issue. The SP20 supports this view. At the same time, SP11 and 12 explained that the mix of females and males in the executive echelons is healthy, even though there are more females than males.</p>	

Table 6: Theme 3: Limited recognition of women's capabilities. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participants (SP)	Verbatim response
SP8	<i>“Well, I think the belief is that males are better equipped physically to deal with some of those functions”</i>
SP8	<i>“So, I think there are certain biases that still creep in, but there are certain leaders, as I have mentioned already, who are a lot more ...I mean, there are some women who can do it right”</i>
SP10	<i>“Customary way of doing things that a man can handle a pallet, men can drive a forklift, and men can carry a carton, and women deserve to just be behind the desk”</i>
SP19	<i>“So, I think there are certain biases that still creep in, but there are certain leaders, as I have mentioned already, who are a lot more”</i>
<p>The above testimony reveals that limited recognition of women’s capabilities is a major executive’s perception of women’s leadership potential in the logistics industry. As SP8 noted, there is a general belief that males are better physically equipped to perform some functions in the logistics industry. This view is supported by SP 8, 10 and 19, respectively.</p>	

Table 7: Theme 4: Notion of family responsibilities as a primary barrier. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participants (SP)	Verbatim response
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SP3	<i>“They do not go into, you know, into these positions themselves because they may not have the time, and they may not have the confidence to do it, and they have such pressure on them from family, you know, that we as males are the traditional breadwinners”</i>
SP11	<i>“This is how I expected and wanted. I do not care that you, you know, have a family emergency, I still expect that end...”</i>
SP13	<i>“You cannot be at work at 06:00 in the morning if you have kids to drop off at school. So, it is a continuous big drive around...also saying there can be equality, but equality needs to make sure that everybody does the job”</i>
SP14	<i>“Dealing with family responsibility can be challenging at times.”</i>

The above evidence shows that the notion of family responsibility as the main barrier is a male executive's perception of women's leadership potential in the logistics industry. SP13 and SP14, respectively, support this view. As SP3 explained, female professionals often avoid business leadership roles due to family commitments. Also, SP11 stressed that there are high expectations at work regardless of family responsibilities, which may discourage females from taking on senior-level responsibilities.

Table 8: Perceptions of competence and leadership approaches. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participants (SP)	Verbatim response
SP2	<i>“Because you are dealing with a lot of male-dominated employees in your base, you have male domination in the space because obviously it is hard work”</i>
SP7	<i>“For a position to that of a female...and there is a succession plan that is put forward, usually a male by default is considered first, then a female, and again that is another way of hindering”</i>
SP16	<i>“But yeah, so going back to your question, in the past, I found female leaders to be very autocratic and very dominating to stick out and stand out and have a position at the table”</i>
SP16	<i>“They tend to hire more males than females for similar positions...may be thinking that men are more competent”</i>

The above testimony reveals that perceptions of competence and leadership approaches are male executives' assessments of women's leadership potential in logistics industries. As SP2 alluded, there is male domination in the team because men

are expected to work harder. SP7 and SP20 support the view. SP 16 explained that female leaders are very autocratic and dominating.

5.5. Gender-Based Biases

5.5.1. To identify implicit and explicit gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent development processes

Gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent development processes were discussed in the interviews with the study participants. The study participants talked about implicit and explicit gender-based biases.

Implicit gender-based biases

The study participants describe several implicit gender biases that influence women's workplace experiences. These included biases in hiring and promotion practices, biases related to performance appraisal and feedback, and assumptions about women's family responsibilities, which often shape perceptions of availability and commitment. These themes are reflected in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following excerpts provide supporting evidence.

Table 9: Theme 1: Hiring and promotion. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP3	<i>“So I think in our industry, on the express end of things, there are a lot more females because we have a lot of softer jobs, call centres, sales, customer service and things like that...Thus, now one has this much wider choice of people to select into senior positions, which is not necessarily the case”</i>
SP11	<i>Then in that regard, because they think the man is going to come in and he is going to pull that energy because the woman is too much of no...”</i>
SP15	<i>“They may consider men over women for certain positions because of the notion that it is a man’s job that needs physical force”</i>
SP19	<i>“Not always, but I think there was perhaps a misconception that women were a lot softer, more emotional in the leadership components”</i>

The above assertions reveal that implicit gender-based bias can be experienced during hiring and promotion in the logistics industry. As SP3 highlighted, the nature of the

sector may lead recruiters to believe that the jobs are suitable only for a particular gender. This view is supported by SP11, 15 and 19, respectively.

Table 10: Theme 2: Performance appraisal and feedback. source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP4	<i>"No, it is really different in the sense of, I think...that yes, the females have to be female leaders, have to prove themselves... although it comes with a softer touch"</i>
SP5	<i>"Females may be appraised differently and mostly based on what they have already accomplished, while males may be evaluated based on their potential"</i>
SP6	<i>"Sometimes the feedback given to male colleagues may be more favourable to their professional growth compared to that given to females"</i>
The evidence provided here shows that implicit gender bias can occur during performance appraisal and feedback sessions in the logistics industry. This view is supported by SP4, 5 and 6 respectively	

Table 11: Theme 3: Assumptions about family responsibilities. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP11	<i>"If you are a male, you may be promoted more easily because they believe you are the breadwinner."</i>
SP12	<i>"I do not get a raise because my partner is in a very senior position and things like that"</i>
SP13	<i>"Child is sick, so if there is not a culture that allows a female employee to be able to have the flexibility to do that kind of stuff, I think it proves quite difficult because..."</i>
SP14	<i>"You may be poorly remunerated because you both are gainfully employed. I think this must stop"</i>
The evidence here shows that implicit gender bias can occur when assumptions are made about family responsibilities in the logistics industry. This view is supported by SP 11, 12, 13 and 14, respectively.	

Table 12: Theme 4: Workplace collaborations and microaggressions. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP1	<i>"They feel alienated, the socialising component of it excludes them. They do not belong, but they are at the table, and that, in a way, is even harder, because if you are not in the room and you cannot contribute, there is an understanding. However, if you are in the room and you still cannot contribute, that is devastating"</i>
SP 2	<i>"Some senior female members turn to distance themselves from other female colleagues because they are far ahead in the system"</i>
<i>The evidence shows that implicit gender bias is seen in workplace collaborations and microaggressions in the logistics industry," SP1 and two support the view."</i>	

Explicit gender-based biases

Also, the study participants discussed several explicit gender-based biases that directly shape women's workplace experiences. These include hiring practices that favour male candidates, disproportionate pay structures, unwanted gendered comments, and unequal parental leave policies. These findings are also reflected in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following excerpts provide further support.

Table 13: Theme 1: Hiring bias. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP13	<i>"The company may put up a job and clearly state that they need only male applicants because of the physical demands of this job"</i>
SP14	<i>"Sometimes, hiring managers prefer males for certain roles because of established customs and the belief that the role is suitable for males"</i>
SP15	<i>"And operations were mainly male-dominated, definitely near the end when we did the alignment and the integration of...we started seeing senior management women from a ...perspective coming to the fold"</i>
SP16	<i>"So, there is very little to no representation of women in senior positions"</i>
<i>The above shows that explicit gender bias is evident in the logistics industry's hiring practices. As alluded to by SP13, a company may openly advertise for a potential male hire. This view is supported by SP14, 15 and 16, respectively.</i>	

Table 14: Theme 2: Disproportionate pay. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP9	<i>"The notion that it is a man's job may influence the hiring manager to pay less to a potential female colleague"</i>
SP10	<i>"Some companies have a different pay policy. These companions pay women less than men due to reasons they try to justify"</i>
SP 11	<i>"It is sad that women hardly make it to the very senior positions as a result of the glass ceiling. Moreover, of course, they will be earning less money as a result of all these..."</i>
SP12	<i>"You are paid differently just because you are a female, which is unfair. I think compensation should be tied to performance at all times"</i>
<p>The above evidence shows that explicit gender-based bias is evident when companies practice unequal pay in the logistics industry. As SP9 explained, the phenomenon is rooted in society's belief system.</p>	

Table 15: Theme 3: Unwanted comments. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP5	<i>"Unpleasant comments, such as not being able to pronounce one's name repeatedly, can be offensive"</i>
SP6	<i>"Sometimes bosses use inappropriate language too"</i>
SP7	<i>"It is more cordial when you work with others and know their names with the right pronunciation. Calling people 'John Bull', Doe, etc., it is not funny..."</i>
SP8	<i>"As expected, it is not possible to communicate in a language you do not understand, but correcting a colleague now and then calls for concern"</i>
<p>The above evidence shows that explicit gender-based bias occurs when bosses make unwanted comments in the logistics industry. SP5 explained that even small actions, such as unwanted comments, may evoke memories of gender-based bias. This view is supported by SP6, 7, and 8, respectively.</p>	

Table 16: Theme 4: Unequal parental leave policies. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
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SP11	<i>"I think unequal caring time for parents has been unfair until the recent ruling in South Africa"</i>
SP12	<i>"I must be given fair treatment when it comes to leaves and days off"</i>
SP13	<i>"Company policies should reflect staff demographics...making decisions that will end up hurting the staff is creating a bad culture that will in turn hurt the organisation too..."</i>
SP16	<i>"Decisions on staff and benefits should be made objectively and not tied to gender..."</i>

The above evidence shows that explicit gender-based bias is seen in unequal parental policies in the logistics industry. SP 13 explained that unequal parental leave policies have often led to workplace bias in the logistics industry. The view is supported by SP12, 13, and 16, respectively.

5.6. The Impact of Male-Domination

5.6.1. To examine how male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices affect the inclusion and progression of women leaders

The impact of male domination emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews with the study participants. According to the participants, male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices shape the inclusion and progression of women leaders in several ways. These include gender bias in decision-making processes, limited mentorship, and developmental support. Restricted opportunities for advancement and persistent pay discrimination. This outcome is reflected in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following questions substantiate these insights.

Table 17: Theme 1: Gender bias. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP1	<i>"There is an issue of gender, and also an issue of your background. Mostly, men turn to move up the ladder... and this is not surprising when they are white males..."</i>
SP2	<i>"I think establishments are also working tirelessly to reduce the gender bias in the promotion process. This way, we will see companies with female individuals at all ranks."</i>
SP3	<i>It is society's norm to believe that... men are superior. Men generally turn out to be different, you know... they are pushful, and business</i>

	<i>demands someone who is very pushful...For example, men will often push for a better salary and position...</i>
SP4	<i>"Often, women are disqualified from the senior ranks because they will ask for maternity leave."</i>
<p>The evidence above reveals that male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices, such as gender bias, affect the inclusion and progression of women leaders. As highlighted by SP1, 2, 3, and 4, the impact of male domination in the logistics industry includes gender bias.</p>	

Table 18: Theme 2: Lack of mentorship. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP15	<i>"When there are fewer females at the top, there are fewer role models too...this definitely affects the growth of females"</i>
SP16	<i>"Having a male boss as a mentor may not work out because they turn to favour males in their succession planning"</i>
SP17	<i>"In a company with a toxic culture, mentorship is often a stepping stone to a string of abuses..."</i>
SP18	<i>"Where the climate is unhealthy, I mean the culture, males in senior positions may also avoid mentoring females because of misunderstandings that may ensue"</i>
The above evidence shows that male domination in the logistics industry can lead to a lack of mentorship for women. This view is supported by SD15, 16, 17, and 18.	

Table 19: Theme 3: Limited opportunities for women. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP9	<i>"I do not think everybody gets promoted fairly...When you count the number of females against the males in the higher positions, there is a gap. I mean, there are still many males occupying those top positions..."</i>
SP10	<i>"I can see a jump in terms of the number of females holding more middle management positions...but there are still fewer females at the top echelons of the company. The companies are still primarily male-controlled, and with only a few women at the helm"</i>
SP11	<i>"Promotions are often pitched towards males...and then the racial grouping issue kicks in...Also, you should be really talented to break the glass ceiling..."</i>
SP12	<i>"I often feel women need to be super exceptional from a cognitive viewpoint. I hardly see women at the top of the corporate...mostly men...that is the truth"</i>
The evidence above shows that male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices have led to limited opportunities for women in the industry. This view is shared by SD9, 10, 11 and 12	

Table 20: Theme 4: Pay discrimination. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP13	<i>“As regards remuneration, women occupy the lower end of the pay scale. This is as a result of women occupying lower-level ranks in the organisations...”</i>
SP14	<i>“Because of labour inequality, the most senior positions, such as top management jobs, are mostly occupied by males, and so they are highly compensated for the jobs they do”</i>
SP15	<i>Companies say they pay you the market rate, but when you compare yourself to those in other markets, you actually see that you are paid below the market rate. So, I think international companies turn to pay better...”</i>
SP16	<i>“The ability to negotiate your pay is always there, but you often fail to get the remuneration you deserve because of some systemic motives...”</i>
The evidence shows that male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices have resulted in pay discrimination for women in the logistics industry. This view is shared by SPs 9, 10, 11, and 12, respectively.	

5.7. Male Executives’ Narratives

5.7.1. To explore male executives’ narratives around gender representation and understand the rationales behind current leadership structures

The study participants discussed male executives’ narratives around gender representation and the rationales behind current leadership structures.

Gender representation

Gender representation emerged as a central topic in the interviews with study participants. Participants explained that traditional beliefs, leader personality, and perceptions of approved competence influence representation within leadership. The outcomes are illustrated in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following excerpts provide supporting evidence:

Table 21: Theme 1: Traditional beliefs. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP9	<i>"Men are more aggressive, decisive, and self-confident, whereas women are more caring."</i>
SP10	<i>"There are positions that need a male occupant because of the demand of the job, anyway..."</i>
<p>The above evidence reveals that the male executives' narrative around gender representation includes traditional beliefs and or stereotypes. This view is supported by SP 9 and 10.</p>	

Table 22: Theme 2: Leader personality union. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP2	<i>"Women at the top often behave like men...they keep low cut hair, they turn to focus on strategic thinking rather. This makes them very suitable for leadership positions because they have similar attributes to male leaders"</i>
SP3	<i>"A woman who wants to lead should focus on strategic thinking instead of being unnecessarily caring, I will tell you..."</i>
<p>The above evidence reveals that male executives' narratives about gender representation involve a union or convergence of leader personality. SP2 and SP3, respectively, support this view.</p>	

Table 23: Theme 3: Approved competence. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP 4	<i>"Sometimes, they misbelieve that males are suitable for certain positions...this is unfair, however"</i>
SP5	<i>"I often hear this 'The man will play a pivotal role in stirring the ship during crisis'...this is a common notion in our world today."</i>
<p>The above evidence indicates that male executives' narratives about gender representation include leader-approved or ascribed competence. The view is supported by SD 4 and 5, respectively.</p>	

5.4.4.1.2 The rationales behind current leadership structures

Moreover, the rationales behind current leadership structures in the logistics industry were relevant in the interviews with the study participants. The study participants mentioned

three rationales for current leadership structures in the logistics sector: historical stereotypes, organisational and personal bias, and an unequal distribution of labour supply. This outcome is shown in Table 3 and Figure 6, and the following excerpts support it:

Table 24: Theme 1: Historical stereotypes. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP9	<i>“Culturally, men are considered leaders because of their leadership traits, while women are seen as caregivers because of their communal traits.”</i>
SP10	<i>“They think men are decisive and aggressive...which makes them more competitive in the workplace.”</i>
The testimony reveals that the rationales behind current leadership structures in the logistics industry include historical stereotypes. The view is supported by SD9 and 10, respectively.	

Table 25: Theme 2: Organisational and personal bias. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP11	<i>When the HR department does not favour female employees, what do you expect? The system is not sound and must be changed.”</i>
SP12	<i>“Women are often given lower starting salaries, and they have fewer mentoring opportunities compared to their male counterparts.”</i>
The evidence reveals that the rationales for current leadership structures in the logistics industry include organisational and personal biases. The view is supported by SP 11 and 12, respectively.	

Table 26: Theme 3: Unequal distribution of labour supply. Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

Study Participant (SP)	Verbatim responses
SP13	<i>“I think more female employees are working than males. However, when it comes to skilled labour, the calculus changes...”</i>

SP14	<i>“Women outnumber men in the workforce, but it turns out that there are more men at the top of the companies because there is a need for high skill at the top management roles.”</i>
The above evidence reveals that the rationales for current leadership structures in the logistics industry include the unequal distribution of labour supply. This view is echoed by SP 13 and 14, respectively.	

5.8. Conclusion

Chapter 5 presented the key outcomes of the qualitative analysis, highlighting how male executives' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions shape gender representation and women's leadership opportunities in the logistics industry. The findings demonstrated that both implicit and explicit gender-based biases shape women's experiences, affecting hiring practices, performance evaluations, developmental opportunities, workplace interactions, and perceptions of competence.

The analysis further reveals how entrenched organisational norms, male-dominated leadership cultures, and traditional beliefs about gender and family roles contribute to unequal advancement pathways for women. The participants' narratives continued that women's leadership potential is often constrained by capability and by structural and attitudinal barriers that reproduce gendered leadership patterns.

Additionally, the findings highlighted how limited recognition of women's capabilities, uncertainty about discrimination, and assumptions related to family responsibilities intersect to restrict women's access to influential leadership positions. These insights reinforce the value of examining gender representation through the lived experiences of executives, as they highlight how perceptions and beliefs translate into practical organisational outcomes.

Overall, Chapter 5 provided a comprehensive interpretation of participants' voices, connecting their perspectives to broader patterns of gender inequality in the logistics industry. Building on these, Chapter 6 integrates the outcomes with the research questions and literature review, offering a deeper synthesis of how the practical evidence aligns with established theories and contributes to the broader scholarly and practical understanding of gendered leadership dynamics.

6. CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an interpretive, theory-informed discussion of the empirical findings reported in Chapter 5, linking them explicitly to the theoretical and empirical insights reviewed in Chapter 2. The purpose is to explain how male executives' belief systems, interpretive frames, and organisational experiences shape women's participation in executive leadership within the South African logistics industry. As argued in Chapter 2, Social Role Theory (SRT) provides a foundational lens for understanding how gendered expectations are culturally constructed and embedded in organisational practices (Koenig, 2021; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Koenig, 2021). These expectations become taken-for-granted assumptions about who is perceived as a legitimate leader, whose leadership is considered credible, and whose career trajectory is seen as naturally aligned with senior roles. Role Congruity Theory (RCT) complements this perspective by explaining how gender prejudice arises when women's behaviours, leadership styles, or personal circumstances appear misaligned with existing leadership prototypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kroes et al., 2025). Implicit bias research further enriches this theoretical base by highlighting how unconscious associations subtly influence decision-making even when individuals claim neutrality (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

The discussion is structured around the four sub-problems (SP1-SP4) that guided both the research design and the presentation of the findings. SP1 examined executives' underlying beliefs and assumptions about women's leadership potential. SP2 analysed explicit and implicit gender-based biases. SP3 explored organisational and structural barriers that shape access to leadership. SP4 analysed the narratives through which male executives interpret and justify existing leadership structures. These sub-problems, together with the themes identified in Chapter 5, offer a coherent framework for interpreting the empirical evidence.

This chapter does not merely recapitulate the findings from Chapter 5. Instead, it situates those findings within broader scholarly debates and demonstrates how the results confirm, challenge, or extend existing theoretical explanations. In doing so, the discussion integrates 13 new constructs identified in Chapter 5, including Institutionalised Male Comfort Zones, Historical Pipeline Inertia, Representation Fatalism, Mentorship by Default, Opportunity Narrowing, and Organisational Innocence Narratives. These constructs add analytical depth to the interpretations by revealing previously underexplored mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced in male-

dominated organisational contexts. They also contribute to future studies, as explained in Chapter 7.

A critical feature of this chapter is the golden thread that links the empirical patterns in Chapter 5 to the theoretical foundations in Chapter 2. This is achieved by explicitly demonstrating how the participants' narratives echo, contradict, or extend established scholarship on gender stereotypes, leadership prototypes, organisational culture, structural inequality, and transformation in South Africa. These traits serve as mental templates for determining whether someone is fit to be a perfect leader. The golden thread is also visible in how the discussion integrates cross-cutting patterns across SP1 to SP4. For example, beliefs examined under SP1 often reappear in the discussion of implicit biases under SP2 or become institutionalised as structural patterns under SP3. Similarly, the interpretive narratives under SP4 draw directly from the assumptions explored in SP1, while simultaneously reinforcing the organisational dynamics examined in SP3. In this way, the chapter demonstrates how individual attitudes, cultural expectations, and organisational structures interact to shape leadership opportunities.

Finally, the discussion draws on contemporary research from 2020 to 2025 to provide updated academic grounding. While foundational studies such as Schein (1973) and Powell (1990) are referenced sparingly for historical contrast, most of the supporting evidence comes from recent scholarship on gender and leadership, including Ng et al., (2025), Mohammed et al. (2024), Evans and Maley (2021), Kroes et al., (2025), Yang et al., (2024), Coleman (2020), Proff and Musalam (2025), Bosch (2025), and Just Share NPC (2024) among others. This ensures alignment with current debates and scholarly expectations regarding the use of contemporary literature.

Taken together, this chapter offers a comprehensive, theory-aligned interpretation of the study's findings, deepens understanding of gendered leadership dynamics in South African logistics, and sets the stage for Chapter 7, which synthesises the conclusions and offers implications for practice and policy.

6.2. Discussion of SP1: Beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions

SP1 focused on the foundational assumptions that male executives hold about women's leadership potential. These assumptions form the cognitive architecture through which women's capabilities, suitability, and leadership "fit" are interpreted. They also provide the psychological basis for the patterns of explicit bias, implicit preference, structural exclusion, and narrative justification that appear in SP2, SP3, and SP4. Thus, SP1

represents the entry point into the deeper mechanisms that shape gendered leadership roadmaps.

6.2.1. Acceptance of male superiority

The first aspect under SP1 revealed a strong tendency among participants to view men as more naturally suited to executive leadership than women. This assumption was often expressed through statements that men cope better with pressure, make quicker or more decisive decisions, or possess a tougher commercial instinct. These perceptions closely mirror the cultural expectations outlined in Chapter 2, particularly the SRT argument that men are socially assigned agentic qualities such as assertiveness, dominance, and independence, which are then mapped onto leadership roles (Koenig, 2021). These narratives continue to muddy the environment, and there has to be a concerted effort to address them and bring about the required changes. Contemporary research in male-dominated sectors, including logistics, confirms that these associations remain dominant in operational environments (Kroes et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024).

Chapter 5 demonstrated that these beliefs persist even when empirical evidence about women's performance contradicts them. Some studies have shown that when given the opportunity, they perform better than men (Mohammed et al., 2024). For example, some executives acknowledged that women handle crises with greater composure or demonstrate more thoughtful strategic decision-making. This aligns with recent findings highlighting women's strengths in emotional intelligence, team coordination, and reflective judgement during uncertainty (Ng et al., 2025; Coleman, 2020). However, these positive acknowledgements were often overshadowed by the broader assumption that men are the default for senior leadership. This reflects what RCT describes as the ongoing tension between gender norms and leadership prototypes, in which women's strengths are recognised but not seen as congruent with traditional leadership expectations.

This theme also links directly to the later discussion of implicit bias in SP2. Several executives described feeling more "comfortable" working with male colleagues at senior levels. This sense of comfort, ease, or familiarity is not adequately explained by classic SRT alone, which focuses primarily on trait expectations, but emerges strongly in contemporary organisational culture research. Chapter 5 captured this phenomenon through the construct Institutionalised Male Comfort Zones, which describes how emotional familiarity with male peers shapes leadership preferences. This construct deepens SRT by illustrating how leadership evaluations are influenced not only by perceptions of competence but also by affective and relational dynamics.

This pattern also feeds directly into SP3, where these assumptions about male superiority become embedded in organisational structures, such as mentorship patterns, access to strategic opportunities, and the informal gatekeeping dynamics described by several participants. It also links to SP4, where these beliefs underpin the narratives that executives use to justify current leadership structures. In this way, the beliefs under SP1 are not isolated attitudes but foundational elements that shape subsequent mechanisms of inequality.

6.2.2. Doubt of discrimination

A second dimension of SP1 was the widespread belief that gender discrimination is no longer prevalent, with many participants arguing that opportunities are allocated fairly or even preferentially to women. This belief mirrors the meritocratic narratives discussed in Chapter 2, where men frequently perceive organisational systems as neutral despite evidence of ongoing gender disparities (Just Share NPC, 2024). The assumption that women are now favoured contrasts sharply with national data showing that women remain underrepresented in executive roles in transport and logistics (Department of Employment and Labour, 2024).

RCT provides insight into this contradiction by suggesting that individuals often perceive themselves as objective even as they make gendered evaluations. Chapter 5 illustrated this tension clearly: participants described leadership decisions as “fair” while simultaneously associating leadership competence with masculine traits. Implicit bias research reinforces this interpretation, demonstrating how unconscious stereotypes shape decision-making despite explicit commitments to neutrality (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Contemporary South African studies confirm that leaders frequently underestimate the persistence of discrimination, particularly in male-dominated sectors (Bosch, 2025).

The finding that some participants expressed concern that transformation policies disadvantage men introduces the construct Reverse Discrimination Anxiety. This construct captures a defensive emotional response to gender equity initiatives and reflects a broader global trend of resistance to transformation. It also links to SP4, where executives use narratives of fairness and organisational stability to justify existing leadership structures. The belief that discrimination no longer exists, therefore, shapes the interpretive frameworks through which both bias and structural barriers are understood.

This theme also links directly to SP3. When executives believe that gender inequality has already been resolved, they are less likely to recognise organisational practices that

perpetuate inequality, such as informal mentorship networks or biased allocation of strategic opportunities. Thus, disbelief in discrimination becomes a mechanism that maintains structural inequality by obscuring its causes.

6.2.3. Limited recognition of women's capabilities

A third key finding under SP1 was the limited recognition of women's competencies, particularly in strategic or commercial roles. Participants frequently acknowledged that women excel in operational, administrative, or relational aspects of leadership but questioned their suitability for high-stakes executive decision-making. This reflects the patterns outlined in Chapter 2, where women are often associated with competence in support functions but rarely viewed as strategic leaders (Evans & Maley, 2021).

Contemporary research challenges these assumptions. Studies by Ng et al., (2025), Mohammed et al., (2024), and Coleman (2020) show that women perform well in strategic foresight, stakeholder management, risk governance, and team decision-making. The persistence of limited recognition in the current study highlights the durability of gendered expectations despite new evidence.

The construct Conditional Recognition emerged from this theme, illustrating how women's strengths are acknowledged only within stereotypically feminine domains. This mechanism reinforces RCT's argument that women face prejudice when their capabilities are inconsistent with gender norms, even when those norms are outdated. It also links to SP4, where executives frame women as excellent leaders "in certain roles" but not in the most influential positions. This conditional recognition becomes a subtle barrier to leadership advancement, shaping both the allocation of opportunities and the evaluation of potential.

This theme also interacts with SP3. Limited recognition of women's strategic ability leads to the pattern described in Chapter 5, Opportunity Narrowing, in which women are repeatedly placed in operational or people-focused roles. At the same time, men are positioned in revenue-generating or strategic functions. Thus, SP1 beliefs translate directly into SP3 structural outcomes.

6.2.4. Notion of family responsibility as a barrier

A fourth dimension of SP1 was the belief that family responsibilities are the primary barrier to women's leadership progression. Participants frequently stated that women are more committed to family life, that motherhood divides attention, or that women choose not to

pursue senior roles due to domestic obligations. These views reflect traditional gender norms highlighted in Chapter 2, in which caregiving is culturally associated with women and perceived as incompatible with senior leadership (Anglin et al., 2022; Eagly & Wood, 2012).

However, recent research demonstrates that organisational structures, rather than motherhood itself, create barriers to advancement. Bosch (2025) argues that inflexible work arrangements, biased performance evaluations, and unsupportive organisational cultures are the primary drivers of gender gaps. The belief that women “self-select out” of leadership, therefore, reflects an individualising narrative that obscures structural constraints.

Chapter 5 captured this phenomenon through the construct Self-Elimination Narrative. This narrative places responsibility for women's underrepresentation on women, while ignoring the organisational conditions that restrict their upward mobility. This links directly to SP3, where structural barriers such as limited mentorship, biased opportunity allocation, and opaque compensation practices reinforce gender inequality. It also connects to SP4, where executives justify male-dominated leadership structures by attributing women's absence to personal choices.

6.2.5. Perceptions of competence and leadership approaches

Finally, SP1 revealed strong gendered assumptions about leadership styles. Participants frequently described women as collaborative, empathetic, disciplined, and meticulous, but questioned whether these traits aligned with the demands of executive leadership. This reflects the stereotypes described in Chapter 2, in which communal traits associated with women are often undervalued in leadership contexts.

Contemporary evidence contradicts this assumption. Mohammed et al., (2024) and Ng et al., (2025) show that collaborative and transformational leadership approaches are increasingly vital for navigating uncertainty and complexity in modern organisations. The persistence of stereotypical assumptions in this study illustrates the continued influence of gendered leadership prototypes despite changing organisational demands.

The construct Perceived Vulnerability of Feminine Leadership captures how women's strengths are reframed as weaknesses in male-dominated sectors. This mechanism links to SP2, where implicit biases devalue empathy and relational leadership, and to SP4, where executives justify male-dominated structures through narratives of risk and stability.

6.3. Discussion of SP2: Explicit and implicit gender-based biases

SP2 examined how explicit and implicit biases shape leadership evaluations and decision-making, revealing how the belief systems discussed under SP1 translate into concrete behavioural patterns. While SP1 exposed the cognitive and cultural assumptions that male executives hold about women's leadership potential, SP2 demonstrated how these assumptions are acted upon, reinforced, and reproduced in everyday organisational life. The distinction between explicit and implicit bias is important for analytical clarity, yet the findings show that the two forms of bias operate in a mutually reinforcing manner. Explicit biases reflect the conscious stereotypes that executives openly articulated, whereas implicit biases appeared in subtle preferences, behavioural tendencies, and interpretive frames that executives often perceived as neutral or objective.

A central insight from this sub-problem is that biases are not isolated phenomena. Instead, they form an interconnected pattern that links directly back to SP1's gendered assumptions, spills forward into SP3's organisational barriers, and becomes institutionalised through SP4's interpretive narratives. This demonstrates the golden thread running across the empirical findings: beliefs lead to biases, biases shape structural outcomes, and those outcomes are justified through narratives that reinforce the initial beliefs.

The analysis also highlights how older gender-stereotype research, such as the early work by Bem (1981) and Schein (1973), still resonates today but must be understood in contrast to contemporary evidence and changing leadership demands (Yang et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2025). The persistence of explicit biases shows that progress toward gender equality in South African logistics is uneven, particularly in organisational cultures where historical norms and masculine occupational identities remain influential. At the same time, implicit biases show that even when explicit attitudes appear more progressive, unconscious tendencies continue to favour men through subtle, taken-for-granted mechanisms.

6.3.1. Explicit gender-based biases

The findings revealed that explicit forms of bias remain present and influential in shaping perceptions of women's leadership capability. Executives openly described women as more emotional, less able to withstand pressure, or insufficiently decisive for senior roles. These statements reflect a continuation of gendered leadership stereotypes that have been documented for decades, and which were reviewed in Chapter 2. While early research, such as Schein's "think manager, think male" framework and Bem's gender schema theory, established the foundational patterns of these stereotypes, contemporary

studies continue to show their persistence in male-dominated industries. For example, Mohammed et al., (2024) found that explicit bias remains prevalent in operational sectors, and Kroes et al., (2025) reported similar trends within logistics environments across Europe and Africa. This study confirms that similar patterns persist in the South African context.

Importantly, the explicit biases identified in Chapter 5 were often supported by anecdotal examples offered by executives, such as describing a woman who appeared emotional in a stressful situation or a man who responded with strength under pressure. These selective interpretations illustrate what Chapter 2 described as attribution bias, in which individuals interpret behaviour through existing stereotypes rather than through objective evaluation. For example, a male executive who reacts strongly may be described as enthusiastic or assertive, while a woman displaying similar behaviour may be labelled emotional or unstable. This interpretive asymmetry reflects a deeper cultural pattern that aligns with RCT's predictions: women who deviate from gendered expectations face negative evaluations, while men whose behaviour reinforces masculine norms are rewarded.

However, the findings also revealed counternarratives that challenge explicit stereotypes. Some participants described women as more composed in crises, more reflective in decision-making, or more effective at managing complex team dynamics. These observations align with recent research highlighting women's strengths in crisis leadership, emotional intelligence, and collective decision-making (Ng et al., 2025; Coleman, 2020). This suggests that explicit biases may be slowly shifting in specific contexts, especially where executives have direct experience collaborating with competent female leaders.

Despite these counter-narratives, the overall pattern showed that explicit biases continue to shape leadership evaluations. A particularly significant mechanism was the heightened scrutiny placed on women compared to men. Participants frequently described how women repeatedly needed to "prove themselves," often more than their male counterparts. This dynamic aligns with the construct Performance Over Scrutiny identified in Chapter 5. Performance Over Scrutiny illustrates how women are evaluated more harshly and held to higher standards, reinforcing gendered expectations that women must demonstrate exceptional ability to receive the same recognition as men. This pattern connects to SP3, where structural barriers, such as limited access to high-profile projects, further reinforce evaluative biases, limiting women's opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities.

Performance Over Scrutiny also links to SP4, as executives often justify women's limited representation by pointing to these elevated standards. Instead of questioning whether evaluative criteria are fair, executives described women as needing "more time" or "more experience" before being considered for senior roles. This demonstrates how explicit biases not only shape judgments but also contribute to the interpretive narratives that preserve male-dominated leadership structures.

6.3.2. Implicit gender-based biases

Implicit biases were equally pervasive but manifested in more subtle ways that participants often did not recognise as gendered. These biases appeared through language such as "fit," "comfort," "chemistry," or "natural alignment," which executives used to explain leadership choices without acknowledging the gendered assumptions underlying these terms. As established in Chapter 2, implicit bias theory suggests that these biases operate beneath conscious awareness and are often perceived as neutral or objective (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). In male-dominated organisational cultures, implicit biases tend to reinforce homogeneity, as individuals unconsciously prefer colleagues who resemble their own professional and personal identity profiles.

The findings revealed several specific mechanisms of implicit bias. One was the tendency for male executives to feel more comfortable working with other men in senior roles. This sense of comfort was described as effortless communication, shared professional instincts, or smoother collaboration. Chapter 5 captured this phenomenon through the construct Comfort-Based Decision Making, which demonstrates how relational ease shapes leadership selection. This mechanism extends SRT by showing that gender norms operate not only through perceptions of competence but through emotional and interpersonal preferences.

Another mechanism identified in the findings was the construct Micro Affirmation Bias. This refers to small but cumulative advantages that men receive, such as informal encouragement, visible praise, inclusion in off-the-record conversations, or preferential access to influential networks. Chapter 2 discussed how micro-affirmations contribute to cumulative career advantage in masculine organisational cultures, and the present findings provide clear evidence of this mechanism in logistics contexts. Micro affirmations reinforce SP3's finding on mentorship and opportunity allocation, showing how informal networks shape professional development and leadership visibility.

A third implicit bias mechanism identified was the Empathy Penalty. Participants frequently described women's empathetic leadership styles as valuable for team harmony

but less suitable for strategic or high-pressure decision-making contexts. This reflects the stereotype patterns discussed in SP1, where communal traits are undervalued in leadership roles. The Empathy Penalty demonstrates how implicit biases devalue women's strengths in contexts where modern leadership scholarship argues those strengths are crucial. As noted in Chapter 2, transformational and collaborative leadership approaches have been shown to enhance performance in complex environments (Mohammed et al., 2024). However, implicit biases lead executives to interpret these strengths as signs of vulnerability.

Implicit biases also reinforced patterns identified in SP1, particularly the assumption that women are better suited for support roles. For example, participants described women as excelling in coordination, administration, or relational tasks, while men were viewed as more naturally attuned to strategy and commercial decision-making. This aligns with SRT's predictions about gendered expectations and reflects what Chapter 2 identified as occupational role typing. These implicit tendencies feed into SP3 through Opportunity Narrowing, in which women are assigned to roles aligned with stereotypical expectations, thereby reducing their exposure to strategic experiences critical to leadership development.

These implicit bias mechanisms collectively create an environment where leadership decisions appear neutral but reinforce gendered outcomes. They also influence the interpretive narratives discussed in SP4. For example, when executives justify male dominance by citing "stability," "chemistry," or "organisational fit," these explanations reflect implicit biases rather than objective criteria. This demonstrates how implicit bias shapes not only interpersonal dynamics but organisational reasoning and leadership rationales.

Importantly, implicit biases often operate alongside explicit beliefs. In some cases, a participant who denied discrimination or claimed neutrality nonetheless described comfort-based preferences that systematically advantaged men. This interplay between explicit and implicit biases reinforces the golden thread across SP1 to SP4: beliefs shape biases, biases shape structures, and structures justify beliefs. The combination of these mechanisms demonstrates that gender inequality persists not because of overt hostility but because of deeply ingrained cognitive, cultural, relational, and organisational patterns.

6.4. Discussion of SP3: Organisational and structural barriers

SP3 shifted the analytical focus from individual-level beliefs and biases to the structural and organisational dynamics that shape women's access to leadership opportunities. While SP1 and SP2 highlight the cognitive foundations of inequality, SP3 exposes how these beliefs become embedded in systems, practices, and organisational cultures. Chapter 2 emphasised that gender inequality is not sustained by attitudes alone but by institutional arrangements that reproduce patterns of exclusion through everyday decisions, informal norms, and organisational routines. The findings in Chapter 5 confirm that these structural barriers persist in South African logistics and operate in mutually reinforcing ways with the beliefs and biases already discussed.

A critical insight from SP3 is that executives rarely recognise the organisational conditions affecting women's progression as structural issues. Instead, as shown in SP1 and SP2, leaders often attribute women's underrepresentation to personal choices, individual preferences, or domestic responsibilities. This misrecognition forms a key part of the golden thread: individual beliefs (SP1) shape biases (SP2), which become embedded as organisational practices (SP3), and are finally legitimised and normalised through interpretive narratives (SP4). In this way, SP3 is not an isolated analytical category. It sits at the intersection of the personal and the systemic, revealing how individual perceptions become institutionalised as organisational constraints.

The themes under SP3 illustrate four core mechanisms through which structural inequality is maintained: the persistence of male dominance, the externalisation of organisational responsibility, gendered access to opportunities and mentorship, and disparities in compensation practices. These mechanisms reveal that organisational cultures in logistics remain intensely masculine in design, expectations, and reward structures, echoing patterns described in contemporary research on gendered organisational dynamics (Evans & Maley, 2021; Kroes et al., 2025; Proff & Musalam, 2025).

6.4.1. Impact of male domination

One of the most striking structural features identified was the pervasive impact of male-dominated organisational cultures. Participants frequently described senior leadership spaces as historically and currently dominated by men, often referring to informal networks or tight-knit groups that operate as de facto gatekeepers. These descriptions resonate with what Chapter 2 identified in the literature as homosocial reproduction, where men in positions of power tend to select, mentor, and promote individuals who resemble themselves. Classic work in this area emphasised the persistence of such patterns in

hierarchical organisations, but contemporary research shows they remain deeply entrenched in sectors such as logistics, mining, and construction (Yang et al., 2024; Kroes et al., 2025).

What emerged strongly from the findings is that male domination is often normalised rather than questioned. Executives described this dominance as the “nature of the industry,” a historical reality, or simply as women not choosing to enter the sector. These narrative echoes what Chapter 2 described as the naturalisation of gender inequality, in which structural patterns are interpreted as personal preference or organic evolution rather than as the product of organisational culture. It also connects directly to SP1, where participants’ beliefs about women’s interests or capabilities reinforce assumptions about why leadership spaces remain male-dominated.

The construct Historical Pipeline Inertia, identified in Chapter 5, captures this dynamic effectively. It shows how executives use historical demographic patterns to justify the present, treating past inequalities as rational explanations for current leadership configurations. This form of reasoning sustains structural inequality by positioning male dominance as inevitable and self-perpetuating. It also undermines transformation by diminishing the perceived need for deliberate intervention. This mechanism links directly to SP4, where the same narratives appear in executives’ justifications for existing leadership structures.

Moreover, male-dominated cultures affect more than just demographic composition. They shape behavioural expectations, leadership norms, communication styles, and performance criteria. Chapter 2 highlighted how occupational cultures with strong masculine identities tend to valorise assertiveness, pressure tolerance, and command-style decision-making. The findings in this study confirm that logistics continues to reflect these masculine norms, influencing which leadership traits are rewarded and which are undervalued. This connects back to SP1, where women’s leadership styles were often reframed as insufficiently aligned with these norms. In this way, SP3 provides the organisational context that sustains the biases identified earlier.

6.4.2. Gender bias as a structural barrier

Another central mechanism under SP3 was the tendency for executives to acknowledge the existence of bias but externalise responsibility for it. Participants frequently attributed gender inequality to broader cultural factors, family upbringing, societal expectations, or women’s personal choices, rather than organisational dynamics. This reflects what Chapter 2 identified as organisational decoupling, a pattern in which organisations

outwardly commit to fairness but do not integrate these commitments into internal practices (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022).

The findings showed that executives often interpreted gendered outcomes as the result of forces beyond their control, framing leadership patterns as reflections of society rather than the organisation. While cultural norms do influence, this narrative obscures the role of organisational structures, policies, and practices in perpetuating inequality. It also reflects the implicit biases identified in SP2, in which participants perceived their own practices as neutral even when they reinforced gendered preferences.

The construct Organisational Innocence Narratives capture this interpretive stance. This construct demonstrates how executives maintain the belief that the organisation is fair, even while acknowledging unequal outcomes. By externalising bias to “culture” or “society,” executives absolve themselves and the organisation of responsibility, which limits the motivation for meaningful transformation. This connects directly to SP4, where similar narratives are used to justify existing leadership structures. It also links to SP1, where beliefs about women’s choices or domestic priorities reinforce the idea that inequality is not structurally driven.

This pattern is significant because it reveals how organisational cultures maintain inequality not through active resistance but through passive rationalisation. When leaders believe that structural barriers are external to the organisation, efforts to change internal systems remain limited. This dynamic reinforces the findings under SP1 and SP2 and provides a critical link to the structural and interpretive patterns in SP4.

6.4.3. Lack of mentorship and limited opportunities

A third mechanism under SP3 was the lack of mentorship and limited opportunities available to women through organisational networks and informal relationships. Participants described mentorship as occurring naturally, typically between senior men and younger male employees. They often did not recognise that this pattern creates unequal access to developmental guidance, visibility, and sponsorship. Chapter 2 emphasised that access to mentorship and informal networks is crucial for leadership development, and contemporary research shows that men benefit disproportionately from these informal support systems (Evans & Maley, 2021; Proff & Musalam, 2025).

Chapter 5 demonstrated how mentorship frequently flowed along gendered lines, not due to explicit decisions but because of shared comfort, familiarity, and perceived alignment. This links back to SP2’s Comfort-Based Decision Making and Micro Affirmation Bias.

Together, these biases shape the informal processes that determine who receives growth opportunities, who is recommended for strategic projects, and who is groomed for senior roles.

The construct Mentorship by Default illustrates that mentorship is not absent for women because they do not seek it, as some participants suggested, but because men are more readily and automatically integrated into mentorship structures. This connects to SP1, where limited recognition of women's strategic potential feeds into the allocation of mentorship. It also links to SP4, where executives justify women's absence from senior leadership by citing supposed differences in interest or confidence.

Opportunity Narrowing, another construct identified in Chapter 5, further clarifies how mentorship patterns influence career trajectories. Women were frequently assigned to roles aligned with stereotypical expectations, such as administrative coordination or operational support. These roles offer limited exposure to strategic, commercial, or revenue-generating responsibilities that prepare employees for executive positions. Participants described these allocations as natural or practical, reflecting the assumptions identified under SP1. However, Chapter 2 highlighted that equitable leadership pipelines require exposure to a broad range of developmental experiences. When women are consistently placed in non-strategic positions, they are systematically excluded from leadership pathways.

This mechanism also interacts with SP2. Implicit biases shape the informal decisions that determine who is invited into key conversations, who receives encouragement, and who is positioned as a potential leader. These informal decisions accumulate over time, creating significant differences in access to leadership opportunities. In this way, mentorship and opportunity structures act as bridges between individual beliefs (SP1), interpersonal biases (SP2), and organisational outcomes (SP3), reinforcing the gendered patterns discussed in SP4.

6.4.4. Pay discrimination

A fourth structural theme under SP3 concerns compensation practices, particularly the disparities in discretionary remuneration such as bonuses, allowances, and performance awards. While several participants claimed that base salaries are equal for men and women, others acknowledged that the fundamental differences emerge in variable pay. This aligns with Chapter 2's review of gendered compensation systems, which shows that while fixed pay may appear equal, discretionary components often reveal hidden inequalities (Just Share NPC, 2024).

The findings showed that participants frequently attributed pay differences to experience, performance, or tenure. However, Chapter 2 highlighted that women's experiences are often undervalued and that their contributions are frequently interpreted through gendered assumptions (Evans & Maley, 2021). Moreover, the allocation of high-value opportunities, discussed earlier in SP3, directly influences the criteria used to justify discretionary pay. For example, if women are less likely to receive strategic assignments due to Opportunity Narrowing, they are also less likely to earn performance bonuses linked to those assignments.

This creates a reinforcing loop in which salaries appear equal, but total compensation reflects gendered patterns. The construct Compensation Opacity captures this dynamic by showing how the lack of transparency in compensation systems allows disparities to persist without scrutiny. This links to SP1, where limited recognition of women's strategic potential influences the types of roles they receive, and to SP2, where implicit biases shape evaluations of performance. It also connects to SP4, where executives justify compensation differences through narratives of merit, stability, or readiness.

Compensation practices highlight the broader structural implications of the patterns identified in earlier SPs. Even when organisations implement formal pay equity policies, the informal and discretionary elements of compensation can undermine equity. In this way, SP3 demonstrates how structural inequality is not only the result of individual biases but is embedded in organisational systems that appear neutral but operate in gendered ways

6.5. Discussion of SP4: Male executives' interpretations of leadership structures

SP4 examined how male executives interpret and justify the leadership structures that continue to produce gender inequality. This subproblem shifts the analytical lens from beliefs (SP1), biases (SP2), and structural mechanisms (SP3) to the interpretive narratives executives use to make sense of these patterns. These narratives function as sense-making tools that rationalise, legitimise, and normalise the existing leadership configuration. Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of narrative framing in sustaining organisational cultures, demonstrating how leaders draw on shared stories, cultural assumptions, and perceived organisational logics to reinforce the legitimacy of dominant structures. The findings in Chapter 5 show that similar processes occur within the South African logistics sector.

A key insight from SP4 is that executives rarely describe leadership inequality as intentional. Instead, they frame it as the product of history, practicality, differences in capability, or organisational risk considerations. These explanations draw heavily from the beliefs identified in SP1, the biases identified in SP2, and the practices identified in SP3. Thus, SP4 completes the golden thread by revealing how these earlier mechanisms become codified as organisational common sense. The narrative frames observed in SP4 serve to stabilise male-dominated structures by portraying them as natural, strategic, or unavoidable.

6.5.1. Male executives' narratives

Participants' narratives frequently combined praise for women's leadership qualities with explanations that subtly restricted their access to influential roles. Executives often described women as competent, disciplined, or effective leaders, but simultaneously claimed that women were "not suited" for the most demanding commercial or strategic positions. This pattern echoes findings from recent studies on gendered leadership narratives, which show that benevolent characterisations of women coexist with exclusionary outcomes (Evans & Maley, 2021; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020). Chapter 5 captured this pattern through the construct Narratives of Balanced Exclusion, which illustrates how praise becomes a mechanism of constraint. Women are acknowledged as capable, but only within specific domains, reinforcing the limited recognition patterns identified in SP1 and the opportunity-allocation patterns discussed in SP3.

These narratives also reflect aspects of RCT, where women who are perceived as relational or empathetic are seen as incongruent with traditionally masculine leadership prototypes. Executives often invoked stability and risk minimisation as reasons for maintaining male-dominated leadership structures, suggesting that women introduce uncertainty or require additional development time. This logic mirrors the implicit biases explored in SP2, where empathy was reframed as vulnerability and where comfort with male colleagues reinforced perceptions of stability. The narratives in SP4, therefore, operate as interpretive bridges between SP1's beliefs and SP3's structures.

A particularly striking finding was the absence of generational variation. While some global studies predict that younger leaders hold more progressive gender attitudes (Ng et al., 2025), the present study found little difference in gender beliefs across age groups. This suggests that organisational culture may be more influential than generational identity in shaping leadership narratives. Where organisational cultures retain strong masculine identities, younger leaders may assimilate into existing norms rather than challenge them.

This underscores the importance of cultural transformation, not only individual attitude change, in addressing leadership inequality.

6.5.2. Gender representation

Another significant narrative pattern related to gender representation. Participants frequently acknowledged that women are underrepresented in senior roles but described this underrepresentation as natural, slow evolving, or reflective of women's choices. This explanatory frame aligns with the beliefs identified in SP1 and mirrors the broader South African organisational trend, in which leaders attribute gender inequality to external factors rather than internal practices (Just Share NPC, 2024). This narrative reduces the perceived need for deliberate intervention, suggesting that representation will improve "naturally" over time.

Chapter 5 introduced the construct Representation Fatalism to capture this interpretive stance. Representation Fatalism characterises inequality as an unchangeable or slowly evolving condition, which masks the systemic and structural barriers identified under SP3. This narrative also reinforces the externalisation patterns discussed earlier, in which executives attribute inequality to societal norms or to women's priorities rather than to organisational culture, leadership expectations, or biased opportunity structures.

Representation Fatalism also links to SP2 because implicit biases often shape who is perceived as a credible or ready leader. When executives view the absence of women as natural, they are less likely to question the biases that influence recruitment, evaluation, and promotion decisions. This demonstrates how interpretive narratives function as mechanisms that solidify the impact of earlier beliefs and biases.

6.5.3. Rationale behind current leadership structures

Executives also relied on rationales that framed male-dominated leadership structures as necessary for organisational stability, risk minimisation, or continuity. These rationales were expressed as appeals to experience, reliability, or proven success and often positioned male leadership as the safest option for the business. Such reasoning reflects what Chapter 2 identified as masculine leadership prototypes, where leadership is equated with assertiveness, strength, and certainty. These characteristics are perceived as aligning more closely with men, reinforcing the congruence assumptions identified in RCT.

Participants often described men as “more confident,” “more experienced,” or “less risky,” even when comparable evidence for women existed. These statements draw heavily on the explicit stereotypes described in SP2, as well as the implicit preference patterns that privilege men through comfort-based reasoning. Chapter 5 captured these dynamics through the constructs Legacy-Based Justification and Risk Aversion Justification. Legacy-based justification shows how leaders explain current structures by referencing historical patterns, reinforcing Historical Pipeline Inertia from SP3. Risk Aversion Justification reveals how leaders frame women’s leadership as uncertain or untested, despite contemporary research demonstrating women’s effectiveness in risk management and crisis decision-making (Ng et al., 2025; Coleman, 2020).

These rationales function as cognitive anchors that justify retaining male-dominated leadership structures. They also demonstrate how beliefs, biases, and structures interact to produce self-reinforcing cycles. When women are not given strategic opportunities due to Opportunity Narrowing (SP3), executives perceive them as lacking the experience needed for senior roles. This perception reinforces the belief that men are more effective leaders (SP1), which, in turn, perpetuates implicit biases (SP2) that shape future opportunity allocation. Thus, SP4 reveals the interpretive mechanisms that stabilise and legitimise these cycles.

6.6. Theoretical contribution

This study contributes significantly to advancing gender and leadership scholarship, particularly in male-dominated sectors. While SRT remains the primary framework, the findings extend its explanatory power by introducing new constructs and demonstrating how gender norms operate across multiple organisational layers. Chapter 2 highlighted that SRT explains gendered expectations as arising from historical divisions of labour, leading to the association of agentic traits with men and communal traits with women. The findings confirm these patterns but also reveal new dimensions not fully captured by classical formulations.

The thirteen constructs identified across SP1 to SP4 deepen the theoretical explanation of how gendered leadership outcomes emerge. For example, Institutionalised Male Comfort Zones and Comfort-Based Decision Making extend SRT by showing that leadership evaluations are influenced not only by perceived competence but also by relational ease. Historical Pipeline Inertia and Legacy-Based Justification extend SRT’s focus on social norms by demonstrating how organisational memory and path dependence maintain gendered patterns. Representation, Fatalism, and Organisational

Innocence Narratives reveal how cultural narratives shape interpretations of inequality, showing how beliefs about fairness and inevitability sustain structural patterns. Mentorship by Default, Opportunity Narrowing, Micro Affirmation Bias, and Compensation Opacity illustrate how informal practices and systemic arrangements create cumulative disadvantages for women, reinforcing the structural analysis discussed in Chapter 2.

The findings also refine RCT by demonstrating how congruity judgments are shaped by emotional, relational, and organisational considerations, not only trait expectations. Constructs such as Empathy Penalty and Performance Over Scrutiny illustrate how stereotypes influence evaluations, aligning with RCT but extending it by showing how these perceptions interact with broader organisational cultures. Implicit bias insights are further advanced by demonstrating how subtle interpersonal dynamics influence opportunity structures, shaping leadership trajectories through everyday practices rather than overt discrimination.

Together, these contributions show that gendered leadership inequality in logistics is not simply a matter of individual bias or an isolated structural barrier. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of beliefs, preferences, cultural narratives, organisational systems, and institutional logics. This multi-layered theoretical lens enriches the broader literature on gender and leadership and provides a more nuanced framework for understanding gendered power relations in male-dominated environments.

6.7. Validity, Transferability, and Saturation

The study achieved credibility through rigorous qualitative methods, including verbatim quotations, iterative coding, and alignment between the research questions, theoretical framework, and empirical findings. The use of NVivo enhanced analytic transparency and supported the systematic development of themes and constructs. Triangulation was achieved through engagement with contemporary literature and cross-comparison across participant accounts.

Dependability was ensured through a detailed audit trail, consistent analytic processes, and precise documentation of decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexivity and methodological coherence across Chapters 3, 5, and 6. Transferability is supported by the similarity of logistics structures across Southern Africa and the global consistency of gendered leadership patterns in male-dominated sectors. Saturation was achieved at interview sixteen, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, where no new themes emerged, and subsequent interviews reinforced existing categories.

6.8. Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that women's underrepresentation in senior leadership within the South African logistics sector is not driven by a lack of capability or ambition but by interconnected layers of beliefs, biases, organisational practices, and interpretive narratives. SP1 revealed that executives continue to rely on gendered assumptions about leadership suitability. SP2 showed how explicit and implicit biases translate these assumptions into evaluative preferences. SP3 exposed the structural systems and informal practices that institutionalise inequality. SP4 illustrated how narratives about risk, readiness, and organisational stability reinforce and legitimise these patterns.

The golden thread running through the chapter highlights that gender inequality emerges not from a single factor but from the interaction of cognitive, cultural, and organisational mechanisms. The thirteen constructs identified by this study advance theoretical understanding by revealing how gendered leadership norms operate through subtle, relational, and narrative processes, even when explicit discrimination is denied.

These insights lay the analytical foundation for Chapter 7, which synthesises the study's conclusions and proposes actionable recommendations for policy, practice, and future research within South African logistics and comparable male-dominated sectors.

7. CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by synthesising the insights derived from the qualitative findings (Chapter 5) and the interpretive discussion (Chapter 6). It restates the research purpose, revisits the central research question and sub-questions, summarises the core findings, and highlights both theoretical and practical contributions. The chapter then provides recommendations for organisational practice, industry policy, and future research, and concludes with a final reflection on the study's significance.

7.2. Restatement of the research purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore how male executives' attitudes influence women's participation in executive leadership roles in the South African logistics industry. Despite the growth of DEI initiatives, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions. This research sought to understand *why*, through the lens of male executives' beliefs, assumptions, biases, and justifications.

Grounded primarily in **SRT**, the study examined the ways gendered expectations and stereotypes shape perceptions of leadership suitability, thereby influencing organisational decision-making, talent pipelines, and leadership structures.

7.3. Research questions revisited

7.3.1. Main research question

How do male executives in the South African logistics industry perceive and influence women's participation in executive leadership?

7.3.2. Sub-questions:

- 7.3.2.1. How do male executives conceptualise leadership effectiveness in relation to gender?
- 7.3.2.2. What underlying attitudes or biases do male executives hold that may influence women's access to executive leadership roles?
- 7.3.2.3. In what ways do the organisational cultures shaped by male executives facilitate or inhibit women's participation in executive leadership?

All research questions were fully addressed through thematic analysis.

7.4. Synthesis of Main Findings

7.4.1. SP1: Beliefs, Assumptions, and Perceptions

Male executives consistently framed leadership through gendered expectations, viewing men as better suited to strategic, high-pressure roles and women as more emotional, communal, or detail-oriented. Family responsibilities were cited as a dominant barrier. Women's leadership strengths were acknowledged only in limited domains. Conclusion: Gender-role stereotypes strongly influence how executives perceive women's leadership potential.

7.4.2. SP2: Explicit and implicit biases

Explicit biases included openly stated beliefs that men are "natural leaders." Implicit biases operated subtly through language such as "fit," "comfort," or "team chemistry." Women's performance was evaluated more harshly, and empathy was reframed as a weakness. Conclusion: Bias, both conscious and unconscious, shapes executive decision-making and perpetuates leadership inequality.

7.4.3. SP3: Organisational and structural barriers

Mentorship patterns, opportunity allocation, compensation structures, and a male overrepresented leadership culture created systemic obstacles for women. Development opportunities were narrowed, with women steered toward operational rather than strategic roles. Conclusion: Structural barriers in leadership pipelines restrict women's progression into executive roles. The review of structures will enhance women's chances.

7.4.4. Rationales behind leadership structures

Executives justified male-dominated leadership using narratives rooted in history, risk-aversion, and representation patterns. Some expressed the belief that all events are predetermined and, therefore, inevitable, and that slow progress is "natural," rather than the result of organisational barriers. Conclusion: Executives rely on cultural, historical, and risk-based reasoning to rationalise limited gender transformation. There has to be a push to move away from this narrative, move from legislation and industry charters.

7.5. Theoretical contributions

The study makes several theoretical contributions, primarily extending Social Role Theory. The extension of the theory provides valuable insights into the South African

executive leadership. Constructs such as pipeline inertia, institutionalised male comfort zones, and others explain the narrative and its embedding in organisational culture. It is a significant point to clarify the mechanisms of congruence, and RCTs help with this, clearly showing how exclusion has been entrenched despite employment equity and any other sector charter. The help of constructs is important, as it helps highlight how organisational culture internalises and continues to reproduce gendered norms.

Though used sparingly, RCTs helped illustrate how women are perceived as incongruent with leadership prototypes, supporting SRT's core assertions. Insights such as micro-affirmation bias, comfort-based decision-making, and empathy penalty demonstrate how subtle biases reinforce masculine leadership norms. Across SP1–SP4, thirteen constructs were identified, representing significant conceptual contributions.

7.6. Practical implications

Executive bias is the most subtle form of concern faced by many of them. It is a complex matter, and most people tend to tell themselves that they are not biased. The bias-skills capacity-building is very important for addressing deeply rooted assumptions and biases in traditional role definitions. Everyone has a bias; it is excellent to know about it and respond accordingly in many situations and challenges.

Formalising mentorship and access to strategic areas and positions of influence. It will always be fine if deliberate efforts are accompanied by policy and direction. There must be clear promotion and advertising requirements. Without these efforts, there will always be excuses for why women are constantly being overlooked. It is used to get and

Executive readiness is built through several initiatives and interventions, such as executive assignments, exposure to senior roles, and acting in senior roles, as these help increase women's chances of being ready for executive roles. Flexible work practices and environments that promote psychological safety. This intervention talks about organisational culture.

Mentorship must be formalised to ensure that women have equal access to strategic roles.

Explicit criteria for bonuses, promotion, and development opportunities would reduce hidden inequality. Women must gain access to high-impact commercial assignments to build readiness for executive positions. Inclusive leadership norms, flexible work arrangements, and psychological safety can help shift organisational culture.

7.7. Policy recommendations

To advance gender equity in the logistics sector, regulatory bodies must strengthen. Strengthen EE Enforcement by mandating transparent reporting on gender representation at executive levels. Such accountability not only highlights disparities but also creates pressure for measurable progress. We also have industry bodies that could play a part in creating DEI standards for the logistics industry-specific charter, taking a leaf from the mining charter, which has been in place for a while. Regulatory bodies should enforce transparent reporting of gender representation at executive levels. Industry associations can adopt a logistics-focused DEI charter similar to mining codes.

Equally critical is the investment in developing female leadership. The target initiatives, such as structured leadership programmes, executive coaching, and networking, are designed to instil confidence to navigate the male-dominated environment. Formal, implementable policies must accompany these initiatives, including flexible work arrangements. The effects of this are to expose organisations to a full spectrum of available potential and talent.

Moreover, establishing targeted scholarships and bursaries is essential to dismantling the pipeline inertia executives often cite as a barrier to transformation. Industry-funded scholarships focusing specifically on supply chain management, operational logistics, and STEM fields would actively construct a future talent pool, rendering the argument of insufficient female skills obsolete. Furthermore, this investment must extend beyond entry-level education to include executive education scholarships for high-potential women currently in middle management. By funding access to advanced business degrees (such as MBAs) and specialised executive leadership programmes, organisations can fast-track women's strategic readiness for C-suite roles, thereby directly countering the narratives of risk and inexperience used to justify the status quo.

7.8. Recommendations for future research

Future research could build on this study in several significant ways. First, qualitative validation of the newly identified constructs would enhance the generalisability of the findings by assessing them across larger, more diverse samples. Second, a comparative study across related industries, such as mining, shipping, and aviation, would provide insights into whether the attitude observed in logistics is unique to the sector or part of a broader pattern across the dominated environments. Third, a longitudinal study tracking changes in executive overtime would help determine whether shifts in organisational culture, DEI policies, or market pressure contribute to the evolving perception of women's

leadership. Fourth, intersectional analysis of race, age and class could bring to light how identical multiple identity markers shape both male attitudes and female experiences, an area underexplored in South African scholarship. Finally, studies focusing on women's experiences navigating executive pathways could offer a complementary perspective by highlighting the strategies, barriers, and forms of resistance that shape women's progression into senior leadership roles.

7.9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that women's underrepresentation in executive leadership within the South African logistics industry is not due to a lack of competence, ambition, or performance. Instead, it is deeply influenced by culturally defined gender roles and traits associated with senior leadership.

Social role theory explains that gendered expectations shape perceptions of leadership suitability. Communal and agentic traits are the descriptors, and they perpetuate implicit and explicit biases that disadvantage women in selection and promotion. Leadership culture rooted in risk aversion and comfort with male norms reinforces exclusion. Structural barriers and limited access to mentorship further restrict women's advancement into executive roles.

By applying Social Role Theory, the study shows that gendered expectations continue to shape male executives' evaluations of women's leadership capability. The newly identified constructs provide nuanced insights into how subtle, often invisible mechanisms sustain inequality in male-dominated sectors.

Ultimately, meaningful gender transformation requires shifting both attitudes and organisational systems. Women do not lack leadership potential; they lack equitable access to leadership opportunities. This dissertation contributes critical knowledge that can inform both academic debates and practical interventions to enable more inclusive and representative leadership in the South African logistics industry and beyond.

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ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION

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

**Ethical Clearance
Received**

Dear Boy Chakela,

This email serves to confirm that your Ethical Clearance Submission has been sent to your supervisor for approval.

Kind Regards,
Masters Research Team

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

ANNEXURE B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL

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

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Boy Chakela,

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

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

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

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

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

ANNEXURE C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE, MALE AND FEMALE EXECUTIVES (INCLUDING SPECIALISTS)

1. Background
Question 1. Can you briefly explain your role and experiences in the logistics industry?
2. Perceptions of women's capability
Question 2. In your experience, how do women compare to their male counterparts in leadership roles and styles?
3. Biases and attitudes
Question 3. What beliefs do you think exist among male executives that can influence the promotion or appointment of women in executive roles?
4. Organisational culture
Question 4. In what ways does the organisational culture at the executive level hinder women's progression into executive roles?
5. Justifying the status quo
Question 5. How do you personally explain how women are represented at the executive level in your organisation?
6. Encouraging women
Question 6. What advice would you give to aspiring women in your organisation?

ANNEXURE D: THE CODE BOOK

Name	Description	Sources	References
Gender Representation	Gender representation in the logistics industry	18	73
Male Executives' Narratives	Male executives' narratives around gender representation in the logistics industry	18	72
The Rationales Behind Current Leadership Structures	The rationales behind current leadership structures in the logistics industry	18	55
Gender-Based Biases	Gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent development processes	20	395
Explicit Gender-Based Biases	Explicit gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent development processes	20	401
Implicit Gender-Based Biases	Implicit gender-based biases in leadership selection, promotion, and talent development processes	20	423
Male Executives' Perceptions	Male executives' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	19	73
Acceptance of Male Superiority	A male executive's beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	15	62
Doubt of Discrimination	A male executive's beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	17	134
Limited Recognition of Women's Capabilities	A male executive's beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	18	76

Name	Description	Sources	References
Notion of Family Responsibilities as the Main Barrier	A male executive's beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	17	63
Perceptions of Competence and Leadership Approaches	A male executive's beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions regarding the leadership potential of women within logistics industries	16	64
The Impact of Male-Domination	The impact of male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices on the inclusion and progression of women leaders	19	58
Gender Bias	A negative impact of male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices	9	18
Lack of Mentorship	A negative impact of male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices	13	28
Limited Opportunities for Women	A negative impact of male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices	9	18
Pay Discrimination	A negative impact of male-dominated organisational norms and leadership practices	9	25

ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

I am researching **male executives' attitudes towards women's participation in executive leadership in the South African Logistics industry**. Our interview is expected to last approximately an hour and a half, and it will help us understand **how male executives in the South African logistics industry perceive and influence women's advancement into executive leadership roles**. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

By signing this letter, you are indicating that you have permitted:

- the interview to be recorded;
- the recording to be transcribed by a third-party transcriber, who will be subject to a standard non-disclosure agreement;
- verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in the report, provided they are not identified with your name or that of your organisation;
- the data to be used as part of a report that will be publicly available once the **examination process has been completed**;
- **and all data to be reported and stored without identifiers.**

If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me.

Our details are provided below.

Researcher:		Researcher Supervisor	
Email		Email	
Telephone		Telephone	

Signature of researcher _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of participant _____ **Date:** _____

ANNEXURE F: LITERATURE BREAKDOWN

Category	Count	Types of Sources Included
Peer-reviewed journal articles	85	Scholarly journals
Peer-reviewed academic books	5	Academic publishers (Routledge, SAGE, Basic Books)
Peer-reviewed academic chapters	3	Handbook chapters
Peer-reviewed conference papers	3	Academic proceedings
TOTAL Peer-Reviewed Sources	96	—
Government, Policy, Legal	5	Executive orders, court rulings, government reports
Corporate / Industry Reports	11	McKinsey, DSV, DHL, DP World, CTA
Media / News / Websites	12	Reuters, CNN, Morningstar, FA News
Think Tanks / Research Institutes	5	Brennan Center, Just Share, IoDSA
TOTAL Non-Academic Sources	33	—
TOTAL SOURCES (ALL CATEGORIES)	129	<i>(92 peer-reviewed + 33 non-academic)</i>
Year Range	Count	Primary Use in Dissertation
2025–2021	93	Main evidence for MRQ, Discussion, Findings, SA logistics and global DEI context
2020–2016	17	Pandemic and post-pandemic gender leadership literature
Before 2016	19	Foundational theories: SRT, RCT, CMT, Identity Theory, classic methodology sources
TOTAL SOURCES	129	—