

Curtin Business School

**Exploring the Transition to Senior Leadership for Women: A
Comparative Study of Female Senior Leaders from South Africa
and Mauritius**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
of
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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number (Approval number: HRE2017-0075).

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ADBR	African Development Bank Report
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
CEE	Commission for Employment Equity
CEER	Commission for Employment Equity Report
FGCC	Federal Glass Ceiling Commission
GGCI	Global Gender Gap Index
GGGR	Global Gender Gap Report
ICSA	Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators
IGOs	Intergovernmental Organizations
ILO	International Labor Organization
JSE	Johannesburg Stock Exchange
MWRCDFW	Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare
OSW	Office of the Status of Women
WEF	World Economic Forum

Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of South African and Mauritian women who have successfully transitioned from middle management into senior leadership roles.

Using a qualitative methodology, this research study adopted a constructive ontology and an interpretive epistemology, guided by the phenomenological perspective. The present study reveals that the career progression of South African and Mauritian women shares several similarities and differences and their career journey from graduating high school to being appointed to a senior executive position is a complex and arduous one. The study uncovers how these women conceptualize and enact leadership, and how they constructed successful careers in leadership in a corporate context. The data derived from 28 semi-structured interviews provide a rich description of their individual experiences of leadership and their career success in the corporate context. *The Pathways into Leadership model* was developed and illustrated that career transitions were a continuous process within three interrelated contexts: the broad societal context, the organizational context, and the individual context. Each phase of the model represents the critical enablers for career success in leadership. The distinctive feature of this framework is how contextual factors influenced women's career decisions, leadership enactment, and career success, which adds a novel contribution to the field of women's career development and leadership and can serve as a guide to encourage young women from developing countries to pursue careers in leadership and navigate through the challenges women face in reconciling their identity as a woman and as a leader within their respective cultural context. The findings also provide insights into how cultural context influences career decisions and leadership behaviour and how women overcome these cultural and social constraints to reach senior management positions in corporate male-dominated spaces. This knowledge will contribute to human resources professionals and senior executive teams and can provide an alternative strategy to transform organizational cultures and develop policies and strategies to create an inclusive work environment and overcome the concurrent constraints women face in pursuing a professional career and maintaining work-life balance in a developing county context. The findings show that historical and sociocultural factors influence women's career decisions, thus contributing to the literature on intersectionality theory. The study provides a gendered explanation of Mauritian women's career advancement into senior leadership positions, to date, no studies on women's careers in senior leadership in the corporate context in Mauritius are available.

1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce myself and my purpose for conducting this study. I am a senior lecturer at the Curtin Mauritius Campus and was a management development trainer at the Charles Telfair Leadership Centre. In my role as lecturer, working with undergraduate and postgraduate students, I observed that the classes were composed of more girls than boys. But, as a trainer who was involved in professional development for middle managers in various private sector companies in Mauritius, I observed that the trainees earmarked for promotion were mainly men. I held two roles – a qualified full-time employee and mother of two. This position often led to arguments with my late mother. After the birth of my first child, she often pressured me to resign from full-time work and start a business because she believed that that would give me more time to dedicate to raising my child.

These arguments triggered a chain of questions around why I could not have both a professional career and motherhood. At times the difficulties surrounding the demands of my family (children and my mother and mother-in-law) and my employer challenged me and the urge to resign and start my own business was very tempting. It was at these moments that my interest in why so few women held senior management positions in Mauritius began. As a South African living in Mauritius, I started to reflect on the differences between the South African context and the Mauritian context and the role of women in the professional arena and in the home. At the time, I was reporting to a male head of faculty and the managing director of the campus was male. I started to look out for female managers and senior managers and discovered that they were exceptions in both countries and my curiosity about successful women in corporate business and how they progressed into these positions developed. It was from these reflections that I began to be interested in understanding how other women succeed in their professional careers.

Exploration of the current understanding of professional women's careers and their advancement into senior leadership positions revealed that there was a dearth of research in this area, especially in the developing country context. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of women who succeeded in breaking through the glass ceiling to attain senior leadership positions. Africa is an important context for this topic as there is a paucity of research on African women managers and leaders, and understanding

professional women's careers and their advancement into leadership roles would extend our understanding of women's careers in leadership in developing countries.

Through this research, I aimed to learn from the participants about their career paths and career experiences and how these experiences culminated into a career in corporate leadership. The research question that motivated this study was: "How do women in middle management from South Africa and Mauritius transition into senior leadership roles?"

This question aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- RO1: Understand how management and leadership are conceptualized by women in Mauritius and South Africa.
- RO2: Identify and examine the factors that influence the transition from middle manager to senior manager/leader for women in Mauritius and South Africa.
- RO3: Explore women's experiences of advancing from manager to senior manager/leader in Mauritius and South Africa to determine how to improve the career prospects and socio-economic potential of women pursuing management careers.
- RO4: Investigate what systemic organizational policies and practices are needed to improve the percentage of women in senior leadership roles in Mauritius and South Africa.
- RO5: Develop a conceptual framework based on the experiences of women who have successfully transitioned from middle management into senior management in Mauritius and South Africa.

To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative approach, guided by phenomenological perspectives and an interpretative epistemology, was adopted. Phenomenology gathers the lived experience of the phenomenon of a women's career in leadership and movement into leadership positions from the participants' perspectives. The phenomenological methodology "let things speak for themselves" and the interpretative methodology "claims there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena" (van Manen 1990, p.180). This study focused on the nature of women's careers in the corporate context and sought to understand retrospectively the essence of women's career pathways into senior leadership. This interpretive study examined how women's careers evolve and how they deal with transitions and challenges throughout their careers.

The research findings indicate that women transition several times in their career before they advance into senior management roles. Career transitions were experienced in four phases:

building the foundations, the steppingstones, reaching the destination and accelerating the progress. At each phase, women identified different enablers that helped them to overcome the challenges they experienced and to achieve success. The study also reveals that women require unique psychosocial support, and at the accelerating and sustaining career advancement phase, the study finds that collaboration between government and organizational leaders as well as human resource professionals are necessary to identify, develop and implement targeted plans and activities to support women in the workplace. The main enablers for successful career transitions are personal qualities, accepting challenging job assignments, self-awareness and internal reflection, continuous professional development, and access to organizational and personal support. Areas of similarity and points of differences in the career trajectory and leadership conception for women from South Africa and Mauritius were revealed. The historical and cultural context impacts women's career decisions, the career opportunities available to them, and their concept of leadership. Management and leadership in the corporate context are portrayed as being highly relational and communal in South Africa and highly transactional and team-oriented in Mauritius.

The structure of this thesis reflects the evolution of my research interest into a defined research statement situated in extant literature.

Chapter 2 provides the research context by describing the working life relevant to women from South Africa and Mauritius. Women from both countries work within a broader political and socio-cultural context. This chapter begins with an outline of the global female labor force participation and is followed by a review of the population demographic, the legislative framework and the female labor force participation rates in South Africa. Thereafter, the chapter discusses the historical, political and cultural contexts and the influence of contextual factors on women's entry into traditional male occupations and their access to and participation in leadership positions.

Next, a review of the political, historical, legislative, and cultural factors affecting women's access to and participation in the labor force in Mauritius is presented, followed by a review of the educational reforms. The chapter concludes with a summary of the contextual similarities between South Africa and Mauritius.

Chapter 3 contains a review of the literature relevant to career development, leadership, and women's career experiences and career development in leadership. This chapter provides an overview of the rationale for the research and defines the research problem. The career

advancement of women and their career progress from early career to senior leadership positions are connected to several extant research relating to career development and leadership. Since this study is situated in two developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, literature on feminism and intersectionality is included. The chapter is organized into four areas: the traditional and contemporary career development theories, theory on African leadership and the history of leadership and traditional leadership theory, women in leadership, and the feminist movement and intersectionality.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology applied to address the research questions. The development of the framework of enquiry is described and the links between the research questions and the inquiry framework are established. A detailed overview of the participant recruitment process, the data collection methods and the data analysis process are presented.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the research findings. Chapter 5 presents the demographic profile of the participants from South Africa and explores the career pathways of these participants. This provides an understanding of how the women progressed from their early career to their appointment to senior leadership positions and the decisions and support and experience required to successfully transition to a senior leadership role. This is followed by an understanding of the study participants' conception and enactment of leadership.

Chapter 6 presents the demographic profile of the participants from Mauritius and explores the career pathways of these participants. This provides an understanding of how the women progressed from their early career to their appointment to senior leadership positions and the decisions, support and experience required to successfully transition to a senior leadership role. This is followed by an understanding of the study participants' conception and enactment of leadership.

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of these findings and their points of intersection and how they contrast with existing literature. The *Pathways into Leadership* model, developed from a synthesis of the findings presented in Chapters 5 and 6, provides a framework for the discussion. This model provides an illustrative overview that captures the career trajectory and transition experience of both South African and Mauritian women.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. It contains a discussion of the points of similarity and differences between South African and Mauritian women's career pathways into leadership and their conceptualization and enactment of leadership. The contributions and limitations of

the study are summarized, and then the chapter concludes with an outline of areas for future research.

2 Establishing the Research Context

‘You can no longer see or identify yourself solely as a member of a tribe, but as a citizen of a nation of one people working toward a common purpose.’

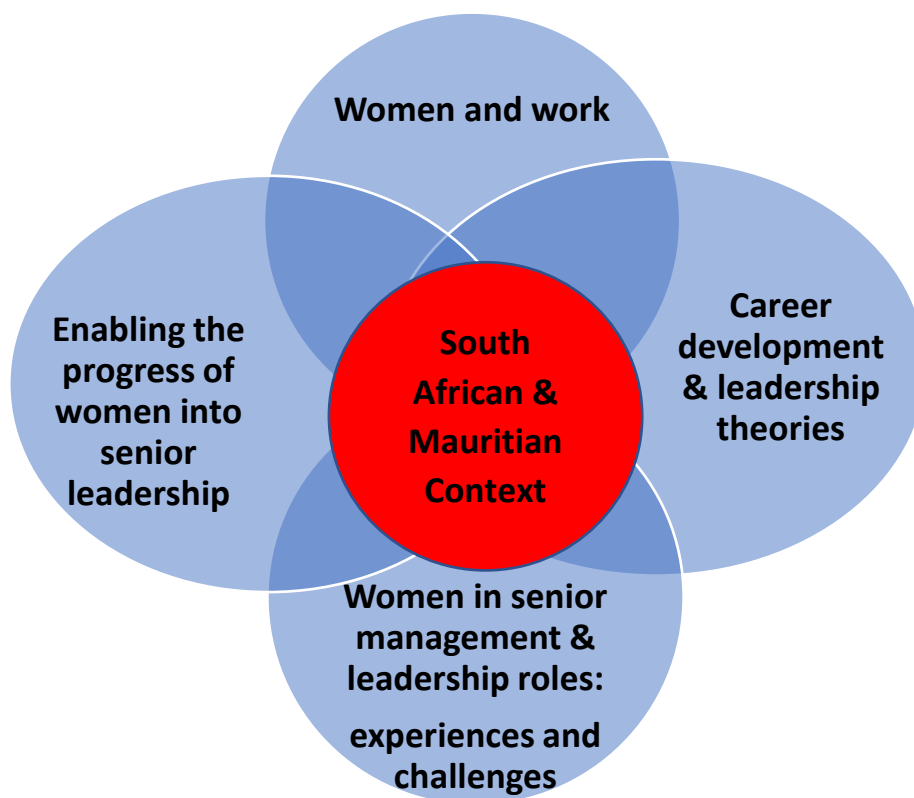
Idowu Koyenikan, Author (Wealth for all Africans: How Every African Can Live the Life of Their Dreams)

2.1 Introduction

The focus of this research is on the conceptualization of leadership and how women progress from middle management roles into senior management leadership roles in South Africa and Mauritius. This chapter focuses on the aspects of female labor participation relevant to leadership and management careers in South Africa and Mauritius. The key areas covered in this chapter are illustrated in the red circle in the conceptual model in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

The Conceptual model of Women Management’s Progress into Senior Leadership Roles



The emergence of women in senior management and leadership positions within South Africa and Mauritius has evolved over the past two decades with the steady increase in female labor force participation. This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one begins with a review of the global rise in female workforce participation and looks at changes in the participation rates of women in middle and top management positions and increases in the participation rate of women in traditionally male dominated occupations. Section two provides an overview of the South African context and the key legislative changes promoting gender equality in all aspects of life in South Africa, and Section three describes the Mauritian context and legislative reforms introduced to foster gender equality in the workplace. The chapter then shifts focus to the persistent gendered employment patterns and issues that affect South African and Mauritian women in the workforce.

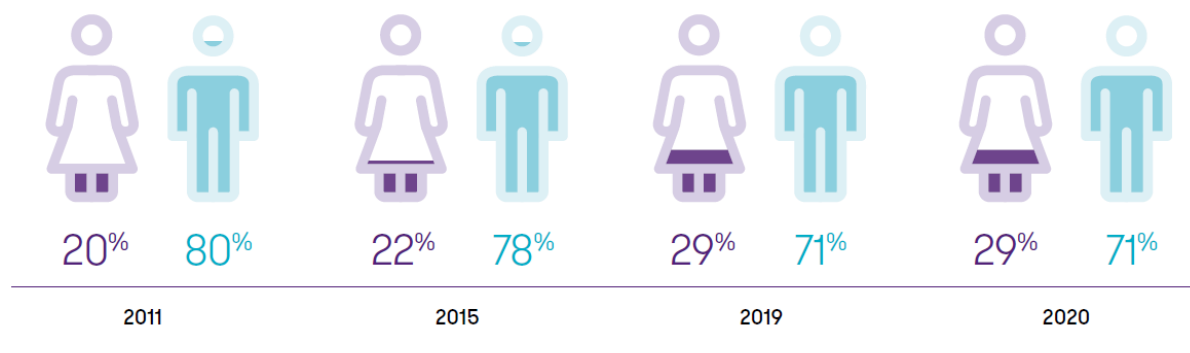
Where cited, statistics relate to the period from 2010 to 2022 and have been sourced from global reports (Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), Afro Barometer reports, the South African Statistics Office, Statistics Mauritius, and the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (MWRCDFW) and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. Seminal research and literature published over the last 10 years from Australia, South Africa and other African countries, Mauritius (where available), America and the United Kingdom were reviewed.

2.2 The Global context

The underrepresentation of women in senior management and leadership roles globally and within the African region is well acknowledged (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Besic et al., 2022; Catalyst, 2018). Globally, reporting on the gender balance in senior management and leadership positions has created awareness about the lack of gender diversity in senior management roles. According to the Grant Thornton Women in Business Report (Lagerberg & Schmidt, 2020, p 3), globally the proportion of women in senior management positions has increased by 9% from 2011 (20%) to 2020 (29%) (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Proportion of women and men in senior management globally



Note. From Lagerberg, F., & Schmidt, K. (2020). *Women in Business 2020: Putting the Blueprint into action*. Grant Thornton. <https://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/women-in-business-2020/women-in-business-2020-report/>

Africa, Eastern Europe, ASEAN, Latin America and Southern Europe are regions that have increased representation of women in senior roles, recording levels of approximately 30%. Nordic countries are described as leaders in terms of diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity (Nordic Statistics, 2016), and this is supported by the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) reporting that Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden are ranked in the top five countries in the 2022 report (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2022). Government reforms contributed to the gender equality agenda. For instance, in 2003 Norway introduced gender quotas on company boards for publicly traded companies. Although Sweden has no legislation on gender quotas, in 2015 the Swedish Corporate Governance Code came into effect. This code established a voluntary target of achieving gender balance on boards of stock exchange listed companies by 2020. Whilst the targets were not legally binding, they did intentionally supplement other gender-sensitive legislation such as discrimination of men in favor of meeting gender quotas and ensuring that positions were filled based on meritocracy rather than quotas.

However, companies in these same countries are required to submit annual reports inclusive of a rationale for their final target proposal for board composition (Schmidt, 2022, p. 77). In all Scandinavian countries governments have adopted a proactive and holistic approach aimed at reducing gender inequality at work in educational institutions and it remains a priority

in the political agenda (Schmidt, 2022). Coupled with gender quotas and/or targets, Scandinavian countries have well-established social welfare systems and social democratic political systems that encourage labor force participation for women. These countries provide extensive paid maternity leave and day care facilities, recognize the rights of fathers, and have introduced family benefits and other entitlements, such as paid paternity leave (Eydal, et al., 2015).

In terms of the African region, Uganda was one of the first countries to introduce gender quotas for political participation in 1989; interestingly, this was well ahead of Scandinavian countries. South Africa did the same in 1994 and Rwanda in 2003 (Porfido & Horgan, 2020). Gender quotas have been shown to increase women's participation in ministerial and parliamentary roles. Additionally, Africa has reported the highest proportion of women in senior management, with 38% of these roles being held by women (Lagerberg & Schmidt, 2020). Rwanda and South Africa have made significant progress at the middle management level, increasing the proportion of women in middle management by 27% and 17% respectively (African Development Bank Report, [ADBR] 2020). In the business sector, Kenya reported the highest percentage of women at board level at 19.8% and South Africa at 17.4% (Fraser-Moleketi & Mizrahi, 2015). The most significant progress towards gender parity was in public and civil service in Africa but in the corporate sector, women remain underrepresented. Further, the ADBR (ADBR, 2020) found that African businesses are still predominantly led by men. While Africa has made significant progress in introducing legislative reforms on gender equality, sexual harassment and domestic violence, gender parity in management and senior management positions has not yet been achieved.

According to the Grant Thornton Women in Business report (Lagerberg & Schmidt, 2020, p 9), the most common business initiatives implemented globally to facilitate the progress of women from middle management into senior management positions include:

- providing equal access to developmental work opportunities (34%)
- creating an inclusive culture (34%)
- providing flexible work arrangements (31%)
- reviewing recruitment approaches (26%)
- providing mentoring and coaching (26%)
- linking senior management reward to progress on gender (23%)
- setting targets/quotas for gender balance at leadership levels (22%)

- providing unconscious bias training (21%).

2.3 South African Context

This section outlines women's participation in the South African labor force in recent decades, including employment in male dominated occupations and industries, and in management and leadership roles.

“Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. Women should be empowered to participate in all aspects of life as equals alongside all other members of society.”

Nelson Mandela State of the Nation address by the President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela (24 May 1994)

South Africa is an ethnically diverse country with a population of 60.6 million people, of which 80% are Black Africans, 7.9% are White, 8.7% are Colored and 2.6% are people of Indian/Asian origin (Statistics South Africa, 2021). In South Africa, there are four race classifications, namely African, Colored, Indian/Asian, and White. People¹ classified as African, Coloreds, and Indian/Asian fall under the Black classification (Clark & Worger, 2011; Khalfani & Tukufu, 2001). Colonialism and apartheid created political and socio-economic structural inequalities. Racial segregation extended from access to education, housing, and healthcare facilities to employment and further education and training opportunities. The Bantu Education Act, later reformed into the Black Education Act of 1953, prevented Black Africans from accessing education, resulting in Black Africans being restricted to jobs in low-skilled, low-paying occupations (Lapping, 1987). A large proportion of Black Africans (men and women) remain functionally illiterate and are not represented in top tier management positions (Statistics South Africa, Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2018). Post-apartheid, several public and social policies and legislative reforms were developed to redress the oppressive policies. Despite this population distribution, the majority of management, senior management and

¹ Asian (South African): of or belonging to a population grouping made up of persons generally of Indian descent, especially as distinguished during apartheid from Blacks, Coloreds, and Whites. 2. Colored (South African): of or belonging to a population grouping made up of persons of mixed racial descent or of certain other non-White descent, especially as distinguished during apartheid from Blacks, Asians, and Whites (Littrell and Nkomo, 2005)

executive management positions are still held by White males (Commission for Employment Equity Report [CEER], 2021).

The 1996 Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic South Africa “outlined the fundamental principle that the new democratic society had to respect and promote the rights of all its citizens indiscriminately, regardless of race, gender, class, age, or disability (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996). With the abolishment of apartheid, the new African National Congress (ANC) government implemented a raft of policies to empower Blacks and women in South Africa, including the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and The Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Act of 2003. The government also set up several government institutions aimed at increasing Black participation in the South African economy and promoting diversity and equality in South Africa, including the National Policy Framework to empower women and increase gender equality (adopted by Cabinet in 2000) and the Office on the Status of Women (OSW).

South Africa is also a signatory to several international and regional conventions and agreements to eliminate gender inequality, including:

- the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979
- the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995
- the United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000
- the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Development Protocol in 2008.
- The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (WEGE) 2013.

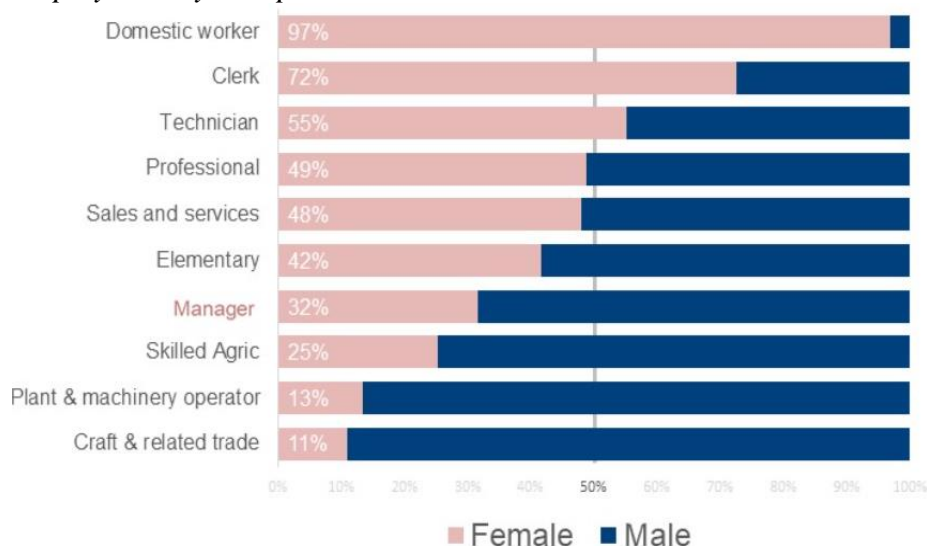
On the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), South Africa was ranked 18th in 2021. On the four indices used for this ranking, South Africa performed highest on political participation (ranked 14th globally) and health and safety (ranked 37th globally). However, progress towards equality on educational attainment (ranked 69th globally) and economic participation (ranked 92nd globally), are critical areas for improvement. One possible explanation for the increased representation of women in parliamentary positions is that South Africa has constitutionally reserved board-level positions for women in state-owned enterprises and for women in politics. This law does not include listed companies and the proportion of women in senior and top management positions is low. Corporate governance codes such as the South African King IV

Report (2016) stipulated that diversity, including gender diversity, should be considered for board appointments.

The South African labor market continues to favor men over women, with more women unemployed than men and more men in paid employment than women. South African women are more likely than men to perform unpaid work. In 2021, the female labor force participation rate was 46.21%, just below the average global rate of 50.14% in 2021 (the Global Economy, 2021). Women are predominantly employed in low-paid and low-skilled work, including in roles such as domestic workers, clerks and technicians, and men dominated in all other occupational roles, as indicated in Figure 2.3 below.

Figure 2.3

Employment by occupation and sex



Note. From Statistics South Africa (2018). Quarterly Labour Force Survey. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=11375>

This disparity exists despite the commitment to creating a democratic, free, and equitable South Africa at the end of the apartheid regime. The legacy of apartheid combined with the South African social-cultural context further contributes to the status of women as inferior beings to men. This patriarchal mindset is deeply embedded in cultural practices and traditional beliefs and customs across African countries, including South Africa (Wadesango et al., 2011). Traditional and cultural practices such as child marriage, marriage by abduction,

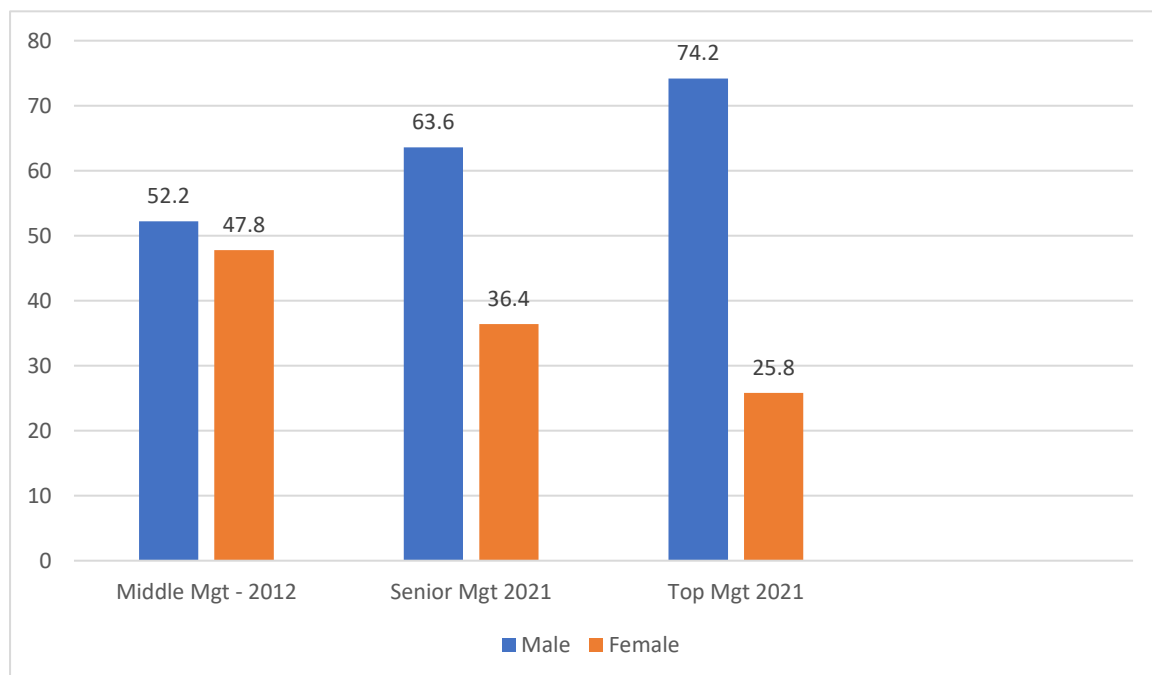
virginal testing, transactional sex and early pregnancy reinforce the inferior status of women in society and these practices have significant negative impacts on creating a gender equal society (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Wadesango et al., 2011). These social and cultural customs contribute to the high drop-out rate of girls from schools in many developing countries and can explain the high concentration of women in domestic and clerical work.

Within the South African context, women come from different tribal backgrounds and their traditional lifestyles are diverse (English, 2007) and these differences impact the extent to which some barriers affect women more than others. Mathur-Helm's (2005) study also found that societal norms in South Africa stereotype women as being less ambitious than men, not aggressive enough, and less competent in and capable of learning mathematics and mechanical skills than men. These structural societal barriers impact women's confidence and belief in their ability to succeed in male dominated spaces (English & Jeune, 2011) and further restrict the progress of professional women in business leadership (Mathur-Helm, 2006).

Female participation in business leadership roles also remains low. The Commission for Gender Equality was established in Section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and the 2021 Report found that only 36.4% of senior management positions were held by women. From 2019 to 2021 they reported a less than 1% increase in the percentage of women in senior management. The gender composition at top level management demonstrates a lower percentage of women in these positions. In 2021, the CEE reported that 25.8% of top management positions were held by women, 36.4% of senior management positions were held by women and at the professionally qualified/middle management level, 47.8% of positions were occupied by women (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4

Proportion of South African women in middle, senior and top management positions



Note. Adapted from the 22nd Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report. (2022). Department of Labour, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa. <https://www.abp.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CEE-22nd-Annual-Report-2021-2022.pdf>

2.4 Mauritian context

This section outlines women's participation in the Mauritian labor force in recent decades, including employment in male dominated occupations and industries, and in management and leadership roles.

Mauritius is a diverse society with a population of 1.3 million people, made up of several ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Mauritius does not have a recognized indigenous population. Mauritius has been occupied by the Dutch, French and British and gained independence from British rule in 1968. Slaves were brought to Mauritius from different

parts of Africa by the French between 1670 and 1769. Slavery was officially abolished under the British regime in 1835 and indentured laborers, mainly from India and Asia, arrived in Mauritius until 1910 (Allen, 1999; Eisenlohr, 2006).

Today in Mauritius, two-thirds of the population are Indo-Mauritians, and more than a quarter have ancestors from Madagascar and other parts of Africa (Afro-Mauritians). Approximately 3% of the population are Chinese (Sino-Mauritians), and 2% are French (Franco-Mauritian) with a small proportion of Mauritians of mixed origins. Unlike South Africa and other African countries in the region, Mauritius lacks natural resources. Since independence, Mauritius has transitioned from a low-income economy into a middle-income economy. The country's primary resources are its human capital and education is highly valued as a driver for economic growth and development. Geographically, Mauritius is part of the African continent, and forms part of the Sub-Saharan African region. However, Mauritius has maintained strong links with India, given the high number of Indo-Mauritians descended from India and Pakistan (Allen, 1999).

Mauritius has been characterized as a patriarchal society that promotes male privilege and power. Male dominance in almost all spheres of society is still deeply engrained in the consciousness of men and women in Mauritian society (Ramtohul, 2009, p. 5). Girls were denied education until the 1940s and access to education was limited to the upper class, mainly the Franco-Mauritian community. Within the Indo-Mauritian community, child marriages were common, and parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school. Women were granted the right to vote only in 1948 with the condition that voting women must be literate, further disadvantaging Indo and Creole Mauritians, since most women from these communities were illiterate. However, many Mauritian women came together, within their ethnicities, and established civil society organisations such as the Mauritius Muslim Ladies Organisation, the Arya Samaj Movement and the *Ecoles Ménagères*. These women's organizations contributed to uplifting women in various ways. For instance, the Arya Samaj movement encouraged formal education for girls, rallied against child marriage and denounced the dowry system (the price the bride's family pays to the groom's family upon marriage). Additionally, class-based women's groups, composed of educated housewives from the upper class, promoted home-based textile handicraft businesses. These groups provided free training that was accessible to remote women across the Island. The training programs created new employment opportunities for women and contributed to their financial independence (Ramtohul, 2020). Non-ethnic, non-religious women's groups also emerged during the 1970s and campaigned for women's rights

and empowerment and against laws that discriminated against women. The autonomous groups lobbied for adult literacy and more employment opportunities for women. The global feminist movement and the UN Declaration of 1975 as International Women's Year increased feminists' consciousness in Mauritius (Ramtohul, 2020, p. 9).

Prior to independence, education for girls started later than for boys and was restricted to the privileged. Mianda (2002) found that education for girls during colonization was limited to domestic skills and preparing them for motherhood and household chores. In 1976, when free primary and secondary school education was introduced, enrolments for girls increased. The elected government set up The Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare (MWRCDFW) in 1982 with the aim to "promote the cause of women, eradicate gender discrimination and ensure that women were given equal opportunities in society" (Ramtohul, 2009, p. 130). The MWRCDFW role was to promote and defend women's rights, to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure that legal measures are taken to promote equality between men and women (Ramtohul, 2009, p. 130). In 1988, the government abolished university fees, giving many young girls access to tertiary education for the first time. Access to free education was the foundation for girls to pursue professional studies and careers (Ramtohul, 2009). The Mauritius Constitution upholds a philosophy of equality for citizens irrespective of sex, ethnic background, religion, and creed. Men and women are entitled to equal rights, freedom, and opportunity for social, economic, and political participation (Pattern, 2001).

With respect to gender equality, Mauritius conducted a comprehensive review of its laws, resulting in new and amended legislations to address gender inequality. In 1995 the government amended subsection 3 of Section 16 of the Constitution of Mauritius. This amendment, passed as the Equal Opportunities Act in 2009, offers protection from discrimination for all citizens based on race, caste, place of origin, political opinions, color, creed or sex. Mauritius is also a signatory to several international and regional conventions and agreements to eliminate gender inequality including:

- the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in July 1984
- the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995
- the United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000

- the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Development Protocol in 2008.
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in 2013.
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 2009-2015

Mauritius has recently moved into the high-income league with a GNI per capita of US\$ 12,740 in 2019, a 3.5 percent increase. (World Bank, 2020). Over the last decade Mauritius has passed several relevant legislations including: The Mauritian Equal Opportunities Act 2008, The National Women's Council Act 2016 (Act No. 5 of 2016) which aims at promoting women's empowerment and gender equality and The Local Government Act in 2012.

Despite these legislative reforms and the commitment to creating a gender equal society, women's labor force participation rate remains lower than men's. Men's labor force participation rate remained relatively stable from 2008 to 2018 at around 89.0% while female labor force participation rates rose from 50.2% in 2008 to 57.5% in 2018. Labor force participation rates among younger women over this period increased significantly from 59.4% to 73.7%. According to Gaddis & Ranzani (2020) education is seen as a key contributor to increased labor force participation rates and attachment to labor participation (p 9). Female participation rates in all levels of education have increased in Mauritius (discussed later in this section).

Women still face unequal access to jobs and political participation (Gokulsing & Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014). Mauritius had the second lowest rate of political representation in the Southern African Development Community (SADAC) region – 5.7% in 2004. To remedy the low representation of women in political activities, The Local Government Act was passed in 2012, resulting in a gradual increase in the proportion of women in local and national government. According to Virahsawmy (2015), 12% of National Assembly seats were held by women. At the 2020 Village Council Elections 272 female candidates were elected out of 1170 candidates, representing 23%, indicating an increase of 11%.

At the National Assembly election in 2019, 148 women were nominated out of 810 candidates and out of 70 members of parliament, only 14 are women (Mauritius National Assembly, 2023).

On the other hand, female participation in top tier positions, in both corporate and business contexts, remains low. Ramguttty-Wong's (2000) quantitative study reported that 4.71% of participants held senior management positions in private sector companies. According to the Hay Group report published in 2015, out of the 612 companies surveyed, only 4.58% of director positions were held by women, 5.6% of board members were women, and no non-executive board chairpersons were women (Hay Group, 2015), showing that little change occurred between 2000 and 2015.

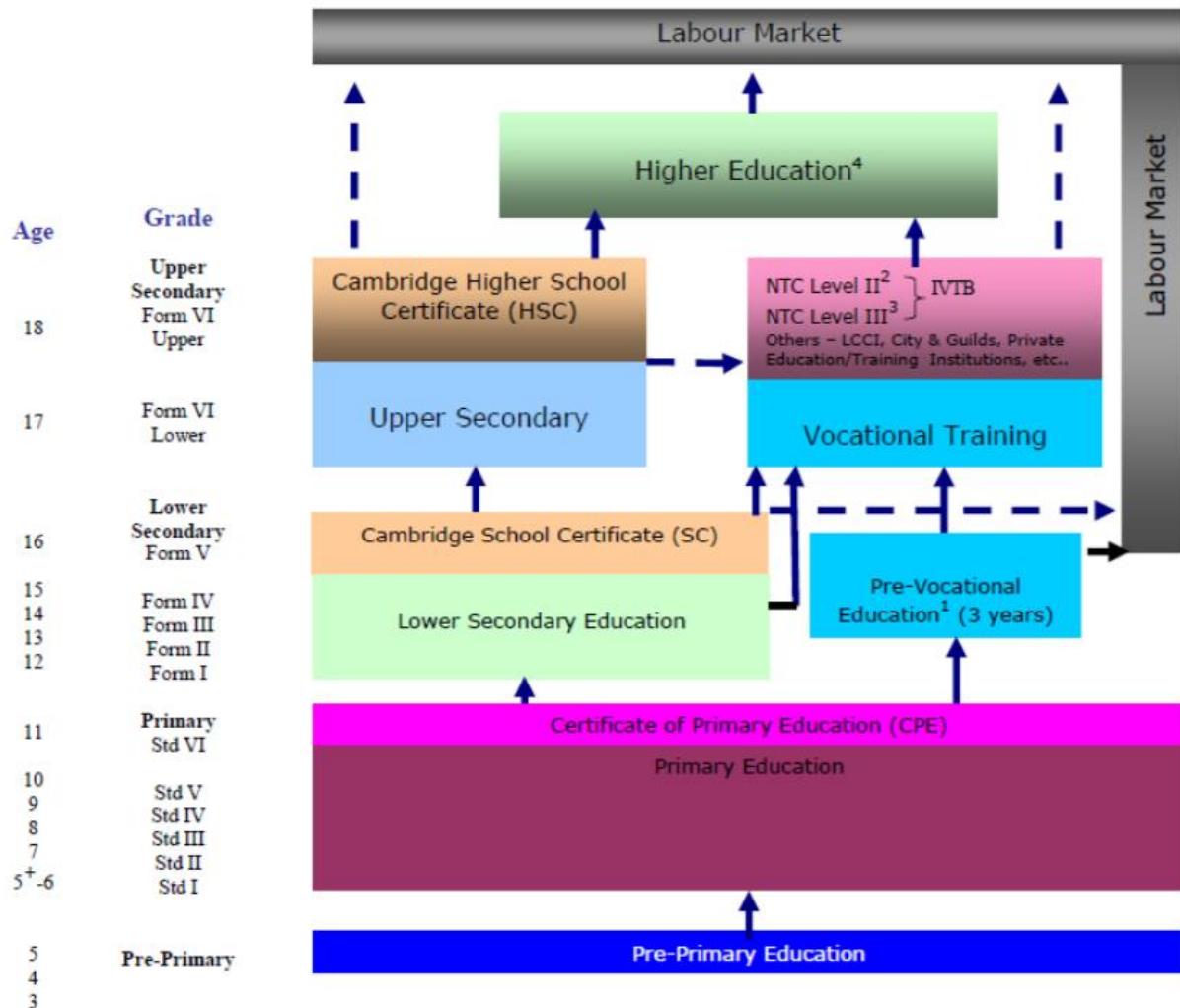
From the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, Mauritius ranks 105 out of 153 countries compared to a ranking of 88 out of 115 in 2006 (World Economic Forum, 2020). The country fares poorly in terms of economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment. In May 2022, the Minister of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, Mrs Kalpana Devi Koonjoo-Shah, presented the Mauritius Gender Country Profile for 2021-2027. The aim of the Report is to coordinate gender equality and women's empowerment policies, programs and plans to develop a holistic strategy to advance the gender equality in Mauritius (Mauritius presents the Gender Country Profile for 2021-2027, May 2022).

2.4.1 The education system in Mauritius

There have been several reforms in the educational system in Mauritius over the past decade. For this research, the previous Certificate in Primary Education (CPE) system will be discussed as all participants in the study passed through the CPE system. The Mauritian education system is divided into four phases: (1) early childhood development and education (0–5years), primary school (5–11years), secondary school (11–20 years) and higher education/tertiary (+20 years). This system is illustrated in Figure 2.5 below:

Figure 2.5

Pathway of education and training system in Mauritius



Note. From Ministry of Education. (2008). Strategy Plan 2008-2020. Phoenix: IVTB

The primary and secondary school system is described as a “rat race” (Jinot, 2017) and places significant pressure on children and parents to compete for seats in secondary schools. The Ministry of Education created an elite school system and branded certain State Secondary Schools (SSS) as “star” schools. This branding was determined by the SSSs’ student performance in the Cambridge School Certificate and High School Certificate pass rates. Only children who scored five A+ in the CPE exam were enrolled in these star schools (Education [Amendment] Act 2006). A further constraint was that there were only 1,000 seats available in these schools. A competitive learning context emerged where students and parents worked towards achieving outstanding results and admission into star schools. This competitive culture

extends into the final school year, the High School Certificate examination. The State awards the highest performers with fully paid scholarships for tertiary education at high-ranking universities in England and Australia. Furthermore, the State provided additional partial scholarships for socially disadvantaged high performers to pursue tertiary education studies at local universities (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2008). Thus, this competitive culture to emerge the best is cultivated from an early age and extends into early adulthood.

Access to education and female participation in education

In 2006 Mauritius ranked 88th on the GGGI, rising to 110th in 2021 (GGGR, 2021). Mauritius has performed well in terms of educational attainment (ranked 78th) and has closed the gap in health and survival (ranked first), but the gap in economic participation and opportunity (ranked 118th) and political empowerment (ranked 105th) remains.

Since the country's independence in 1968, the Mauritian government has shown a strong commitment to skill development by providing free primary and secondary school education to both boys and girls. In 2005, the government introduced free transport for all primary, secondary, and tertiary level students and in 2019 the Prime Minister introduced free tertiary education at all publicly funded tertiary education institutions (Ministry of Tertiary Education and Human Resources, 2019). Additionally, girls outperform boys in primary school achievement, with girls passing at 84.5% and boys passing at 73.2% (Statistics Mauritius, 2018), and girls are found to be less likely to drop out of secondary school. In 2018, the percentage of secondary school dropouts was 4.7% for girls and 8.0% for boys (Statistics Mauritius 2018). At the tertiary education level, there were more female students (58.5%) enrolled in local public funded institutions than males (41.5%) (Higher Education Commission Report, 2020), suggesting that women see higher education as a requirement for economic freedom and employment opportunities (see Table 2.2 below).

Table 2.1*Educational Performance Levels***Pass Rate (%) at High School Certificate (HSC)**

Year	Male	Female
2010	73.7	81.7
2011	75.3	82.3
2012	74.8	82.2
2013	73.9	80.8
2014	70.0	79.1
2015	72.0	77.8
2016	70.9	78.7
2017	69.5	77.9
2018	70.6	78.0
2019	70.8	77.8

Number of students enrolled in tertiary institutions 2019

Level	Male	Female	Total
PhD	135	128	263
MPhil	101	107	208
DBA ²	23	9	32
Masters Degree	1,625	1,834	3,459
Post Graduate Diploma	113	124	237
Post Graduate Certificate	133	404	537
Professional	1,898	2,809	4,707
Bachelor Degree	8,769	12,676	21,445
Diploma	2,023	2,920	4,943
Certificate	151	126	277
Total	14,971	21,137	36,108

Note: “Gender Statics, 2020”.

https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Documents/Statistics/ESI/2021/EI1599/Gender_Stats_Yr20_190721.pdf

Female labor force participation in Mauritius

Despite being more qualified, women face more difficulty in securing full-time employment. In 2019 the labor force, employed and unemployed, was composed of 60% men and 40% women and the number of employed people comprised 62% male and 38% female. More women were unemployed compared to men in all age groups. Unemployed women were found to be more qualified than unemployed men, with 60% of women having completed the Cambridge School Certificate exam compared to 43% of men. From 2009 to 2019, the male employment activity rate was consistently higher than the female activity rate (Statistics Mauritius 2019). Women are also underrepresented in science-related occupations and overrepresented in occupations in education and languages (Statistics Mauritius, 2020).

Additionally, there are disparities in female employment and wages in the private sector compared to the public sector. Women working in the public sector are more likely to hold high-skilled jobs: “one in three women employed in the public sector is either a manager (2.5%) or a professional (30%)” (Gaddis & Ranzani, 2020, p. 15). On the other hand, women employed in the private sector are primarily employed in low- and mid-skilled jobs. Even

though more women than men attend university, men have an advantage in obtaining high-skilled jobs in the private sector. More women than men with basic primary education (certificate of primary education) are employed in low-skilled jobs in the private sector. Women's inability to access high-skilled jobs in the private sector, combined with the flexible working hours and high levels of job stability offered in the public sector, explain why Mauritian women prefer government jobs (Gaddis & Ranzani, 2020).

On average, women working in the public sector are paid more than men. This pay difference can be explained because women on average have higher educational qualifications and are concentrated in high skilled positions in the public sector. Whereas in the private sector, women earn approximately 20% less than men per hour worked (Gaddis & Ranzani, 2020). Tandrayen-Ragoobur and Pydayya (2015) attributed the gender wage disparity to (1) the high concentration of women in low level jobs such as sales, service roles and clerical positions, where wages are lower, (2) job losses in the manufacturing and sugar sectors which forced low educated and unskilled women to move into the informal sector or small business activities, and (3) the absence of minimum wage legislation. However, the National Minimum Wage Legislation was introduced in 2018 with the aim of increasing earnings for low-wage workers irrespective of gender.

2.5 Conclusion

South Africa and Mauritius are two Sub-Saharan African countries that are both ranked as upper-middle income countries. Both countries are culturally diverse and have more young women enrolled in tertiary level education and are amongst the top performers in empowering women through education in the SADC region (Southern African Gender Protocol, 2015). Despite the attempts both countries have made to reduce gender inequality, women in both countries remain significantly underrepresented in senior management and leadership roles. Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012) and Tandrayen-Ragoobur (2014) in their studies on female participation in Mauritius and South Africa, found that both countries are still considered patriarchal societies where a woman's main role and duty is to the family.

3 Literature Review

“I can see now that I started my professional journey on the day at age 4 when I declared to my parents and to the world, Mom, Dad, I want to be a fireman. Now this was not some precious instinct towards civic duty. No, it really wasn’t terribly profound. In fact, it was simply that I loved the colour red and I thought black-and-white dogs with spots were really cool. But when I look back now I see a kid who was not afraid to commit to a different path through life, and I see parents who encouraged their child’s ambition whatever it was”.

*Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard
(MIT commencement speech, June 2, 2000)*

3.1 Introduction

Over the last few decades, researchers’ interests in career development and career success has increased. Most career studies have been mainly Eurocentric and androcentric (Poon et al., 2015 & Naidoo et al., 1998); however, studies in the African and Asian context are available. For instance, in South Africa there has been research on career and professional development amongst teachers and academics (Kriek & Grayson, 2009; Moodly & Toni, 2017) and studies on female career development enablers and barriers (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Erwee, 1986; Ketchiwou et al., 2022; Mathur-Helm, 2006; Naidoo & May, 2006) in Ethiopia (Counsell 2002), Nigeria (Ituma & Simpson (2009) and Lebanon (Tlaiss, 2014). In Mauritius, the most recent research has been on careers and career development, including research on barriers to career advancement among academics (Thanacoody et al., 2006), career advancement and career motivation amongst women in middle management in the accounting profession (Ramdhony et al., 2012), and the career path and career mobility among hotel managers (Ladkin & Juwaheer, 2000). Other more recent studies include those on secondary school students and career choices (Bodhe-Surally & Kisto, 2018) and gender gap in careers involving science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) studies (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Gokulsing, 2022). Several studies in non-Western contexts found that the applicability of existing career theories to people from different cultural, racial, socio-economic groups and women should be further researched (Naidoo et al., 1998; Tu et al., 2006).

As a result, there is limited empirical evidence on managerial career patterns in non-Eurocentric contexts, and further empirical research in non-Western contexts that explore the career trajectories of women in managerial and leadership roles has been identified as a gap in career literature (Counsell 2002; Dries & Verbruggen 2012; Sullivan & Baruch 2009).

Furthermore, studies on female career behavior are frequently compared to male standards and experience. Despite the fact that women make up the majority of workers in most countries, females' career development and advancement in the workplace remains dissimilar and subordinate to their male counterparts (Naidoo & May, 2006).

In this section, a review of the seminal and current literature is provided. The literature review is structured in four parts as illustrated in the conceptual framework in Figure 3.1: (1) career development theories, (2) leadership theories, (3) feminism and intersectionality, and (4) the barriers and enablers of women's experiences when pursuing a career in organizational leadership.

Figure 3.1

Literature review conceptual framework



3.2 Career Development Theories

The term career has been defined in several ways in the career literature. According to Van Maanen & Schien (1977, p. 6):

A person's career within an organisation represents a potential series of transitions from one position to another. These transitions may be few in number or many, they may entail upward, downward, or lateral movement, and may demand relatively mild to severe adjustments on the part of the individual.

Hall (2002) claimed that a career is “a life-long process of work-related activities with a strong upward, mobile, uninterrupted path” (Hall, 2002, p. 8). Hall (2002) also described a career as a profession. The “career as a profession” perspective relates to job occupations that generally follow a clear pattern. Occupations such as doctors, lawyers, businesspersons, and other professional occupations that have an established and well-understood career path and where people frequently move from one job status to another fall within this description. For example, a typical management career path begins with an undergraduate qualification, followed by an MBA program, management traineeship, staff specialist, supervisor, and then manager and executive at various levels (p 9).

Hughes and Coser (1994, as cited in Hall, 2002, p. 10) defined a career as “a lifelong sequence of jobs”. All people who work – all people with work histories – have careers according to this definition. Hughes and Coser (1994) defines an individual's objective career as their sequence of jobs, and their subjective career as the specific experiences that they have in those jobs. According to this definition, a person's career is the way they experience the sequence of jobs and activities that comprise their work history. According to Hughes and Coser (1994, as cited in Hall 2002, p 10), this is their subjective career – a person's changing aspirations, satisfaction, self-concept, and other attitudes toward their work and life. To fully comprehend the course of a person's work life, both subjective and objective careers must be considered as two facets of the same process.

In its broadest sense, career development refers to “the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to shape the career of any given individual over the life span” (Sears, 1982, p. 139). This study focuses on the workplace and organizational context and contributes to the management and career development literature by exploring South African and Mauritian women's career

patterns and decisions and demonstrating that the interplay between how women conceptualize leadership and forge a career in corporate leadership contributes to their career success in the corporate context. It considers both objective and subjective factors that contribute to women's professional success in South Africa and Mauritius. The objective facets include observable choices and other activities undertaken by women to overcome discrimination and organizational barriers and advance from junior to senior management positions. The subjective aspects include women's lived experiences, values, culture, context, motivation and work/family responsibility from early career to senior management position.

3.3 Early Career Development Theories

The following section discusses the traditional career development theories that guide career research and interest. These include:

1. Holland's career typology
2. Super's vocational choice theory
3. Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation
4. Social cognitive theory.

3.3.1 Holland's Career Typology

John Holland developed a career typology known as the modal personal orientation to explain how people make career choices. "Modal personal orientation is described as the development process established through heredity and individual life history of reacting to environmental demands" (Zunker, 1994, p. 45). The main assumptions of Holland's theory (Holland, 1985) are:

1. Most people can be categorized as one of six types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional (p. 2).
2. There are six model environments: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (p. 3).
3. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities and express their attitudes and values and take on agreeable problems and roles (p. 4).

4. Behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment (p. 4).

The degree of fit between the individual's personality traits and the characteristics of the work environment influences individual performance and job satisfaction. Holland's theory has been extensively tested and the contribution and popularity of the theory in career counselling is well recognized in career development and career counselling literature. One criticism of Holland's theory is the limited consideration of women's careers. Zunker (1994, p. 49) found that women tend to score higher in three personality types (artistic, social and conventional). Holland (1985) suggested that women demonstrate higher interest in female-dominated occupations because of prevalent sex stereotypes (p. 49).

3.3.2 Super's Vocational Choice Theory

Donald Super developed the life span theory which emphasized the self-concept and linked the self-concept to leadership self-identity. According to Super (1990) career development is a lifelong process during which people choose occupations that express their self-concept. In this context, self-concept refers to how individuals see themselves in relation to their occupational choices as well as how they see themselves in general. According to Super (1990) the self-concept evolves over time and is influenced by diverse experiences which impact vocational maturity. Furthermore, he claimed that individuals implement and develop their self-concept during their career development when they make vocational choices that allow them to express their self-concept. Super (1990) argued that career development is spread over five life stages, namely growth (spans from childhood up to 14 years), exploration (spans from 15 to 24 years), establishment (spans from 25 to 44 years), maintenance (spans from 45 to 65 years), and disengagement (from 65+ years). From this perspective, careers develop over time through a sequence of job roles and social roles that are spread across one's life span. Super's model recognizes that career choices and interests should be explored together with other life interests and acknowledges that the career patterns of women differ from men due to women's family responsibility roles.

Super's theory was developed when more men than women participated in the labor force (Cron & Slocum, 1986) and when careers were stable, and most people joined an organization in young adulthood and worked in the same organization until they reached

retirement age (Ornstein et al., 1989; Sonnenfeld & Kotter, 1982). With more women entering the labor market and occupying leadership roles in both traditional and non-traditional jobs, career advancement may be more complex and different; therefore, more research on women's career advancement and development in different contexts would contribute to a better understanding of women's career trajectories (Swanson, 1992) and improving policies to reduce gender inequality.

3.3.4 Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation

Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise and self-creation explains how sex, social class, and intelligence are more strongly related to vocational aspirations than to one's vocational interests and values. Linda Gottfredson proposed that as a person's self-concept develops, so too does their view of the world of work, and the range of occupational options they consider narrows or becomes increasingly circumscribed. Gottfredson (1981) stated that circumscription occurs in four stages:

The first stage is the orientation to size and power (ages 3-5), and at this stage young children grasp the concept of being an adult; at the second stage of development, the orientation to sex roles (ages 6-8) children's gender self-concept consolidates; at the third stage, 'orientation to social valuation' (ages 9-13) young people develop more abstract self-concepts of social class and ability and these develop to become important determinants of social behavior and expectations. At this stage, youngsters have higher abilities to understand abstract, complex concepts, and combined with emotional stressors, youngsters become more attuned to their own internal feelings and capacities. At the fourth stage, 'orientation to internal unique self' (starts at age 14) is the stage when young persons have a positive view of all occupations of which they are aware. As children progress from one stage to the next their self-concept develops (p. 574).

Self-concept as defined by Gottfredson (1981 p 547) "is one's view of one's self, one's view of who one is and who one is not. Self-concept includes a person's sense of social life, as well as psychological attributes, and might include a person's view of their abilities, interests, personality, or place in society." Children begin to reject occupations that are not gender-compatible, and then reject occupations of low status or outside their own social class. When they begin to assess their own abilities, jobs that appear too difficult are eliminated as options. As a result, career choices are narrowed or circumscribed by social attributes such as gender, social class, and interests. Circumscription is then a process where young people reject career options they identify as unacceptable. Gottfredson went on to say that compromise occurs when

perceptions of opportunities and the challenges that people may face in pursuing certain occupations influence vocational choice, implying that people will weigh what jobs are accessible and achievable against their abilities and preferences. A mismatch between a person's abilities, interests, and job availability means that the person may be unable to work in occupations that they are interested in and compromise on their career choice (Gottfredson, 1981).

Gottfredson's (1981) concept of that gender self-concept suggests that a young woman who believes that only traditionally female job occupations are suitable for her will choose accordingly, despite her interests and abilities (Davy & Stoppard, 1993; Galejs & King, 1983; Pryor, 1987). Cost of education was also found to be a factor that affected occupation choices for young women (Davy & Stoppard, 1993) and studies by Falkowski and Falk (1983) and Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) explained that maternal employment shaped daughters' life role orientations, with daughters expecting their career patterns of building a family and paid employment to be like that of their mothers. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987, p. 143 as cited in Elly-Brown 2015) reported that maternal attitude to career influenced daughters career choices more than their mother's actual career. According to Betz and Fitzgerald (1987):

- Women's career choices are influenced by four sets of variables:
- Individual variables: self-concept, ability, liberated sex values.
- Background variables: parental support, educational level, occupational status, and work experience.
- Educational variables: higher education, continuing in mathematics, and
- Adult lifestyle factors: timing of marriage and number of children (p. 143).

Additionally, Morrill and Morrill (2013) and Oliveti et al. (2020) in their quantitative studies found that daughters of working mothers were more likely to participate in paid work in adulthood. Oliveti et al. (2020) found that working mothers encouraged their daughters to invest in labor market skills and sons of working mothers were more likely to prefer working wives.

3.3.5 Social cognitive career theory

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) adopts a cognitive constructivist approach that acknowledges that “people are proactive shapers of the environment, not merely as responders to external forces” (Lent et al., 1994, p. 87).

Drawing from Bandura’s (1986) concept of self-efficacy, Lent et al. (1994) stated that SCCT emphasizes the role of personal agency in career decision-making and postulated that the interaction between people, their environment, and their behavior operate together and influence career decision-making. SCCT focuses on three personal agency variables: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1986, p.391), is “people’s judgment about their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances”. These beliefs are central to a person’s personal agency. Outcome expectations refer to personal beliefs about the possible outcomes of behavior and the impact a person’s motivation has on pursuing certain behaviors over others. Outcome expectations contribute to the formation of career interests. Outcomes can be intrinsic (sense of achievement) or extrinsic (monetary). The social cognitive theory posits that “people act on their judgments of what they can do, as well as on their beliefs about the likely effects of various actions” (Bandura, 1986, p.231). Both self-efficacy and outcome expectations affect a person’s behavior, but self-efficacy was found to be a more influential component of behavior. If a person’s self-efficacy is strong, a person may persevere even when the outcome is uncertain. The third component affecting behavior is goals. Goals may be described as the fortitude to participate in a specific activity or to achieve a certain outcome (Lent et al., 1994). Goal setting represents a person’s ability to visualize future desired outcomes and plan and enact behaviors that facilitate goal achievement (Lent et al., 1994). Career development is influenced by objective and perceived environmental factors. The interaction between the three personal agency factors does not function independently in shaping career interests and career decisions.

Lent et al. (1994) found that contextual factors have a direct impact on the formation of career interests, plans, and actions. Objective contextual factors include the quality of education one has access to, and the financial resources and support available for one to pursue specific training. Subjective factors “emphasize that the opportunities, resources, barriers, or affordances presented by a particular environmental variable may be subject to individual interpretation” (Lent et al., 2000, p. 37). Career development from an SCCT lens suggests that

multiple factors from the objective environment as well as how individuals make sense of and respond to what is provided in their environment must be considered.

Bandura (1997) noted that coping efficacy, the level of confidence one has in one's ability to cope with complex and challenging situations (Bandura 1997), also affects the perception of career-related barriers. Individuals with high levels of coping efficacy are more likely to overcome perceived career-related barriers: "strong efficacy for coping with obstacles and barriers can result in successful performance despite expectations of barriers and impediments such as racism and discrimination" (Hackett & Byars 1996, p. 329).

3.4 Contemporary career development theory

Due to the changing nature of work, there have been significant shifts in how careers evolve and develop within and outside of organizations. The following section will discuss career transitions in terms of the protean career orientation; the boundaryless career, preference and choice theory; the kaleidoscope career model; and O'Neil and Bilimoria's idealism, endurance and reinvention career model.

3.4.1 Protean career

Hall (1996) introduced this career concept as one in which individuals can change the course of their career and redefine their career goals by adapting their knowledge, skills, and abilities to suit the changing nature of the work environment. Until Hall introduced this concept, traditional careers were embedded in a context in which organizational processes were hierarchically ordered, centrally planned, and controlled, and formally documented (Arthur, 1994; Baruch, 2003, 2004). Career paths were a balance between employees and their respective organizations, where employees offered loyalty and commitment and employers provided job security, and consistent increases in income and status (Hall, 1976; Orser & Leck, 2010). Traditionally, career advancements were mainly linear progressions within one organization (Baruch, 2006; Bird, 1994).

Hall (1996) conceptualized the protean career as a career where the individual takes responsibility for their career growth and development. This new description of a career emerged when organizations began restructuring and downsizing (Hall, 2002). This trend began throughout the world and organizations were geared toward becoming more competitive

and responsive to external environmental changes. As a result of these changes, the employment contract changed from one in which employers were provided with stable linear and vertical career paths with high job security to one where employees began to take control and responsibility for their career growth (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1996).

Briscoe and Hall (2006, p. 8) expanded on the protean career concept and proposed a combination of two dimensions:

the first being the values-driven dimension described as the sense that the person's internal values provide the guidance and measure of success for the individual's career. And the second dimension is the self-directed dimension in personal career management as having the ability to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands.

Further studies using a sample of undergraduate and MBA students confirmed that the protean career orientation was correlated with personality dimensions such as openness to experience, authenticity, initiative (Seibert et al., 1999) and embracing challenge (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe et al., 2006). Protean careerists value feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment with one's career (Seibert et al., 1999), are constantly striving to achieve desired career goals, and actively pursue personal freedom and growth by engaging in ongoing professional development (Cheng & Ho, 2001). Additionally, the protean careerist is a person who enters into an employment contract with oneself instead of with an employer, allowing them to be highly flexible and mobile across functional, departmental and organizational boundaries (Seibert et al., 1999).

Although Hall (2004), supported by Agarwala (2008) and Briscoe et al. (2006), suggested that gender and career success orientation may not be directly related, other studies found that men adopt a more traditional linear career orientation while women embrace more self-directed careers that resemble the protean career orientation (Evetts, 1990; Ng et al., 2008; Pascall et al., 2000; Sullivan, 1999). Research indicates that women in modern-day society go through several career exploration cycles to reconcile their occupational choices with their personal goals and family responsibilities and resign from their employers more frequently than men (Brett & Stroh, 2001; Schmeer & Reitman, 1997; Stroh et al., 1996). Valcour and Tolbert (2003) reported significant gender differences between inter-organizational and intra-organizational mobility reporting that women with families experience more inter-organizational mobility while men with families have more intra-organizational mobility. According to Shapiro et al. (2008), women manage their own careers and negotiate their own

employment terms and conditions that allow them to adjust their career choices and their family responsibilities (Reitman & Schneer, 2008).

3.4.2 Boundaryless careers

Arthur and Rousseau (1996, p. 6) described the boundaryless career orientation as “one of independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements”. Accordingly, careers are defined as a series of work-related experiences that take place over long periods of time in the workplace (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Arthur (1994) described six different meanings of a boundaryless career:

The most prominent is when a career, like the stereotypical Silicon Valley career, moves across the boundaries of separate employers. The second meaning is when a career, like that of an academic or carpenter, draws validation and marketability – from outside the present employer. A third meaning is when a career, like that of a real estate agent, is sustained by extra-organizational networks or information. A fourth meaning occurs when traditional organizational career boundaries, such as hierarchical reporting and advancement principles are broken. A fifth meaning occurs when a person rejects existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons. The sixth meaning depends on the interpretation of the career actor, who may perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints (p. 296).

Sullivan and Arthur (2006) reconceptualized the boundaryless career concept and described two levels of mobility: physical and psychological. Sullivan and Arthur (2006, p. 21) defined psychological mobility as “... the capacity to move as seen by the mind of the career actor” and physical mobility as “upward, downward, or lateral movements within an organisation or moving across separate organizations.” Women experience more psychological mobility and less physical mobility than men (Forrert et al., 2010). Several factors restrict women’s physical mobility, such as work/family conflict (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Women generally follow their spouses on expatriate assignments in dual career couples (Bielby & Bielby, 1989) and the husband’s career is prioritized because the husband typically earns more (Koeber & Wright, 2006). Other research found that non-supportive organizational policies and cultures force women to exit the workplace to fulfill family responsibilities (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

3.4.3 Preference/choice theory

Related to the work–family and work–life harmony perspective, the preference/choice perspective highlights that women recognize that the current expectations of senior leadership roles involve long working hours and engaging in organizational politics where success is measured by title, salary and vertical upward movement which are not compatible with their needs. Since women measure success by personal recognition, achievement, a balanced lifestyle and authenticity (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007) they opt out (Cabera, 2009) of pursuing senior and leadership positions. This perspective shifts blame away from the organization and society toward women instead. Preference theory has been criticized since it ignores the role of organizational factors and society’s expectations in shaping women’s choices. Cassell and Walsh (1994) and Lewis and Simpson (2010) outlined that organizational practices continue to favor dominant male norms for career success, bureaucratic organizational cultures and structures, and gender-based power dynamics. Lewis and Simpson (2010) further found that the lack of clear criteria and measures for meritocracy surpasses the influence of individual differences on career progress. Other literature focuses on the issue of choice in women’s careers. For instance, Crompton (2008) found that women accountants preferred to remain in positions just below partner level since the job demands and the level of stress that accompanied promotion to partner level would negatively affect their family responsibilities. Since women still bear a greater proportion of the responsibility for childcare and domestic work, creating conflict between work and personal responsibilities (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Lirio et al., 2007; Powell & Mainiero, 1992), women’s choices are an outcome of a realistic evaluation their multiple responsibilities, time and level of support.

3.4.4 Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM)

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005, p. 111) developed the kaleidoscope career model (KCM) that describes that women’s careers are relational; that is, when making career decisions women consider different “interconnected issues, people and aspects” and how these issues, relations, and aspects impact their decision and how their decision would impact these relationships. The KCM describes the significance of three career issues that women encounter: (1) authenticity, (2) balance, and (3) challenge. Authenticity refers to being true to oneself and making decisions that places the self above others, while balance is described as making

decisions so that the different roles in one's life come together to form a coherent whole. balance is defined as participating in activities that allow for control, autonomy, and responsibility (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). This model suggests that women make career decisions that allow them to negotiate and meet their own needs and at the same time satisfy the needs of their family, friends, and others.

The KCM also recognizes the continuous interaction between several needs and can help understand why many successful women may switch to lower status, lower responsibility, and lower paying professional roles at critical points in their career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). The ABC model of the kaleidoscope career (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 113) examines women's career patterns in three stages: early, mid, and late career. During the early stages of their careers, women are focused on goal achievement and challenge in their occupational roles, while balance and authenticity fall to the sidelines. Women in their mid-career are confronted with family responsibilities, and the need for balance becomes paramount and challenge and authenticity become secondary needs. The need for authenticity emerges in the late career phase – the desire for challenge and balance persists; however, these shift according to the choices women make (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Individuals alter their career paths by rotating various aspects of their lives in order to arrange their relationships and roles in novel ways. These shifts may occur because of internal changes, such as maturation, or external changes, such as being retrenched. Individuals assess their available options in order to identify the best fit between job demands, constraints, and opportunities and their personal values, interests and relationships and each decision impacts the outcome of the kaleidoscope pattern (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

3.4.5 O'Neil and Bilimoria's Idealism, endurance and reinvention career model

O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) research suggest that women's careers transition over three stages: the idealistic achievement phase (24–35 years), the pragmatic endurance phase (36–45 years) and the reinventive contribution phase (46–65 years). The idealistic achievement phase is characterized by an internal locus of control, a high focus on achievement and a proactive disposition toward their career and professional future. At this stage, women perceive their professional careers as a channel to achieve their dreams and they want to make a difference in their respective organizations. Although these women experience unsupportive organizational environments, their self-belief in their ability to overcome these challenges enable them to succeed. Furthermore, at this phase, these women encounter more positive

managers than negative managers. In O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) study, women reported that parents played an integral role in their career and life choices. In this study, "91% of women did not have children" and reported that they grappled with the problems associated with balancing a career and family responsibility. These women were aware that existing organizational policies were not supportive of women with both career and family (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

During the pragmatic endurance phase, women adopt a pragmatic attitude toward their careers and career patterns have a high relational content. O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) suggested that the high relational context is attributed to (1) the acknowledgment that their career progression is influenced by others (spouses, children, family as well as managers and peers (p. 183), and (2) the stage where women begin to question the role of their career in their lives and how central their career is in relation to work, home and their community. At this phase women battle to meet multiple roles and demands. It is at this phase that mid-career women experience the full impact of unsupportive organizational environments and because they feel dissatisfied, they begin to dedicate more time and effort to other areas of their lives which provides them with satisfaction and a sense of self-worth and achievement (O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005, p. 184). It is at this stage that women define success in terms of personal happiness and fulfillment and begin to reflect on their life choices and make decisions to start a family.

At the final stage, women reorientate and become focused on fairness and justice and perceive their careers as platforms to help others and contribute to their organizations, their families, and their communities. Women reinvent themselves and view their career as an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to society through their professional role (O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005).

3.4.6 Conclusion

Career transitions are linked to contemporary careers and are boundaryless in nature (Arther et al., 1999). In light of the changing business context and contemporary career theory, individuals' career paths are no longer linear and seem to be discontinuous, and individuals no longer follow a defined pathway into management (Handy, 1994) This discontinuity requires individuals to engage in continuous learning and experience identity changes from multiple

career experiences (Hall, 1996). Changing careers is considered as a functional adaptation to the work environment (Grzeda, 1999). The focus of this study is on career transitions of women across organizational, horizontal, and vertical dimensions. Organizational career transition entails transitions within and across organizations and industries (Nicholson & West, 1988), the horizontal dimension entails changes in function, division or department (Schein, 1973), and vertical transitions involve promotions and demotions.

Much of the career-related research in South Africa and Mauritius uses quantitative research techniques. Following from the above literature, this study will build on the career literature by analyzing the career pathways and transitions of female senior managers from two Sub-Saharan countries and contribute to the body of literature on how the careers of women from South Africa and Mauritius develop from early career through to advancing into a senior management role in a corporate context. There is a scarcity of research (O'Neil et al., 2018) on the strategies that women use to progress from middle management into senior management roles and how women navigate through male-dominated organizational barriers, unique to women. This research study addresses this issue using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to investigate the career patterns of women from South Africa and Mauritius.

3.5 Leadership theories

This section provides an insight into leadership in the African context and the Ubuntu leadership philosophy and provides an overview of the traditional theories of leadership. In terms of traditional leadership theories, the focus is on selected leadership theories since the aim is to demonstrate how these theories have evolved over time in relation to gender.

3.5.1 Leadership in Africa

The topic of leadership, women in leadership and African leadership is a contemporary issue globally and interest in African leadership has increased over the past two decades (Abebe & Teklab, 2020). Africa is often described as a continent that is undergoing an African Renaissance that involves expanding the boundaries of human freedom, equality, justice, and sustainable development to create a unified region that fosters economic growth and social development across all countries in the continent (Mazrui, 2002; Zeleza, 2009). Throughout Africa, reforms in skills, values and gender relations are critical for modernization and

development (Zezeza, 2009). While Africa has been under the spotlight with regards to leadership, there is an absence of research in this area. Nkomo (2011) claimed, “My search revealed Africa was all but invisible in the mainstream leadership and management literature” (Nkomo, 2011, p. 366). du Preez (2012) shared similar views and reported, “Most of the academic literature material currently available on political and other types of leadership comes from outside Africa, especially the West” (du Preez 2012, p. 7).

Leadership in Africa dates back to the precolonial period. Africans have historically aspired to leadership based on humanistic values of inclusion and community service (Bolden and Kirk 2009). The limited literature available on African leadership focuses on poor leadership and many African countries have become accustomed to hearing about corrupt leaders who enrich themselves while ignoring the continent’s socio-economic and political issues (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Obiakor, 2007). Blunt and Jones (1997, p. 19) described the African leadership context as:

influenced by the highly centralized power structure, high degrees of uncertainty, an emphasis on control mechanisms rather than organizational performance, bureaucratic, resistant to change, acute resource scarcity, individual concern for basic security and the importance of extended family and kin networks.

Contrary to Blunt and Jones’s (1997) description, Jackson (2004) held a more positive view of the leadership context in Africa. Jackson (2004) reported that leadership and management in Sub-Saharan Africa are shaped by values that are more humanistic than calculative. Leadership in Africa embodies sharing, compromise, good personal and social relations, and respect for authority (Bolden & Kirk 2009; Jackson 2004).

“In Africa, a leader is viewed as someone who is a servant to the clan, tribe, community or group” (Masango, 2009, p. 313). The concept of kingship is central to traditional African leadership. Early traditional leaders such as kings, priests, and chiefs passed down leadership from one generation to the next. Because most African cultures are communal, leadership is often understood through the lens of a community leader and “good” leaders are those individuals who are actively engaged in the community (Madimbo, 2016). The African philosophy of Ubuntu best explains the spirit of collectivism and sharing.

3.5.2 Ubuntu

The concept of Ubuntu originates from the Bantu people of Southern Africa and represents the cultural value system of the Bantu people. It embodies a caring and community spirit, harmony and hospitality, respect, and responsiveness within communities (Mangaliso 2001). Another key principle of Ubuntu is collectivism. Decision-making processes are participatory, transparent, and democratic. When making decisions, relationships are prioritized over material things (Boon, 2007; Mangaliso, 2001). Relationships with others and concern for others is at the center of the Ubuntu concept. Ubuntu promotes humanity and places emphasis on the value of human life and respect for others and is embodied in phrases such as “I am because you are” (Mangaliso, 2001). Another principle of Ubuntu is the emphasis on consensus or agreement: “Without a common scale, that is, without an agreement or consensus on criteria, the beliefs and practices of the other simply cannot be judged without violating them” (Louw, 2001, p. 15).

Additionally, Ubuntu recognizes and acknowledges diversity and diversity of people in terms of language, history, and culture. Ubuntu values uphold the capacity for compassion, reciprocity, and dignity amongst people (Bekker, 2008) and instils the spirit of unity, brotherhood and solidarity, encouraging leaders to be inclusive, even to the extent of inconveniencing oneself for the benefit of others (Tutu, 1999).

Although Ubuntu shares some similarities with Western leadership concepts, such as transformational leadership, Ubuntu is distinct from Eurocentric leadership models in that it is indigenous and Afrocentric and is essentially a cultural value system that places value on concern for each other’s wellbeing and working together for the common good (Ncube, 2010). Bass (1999) described transformational leadership as a leadership style where the leader “moves the follower’ away from self-interest” through four behavioral components: (1) idealized influence, (2) inspiration, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration. The main assumption of the transformational leadership perspective is the focus on change, and the role of the leader is to envision change and successfully implement interventions to enhance organizational performance. According to Burns (1978 p. 20), transformational leadership is “leadership that occurs when one or more persons engages with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality”. The transformation occurs when the leader successfully creates the vision,

builds commitment towards the vision, communicates the vision and models the vision necessary for change.

Ncube (2010) proposed an Ubuntu leadership framework that explains the five principles of the Ubuntu philosophy. The first principle requires that leaders model the way for followers and that leaders are committed to and uphold values that embody honesty, sincerity, respect for others and truthfulness (Malunga, 2009). The second principle is valuing communal enterprise and a shared vision (Mangaliso, 2001). This requires leaders to create a vision that sets direction for others and whatever benefits are derived for the organization are shared with the group members and not accrued for oneself. The third value of Ubuntu leadership revolves around change and transformation (Ncube 2010). While traditional societies are reluctant to change, Ubuntu leadership encourages leaders to seek opportunities for change and initiate change through others by promoting open communication, transparency, and consensus. Decisions about change are reached through consensus rather than polling, and decision-making follows an iterative process where decisions are revised several times before a final decision is taken. Change is gradual and responsive to external environmental conditions.

Interconnectedness, interdependency, and empowerment is the fourth principle (Mangaliso, 2001). Building relationships that foster trust, collaboration and reciprocity are necessary as high trust, high reciprocity relationships reflect the interconnectedness between leaders and their followers. Through interconnectedness leaders empower their followers by building their self-belief and encouraging them to take initiative. The fifth principle is collectivism and solidarity, where individual needs are subordinate to the collective needs of the community. The collective mindset fosters teamwork and a non-competitive environment, promoting solidarity and a positive work environment. The final element is continuous integrated development which compels leaders to build capacity through mentoring and relationship building.

This leadership philosophy demonstrates how Ubuntu values can be applied in leadership to create an inclusive work culture where both leaders and followers embrace diversity. Mbigi (1997, p. 8) believed that “Ubuntu will show a way to work together and will create a rainbow mentality in our organisation characterized by high degree of cultural, racial, religious, tribal, and political tolerance.” For South Africa and Mauritius to achieve gender equality in top tier management positions, a transformative leadership approach guided by the Ubuntu philosophy for progressive and ethical change is required.

3.5.3 Leadership theories

In this section I provide an overview of the literature on traditional leadership theories and provide an understanding of the underlining premises of these theories. I focus on selected leadership theories because my aim is to demonstrate how these theories have developed over time.

Northhouse (2007) and Bass (1990) provided comprehensive reviews of the history of leadership and traditional leadership theories and categorized the major leadership theories into several perspectives: trait, behavioral, contingency/situational, and transformational and transactional. Table 3.1 below summarizes the four categories.

Table 3.1

Summary of Leadership Theories

Leadership Perspective	Description	Consideration for gender
Trait theories (1930s–1940s)	Trait theorists were the first to study leadership in the early 20 th century. This perspective assumes that effective leaders possess extraordinary personal qualities, skills, and physical characteristics that are innate. Trait theory claims that “leaders are born” and therefore destined for leadership positions (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010). Often referred to as the “great man” theory, research in this period assumed that leadership roles were the domain of males. Between the late 1940s and early 1990s, trait theorists focused their research on identifying innate characteristics and attributes that differentiated leaders from followers and on “why certain people were great leaders” (Rowe & Guerrero, 2016, p. 33). Amongst the prominent studies, intelligence, self-confidence, integrity, sociability, and determination were commonly identified as competencies for effective leadership (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Mann 1959; Stogdill, 1948, 1974).	Sogdill (1948) and Mann (1959 as cited in Zaccaro, 2007, p. 6) found that trait theory does not adequately explain leadership and leadership effectiveness. Chin and Trimble(2015) suggested that trait theory assumes that “traits are universal” and this assumption fails to “note cultural variation and/or gender variation” (Chin Trimble 2015, p. 88). Trait theorists describe leadership traits in masculine terms. As Schien (1973) reported, successful middle managers from the USA exhibited traits and characteristics that were aligned with male rather than female attributes.
Behavioral theories (1940s–1950s)	Behavioral theory evolved from the trait perspective and asserts that people can learn to become leaders. As Gardner (1989, p. xv) claimed, “Many dismiss the subject	All these behavioral models of leadership were developed at a time when the proportion of women in the labor force was

	<p>with the confident assertion that ‘leaders are born not made’. Nonsense! Most of what leaders have that enables them to lead is learned.” The four main behavioral studies include the University of Iowa’s research that identified three leadership styles: (1) democratic, (2) autocratic, (3) and laissez-faire (Lewin & Lippitt, 1938). The Ohio State University study explained leadership as a pattern of behavior along two dimensions: “consideration”, where leaders take into account followers’ ideas and feelings, and “initiating structure”, where leaders’ behaviors are directed towards structuring the work relationship to meet task goals (Kerr et al., 1974). The third study at the University of Michigan identified two dimensions: leadership behavior that is “employee oriented” and “production oriented” (Kahn and Katz 1960). This study found that employee-oriented leaders fostered high group productivity and job satisfaction. Blake and Mouton, (1964) further developed the Kahn and Katz (1960) model and suggested the Managerial Grid, based on two behavioral dimensions: (1) concern for people, and (2) concern for production.</p>	<p>low and when very few women held positions of authority or power in organizations. Additionally, these studies were conducted in the American context (Jogulu & Wood, 2006). However, in behavioral theories, there has been an emerging recognition of the importance of concern for people as a pattern for effective leadership. Concern for people may be regarded as a behavior more commonly associated with feminine attributes (Jogulu & Wood, 2006, p. 239).</p>
Contingency theories (1960s)	<p>The contingency theory of leadership, also known as situational leadership, focuses on specific environmental variables that may determine which leadership style is best suited for a specific work situation (Northouse, 2018). This perspective proposes that no single leadership style is appropriate in all situations. Leadership success is determined by a several factors, including situational factors, leadership style, follower characteristics, the organization, and the task. The contingency approach proposes that leadership has two dimensions – supportive and directive – and that each dimension must be appropriately used in each situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). A leader must judge followers and evaluate each follower’s level of competence and commitment toward the tasks they must perform. Based on their evaluation, the leader will determine the level of direction</p>	<p>One of the limitations of the contingency perspective is that it does not explain why leaders are effective in some situations, while in other situations they are less effective (Northouse, 2018). Vecchio and Boatwright, (2002) found that the situational leadership model did not consider how demographic characteristics such as education, experience, age, and gender impacted on leader–follower relationships. Their study found that education level and work experience were negatively related, and employees with higher levels of education and more work experience needed less structure. Furthermore, their findings revealed that female</p>

	<p>and/or support the follower requires to successfully achieve the job tasks. The level of support and direction followers require evolves as the needs of followers evolves.</p>	<p>and male followers preferred different leadership styles. Female leaders preferred supportive leadership over directive leadership.</p>
<p>Transformational and transactional theory (1990s)</p>	<p>Burns (1978) developed the theory of transformational and transactional leadership. In his study, Burns' (1978) transactional leadership embodies leaders who prioritize work standards and task goals. Transactional leaders are focused on task completion and in return for successful task completion provide rewards. Transactional leaders influence followers through exchange of things (Kuhnert, 1994) that followers value and followers agree to the leaders' demands because it is in their best interests (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). In contrast, Bass (1990) defined transformational leadership as "a behavioral process of being learned and managed. It's a leadership process that is systematic, consisting of purposeful and organized search for changes, systematic analysis, and the capacity to move resources from areas of lesser to greater productivity" (Bass, 1990, pp. 53-4). Other studies have described transformational leaders as individuals who recognize potential in their followers and develop followers' potential fully (Avolio, 1999; Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Bass, 1990). Bass (1999, p. 12) proposed that "transformational leadership motivates followers to do more than expected by (a) raising followers' levels of consciousness about the importance and value of idealized goals, (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and (c) moving followers to address high level needs". Transformational leaders show a high degree of individualized consideration by listening to their followers, acting as mentors, and motivating, and inspiring followers. They promote change by aligning values and norms that are important to the organisation and the followers. One distinct outcome of the</p>	<p>The limitations of earlier leadership theories were that earlier theories did not account for gender. Mandell and Pherwani (2003) found that the transformational leadership perspective includes descriptions of leadership that characterize feminine qualities and reported that females scored higher on the transformational leadership scale compared to males. Burns (2003) also provided descriptions of both men and women as transformational leaders and other studies reported that women are more suited for leadership in situations that require change and collaboration, and have flatter organizational structures (Omar & Davidson, 2001; Powell & Graves, 2003; Wajcman, 1996).</p>

	<p>transactional and transformational leadership perspective was the examination of gender differences and a shift toward understanding how men and women lead differently (Eagly et al., 2003). Several others studies concluded that the transactional leadership traits were more aligned with masculine qualities such as “competitiveness, hierarchical authority and higher control for the leaders and analytical problem-solving” (Klenke, 1993, p. 330) while transformational leadership was aligned with more feminine attributes (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Druckat, 1994), such as “cooperation, collaboration, lower control for the leaders and problem-solving based on intuition and rationality” (Klenke 1993, p.330),</p>	
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The leadership theories described in the table above are informed by the experiences of White, middle-class men in developed country contexts (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Jogulu & Wood, 2006). Previous studies on leadership have overlooked the impact of colonialism, cultural traditions, and postcolonial reforms on leadership and particularly women in leadership (Ncube, 2010). The concept of “‘women’s leadership’ is ambiguous and contested” (Poltera & Schreiner, 2019, p. 10). The shortage of women in formal leadership positions (Trigg & Bernstein, 2016), the paucity of research on women’s experiences in formal senior leadership roles, and recent calls for research analyzing women’s experiences of leadership in senior management positions (Dillard, 2018; Glass & Cook, 2015) from different contexts and situations has motivated this study. Through this study, an investigation of women’s experiences of leadership in senior management positions and how women conceptualize and enact leadership will highlight the strategies that individual women from Mauritius and South Africa have used to succeed in their career development in corporate leadership contexts.

3.6 Feminism

Research on gender issues in the work context cannot be examined without reviewing the literature on feminism and intersectionality. This exploratory study aims to understand the lived experiences of South African and Mauritian women in senior leadership positions. From the previous chapter, it is acknowledged that South Africa and Mauritius are two former

colonial countries that fought for independence and freedom from oppression. From the career literature, gender, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status was found to influence women's career opportunities, career decisions, and career success. The following section will provide an overview of the literature on feminism and intersectionality and leadership. This section will begin with an overview of the feminist movement, followed by a brief history of feminism in South Africa and Mauritius, and will conclude with an overview of intersectionality theory.

3.6.1 Feminist theory

According to Acker (1987), feminism is a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. Calas and Smircich (2009) described the feminist theory as political and plural and discussed six feminist perspectives. When conducting gender studies, Reinharz (1993) described ten attributes of feminist studies and how feminist scholars distinguish their research from traditional research approaches. These include:

(1) feminism is a point of view, not a particular method, (2) feminist methodology consists of multiple methods, (3) feminist researchers offer a self-reflective understanding of their role in the research, (4) a central point of feminist research is to contribute to social changes that would improve women's lives" (as cited in Naples, 2016, p. 2).

First, liberal feminism is concerned with justice and freedom for all individuals and holds the belief that the role of the State is to ensure the removal of all forms of inequality between men and women (Calas & Smircich, 2009). Feminism is a political task and liberal feminists oppose any laws that treat women differently from men. In most developed countries these tasks have been accomplished (Calas & Smircich, 2009). Second, radical feminism emphasizes cultural practices and socialization into sex/gender roles. The radical and cultural feminists emphasize the celebration of women's ways of being. Radicalism aims to reverse the hierarchy and from this view public bureaucracies are seen as institutions that privilege men (Acker 1990; Martin & Knopoff, 1997), and the need for women's presence in politics and key decision-making roles (Celis, 2008; Kanter, 1977) is seen as an imperative for gender equality. Radical and cultural feminists have been articulated into the literature of managing diversity and focused on the suitability of women's skills and traits within the organizational context. Third, psychoanalytic feminism is concerned with experiences acquired by early developmental relations. Fourth, Black feminists challenge earlier feminist theory claiming that

it is focused on White middle-class, heterosexual women thereby ignoring the diversity of women's experiences from their culture and societal positions.

Fifth, postmodern feminists challenge the assumptions that organizations are gender neutral. Postmodern feminists argue that organizations' rules and policies around job evaluation, recruitment, and promotion processes are not gender-neutral and that the bureaucratic hierarchical structure advantages men and men's lives (Burton, 1994). Studies by Halford (1991); Halford and Leonard (2001) and Savage and Witz (1992) found that bureaucracy is founded on androcentric assumptions, and new approaches in the study of paid work found that both public and private organizations are sites where gender is reproduced (Acker 1988; Cockburn 1985).

The postmodern approach provides women with the opportunity to challenge and change existing norms. Weedon (1997, p. 180) argued that the postmodern perspective offers "useful and important tools in the struggle for change." Postmodern feminists advocate for the celebration of women's "otherness" and argue that the marginalization of women should be challenged, and that women's alterity is conceived as "a space to be reclaimed" (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 236). Melissa Tyler's definition of postmodern/post-structural feminism explores gender in organizational settings and provides a method to challenge stereotypes and assumptions of female/feminine. She described gender as an outcome and adopted a deconstructed approach that searched for "hidden or suppressed meanings and recognizing meaning (or knowledge) as the outcome of power relations" (Tyler, as cited in Jeanes et al., 2011, p. 2).

The sixth perspective, transnational feminism/postcolonial, examines the effect of globalization on gender equality. Studies show that transnational organizations demonstrate support for gender equality through formal policies for fair treatment and inclusion (Lagerberg & Schmidt, 2020; Woodward, 2011). International organizations, such as the Organization of Gender and Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), advocate for gender equality and create partnerships with gender activists to change the inferior status of women and enforce policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality. Globalization facilitates the movement of workers across national boundaries and these movements create a "transnational social field, and because transmigration is gendered/sexualized, racialized, ethicized and classed, transmigrants do more than adjust to 'new locals', they also change them and create new spaces for action" (Calas and Smircich, as cited in Jeanes et al., 2011). Black or women of color

feminism and radical feminism is not as extensive as transnational feminism. Decolonial feminism critiques Western theory and knowledge as representing the images and social experiences of developed world countries. Applying the lens of decolonial feminism in management and organizational studies allows us to understand the contextual factors and lived experiences and in doing so, provides a framework that respects the pluralization of differences (Manning, 2020). Manning (2020) discussed the “Global South” as a concept used to describe formerly colonized countries that are classified as developing or underdeveloped economies and fall outside of the dominant Western or developed parts of the world (Mohanty, 2003a and Prasad 2012). Mohanty (1991, as cited in Naples, 2016, p. 4), recommends “‘focused, local analyses’ to represent third-world women’s concerns”. South Africa and Mauritius are newly developing countries. Studies on Black working-class women found that they have been involved in masculine job roles and politics, and served as heads of households and breadwinners when men were away from home during the struggle for political freedom in South Africa (Campbell, 1990). Marginalized women’s struggles are different from White middle-class women: “White and middle-class women feminists focus on liberation from domestic servitude while for many Black and working-class women ‘freedom’ to enter the male domain is frequently oppressive, and can entrench, rather than challenge patriarchy” (Lewis, 1993, p. 539). The lived experiences of South African and Mauritian professional women as they progressed from university into the male-dominated spaces of senior leadership are explored in this study. The findings from this study can contribute to developing social change aimed at improving professional women’s lives and career progression into senior leadership positions.

Butler (2004) claimed that gender is both a historical and social category and is enacted under the constraints of existing norms. The low status of women in South African society, particularly Black African and Colored women, has a long history, originating from the oppression of non-White women during the Dutch and British colonization, and extending to the role of women in the freedom struggle and currently the role and status of women in the post-apartheid era. While all women – White, Black African, Colored and Indian – were reduced to domestic servitude before and during apartheid, White women who migrated to South Africa were expected to undertake “moral surveillance” of other races and ethnic groups. This moral surveillance involved actions used by White women to Europeanize women of non-White heritage. There were enormous differences between the socio-economic statuses of White women and non-White women in South Africa and during the apartheid era. Historically,

women started to organise and protest in the early 1900s, when Charlotte Maxeke, a black African woman organised the Anti-Pass Campaign in 1913. Charlotte was the first Black woman to graduate from college in Ohio and become politically active in the era when most Black women were denied access to education and power (Cook, 2017). The protest was successful and five years later she set-up the Bantu Women's League, which later became the ANC Women's League. Since women were not allowed to become full members of the ANC at the time, the Bantu Women's league was involved with political struggle and addressed women's issues. Maxeke did not support racial segregation and hoped that both Native and European women could work together to address women's issues. In its infancy, the feminist movement in South Africa mainly evolved around women in educational institutions, politically active women and white-upper class women. These women were educated, articulate, organised and shared their views about economic inequality and women's rights openly and boldly.

Donaldson (1997) expanded the definition of feminism in South Africa to include women who work informally together to alleviate the struggles of other women and women who demonstrate acts of solidarity, as feminists in her work with women of colour from marginalised groups. Women from marginalized groups faced three forms of oppression, racial oppression, cultural sexism and extreme poverty. In these groups, women had fewer access to job opportunities, medical care and food and were subordinate to patriarchal practices such as 'lobola'. 'Labola' is the price a man will pay to a bride's family to secure marriage to their daughter and once married, the husband exercised authority over their wife (Donaldson, 1997). South Africa has a complex and diverse cultural landscape, and feminists' movements must not only address sexism, but must also understand social issues black women face considering their cultural backgrounds and expectations. These include racism, economic deprivation and exploitation, hierarchical and undemocratic practises" (Ramphela, 1990, p. 13).

The South African feminist agenda that emerged after the collapse of apartheid was focused on transforming the whole South African society. As Ginwala (1991) expressed "It is the interface of race, class, and gender which has shaped our society and is the fundamental issue that we have to confront" (p. 64). During the apartheid era, Black women subordinated the gender equality agenda in favor of the struggle for racial equality (Hendricks & Lewis, 1994).

South African women activists recognised that the women's rights in the post-apartheid South Africa needed to be addressed when the new Constitution was drafted. Women played an active role in the freedom struggle and women activists did not want the progress of women and women's issues to backslide. (Sachs, 1990), first proposed the Women's Charter, a statement of intent that defined the rights, and privileges of women for women. The women's charter addressed a wide range of women's rights including prevention of domestic violence, prevention of discrimination, employment equity and prevention of harassment (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2019).

As previously documented by Ramtohul (2009), Mauritian women have been fighting for the rights and protection of women in all spheres of society since the arrival of indentured laborers in Mauritius. During colonization, social class and race played key roles in women's mobilization, privileging Franco-Mauritian women. Mauritian women were placed in different positions based on their class, ethnicity, and religion. These influenced their experiences as women because most Franco-Mauritian women were wealthy and privileged in contrast to women who were Indo-Mauritian, Chinese Mauritian, and Creole Mauritian (Ramtohul, 2016). Although Franco-Mauritians were involved in managing the home, slaves, and business, they were ostracized because these activities were perceived as weakening the patriarchal system and challenging the rules of femininity in that era (Vaughan, 2005). Women of Indian and African descent endured sex-based discrimination as their employment was limited to domestic work or lower-paying work in the sugar industry (Ramtohul, 2016).

Socially, the patriarchal mindset is deeply embedded in cultural practices and traditional beliefs and customs across African countries, including South Africa (Wadesango et al., 2011). South Africa has a complex and diverse cultural landscape, and feminist movements must not only address sexism but must also understand the social issues that Black women face considering their cultural backgrounds and expectations. These include racism, economic deprivation and exploitation, and hierarchical and undemocratic practices (Ramphela, 1990).

Similarly, most Mauritians share an Indian ethnicity and Indian values, and their culture is intertwined with Mauritian culture. According to Chakraborty (1995, p. 19), "the Indian culture and value system has been heavily influenced by Buddhist, Vedantic, and Yogic psychology, as well as derivative epic and Pauranic literature." Family and authoritarian values guide an individual's approach to work in Indian culture (Chakraborty, 1995). Furthermore,

traditional Hindu texts discuss the duality of women's roles. There are two types of women: those who are fertile, nurturing, and benevolent, and those who are ruthless, aggressive, and destructive. The traditional roles of wife and mother are dominant. She is devoted and obedient as a wife, subordinate and dutiful as a mother, and she combines her nurturing and loving self with a powerful protector (Nath, 2000). The White Paper on Women in Development (MFWCD, 1995) published in 1995 described the role of Mauritian women as mother and wife and family was pivotal for women. Even though traditional Hindu texts state that women must be honored and adored, the son is the preferred child, and there is no joy when a daughter is born. A daughter is a source of pain, whereas the son is the family's savior, and the woman is regarded as a burden who will never contribute financially. These dichotomies are deeply embedded in the psyches of both male and female Indians, contributing to a culture that frequently makes women feel worthless and inferior (Nath, 2000). Women's increased labor force participation, as well as high enrolment and performance rates in secondary and tertiary education in Mauritius, indicate that the younger generation is changing these cultural traditions (Day-Hookoomsing, 2002).

As Acker (1990) argued, organizational process leads to organizational gendering which disadvantages women and creates inequalities. While women may share similar class status or live and work in the same country, differences around their race/ethnicity, age, gender nationality, or sexual orientation result in differences in experiences and access to different opportunities, social position, and life and career outcomes.

3.6.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be described as a way of:

...analysing the complexity of the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. ... The organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (Collins & Blige, 2016, p. 2)

The triad of race–class–gender recognizes that people are not defined by a single identity and considers the varying and overlapping domains of power that influence how people

experience the world and the workplace (Collins, 1986). Race, class, and gender provide structure in context, but may have varying levels of visibility and importance in a person's self-concept. Mohanty (1995, p. 69) posited that "the assumption [is] that categories of race and class have to be invisible for gender to be visible." Black and women of color feminists argue that the dominant feminist theory was founded on the experiences of White middle-class women, ignoring the reality that gender is a complex phenomenon complicated by race/ethnicity, class, and other diversities (Davis 1981; hooks 1984). Race, as described by Acker (2006, p.444) refers to "socially defined differences based on physical characteristics, culture, and historical domination and oppression, justified by entrenched beliefs". Research on racial inequality has focused on racial discrimination within society and the disadvantages that people of color experience (Brown & Misra, 2003).

"Class refers to enduring and systematic differences in access to and control over resources for provisioning and survival" (Acker 2006; Nelson, 1993 as cited in Acker 2006, p.444). Class inequalities develop from the distribution of wealth in society; people with more wealth will have more power within a society thus creating unequal experiences and different social statuses for people (Collins & Blige 2016). Acker's (1988) research on "hierarchies, jobs, bodies" found that class relations and gender are intertwined and create power differences which are embedded within organizational hierarchies. Additionally, Acker (2006) contended that class highlights the economic experiences of White males more than the experiences of White females and people of color (men and women).

Ridgeway (1991) found that different status attributes (race, gender, social economic status) are linked to well-established stereotypes. These can affect the interaction between people because they are associated with the cultural beliefs and general aptitude and ability of people who come from higher valued statuses. Acknowledging the intersection between race, gender and socio-economic differences would allow for a greater understanding of how these factors affect the interactions of women of color and shape their lived experiences (Moorosi et al., 2018; Ramphele, 1990). Race/ethnicity, gender, and class impact women's access to finances, career advice, networks, and cultural knowledge (Schmidt & Mestry, 2014) thereby affecting their interactions and career success.

Using semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study uses the social constructivist approach to study the lived experiences of women above the glass ceiling in South Africa and Mauritius, together with the institutional arrangements and structural mechanisms that shape

their career experiences. South Africa and Mauritius are racially and ethnically diverse, decolonized countries and by examining successful women's lives within their own contexts and career outcomes, this study will provide a deeper understanding of the individual, organizational and societal factors that enable women to navigate through these intersections to create a pathway into senior leadership positions.

3.7 Barriers to women's career development

A number of scholars have explored the barriers to career progress and success of women in leadership. The following section will provide a review of the literature on the barriers women experience in their career development and transition into senior leadership positions. The section will begin with an explanation of the glass ceiling concept, followed by a review of the literature on social role theory as an explanation for the underrepresentation of women in leadership and management positions. A comprehensive overview of the structural and organizational level barriers that impede women's progress in leadership and management is also provided.

3.7.1 Glass ceiling

Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) first introduced the concept "glass ceiling" in 1986 in the *Wall Street Journal*. The glass ceiling refers to the barriers that women face when they attempt to achieve senior-level positions in organizations, in either public or private sector companies. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (FGCC, 1995, p. 7) defined the glass ceiling as "invisible, artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization and reaching full potential." Powell and Butterfield (2003 p. 6) described the glass ceiling as the "barrier so subtle and transparent, yet so strong that it prevented women and minorities from moving up the management hierarchy". Li and Leung (2001) described the glass ceiling as the discriminatory barriers that thwart women's attempts to progress into senior management positions. According to Cotter et al. (2001),

the glass ceiling inequality originates from gender and racial differences that cannot be explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee, such as previous discrimination in access to education or the choices that the employee makes to pursue other life goals like family and volunteer work (p. 657).

Theories explaining the development of gender-related behaviors in organizations and the formation of the glass ceiling metaphor include explanations that are based in biology, socialization, and culture (Weyer, 2007). Biological theories describe gender differences as innate, and social theories describe these differences as socially constructed and changeable. Among the biological theories is the evolutionary theory, which contends that centuries ago modern man's ancestors traveled in small hunting and gathering bands, and men and women performed different jobs and thus developed different skills (Buss, 1995; Darwin, 1871; Fisher, 1999).

Over the last two decades, socialization and structural/cultural perspectives have been used to explain gender differences in leadership (Bartol et al., 2003; Lueptow et al., 2001). Bartol et al. (2003, p. 9) proposed that "gender identity and differences are acquired through various developmental processes associated with life stages, such as schooling and work life" and these are based on a person's socialization. The structural/cultural perspective posits that "social structures, systems, and arrangements [...] channel and define gender differences due to discrepancies in status and power" (Bartol et al., 2003, p. 9), and that this is why differences in leadership are ascribed to gender. From the structural/cultural perspective, social role theory is well-recognized (Eagly, 1987).

3.7.2 Social role theory

By viewing gender as socially constructed, it is possible to identify the sociocultural aspects of women's experiences and how these influence and impede women's career development and career success in leadership roles.

Gender is a social phenomenon that refers to the learned behaviors and attitudes of men and women that are differentiated by sex. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020, p. 1) described gender as "the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes, and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for women and men." The social structural theory proposes that the origins of sex differences emerged from the social positions of men and women in society and is concerned with the investigation of social norms, stereotypes, and gender roles (Basow, 1992; Eagly & Wood, 1999). This viewpoint contends that because women have less power and status in society and men control more resources, women's social positions are lower than men. According to Shelton (1992) as the division of labor emerged, women prioritized domestic work and spent less time in paid employment. Although more women entered paid

employment, women earned less than men and were concentrated in roles lower down the organizational hierarchy (Jacobs, 1989; Reskin & Padavic, 1994), implying that the cause of sex-differentiated behavior is the low concentration of men and women in different occupational roles. The explanations for the distribution of men and women into social roles include physical stamina and strength; men are prioritized for specific roles because they are larger and stronger (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Another explanation is related to women having children. Women spend long periods of time pregnant, nursing, and nurturing their children, and these responsibilities conflict with job occupations that require continuous work activity (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Men were favored when sex differences in status emerged because men typically specialized in activities that yielded more power, status and wealth (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Morgan and Pritchard (2019, p. 38) claimed that “gender is neither homogenous nor binary, but a fluid concept and various vectors intersect to produce multiple multi-faceted inequalities, challenges, and oppressions.”

According to social role theory, the formation of gender roles is the process by which people of each sex are expected to have characteristics that equip them for the tasks that they perform. These expectations include both men’s and women’s preferred characteristics. Gender roles emerge from the productive work of both sexes and the characteristics that are required to perform sex-typical tasks become stereotypic of men or women (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 413). As such, social roles and social stereotypes have an impact on the advancement of women, the “think manager–think male” perception claims that even if male and female managers have equal potential to advance into senior management, the chances of males being selected and promoted is higher (Schein & Davidson, 1993). Since women are perceived as less qualified, their chances of promotion are limited (Schien et al., 1996).

Gender role stereotypes

Gender role stereotypes are the shared beliefs about the characteristics of men and women. They represent the common perception of gender differences in personality and behaviors (Berger et al., 1980; Deaux & Major, 1987). Gender-related constructs are activated differently, depending on the perceiver, the target, and the situation. As a result, gender-related constructs are complex and interconnected. Lueptow et al. (2001, p. 1) found that “...there has been stability of sex typing of women and men from at least the 1950s to the late 1990s, and even an increase in sex typing, especially regarding the stereotypes and self-concepts, focusing upon the personality traits of women.” Gender stereotypes have both descriptive and

prescriptive characteristics (Gill, 2004). Descriptive stereotypes “are the perceivers’ beliefs about the characteristics of a social group and prescriptive stereotypes depict the group-specific behavioral norms that group members must uphold to avoid derision and rejection by others” (Gill, 2004, p. 620).

Eagly and Karau (2002) found that leadership roles are shaped by masculine or agentic characteristics which include being competitive, ambitious, aggressive, and assertive, while women are perceived as more communal, sensitive, and collaborative (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Placing masculine and feminine qualities at opposite ends of a scale perpetuates sex-role stereotypes. The social role theory argues that “sex differences in social behavior are in part caused by the tendency of people to behave consistently with their gender roles” (Eagly & Karau, 1991, p. 685). These socially constructed gendered roles are then accepted as identity and people constantly draw on these making it difficult for women to hold positions that conflict with established gender roles (Efthim et al., 2001). These stereotypes prevail across society making it difficult for women to be seen as effective in and suitable for leadership positions (Agezo, 2010). Owing to descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes, women face a double penalty: “conforming to their gender-role can produce a failure to meet requirements of their leadership role and conforming to their leader role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role” (Eagly & Johannesen, 2001, p. 786). Women are then discouraged to pursue careers in certain jobs and employers often sex-type jobs and segregate them into those that are appropriate for women and appropriate for men. This often results in women being denied access to training in traditionally masculine jobs (de Groot & Schrover, 1995). This perception disadvantages women at two levels: (1) “women have lesser access to leadership roles and (2) women face more obstacles than men do when pursuing leadership positions” (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p 576).

These gender role stereotypes suggest that women may not aspire to senior management roles and that those women who do want to strive for these roles may need to mimic masculine leadership attributes and suppress their feminine traits (Kerfoot & Knights, 1998). This incongruence between the managerial and gender roles in terms of identity and self-concept creates a barrier for women because if they adopt masculine behaviors to succeed in their managerial role, they lose their femininity (Powell & Butterfeild, 2003). In a study by Liff and Ward (2001) on the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles in a UK bank, male and female junior and middle-level managers were asked about their perceptions of the personal attributes and behaviors related to success within their organization. Male participants

described those women who progressed into senior management roles as more male than female, and women who had “lost their femininity. The study also found that female participants had reservations about succeeding as a woman with children or as a woman planning to start a family in the future, which were reinforced by the small number of visible senior women with families who could act as role models (Wacjman, 1998).

3.7.3 Structural barriers

Women’s careers are more complex than their male counterparts’ due to the role that women play within the family and at home. Women spend more time on and take on more responsibility for household chores and childcare, irrespective of whether both partners are working (Hoobler et al., 2011). Rees (1992) and Tharenou (1999) found that balancing work and family responsibilities influenced women’s careers. Similarly, the ADBR (ADBR, 2020) reported that in the African region, “the burden of women’s unpaid care work equals 2.86 times the burden for men in Sub-Saharan Africa” (p 31). The lack of affordable childcare facilities and adequate paid maternity leave can force women to choose between family responsibility and working in formal paid work (ADBR, 2020). Several studies on the impact of motherhood on women’s careers found that women choose family responsibility over career progression (Dambrin & Lambert, 2008; Smith et al., 2013; Whiting et al., 2015). Furthermore, Berstein (2015, as cited in Hurley & Choudhary, 2016), reported that male senior managers were supported by stay-at-home partners compared to their female counterparts. A study of American women between the age of 41 and 55 years old by Hewlett (2002) found that approximately 33% of successful career women never had children while only 25% of men from Hewlett’s study were childless. A quantitative study by Hurly and Choudhary (2016) found that “the likelihood of becoming a CEO is highest for women when they do not have any children. This probability declines rapidly with each additional child” (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016, p. 257). These findings are a concern for women because when entrepreneurs recruit with this perception, men are more likely to hire men (Knorr et al., 2011).

Advancing into a senior role requires committing time and effort to build social capital and establish strong support systems and spousal support (Crowley-Henry & Weir, 2007). Since family responsibilities take up a lot of time, this leaves women with less time to invest in acquiring the skills and competencies and building the professional networks required for

career mobility. Furthermore Gale (1998), claimed that women also feel psychological anxiety and guilt over the conflict between spending time with their family and spending time on activities necessary to develop their careers. Women believe that choosing a career over one's family is selfish and studies in Britain found that female managers in Britain perceived family commitments as an obstacle to their career advancement (Sutherland, 1985). Chusmir and Parker (1991) also found that even though men and women held similar job-related values, they differed on values pertaining to family responsibility. This often led to benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), where male managers encouraged female employees to take career breaks and opt for family-friendly work policies; presumably, these practices led to women not achieving managerial positions or taking extended career breaks that delayed their career advancement.

On the other hand, Vazquez-Carrasco et al. (2011), in a study among Spanish women, claimed that work/family conflict did not occur if women managed both their personal and professional lives through effective delegation, at home and at work, higher purchasing power and flexible timetables.

Interpersonal and interactional barriers

The second structural barrier women face relates to accessing opportunities to develop social capital through networks, sponsors, and mentors. In a quantitative study by Elacqua et al. (2009) it was found that when supervisors do not mentor female employees and when women do not have access to formal and informal networks within the organization, women are more likely to perceive the presence of the glass ceiling and these perceptions reinforce women's beliefs that men and women are treated differently.

Opportunities to build the social capital necessary for career advancement are fewer for women than for men. Social capital was described by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) as "the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or unit" (p. 243). Cohen and Prusak (2001) explained social capital as "the stock of active connections among individuals; the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible" (p. 4). Social capital can have a huge impact on an individual's career success and can also be used to explain why some individuals experience greater career success than others in the same organizational

environment (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992). Recent studies by Fang et al. (2011) and Servaes and Tamayo (2017) claimed that social capital enables the creation of social networks, which help individuals obtain access to mentors, role models, and information. These connections contribute to enhancing one's self-esteem and building the necessary peer support for career success. Networks provide advantages for information gathering (Bourdil & Geraudel, 2016) and access to new ideas, gossip, and the latest information about events and activities within and across organizations and industries (Williams, 2002) which are pivotal for building one's social capital, power, and career.

It is well established that when analyzing the career progression of men and women, significant differences between their access to building social capital exist. A qualitative study by Metz and Tharenou (2001) in the banking sector in Australia, found that the lack of social capital and access to networks was a significant barrier to women's career progress. Because women are underrepresented in senior and top management positions, women in junior management have limited opportunities to develop strong social networks and interactions and less access to networks, role models, and mentors.

Access to *mentoring* and engagement in sound mentoring relationships benefit employees' career advancement and success because mentors increase the visibility of protégés to top managers, protect protégés when they make mistakes, and guide protégés through tricky situations that, if not handled well during their early career, may negatively impact on their careers (Akande, 1994). Studies by Ibarra et al. (2010, p.82), found that formal mentoring relationships did not always enable career success and promotion for high-potential women. These studies claimed that women were "over mentored" and "under sponsored," female mentors had less organizational power than male mentors, and mentees mentored by people in more senior positions advanced faster in their careers. Women's leadership programs embedded with mentoring programs may unconsciously reinforce gender bias, by framing women as a "problem." Furthermore, mentoring programs that focus on equipping women with the skills to cope in male-dominated job contexts, fail to challenge the underlying cultures and practices that sustain inequality (De Vries et al., 2006). Ibarra et al. (2010) reported that men may not benefit more from mentoring than women do, however, men are more likely to be sponsored by their mentor to secure promotions.

Sponsorship "is a kind of relationship that goes beyond giving advice and using his or her influence with senior executives to advocate for the sponsee" (Ibarra et al., 2010, p. 82).

Sponsorship facilitates career advancement because sponsors leverage their networks to seize opportunities for the sponsee; they open opportunities for sponsees and will “go out on a limb” to fight for their promotion (Ang, 2019, p. 8). Since women are still perceived as risky appointments, high-potential women would benefit from endorsements by influential executive committee members who advocate for their promotion (Ibarra et al., 2010). Unfortunately, women have difficulty finding powerful mentors and sponsors and have fewer sponsors than their male counterparts (Groysberg, 2010). Queen Bee syndrome (Abramson, 1975) is a term used to describe women who have already achieved success in management and deny the existence of systemic gender discrimination. Queen Bees believe that they have achieved career, social and personal success within an existing system and hold the attitude of “If I can do it without a whole movement to help me, so can other women” (Staines et al., 1973 as cited in Marvin, 2008, p. 79)

Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) in a study of South African women found that females in high positions were reluctant to help other women progress because they feared that others would perform better than them and it could jeopardize their positions. They held the belief that they had to work and make sacrifices to reach the top and others should follow the same path, and these beliefs led to stricter ratings for female candidates than male ones.

Studies on young managers found that *role models* are critical for career success in management (Liff & Ward, 2001; Sealy & Singh, 2010). Access to female role models was found to be the second critical barrier to the career advancement and progress of women (Catalyst Conference Board, 2003). Visible female role models help other women alter their conventional cognitive thinking around their existing gender stereotypes about career development. Women in management are less likely than men to have access to acceptable role models within their work environment. A role model, as defined by Shapiro et al. (1978), is “an individual whose behaviours, personal styles and specific attributes are emulated by others” (p. 52). Younger female professionals develop their careers under different circumstances than their older successful professionals with extensive experience and will be selective in the type of role model they wish to emulate. If role models who represent desired behaviors and characteristics admired by younger female professionals are not visible or available, then women lose the opportunities that role models provide. Additionally, those women who succeeded and progressed into top-tier management roles and who did not have families were rejected as role models (Sealy & Singh, 2010). Younger women perceived such successful

women as women who “sacrificed too much of their social and emotional capital in the quest to succeed in the masculine workplace” (Sealy & Singh, 2010, p. 292).

Men and women were found to be selective in the individuals they wished emulate. Young professionals appreciate different qualities and emulate the behaviors of more than one person. These professionals engage in what Shapiro et al. (1978) described as “selective role modelling,” which involves evaluating several individuals and selecting specific traits and behaviors they admire and wish to emulate and rejecting other behaviors (Gibson, 2003). Furthermore, women rarely have one role model for success and are more likely to be exposed to negative role models (Gibson & Cordova, 1999). Exposure to negative role models may actually inhibit women’s career ambitions (Gibson & Cordova, 1999; Sealy & Singh 2010; Shapiro et al., 1978).

Peer relationships are described as relationships between co-workers that are not hierarchical and involve co-workers helping each other. Such relationships are helpful for career success, especially for both men and women who do not have access to mentors and sponsors. Peer relationships are informal and a valuable source of support and career advice (Hill, 1992; Kotter, 1982). As described by Lincoln and Miller (1979, p. 196), “friendship networks are not merely sets of linked friends, but also systems for making decisions, mobilizing resources, concealing or transmitting information, and performing other functions closely allied with work behaviours and interactions”. Because like attracts like in friendships and trigger spontaneous interactions (Marsden, 1998), women are less likely to have access to opportunities to develop these high-trust peer relationships with their male peers and engage in informal social interactions that can benefit their careers.

The “old boys’ club,” is a phenomenon that advantages men in promotions because they have access to networks and interact with more powerful men in a manner that is less available to women (Lutter, 2015). Within this context, men engage in social events and interactions, usually after work and these interactions nurture bonds and connections. Women with young children often cannot participate in these social interactions because they must return home, thereby exacerbating the critical difficulties women face in accessing these networks (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Cubas et al., 2019; Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2023; Jujn & Rubinstein, 2020). Even if women do gain access to these networks, the nature of the interactions in terms of the language and humor used during these social interactions are sexualized and often promote the masculine culture. Women who become part of the group

must then “decode the male behavior patterns” and engage in similar behaviors to become “one of the boys” (Fine & De Soucey, 2005, p. 131). A qualitative study by Kennedy and Power (2010) in Ireland on the impact of elite education and socio-economic status on career success claimed that “the connections one forms in these schools [elite schools] opens doors, and that these networks allow one access to people in power and in positions of influence” (p 239). The study also found that these old boys’ networks are so strong that, “graduates of elite schools are readily identifiable to others within their status group, [and] those responsible for recruitment to high-status occupations may naturally gravitate towards those familiar with the same status culture” (p239).

Sealy (2010) suggested that the old boys’ network could illustrate the emphasis on social capital as the “merit” upon which people are evaluated for a position, as opposed to one’s proven performance in a role” (p. 5). The strong presence and influence of the old boys’ networks within the South African context was confirmed by Padayachee’s (2013) study which found that powerful networks, old (from the apartheid era) and new (post-apartheid era) such as large family networks, church groups, old school contacts, and sports networks, continue to exercise influence over corporate decisions in the private sector in South Africa. Padayachee (2013, p.286) found that “non-executive directors are still drawn from a narrow circle and remain overwhelmingly white and male despite BEE legislations.” Additionally, Ramnund-Mansingh and Seedat-Khan (2020, p. 67) found that the old boys’ network was a significant barrier for Black academic females at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal and described Black female academics’ career journey as a “solitary journey ... which manifests in stress with physical and emotional disorders.” There is also anecdotal evidence from women in management that the presence of the old boys’ network is real (Lang, 2011; Lee, 2014). By examining the career trajectories of female senior leaders from South Africa and Mauritius, we can develop an understanding of how crucial social capital is for career development for women in different contexts and how successful women build their social capital and gain access to networks that facilitate career development and help them progress into senior leadership roles. Through women’s lived experiences, this study will analyze the organizational practices and individual choices that women make, within their socio-cultural context, to establish their networks of support for career success.

Organizational barriers

Elacqua et al. (2009) found that organizational barriers, such as the lack of objective hiring processes, and the number of women on career development pathways for future management and leadership positions reinforced glass ceiling perceptions. Perceptions of a glass ceiling were found to be strongest in organizations that lacked objective hiring processes and had ill-defined and/or non-transparent hiring criteria and poorly integrated performance management systems and competency-based evaluations (Elacqua et al., 2009). Coughlan (2002, as cited in Cross & Linehan, 2006) claimed that a lack of transparent selection criteria for senior management positions gives existing senior managers more leeway to exercise judgment when appointing new senior managers. This leeway can be influenced by the decision-maker's personal attitudes and perceptions of women and can thereby create a space that allows in the decision-maker's preconceived ideas about who should be promoted into a senior management role rather than who is most qualified. These promotion decisions are important and act as an organizational-level barrier for women.

The absence of transparent career and development pathways for women to prepare for leadership positions reinforces perceptions of the glass ceiling presence. Elacqua et al. (2009) reported that the number of women who are participating in and following leadership development programs and are on career development pathways for serious consideration for future leadership roles was found to be a visible symbol of whether men and women are treated differently within the organisation. Candidates for development and career advancement programs must be geographically mobile (willing to work in other countries or business units away from the candidate's home base) and this was found to be another organizational barrier that women face (Elacqua et al., 2009).

Lack of structure in the evaluation process and ambiguous performance evaluation criteria, especially at the management level, is another organizational barrier. At the management level, judging performance is often based on subjective measures such as being charismatic, courageous and resilient. As there are few objective measures to assess job success this can lead to vague performance criteria and creates an opportunity for gender bias (Strumpf & London, 1981). Ambiguous performance criteria can serve to maintain existing gender stereotypes thereby casting women as less successful in the performance, irrespective of their actual performance. Prejudice and bias towards women in the workplace remain a reality and at times, men give less than favorable performance evaluations of females' performance just to prove themselves right. Govender (2007, as cited in Agherdien & Smallwood, 2008) highlighted that "some men can go as far as increasing the workload or

complexity of the work to ensure failure bearing in mind that even the most experienced men in the same position would not cope” (p 2). Heilman (2001) claimed that in male-dominated spaces, women’s success and high performance are often perceived as an exception. When women perform exceptionally well in the role, success is not attributed to the women’s competence, rather it is attributed to exceptional circumstances (Heilman 2001). Hayward (2005, pp. 29-32) argued that there is a vast and expanding gap between the assessment of whether women can be successful in management roles and their actual competencies, experience and talent.

Most research on women and leadership emphasize the barriers that women face, as described earlier; however, the conditions under which women overcome these barriers and progress into senior leadership roles is an under-researched area (Ely, 1995; Gorman, 2005). This study advances the literature on women and leadership by investigating the conditions through which women traversed in their career pathways to reach top leadership positions. Furthermore, the context of South Africa and Mauritius provides further understanding of the career pathways for women from developing countries.

3.7.4 South Africa and Mauritius

Economic and moral arguments for gender parity at senior management and executive leadership levels have been proposed by the Natividad (2015). Research studies demonstrate that gender diversity in senior and top tier management positions positively impacts organizational financial performance and leads to enhanced competitive advantage (Arioglu, 2020; Moreno-Gomez et al., 2018). A global survey of over 21,000 organizations from 91 countries (Noland et al., 2016) found that the presence of women on corporate boards and the C-Suite may contribute to organizational performance. The authors further described that “for profitable firms, a move from no female leaders to 30% representation is associated with a 15% increase in net revenue margin” (Noland et al., 2016, p. 16).

A quantitative study in South Africa among the top 100 companies listed on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange in 2013–2015 (Scholz & Kieviet, 2018) found that “the proportion of female directors, the proportion of directors with a business qualification and the size of a board are significantly positively related with company performance” (p 15). The lack

of data on women in leadership positions in business was acknowledged by the Natividad (2015); Ndinda and Okeke-Uzodike (2012) and Mall (2017).

Research to date regarding how women conceptualize leadership and develop a career in leadership in the African context is also limited. Several reasons have been cited for the slow progress of women in Africa and South Africa. Research in African higher educational systems found that sexual harassment, exclusion from the old boys' network, and the limited number of women in top academic positions (Gaidzanwa, 1997; Manuh, 2002; Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan, 2020) impede women's career progress in academia. The barriers restricting the progress of women in organizational leadership include "traditional gender stereotyping; informal exclusive groupings within organisations; competitive and status-quo cultures; and hierarchical structures" (Mwagiru, 2019, p. 120). Mathur-Helm (2006) conducted a study among South African women in four JSE-listed retail banks and found that the barriers that professional women face in organizational settings include "non-supportive organizational cultures, a distrust in women's capabilities, dominant male-value systems, gender bias, informal promotion without advertising, and insufficient personal contact" (p 317). In Africa, women are simply not seen as leaders, rather they are seen as "submissive and subordinate" (Maseko & Proches, 2013, p 5670). In Ghana it was found that "within the cultural structure men are seen as being competent, skillful, aggressive and able to get things done, while women are perceived as warm, expressive, quite gentle and lacking confidence". Reskin and Padavic (1994, p. 96) claimed that "most cultures share the social value, often rooted in religious beliefs, that women should not exercise authority over men."

Data from Mauritius (Gaddis & Ranzani, 2020) on the context-specific barriers that limit the progress of professional women in management roles is scarce. A World Bank study amongst women between the ages of 16 and 58 who were not engaged in any economic activity in 2020 found that the main barriers to female labor force participation included the availability and affordability of childcare, parental leave legislation, social norms and assigned gender roles, gender wage gap, and safety and violence (Gaddis & Ranzani, 2020). For low-skilled women and women with low education, the cost of day-care can be approximately 30–40% of their earnings. In addition, the prescriptive opening and closing hours for privately owned childcare facilities restrict women's availability to work in organizations that have standard working hours. According to global reports (Afrobarometer, 2017; Gallup World Poll, 2016), the majority of Mauritians believe that women should be in charge of their household and childcare, while most male respondents reported that they believe that women should work

outside the home as well as at home. These findings suggest that for both working and non-working women, social norms assign women with the responsibility for childcare and domestic work. Suntoo (2019) reported similar findings for working middle-line managers. Additionally, most Mauritian women agreed that the home was their responsibility, suggesting internalized traditional gender norms or as Bertrand (2020) suggested that women accept traditional gender norms due to the costs they may face if they deviate from the given social norms.

Anecdotal evidence from professional women from Mauritius suggests that key barriers preventing their progress from middle management into senior management include the patriarchal nature of the Mauritian society, work–family conflict, the lack of empowerment and support for women, and the lack of courage to compete for senior and top management positions (Fakun, 2017). Earlier research by Ramguttty-Wong (2000) reported that sexual harassment, exclusion from high-profile training programs and difficulty with child care as key barriers for Mauritian women in corporate.

Additionally, a common practice in recruitment and selection for positions at all levels in the public and private sector is the practice of preferential treatment based on ethnic affiliation (Boswell, 2014). Boswell (2014) claimed that ‘backing’ “preferential” employment of European descendants and Indian Mauritians of the middle castes in the private sector and civil service” (p. 155) was common in Mauritius. A study on partisanship and organizational change in Mauritius (Gungadeen et al., 2018) also found that partisanship behavior was entrenched in the Mauritian private sector. “Its prevalence through features, such as favoritism, nepotism, ‘clientelism’ and patronage, had a major impact on organisational processes, including leadership, recruitment and selection, performance management, knowledge management and training and development” (Gungadeen et al., 2018, p 666).

South Africa and Mauritius are two culturally diverse developing countries. The dominant values in both societies are held and respected by both men and women and are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural context and most people around the world associate leadership with masculinity. Leadership content is linked to power and status, and it is framed by certain types of (male) people who occupy and are perceived as appropriate for leadership positions. These standards then serve as the yardstick against which other categories are judged. Due to biased evaluation, this may prevent women and men of different social and ethnic backgrounds from obtaining jobs (Billing & Alvesson, 2000, p. 145). However, women are more at risk of stereotypic evaluations when the proportion of women at management level is

low (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). One of the objectives of this research project is to investigate how women from two developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa conceptualize leadership and what contributes to leadership effectiveness. Additionally, this study aims to explore the career trajectories of successful South African and Mauritian women leaders and the career choices and strategies these women employed to overcome the societal expectations and organizational barriers to progress into senior leadership positions.

3.8 Facilitating factors for women's career advancement

Despite the many barriers that women encounter, there is a proportion of those globally who have reached senior leadership and management positions. Research on women from Western contexts who successfully attained senior management roles attributed their success to a diverse set of individual, organizational and societal factors. The following section will discuss the existing literature on career success, the factors that contribute to career development and progress into senior and management leadership positions.

Career success

Career success is defined as “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experiences” (Judge et al., 1995, p. 486). Career success has objective and subjective elements (Callanan, 2003) and is described as an evaluative concept (Jaskolka et al., 1985). Measurements of career success vary, depending on who is judging. When career success is evaluated by others, objective and observable criteria are used, and evaluations of career success by the individual pursuing the career a personal appraisal of how accomplished and successful the individual feels about their career are considered (Jaskolka et al., 1985). Objective criteria for career success include salary, the number of promotions a person has achieved, their position within the hierarchy and subjective career success include criteria such as feelings of personal achievement, acting with integrity, being recognized for job performance and feelings of autonomy. Mirvis and Hall (1994, p. 366) defined career success as “the experience of achieving goals that are personally meaningful to the individual, rather than those set by parents, peers, an organization, or society,” implying that all workers have careers, each of which can be considered successful

in some way, thus expanding the definition of career success to include more personal goals than vertical goals.

Empirical studies on gender differences in the concept of career success found that women describe career success more broadly using a mixture of objective and subjective criteria. Parker and Chusmir (1992) study found that non-managerial women appreciated family relationships and personal fulfilment more highly than non-managerial men, who placed high importance on wealth and position. Duxbury and peers conducted a study among 2,300 professional and managerial employees in the public sector to investigate participants' personal definition of success (Duxberry et al., 1999). Duxberry et al. (1999) found that women emphasized balance between their work and non-work lives, strong on-the-job relationships, learning and developing new skills, and higher levels of responsibility as indicators of success. Whereas male participants in the study rated the ability to shape the direction of the company as important. Duxberry et al. (2000) conducted a similar study amongst 1,500 high-tech knowledge workers and similar findings emerged. Men valued setting and impacting company direction while women valued work-life balance, working with stimulating people, and developing relationships on the job. Dyke and Murphy (2006) studies found that women in upper management roles reported that men and women's concept of career success was vastly different. Dyke and Murphy's study found that women who progressed into top management positions valued balance and did not perceive their need for balance and their need for professional achievement as mutually exclusive. In other studies, women described career success in terms of the challenges they met, and Makosana (1997, as cited in Riordan & Louw-Potgieter, 2011, p. 158) claimed that "Black women in South Africa described success by what had been overcome rather than the number of promotions achieved".

These findings suggest that career success is a complex phenomenon and traditional criteria used to measure career success, power, wealth, and status may not be as significant in the current organizational context (Dyke & Murphy, 2006).

Presence of female board members

Research in developed country contexts found that achieving a critical mass of women in senior positions sends a strong message that women are capable leaders, and these successful women leaders in turn serve as role models and sponsors for women lower down the hierarchy (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Cohen et al., 1998; Huffman et al., 2010; Stainback &

Kwon, 2012). More women in high-ranking positions are advantageous to other women lower down the organizational ranks in terms of hiring and promotions and can even reduce gender segregation, the gender wage gap and the perception of “token women.” Konrad et al. (2008, p. 157) investigated the experiences of women from Fortune 1000 companies and concluded that in companies where there were three or more women in the corporate board, “women were more likely to raise issues related to the advancement of women in the company . . . , as well as taking more active roles in mentoring women executives and speaking to women’s networks.” Skaggs et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study amongst Fortune 1000 companies headquartered in Texas, USA to describe the “influence of women in top corporate leadership positions on women’s managerial representation” (Skaggs et al., 2012 p.941). The findings from this study revealed that “adding women to corporate boards is positively associated with women’s managerial odds, particularly when representation exceeds 15%” (Skaggs et al., 2012, p. 942) and concluded that women need occupy around 55% of corporate board positions before they can positively influence recruitment, hiring and promotion decisions in favor of women. Similar findings were reported by Matsa and Miller (2011), demonstrating that increases in female presence on company board of directors can lead to successive increases in the number of women in top management. As Elacqua et al. (2009) claimed, the visibility of gender diversity in top management sends a strong message to women lower down the hierarchy that women can aspire to those positions.

Organizational level support

Studies amongst senior female managers in the British hospitality industry found that organizational level actions, such as transparent gender equality programs and work–life friendly policies, facilitate women’s career advancement. Recent studies amongst senior women in the hospitality industry in Western contexts found that proactive equality policies and processes were crucial for attracting and retaining high caliber women into senior management roles in the hospitality sector (Calinaud et al., 2021; Mate & Do, 2019) and findings amongst female academics reported similar findings. Calinaudet et al. (2021) suggested that family-friendly policies, such as flexible work arrangements and well-developed paternity leave policies, help women balance their professional and personal commitments and maintain career continuity. However, Callan (2007) reported that flexible work arrangements are only effective when organizational cultures support family-friendly policies.

Developmental Assignments

Education and skills development, building human capital through investing in learning, and development activities were found to enable women's career success (Wodhams, 2008). Scholarly research found that women rely more on educational qualifications and formal career management processes for promotion than men (Heilman et al., 1998; Powell & Butterfield, 1994). Acquisition of experience, education and skills, and applying the required skills and knowledge when performing jobs is critical for career opportunities and promotion (Hoobler et al., 2011). Professional abilities and capabilities are important for women to have access to high quality jobs. Developmental job assignments also contribute to career success for women. Job assignments that involve starting a new business unit, downsizing a department, or repairing a poor-performing business operation – essentially, difficult assignments – were found to be related to career success (Mainiero et al., 1994). Mainiero et al. (1994, p. 56) reported from their findings that “a combination of ‘hot’ problems and then solving them in innovative, fresh, entrepreneurial ways allows her to widen her base of support.” Challenging assignments heighten expertise and allow for growth in new methods of problem-solving (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2007), improve job required competencies (Dragoni et al., 2009), and facilitate on-the-job learning (Preenen et al., 2011). Challenging assignments compel protégés to accept tasks that stretch their capacities. Successful women also reported that demonstrating consistent high performance (Ragins, 1998), networking with powerful men and being sponsored (Davies-Netzley, 1998), and setting career goals (Russell, 1994) facilitated their career success in management.

Formal mentoring

Mentoring is a “relationship between a person with advanced experience and knowledge and a more junior person who seeks assistance, guidance and support for their career, personal and professional development” (Fowler et al., 2007, p. 666) Studies have demonstrated that individuals who were mentored out-performed those who were not mentored (Chao, 1997; Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997). Mentors provide career support in the form of sponsorship, coaching, exposure and psychological support and counselling (Kram, 1985). Formal and informal mentoring benefits both men and women; however, women experience more difficulty in finding influential mentors informally (as described earlier in the section on

the interactional barriers that women experience), thus formal mentoring programs were found to be crucial enablers for women's career development (Bozionelos, et al., 2016; Dashper, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2010). Dashper's (2018) study amongst women from the events industry at different stages in their career reported that formal industry-wide mentoring enhanced participants' confidence, helped participants to commit to career planning and setting goals, and expanded participants' professional networks. Mentoring also contributes to organizational success (Locke & Williams, 2000; Marin-Chua, 2009) and sound mentoring relationships build women's capabilities and effectively contribute to creating social change (Murphy et al., 2017).

Networking was another interactional enabler of women's career success. Amongst Australian women, cultivating networks with peers and senior figures within the organization was described as a key enabler to overcome the challenges that women in academia encounter (Mate & Do, 2019). Dang (2017 p. 43) noted that "women's interpersonal and networking skills play an important role in winning support of their superiors and colleagues in placing them in their current positions of power and leadership."

Individual factors

Personal characteristics such as "resilience, self-efficacy, assertiveness, commitment, and personal vision" were described as significant facilitators for women in leadership (Calinaud et al., 2021, p. 687). Colwill and Townsend (1999, p. 208) found that emerging industry senior leaders should possess characteristics such as "high level of education; global focus, information-sharing; extensive delegation; results-driven; ability to cope with high levels of pressure and adaptable to rapid change." Women have a higher degree of emotional and cultural intelligence, the ability to empower others and adopt a shared leadership approach, place higher emphasis on customer service and employee well-being, and adopt a considerate and caring leadership style (Evans 2010). These characteristics are consistent with the competency profiles described by Colwill and Townsend (1999). Women are constantly multitasking and managing the home and family responsibilities, making them more suitable for similar roles in the organizational context (Evans, 2010) and indicating that women are suitable and qualified for careers in leadership positions yet are not progressing into these positions. Additionally, Fisher (2002) described women as having intrinsic values, and having the ability to read people and understand them and should be valued and appreciated for these qualities in society and in organizational roles. Enaifoghe (2018), found that female leaders

have “resonance-building leadership styles, and are adaptive in their communication style.” In their study, women were described as cooperative, collaborative, and mentoring, and these qualities are critical for progressive leadership.

Clevenger and Singh (2013) reported that personal career plans supported with transparent promotion policies and processes were another enabler of career success for women. Acker (1990; 2012) explained that career development plans give women a sense of direction and can assist women overcome gender stereotype barriers. Along with career development plans, Calinaudet al. (2021) reported that investing time reading about current trends and evolutions within the industry allows women to adapt their career plans.

Social support and assistance from partners and spouses were found to be helpful throughout women’s careers. As described earlier, women are responsible for the majority of household chores and childrearing – spouses that demonstrate support through helping women with these duties was found to influence women’s career progress (Cimirotic et al., 2017; Valimaki et al., 2009).

The literature on the perception and existence of the glass ceiling and the barrier the glass ceiling effect creates is well documented as described in the literature review above.

3.9 Summary

The aim of the chapter was to provide a review of the literature on women’s careers in leadership and management. Much of the existing literature on career development and leadership is centered around masculine experiences in Eurocentric contexts. There exists a substantial body of literature on the barriers to women’s career advancement into senior management and leadership roles in academic settings.

The role of societal expectations and the socio-cultural context of developing countries in a postcolonial era on gender equality and women’s progress was examined and the scarcity of research in South Africa and Mauritius among senior managers and professional in the business context was identified as a gap in the literature. The literature on how women conceptualize and enact leadership and the experiences of women who have successfully transitioned into senior leadership roles in developing countries in the business context is a fairly new area of research. The literature review also indicated that there is a scarcity of

research on women in top management positions in non-Western contexts. Another aim of this study is to understand how women conceptualize and enact leadership from a developing country context. Investigating women's lived career experiences and their career pathways from early career stages through to their advancement into senior management positions will increase our understanding of how women navigate the intricate process of vertical segregation, which the literature shows to be inflexible despite government reforms. The experiences of women from South Africa and Mauritius who have successfully transitioned into senior management roles in corporate contexts and how these women conceptualize and enact leadership is a significant gap in the literature and the current study aims to address that gap. The changing economic, social and cultural contexts in South Africa and Mauritius call for more research that generates macro- and micro-level changes necessary to create gender-equal and inclusive societies in culturally and contextually diverse countries. Against this background and applying a qualitative research design, the outcomes of this research project are to add to the literature on women's career success and experience in corporate South Africa and Mauritius. Another outcome of this study is to identify and understand how women from two Sub-Saharan African countries conceptualize leadership. The following chapter outlines the research design for this study.

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The literature review examined relevant literature on the advancement of women from middle into senior management roles in Africa, South Africa and the Western context. This chapter explains the research methodology applied to address the research questions for this study. The chapter begins with an overview of the qualitative research paradigm and describes the way the study was conducted and the criteria for evaluating qualitative research. A qualitative method was selected because my aim was to understand the unique experiences of women in senior management in South Africa and Mauritius. The strengths and limitations of the qualitative paradigm are discussed. Thereafter a detailed description of the research design, the participant recruitment process, data collection methods and the data analysis process will be provided.

4.2 The research question and research objectives

The literature review revealed that whilst there is some research on female leadership and career transitions of South African women, there is very little published research about women's conceptualization of leadership and career advancement in Mauritius. This research builds knowledge by exploring the experiences of South African and Mauritian women leaders who have made the transition from middle to senior management in corporate Mauritius and South Africa. This study further explores how women from two upper-middle class economies in the Sub-Saharan African region conceptualize leadership. There is currently a lack of understanding of how women conceptualize leadership and what it means to be a female leader in Mauritius and South Africa.

While there is a body of existing research on leadership and management, much of the research is from a male perspective. Studying the experiences of women who have progressed into senior leadership roles brings forth each woman's diverse experience in progressing in the corporate environment. By investigating the experiences of women, and identifying how

women have empowered themselves, strategies that can transform patriarchal systems can be identified, including a focus on diversity dimensions.

The perspectives and experiences of South African and Mauritian women who successfully transitioned from middle into senior management and executive positions are limited. Some research has identified that it is particularly challenging for women to develop a career in leadership and progress into senior leadership positions due to the gendered nature of organizational practices, norms and values. Another problematic issue is the identity conflict that women experience. Women leaders may struggle with their identity as leaders and how others perceive them in senior leadership roles (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Humberd & Clair, 2016; Karelaia & Guillen, 2014).

Given the limited understanding of female senior executives' career journey and transition into senior leadership positions, their experiences in senior leadership roles, their conceptualizations of leadership, and the assumption that women's experiences are likely to differ from the predominantly White male and Western perspective of existing research led to the development of the research question: How do women from South Africa and Mauritius transition from middle management into senior leadership roles and conceptualize leadership?

This overarching question aimed to achieve the following research objectives (RO):

RO1: Understand how management and leadership are conceptualized by women in Mauritius and South Africa.

RO2: Identify and examine the factors that influence the transition from middle manager to senior manager/leader for women in Mauritius and South Africa.

RO3: Explore women's experiences of advancing from manager to senior manager/leader in Mauritius and South Africa to determine how to improve the career prospects and socio-economic potential of women pursuing management careers.

RO4: Investigate what systemic organizational policies and practices are needed to improve the percentage of women in senior leadership roles in Mauritius and South Africa.

RO5: Develop a conceptual framework based on the experiences of women who have successfully transitioned from middle management into senior management in Mauritius and South Africa.

The next section provides an overview of the research design to answer the research question and to address the research objectives.

4.3 Overview of the Research Design

“[O]ne can’t judge the appropriateness of the methods in any study or the quality of the resulting findings without knowing the study’s purpose”.

(Patton, 2002 p10)

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) called for further qualitative research on women in leadership and management as most research on women in leadership in Africa has been conducted using a quantitative methodology. This research focuses on the lived experiences of women from South Africa and Mauritius, their conceptualization of leadership and their career journey from the early career phase to a senior management/leadership role. The ways in which they individually transitioned into senior leadership roles and comparisons between the experience of South African and Mauritian women is also explored. A qualitative research approach uncovers veiled individual, team, and organizational processes and provides an understanding of how these processes evolve over time. At the individual level, qualitative research is vital for understanding what individuals experience and how they interpret their experiences (Bluhm et al., 2011). Additionally, qualitative research contributes to an understanding of the specific social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect the phenomenon under study (Bluhm et al., 2011; Bryman, 2004). Babbie and Mouton (2006) and Phendla (2004, cited in Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009 p. 54) mentioned that qualitative research methods “can facilitate reflection and analysis, and bring meaning and an accurate understanding of women’s issues and experiences”.

Studying women who successfully pursued careers in leadership and management and progressed into senior leadership roles in different contexts, allows us to understand more about the career trajectory and career decisions of women who succeed in attaining senior leadership roles. A qualitative approach was selected for this study because it allows us to uncover new knowledge and concepts that consider the social context of the participants (Shah & Corley, 2006). Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the research design.

Figure 4.1*Overview of the research design*

RESEARCH PARADIGM Qualitative study Constructivism/Interpretivism
STRATEGY Phenomenology
DATA COLLECTION Semi-structured in-depth interview using life stories
STUDY POPULATION Women in senior leadership positions
SAMPLING Purposive Snowballing
DATA ANALYSIS Thematic analysis

Qualitative research has been defined by several researchers. The frequently cited definitions of qualitative research are detailed in Table 4.1 below. This study was guided by Malterud's (2001) definition and aimed to investigate the phenomenon women in leadership and explore the participants experience, thoughts and feelings. The participants' stories would provide insight into the experience and rich details about the experience.

Table 4.1*Definitions of qualitative research*

Definition	Researcher/s
"An array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in a social world."	Van Maanen (1983, 9)
"Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meaning are, what the world looks like in that particular setting.... The analysis strives for in-depth understanding."	(Patton, 1985, p. 1)

<p>“Qualitative research, also called naturalistic inquiry, developed within the social and human sciences, and refers to theories on interpretation (hermeneutics) and human experience (phenomenology). They include various strategies for systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textual material obtained while talking with people or through observation. The aim of such research is to investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves.”</p>	<p>(Malterud, 2001, p. 398)</p>
<p>“Qualitative research is essential when we need to understand a complex issue in greater detail. This detail can only be obtained by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in literature.”</p>	<p>Creswell (2012, p 48)</p>
<p>“Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in theory natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case study, personal experience introspective, life story interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individual lives.”</p>	<p>Denzin & Lincoln (2004, p 2)</p>

Qualitative research comprises fieldwork that mainly involves an inductive research process that presents rich descriptions of participants’ lived experiences and the meanings that participants constructed from these experiences. Having decided to adopt a qualitative methodology, the next step was to identify the appropriate qualitative method.

A research paradigm is a framework that guides how research should be conducted and is based on the researcher’s assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2009). According to Creswell (2007) there are four schools of thought: social constructivism/interpretivism, positivist/post-positivist, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism. Constructivism suggests, “that social reality is subjective since it is socially constructed” (Collis & Hussey, 2009 p 59). Constructivism accepts that there are numerous realities and confirms that a “deeper understanding of phenomenon is only possible through understanding the interpretations of that phenomenon from those experiencing it” (Shah & Corley, 2006 p. 1832). Schwandt (1998) reiterates, “The process of investigation and understanding starts with the participants and through a ‘dialectic’ of iteration, analysis, critique, reiteration, reanalysis, and so on that leads eventually to a joint (among inquirer and respondent) construction of the findings” (Schwandt, 1998). According to Guba and Lincoln

(1989, p143), “constructions are resident in the minds of individuals. They do not exist outside of the persons who created them and hold them, they are not part of some ‘objective’ world that exists apart from their constructors.”

Following the constructionist paradigm, this study focuses on the diverse experiences’ women have had in male-dominated social, cultural and organizational environments. Their perceptions of events and situations will vary because of their subjective view of their experiences. The social and cultural context in which women develop their careers in management is complex and a quantitative approach may not capture this level of complexity.

Epistemology is concerned with what constitutes knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009) in an area of study. Chia (2002, p. 6) described epistemology as “how and what is possible to know.” Thus, epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is generated and what is accepted as valid knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 112) claimed that “there are multiple versions of reality and as a result there can be no singular truth.” Interpretivism recognizes that researchers have values, and these values decide what are acknowledged as facts. In an interpretivist investigation, the investigator aims to interpret meaning, inductively generate meaning and recognize that there can be biases and multiple perspectives. Researchers adopting an interpretivist approach endeavor to reduce the gap between the investigator and the phenomena under investigation.

The philosophical assumptions underpinning this project are reflected in the constructivist ontology and the interpretive epistemology. One of the main strengths of qualitative research is the assumption that reality and knowledge are socially constructed and maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). According to Biggart and Hamilton (1987) qualitative studies of leadership recognize that:

Leadership is a relationship among persons embedded in a social setting at a given historical moment. Strategies of leadership must consider the normative basis of the relationship and the setting, and the distinctive performance abilities of the actors involved. Theorists, no less than would-be leaders, must take these factors into account. (p 439)

Similar views were expressed by Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) when they described leadership as “acutely context sensitive. The zones of maneuver open to the new leader in deciding what to change and how to go about it are bounded by the context within and outside

the firm” (p 165). Similarly, increasing our understanding of careers and career development, Blustein et al. (2005) argued that:

Using the methods and framework of qualitative research, social constructionist research seeks to establish a more empathetic and closer connection to participants and gain a deeper understanding of their experience through firsthand accounts, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, interviews, and narratives. (p 356)

Moreover, Cohen et al. (2004) claimed that social constructivism acknowledges that people are part of their environments, and that through their actions they contribute to the creation of “the materials that become the constraints and opportunities they face. It is an iterative and ongoing process, involving at times the reproduction of existing structures and at times their transformation” (p. 409).

4.4 Rigor in qualitative research

Methodology refers to “an approach to the process of research, encompassing a body of methods” (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Qualitative data collection methods include observation, interviews, focus groups, and collecting extant texts (Carter & Little, 2007, p.1318). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data. In-depth interviews are valuable to “find out what is happening [and] to seek new insights” (Robson, 2002, p. 59). In-depth interviews gave me greater flexibility in the interview process and facilitated participants’ engagement on their own terms in relation to the subject under investigation. It is also an approach to data gathering that is closely related to feminist research. The main disadvantages of in-depth interviews include the large amount of time and planning required for the interviews, and the sample population is often small thus the findings cannot be generalized (Liamputtong, 2013).

Bryman et al. (1996, p. 354) described four types of qualitative research design relevant to the study of leaders, as shown below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Four types of qualitative research design

Type of research design	Description
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1. Detailed study of a single organization and leader.	These types of studies use participant observation, some semi-structured interviews and the examination of documents such as minutes of meetings and mission statements.
2. Multiple case study design.	Involves a detailed examination of leaders in a small number of organizations. Researchers aim is to make direct comparisons between the cases as a method to develop theoretical insights. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews with leaders and other key actors; examination of documentation and little non-participant observation.
3. Research design that focuses on what a fairly large number of leaders say about their leadership practices.	This design is based on semi-structured interviews with the leaders concerned.
4. A research design that invites people to describe specific leaders or leadership practices.	This design involves detailed narratives from research participants.

The present study examines how women from Mauritius and South Africa have successfully transitioned from middle management into senior leadership roles and their conceptualizations of leadership. The research aligns with Bryman et al's. (1996) fourth description as outlined in Table 4.2 above. This study investigated how women from two developing countries in the African region develop successful careers in leadership, conceptualize leadership and enact leadership, in a corporate context.

The qualitative research design adopted for this study focused on 28 female leaders – 14 from Mauritius and 14 from South Africa. The data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews. Creswell (1998, p.64) recommended that for phenomenological studies a sample size between five to twenty-five as guideline for qualitative research. Bertaux (1981) argued that fifteen is the smallest acceptable sample size in qualitative research while Morse (1994, p. 225) recommended at least six participants for phenomenological studies. Since the sample population was heterogeneous (Kuzel (1992, p. 41) and the research objectives aimed at understanding women's career experiences in two countries, a sample of 14 participants from each country was selected.

The data derived from the interviews provided a rich description of their individual experiences of leadership, in leadership and of their career progress from early career until their

appointment in senior leadership roles. This research involved “listening to women and giving them a voice” (Bagihole, 2002). Each interview was semi-structured and guided by a set of predetermined prompts and open-ended questions (see appendix 9.3). A constructivist–interpretivist researcher conducts in-depth semi-structured interviews with research participants for a longer duration and during the analysis phase I read and re-read transcribed data with the aim of identifying multiple meanings of the phenomenon from the stories and experiences of the participants. I recognized that there is no single truth. This is the process I followed for this research.

The credibility of the research is based on the participants’ detailed descriptions in their own words and peer review. According to Liamputtong (2013), “a peer is a colleague who is not directly involved in the research but has a general understanding of the research topic and of qualitative research inquiry” (p 33). Although I was the primary researcher in this project, I had weekly meetings with my supervisors, as the interviews generated large volumes of data and making sense of the data was overwhelming at the beginning. The peer review process helps a researcher to clarify their perspectives and keeps the researcher honest and is a way of reducing researcher bias (Liamputtong, 2013). This was especially challenging since I collected data from South Africa and Mauritius and being South African, I understood and made sense of the data collected from South Africa much more easily. As a person living in Mauritius, understanding the cultural context from the perspective of Mauritian women and constantly reflecting on my own experience of the Mauritian culture and comparing my experience to the experiences of the research participants was an area where my supervisors guided me immensely. This enabled me to bracket my own experiences and to listen to the voice of the respondents. Husserl (as cited in Byrne, 2001) claimed that bracketing allows a person to “objectively describe the phenomena under study” (p830) and can remove their own preconceived ideas and prior experiences on the topic under study. “Bracketing assumes people can separate their personal knowledge from their life experiences” (p. 830).

The preliminary analysis was presented at an international leadership conference and feedback on the analysis that had been undertaken at that stage was positive from peers.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the audit trail as one of the strategies used to establish the confirmability of the research. The audit trail is a process where the researcher provides a rich description of the research decisions and judgments of the researcher throughout the research project. These descriptions are presented later in this chapter. Memos – notes taken

during data collection – and coded transcripts were read, re-read and cross-checked with recordings to ensure consistency and honesty in the data. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was also used to code and organize data during the analysis phase. Examples of the coding and analysis phase can be found in Appendix 9.4 – 9.6.

The credibility was established by representing the participants' responses on their career in leadership as authentically as possible. Rich descriptions, including direct quotes from the transcripts and a summary of the participants' profiles, aimed at giving voice to the women and to present their experiences in detail.

Furthermore, presenting the findings as separate cohorts and as separate layers that match one another, where possible, allowed me to offer genuine descriptions of women's experiences within the South African and Mauritian contexts. Self-reflexivity describes the honesty and authenticity of the researcher, the research participants and the research processes. Reflexivity encourages the researcher to be honest about their shortcomings, be introspective and assess their own biases and motivations (Tracy, 2010). Detailed descriptions of my reflections are presented throughout this chapter. Through reflexivity, after each interview, I believe that the steps I took resulted in sincerity and authenticity.

Participants faced different obstacles and employed strategies to gain success unique to their social-cultural background. Furthermore, the participant group was heterogeneous, comprising single women, married women with children, married women without children, and single mothers. This gave rise to highly diverse career expectations and aspirations (Hakim 2006). This research study aimed to explore, interpret and understand the real-life experiences of women who successfully transitioned from manager to senior manager and thus this project adopted a constructive ontology and an interpretive epistemology and proposed that the constructive/interpretivist methodology was best suited to achieve the research objectives.

4.5 Empirical Phenomenological Research

“Explore the participant's view of the world and to adopt, as far as possible, an ‘insider's perspective’ of the phenomenon under study”.

Smith (1996 p264)

Phenomenology adopts the position that human truths can only be accessed through inner subjectivity (Thorn 1991). Phenomenological research methods are informed by the

philosophical beliefs of Heidegger (1962); Husserl (1960) and Merleau-Ponty (1962). Manen (1997) described phenomenological research as research that examines “the way that a person experiences or understands his or her world as real or meaningful.” Knowledge cannot only be generated through empirical/analytical science, but rather through sharing “common meaning of mutual history, culture and language of the world” (van Manen 1997, as cited in Flood, 2010, p8). Van Manen described two types of meaning: cognitive and non-cognitive.

Cognitive meaning is “meaning with the designative, informational, conceptual and expository aspects of text – the semantic and linguistic meaning that makes social understanding possible” (van Manen, cited in Flood 2010 p.7). Non-cognitive meaning includes meanings of text that lead to phenomenological information that deepens everyday understanding, as described by van Manen (1997). As phenomenological knowledge is generated, this leads to thoughtful action through constructionism. By studying people’s lived experiences and subjective understanding, the researcher interprets how people interact in their environment and their social context.

According to Crotty (1998, as cited in Bennett-Jacobs et al., 2005, p. 13), “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their worlds and developed and transmitted within essentially social context.” There are two main phenomenological methods: descriptive (eidetic) and interpretive (hermeneutic). The descriptive approach assumes that subjective information is beneficial for researchers who aim to understand individual motivation because how people behave is influenced by what they perceive as real.

Interpretive phenomenology is founded on understanding how things appear. The researcher encourages the research participant to describe an experience without trying to interpret the experience. Interpretive approaches address the question of what it means to exist in the world. This involves the researcher becoming immersed in the research participant’s world and the researcher uses reflexivity to create understanding of the research data. Heidegger (as cited in Byrne, 2001) recognized that “gender, culture, history, and related life experiences prohibit an objective viewpoint yet enable people to experience shared practices and common meanings” (p 831). This perspective recognizes that while “people are free to make choices,” choices are constrained by specific events or phenomena in their lives (Flood 2010, p. 9). The researcher then analyzes the meanings of the choices and how these meanings

impact the research participants' choices. The researcher's expertise guides the research process and Heidegger disputed Husserl's claim that the researcher can separate or bracket their prior knowledge and experience on the topic under investigation. Heidegger established that the researcher applies reflective thinking and writing that leads to creating an understanding of the meaning of the experience. Reflective researchers examine their personal connection with the research and this connection informs the research. One of the challenges of researching the lived experience of research participants is to establish clarity on the nature of the knowledge being analyzed.

Throughout the research process, the researcher must reflect on the process of interpreting the lived experience (Wilson, 2014). Phenomenologists are concerned with research participants' experiences of something and understanding what makes those experiences distinct and recognizable (Sokolowski, 2000). The aim of phenomenological research is to identify and understand "what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience" (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1985) described two descriptive levels of the empirical phenomenological approaches:

Level 1, the original data is comprised of naïve descriptions obtained from open-ended questions and dialogue and level 11, the researcher describes the structures of the experience based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participant's account or story" (Giorgi, 1985, p. 69).

According to Byrne (2001), researchers adopting the phenomenological approach must:

1. organize how they aim to address the research questions
2. develop a clear sampling plan
3. collect data through observations, interviews, or written descriptions
4. analyze data using transcriptions of interview data and identify broad themes through a coding and categorization process (thematic analysis)
5. use direct quotes from the participants and confirmations by others to ensure credibility of the conclusions.

For this study, I followed Byrne's (2001) model and Giorgi (2005) and Gioia et al. (2012) thematic analysis process.

4.6 Research design and implementation

My choice of methodology was consistent with the constructivist/interpretive research paradigm because the focus was on understanding the phenomenon of leadership and transition to leadership from the participants' perspectives. One of the main challenges of a qualitative research strategy is the tendency for the researcher to focus on searching for data rather than examining the data. This is more so during the axial coding stage, where I became very descriptive and lacked a critical eye for the meanings within the descriptions. Axial coding "puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its sub-categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My supervisors helped me immensely during this phase through active dialogue, discussion and debate regarding the meaning of the data. Corley and Gioia (2011) established that investigating organizational worlds through the individuals operating in the organizational context's researchers describe, explain and prescribe the experience. There is an increasing need to focus on the processes by which individuals and organizations interact in order to capture the qualities that describe the phenomenon under investigation (Gioia et al., 2012). Aligned with the assumptions of the constructivist/interpretive paradigm that demonstrates that the world is socially constructed (Schwandt, 1998) and "by studying the social construction process we focus the study on an understanding of the participants experiences rather than the number and frequency of measurable occurrences. As Einstein claimed: 'not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted'" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 16).

Research participants are "knowledgeable agents" and the researcher is described a "glorified reporter," and the researcher structures the interview in a way that gives voice to the participants and analyzes that data in a way that represents the voices, thereby allowing for the discovery of new concepts (Gioia et al., 2012). I believe that this approach helped me with the analysis and the thesis that emerged from the data was co-created through the research participants' stories and addressing the research questions.

4.6.1 Data collection methods

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted, but in answering the questions the participants took a life-story approach (Acevedo et al., 2019). The life stories they shared related to their lived experience. The life story approach has been used in feminist research to uncover the diverse experiences of women and to give voice to women in disciplines that have

been previously neglected (Ojermark, 2007). This interview approach provided participants with a platform to narrate their experiences based on their lived experiences and allowed the participants to appreciate their own lives and social realities (Acevedo et al., 2019, p. 349). This approach was appropriate for exploratory research in the social constructivist paradigm.

The current study is based upon the participants' life histories and their career decisions and life stories. The research involved analyzing research participants' "whole life" and participants' "retrospective memories became a window into broader social and societal conditions" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 12) that impact women's careers. Bertaux (1995, as cited in Ojermark, 2007, p. 6) argued that collecting data on the life histories from participants from the "same social milieu" can contribute to understanding a certain social reality or the phenomenon of interest. Women who succeed in patriarchal societies in male-dominated career roles are in the best position to provide valuable insights into the transformations required to create gender inclusive organizational and societal systems. A dearth of research on women in senior management positions in developing countries, specifically the Sub-Saharan African region, established the motivation to investigate and understand women's experience in corporate contexts and their progress from early career into senior leadership roles.

Given the life history perspective three approaches to analyzing life histories were described by Miller (2000). The first is narrative, which involves analyzing the interview and identifying themes that emerge from the interview transcript. This approach entails a microanalysis of the transcribed text to develop a deeper understanding of the contextual nature of reality. This methodology was adopted for the study because this study aimed to explore and understand women's experiences of transitioning from middle management to senior leadership positions and their conception and enactment of leadership. The second is the realist approach which begins with hypothesis development; through interviews, facts are then produced and incorporated into theory. The third is the neo-positivist approach where the research approach allows for systematic data collection and data analysis and is dependent on the data for theory building (Miller, 2000). In the career context, narrative approaches allow the researcher to capture the sequential nature of career experiences. Arther et al. (1989) explained that narratives are connected to the concept of career as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (p. 8). The role of narratives in examining, describing and understanding careers has been acknowledged (Bujold, 2004; Cochran, 1990; Cohen & Mallon 2001). Career progress entails taking risks and because individuals handle challenges, uncertainty, opportunities and inner conflicts differently, researching and understanding career

behaviors is a creative process and the life story interview method allows the researcher to make meaning from the experiences and discover the environmental influences on careers (Bujold, 2004). Drawing on Millers work, micro-analysis of the transcribed text was undertaken.

Interviewing women from two countries – one a country where I was born and raised and the other a country where I settled and established my family and career – was a profound experience. Most of the participants acknowledged the critical importance of the research project for women in South Africa and Mauritius and were warm and forthcoming during the interviews. In the following section, the target population for this study is discussed.

4.6.2 Study population

The target population for the study was women who held senior management/leadership positions in private and public companies in corporate South Africa and Mauritius. A senior leader/manager was defined thus: “as positions with titles such as ‘Director’ comprise a ‘step beyond’ senior manager, but who do not provide equity in the firm, and are instead of an employer-employee nature” (Almer et al., 2012, p. 122). The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency in Australia classified management and senior management into three categories: Tiers 1, 2, and 3. The classification of management included Tier 1 managers, those responsible for formulating programs and policies and assuming accountability for financial, employment and human resource aspects of a specific work area. Tier 2 is responsible for, and supervises, Tier 3 Managers. The duties of Tier 2 managers are of higher order than Tier 3 managers in that they are directly responsible for leadership and strategic direction of lower tier managers. They directly report to Tier 1 managers and support Tier 1 managers in relation to strategic organizational operations and development. Tier 1 management is defined as having ultimate control of the organization and usually there would only be one person in that category in each organization (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2009, p. 584). For the purpose of this study, a senior leader/manager was defined as a manager at the Tier 2 level who did not have equity in the organization. Only participants who ascended into a senior leadership role through a recruitment and selection process were selected for the study. Female entrepreneurs and women who held senior leadership roles in family-owned businesses were excluded from the sample because this study aimed to identify how women progressed in their career in corporate organizational contexts.

The task of selecting a sample for qualitative studies is very important and often has a strong influence on the quality of the research. Qualitative research includes purposive and snowballing methods. According to Patton (2002), the strength and logic behind using purposive sampling rests in the researcher selecting “information rich” participants for an in-depth study, thus allowing the researcher the opportunity to learn more about the topic under investigation. The sample size is small, and the participants are selected to serve and investigate the purpose rather than to be statistically representative of a population (Carter & Little 2007). A purposive sampling technique was adopted to recruit participants from Mauritius and South Africa. Purposive sampling “involves the conscious selection by the researcher of certain subjects or elements to include in the study” (Crookes & Davies, 1998). South Africa is a racially diverse population and Mauritius is an ethnically diverse population. While recruiting participants, I was mindful to include women from the different ethnic and racial groups. The online screening for participants enabled the researcher to search for diverse participants and invite them for an interview after the diversity criteria were satisfied. Recruiting and selecting participants for the study was carried out in three phases and is described in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3

Participant recruitment phases

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
South Africa	I scanned JSE listed company websites and generated a list of potential participants. I called companies and explained my research to potential participants’ personal assistants. Emails with the participant information sheet and consent form were sent. Opportunity: When the targeted participant was unavailable, the personal assistants provided the information for other participants. Challenge: First, scheduling a Skype interview was met with hesitation from	Referrals. I shared my research with close family members and friends from South Africa during social events I attended. Opportunity: I used their names with permission when I contacted potential participants and participants agreed to be interviewed. Challenge: The referrals were limited to Indian women. Second the two participants from personal networks felt obligated to participate. I found that establishing rapport during the interview was difficult. Post-interview reflection helped me realize that the	I scanned social media (Facebook and LinkedIn). From the lists generated through the internet search, I started to reach out to potential participants through social media. I secured my first interview via Facebook chat. Opportunity: I joined “Now Network of Women” on LinkedIn. This group has 15,681 followers (as of 14 January 2020) and connects professional women and promotes women’s successes. The advantage of LinkedIn is that once you have connected to a number of graduates, the search engine prioritizes

	<p>potential participants. Second, the potential participants were busy and could not make time for an interview. Outcome: Two participants agreed and participated in the study.</p>	<p>participants' motivation to participate was largely to meet the referrer's expectations rather than to share their story. Outcome: Two women were interviewed. I decided to rethink my strategy to recruit participants and did not use referrals thereafter.</p>	<p>others from the same program. Challenge: It was very time consuming and while many women accepted my invitation, an equal number did not respond. I sent out 84 LinkedIn invites and over the period of 12 months, 20 responded positively and agreed to participate and 10 culminated in a Skype or WhatsApp interview. Many women were busy and could not make time to participate in the study. Outcome: From the 14 women who participated in the study, 10 participants were recruited via LinkedIn.</p>
Mauritius	<p>I scanned the Directory of Top 100 Companies in the Mauritius Index. I called the company and sent emails with the participant information sheet to potential participants' personal assistants. Challenge: In 2016 the composition of the executive team (where available) was male, and/or most company websites were outdated, or the members of the senior management team was not published. Outcome: Initially two participants agreed to participate in the study. Phase 1 was ineffectual. The women I contacted were initially curious about the study but did not commit to a date and time for the interview.</p>	<p>Referral. I shared my research interest with colleagues and students at my workplace and asked for referrals from their networks or their spouses' networks. Opportunity: Students' parents worked in top companies and colleagues were very helpful at this stage. Challenge: Verifying the background of the potential participants. Since the targeted participants had to hold a senior management role in a non-family-owned company, I risked offending colleagues. Social media verification was limited due to some profiles being outdated. Outcome: Eight women agreed to participate in the study. This was the</p>	<p>I made a second attempt to contact previously selected participants. I called their companies and spoke directly to the targeted participants. The second round was much more successful. Four of the women who initially refused to participate agreed to participate. Opportunity: These were women in Director positions and with extensive experience. Challenge: Due to the nature of their job, they scheduled and rescheduled their interview. I persevered and was patient. Outcome: Four women agreed to be interviewed.</p>

		most effective strategy to recruit participants in Mauritius.	
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Purposive sampling using the snowballing technique allowed me to identify participants and ensure that four racial categorizations in South Africa and four ethnic groups in Mauritius were represented in the sample population. Snowballing requires a reference from one person to the next and allows the researcher to approach participants with credibility (Streeton et al., 2004). One of the key advantages of snowballing, is that it allows the researcher to reach potential participants that other direct methods cannot reach. This was especially the case in Mauritius.

4.6.3 Interview reflections

Direct contact via phone calls and emails was ineffective as the people I contacted did not know me and were reluctant to participate. Through referrals, I contacted participants and mentioned the name of referrer (with the referrer's permission) and was able to recruit participants. Finding contacts through organizations provided insider knowledge of people's roles and functions within the organization and this method developed referral chains, was more cost effective than phone calls and very efficient (Patrick et al., 1998) for recruiting participants in Mauritius. Establishing rapport with most participants was not very difficult once they started to tell their career story. I struggled to establish rapport with two participants, MAU4 and MAU7, who appeared to feel quite challenged during the interview. After post-interview reflections and reading the transcripts, I attributed the interview experience to my lack of understanding of the public sector culture (for MAU7) and reluctance on the part of the participant MAU4 to share their story. Participant MAU7 held a senior position in the public sector and was evasive about specific experiences she encountered in the public sector. Participant MAU4's child was a student in my postgraduate class (I was unaware of this prior to the interview – the participant informed me during the interview).

Recruiting participants in South Africa via LinkedIn was the most effective strategy for this part of the study. I used LinkedIn for the current study to recruit female research participants from diverse races, occupational and industrial sectors who held senior management/leadership positions. The information provided on LinkedIn afforded me the

opportunity to carefully research potential participants before reaching out to them. According to Gelinas, et al. (2017) there are two types of recruitment approaches, namely active and passive. I engaged in an active recruitment approach where I approached specific individuals with the aim of enlisting them in the research study (p. 5). I was mindful to respect the privacy of potential participants. I only contacted participants once by sending an invitation to connect. Once the invitation to connect was accepted, I sent the participant information sheet and remained in contact with the participant via LinkedIn.

To gain a holistic and complete picture of participants' journeys to senior leadership, interview questions were designed to focus on different periods in the participants' lives. Data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Since the study involved collecting data in two different countries, a multi-method interview technique was used. Data collection in Mauritius involved face-to-face interviews for all 14 participants and data collection in South Africa involved VoIP interviews for 13 participants and one face-to-face interview with participant SA4 (she was visiting Mauritius and agreed to participate at that time). The decision to adopt a multi-mode interview technique was motivated by the geographical distance. I did not want to restrict recruiting participants from one province in South Africa. Additionally, I was living and working in Mauritius and travelling back and forth between South Africa and Mauritius for interviews would have been very expensive and time consuming.

4.6.4 VoIP interviews

The advantages of using VoIP for this study are that it allowed me to eliminate the costs and time involved in travelling to and from Mauritius and South Africa and enabled me to widen the range for recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds and cultures and from different parts of South Africa (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Since the initial response rate when recruiting participants was so low, when screening LinkedIn profiles, geographical location was not a constraint. The time difference between the two countries was also not a constraint. South Africa is two hours behind Mauritius, so scheduling interviews during or after working hours was easy; Skype interviews also allowed participants to select an interview time and location that suited their commitments (Lacono et al., 2016) and allowed me to collect data from two countries (O'Conner et al., 2008). Given the busy schedules of senior managers, this flexibility may have been one of the reasons participants agreed to be interviewed.

The drawbacks of online interviews highlighted by Hay-Gibson (2010) include the availability of the right software and both the researcher's and the participant's ability to trouble shoot when problems arise. While acknowledging these drawbacks, I selected Skype as the primary video interview platform but was flexible about using other video conferencing software when Skype was not possible. While planning the Skype interviews, I engaged in discussions with peers in the IT field about what could go wrong with a video conference call. Another key reason for success was the participants' commitment to the process. Prior to some interviews, the IT representative from the participant's organization contacted me to set up the conference call. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) found that Skype provided other benefits for qualitative researchers and participants: Skype software is easily accessible and can be downloaded free of charge. Skype also provides a variety of options – video and audio, Skype can be used on both mobile phones and landlines, and has a message function, so if there is a break in audio and video communication the participants could switch to messaging.

The initial research strategy was to use Skype to conduct video conference interviews. The strategy changed as I recruited participants. The challenges of conducting online interviews for data collection mainly involved connectivity issues. These are summarized with solutions adopted in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4

Summary of VoIP challenges and solutions

Challenges	Participant forgot the user password.	Participant logged on to the incorrect Skype profile.	One participant agreed to participate during her drive to work and we could not connect. Once we connected much time was lost and I could not record the interview.
Solutions	Communicated via email and agreed to switch to WhatsApp video call.	Skype for Business and Google Meet.	I made notes during and after the interview.

At the end of the data collection phase for South Africa, I had conducted eight Skype interviews (home edition and Skype for Business), five WhatsApp video calls and one face-to-face interview. Participants could choose whether to turn on the webcam or not; five

participants turned on the webcam. There was no notable difference between those interviews with or without the webcam. I always kept my webcam on, so that participants could see me. The duration of each interviews ranged between 40 minutes and 105 minutes and one interview was 27 minutes due to time lost over connectivity. All participants were tech savvy, patient and helped me find solutions when we experienced technological problems.

4.6.5 Interviews

In Mauritius, 12 interviews took place at the participant's office, one interview at my place of work, and one interview at a coffee shop due to a fire alarm evacuation. The duration of each interview ranged between 47 minutes and 110 minutes. The initial duration for each interview scheduled was 45–60 minutes, but most interviews went on for 90–110 minutes. The participants were very generous with their time and even lost track of time during the interview. Once they began reflecting on their career and their career choices, they were open and forthcoming with their experiences and the conversation flowed easily.

Each interview in Mauritius and South Africa was audio recorded. At the start of each interview each participant was asked for verbal consent and also informed that they could withdraw from the study. For the face-to-face interviews with the participants from Mauritius, I used the Sony ICD-PX470 Digital Wide-Stereo MP3 Voice Recorder and my cellphone recorder as a back-up. For the Skype interviews, I used MP3 Skype Recorder 4.35 (free edition for personal and commercial use) and I placed the Dictaphone next to the laptop speakers as a back-up recorder. Prior to every Skype interview, I conducted mock calls to identify any possible problems I could face during the interview and all recording devices were tested to ensure that the interviews were recorded, and the sound quality was good.

Verifying the identity of the participants from Mauritius and South Africa

To verify the identity of each participant before the interview, I conducted an online search on each participant. Prior to confirming a date and time for each interview, an email exchange between myself and the participant or the participant's personal assistant took place. I also screened the organization in which the participant held the senior leadership position to verify the identity and job role of each participant. All participants were informed that the information would remain confidential. Although the participant information form and consent form were sent to each participant, most participants did not read the form prior to the

interview. Given the nature of their jobs, the participants may not have had the time to read through the documents and were prepared to wait until the interview for this information to be clarified.

Pilot Interviews

Two pilot interviews were conducted. As this was my first experience of conducting data collection interviews, I wanted to trial the face-to-face and Skype interview process. The choice of participant for the pilot interview from South Africa and Mauritius was influenced by the participants' extensive experience and their enthusiasm for the research project. I included the data collected from the pilot interviews in the study as the interviewee responses addressed the research questions. After the pilot interviews, I reflected on the interview process and noted two key concerns: (1) both interviews were 1 hour 40 minutes and I was worried during the interview that the participant would stop the interview before I asked all the pre-prepared questions; and (2) I felt that I focused too much on the career transitions and did not dedicate enough time on the conceptualization of leadership.

Thereafter I transcribed each pilot interview and while transcribing, I realized that my interview process for the South African participant and Mauritian participant was very different. Before the Skype interview, I was very apprehensive about using technology for data collection and more importantly, interviewing someone with higher degree qualifications and so extensively experienced. But the participant was very forthcoming and open and helped me overcome my anxiety. There were no interruptions during the interview and no connectivity issues. We established a rapport very quickly and she was very open and expressive during the interview. The participant volunteered a lot of information (she emailed one of her keynote speeches to me immediately after the interview). Reflecting on the interview, I believe that there was no language barrier; she spoke clear English. Although the interview was semi-structured, the participant spoke about her experience, her career decisions and why she believed women were lagging behind and gave her thoughts on how women can transition into senior leadership without any prompts from me.

While transcribing the pilot interview conducted in Mauritius, I realized that first, I would interrupt the participant while she was speaking with follow-up questions; second, that the participant often apologized for taking time to express herself in English; and third, when there were long pauses, I assumed that the participant did not understand the question and I re-phrased the question without realizing that the participant was searching for appropriate words

and expressions in English (Mauritian participants are bilingual – English and French); and finally, I dedicated too much time to research question two, discussing the participant's career journey, and too little time on exploring the participant's conceptualization of leadership. I also noted that the participant constantly asked if her responses were adequate.

Changes introduced after the pilot interviews.

Following reflection on the pilot interview process, I explained at the beginning of each interview the four key areas of the interview. As I finished one section, I introduced the next section of the interview. This allowed me to control the time and the pace of the interview. I started each interview with questions relating to the participant's definition of leadership and the leadership context in Mauritius for Mauritian participants and the leadership context in South Africa. For South African participants, I allowed more time for each interview and only re-phrased the question when the participant asked me too. I was mindful of my own behavior during the interview and exercised patience during subsequent interviews. As I conducted more interviews my interviewing skills improved.

Reflections on interviews

Participants in Mauritius wanted to get to know me and asked about my background, for example where in South Africa I come from, why I relocated to Mauritius and so on. The participants in Mauritius related their personal and business experience with South Africa and asked questions about me and my perceptions of and experience in Mauritius. Participants wanted to educate me about the Mauritian context – in subtle ways. These were included by explaining the history of Mauritius or asking me if I was aware on the star school system (as explained in Chapter 2) in Mauritius. I found that they were careful too and did not want their expressions to be taken out of context. Some participants often asked if they answered the question correctly. I had to reassure the interviewee that their experiences and decisions were important and that the information they shared was relevant. Two participants were very concerned about recording the interview and confidentiality. For subsequent interviews, I always stressed how the interview data would be stored, used and cleaned to remove all identifying information and statements to ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality was very important for the face-to-face interviews. Participants agreed to participate in the study because they found the study important. The political and legislative landscape may have influenced the women's decision to participate in the study. Similarly, two South African participants were concerned about confidentiality. These two participants

received the invitation to participate from senior male colleagues and may have felt obliged to participate. In the case of MAU7, once I explained how the data would be used and that all names and companies mentioned would be removed, she relaxed and shared her life experience.

As the interview progressed, all participants became more relaxed and willing to share their story and opinions openly. Some participants wanted to share their knowledge of South Africa and other African countries. With my limited travel experience, I found it very interesting how Mauritian participants were able to compare Mauritian, South African, European and American organizations. This was very different from the South African participants. Only one South African participant had worked in London. All other participants worked within South Africa and neighboring countries.

Interviews

For subsequent interviews in Mauritius, I told the interviewees they could express themselves in French. This did not happen often and if it did, it was one or two words or phrases. In such instances, during transcription, I would copy the sentence and ask a French/English language specialist to translate the word or phrase.

As noted above, I decided to divide the interview into four segments, commencing with the conceptualization of leadership, followed by open-ended questions such as “Can you describe your journey into senior leadership.” At this point I was a passive listener and was neutral. The questions were asked in such a way as to not influence the participant and to give each participant enough space to describe their experience in their own words about how these women leaders made sense of critical moments in their life and career and how these led to changes in their enactment of leadership and their career direction and decisions. In interviews where the participant did not flag any challenges and supportive structures, I asked questions about the organizational support the participant received. Each interview ended with questions relating to the structures and policies needed to accelerate the progress of women into senior leadership roles.

Some participants, as discussed above, were uneasy about being recorded. I believe that Mauritius being a small island country where persons in senior positions are well-known, and everyone is connected to one another either through familial or professional networks, may have resulted in this unease. Three participants were more open once I switched off the Dictaphone. It was only then that they spoke about the Mauritian culture and even mentioned

the different ethnicities and explained how ethnic background impacted women and their careers. I listened carefully to the participants and asked if I could make notes. Immediately after the interview, I sat in my car and wrote down my thoughts about the interview. These notes and memos allowed me to reflect on the interview process and understand how my behaviors during the interview may have influenced the participant and the data collection process. This also helped me to identify hidden meanings in the data and clarify my thinking on the research topic and articulate my assumptions and subjective perspectives. According to Glaser (1978), meticulous memo writing prevents the loss of ideas and allows a researcher to retain and record thoughts, feelings, ideas and musings and that can be useful later in the analysis process. Charmaz (2006, as cited in Birks et al., 2008, p. 69) claimed that memo writing “initiates and maintains productivity of the researcher”.

4.7 Data Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of all participants (as described earlier in this chapter) and I transcribed each interview. While the transcription process was very time-consuming, it did allow me to repeatedly listen to the tapes and become familiar with the data. Twenty-seven interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio recording into text documents, and one interview was converted to data from the interviewer’s notes. According to Halcomb and Davidson (2006), verbatim transcription establishes an audit trail and for research adopting a phenomenological framework verbatim transcription facilitates data analysis and brings the researcher closer to the data. I made notes immediately after each interview and also listened to each audio recording. Listening to the audio recordings enabled me to familiarize myself with the data and provided the opportunity to double-check the transcript for errors in transcription. While listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the data, I made notes and memos using the comments function on MSWord and handwritten notes in my notebook. Glaser (2001, p. 145, cited in Jones & Alony, 2011), stated that “all is data,” meaning that “exactly what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever, the source, whether interview, observations, documents. It is not just what is being, how it is being and the conditions of it being told, but all the data surrounding what is being told.”

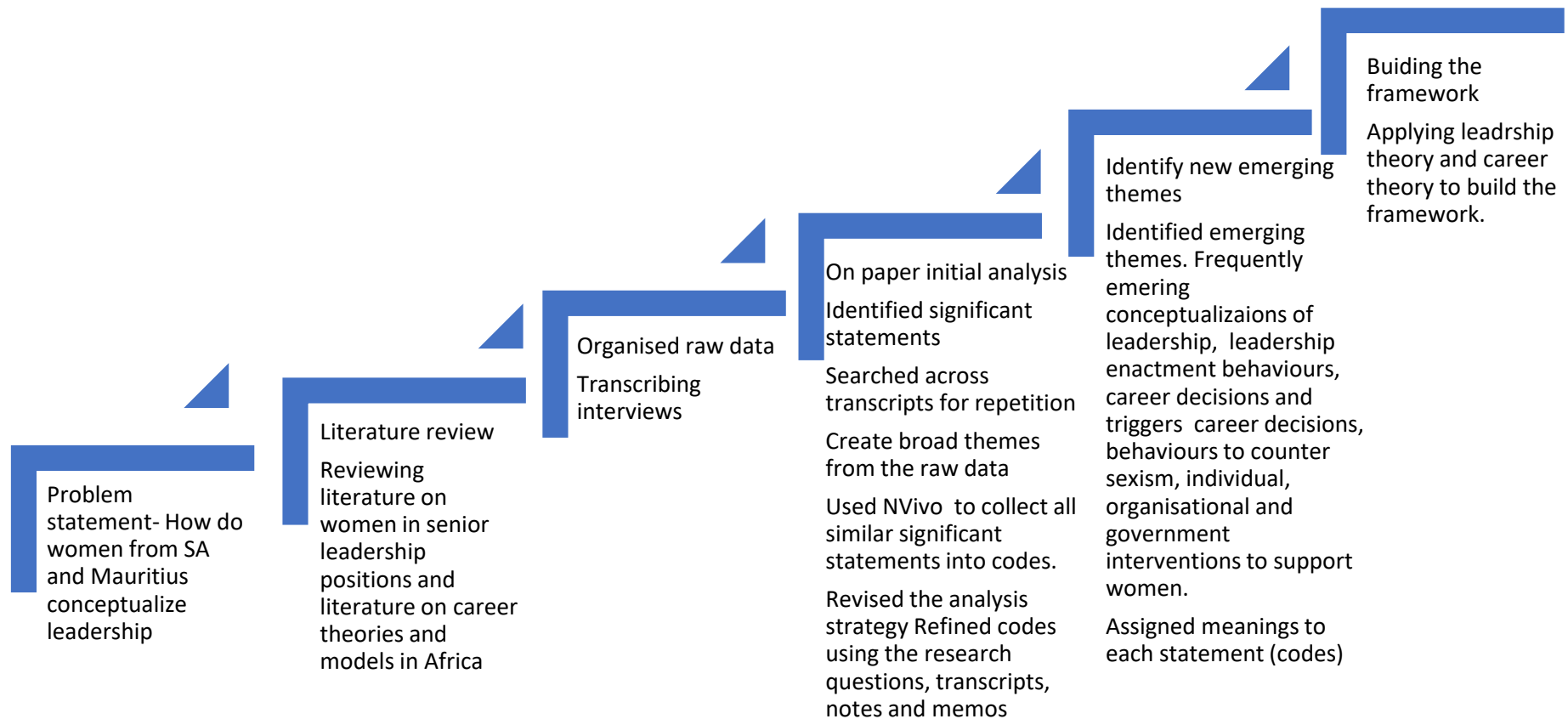
Keeping research notes while interviewing and transcribing interviews allowed me to capture the research context and keep track of my reflections and decisions while interviewing

and undertaking the initial coding. The participants often asked about confidentiality during the interview. This was particularly important for all the participants given that they mentioned names and organizations that could be easily identified. The South African cohort was interviewed just prior to the National Women's Day so they talked about the initiatives they were directly involved in via their organisations and women's groups. While this was not initially part of the research objective, the programs women were involved in provided valuable insights into the unspoken social barriers that women in South Africa encounter and how these may impact their career and lives.

Another noteworthy observation was the reasons why the participants agreed to be part of the research project. The primary motivation was interest in the topic and a desire to contribute to improving the professional lives of women. The participants wanted their stories to serve as a mechanism to change the mindsets of young women: "*I must share my story*" (SA12). On this point the objectives of the researcher and the research participants were aligned and this common objective contributed to establishing rapport during the interview. A second noteworthy observation was the participants' reference to luck or "being lucky" and their reference to motherhood in their description of the difference between male and female leadership styles. This is explained more fully in the findings chapter.

4.7.2 Thematic Analysis

According to Tesch (1990, as cited in Smith & Firth, 2011, p. 54) "thematic analysis is an interpretive process in which data are systematically searched for patterns to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon". This leads to the construction of meaningful themes. Figure 4.2 below illustrates the process of analyzing data and building the research framework that was used for this research.

Figure 4.2*Overview of the Data Analysis*

Note. Adapted from Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Initial analysis

I started writing notes and memos in the margins of the documents as I was transcribing the interviews. This process helped me to track my reflections and make sense of the data. Each audio file, transcript and memo were allocated a non-identifying code and saved as a Microsoft Word document using the same non-identifying code. This allowed me to identify and cross-check excerpts from the interviews during the data analysis phase. I highlighted initial similarities and differences and made notes on specific experiences and expressions to further explore. I maintained this throughout the transcription process. Thematic analysis involves searching across the data “in order to find” repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). After each interview was transcribed, the first reading of the transcripts allowed me to examine the data from different angles (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 229). Initial coding was manual and involved highlighting significant statements, making notes in the margins of the transcripts where I noted similarities or differences between statements (see Appendix 9.4). At this point, I treated the data as one data set and cohort and the data from the Mauritian and South African participants were grouped together. This was followed by creating hand-drawn summaries of the career path for each participant and handwritten summaries of each research question (see Appendix 9.5).

At this stage I worked mainly with text transcripts and my notebook and made reflective notes from each transcript. I worked with each transcript separately and I spent a considerable amount of time immersed in the data in order to broadly understand the participants’ career pathways into senior leadership and the life and career decisions the participants made and how these decisions contributed to their career progress and success in the corporate world. I returned to each participant’s account to identify statements, phrases, and examples that directly related to their definition of leadership and their experience in the corporate context. I was alternating between the participants’ definition of leadership and their experience as a female leader in business. The aim of this phase was to get a feel for each woman’s experience and understand the spoken and unspoken meaning of each participant’s story.

At the end of this process, I collected sets of significant phrases from all participants. I kept track of my first impressions from each transcript and the initial themes that emerged were inductively generated from the raw data. Themes were not dependent on how many participants expressed the same or similar experience but were coded on whether they captured something significant in relation to the research question and objective. For example, when working with

the data from the Mauritian cohort, the cultural stereotypes attached to women working outside the house after hours was not described by all participants, but these comments shed light on the socio-cultural constraints that women from Mauritius faced. With this approach, the themes identified were linked to the data. I found myself comparing experiences amongst women (comparing South African/South African and Mauritian/Mauritian women) and comparing experiences between the two countries (South Africa/Mauritius). This process aligns with Giorgi et al. (1979, p.83) analysis process:

First, the researcher reads the entire description of the learning situation straight through to get a sense of the whole. Next, the researcher reads the same description more slowly and delineates each time that a transition in meaning is perceived with respect to the intention of discovering the meaning.

I continued to work with printed copies until data collection ended. After all interviews were transcribed, I used NVivo Pro 12 to help manage the data. I generated nodes from the interview questions and raw data from each transcript was collated under each node; 72 codes emerged (see Appendix 9.6).

At this point in the analysis, I was extracting significant statements from each transcript and categorizing statements under each node on NVivo. I realized that there were too many codes and sub-codes, and that many extracts from the transcripts were multi-coded. With the high volume of data, I was unable to find direction within the data. At this stage, after de-briefing meetings with my supervisors, I decided to separate the data into two cohorts – South African and Mauritian – and work with one data set at a time. I started with the South African data set and began to code transcript material, guided by the research questions, under five core themes (RQ1–RQ5) to guide the analysis. From the five core themes, sub-themes emerged and transcript data that initially did not fit into the five nodes were categorized under a sixth node – Other. I did not eliminate any codes at this stage and re-started coding by sorting and collecting the data under each research question. All potentially relevant excerpts from the transcript were coded under each broad theme. I was having weekly meetings with my supervisors and these meeting allowed time for peer de-briefing and helped me to examine my thoughts more carefully.

Thereafter I read and re-read the text under each research question and reorganized sections under sub-themes such as “bad leadership,” broad South African and Mauritian context, “characteristics of women,” and “definition of leadership” (see Appendix 9.6).

DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000, p. 362) defined a theme as “an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole.”

Searching for themes

Axial coding “puts those data back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its sub-categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). NVivo proved to be very useful for categorizing and organizing data. As I progressed with reading and re-reading the statements, I felt like I was losing a sense of the data. I revised my approach. I downloaded each node and worked theme by theme on printed copies of the coded data within each theme. I mixed open coding with axial coding and used line-by-line labelling of interview responses. Thereafter I categorized the labels into broad themes. For example, to analyze how women defined leadership the line-by-line labels led to separating the transcript data into conceptualizations of leadership and leadership enactment. For example, from the South African cohort, some women used expressions like, “*I leave no one behind*” and women from Mauritius described their experience of African leadership from their travels and regional training experience. While these comments were not a direct response to the interview question, the data was important because these comments illuminated the contextual nature of leadership and career development.

During the thematic analysis, I became attuned to what I perceived as instances of women’s self and identity construction – how women referred to themselves or other women. For example, the South African cohort used terms such as “*White women*” or “*as a woman*” or “*Black women in SA*,” and the Mauritian cohort used terms and phrases such as “*I am from XXX secondary school*,” “*I did really well at primary school and attended a star college*,” and “*I studied abroad*.” Based on these observations on how women presented themselves, I started to explore the data for changes and transformations that women underwent as they matured and advanced into senior leadership roles. I also explored the critical triggers for career mobility and the socialization process that women undergo in order to adapt and adjust in male-dominated spaces: “Identities are meanings that individuals attribute themselves to answer interrelated questions of ‘Who am I’ and ‘How should I act’” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 6). For interpretive studies, in an organizational context identity was found to be critical in “understanding the complex, unfolding and dynamic relationship between self, work and organisation” (Alvesson et al., 2008, p. 8). How an individual identifies with their profession

and their organization builds their identity and involves embracing new identities as they develop new expertise and take on new organizational roles.

The process of shifting between and within transcripts and making constant comparisons started the process of intuiting. Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) described intuiting as the critical reflection a researcher undertakes to identify themes as they are discovered from the narratives. From this point I started free writing. During free writing, I answered questions such as, how do women from South Africa conceptualize leadership? How do women from Mauritius conceptualize leadership? What were the key triggers for a career transition? How did women from South Africa and Mauritius navigate the senior management environment? What support systems did women use to progress in the corporate environment? How did women describe the corporate context? What can be done/changed to accelerate the progress of women in management and leadership? Sub-themes emerged and summaries were created for each theme and sub-theme. The common themes created the basic structure of the phenomenon.

During this phase my supervisors reviewed the free writing, and emerging themes and sub-themes were vetted during weekly team meetings. For example, initially under the broad theme on career transitions for South African women, extracts relating to the historical context of apartheid, affirmative action legislation and diversity was collated under the sub-theme “triggers for career transition.” Later, these extracts were moved into two sub-themes “legacy and apartheid” and “diversity.”

Reviewing themes

The final stage of the analysis started once I reviewed and refined the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I reviewed the coded data excerpts, and I considered if each theme accurately reflected the meanings from each data set. Any inconsistencies in the initial coding and themes were identified at this stage and if any significant excerpts from the data were excluded, new codes were included and if there were overlaps in the codes, codes were deleted (King, 2004). I then transferred statements from one category to another. The reflective process and reinterpretation of data allowed me to track differences between themes as I integrated the themes. I read and re-read the summaries and integrated how women conceptualized and enacted leadership and how women transitioned into senior leadership positions. I was also concerned that I was not describing the intensity of the sacrifices of participants from Mauritius. For example, participants with children described emotional events in their life and

the regret they felt once they ascended into a senior leadership role. Two participants questioned their choices and reflected that the time lost with their children could not be reclaimed, while other participants looked back and accepted that they had “lost opportunities.” The iterative process of moving back and forth between the raw data and the themes ensured that I provided rich descriptions of the original statements.

Even though revising the data analysis process was time consuming, the revised strategy was necessary and pragmatic. By separating the data sets, significant social, historical and contextual patterns within the data were not lost. I was able to manipulate the data much more easily, and identifying patterns and relationships between the data created more opportunities to make meaning of each data set. As themes emerged from each data set, I was able to identify significant contextual similarities and differences between South Africa and Mauritius and the critical career obstacles that women experience. Twelve themes emerged from South Africa and 11 from Mauritius.

Fitting the pieces together

The final stage of the analysis is for the researcher to establish the connections between the themes and to develop a holistic and integrated discussion that reflects the key themes that emerge. Through this process, I constantly asked myself:

- What actions and experiences did these women undergo that allowed them to succeed in a male-dominated space?
- Did the women have similar career experiences? Did the women face similar challenges?
- Do women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualize leadership differently?
- What do these themes say about South African women’s leadership styles?
- What do these themes say about Mauritian women’s leadership styles?

While analyzing the data and writing about each theme I questioned whether women’s careers and transitions into senior leadership were structured planned journeys or whether they were the outcome of the context, the individual and the opportunities that were available. I frequently questioned how each theme related to each other.

As a result of the analysis, Chapter 7 discusses the *Pathways into Leadership* model, that was developed to explain the findings for the transition experiences. The model applies to both women in Mauritius and South Africa, although at each stage there are some differences in

how the foundations were built and the steps they took in terms of access to support and the type of career moves they made. This is followed by a discussion of their leadership conceptualizations and enactment of leadership in South Africa and Mauritius.

The process of writing about each theme developed from the phenomenological analysis of interview data and showed links and relationships between the themes. While the themes illustrated key elements of the career transitions that women undergo, I realized the themes alone did not reflect the convoluted and complex experiences that women endure. Reflecting on the interrelation of the themes, a four-stage framework on how women transitioned into senior leadership positions emerged. To ensure that the context in which the participants developed their careers was not lost, social-cultural influences on leadership conceptualization and career development were discussed throughout the framework. The stages describe the essential structure of women in business leadership, their leadership styles and the meanings of the participants' collective experiences from early career into a senior leadership role. The four stages provide generalizations from all the participants' stories and insights into the career decisions and strategies that women used to succeed in a male-dominated corporate context.

4.8 Ethical Issues and Data Storage

Permission from each participant was sought at the beginning of each online and face-to-face interview and all participants were emailed the participant information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 9.2) before each interview was scheduled. For this study, the main ethical issue was confidentiality.

To ensure that participants could not be identified, transcripts were labelled with a non-identifiable code, which could be linked to a participant list held only by me and my two project supervisors. Furthermore, when reporting the data, pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' privacy and any identifying information within the transcript was changed in such a way as to protect the identity of the participant while maintaining the meaning of the conversation. Following transcription, all identifiable information, such as names of colleagues, superiors, job titles and organizations mentioned during the interview were removed. All interview recording and transcripts were stored on Curtin University's research network drive and Curtin Mauritius One Drive for storing research project data. This complies with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Curtin's Research Data

and Primary Materials Policy. My supervisors and I would be the only persons with access to the data. The research was approved by Curtin University's Human Resource Ethics Committee (Approval number: HRE2017-0075) in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). I gained ethics approval from the Ethics and Safety Committee (see Appendix 9.1 for ethics approval).

4.9 Summary

This chapter has described the methodology applied in the study of how women from South Africa and Mauritius transition into senior leadership positions. The chapter explained the research questions and research objectives that motivated the study. The research framework used to address the research questions was discussed together with the philosophical and theoretical perspectives adopted for the study. The research design, stages of research and the methods for data collection, rigor in qualitative studies and analysis was described. Within the chapter, my reflections and experience in conducting the study were explained.

The next chapter begins with reporting the findings from the research.

5 Findings: South Africa

This chapter presents the findings from 14 interviews with South African women holding senior management positions in South African corporations. The findings are explained through the identification of key themes and are supported by participant quotes. The quotes are presented in italics and end with the participants being identified only by country and number code. The findings highlight how these women successfully transitioned from middle management into senior leadership positions and their conception and enactment of leadership. The findings include the challenges they faced as women and the strategies they used to progress and break through the glass ceiling. The chapter begins with an overview of the demographic profile of participants. A definition of senior management and the conceptual framework for women's success in corporate leadership is also provided. This is followed by a presentation of the findings for the women in South Africa. The findings are presented as two conceptual maps: one illustrates how women from South Africa successfully transitioned into senior management roles and the challenges they experienced, and the second elucidates how South African women conceptualize leadership.

5.1 Participants' professional and educational profiles

The research project involved analyzing data from 14 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with women who held senior leadership positions (as defined in the research methodology chapter) in their respective organizations. Table 5.1 provides an overview of each of the participants.

Table 5.1*Participants' Profiles*

Case	Age	Industry	Job Title	Marital Status	No. of Children	Years in senior leadership	Educational level
SA1	36-40	Telecommunications	Director	Single	1	7-10	Bachelors
SA2	41-45	Financial Services	Head of Investments	Married	2	9	Master's level
SA3	46-50	Telecommunications	General Manager	Married	2	7	MBA
SA4	46-50	Higher Education	Campus Director	Married	2	4	Ph.D.
SA5	36-40	Information, Communication & Technology	Managing Executive	Married	1	6	Master's level
SA6	NA ²	Energy, Mining & Utility	Chief Strategist & Marketing Executive	Married	NA	6	Bachelors (Hons)
SA7	NA	Accounting and Taxation	Associate Director (11 years)	NA	NA	NA	Chartered Accountant
SA8	34	Audit and Assurance Tax Consultant	Associate Director	Married	2	6-7	Honours, BCOM Information System
SA9	31	Legal Patent Attorney	Partner	Married	2	8	Bachelors plus Patent
SA10	NA	Banking	Managing Executive Director	Single	0	3 years at EXCO	Chartered Accountant
SA11	52	Retail Pharmaceutical	Group Marketing Director	Married	2	16	BCOM Econometrics
SA12	36	Information, Communication & Technology	Head Corporate Affairs & Communication	Single	0	4	Masters
SA13	NA	Automotive Manufacture & Retail	HR Director		3	10	Masters
SA14	NA	Pharmaceutical	Head of Communications and Patient Advocacy	Married	2	8	Masters

² Not assigned

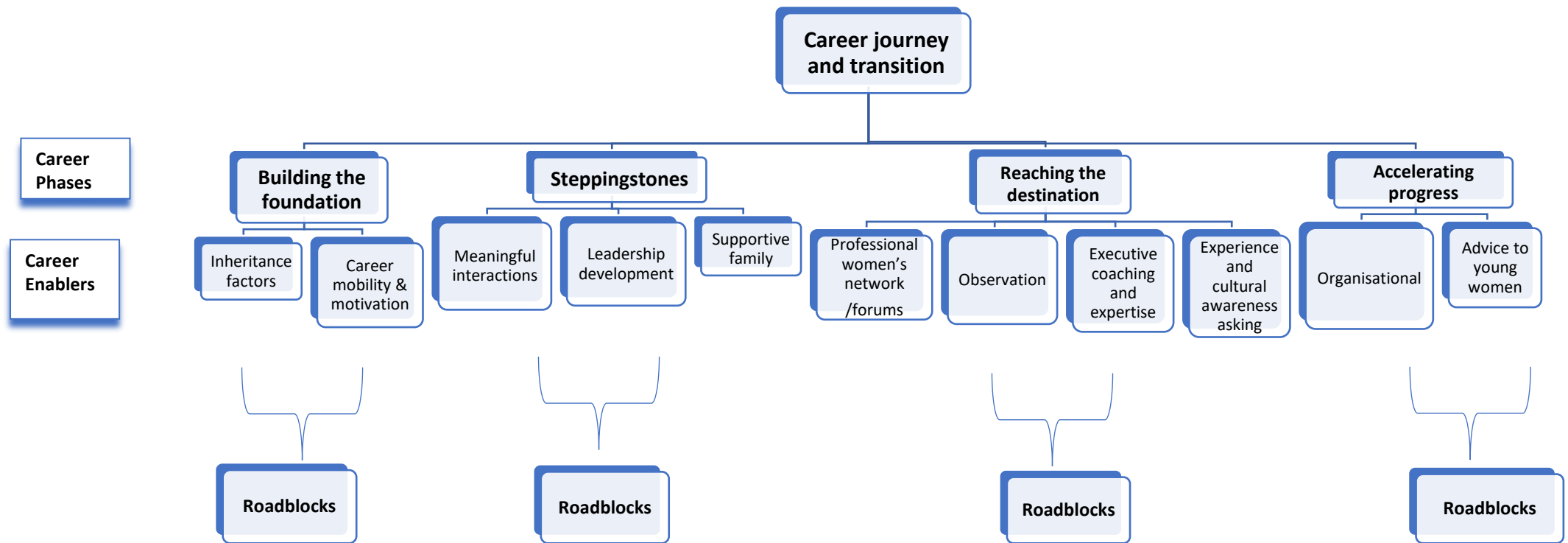
All participants were university graduates and entered the corporate business after graduating from full-time university studies. Two participants held a Doctorate qualification and six a Master's level qualification. Three participants held professional qualifications as Chartered Accountants and one participant held an LLB qualification. All participants received leadership development training, sponsored by their organization, and had access to an executive coach at some stage of their career. The duration of the leadership development training varied between short courses over six months, and MBA programs between 12 and 24 months and business leadership programs targeted for women.

5.2 South African women's career journeys and transitions into senior leadership roles

The following section addresses the research question: "How do women from South Africa transition into senior leadership positions?" The findings are explained through the identification of three broad themes: career enablers, career roadblocks and career transition triggers, supported by participant quotes. Each theme is discussed under four phases. An overview of the four phases is then presented in Figure 5.1. This concept map provides a diagrammatic overview of the respondent's career journey from graduating from secondary school to their appointment into a senior leadership position in three broad phases: (1) "Building the foundations," (2) "Steppingstones," and (3) "Reaching the destination." A fourth phase, "Accelerating the progress" reports on the participants' advice to younger women and organizations on how to increase the progress of women in senior leadership positions. Each phase has sub-themes that describe the career-related actions and activities that facilitated the career progress of participants and the roadblocks these women encountered as they advanced in their careers.

Figure 5.1

Concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership – South Africa



5.3 Building the foundations

This section reports on the inheritance factors that influenced the participants' early career choices, triggers, barriers, and the subsequent decisions that led to a transition from starting work to their appointment into senior management roles, and the roadblocks young women experienced in their early career.

5.3.1 Inheritance factors

Whilst describing their career pathways into leadership, most participants described their family background and the positive influence their parents, grandmothers, and teachers had on their career decisions. Their parents instilled in them the importance of education and hard work.

My father was a professor and lecturer. My role model in the workplace. My mother owned her own preschool for a while. Then she had her own catering business and so forth. But she was a mother of eight. I think I watched her manage eight children differently. Each one of us and between the two of them, I knew nothing else but to lead. I knew I had a role. I had responsibility and you don't blame other people and you address whatever issues or problems you have. I am the seventh child, so I had 6 older siblings to also watch them go through their career, get to university. University was not an option. We were a very academic family. I sort of fell into it. (SA3)

Their socio-economic positions and family support positively shaped their career ambition and personal traits and values.

I think my dad was constantly deciding about my career path and where and how to progress. (SA10)

These women had within their intimate family men and women they could rely on for counsel and support when making career decisions.

Two participants reflected that their parents wished for them to pursue a career in medicine. Both women were straight-A students and met the university entrance requirements for medicine. These two women rebuffed their parents' choice and pursued careers of their choice.

And at the time the careers they felt were sort of safe for me was going to be a doctor and I made a complete U-turn and said no, I want to go into technology. (SA1)

The women also expressed that their gender identity and perception of gender roles were shaped by their early life experiences and home environment. When narrating their career

experiences, the participants reflected on their espousing home and school environments and equal opportunity mindset. Nine of the 14 participants explained that their parents treated boys and girls equally and that they were equally encouraged to pursue higher education.

They brought us up the same, we all cooked, we all washed cars, we all trimmed the garden. (SA3)

Boys and girls were treated in the same manner. The women described the role their fathers played in shaping their perceptions of the role of men and women at home and in the workplace. Their narratives illustrate that values and beliefs are shaped by one's environment. As SA5 reflected:

So, we were only 3 girls and my dad I remember from a very, very young age I think this came from both my mom and my dad where you could do whatever a man can do probably better. So, we grew up where there should be no difference and you can literally do whatever you want.

She went on to explain how her parents' attitudes and values helped her at university and in her career.

I think that's what I brought into my career and working in and studying a male-dominated degree. So, I was 1 or 2 girls that were studying the degree that I did and I never felt out of place because I was pretty much taught and I've grown up with this concept of yeah, it's fine and that I'm not out of place. That I've got as much right to be here as any of the guys. (SA5)

Another participant related how her school experience contributed to developing her self-confidence.

In high school, I was in the girls-only boarding school, and looking back I think it actually helped me a lot in my learning to be assertive and learning to believe that women can do anything that males can do because there was never a notion that you cannot enter a profession because you are a girl or because you cannot do as well, which I think maybe if I had been in a mixed gender school, I might have encountered that then. But it was an environment that kind of promised the world is yours you know. (SA2)

Three participants expressed that their home environment was very traditional with male role models dominating, and that their brothers received subtle preferential treatment. As one participant explained:

You know my parents were not perfect, so they also had their biases you know. My brothers and I are almost the same age - they are twins, they are a year older than me. When they bought cars very early on in their life's stages, like when they were 22 or 21 nobody complained. My dad complained when I bought a car when I was 23 years old, in fact 24. I think he felt being a woman

is dangerous. I should be doing other things you know. And I remember saying this is double standards. (SA13)

Inheritance factors such as their socio-economic status, guidance from parents and schoolteachers, and gender-neutral family values and expectations contributed to building the foundations for their later career success.

5.3.2 Career mobility and motivation

A career transition is described as any move a person makes, either within the current organization or across organizational boundaries, in their job that results in a change in their role (Ng et al., 2005). These changes may create small or large career disruptions. The extent of the disruption is impacted by the type of boundaries crossed (Ng et al., 2005). A second theme that emerged from the stories was the different triggers that led to a career transition. Most South African women transitioned six or more times in their careers across organizational and industry boundaries after graduating from university. When relating their stories, the women described their personal attributes and individualities that contributed to their career success. The main triggers for career transitions amongst South African women included starting a family, being selected, CEO and superiors' behaviors, organizational culture, Black Economic Empowerment Legislation, and being headhunted, as illustrated in Figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2*Triggers for career transitions***Starting a family**

One lady said look, you can't be Superwoman, you can't do this you have to decide between your child and your job. (SA3)

Parenthood commonly led to a career transition. Getting married and starting a family did not hamper their progress but it did trigger a career transition. Almost half of the participants with children resigned from their position and either moved into part-time consultancy, started their own business, or took up positions in other organizations where flexibility was negotiated into their new role. What is interesting in their stories was that they always found new positions when they returned to the corporate world. None of the women reported that they had difficulty returning to work after resigning from their full-time positions. As one participant related:

My desire is to be there for my child because you will be gone for a week, and you come back, and she is walking or she is doing this and I felt that I was missing out. So, I actually took two years off of my work and I was a part time consultant. I also helped my husband to set up his business until my daughter was 4 and then I went back to work. (SA3)

Being selected

Three respondents' careers evolved within the same organization. These women started their careers in their respective organizations through graduate trainee programs. Their careers transitioned as they acquired professional accreditations through intensive learning and qualifications. They developed technical expertise that prepared them to hold more senior positions in the organization and were recommended for, or notified about, positions they should apply for by supportive seniors. These women pursued careers in accounting and legal professions. The career pathway resembled a traditional linear career path.

And you could call it backing and people who continue to just believe in me. And see what, what potential I could be, which sometimes I couldn't see that myself. So, I think what's very important is an environment of, it's not just about nurturing and pulling people through, it's about you, you have to show yourself as well. And hence you have to show and be able to well, show people what you can do. And that must, what I think was probably not always available in an environment where the stars line up. Where there are positions that come up where you must show yourself in terms of what you can do through it and then you've got people then punting for you into those positions. So, I just think if I look back into my career somehow all those things were, were lining up. So, ja I think it has come through with a lot of hard work, a lot of sacrifices had to be made and fortunately enough some strong relationships that were built through time. (SA10)

Demonstrating competence, acquiring qualifications and waiting to be noticed and selected triggered a transition. From the above comment, it can be suggested that women did not actively put themselves forward but prepared themselves with experience and qualifications and waited for others to notice their hard work and promote them.

CEO and Superior behaviors and actions

You, you made me feel as if I'm fighting a street fight with my hands behind my back. (SA11)

More than half the participants cited unsupportive superior behaviors as a trigger for a career transition. These women transitioned across organizational boundaries because their CEO or superior behaved in a manner that they considered harsh, unfair and unsupportive. One participant reported that she stayed and completed the project because she did not want her reputation in the corporate environment to suffer. She felt that because women are so few and far between in the corporate environment, resigning at the first hurdle was not an option. She

stayed and upon successful completion she resigned to join another organization. Other women reported that the actions and comments from their CEO were pivotal in their decision to search for roles elsewhere.

A CEO that I reported to at some stage, and he told me, "Well, you're a woman so you should be happy that you've gotten this far and I don't see why you should make such a fuss about moving." So, and he was single-handedly probably part of the reason I at that stage left his team and moved to another team in [] basically out of that comment. (SA5)

Male superiors were a contributing factor in influencing these women's career decisions. They did not want to be a part of an organizational environment that conflicted with their values and leadership style. It appears that the type of CEO and superior and their behaviors are seen as contributing factors to whether women stay or leave an organization or whether they persist in progressing into senior leadership.

Organizational culture

I had been with [] with the bank for 11 years and I got this sense so the glass ceiling. (SA5)

The presence of the glass ceiling was another trigger for a career change. Some women reported that superiors expected them to be happy with their positions and were evasive when issues around promotion and career progress were raised, leaving them feeling uneasy and opening their eyes about their future in the organization. The need for challenge and having stretch assignments coupled with their observations around how their male counterparts were progressing triggered their intent to search for other opportunities outside their respective organizations. As one respondent reported:

I got this sense that I was reaching the ceiling in []. I was becoming very comfortable with the role I was doing, and I wasn't really stretched anymore I have realized all the senior positions that were available to a great extent were being filled with males and that made me very uneasy. When I resigned, they brought in all sorts of senior leadership to try and convince me to stay and there were all sorts of discussions around, "What would you like to do? Which business units would you like to go in? What should we create for you?" But nothing, so it's a bit after the fact and it's like ok well we'll give you your different position just to keep you quiet and yeah that doesn't sit right with me; so, no real tangible structural changes. (SA5)

Headhunted

Several women were already employed in their respective organizations and were headhunted for senior roles. When roles were presented to them, they looked for challenges and new experiences and held the desire to progress into Director roles. These opportunities were presented to the women from different sources. Some women were headhunted, some were promoted, and others were told about opportunities through their women's networks or through their sponsors and mentors.

I was headhunted, the agent got hold of me and said, "Would you consider this role but it's in Durban?" (SA14)

The women found career opportunities through diverse channels. What was common with these women was that they did not hold back when opportunities presented themselves. They pursued opportunities and if it did not work out, they had the resilience to move on to the next opportunity. The women indicated that while they did not actively aim for senior leadership, they did aspire to climb the corporate ladder and held a high need for achievement. Once they reached a senior management position, when an opportunity for a director role presented itself, the women applied and were appointed.

When I started here, I always wanted to be a Partner. The road to qualifying in what I am doing is very long. In SA I am the third Black female []. Because of that you get volunteered to do different things. I was recognized internationally. (SA9)

Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Legislation (BBBEE)

Women leadership is a compliance thing. Company needs points. (SA7)

In the South African context, the intersection between history, race, and gender emerged throughout participants' narratives. Some women made both overt and covert references to how race, culture and gender influenced their career journey. In some stories, being a person and a woman of color led to opportunities and accelerated their progress into senior leadership, whilst for others, being a person of White descent triggered a career transition or a career plateau. There were mixed perspectives on how gender and race impacted women's careers. One respondent reported:

Around eight years ago [], the firm decided to go on and conform with, you know, the Government policy and to go on the BEE drive. And that would entail Black females specifically. (SA9)

These comments suggest that organizations' strategies to consciously alter the demographic profile of the workforce created opportunities for women of color and triggered career transitions through career development plans and access to training and leadership development.

Another respondent illuminated the interconnection between legacy and her career from a personal values perspective. When asked about people or events that discouraged her in her career, she said:

But I think if I were to tell you about the ongoing narratives among friends, amongst family, the bill is always there you never crack this, this is a white man's world is not going to change. That is why a lot of us have gone on our own you know. So that's kind of discouraged me, and this is what people say, "look you are basically not going to win this one. And my big why in life well, my big passion is transforming corporates of South Africa. That's my big why. That's why I wake up when it gets tough. My purpose which is transforming corporate South Africa. That has to happen even if I die trying. (SA13)

This motivation to remain in corporate South Africa rather than set up her own company stems from wanting to change the narrative. "A lot of us have gone on our own" may refer to Black women, or Black males, who resigned themselves to the outcome that no matter how good you are, race or even gender stereotypes persist and negatively impact one's career. This is tied to women's definition of leadership in Africa. Leadership is about creating a better future for those that follow: "We don't have the luxury to resign." The sense is that as a leader in South Africa, and a leader of color, you have an inner and collective responsibility to change the narrative. SA13's career motivation at an executive level is to make a difference and this may be an enabler in her career.

The legacy of apartheid affected other women in the sense that their careers in senior leadership plateaued.

Where I was at [], and you know the South African environment, we no longer appoint white people in senior positions and [] was at a point in time when the [] told me we are not going to consider you for more senior positions. So, I was told that they acknowledged what I did, and they gave me the credit, but they said to me in terms of the next position, which is the CEO of the [], they would not consider me, they needed a Black person. At the same time two of the positions at [] that I would have been interested in were also reserved for Black people, so I was at the end of my career. The CEO I was working with had just resigned and I was told that my CV was the strongest, but they

wouldn't give it to me because they needed the goodwill from the unions, and it would not send the right message. (SA4)

At certain points in their careers, the women were confident enough in their abilities, and according to their stories, they achieved high levels of performance. When the organization or their position in the corporate environment did not match their values or meet their expectations and needs, this triggered a career transition. The women were not defined by where they worked, but rather by what they achieved and the role or project they moved into. Their stories reflect a boundaryless career orientation, where they seek opportunities and challenges. Opportunities were enabled by sponsors and their networks. Although two participants reported that they spent their whole careers in the same organization, they also reported that they always looked out for new positions that matched their qualifications, skills, and ambition, and embarked on learning programs to develop their skills and increase their eligibility for promotions.

There was also the reality that there is a scarcity of senior management talent in South Africa, and this may have positively impacted women's careers.

I think it's a lot of pressure on them (young Black women). I think sometimes they get over-promoted and then they fail. And then people say "Ja, you see, look at female leaders." But it's not because they couldn't produce, it was because they were pushed up the ladder too quickly. So, as long as we have an under-supply of woman leaders, this situation will carry on happening. (SA11)

5.3.3 Roadblocks

Being raised in a home environment where boys and girls are treated the same nurtures a worldview that being a woman is not a constraint in the corporate context. However, for some it left them underprepared when they encountered discrimination or harassment. For instance, one participant found herself in a situation where she was made to feel inferior. She related her story about an early career experience with her manager:

In one of my jobs, I had quite a traumatic experience. I recall that experience in my 20s. The CEO was not going to be able to manage me, my personality is too strong. And he took it upon himself to show me my personality was not strong enough. It almost broke me. So, its things like that that you'd count as sexual harassment where it gets physical; I mean it's quite a lot of things. So, the journey is rough, but you have to stay the course because it's not about the environment or the people that are trying to put you in your place. (SA12)

5.4 Steppingstones

This section reports on the experiences that paved the way for all participants to progress into management and leadership roles. Meaningful interactions, leadership development and supportive family as illustrated in Figure 5.3 were reported as critical enablers. Access to organizational support from superiors, the importance of networking, and personal support from spouses and extended family participants are reported. This is followed by a summary of the roadblock's women experience at the middle management level.

Figure 5.3

Career enablers at the professional level



5.4.1 Meaningful interactions

The participants emphasized the role of mentors, sponsors, and role models as enablers for their leadership development and career success. Being nurtured by their superiors and being led by supportive and development-orientated leaders assisted participants to access

challenging work assignments and job opportunities that enabled them to develop technical and leadership competencies and helped them in their careers. Supportive superiors also provided the psycho-social support these women required at different points in their careers.

Mentors and Sponsors

An overwhelming majority of participants attributed their progress into senior leadership to having mentors, sponsors, and supportive superiors in their early career phase. Some were mentored and sponsored by their immediate superior or a senior manager within the organization, and others were mentored and sponsored by individuals from their personal network. Participants were sponsored by both males and females. One participant explained:

I had a very progressive director that I reported to. (umm) He was younger than me, but he was absolutely my mentor. And he very quickly saw my potential and he very quickly helped me put the right building blocks in place. (SA11)

Some participants used the words mentors, sponsors, and supportive relationships interchangeably and others specified the difference between sponsors and mentors.

Another participant clarified why she referred to supportive relationships as sponsors.

I had sponsors along the way. I call them sponsors because it was people that one, I did not directly report to them. So, they wouldn't benefit anything by highlighting what value I can bring into the environment. They were happy to recommend me to whoever was hiring. (SA3)

This support boosted women's self-confidence, but it also helped in practical ways – participants were presented with opportunities for promotion and recommended for interesting projects. Supporters also made recommendations to hiring managers and kept the women informed about their role and foreseeable changes in their role or position, helped them prepare for interviews, motivated them to apply for salary increases and basically told them how to behave in the organization. A few women mentioned that they were supported early in their employment to attend and participate in executive meetings.

The women described themselves as lucky, very fortunate or privileged to have had supportive relationships and explained that superiors that helped women understand the unwritten behaviors, exposed them to environments that helped them interact with peers and in board meetings.

The women reflected that their positive experiences with having supportive relationships and “good” CEOs shaped their leadership aspirations, spirit, and style.

One of the main things I have had and the privileges I have had in my life. I have had just brilliant leaders everywhere. I have had the type of corporate sponsorship where I've had people who believed in me, who push me, who will drive me, who recommended me for the next big thing. People who recommended me for the next leadership program. (SA13)

Positive role models

The women interviewed described the role models they encountered throughout their lives. Role models shaped their values, beliefs and behaviors, increasing their self-awareness and developing their leadership attributes. As SA1 explained:

So, one of the critical things I personally took from him as a leader is how he would be about taking the position of power. He would give it to you. You need to take ownership though, of whatever power position you are going to play in. So, you can't just be happy to be a manager without taking ownership of things going wrong or things going right, and you also need to be accountable for every decision you are going to be making. And those are the qualities that I've taken with me. He allowed you to take charge and allowed you to take full ownership and also accountability. (SA1)

Bosses that treated people fairly, allowed others to take the lead, delegated and coached the women about responsibility and accountability were held in high esteem by the women.

I had a role model from day one and it was a woman. Luckily for me! (SA3)

Several women were positively influenced by their female superiors in their early career phase. Women in senior positions are visible symbols that serve as role models for younger women and convey a strong message that women can succeed in a corporate environment in South Africa.

One of the ladies was my superior. She was on the BOD at the age of 30, already she was in a senior CEO position. So, she managed to climb the corporate ladder very quickly. The way she treated people was absolutely awesome. It didn't matter if you were the cleaning lady or on her senior counsel, you know she treated people exactly the same She was very engaging, very understanding. (SA6)

Some participants underlined the importance of being treated fairly and being respectful of others and embraced these values into their leadership style. SA4 reflected on one of the superiors she worked with early in her career. SA5 recalled that as the only female team member, she appreciated that her superior did not treat her any differently.

"I was quite lucky, the first leader I reported too, I was the only female in the team, and he made a point of not treating me differently to any of the guys. He was fair, he treated us slightly differently, but he was fair, and he never made me feel left out or stand out. (SA5)

Some women described experiences that also helped them to discern the type of leader they did not wish to work with or become. From their stories, it can be implied that roles models also delineated the leader behaviors the women decided to avoid. These were superiors whose behaviors they did not appreciate and once exposed to these behaviors, they consciously decided to avoid them. As SA related:

I reported to a female leader, and she was quite aggressive and incredibly goal oriented and I think for me that was quite clear that if I ever make it into a leadership position, I don't want to be like her. (SA5)

Most participants described people who had positively influenced them. However, what was interesting in the participants' stories was that there were no ideal role models. There were behaviors they admired and behaviors they did not.

5.4.2 Leadership development

All the women described being selected for leadership development programs in their respective organizations and some explained that the programs were part of the organization's commitment to respect BEE guidelines. As described by one participant, development programs began for all entry-level positions either as part of graduate training programs or as part of community skills-building programs. Leadership development programs created a pipeline of women earmarked for leadership roles. While reflecting on her journey into a senior leadership role, another participant explained that leadership development focused on self-awareness and self-understanding:

I used to be very reserved. I was taught at home to be a person who should be subdued. And I had to understand myself first and become aware of what I wanted. I was selected for a Women Leadership program by my company. The firm initiated and asked me to join. In this program I was given a personal coach. The first part was to understand myself and my strengths. Understanding yourself is very important as gaining clarity on what you want and what you want to pursue. I used to let my male counterparts say and decide and I don't challenge them. I asked myself why don't I become more confident? Women feel that they need to know everything and don't ask for help. I asked myself why don't I ask my male colleagues for help. You will see that they are willing to help. (SA7)

5.4.3 Supportive family

Most of the women agreed that their family was a significant support in their career progress.

Spouses

I couldn't have done the things that I was able to do had he not supported me. (SA14)

Partners helped with childcare responsibilities and managed the family when the women needed to commute or work odd times. Coupled with supportive partners, the women relied on hired help and parents to help them manage career demands and family responsibility.

He was very supportive. I mean I couldn't have done the things that I was able to do had he not supported me because of the commute for example. It meant that I was away from home a lot of the times and he also has a career of his own. He's in the banking industry and there was a time that he was also traveling a lot, but he was very supportive. (SA14)

One woman related:

I married a man purposely who did not have female inferiority shall I say or the fear of women. He was very much an entrepreneur, and, in every business, he started, I was his partner. We had an equal say in how much we are investing you know. If I felt it was wrong, I would tell him it was wrong, and I could demonstrate it to him, and he really treated me like a partner. (SA3)

Another participant spoke about the social and emotional support she received from her sister.

I suppose I also had a very thoughtful/forceful sister who broke the mill... [an expression one uses to describe experiences that are very painful, stressful, and difficult, that one learns from and can lead to personal change] I suppose we were fortunate enough that we never grew up in that limiting mindset environment. (SA10)

Another participant emphasized the support she received from a close family member early in her career.

One of the people who encouraged me was my brother-in-law, my sister's husband who took me under his wing and mentored me and took me into corporate. I would help him with his strategies even before I did my internship I was at varsity, and he would expose me to these things. So, he really drove me and showed me what to do.

The support from spouses and siblings with experience in the corporate environment provided a safe platform to seek advice and guidance on how to navigate the challenges that the women encountered.

5..4.4 Roadblocks

The participants described several systemic disadvantages and inequalities they experienced at the steppingstones phase.

Networks

Boys' club mentality. (SA5)

The perception of a boys' club is prevalent in corporate South Africa. Many women still hold the belief that senior positions in corporate South Africa are reserved for men and no matter how skilled a woman is in her position, she will not have access to senior leadership opportunities because these are reserved for men. From the women's experiences, prejudice, gender bias and discrimination are common in the South African corporate context. The women experienced indirect and at times unintentional expressions of racism and sexism.

When I joined [] I have had many women come to me and tell me that this is a man's world. You won't get anywhere you know. Manager is sort of where you will end up. Senior management reserved forever. (SA3)

These comments, while appearing innocuous in nature, may subtly influence the women's career ambition into senior leadership positions and credentials.

Identity and the pressure to conform

The women expressed how societal expectations influence women. Society sets different standards for men and women and often women feel pressure to conform. This process of conforming to pre-set standards is described as necessary and unconscious and much later when women reflect on their careers, they recognize the changes they have endured and the burnout they have experienced as a result of that. One participant described that a lot of the behaviors she adopted originated from observing how the leaders around her behaved and the outcomes of those behaviors:

And you see the behaviors, the characteristics, how they relate, and I think that you almost automatically understand what it takes to be that. So, for me I think that is something that came naturally but as I've gone through the ranks, I realized that I was losing myself and pieces of me and it's very tiring to be someone that you're not and doing things that aren't natural to you. But I think corporate has been so intertwined in that character that it's something that is very difficult to break down and breakthrough, but I think that women are getting back to themselves. (SA12)

This participant further elaborated that society's expectations, together with organizational policies, promote gendered norms and expectations. One participant reflected that the impact

of incompatible messages that women receive confuses young women about the behavioral and grooming expectations of professional women in the corporate environment.

We are told that when we get into corporate, tone down your makeup. Most of the things are not ideal in the corporate environment. If you look at the policies, it's really about women. So those are the things that we need to deal with. We created the society in which we live in as women, and the society that we have today are a result of what society has taught women to be. But you're sending so many mixed signals that you're confusing the young girls and the young women. (SA12)

As SA3 explained, women felt the need to conform to the existing norms of leadership effectiveness. The expectations for leadership effectiveness are determined by men and young women are conditioned to believe that they have to conform and compete to outperform men to succeed in the corporate environment.

For many years I think even for myself, straight out of university you go out and you are taught that in order to make it into management you got to work harder than a man. You have to emulate what they do. You are competing in a man's world. For many years have also tried to work like them. Work longer hours than them. Make sure I am going to training that they are going to and I think only probably as I keep my fortune up, I begin to realize that they don't have it. They don't necessarily have it right you know. (SA3)

These inner battles negatively impact women's acceptance in the corporate world and may stifle their progress into senior leadership. Reaching a balance between the behavioral expectations of others and one's own personal image challenged some women. These stories emphasize that career and leadership aspirations overtly or covertly communicate behavioral expectations and women need to make conscious choices about the behaviors they select and enact.

Motherhood

An overwhelming majority of women reflected that starting a family was a roadblock in their early careers. Although family roles are changing and men are taking a more active role in childrearing and housework, women still perceive that managing the home and family remains their responsibility.

Some women openly described the penalties for starting a family, such as being made to feel guilty for being a mother and pursuing a professional career. Whether their superior was male or female, the women were at some point asked to choose between pursuing a professional path or motherhood. These women felt more pressure, had to work harder than their male peers and eventually resigned from their respective organizations. As one participant reported:

The bottom line is I would have to choose between being a professional and being a mother. When I returned from maternity leave things were quite different in terms of management style from this male CEO. Just in terms of being monitored a bit more. Suddenly my leaving at 4:00 in the afternoon regardless of whether I'd been in the office until 8 the previous night suddenly became an issue and there were things like that that started to come up. (SA2)

The women also mentioned that although it was their choice to focus on children and family, the corporate culture was “*just too rigid*” (SA8) for them at the time. They did not foresee any changes and decided to depart from the organization. They selected roles that suited their lives and were confident in their ability to take up new positions in different organizations.

Women fail because their support structures fail. (SA11)

Women's lives and their career twists and turns are very different from men's. Some participants explained that women are responsible for family planning, managing the home and family, and their career and their career development. This leads to women dividing their time between their multiple responsibilities, resulting in limited time to focus on a career and development. Some women highlighted that there are social structures that hold women back. The women described maternity leave benefits as inadequate. Some organizations provide additional maternity leave benefits, but these are few and far between. Generally, additional benefits are allocated once a woman has reached a certain level in the organizational hierarchy. This implies that women should delay family responsibility until they qualify for these benefits. One respondent described how her organization was reviewing maternity leave benefits.

I had extended maternity leave. You are only allowed for three months, I got five, fully paid. Ja, it was fully paid. I didn't have to claim from UIF³. That's also very attractive, but that is not put to everybody. It's only if you are at a certain level that you can get that benefit. (SA9)

Young South African women face a different set of struggles early in their careers and if not effectively supported, they are less likely to progress in corporate business. (Erwee, 1996; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019) The social realities of young South African women were mentioned in the narratives, but this is beyond the scope of this study. One participant related that the perception that women are bound to take maternity leave is still a barrier for women early in their career.

³ UIF refers to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, where employers and employees sacrifice a small percentage of their earnings for salary protection in the event of unemployment or loss of income.

Maybe the only challenge that I have seen so far is when you are still young as a woman. There is a lot of fear from male management about the fact that you still want to get pregnant. You are going to take a lot of maternity leave you know away and then what happens in that time? I have seen that to be a problem of promoting young women in the organization. (SA3)

The treatment women receive after maternity leave places increased pressure on young mothers. Men remain fixated on the lost time due to maternity leave or the flexibility women need to manage both roles. Women feel that they are watched more closely, and this places additional stress and burden on them.

5.4.5 Unsupportive gendered environments

The women further described experiences where they felt unfairly treated early in their careers. What is interesting in these stories are the reactions of the participants toward the experiences. They voiced their discontent and did not accept unfair treatment or sexist behaviors. An additional interesting point is the language the women used. “*I paid my dues,*” may reflect that the women felt that they needed to work harder or sacrifice more to have an equal footing with their male counterparts.

SA4 reflected on her early career experience while she was in a 6-month management program:

So, we all did our presentations to a panel of people. We didn't know the people at all, and I did mine and the man said to me the market is not ready for a female and you are not an engineer. I said to him that is the most chauvinistic thing I've ever heard. How can you say something like that? And he said I know. I said to him “Well I came through this program and I paid my dues and I think I'm just as good, if not better than any of the guys and I think this is very discriminative.” (SA4)

As women in senior leadership positions voice their concerns, organizational members' awareness of existing systemic practices and habits increases. These systemic practices are not just women's problems but reflect deeply embedded stereotypes that are shared problems for men, women and organizational leaders. Voicing is only the initial step required for transforming the senior leadership culture, so that women can feel more included. How the CEO and members of the executive team respond to the voices of these women is also significant.

Risqué comments

Some women mentioned the crude jokes and the abrasive environment that they were exposed to, as SA4 described:

When I was a junior market analyst, I did a competitor analyses presentation. It was a huge auditorium full of just males and I was the only female there the marketing director at the time introduced me and he said “Next, we have our only female [], the [] were the new recruits, a group of 12, who’s now a market analyst and who will present the competitor analysis to you. But you need to be careful because men think every eight minutes about sex, and you have 10 minutes.” I got up, I looked at him and I said to him that I’m surprised about his comments because we are all professionals here and his comments tell me a lot about his own thoughts. I did my presentation and afterward, I put in a grievance against him. (SA4)

Another participant related how the reactions to women’s struggles are overlooked. She commented:

Sometimes we say we are experiencing challenges of various forms of discrimination, and it is brushed off. They say, “Oh no you need to suffer now this is the kind of environment, it’s competitive, it’s aggressive.” Show, you just as a woman you need to keep up right? But if there was more recognition that our struggles are legitimate and that something can be done about it, that would really be a starting point for organizations. (SA2)

These early career experiences reveal the deep-seated impediments that women traverse in the corporate context. Societal changes and organizational support structures aimed toward eliminating these embedded practices were suggested as imperative for gender equality.

5.4.6 Organizational level support aimed at balancing work–life responsibility

From the organizational level, the women described a variety of interventions that organisations could implement to support women and men with family responsibilities.

Organizations treat all of us using a cookie cutter approach. (SA13)

The women were very specific that organizational support structures aimed at supporting work–family responsibility and harmony not only benefit women. Men with family responsibilities also crave more flexibility, be it for childcare or for caring for aging parents or relatives.

If it were up to me, I would allow that kind of flexibility where one can work in the afternoon only or you can choose to work from home on certain days of the week if that is what works for them. By the way that can also be extended to males as well because recently, they are also taking on the responsibilities at home. (SA2)

The women suggested that on-site creche facilities, increased flexibility, work-from-home arrangements, upgrading technological facilities to support work-from-home arrangements, and extended maternity leave benefits would be helpful. Additionally, acknowledging that people are different, with different needs and support structures was emphasized. One participant related:

Work-life integration is for everyone particularly for women, understanding that you are not just an HR director. You are also a mother, you also a sister, you are an aunt, you are whatever you are, a student but really finding that happy balance and it would be different for all of us, for people to say you know perhaps it doesn't work for me to come here at 8 o'clock because I have got kids to drop off and that's what I found that is where organisations are removed. It's still one size fits all to say everybody must be here at a certain time. I find that is one of the frustrations about corporate that we really do treat everybody as a one size fits all. (SA13).

5.5 Reaching the destination

This section reports on the women's experiences at the senior leadership level and the strategies they used to successfully transition into the senior leadership role. As illustrated in Figure 5.4, executive coaching, professional women's forums, observation and reflection, hard work and expertise, experience, and cross-cultural awareness were identified as the critical enablers for successful transition.

Figure 5.4

Enablers for the successful transition to senior leadership



5.5.1 Executive Coaching

All the women agreed that executive coaching and mentoring from their CEO were significant enablers for leadership success at the senior management level. In South Africa, appointments into senior leadership positions were supplemented with executive coaching and mentoring from the CEO, for all senior leaders, regardless of gender. As reported by one participant:

At one point I became unpopular for being outspoken. So, I think it is a skill that one learns as one goes along with coaching and mentoring as well. (SA2)

The impact of executive coaching was described by another participant:

You know, when I started, as I told you, in the first six months, I was going “ohhhh” with these strong men. And I said to my CEO, I need a mentor. And he said great, and we got an external mentor. Because I do not want to discuss my personal stuff with somebody internal and maybe they blab about it. They

got me a professional coach, and for four years I saw her every six weeks. And I'll tell you Shubashni, it did me a world of good. Just to have that person, that's their job, their job is to look out for pitfalls and to mentor. And by the way, I wasn't the only one. There were two males that were also being mentored and my CEO was mentored as well. (SA11)

SA12 reflected that formal development was important for one's career progress and through the leadership programs she realized the importance of formal mentorship. She spent a considerable amount of time searching for a mentor she was comfortable with. She explained:

Starting as from tomorrow actually a mentorship that I'm doing with a lady who sits on a number of boards because I've never really had a mentor and I realize that I really need to have that, and I've been looking for years. So, I've found someone who I think I can work with. (SA12)

5.5.2 Professional women's forums

Female leaders have got other things to talk about. (SA11)

The importance of supportive women's groups was emphasized by some women. The complexity of operating in a senior leadership role necessitated the need to discuss and share their challenges. This emphasizes that an understanding of the background and cultural differences may influence a leader's acceptance among followers and success at the executive level. It may also reflect the sensitive nature of their position and that seeking advice and guidance with work and family-related issues from women in similar positions was significant to their success.

I think having a strong network of advisors for me worked very well. To have a soundboard and to be very stable, fair and transparent. If you don't have these things in place, you are really bugged. In South Africa, I have a book club of a lot of professional women, and we didn't read. We loved reading but that was not why we had the book club. We got together to talk as people from diverse backgrounds, and all the women were very successful in their own rights, but we could talk about families, husbands, work. No one worked in the same place, and no one had the same qualification. We didn't move in the same circles, so we were there to support each other. (SA4)

Women leaders have different sets of career needs and demands, and the women indicated that women's support groups helped them to understand those needs. The purpose and impact of women's support groups and forums play a significant role in integrating women into senior

leadership; sharing experiences exposes women new to the senior leadership role about the senior leadership context.

5.5.3 Observation

Observing others on the senior management team and reflecting upon and learning about their peers' motivations and behaviors was a strategy the women used when appointed to the senior team. Through observation and reflecting on their peers, the women learned about each team member and worked with the information to win their peers' support, which contributed to their leadership effectiveness.

One participant recounted an experience in her first senior management role. In her situation, there was one other women on the senior management team, and she initially felt a sense of comfort and reported:

At one point I became unpopular for being outspoken. So, we will be in a meeting, and if there was a proposal on the table or an idea that was being discussed, if I didn't agree I would voice my disagreement until I figured out it was a much better approach to talk to the person offline. And say, "Hey I noticed that you put his own agenda for this meeting," you know any kind of talk about it and make that opinion known privately to them before getting into the meeting. Then it would make for easier conversations, I think, and less antagonism. (SA2)

The presence of other women on the team may not necessarily aid with adapting to the new team. Other participants explained that they focused on the business objectives and aimed at observing and understanding their peers' roles and responsibilities.

I've never had a problem with males, and I think to some extent they never considered me as a female because I never tried to charm them into a decision or use the fact that I'm a female to position me differently. I've always worked with males, it's never been I problem, I think my own strategies in terms of working with males. I know I see the bigger picture so I understand the motivation behind their decisions and I play it, so I know that this person is very interested in the bottom line, so I look at the person and I would say this is the bottom line, this is the increase in the profit, or this is the turnover, then I would look at this person is very interested in staff development and I would say in order to empower staff this is what we would do, so it's about understanding the roles of your colleagues and understanding what motivates them to make decisions and playing is not the right word but it's a descriptor, it's about pitching your proposals in line with their key drivers, so I suppose that's the way I did it and I've never abused or used the fact that I'm female. (SA4)

These comments suggest that women are cautious when they are appointed to a senior management position and accept and adapt to the existing masculine culture as a strategy to transition and lead effectively.

5.5.4 Expertise and performance

The women were very clear that expertise and performance were essential enablers in their transition into senior leadership. Within the narratives, the women expressed that their journey into senior management was not an easy one, and their acceptance into the senior team was afflicted with challenges. Their self-belief, hard work, and career resilience were enablers of their success.

His words to me were “Listen we’ve never had a female on the board” That was number one. Second, he said “Don’t think your five degrees will impress me at all. Don’t think you gonna come in here and tell us what to do. You don’t have any retail experience. This is not a university, and we are not going to.” So that was sort of the attitude I came in with. (SA11)

She reflected on her reaction:

I could have chosen two things. I could have been defensive and told him what I thought of what he said, or I could have proven it by just coming up with the most amazing ideas, the most amazing campaigns and I did. But it took blood and sweat. But you know what, within three years no meetings were taken without me in the room. No meetings, no strategy meetings. If [] is not there we are not in the room, we are not talking about this. (SA11)

From the descriptions, it seems that women were not always optimistically accepted by their male peers. Women had to work harder to gain acceptance. Participant SA5 related how she dealt with the challenge of sexism.

I’ve then decided to let my work speak for itself. So, I would brush off the sort of pet naming and to a greater extent I would have sort of ignored it and then make sure that when I put teams to work for those guys, their work was of absolutely outstanding quality and that the clients be the ones giving us those comments to say that “We haven’t worked with a team like this before.” So, I’ve always tried to let the work speak louder than sort of just their opinion that I am a female. And needless to say, I would also make sure they’ve got a decent appropriate number of females in their team working on their clients. (SA5)

One participant acknowledged that being appointed into the senior executive team did not always guarantee acceptance into the team. It was about building credibility and maintaining a level of respect toward each other. Respecting individual differences and being self-aware and understanding your self-worth was also important.

In a technical environment, I had to build the credibility fast and ensure that I was speaking from a position of facts and also a position of experience for me to be accepted by my male peers. But that is trust that was built over a long time but also it didn't take a long time to build the trust because I was operating from a space where I had the facts in hand, and I also was willing to develop the experience jointly with them. (SA1)

5.5.5 Experience, interpersonal skills, and cultural awareness

A noteworthy point raised by these women was their previous experience and how they applied their acquired knowledge of cultural nuances to shape their interaction with their peers. These interpersonal skills and cultural awareness were consciously applied in their interactions.

Over the years I have kind of learned to be conscious of the people I am interacting with, with the audience. Typically, it is an older African man, one almost must be indirect and kind of make suggestions as opposed to proposals. So, it's kind of well "I was thinking that we could implement this," instead of directly saying "The best way forward would be for us to just do this," you know that kind of thing. (SA12)

5.5.6 Roadblocks

Reaching the senior management level presented a different set of challenges for women. The demands of an executive role, the feelings of isolation that these women experienced and their need for authenticity challenged South African women. The high visibility associated with their appointment placed considerable stress on these women to work hard and exceed performance expectations and establish their leadership credibility on the senior management team.

Feelings of being left out

Diversity is being invited to the dance; however, inclusion is being at the dance and being asked to dance. (SA13)

Some women expressed how they felt excluded and overlooked for out-of-office events and team building activities. Existing organizational practices and gender norms persist at the executive level as well. Most women described experiences of exclusion and sexism and

believed that they had to work much harder than their male counterparts. While some raised the issues in the workplaces, some simply discussed these behaviors with trusted others. Others simply accepted these behaviors as the norm and adapted their leadership style to navigate through these challenges. As one participant reported:

Being excluded plays itself out in many ways you know it could be because I am female, it could be because I am Black, it could be because I am in HR you know. Because remember you can also be excluded on those bases as well. You are in a field that nobody take seriously you know. This is one is just a cost center she is not core business. So, it could be on a different level, but the thing is it is the reality. I don't know why that is the case. I can only assume that you know my reality now is that I am feeling like I am still excluded from some things, from a lot of things. (SA13)

Being excluded from social gathering and events was another challenge for women. As one participant reported:

Right now, you still find the boys' club. The boys would go and play golf and I still remember saying to somebody one day that, you know, I've been in this company for more than three years and it's clearly an EXCO [executive meetings] thing that they do. But not once did they actually say, do you play golf? Do you want to join us etcetera? But it's something that the boys do. I am only one of two. I know the other one is not interested at all. But I still feel like you can't and sometimes I think I am not even included or invited because they are assuming that like the other lady I wouldn't be interested. Which is also presumptuous right? I don't know to this point why I am been, but I am sharing with you that I haven't been. But I am like it's fine I am also not a golf player, but I want to be asked at least. (SA13)

Some women experienced conflicting reactions and responses in the team. SA4 explained:

There will be periods where you will act differently in response to different situations, but I think at the moment, a lady can be ambitious, but she is called a bitch, a lady can be passionate but she will be called emotional. I think one needs to break through stereotyping and that is really linked to gender roles and gender behaviors. (SA4)

This places additional restraints on women in their executive role. She further explained that as an individual, these stereotypes can be reduced:

If you are stable those types of stereotyping descriptions go away. It's really about being stable and having a soundboard that helps you. (SA4)

Culture

Culture and cultural nuances and societal gender role expectations impact women's experiences and influence their enactment of leadership and behaviors at the executive level. One woman shared her experience in the boardroom:

According to society there is a particular way, traditionally in the African culture, how women are expected to address men. So, it is almost similar to the dynamic between a parent and a child. Not quite as pronounced but in general in society if you ask the average person, there is definitely a difference when one speaks to a man. I have found in some organizational cultures where I have worked, you know in a boardroom, things might get heated, and people interrupt each other and sometimes ideas get dismissed. But if it's a man doing that to another man it's kind of oh yeah, he is argumentative and it's not an issue. But if it's a woman, and I have experienced that personally, if it is a woman disagreeing very strongly with a male leader for example, the language now becomes about being disrespectful, insubordinate as opposed to argumentative and strongly opinionated, which from a man is kind of seen as a positive attribute. You know, to have a strong stance on things, forceful in your engagement but it is not well received as a woman. (SA2)

The belief that men prefer to support other men when making senior appointments was also mentioned by one respondent. It was suggested that men prefer to maintain the status quo of the senior leadership team because they share similar traits and expectations. Introducing change, in the form of including too many women in senior positions, was perceived as threatening to their position.

A short little anecdote, I've been told in one of these discussions around partnerships and whom we are bringing on board as a partner. A comment was made that a partnership is like a marriage, and you need to decide whether you want to be married to this person or not and that comment made me almost get a sense of I think there might be a bit of discomfort having too many females in a partnership structure. And that the males still like to keep this very male structure and that is what they are comfortable with. (SA5)

Identity and the pressure to conform

Do I become a boy or do I stay a woman in a boy's environment. (SA11)

The women who do not want to be perceived as emotional or 'motherly' opt to follow the traditional male leadership prototype, reinforcing the bias that to achieve success in a leadership role, a woman must mimic the behaviors of their male counterparts. One participant recounted an experience of a close friend and member of her women's forum:

Michelle on the other hand decided that she was going to remain completely private. So, she had a persona at home, and she had this, this steel lady persona at work. Where in fact she was a very soft-hearted person. While at work she came over as very abrasive, in your face I'm gonna do this. And when she would talk to her staff, she would talk in a certain voice you know. And at the end of the day her relationship with the trade union became so bad with her because they couldn't stand this woman. You know it's Black men and this white woman comes over as you know I'm so rough and I'm so tough. And in the end, she is a person. It took such a toll on her health and on her family and she's now resigned without having another job to go to. Now see that's where

the other extreme is where it becomes bad. It's forever that dichotomy in your mind – do I become a boy or do I stay a woman in a boy's environment. (SA11)

On the other hand, another participant reported that some women give too much importance to their motherly instincts and rather than expressing their femininity in their leadership style, they work on being emotionless and distant in the corporate context.

Sometimes you find women overcompensate for that maternal instinct and that's when you sort of have these woman bosses who are quite harsh, and you know we can use swear words to explain them. You know sort of, of the female dog kind of way, and that's because they are trying to overcompensate. So they don't want to be seen as these weak mothers who are caring because that's not how it's done in business. (SA6)

Establishing their own leadership identity and maintaining their femininity remains a challenge for women.

Organizational politics

Organizational politics at the executive level was described as another roadblock by one participant.

One of my biggest challenges is just politics in an organization and sort of how quickly politics in an organization change and this is still something that I have a lot of discussions with a lot of people around, how do you deal with this and what is the best way? Do you become involved? Do you try and steer away from it as much as you can? (SA5)

Family responsibility

The parenthood challenge persists at the executive level. Parenthood limits women from overnight travel and pursuing international assignments. One participant reported:

A lot of my clients are overseas. And it's important to go to overseas conferences and meet with them on a regular basis. And most of the time being a woman and having responsibilities, I can't make those conferences even though I am the partner responsible for those clients. In the past what I have experienced, you know, some of the other male partners would take your place and visit and attend these conferences. And they would try to you know take credit or try to take those clients away. So even though they are still the firm's clients, you are not the attorney responsible for them anymore. It would shift to them. Because now they are the client liaison person. (SA9)

The female corporate partners affected by these practices voiced these concerns and the organization addressed these issues.

But that's changed now. Because we raised it before. And a lot of the male partners, you know, felt for the female partners and they've agreed to be you know, a little bit more sensitive when it comes to poaching clients. Or even

when you not here for like five months when you on maternity leave. You have to hand over your clients to somebody else and most of the time it's a male. And then they develop that relationship with the client and will want to carry on with that client, even after your return. Which is not right. (SA9)

Several participants reported that their male counterparts have strong support from their spouses and partners.

There is a difference. The difference is that I need to make sure that my housekeeper knows what to cook tonight. I need to make sure that the varsity fees are paid. That my child is prepared for an exam.... Let's say 80% of the males around the table that I was a director of an even now their wives don't work. Their wives are their support structures at home. They don't worry about payments of accounts, or food in the fridge. Whereas for female leaders, their husbands work as well. So, you must juggle it. And then you can't, so if the guys say after a meeting let's go out for a beer. You can't say oh, sorry I need to go home and bathe the child. You immediately have to make the trade-off between "Do I wanna go or don't I." And sometimes you have to have the guts to say, you know what guys I need to leave. My child is writing an exam tomorrow. And that's that. And I think that a lot of female leaders battle with that. It's more outside the workplace that they battle with the balance than inside the workplace. (SA11)

Another participant reported how her family circumstances influenced her decision on whether to accept an international assignment.

The only opportunity for me to grow was for me to take an international assignment in Germany, but I didn't want to go to Germany. At the time, my family circumstances did not allow for this considering the age of my kids. Germany is a nice place to visit, but I don't think it would be a nice place for me and my family, my children especially. So, I saw another role in [] an applied. (SA14)

In summary, although women face roadblocks once they are appointed to senior leadership positions they rely on executive coaching, professional women's forums, their experience, competencies, accumulated career resilience, and strong support networks to successfully transition into the role and become effective leaders.

5.5.7 Achieving work–life harmony

The women described a variety of methods they used to achieve work–life harmony and pursue and maintain a career in corporate leadership. The remarkable similarity between

the women was their approach to managing their family responsibilities and their career and progress into a role as a senior leader.

At the individual level, these women emphasized that planning and prioritizing, combined with flexible arrangements, hired help, and supportive parents and spouses were critical for achieving a balance.

So, it's about understanding the demands from the community and saying to the teacher "If you are going to arrange a meeting for Monday morning at 7, I am happy to be there but I can't be there at 10." So, it's about managing it. (SA4)

Another participant reported that setting up boundaries and respecting your boundaries was essential:

I used to pretty much live for my work and when I got married, I made a very conscious effort to not take work home in the evenings and then started doing much less over the weekends. I realized very quickly that it's a burden you place upon yourself and because you are putting them, people start expecting them from you. As soon as you almost put out those boundaries, people start to respect that. (SA5)

She went on to describe the adjustments she made upon the birth of her first child:

I recently had a little baby boy and I was again very conscious. When I moved to [] I started negotiating around flexibility in terms of when I will leave home when I'll come back home; working from home so I can spend more time with him. Ultimately, for me it's setting clear goals and knowing that you have to achieve those in a certain day or in a certain week and sort of playing the two of them so if you hit your goals, you've got more spare time to spend with your family. And that model seems to be working for me. (SA5)

5.6 Accelerating progress

When posed the question of what CEOs and HR professionals can do to accelerate the progress of women into senior leadership positions, women reported a range of suggestions on which people management policies need to be reviewed and introduced. South African women emphasized the social and organizational transformations that must take place within the South African context.

Some common suggestions include internship programs, programs directed at young girls, and graduate internship programs. Several women reported that organizational internship programs can be steered toward the professional development of South African women. What

was interesting in their suggestions was the long-term nature of the changes they considered important. Some participants suggested bringing in early-career professional women and working together to establish career development and leadership development plans. One participant suggested that corporates must partner and collaborate with recognized training organizations (RTOs) and universities and develop leadership programs for the younger generation. SA5 reported on the graduate leadership recruitment program for data science students.

We started an insurgent program with universities. It's a competition that we run externally to [] and the intention was to find the next set of leaders. You had to be younger than 25 to qualify for the program. (SA5)

She elaborated on how the recruitment phase can be reworked:

A conscious effort to make sure that they give preference to women being hired in the company and I think that if women get, and I don't mean preferential or anything. But I think there might be a different way to interview and to make that distinction between sort of a "male" style and a "female" style interview style. Just to have a more objective assessment of leadership quality. Because I think, currently, quite often when you interview a male, it's like "Yeah you will be perfect for the role." If you want to get the same type of information and comfort out of a female, you probably need to do things differently. (SA5)

Another participant suggested that continuous review of the team demographics, thinking about what the organization wants the team to look like going forward, and creating mindfulness and consciousness amongst everyone in the organization.

And it's the subtle things. So now when we get our CVs coming through, we look at it, let's check out how this woman is doing! Can she fit into our team? (SA8)

She also suggested subtle actions that executives and line managers can use.

We needed to make a mascot and they said, oh let's call him "Digital Dave" and I said no guys, let's call him "Digital Debby," it's female because she can juggle her personal life, she can do everything she needs to do. It's about changing mindset. (SA8)

From the responses, it can be noted that creating an inclusive organizational culture is everyone's responsibility. Although the participants emphasized the critical role of the CEO and the HR Director, they also expressed that every manager and senior manager must be committed to the process. The HR function is responsible for providing the support that managers and executives need to facilitate change and build the commitment towards an inclusive culture.

5.6.2 The leadership pipeline and talent management

Identify women's talent early on in the game. (SA8)

Another common suggestion was around building the leadership pipeline through career management discussions early in young women's careers. Sitting down with young women and having open discussions about their career path and their current and future role within the organization or profession would contribute to creating a talent pool of female leaders for the organization and industry.

As one participant reported:

We need to observe talent and help talent grow, and sometimes selfishly, in terms of developing them for your own space. But also, selflessly, in terms of developing them for others. (SA1)

It needs to be acknowledged that women's careers are very different from men's and that at some point in their careers they may start a family. Therefore, line managers and HR professionals can start engaging in discussions with early-career women to identify the types of organizational support they will need during this phase of their lives. One participant suggested what organizations can do:

Bring them in young. Identify them early and train them towards that and accept that they are going to go through a phase that ends up with going through maternity leave. But six months away is better than trying to get someone who is not good. (SA3).

She further elaborated that honest conversations during the career planning discussion were important.

For organizations that are very professional, very specific to what they do, they need to make sure that they are recruiting the right people. So, if you want to get someone to become a partner, don't force it on them. They have got to have the desire to become a partner and then train them up to do that. You do not wait for them to get to the manager level and then they tell you that they are leaving, and you are trying to give them a partnership. (SA3)

5.6.3 CEO commitment

The role of the CEO was described as integral for creating a gender-diverse and inclusive executive suite culture. All the participants asserted that the executive suite remains male-dominated, and that gender diversity in corporate South Africa is limited. When asked what initiatives the women were undertaking to increase the proportion of women at the executive level a popular response was that they keep the conversations about gender diversity going.

I think it's just about getting it done. (SA1)

One participant reported that the gender diversity agenda:

...needs to be a strategic intent. It needs to be discussed around the boardroom table as a strategic intent. And sometimes people are scared to name what it is. But if you are not talking about that on a Monday morning in your meeting, then it's not going to happen. So there needs to be a strategy behind that. (SA11)

The women expressed that the gender diversity topic is a regular topic discussed at the executive level, but beyond conversations, they have noticed very little change. Another participant clarified that the commitment must come from the CEO.

It has to come from the top. It must be looked at as something that everyone believes in and is driving. So, the CEO and the whole executive committee, to believe it and have to be living it. (SA10)

SA10 further explained that the executive committee members that raise the gender diversity issue during executive meetings would talk about the importance of gender diversity, yet still have male-dominated teams.

They push the conversation, but you don't see the parity in their team. So that made me think, some people are talking about it, but not necessarily living it. (SA10)

The above comments suggest that women alone cannot push for more gender diversity at the executive level. The commitment of all executives, men, and women, is required.

5.6.4 Visibility of successful women

Coupled with career management planning, the women reflected that increasing the visibility of women who successfully accomplished managing a family and a corporate career would impact young women's careers in corporate business.

I don't think there's enough emphasis on current female leaders in the business. If you open the newspaper still today, it's all men. I think that if we can showcase women a lot more, in their success and what they have achieved, we will go a long way. (SA6)

Another participant explained that highlighting women's success:

...is potentially one of the things that need to change in the culture. I think it's because some of the male staff are so top on mind, they become the logical choice. (SA5)

It was also suggested that successful women can change the narrative around women in leadership by sharing their experiences with younger women.

I think it's about sharing our stories because I think people need to understand, again, it's not about being a female, it's about understanding. Regardless of the adversity you had to overcome, the perceptions, the boundaries, and the barriers, you can do it. You can do it, and you should do it! (SA4)

5.6.5 Improved Leadership development programs

We have to start at the grassroots, at the bottom. And I think that self-love and self-awareness and actualization is something we must teach at a very young age. (SA12)

As discussed under the Steppingstones section in this chapter, leadership development programs had a considerably positive impact on women's preparation for senior leadership positions. Several participants suggested that the nature and content of leadership development programs needed to change. The content of leadership development programs focused on technical skills that any leader, male or female, must possess to qualify for an executive position and expressed that the existing content in MBA programs lacked platforms where successful women could share their experiences.

All other programs I attended were like MBA programs. This one was quite unique. It was about providing a platform for these female leaders and the development was more around personal leadership and organizational leadership. This program partnered up with other female leaders in other environments in emerging markets. (SA1)

She further recounted:

I remember the one time we sat with this woman, she comes from Saudi Arabia. It was about sharing how in Saudi Arabia; I think we are in a better position

in terms of how females are accepted in leadership from there. And how she basically crafted her own leadership journey where men could hear her voice and all of that. Sort of about experiences, sharing experiences more than developing technical skills. And in the process, we picked up a lot of different skills sets, also different ways of how you can be more of a balanced female leader, and I think that program was quite good because all the other programs were focused on the same things. (SA1)

Several participants reported on the unique historical and socio-cultural context in South Africa and reported that organizational and society-wide programs that help women understand and recognize that they are not “second-class” citizens are needed. In some instances, women believe that there are taboo topics that cannot be raised and discussed. These taboo topics are often the reason women are left behind.

One participant suggested that the content of leadership development programs for women must be carefully selected. She suggested that leadership development programs for women and women’s platforms should include:

How you deal with confrontation, expectations from CEOs and other executives who were there before; and how to handle that. Because nobody is going to model what comes with being a manager. So, it’s making sure that I am creating robust managers who can handle I think the storms as they climb up the ladder. (SA12)

These suggestions illustrate that sensitizing young women early in their careers would lead to a strong self-awareness of their own behaviors and of the realities of corporate environments, thus allowing women to better prepare themselves for senior leadership roles. Story sharing and visibility would also contribute to reducing existing stereotypes and serve to inspire young women to pursue careers in senior leadership roles.

5.6.6 Advice to young women

When asked the question “What advice would you give 25-year-old women aspiring to a career in corporate leadership today?”, the breadth of advice they would offer reflected their personal view on achieving a senior leadership role. During each interview, the women talked about a range of challenges they faced throughout their careers and their responses to this question reflected the participant’s individual experiences and values. The range of responses suggests that there was no consistent model or framework that the participants followed or would necessarily recommend but rather it was a reflection of their experiences and whether

or not they would encourage a young woman to make similar or different choices from their own.

One common response among the women was the importance of staying authentic and true to one's values, believing in oneself, finding a mentor, and building relationships.

I think some of the ones that I've learned is to be authentic, be you, be true to who you are. Yes, there are expectations that and yes being professional and acting professionally should not take away from you who you are. It should be in harmony with your values, which leads to my next point, which is be true to your values. Know what you can stand for, and what you tolerate, and don't waver. Being adaptable in a corporate environment sometimes gets taken as you are compromising who you are. So, don't compromise who you are. So adapt in the sense of it's a new space it could be a new cultural context, understanding it but be true to who you are as an individual and bring that in to support whatever the corporate objectives are. (SA1)

The women also suggested that young women should focus on building relationships and managing relationships. The participants expressed that those who aspired to a career in corporate South Africa must build relationships, network, and increase their visibility within their networks and roles. SA1 explained the importance of relationships in the work environment and advised young women on the type of relationships that impact one's leadership.

It is about building relationships and building relationships doesn't mean that you have to be friends with everyone but it's about your needing to develop trust and a rapport with the people around you. We may leave the office and not see each other until the next day. We may not hang out in social environments, but primary is respecting the individual in front of you; primary is making sure that the relationship is a relationship of respect and of trust and in that way, people will be more open to you and also more open to supporting you and also being honest and true. (SA1)

One of the quandaries many women find themselves in when making career decisions is finding the balance between pursuing a professional career and raising a family. Within the stories, the participants shared experiences where they faced this difficulty. Three respondents expressed that they would advise a young woman that managing a professional career and raising a family can be accomplished. SA4 advised:

I think that so many people, especially females think that you either need a career or a family. You can have both, it just takes a bit more planning and commitment, because I think that someone who stays at home and raises a family has time for themselves, I don't always think that I had time for myself, which is fine, it's about knowing what you want out of life. (SA4)

Participant SA7 would advise all women to be mindful of their words and the impact of their words on other women's mind-frames and situations.

Often, we find that women put other women down. They make comments like "Look at her she chooses work over her children." These comments often affect women in the corporate environment. (SA7)

This advice aims at increasing women's awareness of the impact of such comments on reinforcing existing stereotypes. Such comments often have a negative impact on women's career decisions.

All the participants were supported by mentors or sponsors (as discussed in the steppingstones phase). Two respondents reiterated the importance of mentors in their advice to young women.

I would have looked for a mentor much earlier in life. I actually didn't know what a mentor was until a few years into my career, and I simply didn't have a formal mentor, mentorship relationship until later. So, I would definitely say build relationships and find a mentor, or two, or three. (SA2)

Several women expressed that knowledge and expertise built their credibility amongst peers.

They will take you when you are really, really good and that's why I push females to study further, to read, to get as much experience as you can, to become an absolute fundi in your field. (SA11)

Having a flexible mindset was also important for career success. As one participant advised that early career women should not:

...get married to whatever they studied. So, the fact that you studied, I don't know in my case, I studied economics and when I studied, I was becoming an economist. I did everything else in my life except that. So, studying yes and say you have got a dream to become X, but also know that life may not turn out that way because jobs come up based on supply and demand. (SA13)

The importance of taking initiative, being reliable, focused, self-motivated, humble, resilient, and working hard was voiced in the participants' responses.

"Nobody is going to do it for you. Nobody is going to push you" (SA9).

Another participant highlighted the importance of knowing when to say no:

I think the one thing is to know when to say no, because saying yes is not always the right thing, so know when to say no, it's good to say no, focus, know where you want to go in your own career. (SA4)

The participants were very forthcoming regarding what they felt were the critical qualities, attributes, and skills that young women ought to develop early in their careers. The range of

responses illustrates that their advice originates from a personal reflection on their lived experiences, showing that the journey into a senior leadership role may not be a structured and linear process. There is a self-awareness about the decisions they took at critical points in their careers and what they learned from those decisions, and a self-awareness of what worked uniquely for them. The responses further suggest that despite the varied paths there was a general view that career planning is essential to guide career decisions and maintain focus on one's long-term objectives.

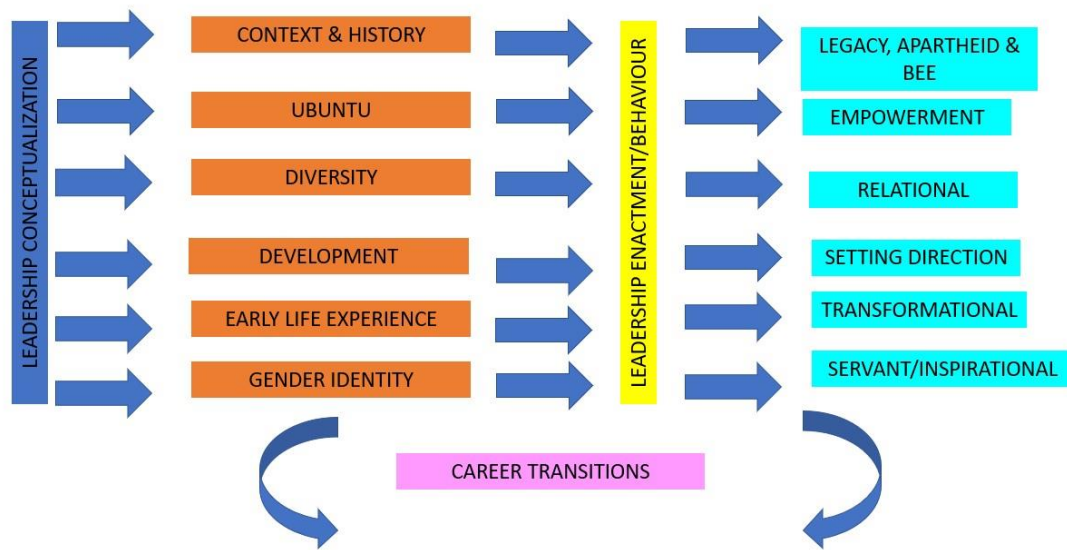
In summary, as noted above, being true to themselves, seeking support through mentors and sponsors, working hard, and becoming an expert were seen as enablers for successful transition into senior leadership positions.

5.7 Leadership conception and enactment in South Africa

This section reports on the participants' conception and enactment of leadership as well as the contextual forces that shaped their concept of leadership. An overview of the interview themes for research question one: "How do women from South Africa conceptualize and enact leadership?" is then presented in a concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership (Figure 5.5). This diagram provides an overview of the respondents' conceptualizations and enactments of leadership under two broad themes: (1) "leadership conceptualization" and (2) "leadership enactment." The leadership conception theme is categorized into seven sub-themes and the enactment theme is categorized into six sub-themes. Each sub-theme is presented in the section below.

Figure 5.5

Concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership – South Africa



5.7.1 Leadership conceptualization

Several factors shaped South African women's concept of leadership, including context, historical events, Ubuntu, the diverse socio-cultural context in South Africa, and the participant's early life experiences.

Context and History

We deal with legacy ... and also that diversity and inclusivity are two key considerations African leaders need to understand legacy because we've got a complex history and maybe a newer history to the rest of the world. (SA4).

The external or international portrayal of African leadership is dominated by perceptions of corruption in the political landscape and the women acknowledged that political constraints and corporate leadership intersect. However, the purpose of this study is focused on corporate leadership and not on the broader national political landscape.

Overall, these women portrayed and perceived leadership in Africa, specifically South Africa, as a unique and complex construct that is difficult to define because it is in transition.

Leadership: A concept in transition

The women described leadership in South Africa as a leadership in transition. Leadership styles and behaviors are perceived as changing from an authoritative command and control style towards a collaborative, inspirational and servant type leadership style, where leaders need a thorough understanding of context, culture and legacy.

African leadership is around what is fit for purpose at the time. In terms of where we are from in a developmental environment. I think it's being focused on where we are as a nation and as a continent. From that point of view, I think we have started seeing some elements of a changing perspective, it's about the future thinking of leadership in terms of how do we build that mold, in terms of coming in for the future. (SA1)

A participant went on to describe the South African context as an environment:

That is fast changing to adapt to the new South African context in terms of where the country is going and we've had in mind an understanding that you have probably not just eleven ethnicities in the country, but also a lot of people coming from outside of South Africa, Africa and also Europe. (SA1)

The women overwhelmingly agreed that a patriarchal culture is still present, but three respondents stated that the place and acceptance of women in senior leadership roles is genuinely appreciated by their corporate employers. These respondents agreed that the development of women within corporate South Africa is underway, and the future for women in senior leadership roles is positive.

That's an interesting question. I think quite traditionally, leadership in Africa has been quite patriarchal. There's quite a sense of patriarchy in leadership ...but it is slowly changing, where leadership is becoming someone that can mobilize and inspire an organization. They are starting to look for younger blood, for people that motivate or inspire, that get things done. I think the definition is slowly changing but still very male-dominated. It's sort of modern age leading. So, you are not that authoritative dictator giving instructions. (SA5)

Many women made reference to a new leadership style which they saw as leadership in transition. Some referred to it as a shift from traditional to modern leadership, while others compared leadership between a traditional and progressive leader. This difference will be further discussed in the section on male vs female leadership styles.

I think leadership is leadership (SA12)

When asked if they perceived a difference in leading in the African or South African context compared to other contexts, some women believed that leadership in Africa is no different from

leadership in other parts of the world. They agreed that the fundamentals of leadership – planning, organizing, creating vision, and setting direction – were universal. However, when they reflected on the question, they emphasized the environment and described several contextual differences in Africa and more particularly in South Africa. One participant noted:

If you asked me five years ago, I would have said no because leadership=leadership=leadership. But I think South African leadership is unique in the sense that we deal with legacy in a different manner and also that diversity and inclusivity are two key considerations in our daily decisions, and I don't think that is necessarily shared across borders. (SA4)

The respondents perceived two dimensions to leadership: (1) leadership as a role or function and (2) leadership in the context in which you are performing that role. They described the African context as unique, communal, diverse, afflicted with challenges and influenced by culture, the political landscape, and social transformation.

I imagine that being in Africa, we are communal in nature. We are community-based. It's not about "I" it's about "we." (SA13)

In Africa and South Africa, leaders have a broader, national responsibility beyond achieving corporate objectives. One participant reflected that.

Africa is unique in the sense that it is a continent that is viewed as being generally lagging behind in a lot of things, it's got its unique challenges. Maybe from that perspective if you are an African leader, you should be a leader who is willing to change the narrative of the continent. (SA14)

Another significant difference noted was the collective nature of the African culture and that an understanding of the different stakeholders' interests and needs was important for decision-making.

I suppose it's a notion of collectivity where I don't think leaders are appointed simply on the basis of employment. So, it is to understand that there is a collective mandate and to understand that there are different claims. There is a wonderful saying that says if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together and I think a lot of American and European leaders go fast but African leaders go together. (SA4)

Ubuntu

One of the key differences identified was that leadership in South Africa is centered around the collective and communal nature of the South African context, emphasizing that in their leadership conception, inclusion and managing diversity are critical leadership behaviors for leadership effectiveness.

“We have a concept here called Ubuntu” (SA13)

The women described the South African context as collective and communal and the Ubuntu philosophy was echoed throughout the narratives, although not all participants used the term Ubuntu.

We are all leaders in our respective capacities whether you are in a home environment or in a social environment we have a concept here called Ubuntu, Ubuntu is about you are a person because of other people. You are not a person because of yourself. I do not exist because of myself, I exist because there is a bigger purpose. (SA13)

She follows this statement with:

That is a South African thing, or that’s an African thing, not so much a female thing to be honest. (SA13)

These comments suggest that leadership conception in South Africa has multiple dimensions shaped by culture from a broad African perspective, a gender perspective and a South African view.

It really means something bigger than myself. It’s not really the number of people or the position that I hold, it’s really about looking at my purpose and doing things for something bigger than myself. It really is about a collective and working together towards something greater than yourself and greater than your own personal goals. (SA12)

Humanity as a character trait was described as essential in these women’s conceptualizations of leadership. Love, care and respect for others was illustrated in their descriptions. While meeting objectives is critical in one’s performance as a leader, performance is not just measured by profits. There are other roles and expectations that leaders in South Africa must embrace to be successful. Leaders need to show empathy, understanding of the cultural nuances, work with not just age, gender and racial diversity, but also ethnic diversity, diversity in socio-economic backgrounds and diversity in values. The values of communalism echoed through their responses on leadership in South Africa.

Diversity

“we’re so diverse there’s no one true culture” (SA6)

The women explained that the South African context is unique and diverse. They described individuals who understood cultural background, social-economic backgrounds and

legacy and who held a strong commitment to developing others and inspiring others to be better as the core components of leadership in Africa and SA.

I think diversity and inclusivity are a major thing because you are dealing with so many different types of people on a daily basis. (SA4).

Development

The women revealed that leadership embodied developing others. The women expressed that leaders have a responsibility to assist, coach, and mentor staff to plan and manage their own career development. Collaborating with each team member to identify their strengths, weaknesses and career aspirations and jointly set career development objectives that linked the team objectives with everyone's personal development ambitions was found to be a critical role for the women.

Leadership for me is also ensuring that you create enough opportunities for people to grow and develop, and it's also taking the time to understand the people that report to you and that you work closely with. (SA6)

The women explained that leadership also involved supporting staff in their learning and development journey through coaching, provision of regular feedback and providing opportunities for engagement with challenging and diverse projects.

I think leadership is setting an example and supporting people reporting to you. It's about developing the people that are working and reporting for you to such an extent that you create success and setting an example where people want to follow you, because if people want to follow you, they aspire to be like you and they then do what is required and more because they are personally committed. So it's walking in front and walking behind. (SA4)

Early life experience

The women interviewed described female role models who have had the most impact in their lives. These early life experiences shaped their values, beliefs and behaviors, and contributed to their conceptualizations of leadership and leadership styles.

"She had to break every norm" (SA3)

One participant explained that at a very young age, she observed her grandmother, and she grew up believing that women were not victims of circumstance.

If I think about my grandmother whose husband died very young and it was just her and her son in a very rural village. Very poor and she needed to manage my father who was one of the few graduates that came out of Tanzania. For him to get a doctorate from a village mud hut. That was leadership. As far as I see it, she had to break every norm and convince the community to encourage and to be able to go to school and leave her alone for years. Encourage him to go overseas and study and come back and be somebody, for me that's leadership. (SA3)

Early life experiences of observing close family members overcome hardships to achieve success shaped the women's values and conceptions of leadership and developed their personal character.

Gender identity

The women attributed the differences between men and women to societal factors, including the way in which they were raised by carers and parents, life experiences and fundamental genetic make-up. These factors shaped their leadership styles.

One participant reported on the difference between male and female leadership styles thus:

Men are brought up and told to be number one – strong. Therefore, emotions are not encouraged when you are a man. Men are brought up to be extremely competitive at a very young age, so everything is a competition. Men are taught to stand up for their views even if they might not necessarily be right or they would not necessarily back down a lot of their views. Whereas women I think we are nurturers by nature. We nurture our children we nurture our families. We nurture everything around us. So, our leadership style is almost a motherly type of leadership where I see beyond what you are saying. I am looking for what you are actually feeling to what you actually mean and if I can really touch that then I can encourage you and then I can win you over and we can move together. I think that's a major difference. (SA3)

The common narrative emerging from these tales is that a harsh command and control leadership style is not embedded in their conceptualization of leadership: a female conceptualization. The women recognized that there are biological differences between men and women and these differences influence a person's leadership style and effectiveness. Furthermore, women bring into the leadership space traits and individualities that add value in senior position roles.

Another participant explained that women are distinctive in their ability to balance the need for goal-driven behavior and people-centered behaviors better than men.

I think women bring something very unique to the table when it comes to leadership and I think as women we can be as goal-oriented as men, when need be, but we can also step away and become a lot more people-focused when need be. And I think for us when to be people orientated, when to be goal orientated, to an extent almost come naturally but I don't think men has got that ease to move between the 2 focuses and I think that's what makes women leadership so special. That's what we bring to the table that's very special. (SA5)

5.7.2 Leadership enactment

This section reports on how South African women enact leadership. The participants emphasized that their leadership style involved developing and empowering staff, creating a vision, building relationships, inspiring others, and initiating and implementing change. South African women reported that the legacy of apartheid and legislative reforms influence their leadership behaviors.

Legacy, apartheid, and Black Economic Empowerment legislation

Several women reported that leadership enactment depended on the context and experiences and life histories of the people they are leading. History and the legacy of apartheid has a substantial influence on their leadership enactment. In their leadership positions they focused on the following:

I think it's exceptionally difficult to [define] in this environment to put a word or to describe it. Because we're so diverse there's no one true culture, there's no one true way that people lead or manage others and the doesn't necessarily come from a racial background, because you have people of color and people of non-color who are very sort of self-intuitive. It depends on the circumstances, the context, the environment, how you've been raised as a person. I have met Black people who are very receptive to being kind and caring and cautious and White people who come from very conservative environments. Throughout my career I have had very vast cultural differences. (SA6)

Empowerment

The vast majority (12 out of 14) of the women interviewed believed that leadership equated to empowerment.

It's a broader definition in terms of the impact of one's leadership and again the legacy. In South Africa, in particular, we have the legacy of apartheid

where people of colour were excluded from certain opportunities and so leadership involved empowering those previously disadvantaged. (SA4)

What was common amongst all the responses was that leadership enactment involved empowering and developing previously disadvantaged groups, including women, for future leadership roles. Although they adopted a structured approach to empowering their employees, building trust, giving feedback, being honest, and developing staff were important leadership enactment behaviors. They identified the need to treat people fairly as it helped to build trust and ensure expectations were clear.

I have a lot of one-on-ones. I have a lot of team meetings. (SA13)

These actions were then followed up with regular feedback sessions and monitoring. The structured process the women followed recognized individual differences among their subordinates and all the women commented that understanding the individual needs and aspirations of the team was an important step for building trust with their team members. The women also agreed that sometimes empowerment meant having honest conversations with team members and these conversations sometimes led to the team member being transferred to other roles or leaving the organization.

I give feedback in terms of how to improve things opposed to just doing it myself. And sometimes it's actually harder to give feedback that just do it yourself. I'm very honest in my approach and people actually appreciate it once they get to understand it and I will actually say to someone "this is not on standard or you are not ready for a promotion and I can send you to the interview but you are not on standard so firstly it is going to damage your own reputation and secondly you are not going to get it, so I'm not going to do it." So, people trust me, and I think for me that is important because they will come back and get my input. (SA4)

Being a sponsor

What is interesting in these women's journey is the impact their early and mid-career experiences had on their leadership style and leadership enactment. The women emphasized that leadership was not a position and that leadership evolved around a person's ability to develop others through building collaborative relationships. From the narratives, it can be noted that once women reached a senior role, they supported the development and progress of other women. The platforms these women used to help other women include mentoring

younger employees, participating in secondary school career initiatives, drawing on their personal and professional networks to develop staff and other women, and influencing other women through one-on-one conversation and conversations at the executive level.

It's about identifying if there's any developmental needs at a professional level and then I will draw on my bank of knowledge to say this is what I think you should be doing but also what I've done in the past is I've also partnered up people in my team with people from outside the organisation. From the network of people that I have, if someone has a professional need, let's say to they want to go and study something like digital marketing. I will look at my network of people that are experts within that field and then partner them up with those people. (SA1)

Several women reported that they sponsored and mentored young men and women.

The team was predominantly women (her team). What I did was just moved them into management positions where I saw potential. Where I had the one-on-ones and mentored and understood where people wanted to go. I found that a lot of them had a more administrative level, I wouldn't say it's not worth it because when you're head of the department and managers report to you and now you don't have managers, you develop people to become managers in those manager positions. So, for me, the biggest drive really is to get these women into management positions. (SA12)

Being a role model

My brother said, "I want my daughter to be like you," and you realize that you're busy living your life living for yourself and you don't realize people are watching, people are emulating; people regard you. I mean I didn't realize the weight of my words until someone said, "You know this other day this is what you said, and this is how it made me feel." You know and I was like, "Oh wow that's great you know I didn't even realize that my words would have that much of an impact." (SA12)

Because women are underrepresented in senior leadership roles in South Africa, their visibility in these roles serves as a role model for other women. One participant recounted:

I don't think when I'm sitting in a board room it makes any difference to me. But when you do walk in the corridors and I have women who look up to me sometimes is not even about what they say, it's the way they look at you that you actually realize that I represent something bigger than my male counterpart. And therefore, I actually need to make myself accessible for them to ask whatever questions they might ask in terms of how did I make the journey. But I have also seen that it encouraged a lot of other women to be bold and actually apply for these positions and in my own organization now I had quite a number of positions opened up. I restructured the team, and I got a lot of approvals. And I get about 80% of women applying which was not

happening before when we had a GM who was male. So, I think it has built confidence in other women that they too can do it. (SA3)

These comments suggest that female senior leaders represent a much bigger role in the corporate environment. Female senior leaders in business are more visible and serve as role models for early-career women. Additionally, they spend time formally and informally mentoring other women and being careful about how their actions and outcomes may affect other women. This was explained by one participant who decided to resign at the end of her contract.

It was a three-year contract, so I opted not to renew it. There were some discussions about why I wasn't renewing. I did mention that (the change in her superior's behaviors after she returned from maternity leave) as one of the reasons. I was careful not to make it seem like I couldn't handle the work any longer because I knew it would put the next women that will come along at a disadvantage. So, I was careful to craft it and say that I actually needed more flexibility in my life, and I am at a stage in my career where I would like to be able to customize a bit the times and the work that I do. (SA2)

Relational

People are very much important, more than organizational objectives. (SA1)

The focus on developing relationships with peers, superiors and staff was emphasized by all participants. As leaders, they focused on understanding each team members' personal objectives and guiding employees towards achieving their personal and professional goals.

"For each individual under my care or guidance" (SA1)

Their leadership style also involved collaborating with staff, setting the direction, and understanding task and organizational objectives. It is of interest that all the women acknowledged that their success was founded on their ability to build relationships with others. This involved understanding their team members through having honest conversations with them and providing a focus on meeting personal, project and team objectives. The way in which these women achieved the vision and objectives reflected their commitment to developing sound relationships with their team. They describe their leadership behaviors thus:

It comes down to compassion and understanding and just having empathy. (SA9)

Despite holding corporate leadership roles, the women were also very clear that leadership was not a position or a title.

For me leadership is not about a position, it is not about a salary, it's not about power, it's about developing the people that are working and reporting to you in such an extent that you create success and setting an example where people want to follow you. (SA4)

The common focus on relationships and collectively working together is further emphasized in their responses on African and South African leadership.

I like to find out about how people are feeling, how their experience in the company can be made better. (SA14)

The focus on developing sound relationships with employees, understanding each team member's personal objectives, and guiding followers towards achieving their personal and professional goals was common amongst the women's personal definition of leadership.

For me people are very much important more than the organizational objectives. I need to ensure that the people around me are in a good space. Making sure that the relationship front was what I delivered on more than the other objectives. (SA1)

Setting direction

Setting the strategic direction and understanding task and organizational objectives came through in their articulation of their realm of responsibility. Many of the women used terms such as accountability and meeting objectives when responding to questions relating to empowerment and communication.

It's about the bigger picture and how to get everyone there. I always say I have a saying that says, "I will leave no one behind," and for me that's what drives me, leaving no one behind. (SA12)

Transformational

Most participants from this cohort narrated experiences of successfully implementing change and stressed that initiating and implementing change programs was an integral part of their leadership enactment.

I think change is what I do. (SA4)

The types of change initiatives described through each participant's story centered around changing team or organizational culture, leading change programs to meet regulatory

compliance standards, restructuring the organization and implementing training and development programs.

Change is something that I'm perceived to be quite good at. I've been brought in to take over a very fragmented team, sort of a previous role that I've had at []. To make quite a fragmented team that was sitting all over the organisation, into a single unit and start changing the operating model inside the organisation from every business unit for itself to have a central team, where every business unit needs to make use of a central team. In a consulting world, people are quite precious about who's bringing in the money. So that was quite a different mindset, that we have a central team that the rest of the organisation needs to tap into and money flows accordingly. So yeah, I was brought in to do that journey quite a lot. (SA5)

As SA5 goes on to explain, change requires a lot of personal interaction with those impacted by the change and this helped them to see both the individual and organizational benefits.

So, I often joke on the inside saying that, "I drink coffee for a living." But that's how I've made it happen. I've had a lot of interactions with the relevant stakeholders over lots of cups of coffee sharing my vision, sharing why I believe what we are doing is the right set up. What will be the benefit for the bigger organisation as well for that particular person that I'm talking to? And ultimately, by the time I left [] that central team was set up, it was 24 people strong and the whole operating models were in place and ready to be rolled out. (SA5)

From the comments, it is observed that all the responses to this question illustrated the importance of (1) support from the CEO and the HR Director, (2) linking the change with the organization's strategic direction, (3) identifying advocates who support the change initiative, (4) explaining the rationale for the change, and (5) transparency throughout the change process.

Another interesting point was that the participants were change initiators at different stages of their career and not only when they reached senior leadership positions. Some participants reported that their success at implementing change increased their visibility and led to promotion.

It was not only successful. I was made the group IT manager is an output of the efforts that I had put in there and I had the pleasure of 3 years to see that strategy implemented. (SA3)

Another participant reported that initiating change may not always be successful. She explained that her motivation to work in corporate South Africa was to increase gender and racial diversity in South African corporations.

The ongoing narratives among friends, amongst family, the bill is always there – you never crack this, this is a white man's world is not going to change. That

is why a lot of us have gone on our own you know. So that's kind discouraged me, and this is what people saying look you are basically not going to win this one. And my big why in life well, my big passion is transforming corporates of South Africa. (SA12)

But she also acknowledged the challenges associated with transforming the corporate culture and redressing historical racial and gender imbalances.

Change is not an easy thing and it's not something that you can force on people. That it's also for you to understand that as much as you want to bring change for good, if it is not your place to bring change then it is not your place. If yours is just to plough the ground so that someone else can come plant the seed, then I think it's an understanding that I'm part of a bigger value chain and I think that's one of the things that I have learnt that I'm part of a bigger value chain. Sometimes I want to bring change but maybe I'm not the one to plant that seed, maybe I must just plough the ground and prepare it for the next person to come in and bring about that change. So, for me that's what change has really taught me is that when you're trying to bring about change is that you need to be able to convince people and you won't always be able to convince people and it's ok. Yeah. (SA12)

From these comments the participants illustrated a transformational change approach in their leadership practice. It was clear that the effective implementation and management of change was central to their leadership enactment.

Servant and Inspirational

The women related that leadership was also about serving a purpose beyond their own objectives and goals. The way these women described their leadership behaviors demonstrates a certain level of selflessness. The women described their experience of leadership. Leadership was about giving back to the community and society as reported by one participant.

Whether it being through your company or through yourself. And we've seen some fantastic stories of people who have gotten involved. I think of my current CEO who personally – they've got feeding schemes. They've got programs for young females who don't have access to sanitary wear, and none of that is ever published. And that's the stated intent, it's not a marketing tool and you'll find that most of the inspirational leaders in SA have that trait where they've got that humanitarian touch. (SA11)

The positive impact of relationship building between leaders and staff comes through as inspirational and creates an environment of mutual trust and respect. The quotes suggests that these women recognize and enact the virtues of fairness, equality, and respect for one another.

The way that she treated people was absolutely awesome. You know she was very engaging, very understanding. It didn't matter if you were the cleaning lady or if you were on her senior counsel, you know she treated people exactly the same. Very open, warm-hearted, comforting and that was for me a true inspiration to say. (SA6)

In articulating the virtue of respect, one participant described her former superior thus:

One of the things I've learned from him is if you need to tell people what your credentials are all the time then you don't earn the right to respect, so people need to uncover it themselves He treated everyone as equals and I think for me he set the example, he worked extremely hard and it's something I do as well, I try and treat everyone as equals, I try to be fair, I try to be respectful, I try to know what is happening everywhere at once and those were all of the things he instilled in me, and he always gave opportunities for you to speak your mind without taking offence or without being defensive. (SA4)

She further explained that her enactment of leadership centers around truthfulness in honestly communication with staff and taking personal responsibility:

I also never set people up for failure and I think that's quite important because people know that if it went through me it will be successful, so I'm very honest in my approach and people actually appreciate it ... So, people trust me, and I think for me that is important because they will come back and get my input. (SA4).

Prior research (Medard, 2017; d'Agostino et al., 2016) has often portrayed Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa as corrupt and hostile, but it can be observed from these comments that these women's conception and enactment of leadership was founded on the principles of building trust through acting with fairness, integrity, and transparency. Participant SA11 explained that these values were a critical component of leadership, and that leadership in South Africa is transforming into a leadership model where acting ethically is critical for organizations and their leaders.

In the current political landscape honesty and integrity has become key. I think they have become the absolute key credentials. You know in the past it was very much what your experience was, how many degrees you had how many companies you have run. And I'll tell you now that the scrutiny in terms of integrity and honesty because there is so much corruption in our country. It has absolutely become a pre-requisite and I'll tell you that the tolerance in companies for unethical behavior is zero. When I worked for [] who is a as you know is partly owned by [] that ethics line is one of the most active ethics lines I've ever come across. And people are held responsible even for small things and people get held accountable because your followers need to see that you mean business. (SA11)

She further explained that leadership development programs for aspiring senior managers dedicated a significant part of the program towards ethical leadership.

Ethics was a huge issue. And I think that is what part and parcel of what private sector are doing at the moment. It's about integrity and honesty and quite frankly leaders are caught out and they disappear forever. They'd never allowed back in. There is no tolerance in the private sector and I umm I think umm that is important. (SA11)

Another participant reflected that:

So, for me leadership is not about a position, it is not about a salary, it's not about power, it's about developing the people that are working and reporting for you in such an extent that you create success and setting an example where people want to follow you. (SA4)

These women conceptualized leadership as a role where leaders serve others. The hidden social barriers that impede women's progress early in their development was expressed by participants and many women from this cohort were actively involved in programs to uplift communities and remove social impediments for women to succeed.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter started with an overview of the profile of the 14 participants interviewed and their career journey and patterns from graduation to their appointment to senior leadership positions in South African corporations.

The four-stage conceptual model illustrated the career trajectory of South African women. The career journey and transition conceptual model describes the key enablers that facilitated their career progress from early career to their appointment to senior leadership positions and explained the career transitions and challenges these women traversed to progress into a senior leadership role.

A two-tier framework describes how the participants conceptualize and enact leadership. Conceptualizing leadership describes how women in senior leadership positions in corporate South Africa define leadership and enact their leadership roles in their respective positions.

The "Building the foundations" phase describes the impact of their early life experiences on their career choices, career mobility and motivation. The "Steppingstones"

phase explains supportive structures, relationships and learning paths the participants traversed to prepare them for senior management. The “Reaching the destination” phase describes the experiences of these women once they reached the executive level and the strategies these women employed to adapt to and integrate into the male-dominated senior leadership team. The “Accelerating progress” phase describes (1) the advice these women would share with young women pursuing senior leadership positions, and (2) advice to CEOs and HR directors on how to facilitate and sustain the progress of women into senior leadership roles.

These women’s careers resemble a boundaryless career orientation. They transitioned (inter- and intra-organizational transitions) five or more times throughout their career and their career decisions were triggered by the need for more balance in their lives, their desire for challenging work assignments, opportunities for career development, and the impact of unsupportive superiors. The main enablers for their career success included personal values and characteristics developed during their early life experiences, their achievement orientation, their gender-neutral mindset, legislative reforms, meaningful relationships with superiors, mentors, sponsors, access to structured leadership development training and executive coaching, support from parents and spouses, their expertise and performance. The main challenges these women experienced included unsupportive superiors, perceptions of sexism, feelings of exclusion, systemic gender stereotyping, and lack of support after maternity leave.

Leadership conception for women from South Africa was shaped by context, their early life exposure to leadership, the values and virtues of the Ubuntu philosophy, the diverse social-cultural context, and their gender identity. Leadership enactment was influenced by the legacy of apartheid and the legislative reforms, and involved relationship building, empowering people through mentoring, sponsoring, and supporting employees, building trust, and collaborating with employees, peers, and superiors to implement change and create an inclusive work culture.

6 Findings: Mauritius

This chapter presents the findings from 14 interviews with Mauritian women holding senior management positions in Mauritian corporations. The findings report on three themes that emerged from the data. The first theme reports on the participant's career journey from post-education graduation to appointment into senior leadership positions. The second theme reports on the enablers of career success in leadership that the Mauritian women encountered throughout their careers. The third theme reports on how these women conceptualize and enact leadership. The chapter begins with the demographic profile of the participants, the definition of senior management used in this study to recruit participants, and the conceptual framework for women's success in corporate leadership.

The findings are presented as two conceptual maps. One illustrates how these women successfully transitioned into senior management roles and the enablers and roadblocks for career success in Mauritius. The other elucidates how these women conceptualize and enact leadership.

6.1 Participants' professional and educational profile

The research project involved analyzing data from 14 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with women in management positions (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1*Participants' profile – Mauritius*

Case	Age	Industry	Job Title	Marital Status	No. of Children	Years in senior leadership	Educational level
MAU1	41-45	Financial Services	Director	Married	1	NA	Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators
MAU2	46-50	Financial Services	Director	Married	2	7-10	Bachelors and Fellow Chartered & Certified Accountant
MAU3	30-35	Transport & Logistics	Managing Director	Married	2	9	MBA
MAU4	51-55	Financial Services	Partner	Married	3	1	Bachelors & Institute of Chartered Secretaries & Administrators
MAU5	NA	Conglomerate	Chief Communications Officer	Divorced	0	15	Master's level
MAU6	46-50	Hotel & Hospitality	Chief Financial Officer	NA	0	5	Master's level
MAU7	41-45	Financial Services	Director	Married	2	9	Master's level
MAU8	50-55	Information, Communication & Technology	General Manager	Married	1	5	IBM Professional Certification
MAU9	41-45	Financial Services	Associate Director	Married	2	2	Bachelors in engineering
MAU10	50-55	Conglomerate	CSR and Sustainability Manager	Married	2	18	Master's level
MAU11	41-45	Financial Services	Associate Director	Divorced	1	1	Master's level
MAU12	50-55	Conglomerate	Chief Operating Officer	Married	3	15	Master's level
MAU13	NA	Agri-business	Director	Married	3	13	PhD
MAU14	40-45	Conglomerate	Chief Marketing and Communications Officer	Married	3	3	Master's level

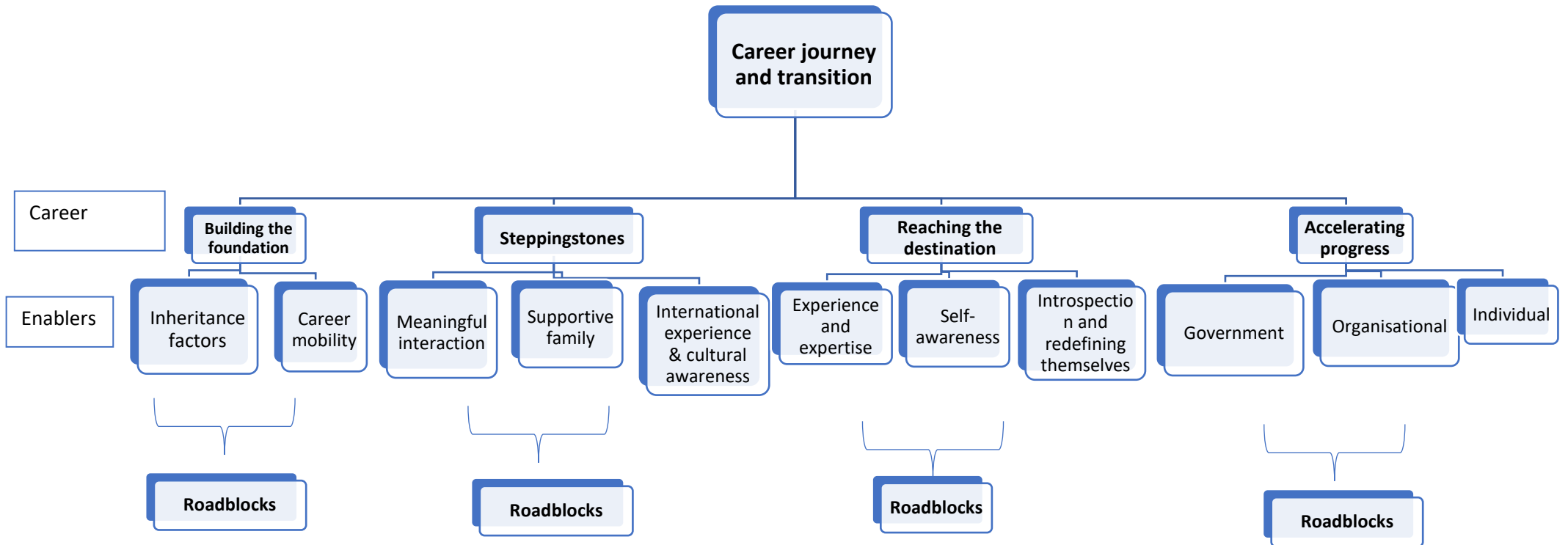
All the women pursued further education, but the participants' progression from secondary school into post-secondary education and work differed. Some women worked full-time and pursued further education on a part-time basis while other participants pursued full-time university qualifications before they entered corporate business. Five women described the competitive primary education system and were from the Mauritius 'star' schools (as explained in Chapter 2, section 2.4.1). Eleven participants from this cohort lived abroad. Out of the fourteen participants, six started their careers outside of Mauritius and three women were born and raised abroad. Eight participants held a master's level qualification, one held a PhD qualification, and six held bachelor's and professional qualifications.

6.2 Mauritian women's career journey and transition into senior leadership roles

The following section addresses the research question: "How do women from Mauritius transition into senior leadership positions?" The findings are explained through the identification of two themes and are supported by participant quotes. An overview of the interview themes is then presented in Figure 6.1. This concept map provides a diagrammatic overview of the respondents' career journey from graduating from secondary school to their appointment into a senior leadership position under three broad phases: (1) "Building the foundations," (2) "Steppingstones," and (3) "Reaching the destination." A fourth phase, "Accelerating the progress" reports on the participants' advice to younger women and organizations on how to increase the progress of women into senior leadership positions. Each phase has sub-themes that describe the career-related actions and activities that facilitated the career progress of participants and the roadblocks these women encountered as they advanced in their careers.

Figure 6.1

Concept map of the career journey and transition into senior leadership positions - Mauritius



6.3 Building the foundations

This section reports on the inheritance factors that influenced the participants' early career choices, triggers, barriers, and the subsequent decisions for a transition from starting work to their appointment into senior management roles and the roadblocks young women experienced in their early career.

6.3.1 Inheritance factors

When describing their career journeys, the women made constant reference to their family backgrounds, their parents, and their primary and secondary school experiences. Their career choices and decisions were encouraged or in some cases, limited by their background and external structures that created opportunities and challenges. Parents' attitudes towards the role of men and women in society also contributed to the women's sense of identity and shaped their expectations. Three women described how their lineage of strong women and women who were committed to uplifting and progressing their families impacted their career ambitions. Each of these women came from humble backgrounds and observed their grandmothers and mothers' actions and behaviors and sacrifices and drew inspiration from their experiences.

One participant discussed her father's role as a sports coach in Mauritius and how this presented opportunities for her and her family to travel extensively. She expressed that this early exposure to different cultures developed her cultural adaptability skills which enabled her to work for multinational companies.

I come from a background where my dad was a sportsperson as well in addition to his work and I had exposure to people from all walks of life and from different communities. And through his exposure to sports, he used to travel a lot and we had exposure to people around the globe, so from Reunion Island, South Africa, the UK. etc. So, I've been exposed to a lot of cultures. We were exposed to other cultures which were very important. (MAU2)

A critical factor that impacted the women's career choices and career journeys was their family background and access to higher education after completing their high school certificate qualification. Several women started their career working in entry level positions post-secondary school because their parents could not afford higher education, or because the women did not want to place financial burden on their parents.

So, I've quite struggled to get to professional studies because my parents couldn't afford to send me to university. So, I had to struggle by myself to try

to get to, to have tertiary education. So, I started really by working after secondary school. (MAUI)

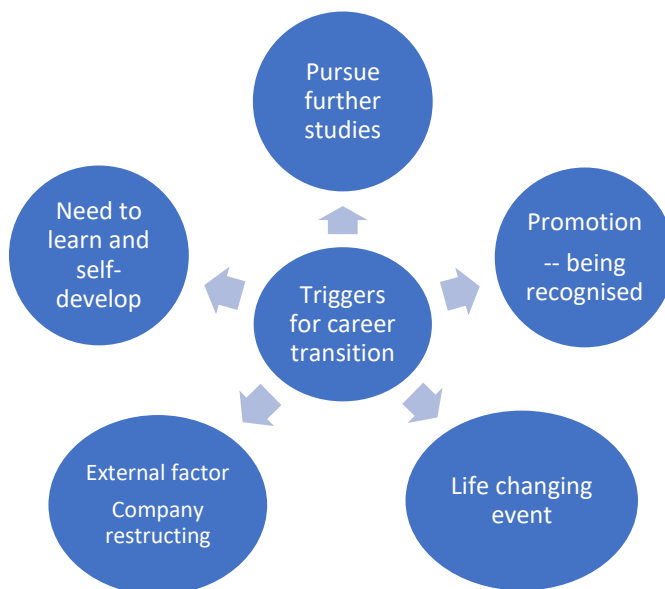
Although these women were high achievers, commencing in their primary school years all the way through to secondary school, access to higher education was restricted due to their socio-economic background.

Parents who empowered their daughters from an early age and created a gender-neutral home environment laid the foundations for many of these women. Ensuring that boys and girls were treated equally and given the same opportunities for learning and development allowed these women to develop gender-neutral attitudes and characteristics in their early life that helped them in their careers.

I'm the only daughter, and at home, there's never been this sort of discrimination against girls or boys and everyone was treated the same. (MAUI)

6.3.2 Career mobility and motivation

A second theme that emerged from the narratives was the different triggers that led to a career change. The main triggers for career transitions amongst Mauritian women included the desire to pursue further education, promotion, life changing events, external factors (organizational restructuring), and the need to learn and self-develop, as illustrated in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2*Triggers for career transitions***Pursue further studies**

I had a government job and then I left and went for my studies. (MAU8)

Early career choices and determination to pursue further studies was found to be a trigger for career change. After working for some time, three women decided to leave Mauritius and pursue further education abroad. The reasons for leaving Mauritius centered around the lack of availability of appropriate learning programs along with a lack of support to complete distance learning courses.

We didn't have lots of support in Mauritius in terms of ICSA studies. So, I decided one day, like that, after working four and a half years at [], and because there was an ICSA office and there was a guy from ICSA London visiting Mauritius. I was at that point in time where I had reached the professional level. It was very tough; I couldn't have the support necessary to go on with the course. The ICSA representative suggested that I come to London to complete the qualification. (MAU1)

Most women changed jobs and job roles several times throughout their careers as they achieved professional and university qualifications.

"With qualification came promotion" (MAU2)

A mixture of high performance, experience and qualification led these women to gain promotions to higher level positions in middle management and project management roles and ultimately into senior management positions.

I was a clerical worker. I worked there for 6 years. I passed all exams and I manage to finish the qualification. I left my current organisation and then worked for [] and then the country leader asked me to come back. Then today I am a partner here! (MAU4)

Need to learn and self-develop

Some women explained how they sought challenging work assignments and career growth opportunities in other organizations. The motivation to change jobs stemmed from the need to challenge and develop themselves and have new career experiences. As participant MAU2 explained:

Boredom! It was repetitive work. I was working in IT, I was the head of the department. At some point, the structure was there, logistics, everything. I was doing repetitive work. And finally, I realized that when there are challenges, I like them. The more difficult I like it. When there is a problem, I like it. So, I started looking for a new job. Then [] approached me and I could either I could go into an accounting firm or come here (her current organisation). I was never in sales. I was in after-sales. That's why I accepted the job. The more difficult, I don't see time pass by. But it was some turning point in my life like I said, boredom killed me. I took the decision to leave the company even though they proposed to change the job. (MAU8)

Life changing events

Several women reflected that at particular points in their lives and careers they made choices for personal satisfaction and family. After committing several years of their early working lives establishing their careers and developing expertise, their motivation for change stemmed from the need to satisfy their personal life goals. Marriage, a desire to spend more time with their children, and the need to return to Mauritius to care for aging parents triggered a career change. At this point in their careers, these women were accomplished and had been promoted to professional-level positions. For some women, returning to Mauritius resulted in accepting positions with lower salaries and job status. For others, family responsibilities triggered a search for roles in which they had more control over their working hours. As participants explained:

I think I could have stayed there and made my whole career there, but after eight years I was quite lonely, so I came back to Mauritius because my childhood friend was here, and we were starting a long-distance relationship

over three years. I was not sure about the decision to come back, but then I let myself go with the flow and I came back. (MAU9)

For two participants, marriage to a Mauritian national led to relocating to Mauritius. These participants established their careers in Mauritius.

I did a year there and then I met this Mauritian guy, and he said why don't we go and live in Mauritius? So, in the end, I didn't finish what I call my first PhD I did 2 years of that and then I came to Mauritius looking for a job and for the first time in my life I had five months of holiday, without knowing where I was going and so this was a very critical point. (MAU13)

The above quotes suggest that women adjust their career aspirations to meet spouse and family needs. In making further sense of the context, these quotes suggest the accommodating nature of these women as well as the value these women place on the family. This relates to the participants' comments on the Mauritian cultural context and the role of family in professional women's career motivation.

External factors

All the women described how they embraced the opportunities that emerged within their respective organizations.

In that company, I grew up to Managing Director in 4 year and a half. Because of the crisis. It was a crisis time in Europe. It was the booming period for the start-up and then the crisis of it and then the manager left. And here you go, you had twenty people to manage. (MAU5)

A few women from this cohort changed roles as a result of organizational mergers, re-branding or restructuring. For one woman, the merger triggered her resignation from the organization.

Then the [] merged with the audio-visual center of the [] and so far from being a private sort of, not really private sector but an independent organization, it became a governmental organization, and I didn't fit in very well with the values there and so then I applied to work at []. (MAU13)

As mentioned, some women transitioned within their respective organizations as an outcome of organizational restructuring. One participant highlighted that with each organizational restructure, she was "sort of" promoted and selected for higher levels of responsibilities. These changes positively impacted her career growth within the organization.

The company had evolved quite differently. There was a merger with [] and then it was rebranded as [] and thereafter some business units were sold off. I was part of the business unit that was sold off and we became []. (MAU1)

6.3.3 Roadblocks

A significant roadblock that Mauritian women faced at the foundation phase was the rigid socio-cultural expectations placed on the role of women and family in society. These expectations adversely influenced women's career aspirations and reduced their career mobility. All the women stressed that young, qualified women had to make choices and negotiate with their parents and spouses to satisfy their professional aspirations and family responsibilities.

Whereas in Mauritius, I see that let's say, women and not yet there in terms of leadership because, I believe, of circumstances. If we look at the let us say, the composition of the Mauritian population I mean they are some traditions that are difficult to overcome. (MAU6)

She went on to explain the cultural expectations of women in Mauritius:

So, women are expected to look after the family. If they do have a good education and they get into professional work and they don't have a support system behind them, they are left with having to make a choice of whether to let's say leave the professional sphere to be a stay-at-home mum. (MAU6)

Linked to strong cultural expectations for women to marry and start a family, some women described their obstacles to pursuing tertiary studies, which included the affordability of full-time education and the limited tertiary education choices available in Mauritius. They also had to negotiate alternative arrangements with parents and partners to achieve their goals and ambitions.

It's a large family, we're ten brothers and sisters. I wanted to be a doctor you know. My parents and my father decided that you know it wasn't the thing to do for a woman. So, he said no, you're going to do business. He's a businessman. So, I went to do business. At the end, I haven't a choice right. (MAU12)

6.4 Steppingstones

This section reports on the experiences that paved the way for all participants to progress into management and leadership roles. Access to organizational support from superiors, the importance of networking, and personal support from spouses and extended family participants are reported. This is followed by a summary of the roadblocks that women experience at the middle management level.

6.4.1 Meaningful interactions

The participants recalled that meaningful interactions in their professional and organizational contexts facilitated access to professional networks, mentoring relationships, and corporate sponsorship. Developing and nurturing relationships assisted the participants in forging strong relationships that helped them access challenging work assignments and provided psycho-social support during difficult situations.

Networks

When it comes down to it, it's about networking. Who do you know? And who would you recommend? (MAU8)

During their education and work assignments the women built personal and professional networks that provided support during critical moments in their career. These networks helped the women navigate their job roles, exposed them to opportunities for growth and development and increased their visibility within the organization. As one respondent explained:

I think you know interacting with people is very important. It's just making sure you knew who stakeholders are. With whom you must interact within the different positions that you're taking. These persons can be from higher up or lower down in the hierarchy, or from the team but they support you to get the job done. Just make sure you have both set of stakeholders behind you to make sure that you get the job. (MAU6)

She went on to explain that this also helped with problem-solving and decision-making.

But then you also build your network and use your circle of people who are in the same situation you are facing, the same problems then you get to share your ideas. You form your network. I think it's very important to build a network of people who can support you and whom you can bounce ideas with. It happened within the bank, and within the management team. I mean some of whom you click better than others. (MAU6)

Mentors and sponsors

He made me believe that I could believe in myself. (MAU3)

Participants described the impact that mentors had on their self-confidence and career decisions and success. The women explained how their managers and CEOs acted as mentors and guided them at critical points in their career. Several women described moments in their careers where they felt discouraged and wanted to quit and how the impact of conversations with their mentors helped them overcome feelings of inadequacy. Critical conversations with mentors

also encouraged the women to persevere and reach their potential. Some respondents described the impact of mentors early in their career thus:

I went into this big corporation thinking that yes I will be coming in just as a corporate lawyer and not as a leader and this lady who was the head the whole of the UK and Asia Pacific, she noticed my traits very, very quickly that is what she said it I'll act as your mentor. And she did that and I am so glad she did because she made me into the person I am now. (MAU11)

Other women described how conversations with their mentors helped them overcome challenges encountered as part of their senior management experience. Respondents described moments when they doubted themselves and how their CEO mentored them through.

These people are, have given me at one point or another in my career the level of reassurance that I needed to go for the next step. For example, my American boss, I will talk about him. I was on my first crisis on the ground. Really hard, really difficult, with people having to go through a really difficult transition. And I was panicked. Because that was my first real crisis and that everything that I say and write will have consequences on the life of the people and that. It was pretty tough. And I was on the phone with him. So, he was in St Louis and I was in the South of France and I said to him, you know [] it's really hard and it's my first one. And he said, "Don't even think about that. Don't say that to nobody. If you want to talk about it talk to me. But never ever say that it's your first crisis. Go on the ground and do what is logical, follow what your heart and your brain is saying to you. That's it." And I just needed that. Because I had planned all of it. I was just that I was having no experience and that I was to succeed. And he was like bullshit. You will do it. You will do it because you have to and second because you have enough. I'm trusting you enough to go for that and if you need it, the security net, call me. (MAU5)

What was common within the narratives was each woman's acknowledgment of moments when they felt inadequate and questioned their ability. The women reflected on the positive impact of sharing and discussing intrapersonal conflict with people whom they trusted and who also understood the complexities of senior management roles. They further reported on how this support helped to build their confidence and self-esteem.

6.4.2 Qualifications and hard work

Prior to having children, most women from this cohort dedicated a significant quantity of time and effort towards higher education, completing professional qualifications, and gaining experience that would advance their careers. These women narrated that they were open to opportunities to work long and unsociable hours, travel overseas, accept foreign

assignments, and study. They described the long working hours and the performance-driven culture and expectations of their employers as the norm, and they were driven to succeed in this environment.

It's very promotional oriented so people have to go from one step to the other. I was in consulting for some time. And in consulting⁴ you do not have a time to start nor a time to finish. The deadline and the client were key. (MAU2)

6.4.3 International mobility and cultural awareness

All participants from this cohort explained the significance of international experience and exposure in shaping and influencing their careers. The nature of the experiences differed from woman to woman, but the impact of international exposure cemented their career development and progress. The experiences shaped their understanding of cross-cultural differences and expanded their respective organizations' business activities. Furthermore, the willingness to travel to engage with overseas clients and for training increased their visibility and understanding of regional and international operations.

And these are top seniors from big companies. So that opportunity, I say, was what is great in the job that we do. We interacted with the "crème de la crème" (cream of crop) from all over the world. We interacted with CEOs from all over Africa, CEOs from Europe, and CEOs in the US. I think the exposure happened when I started traveling as well. I had a lot of exposure you know and different cultures. (MAU2)

Not only did the experience enhance the development of their regional and international networks, but also provided new insights and ideas to integrate into their organizations.

The women who chose to pursue higher education and work abroad were also exposed to different learning and working cultures which significantly accelerated their career progression. When they were employed internationally, they had access to structured career management and development programs, together with diversity and inclusion policies, that assisted participants in planning their careers and accessing development opportunities that increased their expertise, experience, and visibility. It also enhanced their confidence, self-belief, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Additionally, they reported that their

⁴ consulting – she does not refer to independent self-employed consulting. In this context, consultant/consulting refers to a job title employed on a full-time capacity in the financial services sector.

employers in Mauritius valued their international experience, and this helped them move up the hierarchy.

I wanted to have some experience in England, so I applied to continue my traineeship as a Chartered Accountant in the UK. I didn't get into the big four, but a mid-size firm gave me an offer and I think this offered me many possibilities. I met quite a few partners from diverse backgrounds. They were quite flexible in a sense, I had the opportunity to work with clients across different sectors which probably may not have been the case if I had joined a big firm because they would have tended to make you specialize in certain sectors that consisted of a combination of clients in listed companies, and small companies. It's really a broad experience that I got during my 3 years training before I got my certificate. (MAU6).

What was interesting when these women described their career paths, is that while they encountered several constraints in their early career, they were determined to improve their lives as well as the lives of their families.

6.4.4 Supportive family

I've been lucky to have a good husband. Because he's been supporting me all along. And he's always been by my side. (MAU1)

The significance of a supportive home and family structure was highlighted by the women from this cohort as a meaningful steppingstone for their career success. Encouraging parents, parents-in-law, siblings, and partners helped the women meet the expectations of corporate leadership. Family support alleviated the difficulties the women encountered in meeting their diverse roles as daughters, mothers, partners, and corporate managers. As one respondent explained:

At [], I got the chance to expatriate in Malaysia. He (her husband) actually resigned from his position at [] to follow me. Which is again not something that all men would do so I was very grateful that he did it. There was really no resentment around it, even for him because his career was put on hold at that point in time. (MAU3)

Living and working abroad meant that these women were unable to undertake the day-to-day family responsibilities afforded by living near their family.

I would say very honestly, without that family-knit, close-knit family it would have been very difficult to achieve what I have achieved because I know that if somebody falls at home, my sister will be there to pick them up. It's like there is a support system. I think you need a support system. (MAU6)

Since overseas travel was an underlying expectation in their respective roles, the women relied heavily on family and partners to assume responsibility for the home and family.

My in-laws were very open people, coming late was not an issue, they did not put pressure on me and my husband is ok about it and he's cool about it, you know. He is not married to someone who starts at 8:30 and who comes back home at five! I finished at ten o'clock at night, it's fine by him. (MAU2)

Trust, help and encouragement from close family, coupled with an understanding of the complexity of their positions, contributed to these women's success. These women reflected that emotional support during their career was significant. It was not only for taking care of children or completing house chores but support in terms of understanding their role and the difficulties associated with the role. In terms of gender roles in the Mauritian society, some of these women were supported by family members to overcome restrictive cultural expectations. Another key observation from the above quotes was the acceptance of the long and rigid work hours and work expectations.

6.4.5 Roadblocks

The women explained that stereotypes around their roles as women and mothers were connected to their commitment to a corporate career.

Gender stereotyping

These women believed that men associated motherhood with less commitment to work and workforce participation.

Like I said they always think that a woman needs to cook, to conceive babies, to be at a secondary level⁵. I don't know why they think about women like that. (MAU8)

One woman described how anxious she was when she discovered that she was expecting her first child.

I had my first child quite young, and I felt bad about being pregnant because I had started the job 6 months before and I felt I did not know how to announce

⁵ she refers to being secondary to men. That is, women must accept being inferior.

that because I feel so bad. I thought it would take a year or so and I fell pregnant. And my boss was a woman, and I did not know how to handle that because I've heard many times that when you first start a job allow at least one year before you get a baby. This is what was said, and I was ashamed. I was feeling bad because I was ashamed. (MAU14)

This quote suggests that there is a perception that pregnancy negatively impacts women's careers. This perception placed additional strain on women. This participant elaborated that she chose to remain working but did not apply for promotion.

I had a series of opportunities and for a long time, I didn't grow. For eight years I didn't move, and I didn't have even one rupee of salary increase. I had opportunities but I don't know, I had a gut feeling that I had to stay there. During those 8 years, I had two other children, I felt safe because I knew the job and it would be ok to be away for 3 months. I believe women are stuck and then prefer to leave or take a lower position and then it's too late. You missed 10 years of your career raising your kids and working as an admin or clerk. It's difficult to catch up 10 years later if you want to start again. (MAU14)

It is clear that her strategy to balance work and raising a family was to allow her career to stagnate. This was due to her felt perceptions that pregnancy and motherhood would be a barrier for promotion.

Cultural expectations

Culture and tradition ingrain certain gender expectations and beliefs into society and all the women described different forms of cultural expectations embedded in Mauritian society and culture. The expectations of the 'girl child' in society included expectations such as:

I've seen around myself a lot of my friends who are very capable women who have had to make a choice between a professional lifestyle and looking after the family because of the lack of better support system. (MAU6)

Some respondents also reflected on the conflict that emerged from earning equal or higher salaries than their partners.

Back to when I was at []. I was asking for an increase in salary or promotion or negotiating for a promotion and I was told that my work was very good. I had nothing to worry about, everything is fine, but I didn't need the money because my husband had a good job. So, I said "Do you want to employ my husband, or you want to employ me?" "Well, yes [] I know, but your husband has a good job." (MAU13)

Another respondent also described the challenges associated with earning close to or greater than their spouse.

I was already earning more than my husband when I made the move to become a manager. I know for him it was a difficult time. But (...) I think what's (...) it's all about how you deal with it and the understanding. For me, it was clear that he has made a sacrifice for me to get up. (MAU1)

The expression “he made a sacrifice,” suggests that women are not fully accepted as breadwinners and their role is determined by the status of their husbands. They appear to have reconciled these internal conflicts and persevered to establish themselves professionally and within their community. One respondent who completed her PhD reflected that society often neglected the status of women, no matter how educated or intelligent she may be.

So then when I used to go to dinner parties and cocktails parties I used to be “Oh this is [], wife of [], mother of [] and she plays quite a decent game of tennis.” But in the end, you have to accept that this is what the society was like and as one person you can't change the society. (MAU13)

“This family–life balance keeps coming over and over again” (MAU3)

Although not all women from this cohort had children, all women acknowledged that starting a family while pursuing a professional career in a corporate environment was a career constraint.

“This family–life balance keeps coming over and over again” (MAU3)

Participants with young children cited that once they started a family, they found themselves sidelined and underutilized at work. They had limited time and energy to maintain their professional networks and therefore were less likely to be promoted.

I was left behind, I think. The place where I was left behind was when I, well I had two children, my children are just one year apart, so I had three, so six months of maternity in two years. That was probably the point where I was left behind because my performance was kind of split. So, if you look at my career in terms of when I got my promotions, maybe I would have gained two or three years if I hadn't had any children. (MAU9)

Participants went on to state that international travel and training was a part of working in companies with international partnerships and an expectation of the job. Some organizations provide equal opportunities for all employees, but family responsibility and cultural expectations restrict women.

We have highly competent women. Highly competent! As a firm we give equal opportunity but tomorrow, if we have to have a big project. We need two managers to travel. Let's say 2 weeks here and three weeks there. Probably you will get one woman and all the guys. It's not because the women are not competent. It's because they can't. They got the "this will not be possible" answer and this is a reality. It will be easier for the guy to travel 2 weeks or 3 weeks away from home than the women leaving for 2-3 weeks away from home. (MAU3)

The pressure to conform to existing male models of leadership

No one was asking me to copycat men. (MAU9)

All the women described their corporate environments as male dominated. Although two participants reflected that the nature of the business and the key job expectations were detail orientated and entry level to middle management positions were largely filled by women, senior positions were the domain of men. These women described situations where they encountered other female line managers and senior managers who felt pressure to conform to the existing role expectations and behaviors that their male counterparts demonstrated. Women observed the actions and behaviors of their male counterparts and often mimicked those behaviors when they progressed into senior positions.

Because it's difficult to climb up, women have the tendency to think that if they imitate their male counterparts they will reach there. So, they tend to copy, and they will end up having the same style. they try to imitate their male counterpart and as a result they become even worst competitors and you know they will go to even worst extremes to reach the top. (MAU2)

6.5 Reaching the destination

This section reports on the participants' experiences of becoming senior leaders. Participants recalled that they were often seen as women rather than leaders and how, through self-reflection, self-awareness and introspection, they re-defined themselves with regards to their self-concept and their leadership identity. Supportive CEOs and executive coaches assisted the participants to transition into their roles.

6.5.1 Self-awareness

The women reflected that as they progressed in their careers, they realized that women bring exceptional attributes into the senior management team and that by just being true to

oneself and acknowledging that men and women are different, there was no need to compete with their male counterparts and imitate men. The respondents described critical self-reflections where they transformed themselves. The women explained:

You know I've actually spent a lot of time defending the fact that I am exactly the same as a man. Actually, I used to think that I was the same as a man, because it used to frustrate me that people would treat me as a woman and that would take it as a differentiating factor at some point in the beginning of my career, because I couldn't understand why, because basically I had done the same studies than the male colleagues. You know I managed to get into one of the high, top engineering schools with other guys that I thought I was exactly the same as them. then it actually changed when I got married and had children and that point, probably I think, that there was a change that operated within myself and at that point I realized that I was different from my male colleagues and it was also that point when I thought that no one was asking me to copycat men, I had to bring, I had to be my own self actually, you know being authentic in who I am versus trying to copy what the guys do. (MAU9)

Self-realization at critical moments in executing their senior role triggered introspection that led to personal transformation. As participant MAU3 expressed:

I realized it the hard way. I actually was very feisty at the beginning. Because I thought it was always a competition with my male colleagues. So, I had to stick my neck out all the time and I had to push for I think this is right and if we had to do it, we should do it now. I was hiding a lot of my emotions, my feelings around things thinking that they might perceive it as weakness. They might think that ah, it's just a woman talking, you know. Or the kind of, of very, very derogative speeches. So, two or three years ago I realized that there was no need for this. Because, when I take a look at my career, I'm already there. Ok, I'm so far ahead compared to a lot of people so why should I continuously be pushing myself like this? So, I need to embrace who I am, so I need to embrace I'm a woman, so you have to deal with it. (MAU3)

Some women expressed their thoughts on their experiences with other female executives in the Mauritian corporate context. From these expressions, it appears that women are conflicted over the conceptualization and enactment of leadership. The ideal leadership prototype is ambiguous. Whilst some women reflected that increased self-awareness of their own behaviors transformed their style, others adopted the traditional male leadership traits and enacted leadership in a masculine style. These expressions give us insight into the complexities women face and the expectations for men and women within the Mauritian context.

When I look around, the female leaders I can see they have kind of a very much masculine way of thinking. They are very tough and very pushy and bully. And this is what I see around and most of the time those persons have a very strong character. While for men it's not very necessary because they do not have to prove to anyone that they can there. They are allowed to be there. (MAU14)

6.5.2 Introspection, reclaiming and re-defining themselves

Through self-awareness these women reoriented their expectations of themselves. The realization that they had to be perfect and the best at what they did placed considerable pressure upon these women, even when they reached senior executive positions. When sharing experiences, many women continued to feel guilty about the lack of time and lost time with children and family. They described this as a cost and revealed that at some point they had to accept their choices and accept that it was okay to stumble. One respondent described her experience thus:

These things kept bottling up, and it did until 2012, when I had a meltdown, I had actually a physical breakdown. For bottling too much over a long period of time. I also had my son, a couple of years prior. Where it didn't go too well, I had some episodes of baby blues and all. It all made me vulnerable, so I couldn't figure out and know where's the right balance between my work and my home. And the emotions that all come in it. And then I collapsed. I collapsed. And then I had to go through a full year of therapy of why. I was ok. I kept working at the same time, but it's just on the side I still went through the therapy. (MAU3)

She expressed her transformation as a process of self-awareness:

I realized that work doesn't define you. It stayed actually in my mind that this – I live for my work. And then the rest, it just follows. Now the priority has shifted, I work for my family. And if the work is not there tomorrow, that's ok, I can move on. I can do something else. (MAU3)

Another participant described how she overcame the regret associated with balancing the demands of a corporate career and her family responsibilities:

I do my best, I'm not a perfectionist. So, I say to myself, you know what, I can get it wrong. It doesn't have to be perfect. I can drop some balls. It just got be the right balls. So, hmm, it's okay if I'm not there every day to pick up my kids from school, despite my children may be saying, you know, everybody's mom, I know it's not everybody's mom, but for them, it is. But you know what, I don't. So, from time to time, I will as a treat, I'll pick them up from school and that's the best I can do and that's fine and they, you know that. They are actually really excited. So, I balance it by saying to myself, you haven't, you don't need to be perfect, allow yourself the slack, you know, it's okay(x2) to make mistakes. (MAU12)

When asked if they were mentoring, coaching and contributing to the development of young female talent, most of the women expressed how much they wanted to, but how time poor they all were and most importantly, how guilty they felt towards their children and family. One

participant related that she was requested to mentor and coach young women, but she declined. She expressed her reasons with tears in her eyes during the interview.

No, I've been approached but I have refused because my work is too much for me. I decided at this point in my life I need to pay more attention to my kids. I have realized that my daughter is 19. I have lost a large part of her childhood because of work. So, I refuse to do these things because I would like to share more time with my own kids. (MAU8)

She further expressed how her husband supported her throughout her career and her reflections on her life and career choices.

We did it for the kids, but maybe it's a bad excuse to say. It's our personal willingness also to strive higher. To be in a higher position, but he encouraged me, he never prevents me from doing anything. Only now, he said stop you need to pay attention to the kids. Because your daughter is getting older and older and one day, she will get married and you will regret those moments with her, and in fact it's true. She is 19 and it's unbelievable, she wants me to take her in my arms and this is very painful now for me to think about it. She even wrote me a letter saying that I hate your job. I am sorry, I didn't want to say because it's a successful woman like we said a working woman, but I lost something. (MAU8)

This participant apologized for being emotional, illustrating that even though she achieved career success, she stills struggles with her choices and evaluates whether it was worth it. It could also reflect that women must bury the personal costs of success. The extrinsic rewards of success are visible (status, job title, and position), while the personal costs are often unspoken. It also reveals that the concept of being a “successful woman” is multidimensional. It not only relates to success in women’s professions and careers but is enmeshed with their cultural expectations and their relationships with their partners and children. Reflecting on their lives and careers, most Mauritian women mentioned how they negotiated the evolving expectations of themselves and expectations from others to reach a balance. Their individual agency factors and the context they found themselves operating within lead to both feelings of success in some domains and feelings of regret in other domains. One gets the sense that the women worked very hard and were ambitious and determined and once they reached a high-level position, they then focused on the family. By this time their children were older, and the relationship dynamics and expectations had changed.

Some women tend to go through to the position of senior leadership for a number of years and think now it's time for me to slow down. So, it's very much

a lifestyle choice I think, and I have seen it happen more regularly here in Mauritius than I have outside of Mauritius. (MAU11)

6.5.3 Roadblocks

Being appointed to a senior leadership position presented a different set of complexities. The high visibility and accountability associated with the role, together with establishing their own leadership identity and balancing the demands of an executive role and other personal roles, were some of the barriers that women encountered.

Self-doubt

Respondents described moments of self-doubt and felt that they were “not good enough” for the project or role. This was common within the narratives, where the women acknowledged that there were moments they felt inadequate and questioned their ability. The women reflected on the way in which sharing and discussing intrapersonal conflict with people whom they trusted and who understood the complexities of senior management roles encouraged them to resolve the conflict and fulfil their roles.

I had an episode where I just felt like I was not good enough and I was not delivering enough. So, I had a chat with my boss who was just here. And then he was like ‘why are you doing this to yourself’? And he asked me, “Why are you doing this to yourself.” I didn’t realize what he was saying then, because I was actually very angry, and my mind was very clouded at that moment. And he was just take a look. Stand up and just take a look behind yourself, which I did. And then he said look at these people, they will do anything for you. (MAU3)

Gender identity

The women describe how they maintain a sense of authenticity. The expectation that women must dress in a particular style, speak in a specific way, and act as per pre-established social expectations places undue pressure on women both in corporate environments and society.

I don’t wear heels and I don’t wear makeup. (MAU3)

Women experience conflicting cues on how they should behave in senior positions and what is considered acceptable and unacceptable. The women in this cohort expressed that through their learning and work experiences, their leadership identities and their identities as women

were formed and revised. Their identity in the work context was not fixed. Instead, as they progressed into senior leadership roles, they were often required to mask their feminine identity or fit into gendered stereotypes at work. But as they developed, they became aware that being true to oneself was critical for a successful transition into senior leadership roles. The self-awareness reshaped their identity and increased their authenticity as leaders.

I was a bit frustrated. I will be honest with you. Because for me it doesn't make any difference if you are wearing a pair of high heels compared to if you are wearing flat male shoes. It shouldn't make me any different if I am wearing a skirt or suit as opposed to a trouser and top. (MAU3).

The women described how they experienced social resistance within the senior leadership team. As a result, these women had to modify their tone as well as learn how to get heard in board meetings and amongst their male peers.

I've noticed also, in few instances, when we are having a discussion, it might be that at a certain point, some people would be more aggressive in putting their point forward without, even though you are speaking, they will just cut you and speak. And I think this is because probably because I am the youngest or is it because I am a woman? I don't know. But they feel that they can do it and it's ok. (MAU2)

Defending their position

Within the narratives, these women acknowledged that as they progressed, there were perceptions that a woman's success was due to national or organizational diversity and inclusivity policies or relationships with senior male colleagues. Four women described these situations as very challenging for them. What was interesting in their responses was that they were resigned to the reality that these comments and behaviors were the norms when a woman accomplished a high-level position. Women not only battle with the task and role expectations associated with the position, but they also need to spend time and energy establishing and demonstrating their competence before they are accepted into the team. Two participants explained that they were judged not only on gender, but also on being young, illustrating that age may also have a negative impact on women's progress.

As a woman, perceptions are that you arrived (achieved your position) here because of something and obviously if you are young, I won't say good looking, but I am not bad looking. If you are ok, you progress and get promoted, then you have to have slept with someone. (MAU14)

These comments suggest that some women have difficulty identifying the exact reason for the unfair treatment they are subjected too. Is it because they are young, attractive, of a particular race or ethnic group, or simply because they are women?

One respondent further elaborated that when men progress, they are not subjected to such comments – they are simply accepted at the higher-level position.

He was equally close to the boss as I am now, but he was a man, and nobody ever said anything about how he succeeded about why his department was performing. I realized that if it's a man who succeeds wherever and whatever community and in whatever culture, it's just normal, it's just normal. When it's a woman, it's either people admire you, which is the best-case scenario, or they are jealous which is the worst-case scenario. Envy or jealousy but people are not indifferent, there is an impact anywhere. (MAU14)

Another respondent related that that when women are promoted, often corridor conversations question her promotion and attribute her success to diversity policies and gender quotas.

What I hate is when people say that there is so much positive discrimination against women that when you are promoted or do something nice it's not because you work hard and because you do it, it's because you are a woman. That is something that you hear sometimes, so it must be merit, otherwise, this is what people will think, "She got promoted because she is a woman and the company is actually promoting gender diversity and promoting equality, but actually she is only being promoted because she is a woman." It doesn't happen a lot, but there are people who think so. (MAU9)

What was noteworthy was that when the women described their stories they were challenged at home and had to negotiate their expectations and adapt themselves to meet family and partner expectations whilst also adapting their demeanor and habits to meet corporate expectations. It seems that women must work so much harder than their male counterparts, even when they achieve senior leadership positions.

6.5.4 Overcoming the roadblocks

Being courageous and sharing their fears and thoughts and openly discussing their fears and self-doubt with male mentors, trusted superiors and peers enabled these women to overcome self-doubt.

My American boss, told me, "You will do it. You will do it because you have to and second because you have enough. I'm trusting you enough to go for that and if you need it, the security net, call me." (MAU5)

Two participants described organizational support in the form of executive coaching and how working with an executive coach helped them overcome different but specific challenges experienced at the executive level.

One participant described her feelings of self-doubt, and how executive coaching sessions assisted her.

I realize that there's no need for me to be running all the time. At some point you need to stop and contemplate what you've done. Even if it's a matter of just a few minutes, appreciate, appreciate the people, appreciate what you have done, and appreciate yourself. (MAU3)

Another articulated a different challenge:

I can relate to three people like me. No, me plus two other men. Same kind of age, same responsibilities, same level, same grading and obviously they earn much more than I have. Until a few weeks ago, I would have said I am fine with that they are lucky that they negotiated better than I did. But this was before one of my coaching sessions. My coach said the money is not fair and that is not ok because I had a wrong perception of feminism, and I wasn't a fighter for that. And just we had that conversation where I agree now with him that is not okay. (MAU14)

At particular points in their executive role, these women experienced feelings of self-doubt and felt overwhelmed as leaders. The support of trusted peers, reassuring CEOs, and executive coaching was described as important when operating in the complex senior management role.

6.6 Accelerating progress

When posited the question about what CEOs and HR professionals can do to accelerate the progress of women into senior leadership positions, the women from Mauritius unanimously agreed that they needed more support. These women identified a wide range of supports that organizations, politicians, educational institutions and society could provide. The foundation of their suggestions needed to be embedded in the mindset of all Mauritians, encompassing parents, teachers and senior managers, and CEOs. The respondents suggested that support for women should include a holistic framework that must aim to change the cultural expectations and entrenched gender identity and gender expectations of women. A few women described sectors and organizations that created and maintained an environment and culture that supported the career progress of women.

We pretty much balance, for one sector, the Mauritius Ports Authority, the balance is now going in the opposite direction, with more women than men. I think it's already 52%. (MAU10)

6.6.1 A stakeholder approach

Several respondents emphasized the role of the HR management collaborating with employers, government officials and employees. Creating strategic partnerships among private sector companies was another noteworthy suggestion from the participants. Because Mauritius is a small island economy and people know one another, the established narrative that women value family over career progress is robust and accepted. Those women who did progress acknowledged that their progress involved strong family support, challenging existing cultural values and traditions, and personal sacrifice towards their family. Due to the complexity at the national, societal and corporate levels, an integrated stakeholder approach was suggested. A stakeholder approach would facilitate the development of a national and corporate framework for Mauritius.

Do something that's more at a national level. Like when there's a career, or career guidance conference, bring some of the women that are here into the play and ask them to talk. Get it done very nicely without having to be all tough and rough all the time. We have to find the right platform to have this exposure. (MAU3)

The strategic role of the HR function within the country and within corporations was also identified as critical for the development and progress of women in Mauritius. Several women suggested that the role of HR must evolve and adopt a strategic approach to staffing and developing talent within the organization. Diversity awareness campaigns, gender diverse recruitment and selection panels and mentoring and coaching were suggested by the Mauritian women:

I remember I've been through an interview once and I was very much uncomfortable because I wasn't prepared and obviously, I didn't get the job. (She laughs) Because when you get sometimes in interviews, you've got a few people, guys, big guys sitting in front of you. You are just out of school or something like that out of university. It can be impressive. It can be impressive. Now if you've got only men, three big men sitting in front of you and asking you loads of questions. If you are not, maybe for men it could be a little bit lighter somehow, but for the girl they need to be really sure of themselves and prepare themselves really well. (MAU1)

The respondent described the male interviewers as “big guys” – a term referring to their presence as successful professionals in their sector of expertise. It also reinforces the gender-based stratification at the senior levels, suggesting that young women from gender-segregated secondary schooling who had little experience with interacting and communicating with men

may feel overwhelmed during an interview. Gender-diverse selection panels may put young women at ease during the selection process.

The nature of the job interview and the type of questions asked was also suggested as important to put women at ease. Talking about career paths and development plans was suggested as important during the onboarding process.

When employing somebody in induction and recruitment stage, the type of questions you will ask is very important because it will communicate what you are trying to demonstrate. What I demonstrate is that we encourage gender diversity, we want women in roles, there is a clear career path, so if you do well and have the right mindset, there is a path for you to grow. (MAU11)

Other women suggested that HR must increase reporting on diversity ratios and creating awareness among senior management and line managers on the importance of diversity in all forms:

I do tell them to look at the picture, it looks really bad with too many guys. At the same time, I talk mostly about the lack of diversity not just about women. They need diversity, they need youth also, they need IT guys, they need girls. Diversity is important for a board, our boards are not diverse enough, not colorful, not different thinking way of people, they miss an opportunity. (MAU10)

The extensive time commitment and expertise necessary to understand the reasons why women do not progress, and the barriers women face in the business environment were emphasized by the participants. Participants suggested that clusters of companies should pool their resources and expertise and share best practices. The costs involved were described as high, and as one participant related, if HR professionals in Mauritius worked together, change could begin.

It's a lot of money that you have to put in there. It's not the kind of decision that is easy, but it's a commitment. (MAU5)

6.6.2 Chief executive officer and senior management support

The CEO and the senior management roles are critical to women being genuinely accepted in corporate environments. Many of the women in this cohort stressed that the working hours and corporate culture was not aligned with the cultural expectations of women in Mauritian society.

Two women reflected upon their respective discussions with their CEOs on the gender mix and the lack of gender diversity in the senior leadership team. They described the CEOs' attitudes towards diversity:

I did engage with my boss a few times and he listened. Diversity would actually help us here, but then the comeback has always been that we look for diversity of thought. (MAU3)

The focus on meritocracy and business success remains the priority for CEOs.

[] is very aware of this and he has his vision of saying, "Oh, I can bring others just for the numbers." That will be fake, and I don't want that. I think the challenge [] was to choose the rhythm and the fact of saying I want to be surrounded by the best people. And if the people that came in, I have to be ok with the nomination. I don't want the change just for the image. I want the change because it would be best for the business. (MAU5)

6.6.3 Government

Mauritius is a country that is dominated by political allegiances as well and I think that this political allegiance culture is not going to go away. And I think it is to use the politics and political arena to develop more women in more senior leadership roles, and to have that allegiance with the government into industry. (MAU11)

Women felt strongly about the role of the State. While the women openly rejected the introduction of gender quotas and believed that that would undermine the capabilities of women, many participants acknowledged that grassroots level change was necessary. Almost all the participants kept returning to the social stigma attached to women who work late hours outside the home and the hurdles of family and children. State institutions, political figures and corporate leaders need to work together to transform these gendered attitudes and mindset.

It's awareness, advocacy. I think a lot of advocacy, especially speaking to the guys. Because I'm sure the husbands want well for their wives. It's just at times the social aspect is so strong or it's just a case of habit, you forget about it by involving more men to that type of discussion. Awareness, advocacy, writing a lot, having workshops. It's about changing the mindset. And I think it must start at school as well. Why not include that as a curriculum at school. Talk about diversity and the importance of having a balance. (MAU2)

6.6.4 Advice to young women

The women from this cohort identified a variety of actions and decisions that young women should engage in early in their careers. Pursuing careers in leadership in the corporate environment was expressed as rewarding and challenging. The respondents shared the key lessons they learnt along their career pathway into senior leadership. The following section reports on the career advice they would give younger women.

In the early and mid-career phases, they described how they accepted opportunities and the positive outcomes they achieved from these opportunities. Participants perceived that women often did not seek out opportunities because they felt that they were not ready or that the role was not for them. Their advice was for young women to overcome social stereotypes and embrace opportunities that come your way. Making and taking opportunities was a key part of their career success.

If you feel that you are competent for something, just go ahead and do it. Put your hand up anytime and every time that you feel that you want to add something. Ask questions even if people think that they are dumb. That's all right. (MAU3)

The fear of failure and not being good enough often afflicts women and this leads to their declining opportunities. Most women described how facing hardships, making mistakes, and failing taught them valuable lessons about the job and themselves. Making mistakes was described as part of the learning process and developing their resilience.

Learn from your mistakes. That is what is good. You have to do mistakes, that is what we need to encourage women as well. Never be afraid of mistakes. Even when you do things wrong it's ok, everyone does things wrong, but you won't do it again wrong. You learn, so you should never be afraid everyone makes mistakes, it's ok. (MAU4)

Another participant explained that there will be moments when you feel down and doubt yourself.

You are strong but it's ok to feel bad, it's ok to feel weak because we are human beings. It's not because we are girls. (MAU14)

Most women accepted that they did not plan their careers. Their primary motive for work and study was to increase their family income, learn, and accomplish meaningful work.

You know what motivated me was that I needed to work. I needed to work it was a tough life. I wanted to do something. I just wanted to have a small job I had no ambition. (MAU4)

These women talked about the importance of setting goals and having a clear vision. Two women emphasized the importance of career planning and the importance of alternative plans. These women admitted that plans do not always work out, but if one has alternative plans, they are more likely to achieve success.

Do not put all your eggs in one basket. Always have a plan B and a plan C. So always thinking ahead, always thinking of what else I can do. (MAU11)

Throughout the narratives, many women spoke about the impact that networks, mentors and supportive bosses had on their career planning and progress. A few women repeated the importance of building relationships early in one's career and how connecting with networks impacted career structure and development. Some women mentioned that being strategic about developing technical expertise was important but realized that being strategic about building relationships and networks was far more valuable for career success.

I think communication and networking are very important as you grow in your career ladder. I would have sort of, if I had to do that aspect I would have worked on this much more. At a later stage, you realize that this is what is required. Whatever your technical knowledge or whatever this can be. It's easily acquired, whereas your relationship building through the network, be it communication is more important. I think if I had had that guidance a long time ago that would have been more helpful. (MAU2)

The role of mentors and role models, coupled with the guidance that mentoring relationships provide, was also mentioned as critical for young women.

I would say that you should find a role model. You should find a mentor, somebody who would guide you in the process. Somebody, who will accompany you and from whom you should be able to get advice because for me that has worked. (MAU6)

Overall, these women would counsel young women to take more control over their career choices and decisions. Young women today must spend time understanding their beliefs and values. They must dedicate time to building a support system through family, mentors, and peers. A common theme amongst these women was a reassurance to young women about the value of making mistakes and embracing opportunities. Early career women must overcome the fear of failure and accept that making mistakes is part of the journey. The opportunities that arise from errors and the lessons learned will help them accomplish career success.

“Do not make obstruction of your gender, you are not a woman, you are a person.” (MAU12)

Two participants reflected that early career women should avoid defining themselves as per the established “rules” for women. They should see themselves through the lens of being a person, rather than the lens of being a woman. As a person, their view of their abilities and opportunities would expand and they would experience less resistance in their career ambition and career success.

Try and take that factor out and for one moment move it aside and try and understand why what is happening without the gender element because very often it does play at a of point control in certain situations but often it can also cloud us from being able to see the way forward; it's like hitting a wall yeah and not seeing that actually there're other roads that can help you overcome that road. (MAU12)

Participant MAU10 explained that women must “*break the rules.*”

Do not follow rules, there are no rules. The sky is the limit to what you want and can do. Stop following rules. But it's just that we have things that the way we think it should be, you know this little voice that's kind of so reasonable, let it go of that. This's what is stopping you, you're stopping, women are stopping themselves more than what everyone else is expecting of them. (MAU10)

The participants in this study suggest that early career women need to redefine their identity in society. They recognize that the role and place of women are socially constructed and if women wanted to succeed in leadership, they would need to redefine these social constructs.

“You do have choice.” (MAU12)

Being humble, hardworking, and always learning was echoed by all participants – more so when they achieved career success. Several respondents stated that, along with hard work and humility, love and passion for what you are doing were important. These women founded their advice upon the opportunities that are now available in Mauritius. These women recognized that decades ago, women had little choice (as discussed in the section on career mobility) in their career paths and engaged in work and studies that were available when they graduated from high school. Sometimes women settle and accept their place – the women in this cohort explained that young women need not settle and accept. They must do things that they are passionate about and work in organizations that value their contributions and treat them fairly and with respect. Passion, choice, and embracing opportunities were seen as significant for several women.

Don't stay in that organization that belittles you because you are a woman or blocks you because you're a woman. They don't deserve you to stay there. (MAU12)

These comments suggest a shift from traditional career pathways towards boundaryless career orientations and encouraged mid-career women to seek more interorganizational mobility.

Self-awareness and self-belief were described by several women as critical attributes for career success. Several women suggested that early career women should engage in projects, training and learning activities that would increase their self-awareness and understanding about their own needs, strengths, weaknesses, values and beliefs. These women described self-awareness as a critical enabler for career success.

Have that introspection about themselves. Once you start being self-aware as a person of what you are, who you are, what you stand for and what you want to achieve in life What's important for you? What do you want to do? I think these are for me the main attributes that have helped me progress in my career” (MAU2)

Increased self-awareness helped these women to recognize and understand their values. Four respondents encouraged women to be authentic.

“Be authentic, to stay true to herself and have strong values and then stick to them.” (MAU2)

These participants posited that women viewed leadership from a male perspective and that the role and behaviors that embodied leadership were shaped by existing social norms. They reflected that early and mid-career women must be true to themselves and “*run their own race.*”

It doesn't matter whether you reach your particular goals in five, six, ten years' time so far as you are clear in your mind so far as to what you want to do. And don't compare, don't compare yourself to others. We have a tendency to compare, especially women, we compare ourselves with our male counterparts. But it doesn't matter whether they reach there before us Run your own race and know yourself. (MAU2)

A woman's identity in a corporate context will undergo many challenges and alterations, but if early career women increase their self-awareness and developed a sound understanding of their values and beliefs, these identity alterations will not conflict with their true selves and deeply held values.

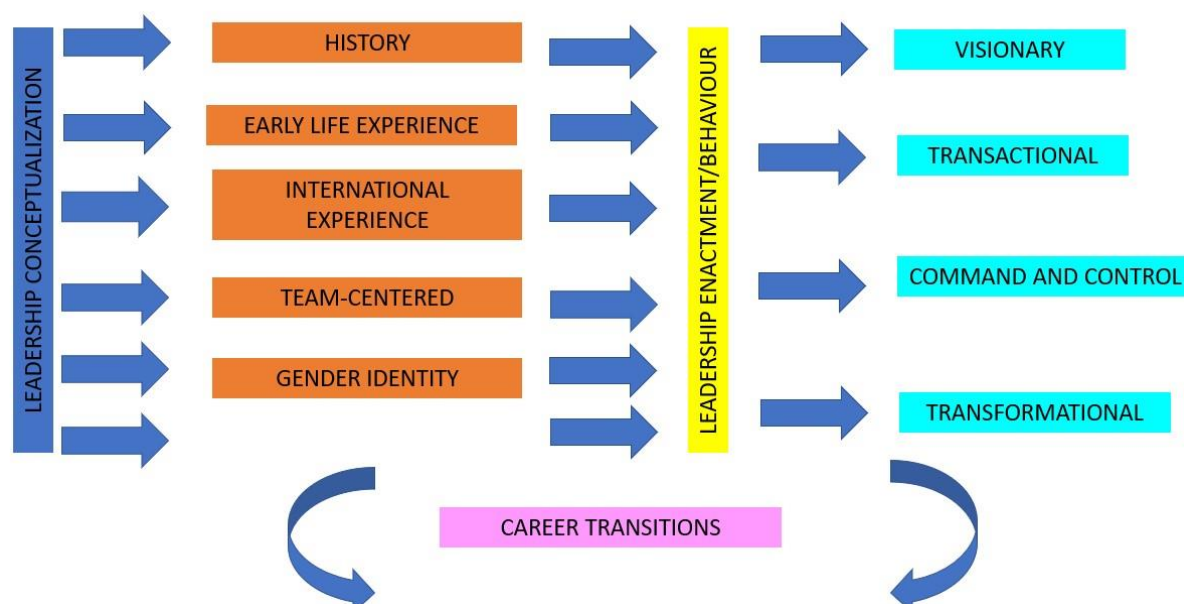
6.7 Leadership conception and enactment in Mauritius

This section reports on the participants' conception and enactment of leadership as well as the contextual forces that shaped their concept of leadership in Mauritius. An overview of

the interview themes for research question one: ‘how do women from Mauritius conceptualize and enact leadership?’ is then presented in Figure 6.3, the concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership. This map provides a diagrammatic overview of the respondent’s conceptualization and enactment of leadership under two broad themes: (1) ‘leadership conceptualization’ and (2) ‘leadership enactment’. The leadership conception theme is categorized into five sub-themes (history, early life experience, international experience, team-centered, and gender identity) and the enactment theme is categorized into four sub-themes (visionary, transactional, command and control and transformational). Each sub-theme is presented.

Figure 6.3

Concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership - Mauritius



6.7.1 Leadership Conceptualization

This section reports on the third theme: the participant’s conceptualization of leadership. Each of the contextual factors and the sub-themes are described, discussed, and supported with participant quotes.

History

“Though our government is not perfect they are doing things to improve.”
(MAU4)

The women interviewed held positions in large local family-owned companies, multinational organizations, and conglomerate companies in Mauritius. As explained in Chapter 2 section 2.4, post-independence, the Mauritian government introduced free education and health care and committed to building the human capital of the nation, encouraging entrepreneurial activity, and foreign direct investment. These foreign partnerships have had an impact on the participant's conceptualization of leadership.

Within their narratives, the women outlined the culture of Mauritian-owned companies as a family culture with a high concern for people. They made constant comparisons between their experience with parent-country nationals (through business travel, participation in training in the parent country and regional training programs) and Mauritian owned companies. Many women expressed a sense of pride in Mauritian political and business leadership. The women credited the economic progress of the country, since it gained independence, to effective political and business leadership and the entrepreneurial nature of Mauritians.

Five women referred to the interplay between independence and the partnership between political and corporate leadership:

US and UK economists said that when we got independence, this country will be doomed. Yeah, because we had nothing it's a small country, 70 by 40 kilometers and there only sugarcane here and nothing. We do not have any resources. So that guy thought that Mauritius would be doomed. I believe that we got through. Though our government is not perfect they are doing things to improve, of course we want things to improve and I believe they have taken very, very good decisions. (MAU4)

From the above quotes, it's clear that the concept of leadership was shaped by both the political and the private sector leaders which contributed to the overall economic and social progress of Mauritius. These women appeared satisfied with the leadership because the country as a whole has progressed through the combined effort of entrepreneurs and political leaders. For instance, participant MAU12 expressed:

I think education has played an enormous role in the leadership material we have; we've done very well in terms of education literacy rates. I think we've addressed a lot of the basics and that has been good leadership you know. With all its, whether it's private sector or public sector I think that one can make a distinction but at the end of the day it should take a holistic approach; it's what impacts the country, so I think on both sides there's been rights and wrongs, but those rights have actually worked well for the country. (MAU12)

Within the narratives, an interesting point noted by some Mauritian women is the entrepreneurial nature of the private sector in Mauritius. Many corporations in Mauritius are

family-owned businesses and these businesses started off as small sole ownership companies and over time expanded into large enterprises and diversified conglomerates that are listed on the top 100 companies of Mauritius. As participant MAU12 described:

There's a strong entrepreneurial leadership. So, you can see there were lot of entrepreneurs or entrepreneurial leadership. So, people who start doing their own little thing and then a little bit more and a little bit more and gathered behind them. You know you have a lot of groups in Mauritius that started off with one man you know, selling the corner shop but who had the vision or one woman yeah, had the vision, to say well now I'll build a bit more, I'll build a bit more. So, this entrepreneurial leadership I think is very much in the root of our country. (MAU12)

Participant MAU6 reflected that she looked up to her father who:

...had overcome the difficulties of starting a business in the 60s, with the limited resources that the family had, and then growing it into a listed company today. (MAU6)

The interplay between historical and social-economic factors and how these improved the lives and livelihood of the population influenced women's concept of leadership.

Early life experience and socio-economic background

She was very sort-of brave, and this was a role model for me. (MAU2)

The women summarized that their early life exposure to leadership within their close family shaped their concept of leadership. From a young age these women observed their parents and grandparents and integrated these behaviors into their concept of leadership. Participant MAU2 described the impact of her grandmother on her life.

My grandma was very sort-of a strong woman. Her husband died at twenty-eight, and my dad was eleven months old. She carried all the property, all the property that was leftover and ensured that nothing was lost. She was very sort-of brave, and this was a role model for me. (MAU2)

Their family structure and interaction with parents in the home environment were also outlined in their definition of leadership.

I have had a living role model in front of me which is my father. So, he has been a pioneer in many sectors in Mauritius and from him, I have learned a lot without even realizing it. Because in your day-to-day life the stories that he used to tell, you understand the difficulties in getting to the top. So, he has been a role model, a very supportive father, being a provider to allow us to get to where we are today. (MAU6)

A stable family background was not common for all participants, but the emphasis that parents placed on the importance of education and observing their mother or father successfully overcome personal difficulties from a young age influenced their concept of leadership.

My mum, she had no education. My father was an alcoholic. They had 4 kids and without education she walked and looked for work and sent all four kids to school. Even though life was a struggle. Without education, she educated me that's the best thing to do. And then with time she changed my father. My father with three daughters and one son, stopped drinking alcohol, and he too changed his mindset. We were from is very poor family without having things easily, you strive to win. (MAU8)

International Experience

Another dimension that contributed to participants' concepts of leadership was their experience at regional leadership training conventions and working in multinational organizations. Some participants studied at foreign universities and were exposed to diverse cultures and leadership styles which influenced their concept of leadership.

Many Mauritian women had traveled around the African region and engaged with diverse African cultures through regional training programs and regional partnerships for business. This exposure developed their cultural awareness and led the women to differentiate Mauritius from other African States. For instance, MAU2 articulated her concept of the difference between leadership in Mauritius and leadership in Africa from her training at a regional African Leadership Program. She described the differences thus:

When we talk about African leadership, it's a lot about storytelling. So it's, it's, because you've got many people in the villages and the way of empowering the new generations was a lot through story-telling. Storytelling by the older generation, and this brings inspiration as well. So that come to my mind when you are talking about African leadership. We have a connotation in Mauritius to relate leadership to politics. So, it might be when you are talking about leadership it's about political leaders. And it's not so much about professional leaders and spiritual leaders or these sort of thing. (MAU2)

Similarly, women worked in organizations that had strategic partnerships with European and American multinational companies, so their leadership concepts were formed from their experience with American and European business leaders. The differences between their experiences with Mauritian leaders and foreign leaders were captured by participant MAU2's comment:

It's an American company, and in American companies they hire and fire. So, their aim is no emotion per say, in the relationship of employer-employee. So,

I hired you today, you don't deliver, I can sack you. This is normal culture in America. Whereas here in Mauritius, it was a two-partner/owner managed company, It's a family business. And the culture here is that you treat the employees as members of the family. I remember my first day I came in, my boss told me welcome to the family. So, it's, it's already that culture of, you know, knowing people here in Mauritius, they know a little bit about, more about the culture in Mauritius, so this is the prime difference. From a very impersonal way of working and a culture of American way of working to one which is a Mauritian culture, family business, you have a voice, you can be heard, and they understand. (MAU2)

The above comment suggests that women appear to be satisfied with the cordial nature of their superiors who understand their needs and adjust their performance expectations to meet those needs. In their concept of leadership, being able to express oneself, and being understood and heard was considered essential. The generosity and empathy in family-owned business cultures were described as the positive attributes of Mauritian leadership. Many women considered themselves lucky or privileged because of the culture they experienced in Mauritius. They focused on context, culture, and cultural awareness in their concept of leadership.

We in Mauritius are more privileged in some shape or form. I had a colleague that was, talking about DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo) for example, and she said that at some level you are not expected to exceed your husband's status. You are supposed to stay put and the husband must always maintain a higher standard in the house, and he must be the breadwinner and the likes. So, it's extremely tough for those women you know to just pierce through the ceiling compared to us where it's not really a taboo or at least the mindset is changing these days where it's fine for a woman to have a career, it's fine for a woman to be the breadwinner, which is, in my case and my husband is fine with it. (MAU3)

Team-Centered

Leadership for me means teamwork. (MAU8)

Ten women outlined that their leadership concept was about bringing people together to achieve a common goal while maintaining each person's motivation and encouraging and inspiring each person towards meeting individual and team targets. Effective leadership behaviors were also deemed to include building trust and understanding team members, demonstrating concern for people through setting aside time to explain tasks to employees, showing people what to do and explaining the required standards of performance.

Leadership for me means teamwork. Leadership to lead, you need good teamwork. If the people don't trust what you are planning to do you will not be able to lead. You can give all types of instruction and if the people don't trust you, you will fail. (MAU8)

Another participant explained:

We set up the team dynamics. I believe in understanding and being very flexible. I don't think you should be too lax, but I think it's about building a relationship because it pays off. (MAU7)

This cohort also emphasized the need to inspire team members towards goal achievement as well as leading by example. There was also a focus on building quality relationships between leaders and staff. One participant considered leadership to be:

...a mix of inspiration and trust. For me, a leader is someone where, when you are with the person, woman or man, the value added this person gives you trust and inspiration. (MAU5)

Gender and leadership

All participants considered the question about the differences between male and female leadership. Some women disagreed that men's and women's leadership styles were different and explained that the difference between their leadership styles was due to differences in personality.

I think it's more about personality rather than gender from what I gather. (MAU1)

However, other participants from this cohort expressed that women and men brought different characteristics and elements into the leadership arena and these differences positively impacted corporate success. They described women as nurturing, team-orientated, people-centered and more participative and collaborative than their male counterparts.

I think in general; women have I would say in general they have got a bit more time to listen. They have a bit more of a participative leadership style you know. I mean many women are bit like me. They understand they try to understand the issues and then bring the people. They are sometimes I would say have a bit more emotional intelligence than men. So, I think in a board where there is diversity, there is more women. I think the dynamics have changed slightly. So yes, I would think that women have a slightly different leadership style. More participative use a bit more in emotional intelligence in decision making. Not just always you know push ideas, not as impulsive, they take a bit more time. They consider many other factors other than the usual ones in making a decision. (MAU6)

From their experience, they outlined that men were competitive, pushy, and results-driven rather than people-driven.

Men's leadership tends to want the end result, so they want to see for instance financials, they want to see forecasts, they want to see results. Women do a lot of work on the background, so they like to spend more of their time

understanding their clients, understanding their teams, and think about the future a lot more I think I think compared to men. (MAU11)

Additionally, another participant reflected that women were emotional beings who are often forced to suppress their emotional side, suggesting a gendered concept of leadership.

I need to hide my emotions; I need to hide the fact that I'm not having a good day. Or I need to hide the fact that I'm considering this feeling when I'm taking a decision and not being constantly effective. (MAU3)

The perception that women worked harder than men, were better prepared for meetings, supported their ideas with facts and information, and were more sustainable in their decision-making was found to be a common observation among the participants.

They work more, much harder, longer hours and they're climbing and also more attentive to details. If I was a CEO, I would probably get more women. They're the backbone and they are the one really doing the work. When I see a guy, most of the time they're having meetings, joking, having the relationship thing going on. (MAU10)

From their experiences in the corporate and professional context, they outlined that their male counterparts often took more risks than they did and spent more time increasing their visibility and securing access to networks and groups that could further their career.

I know for a fact and its proven this is what men do. Women usually don't talk about their achievements, they are not used to going around to boast, you will find very few women who would go around and do so and actually it probably wouldn't show up well if a woman does that but guys do that all the time. (MAU9)

A common observation the participants shared in their narratives was that women hesitate to apply for senior roles because they are concerned because they do not fulfil all criteria and requirements.

I think women should, first thing, stop second guessing themselves. Because we do that. We're very, very critical of ourselves. We're not good enough. The men don't think twice before applying for a job even if he's 70% competent. He will still go for it, he will very confidently so. Women might think like, "Hey I'm 99%, I lack the 1%, so I won't give it a shot." (MAU3)

Participant MAU6 shared a similar view and explained that this difference could be associated with societal role expectations – men see themselves as the main source of income for their family and they are likely to take more risks to ensure that they can safely provide for them.

The women believed that the leadership style in Mauritius was changing from a command-and-control style to a team-centered leadership approach. Furthermore, they indicated that the

management by objectives approach and the implementation of performance management systems would reduce the advantage of old-school networks for Mauritian men. One participant described the differences between how men and women gain access to management and senior management positions:

We're more sustainable, we'll look at the whole picture, not just the money. Women are getting more and more up there, by the sheer capacity of their work. They work more, much harder, longer hours and they're climbing and also more attentive to details. They're the backbone and they are the ones really doing the work (MAU10).

Mauritian women's concepts of leadership are derived from multiple lived experiences of their parents, the behaviors of past and current political and business leaders, the history of Mauritius, and observation and experience of interacting with foreign-owned business managers and leaders.

6.7.2 Leadership enactment

The concept of leadership as well as the experiences of Mauritian women have been explored earlier in this chapter. The following section reports on how Mauritian women enact leadership.

"Leaders evolve through cultures and therefore those cultures will impact and influence on their behaviors in that context." (MAU12)

Visionary

The participants' narratives suggest that their leadership practices involve adopting a long-term view and creating, communicating, and sharing that vision amongst employees. These actions were deemed important leadership behaviors.

Having a vision to see what needs to be done, leadership is about setting the vision and trying to have meaningful exchanges around it. (MAU7)

Their long-term focus and commitment to setting direction was also expressed in their comments on how they built trust and inspired their employees. For example, several participants reported that they engaged in behaviors aimed at developing employees and creating job assignments that encouraged continuous learning and development.

Leadership for me is seeing people who started and today they are at top level management. You should help people grow and you have to guide them. (MAU4)

Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership emerged as important in many participants' leadership enactment behaviors. These women reflected that their leadership behaviors involved clearly communicating team objectives to employees, monitoring employee progress towards achieving the set objectives, meeting organizational and task objectives, and rewarding employees for goal achievement.

One participant explained that the relationship between a leader and a follower is based on an exchange.

In a corporate leader what you should be looking at? That you help the company to grow and that you have a better chance in the company to move upwards and to be promoted and to also can have the opportunity to do many things. The opportunity of course to have higher pay. Yeah, that's what people were looking for. And in a leader what they would be looking is for recognition. You know you recognize all the effort that I have done. This is very, very, important, you must recognize the efforts that a person has done. How do you do that? You give a person a promotion or you give a person a better pay and treat people well. Today you can't not treat people well. (MAU4).

Teamwork, building trust, and developing relationships were described as means to achieve organizational objectives and develop individual credibility rather than to understand individual career aspirations.

Once you reach a goal, this is the ultimate credibility that you can gain. So, you sit together, you work, and you say this is the objectives by the end of the year this is where we need to go by doing these things. And if you do these things and get to the goal, I think this is the ultimate credibility that you can get. I think at the end of the day you need to gain the trust of people, not just people who work for you, but you need to gain the trust of your hierarchy as well. (MAU6)

Interestingly, another suggested that building trust is important for future exchange and interactions with followers.

But it's about building trust in a relationship and when you need to cash in on that trust phase back, it's there. (MAU7)

The above quotes suggest that leaders collaborate with staff to identify appealing rewards in exchange for staff performance or compliance. This system of exchange resembles

transactional leadership behaviors, where leaders act in ways to encourage staff to meet team objectives and in exchange, honor the promises they made to their staff.

Command and control

I am not a dictator. (MAU2)

In their conception of leadership, the women emphasized the collaborative, team, people centered and cooperative behaviors. However, within the narratives, these women used phrases that aligned with traditional command-and-control behaviors. They frequently described their previous and some current superiors as tough, as managers who ruled with fear, and commented that these behaviors are no longer appreciated in the current business environment. However, when asked to describe how they believed their employees would describe their leadership behavior, phrases such as hard, focused on the bottom-line, and dictator were included in their comments.

And I said I'm not a dictator. And I think I come across as someone who is principled, no messing about and if I have to do something, I get it done. I think this is how they view me. Probably this is not the way I would have wished people viewed me. But this is what comes out. (MAU2)

Other participants made similar comments:

Very result oriented. I will still ask for the outcome. I never lose sight of what we need to deliver as a business. And I will be tough when I need to be tough. the results are there. (MAU3)

These comments suggest that agentic masculine leadership behaviors prevail in the corporate context and demonstrate a strong preference towards task focus and employee behaviors.

Transformational

When the participants were asked about their role in implementing change, more than half the participants described this as part of their management role. They related that they successfully identified issues within their department and across the organization and committed themselves to resolving these problems in their leadership role. Examples included the introduction of new work processes to increase efficiencies, organization-wide change aimed at improving employee well-being, introducing new technology, and lobbying for social change on sustainable business practices in Mauritius. The behaviors these women described reflect transformational leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership involves creating a vision and building commitment towards the change program. This requires educating others about the change program and collaborating to plan and implement the change project and

overcome resistance to change. From their descriptions, they successfully implemented change programs that improved team and organizational performance. Despite being somewhat process-driven, the participants demonstrated a transformational change approach in their leadership enactment. Several women commented on change:

It's a lot of work about educating. I guess I did such a good job of talking to them and getting them convinced to instill in them this mindset. (MAU10)

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter commenced with a demographic overview of the 14 women from senior management teams in Mauritian organizations. Their conceptualization of their career journey to leadership roles emphasized their experiences both within and outside the Mauritian corporate environment.

The concept map of their career journeys and transitions into senior leadership roles illustrated the career trajectory of these women in the Mauritian context and summarized the main enablers for women's leadership success in corporate Mauritius and roadblocks experienced throughout their career in business.

The "Building the foundations" phase described the inheritance influences on the participants' career and their career mobility and motivation. The "Steppingstones" phase explained the supportive structures, relationships and learning paths the participants traversed to prepare them for senior management. The "Reaching the destination" phase described the experiences of these women once they reached the executive level and the strategies these women employed to adapt to and integrate into the male-dominated senior leadership team. The "Accelerating progress" phase described both the advice these women would share with early-career women pursuing senior leadership positions as well as the advice they would give CEOs and HR directors to facilitate and sustain the progress of women into senior leadership roles.

These women's careers resemble a traditional linear career pathway during the building the foundation's phase; however, as their careers developed, their careers became more boundaryless in nature. They transitioned several times in their career and most women's career opportunities and decisions were motivated by the need for challenging assignments and opportunities to learn, organizational restructuring, and being selected by superiors. All the

women with children returned to work after maternity leave and made career adjustments to accommodate the expectations of motherhood and their professional career aspirations.

The concept map for the conceptualization and enactment of leadership illustrates how these women conceptualize and enact leadership. Leadership for women from Mauritius is constructed through their experience of leadership from a local historical and political lens and an international perspective. Strong trade and investment partnerships with Europe and India have influenced and shaped these women's conceptualization and enactment of leadership. Their conceptualization of leadership is founded upon their experiences studying and living elsewhere and working for multinational companies either based in Mauritius or in Europe. These women described leadership as relationships that embody relationship building, trust, empowerment, and inclusivity. Their enactment of leadership is centered around a command-and-control framework and highly transactional relationships between the leader and the follower.

Professional qualifications, international mobility, meaningful interactions, leadership development and supportive family, supportive CEOs, and professional relationships from their early career to their appointment into senior leadership roles were described as critical enablers for their success. The challenges these women faced and surpassed within the Mauritian context were derived from the limited opportunities for career guidance and limited options to pursue tertiary education, the social-cultural expectations placed upon women, gender bias towards women with children, gender stereotypes, organizational culture, and long working hours.

7 Discussion and Analysis

“The seeds of success in every nation on Earth are best planted in women and children.”

Joyce Banda, Former President of Malawi

7.1 Introduction

The overarching aim of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of women from South Africa and Mauritius who had broken through the glass ceiling and transitioned into senior leadership positions. The study was guided by the overarching research question: How do women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualize leadership and transition from middle management into senior leadership roles? This research question was supported by the five research objectives shown below.

RO1: Understand how management and leadership are conceptualized by women in Mauritius and South Africa

RO2: Identify and examine the factors that influence the transition from middle manager to senior manager/leader for women in Mauritius and South Africa

RO3: Explore women’s experiences of advancing from manager to senior manager/leader in Mauritius and South Africa to determine how to improve the career prospects and socioeconomic potential of women pursuing management careers.

RO4: Investigate what systemic organizational policies and practices are needed to improve the percentage of women in senior leadership roles in Mauritius and South Africa

RO5: Develop a conceptual framework based on the experiences of women who have successfully transitioned from middle management into senior management in Mauritius and South Africa.

The findings described in Chapter 5 and 6 provide an understanding of how the women conceptualized and enact leadership and the career trajectory and development of South African and Mauritian women. Three key themes were identified for both the South African and the Mauritian participants: the importance of context in shaping conceptions and enactment

of leadership, the career trajectories of women, and the enablers and obstacles women experience throughout their leadership career.

Chapter 5 presented the findings on South Africa.

The first theme encompasses the women's career journeys spanning from post-education to appointments into a senior leadership position. Career transitions in corporate business contexts in South Africa followed mostly followed a linear and lateral career pathway accompanied by career breaks at different stages of their career development. The findings suggest that women did not intentionally set out to become senior executives, rather they were high achievers from childhood, and pursued higher studies in South African universities, strengthening their self-concept, performance, and expertise. They joined organizations through graduate training programs and had access to career management and structured leadership development training with clear pathways for promotions and leadership tracks. South African women transitioned several times throughout their careers and triggers for career transitions included both push and pull factors. Pull factors included being selected or headhunted for new roles or pursuing new challenging job opportunities. Push factors included unsupportive CEOs or managers, starting a family, organizational culture and perceptions of the glass ceiling.

The second theme that emerged from the findings were the enablers and roadblocks for career success in corporate South Africa. The organizational enablers described by the women included the motivation to embrace new opportunities, successfully completing challenging assignments, sponsorship and formal mentoring, and participation in structured leadership development programs. At a personal level they identified gender-neutral family norms, self-efficacy, and self-awareness as career enablers. The roadblocks included unsupportive organizational cultures, unsupportive superiors, exclusionary practices, gendered social and cultural expectations, unsupportive structures, and gender stereotypes.

The third theme explained how women's leadership concepts and enactment and career ambition are shaped by contextual factors, emphasizing the complex racial and cultural diversity. Embedded within these factors are a strong sense of Ubuntu values as well as the legacy of apartheid. The career trajectories of these women were also impacted by early life and career experiences of leadership and gender identity and opportunities for leadership development training. Leadership enactment behaviors woven throughout the narratives included self-descriptive terms such as collaborative, collective, consensus, caring and

nurturing, transformational, and inspirational, amongst others, which align with the servant, Ubuntu, and transformational leadership behaviors. A significant outcome highlighted by the findings related to the leadership conception and enactment theme was that contextual realities experienced by South African women emanate from the historical oppression of Black people during the apartheid era.

Chapter 6 presented the findings from Mauritius.

The first theme explains women's career journeys. The findings highlight that Mauritian women's career transitions were more diverse post-secondary school qualifications where some participants pursued full-time studies and part-time work, while others delayed graduate and professional studies and engaged in full-time work and part-time studies. The main triggers for a career transition included the pursuit of further studies, organizational restructuring, improved career opportunities, being selected for more senior roles, and life-changing events such as marriage which often brought with it childcare responsibilities.

The second theme was the enablers and roadblocks for career success in the Mauritian corporate sector. The enablers described by the women included the motivation to embrace new opportunities and continuous learning, having an entrepreneurial mindset, international mobility and cross-cultural awareness, networking, technical expertise, qualifications, and completing challenging assignments. At a personal level, their early life challenges, gender-neutral family norms for occupational choices, personality and personal support were identified as enablers. The roadblocks preventing the advancement of women in corporate settings included unsupportive organizational cultures, unsupportive superiors, deeply entrenched gendered social and cultural norms and expectations, unsupportive structures for women with children and gender stereotypes.

The third theme encompassed how women's leadership conception and enactment and career ambition is shaped by contextual factors, emphasizing the history of Mauritius, international exposure and experience, their employment in organizations with international partnerships, socio-economic status, early life experience, culture, and gender identity. Mauritian women's leadership enactment behaviors included teamwork, setting direction, monitoring, communicating, and being honest. Their enactment of leadership aligns more closely with transactional, command-and-control, entrepreneurial leadership behaviors than the South African participants' more transformational leadership descriptions.

This chapter presents a discussion based on the analysis of the findings. The similarities and differences to existing literature are highlighted. Points of contrast with the existing literature are significantly important for the study's key contributions to knowledge and practice, which are presented in the concluding chapter. The discussion of the findings is guided by the *Pathways into Leadership* model shown in Figure 7.1. Reflection from the findings and interrelation of the themes that emerged from the interview data led to the construction of this conceptual model that illustrates South African and Mauritian women's career transitions and demonstrates the complexity of their experiences within the broader societal, cultural and corporate context.

The chapter begins with an overview of the *Pathways into Leadership* model and is followed by a discussion of the model's representation of South African and Mauritian women's career pathways and the enabling and inhibiting factors women experience at each stage. As women's careers evolve across their lifespan, the journey into senior leadership positions is affected by external events, changing life circumstances and internal psychological experiences that evolve at each stage through reflection and introspection. Section 7.3 discusses each phase of the model and relates to research objectives two, three, four and five: to understand the individual, cultural and institutional factors that contribute to women's successful transition into senior leadership positions from early career stages until they reach senior leadership positions and the empowerment strategies most needed to accelerate the progress of women into senior leadership positions.

The discussion presented in Section 7.4 responds to the first research objective: to understand how management and leadership are conceptualized by women in Mauritius and South Africa. The complex and dynamic influences of the historical factors and cultural diversities within the South African and Mauritian context act simultaneously and interactively on women's conceptions, experiences, and enactment of leadership.

7.2 The Pathways into Leadership Model – an Overview

The *Pathways into Leadership* model presented in Figure 7.1 illustrates how South African and Mauritian women transition into senior management and leadership positions. The *Pathways into Leadership* model has four phases: (1) "Building the Foundations," (2) "Steppingstones," (3) "Reaching the Destination," and (4) "Accelerating progress." The model depicts a series of

steps. Steps one to three depict women's career phases from early career and professional activities to reaching a senior leadership position, and step four illustrates the future strategies necessary to facilitate the progress of women from South Africa and Mauritius into senior leadership positions. The nature of women's career experiences and how these experiences triggered career transitions are not fully captured by existing career pathways models. Existing models can inform some of the findings in this study, but they do not sufficiently express the complex and dynamic nature of the career development process for professional women. The model offers a background of the career decisions and activities of South African and Mauritian women that led to their career success in corporate leadership from their early career to their appointment and success as senior leaders. Furthermore, the model considers the influence of early childhood experiences and the socio-cultural environment together with the organizational environment. Amakye et al's. (2022) focused on women's organizational experiences once appointed into senior leadership positions and identified the challenges women experience at the executive level and the strategies used to navigate their role. Existing research focused on the barriers women encounter and the perception of and effects of the glass-ceiling barrier for women in corporate leadership (Barkhuizen et al. (2022); Mathur-Helm (2006; 2005); Ramdhony et al. (2012).

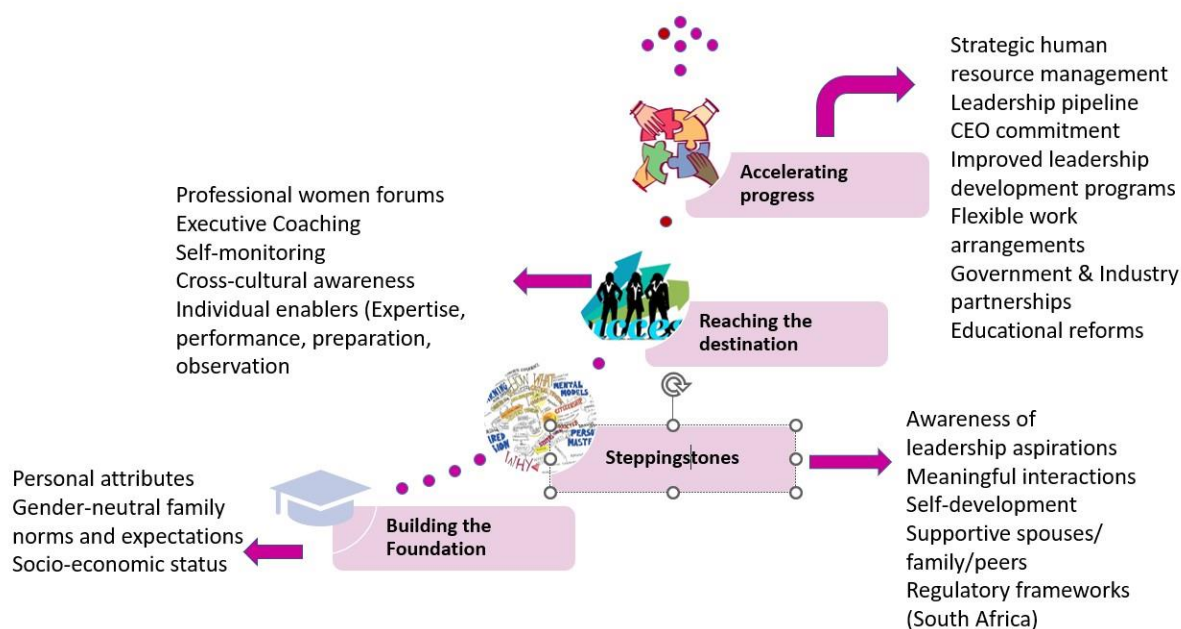
Jackson et al's. (2022, p. 160) T-shaped model of the characteristics of African research leaders focus on the key competencies for successful research leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) and reported that women pursuing promotion in HEIs are have difficulty balancing their teaching and service roles with research output demands (Jackson et al., 2022). Moodly and Toni' (2017) framework towards higher education model, focused on policy implementation and highlighted that the institutional environment can address gender inequality at three career stages (early career; mid-career and late career) in HEI through policy formulation and implementation in South Africa. This study indicates that women who aspire to reach senior leadership positions in corporate settings need to develop specific skills and qualities as they progress in their careers. These skills and qualities are situated in the context in which they are living and working and include self-awareness, cultural intelligence, and social capital. The study also suggests that there are distinct phases in a women's professional career path and as women transition from one phase to another, women may need to proactively develop the above-mentioned skills and qualities across each phase to position themselves for success in senior leadership positions.

Career transitions at each phase come with challenges of negotiating the changes that accompany each new role. Career transitions also trigger self-reflections and introspection that transform the way they think and feel about their leadership role and enactment.

Each phase of the model represents the critical enablers for leadership success. These enablers are interwoven with the contextual factors and constraints that women experience as they navigate through the complex male-dominated corporate environment and reach senior leadership positions.

Figure 7.1

Pathways into Leadership Model



7.3 The Pathways into Leadership

Each phase of the *Pathways into Leadership* model are explained in the following section.

7.3.1 Building the foundations

This phase of the model discusses the early life influences and the impact of these influences on their career success. It describes how these early influences helped shape women's future careers.

Supportive contexts

One of the areas that was striking in many of the women's stories was the impact of their family on their development of ambition and drive. For some it was because of what they described as gender-neutral family values and the positive encouragement and support received from family, teachers, and female role models during their childhood and adolescence. All the women from this study were high achievers at school and university and reflected that they were always determined to be the best – a value instilled in them from childhood.

For the South African women, the role of their fathers as their biggest champions and what they described as being in a gender-neutral home environment reduced gender stereotyping and gendered attitudes in their formative years and influenced their early career decisions. The women from this study generally described their relationships with male family members as equal and the motto that there are no girl or boy jobs was reinforced at home from an early age. Weisner and Wilson-Mitchell (1990) reported that parents that espoused egalitarian values raise children who are more knowledgeable about sex-egalitarian beliefs and who question cultural norms. Epstein and Ward (2011) carried out a study on parental socialization methods about gender. Amongst 291 United States college undergraduates and 259 United States adolescents from public high schools, they reported that children raised in environments where the parents communicate and promote egalitarian gender roles have more liberal views towards gender roles and expectations.

Interestingly, the women constantly made reference to the patriarchal nature of either the South African or Mauritian culture but described their parents and their home environment as gender neutral. They emphasized that they were treated the same as their brothers, they all had to complete household chores and had equal access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Parents and family upbringing were also found to be instrumental to these women's career ambitions, development of leadership capabilities, and career success. Similar findings were reported in a study on Filipino CEOs (Osi & Teng-Calleja, 2021) where an equal opportunity mindset encouraged women to pursue careers of their choice, and their career

choices were not limited to traditional female roles. Constant encouragement and an emphasis on hard work and diligence was espoused in their values. The paradoxes that emerged from these women's descriptions of their upbringings reflect some ambiguities in both the South African and Mauritian context. The women were consistent in their description of their supportive parents and family values, but also narrated instances where parents responded to their needs in a different way compared to the needs of their brothers. For instance, decisions to learn how to drive and purchase a car were met with resistance. These activities may have been perceived as overt symbols of independence that parents fought or underlying gender stereotypes that reflect the patriarchal society the women observe.

Roadblocks at the Building the foundation phase

While Mauritian women described their family environment as supportive with regards to family values, several also described their early life experiences as challenging and competitive. For some, early life socio-economic status and their parents' occupation narrowed their career choices. Some described their family income as unstable, and most were single-income families. While primary and secondary school education in Mauritius was free, parents had to finance higher education. In families with stable incomes, parents have the resources to invest in their children's education and perceive greater benefits, which may not be the case for low-income families (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). These women made realistic occupational choices motivated by the availability of courses and their innate desire to gain university and professional qualifications (Croll, 2008). These contextual constraints pushed women and men into occupations where training was available in Mauritius, or into occupations where scholarships were available, or through the access and availability of distance learning programs, suggesting that Mauritian women had high individual agency but limited occupational choices.

For South African women, their formative years were stable, and all women were raised in financially secure families where it was expected that they would pursue university studies, since most women had at least one parent and sibling who went to university. For these women, their parents, older siblings and male family members provided career advice and they noted that they rarely encountered sexism while growing up and were never told that as a girl you should act in a certain way. However, when they joined the workplace as young interns, the realities of the workplace were very different from their upbringing, suggesting that while their upbringing provided many opportunities and choices for their careers, it did not sufficiently prepare them for the realities of the corporate environment. In the workplace, not all men they

encountered treated women the same way that their fathers and brothers treated them. The blurriness between how women are expected to behave in the home and how women are expected to behave in the work context was described as a barrier for women in South Africa. It was noted that how women greet a male person and the culturally appropriate non-verbal communication cues should be separated between the home and work environment, otherwise this leads to poor communication and harassment. In home environments that reinforce patriarchal mindsets, women are expected to be submissive and obedient (Wadesango et al., 2011) and men expect women in the workplace to conform to these behaviors.

Their encounters with sexism, racism and sexual harassment challenged these women early in their careers and while some responded to harassment behaviors by reporting these to relevant managers, other participants isolated themselves and started to withdraw from family and friends. Finding the right support to recover from these experiences was cited as an obstacle and reporting such incidences when they were young and new to the work environment did not always solve the problem.

7.2.2 Steppingstones

Steppingstones is the next phase of the model. It identifies the individual and organizational support structures that women encountered once they had reached the professional stage of their careers. The foundations phase set the platform for women to acquire educational qualifications and their initial professional roles. The steppingstones phase illustrates the different professional activities they cited as contributing to accumulating the professional and leadership expertise that increased their visibility and eligibility for senior leadership positions.

This phase incorporates personal attributes, undertaking formal leadership training, meaningful interactions and personal sources of support as enablers of career and leadership growth and the roadblocks they encountered.

Personal attributes

This study reveals that personal attributes, including optimism, a positive mindset, creativity, resilience, conscientiousness, adaptability, and open-mindedness were attributes that facilitated success in the corporate context. These women adopted a proactive approach toward

their career growth and development, whereby they foresaw changes, then planned and took actions individually to adapt to their work environments. They demonstrated a willingness to search for opportunities for career advancement and embrace opportunities that were available, and they were able to adapt to new roles and responsibilities and acquire the skills, competencies, and attitudes critical for leadership. These findings are consistent with SCCT, Lent et al. (2000), who demonstrated the role of personal factors on career choice and success, and Savickas (1997) conceptualization of career adaptability. Savickas (1997) reported that career adaptability encompassed three elements: “planful attitudes (that is developing values, skills, and abilities that fit one into relevant careers), self- and environmental exploration (that is, searching for or aligning to a career or environments that fits one’s personal characteristics), and informed decision-making” (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). Career advancement was mainly attributed to their qualifications, skills and expertise and confirms that these women’s career development aligns with protean (Hall & Mirvas, 1996) and boundaryless career orientations. Taking into consideration the educational attainment of all participants, the findings support the assertion that education and qualifications may assist women in their career advancement in leadership roles (Metz, 2003).

The perceived personal agency factors, such as hard work, high performance, achievement orientation, expertise and qualifications identified by the women in this study are similar to the individual factors identified in previous studies by Tharenou (2001) and Metz (2003). While hard work and performance were regarded as enabling factors in this study the women also identified self-confidence as an enabler. In reference to other women who did not progress and in reference to the differences between men and women, the respondents described self-doubt as an obstacle to women’s progress. Most women explained that professional women did not actively apply for promotions and disclosed that they were selected for promotion or encouraged to apply for promotions by their superiors, sponsors and mentors rather than putting themselves forward, despite their reported self-confidence. Barker and Monks (1998) reported that women in the accounting profession in Ireland preferred to develop specialized expertise and operate in expert roles rather than general management roles because of their lack of confidence and desire to avoid the organizational politics often associated with general management roles.

The women expressed that, along with a strong belief in oneself and a can-do attitude, overcoming hardships and obstacles through perseverance, hard work and optimism built their career resiliency.

Career resiliency

South African and Mauritian women's journeys into senior leadership positions demonstrate high levels of career resilience that was accumulated by overcoming different sets of adversities at each career stage. These women relied on skills, behaviors and capabilities that were developed from the cultural and contextual hardships they encountered as children, young women, and female managers and senior managers in South Africa and Mauritius. Career resiliency as defined by Kuntz et al. (2016, p. 460) is the capacity "to utilize resources to continually adapt and flourish ... even when faced with challenging circumstances." The capacity to cope with different life and career events were emphasized by all participants. In general, the women focused on what they did and the steps in their career path and how they dealt with problems and did not express these as barriers – rather they expressed these as embedded in "how it was in South Africa and Mauritius at the time." They constantly referred to past experiences and what they learned from those experiences and how these helped them overcome obstacles along the way. For example, the context and culture influenced how Mauritian women negotiated the gender role expectations around earning more than their spouses in a patriarchal cultural context. Nevertheless, in this study, the women built their confidence and career resilience by navigating through hardships and achieving career success.

Self-efficacy

One explanation for these women's success in corporate leadership is Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997, p. 3), "perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." From the study, women could set goals and conceptualize and enact plans for career success outside of the norm. They were able to envision the possibility of progressing into senior leadership at some point in their careers and embarked on the demanding and long educational path to success. Many women stated that they were lucky or that timing, being at the right place at the right time, helped them progress. For instance, respondents from South Africa cited events like legislative changes that compelled organizations to meet new reporting and compliance measures as being advantageous to them, while others spoke about Black Economic Empowerment requirements and top management's commitment to addressing gender issues. Respondents from Mauritius noted that timing, in terms of organizational restructuring and gaining qualifications in skills-scarce areas, enabled them to succeed in the male-dominated professions.

As noted above, many women attributed their opportunities to luck. Referring to themselves as lucky or very fortunate to have been selected for leadership training or a middle management position or just keeping in touch with a previous boss or reading about an opportunity right when they felt the need for a job change. Reflecting on their individual career choices, the women acknowledged their individual agency traits as well as their belief in God and luck. Statements like, “I guess I was lucky” were expressed by most women. Previous research on the importance of luck in career advancement is contradictory. Nzioka (2014) and Zhong (2006) found that luck played a minor role in the career advancement context, while earlier research (Newman, 1993) listed luck as a significant factor for career advancement. In this study, women may have used the term “luck” as an expression of their humility. Wosinska et al. (1996) found that females who were highly modest in self-promotion were favored over moderately modest women, whereas the men who actively self-promoted were favored over men who moderately self-promoted. The women from this study had similar views. Despite these observations, the women from this study possessed an advanced sense of their own career-related self-efficacy.

Leadership development

With regards to the overall background of the participants from this study, significant levels of education and training in leadership development skills were found to be enablers for their career success in corporate business. Expertise and intellectual capabilities were developed and applied throughout their careers to construct credibility in their respective roles. One may deduce that leadership development and training positively contribute to effective leadership among women in South Africa and Mauritius. In the corporate context, structured leadership development programs have been reported to have a positive impact on managerial capabilities and career advancement for both men and women (Lamsa & Savela, 2014; Simpson, 2000; Sturges et al., 2003). MBA programs combine a formal curriculum with informal learning processes that increase individuals’ understanding of how to set career goals, and women benefit from the social interaction and start to build their own network and increase their visibility (Warhurst, 2012). Studies on both men and women by Simpson (2000) and Sturges et al. (2003) found gender differences in the outcomes derived from management development training. While both men and women reported increased levels of self-confidence and increased ease with dealing with change, women reported more intrinsic benefits from these programs and reported high satisfaction with the process of self-discovery and self-awareness.

All the women from this study reported formal and informal participation in management and leadership development training. For most South African women and the Mauritian women who started their career overseas, management development programs were part of structured career management plans with upward mobility. For the Mauritian cohort based in Mauritius, participation in company-sponsored short courses locally (with international trainers) and abroad (attending conferences or training organized at the company headquarters abroad) was the avenue for leadership development.

The South African cohort reported that management training programs often molded women into masculine models of leadership, placing pressure on women to conform to the existing masculine image of a leader. Gagnon and Collinson (2014) reported in their ethnographic study of two in-house leadership development programs for mid-level managers and senior managers, one in America and one in Europe, that the underlying message from these two programs was that “to lead you must conform” (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014, p. 662) and leadership development programs prescribed traditional masculine leadership identities such as competitiveness, aggressiveness, being logical and non-affective. Some women from this study suggested that graduate leadership development training content should be adapted, with more focus on women in leadership and progressive leadership that does not reinforce masculine leadership traits, but instead emphasizes diversity and inclusivity (race, gender, background and context). Leadership training, it was suggested, should also include sessions where women can share experiences of how they negotiated the patriarchal mindset within their family and professional contexts and crafted a place in the leadership team for themselves. Exposure to leadership development in Western contexts affirmed for some that the leadership model that was being espoused was highly masculinized and was not one with which they resonated. Similar findings reported on MBA program content found that learning content in MBA programs supports a masculine ethos (Kelan & Jones, 2010) and that the design and content of MBA programs need to be feminized (Simpson, 2006).

Although most Mauritian women described the leadership development training as ad hoc (for example, they enrolled in courses on their own when they identified a skill gap) within the organizational hierarchy, their investment in their formal qualifications was more structured and gave them the impetus needed for career progress. For South African women, BEE and diversity and inclusion programs and structured leadership development programs were a common feature in their organizations and provided South African women with the leverage to progress in their careers.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness was described as the most important learning outcome from leadership development training and other training interventions these women undertook after graduating from university. Carden et al. (2022) defined self-awareness as:

...a range of components, which can be developed through focus, evaluation, and feedback, and provides an individual with an awareness of their internal state (emotions, cognitions, physiological responses), that drives their behaviours (beliefs, values, and motivations) and an awareness of how this impacts and influences others (p. 164).

Through self-awareness activities within leadership development programs, these women had increased awareness of their own values, thoughts, and behaviors and how these elements positively and negatively affected their decisions, confidence, and career progress. Professional development programs help women become more self-aware and both the South African and Mauritian women from this study described self-awareness as an enabling factor that helped them grow and develop into successful and effective leaders. They described how through self-reflection, feedback from self-awareness activities, and conversations with trusted peers, they gained better perspectives and understandings of themselves, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Self-awareness content in leadership development programs taught women the technique of “practical reflection.” Practical reflection, as explained by these women, were moments where they looked back on a situation and questioned their reactions and behaviors and the responses and behaviors of others, and through introspection, they identified the appropriate behaviors that helped them through these difficult interactions. The women found the interpersonal components of these programs useful as it helped them raise awareness of how their behaviors affect others, and this triggered personal transformations and assisted them to construct authentic versions of themselves. Adjustments in their perceptions of the expectations they place on themselves and learning to be kinder to themselves were other outcomes of self-awareness activities. Prior research has found that individuals with high self-awareness are promoted more often and are effective leaders (Axelrod, 2012; Collins, 2001; Dierdorff & Rubin, 2015; Showry & Manasa 2014).

The benefits of self-awareness identified by the women in this study are consistent with previous research findings (Erikson, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2018; Whetten & Cameron, 2016)

and point to why they are an important aspect of the steppingstones to more senior leadership roles.

Meaningful interactions

Developing social capital through a variety of meaningful interactions and interpersonal relationships such as networks, mentors and sponsors was found to be a significant enabler for career advancement for participants from this study. Similar to previous studies by Cimirotic et al. (2017) and Holten and Dent (2016), participants noted that their superiors' confidence in their capabilities and constant guidance and advice on how they should act, respond and handle particular situations contributed to their career progress. They reported that their superiors acted as mentors and role models who "showed them the way" into leadership positions. These women stressed that their path was easier because they were supported by their superiors. Others described superiors who earmarked them as high performers and created opportunities for them to develop and demonstrate their potential.

Despite the low presence and visibility of women in senior management positions, several women stated that they were fortunate to have been supervised by women higher up in the hierarchy. They described their female superiors as role models and informal mentors who promoted their emotional empowerment and assertiveness very early in their careers, demonstrating that women can reconcile their professional aspirations and personal goals to navigate multiple roles and balance work-family demands. Such support increased their motivation, confidence, and self-efficacy and positively influenced their career direction and goals. These benefits are consistent with existing literature on the correlation between mentoring and career success (Bozionelos, et al., 2016; Kram, 1995; O'Brien et al., 2010).

The participants from this study were able to identify and articulate the different kinds of mentoring and social support that assisted women to break through the glass ceiling. Some women were part of formal mentoring programs built into structured leadership development and career management programs, while others were mentored by their superior or supportive peers. Cross et al. (2019), in their research study amongst health academics, reported similar findings on how different forms of mentoring, interpersonal interactions, and organizational social support improved female academics' career and personal development. Mentors provided encouragement, inspiration, professional sponsorship, and a framework for friendship (Cross et al., 2019).

Sponsorship

This study also found that corporate sponsorship was an enabler for career advancement into senior leadership positions. A number of South African women differentiated between mentors and sponsors. These women explained that sponsors were people, mostly men, who they did not report to, but who took an active interest in their development and connected them to opportunities for work assignments that developed their expertise and increased their visibility. These sponsors actively advocated for challenging assignments, invited them to executive committee meetings and provided opportunities for them to not only observe but also contribute, and nominated them for promotions. This was also supported by several Mauritian participants who expressed similar views around influential partners and superiors higher up in the organizational hierarchy who publicly backed them for challenging work assignments and through one-to-one chats reassured them of their support and confirmed their ability to perform new roles and take on higher levels of responsibility. However, the Mauritian women did not specifically use the word sponsor. Rather, expressions such as “people who provided the reassurance, or a chat with this person higher up in the hierarchy who said ‘he saw something in me’” suggests that these comments align more with sponsorship rather than only mentoring and supportive interpersonal relationships. Scheepers et al. (2018, p. 490) highlighted that the underlying difference between mentoring-only support and mentoring–sponsorship support was that those mentors who sponsored their proteges placed their own reputation at risk, were mostly proactive in their relationship with a protégé, demonstrated a vested interest in their protégé’s career success, organized training and stretch assignments with high visibility for their protégé, and gave them access to their networks. However, there are areas where mentoring and sponsorship overlap, especially in giving advice and providing emotional support. Most women reported sponsorship from predominately male superiors, likely because of the limited number of women in powerful and influential positions in both South Africa and Mauritius.

Networking

Similar to previous studies (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Holten & Dent, 2016; Lord et al., 2014; Wolff & Moser, 2009), both the South African and Mauritian cohorts talked about networking as an enabler for career success. Existing literature on the relationship between networking and career success found that networking positively contributed to salary growth,

led to higher levels of job satisfaction, and assisted in building developmental relationships (Gould & Penley, 1984; Kram, 1985; Wolff & Moser, 2009). Networking differs from mentoring and sponsorship in that network relationships are less powerful and personal than mentoring and sponsorship relationships (Kram, 1985), and the individual takes more responsibility for their career growth and invests their time and energy in building the social capital and employability necessary to advance their careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

Mauritian women did not emphasize the impact or value of mentoring (formal or informal) to the same extent as the South African cohort, but they stressed the importance of networking in their careers. The Mauritian cohort emphasized the importance of interacting with key stakeholders within the organization and industry and knowing “who’s who” in the organizational hierarchy, maintaining contact and relationships with previous bosses, socializing with family members in influential positions, and engaging in professional activities. Given that Mauritius is a small country where most professionals know one another or are linked through familial relationships and friendships, networking was considered an enabler for their success.

However, a few Mauritian women identified this level of familiarity as a barrier, describing the unfair networking practices that advantaged men over women. These included politicking and backing or partisanship behaviors (Gungadeen et al., 2018), and meetings and social engagements that women with children could not attend because they needed or were expected to be home with the children. For some, this meant working to change organizational practices that favored men because they had fewer caring responsibilities. However, several participants held an optimistic outlook that the power and influence of negative networking behaviors would diminish with the implementation of formal reporting and performance management systems. Despite the challenges, networking helped women to build relationships within the team and higher up the hierarchy and gain the support they needed to successfully implement changes and complete projects that increased their visibility which led to promotion.

Several South African women reported management development training and leadership programs such as MBA programs, short women’s leadership courses, and industry and corporate events as effective platforms for women to build their network. Similar to the Mauritian cohort, being aware of the key stakeholders within the organization and spending time getting to know team members helped the women to build their own friendships and networks.

All the South African participants identified and discussed the presence of an old boys' network and how this was considered to be both a barrier and challenge to women's career progression. This network engaged in informal social gatherings and team-building events which indirectly prevented access by women. For example, in South Africa, men often socialize and network while playing golf or meeting on Friday afternoons in the pub, which are both incompatible for women with families (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). As described in the section on career patterns, motherhood and family responsibility were significant challenges for women and often they could not participate in these events because they needed to return home to take care of their children. Most of their males' peers had stay-at-home partners and did not face these constraints. Several women expressed that they felt isolated as they were excluded from these interactions and thus were unable to develop the connections and social relationships that emerged from these interactions. Similar findings were reported by Lutter (2015) and Padayachee (2013) who reported that access to networks was less available for women compared to men and was a significant barrier to the career progression of women.

International student mobility

Most Mauritian women described international mobility as an enabler for career progression. Studying and working abroad increased women's human, cultural and social capital and these women readily secured professional and management positions in international companies as a result. Attending short or long training programs and living and working abroad was described as a catalyst for their career success. International exposure developed their openness to diversity and acceptance of differences, cross-cultural awareness and communication, and entrepreneurial mindset. Furthermore, some highlighted that international mobility also exposed them to business opportunities, career development, and management programs that were not yet available in Mauritius at the time, allowing them to learn best practices and processes used elsewhere and bring that knowledge and opportunities back to Mauritius. These competencies and opportunities were highly valued in Mauritius, given that it is a small island economy with no natural resources and is heavily reliant on foreign direct investment, entrepreneurial activity, and human capital for economic growth and development. Working on projects that had not been implemented in Mauritius provided opportunities to lead and successfully expand Mauritian operations. This is supported by previous research which found that international student mobility increased intercultural competence (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Onorati et al., 2017; Winslade, 2016) and increased

entrepreneurial and global business competence (Hallows et al., 2011). This research shows that these women accrued similar benefits through early career mobility.

Studying, living, and working abroad during their early adulthood meant leaving their parents' home, and their country, and learning and adapting to new cultural contexts. This also involved more uncertainty and risk and expanded their social networks so that they relied less on their parents. Shifting away from home made them more independent and self-reliant thereby transforming their identity, which meant that they were distinctly and permanently different from other women around them and their local networks. This experience helped them negotiate and re-negotiate traditional gender norm expectations upon their return to Mauritius. Ongoing self-reflection and comparison between their lives and professional experiences abroad and their experiences in Mauritius increased their self-awareness of how to negotiate around the familial constraints prevalent in the Mauritian cultural context. Their experience abroad made them less attentive to some traditional gender role expectations embedded in the Mauritian culture.

International mobility was not described as an enabler for the South African cohort. All South African participants completed graduate degrees in South African universities and relocated for work and study purposes within South Africa and its neighboring countries. Only one participant had worked in a foreign country in one of her previous positions but did not identify it as an enabler for her success in leadership. This may be explained by the difference in availability of higher education institutions between South Africa and Mauritius. It can also be explained by the legacy of apartheid, when international opportunities were not readily available; hence, the development of a stronger higher education infrastructure within South Africa.

Engaging in mentoring and sponsorship

Contrary to previous research findings (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011), both cohorts revealed very limited queen bee behaviors. Most South African participants engage in formal and informal mentoring and sponsorship behaviors (for both men and women) and use their current positions to advocate for policies that promote women, diversity, and inclusion. Mentoring and sponsorship were described as an integral component in the South African women's conceptualization and enactment of leadership. Some women specified that they mostly mentor younger males in their team due to the very limited number of women in technology. For example, they described pushing the female agenda by organizing university

visits targeted at young women, training and development interventions for high-potential women from their teams, connecting younger women to resources that could further their careers, and recruiting young women into their professional women's networks to increase accessibility to mentors and sponsors for younger women. All the women involved in these developmental interventions were mentored and sponsored early in their careers, suggesting that positive role models clearly impact developing inclusive leadership styles and constructing an empowerment culture in leadership behaviors. A second explanation for these women's commitment to mentoring and sponsorship is their collective and shared belief that women can benefit from female managers and senior managers who have already successfully navigated the labyrinth and who have the networks to create opportunities and platforms that empower women.

On the other hand, despite wanting to see more women in senior roles, very few women from the Mauritian cohort were inclined to engage in mentoring and coaching others. Formal mentoring, sponsorship and coaching was not described as part of their leadership behavior. Informal conversations around professional development in terms of qualifications and professional accreditation and empowering younger team members through increased autonomy were emphasized as supportive leadership behaviors amongst Mauritian women. Mauritian women acknowledged that the corporate environment was tough in terms of work–family balance and stressed the social-cultural constraints women experience, rather than experiences of discrimination or sexism. Yet, these women stressed that for their career, qualifications, meeting performance objectives, and being available to work whenever required were criteria for promotion early in their careers. These comments indicate that Mauritian women may exhibit more agentic qualities in their organizational behaviors and leadership. For instance, when describing the difference between male and female leadership styles, some women said that no differences exist, and they did not like to stereotype or categorize people; in other words, they adopted a gender- and culture-blind approach (Gündemir et al., 2019). Apart from the work–family conflict, these women denied the difficulties women face in the workplace. Derks et al. (2016) reported that successful women's denial of the presence of the challenges women face is a characteristic of the queen bee syndrome. This suggests that there are elements of this approach in the Mauritian context that may contribute to women's underrepresentation in senior roles.

The absence of structured leadership development programs and career management interventions, coupled with the social-cultural expectations in Mauritian society with regard to

the role of women at work and at home, may help explain why the Mauritian participants from this study are less inclined to engage in mentoring and sponsorship. Additionally, the women who started their careers in Mauritius relied on themselves (their hard work, performance, and sacrifices) and close friends and family, past superiors, and self-constructed networks to forge a pathway into senior management positions. Challenging the existing patriarchal mindset may not be possible to achieve by a handful of successful women, as the social norms and expectations around the role of women in society and in the home are deeply embedded in the Mauritian culture and context.

Similar to the South African cohort, the Mauritian women from this study did not comment on situations where female peers refused to support them or blocked their progress. However, they did emphasize that gossip, unsupportive comments from both male and female peers, and situations when their female peers withheld information or did not support their suggestions in meetings, prevailed within the corporate context. One further possible explanation for these unsupportive behaviors is that most women from this study reported that they were the only female or that the majority of members of their teams were male, therefore they did not have the strength in numbers necessary for females to support females (De Vries, 2015; Skaggs et al., 2012).

Personal sources of support

In this study, the women described several sources of personal social support that they received throughout their careers. The most important sources of support were spouses, parents, parents-in-law, siblings, and paid domestic help. Some women from both cohorts noted that their spouses shared household and childcare duties but very few took full responsibility for the children and the home environment. Previous research (Jyothi & Jyothi, 2012; Tharenou, 1999) has reported that women do most of the household work and thus have less time to invest in their career development. These findings suggest that this is not always the case, and that some men do take responsibility for childrearing to support women in their professional success. Of particular interest is the cultural context for both cohorts, where there is an expectation that household chores and caring responsibilities are delegated to paid domestic help.

Additionally, many women mentioned that their partners and siblings also held high-level positions, and apart from sharing childcare responsibilities, they also provided professional advice and assistance. Practical assistance from personal relationships was

reported in previous studies to be very important for career growth (Gallhofer et al., 2011). From the Mauritian cohort, several women mentioned that their spouses and extended family were very supportive. They did not uphold conservative family values, for example being a wife and mother and working outside the home for long hours. Their spouses and parents-in-laws accepted delegating “women’s” activities such as bathing the children and preparing meals for the family. These women respected their family’s trust in them and appreciated their freedom. However, they did not speak about challenging the expectations that this was women’s work and that they were being helped to do it. South African women noted that male peers with working wives were more understanding and considerate of childcare responsibilities and often supported them when they raised concerns during meetings.

Career patterns

The career patterns of the women reflected “a degree of orderliness.” Changes in legislation, working environments, and occupational opportunities have led to changes in the career trajectories and patterns of women in this study. This study found that most women from South Africa and Mauritius transitioned in and out of organizations and job roles several times throughout their careers and were highly mobile.

Impact of motherhood on the career path

Motherhood was repeatedly described as a significant challenge and dilemma and a trigger for a career transition for South African and Mauritian women. South African and Mauritian women reported that prevailing cultural stereotypes, traditional organizational cultures, and unsupportive attitudes of superiors were critical barriers for women with children. Assistance with and the support for childrearing often came from extended family (parents and parent-in-laws), spouses and babysitters. South African and Mauritian women did not mention household chores as a barrier since the availability of affordable domestic help allowed professional women to outsource household chores, and reliance on spouses for such assistance was minimal. However, it was still seen as the women’s responsibility to manage the home with regards to communicating with domestic help, school authorities and monitoring their children’s progress at school.

Almost half of the South African women with children (5 out of 11) transitioned during or after pregnancy (resigned from their full-time position and moved on to professional consultancy roles or started their own businesses) because of the unsupportive organizational culture and attitudes towards women with children. South African participants stated that once

they returned to work after maternity leave, they were treated differently. This perceived differential treatment triggered a career transition to either consultancy or a different organization where they felt that they were valued for their contributions rather than the time they spent in the office. The women felt that they were watched more closely, their work times monitored more severely than before pregnancy and maternity leave, and there were general comments about their ability to manage the demands of a professional career in business and family responsibilities. “Guilt-free conversations,” in reference to requesting to leave early to take a sick child to the doctor, were perceived as too rigid and often pushed women into roles where they had more autonomy. Consultancy complemented their professional and family roles and allowed them flexibility without this additional stress. These findings are consistent with previous research Benard et al. (2008) that has reported that mothers face different forms of discrimination and that their work is subjected to higher levels of scrutiny than men or childless women. Women with children are perceived as less committed and less competent in their positions and are overlooked for promotion and training opportunities (Hoobler et al., 2011).

The Mauritian women with children did not take career breaks and returned to full-time roles after maternity leave. Some women (both South African and Mauritian) pursued full-time positions and motherhood but accepted a role with lower responsibility and did not apply for promotions when their children were young. In a qualitative study amongst 27 female professionals in America, Whitmarsh et al. (2007 p.230) identified three “life patterns” that described the relationship between women’s careers and starting a family:

- (1) unitrack, a career/work history without the added role of motherhood;
- (2) sequential, an initial career/work history followed by an interruption for focus on the responsibilities of motherhood with re-entry to career and the world of work;
- and (3) multitrack, the juggling of the expectations associated with full-time employment with the responsibilities of motherhood.

Most South African women with children had careers that aligned with the sequential pattern and all Mauritian women with children had careers that aligned with the multitrack pattern. One possible explanation for the Mauritian women’s choices, is their strongly held perception that career breaks for full-time motherhood would signal the end of their professional career and re-entry at a similar level after the career break would be impossible. These findings are consistent with the findings from Hewlett and Buck-Luce’s (2005) and LaPierre and Zimmerman’s (2012) studies which reported that women who take career breaks

(even short ones) for family responsibilities often face financial penalties and have difficulty returning to the full-time positions they held before the career break.

This study also found that career patterns reflected women's need to adjust their career aspirations to find a compatible fit between their professional career growth, marriage, and family responsibilities. Gottfredson (1996) explained this as the "compromise" stage in career development, "as individuals often discover, when the time comes, that they will be unable to implement their most preferred choices" (Gottfredson, 1996, p. 187).

Women who combined full-time work with the demands of motherhood experienced many personal challenges while building a lifestyle that integrated meeting professional responsibilities with fulfilling their roles and expectations as mothers. The women juggle multiple identities and relationships with spouses, children, parents, peers, and staff, with several women describing moments in their lives and career during which they felt physically and emotionally burnt out. While all of this is common among women in general, the picture changed drastically in the case of Mauritian women.

There was an interesting cultural dynamic for the women from Mauritius. Societal expectations placed enormous pressure on these women to maintain cultural role expectations as mothers and wives, whilst being full-time professionals. Expectations of meeting social familial requirements often conflicted with work obligations and working around these obligations often led to working extremely long hours to meet both family and professional requirements. These sociocultural factors place extreme pressure on professional women and often jeopardize their career ambition and success. Most women often describe the double shift – working all day in their professional roles and then returning home to take care of the family's needs. This can be linked to the strong Asian influence on the island. Around 70% of the population is of Indian descent and the socio-cultural link to the Asian context is deeply embedded in Mauritius (Gopaldas, 2019; Nath, 2000). The women further described the many sacrifices they made to reach senior executive roles. Some became very emotional when they described their feelings of guilt around not being able to watch their children grow up or spend enough time with their children once they reached senior management positions. Osi and Teng-Calleja (2021) and Niemisto et al. (2021) reported similar findings. In their study, female CEOs expressed feelings of guilt at having to sacrifice family time for work demands. Mauritian women showed adaptability within the constraints of tradition and their professional role.

Careful planning and prioritization of their home responsibilities and work demands; communicating with superiors, clients, school authorities, partners and domestic help; flexible work schedules; and work-from-home arrangements were described as essential enablers for constructing a lifestyle that was compatible with their professional aspirations and their family life. This study also found that flexible work arrangements and work-from-home arrangements were only available once women reached a certain position in the hierarchy and/or once women were earmarked for promotion. At the line management level, motherhood remains a critical barrier for professional women in South Africa and Mauritius. Once women reached the senior and executive management level, they experienced more flexibility in their working and personal lives. Nevertheless, the hurdles women experienced became manageable through structured career development plans and gender diversity initiatives, that appear to reflect the opportunities provided to men and women in organizations. Additionally, these women also described organizational investment in information technology and secure communication and information technology networks as enablers for a multitrack career pattern.

Despite the challenges of balancing their professional aspirations with family and childcare responsibilities, the women reflected that family support, educational qualifications, organizational interventions such as career pathing and management plans, and leadership development programs enabled them to progress into senior management and leadership positions. Motherhood was identified as a consistent organizational level obstacle by all the women in the study. Windsor and Auyeung (2006, p. 829-830) reinforced this finding stating that “when women are viewed for promotion, their parental status is considered more negatively than that of their male counterparts.”

Roadblocks at the steppingstones phase

As outlined earlier in this chapter, many South African women described situations when their superiors' behaviors were unsupportive. They also used terminology such as “abrasive” to describe communications and this led to stressful work environments. These behaviors and permeating cultures were misaligned with their own work values and work ethics. Unsupportive male superiors and environments were described as toxic, sexist, discriminatory, and unfair, and some identified their managers as those who were holding them back. Some were expected to be happy with what they had achieved in their career and requests for career development and opportunities for promotion were ignored; some organizations required a resignation before discussions about further opportunities could take place. Previous studies have confirmed that negative attitudes and gender stereotypes continue to restrict

women's career advancement. Discriminatory practices such as limited access to development opportunities, biased performance evaluations, and hiring and promotion decisions increase glass ceiling perceptions and restrict women's career progress (Elacqua et al., 2009; Simpson et al., 2004).

This was not the case for the women from the Mauritian cohort. The Mauritian women did not describe their work environment as toxic or their previous or current superiors as unsupportive. Instead, they reported that it was the nature and demands of the work that did not support women with children. For instance, Mauritian participants working in international companies with partnerships in Mauritius explained that time differences between America and Europe necessitated that they work until late in the evening and this conflicted with expectations that they should be at home caring for the family in the evening. They also indicated that organizational cultural differences between Mauritius and other developed parts of the world often challenged them, leading them to make decisions or transition to companies where the management style and organizational culture was more compatible with their needs. The American culture was described as a "hire and fire" culture, and meeting performance objectives and targets was imperative and non-negotiable, in contrast to the Mauritian organizational culture which is perceived as a family culture and a family business. Women who transitioned into Mauritian-owned companies usually undertook less demanding roles in order to meet both work and family expectations. These findings are similar to previous research findings, where women with families experience a different type of discrimination, referred to as benevolent sexism (Hoobler et al., 2011). This form of discrimination discourages women with families from applying for promotions, and training opportunities and encourages women to move into less demanding roles or part-time work. Moya et al. (2007) explained that managers appear to protect women and make these suggestions as a form of support; however, when women opt for these alternatives, it disrupts their career and excludes them from networks and developmental opportunities necessary for career progress and promotions. In Mauritius, many participants had either experienced similar practices or witnessed other professional female peers stagnate in their positions following pregnancy and marriage and leaving the organization for less challenging job roles or becoming stay-at-home mothers.

Societal expectations were discussed by many Mauritian participants, noting that societal and familial values and expectations put pressure on highly competent young female professionals to accept jobs with standard working hours, even if these were lower paid with lower responsibilities. Pressure was also placed on young unmarried women by parents who

restricted their daughters' working hours. Having an unmarried daughter outside the home in the evenings is a cultural taboo. Even in scenarios where young women's parents are agreeable to their daughter's professional development, upon marriage, these young women may encounter similar restrictions from their parents-in-law. While spouses may be agreeable to their wives working long hours and understanding of the demands of the profession, extended family members put pressure on them to resign or change jobs, thus making it difficult to retain young female graduates and invest in their career development. Previous studies (Mishra-Panda, 2008; Waylen, 2008b) on the low participation of women in political roles reported that a barrier to participation in political roles was the separation between public and private lives. The separation between public and private life reinforces established ideas about men's and women's roles in society. Tambiah (2003) found that the separation between public and private life is informed by gendered beliefs of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in society; to work outside the home may risk one's reputation and women face additional penalties when they deviate from social and cultural norms. These challenges are different from the South African women's experiences and from Western contexts where women may not experience the deeply embedded social cultural limitations associated with working late outside of the home.

7.2.3 Reaching the destination

This phase represents women's appointment into senior leadership positions and enablers that facilitate her success as a corporate business leader. The women from this study reflected that despite the roadblocks they had encountered in their early career, their hard work, self-determination, self-efficacy, and relentless need to learn coupled with support from superiors, sponsors and mentors who provided them with opportunities for challenging work assignments and promotions, prepared them for executive level positions and contributed to their successful advancement into a senior leadership and executive roles. However, once they reached the executive level, their attention turned to successfully transitioning into the executive team. Success at the executive level was attributed to several personal and organizational factors.

The following section will discuss the key enablers for successful transition from a mid-management level into an executive role for South African and Mauritian women. The main

enablers described by the participants in this study include cross-cultural awareness, self-monitoring, observation, and executive coaching. The ongoing roadblocks are also discussed.

Cross-Cultural awareness

Rockstuhl et al. (2011) found that increased cultural intelligence (CQ) contributed to leadership success. CQ is related to understanding and dealing with people from foreign cultures as well as people from different sub-cultures within one's own culture. Van Dyne et al. (2010, p.133) described CQ as a leader's ability to interact effectively with people and situations that involve different cultural backgrounds. Individuals with high CQ recognize situations that may be confusing (different from their own culture) and reflect on "what is happening (or not happening), and make appropriate adjustments to how they understand, relate and lead in the context" (Van Dyne et al., 2010, p. 133). This study revealed similar findings. South African and Mauritian women explained that leading in the corporate context did not only include gender-related issues and stereotypes, but that culture, race, and background were also major considerations in their experiences at the executive level. One cannot fully understand the participants' journeys unless there is consideration of the impact of the intersection between race, ethnicity, and culture on their experiences.

Existing literature on women's experiences in executive positions is very much described from a European and Western perspective (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009) and while South African and Mauritian women share some similarities in their experiences of leadership with women from Western and European women, there is a uniqueness that has emerged from the diverse historical and cultural factors prevalent in South Africa and Mauritius. This study found that awareness of the socio-cultural and historical contexts in South Africa and Mauritius were significant contributors to women's success in leadership and how women conceptualized and enacted leadership in a corporate context. For most women, the cultural understanding was not only around gender, but included an understanding of culture and background which was important for leaders to build rapport and trust with their peers and subordinates. As leaders, these women constructed an overall repertoire of understanding of the different cultures and backgrounds and expressed that they developed a sense of consciousness and mindfulness around societal and historical issues at large which assisted them in their interaction with superiors, peers, clients, and employees from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.

Self-monitoring

Amongst different strategies the women applied in their leadership success at the executive level, self-monitoring was described as important strategy. Inzlicht et al. (2006) demonstrated that individuals from marginal groups high in self-monitoring performed higher than those low in self-monitoring. Because women are the minority on executive teams, stereotypes associated with women's competence and ability to lead and the role of women in the team are activated, and perceptions of those stereotypes by women and minorities may lead to underperformance due to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat refers to the pressure people sense when they are at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their group (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2003). Individuals with high self-monitoring cognitively appraise the situation to assess the level of threat and consider their own coping strategies and resilience. When their coping strategies surpass the perceived threat, they recognize the threat as a challenge and a potential gain and experience higher performance (Major et al., 2002).

One of the frequently mentioned comments by all participants was the criticism that women encounter when they adopt agentic behaviors – they are sanctioned for breaking feminine gender role stereotypes. Self-monitoring assisted these women to monitor and shift between feminine and masculine leadership styles. The women reflected that some situations called for a task focus and making tough decisions, and other situations required empathy and nurturing and a developmental approach. They emphasized that communal, nurturing, and developmental behaviors increased their likeability and success. Talking over issues with trusted peers or friends assisted women in monitoring and reflecting on their leadership behaviors and ensuring the appropriate response in each situation. Previous studies (Anderson & Thacker, 1985; O'Neil & O'Reilly, 2011; Rudman & Phelan, 2008) reported that self-monitoring positively contributed to women's career success in non-traditional gender roles.

Executive coaching

The women from this study stressed the importance of continuous development at every stage in their career. However, at the executive level, South African participants stated that executive coaching was a critical enabler for their success in the executive team. External coaches offer executives the platform to have honest conversations in safe environments where they can reflect and share their thoughts without fear that it will be evaluated or shared with others (Hall et al., 1999). Vinnicombe and Singh (2003, p.298) described executive coaching as a "support mechanism" for women in their leadership development. Participants from South Africa and Mauritius reinforced the importance of executive coaching once they reached the executive level, explaining that it helped in constructing their own personalized

conceptualization of leadership and gave them the confidence to enact leadership as they saw it. Previous research (Eagly & Johannesen, 2001; Eftim et al., 2001) has reported that leadership is defined by agentic attributes, and gendered stereotypes of leadership effectiveness places additional pressure on women to conform to these agentic characteristics and behaviors. Participants explained, as noted earlier, that leadership development training at the mid-career stages emphasizes masculine leadership attributes (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014). Most women from this study recounted that being true to their concept of leadership and how they enacted it was a critical outcome from executive coaching.

Existing literature has reported that for female leaders, coaching is a developmental tool that helps women transition from doing leadership into thinking and feeling like a leader and constructing their own leadership identity (Skinner, 2014). The findings suggest that through coaching, these women underwent an individualized process of change and developed a female leadership identity through dialogue, reflection, and feedback that connected with their professional leadership role and their identity as a woman. Skinner (2014) and Dutton et al. (2010) reported that iterative feedback and ongoing dialogue led individuals to develop greater awareness of the different aspects of their identities over time. The women from this study described that in their early and mid-career stages they placed immense pressure on themselves to meet all expectations and this stressed them out at times. Executive coaches assisted women to understand the nuances in their careers and were able to guide them in the development of their unique leadership style and identify and recognize the contributions that their unique style brings to the team and the organization.

Working with an executive coach helped these women to accept their femininity and accept that they did not need to conform to the masculine leadership prototype or the traditional social-cultural definition of a woman, wife and/or mother. Most articulated that they did not conform to gendered expectations or present themselves as someone who did not reflect their preferred personification. Others reported that executive coaching helped them to find the balance and authenticity they desired between the different roles in their lives and set the boundaries between their executive role and the needs of their family, friends, and others, and being true to themselves.

These findings suggest that once women reach the executive level, the need for balance and authenticity became important to them. Being authentic and true to one's values was described as a significant contributor to their success at the executive level. Mainiero and

Sullivan (2005) explained that women's priorities shift as they progress through their early, mid, and senior stages. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) claimed that women value challenging work assignments in their early careers, balance at the mid-career level, and authenticity later in their careers. The narratives of South African and Mauritian women reflect a similar shift in these women's career journeys. At the Building the foundations and Steppingstones phases, women focused on the need to learn, seeking, and accomplishing challenging work assignments. Once they reached the mid-management level in their careers, these women's focus shifted towards finding balance between the different roles in their lives (spouses, family, relationships and professional). Once they progressed to executive level, authenticity became the central area for development. Being true to oneself and openly expressing their authenticity were described as enablers for their transition into the executive level.

Professional women's forums

Participants from the South African cohort highlighted the impact of professional women's forums, volunteering, leadership development training, and corporate events that connected them with other professional women as significant enablers for career success. Professional women's forums were composed of successful and high achieving women across industries, with diverse ages, races, and ethnicity, and family and relationship statuses. These groups support women and often offer personalized discussions on sensitive and confidential topics in a safe and confidential environment. Cree-Green et al. (2020) reported similar findings among medical academics that formed their own professional group – Supporting Women in the Medical Sciences. Cree-Green et al. (2020, p. 1132) noted that these group meetings benefit women by providing a “safe place and designated time to reflect and get feedback from successful and intelligent peers on issues that members of the group struggle with from time to time.” Similar findings emerged in this study, where some women described that peer mentoring and sincere relationships helped them cope with the politics that prevail at all organizational levels.

Additionally, some women described personal networks (composed of male and female confidants) – a small group of trusted individuals upon which they could rely and with whom they could discuss issues and lean on for support for both personal and professional matters. These groups provided additional social and professional support which enhanced their self-confidence and helped them clarify their career goals and career-related decisions.

Individual enablers

As newcomers to the executive level, the participants felt they had to demonstrate their competence and establish their credibility within the group. Observing their peers and the team culture was a tactic used by many women. The women explained that their expertise and past performance prepared them for the position, but exceptional competence and performance established their credibility on the team. Preparation involved thorough fact-checking and working harder to ensure superior performance on tasks. Whilst it has been shown that women are held to higher performance standards than men, Carli (1995) and Shackelford et al. (1996) reported that women who demonstrated high competence relevant to the skills on the team exerted more influence on team members than women who were less competent. Observation involved initially conforming to the team procedures, observing the team culture, and delaying trying to influence members of the group until they understood the team culture and each member of the executive team. This strategy is one that is more likely to lead to success, as past research has found that women who challenged group procedures early in their appointment were disliked and seen as less desirable by male peers (Shackelford et al., 1996; Wahrman & Pugh, 1974).

The findings at the executive stage reveal that women may need different types of support to successfully integrate and perform in their leadership role. Support in actualizing an identity which is authentic and independent from existing social norms and stereotypes, and deciding how to confront any injustices that they experience appears a critical aspect of success in the role. The findings also signify the importance of formal and informal support from CEOs, executive coaching and mentoring, professional networks, and spouses and close family as enablers for success that guided women in defining their strengths and motivated them to persevere within their executive role, despite the challenges of being the only or one of two women on an executive team.

Roadblocks at the executive level

The women recounted experiences where being seen as communicating and behaving as women on the executive team left them feeling vulnerable and this vulnerability stemmed from their status as a woman. They recounted experiences where they felt that they were expected to dress in a certain way, speak in a certain way, be accommodating, non-competitive, and non-aggressive. In other words, to not present a stereotype threat. They found that men

were given more freedom to express their feelings and ideas and when women were assertive or aggressively challenged ideas, they were treated differently. Male peers were praised for competitive and aggressive behaviors during meetings while women were poorly evaluated when they displayed similar behaviors and acted contrary to existing gender norms and stereotypes. Thus, these women learned to exert competitiveness and assertiveness with caution.

Being heard and identifying what were acceptable verbal and non-verbal expressions were other impediments women faced. They were talked over, not given time to express their ideas, and were openly challenged on their ideas and proposals. The women also recounted that their mistakes were more often highlighted compared to their male peers. Training and grooming for promotion included content around appropriate dress style, the use of make-up and the type of shoes they selected, suggesting a feminized view of leadership which was at odds with the expectations of working longer hours and emulating men. These were expressed as obstacles in their role and made it more difficult to succeed at the executive level. Previous studies have reported that women operating in male-dominated occupational roles were held to stricter standards of performance, were perceived differently and received less support compared to male peers (Eagly, 2005; Izraeli, 1983). Manzi and Heilman (2021) reported that unsuccessful women in male-dominated spaces were seen as exemplars that confirmed stereotypes and noted that successful women were often overlooked.

The legislative framework in South Africa emphasizes the commitment to race and gender diversity through the implementation of quotas for political representation and publicly owned institutions. In Mauritius, gender quotas are legislated only for local elections and there is still a hierarchy in terms of gender and ethnicity in public and private sector organizations (Boswell, 2014). Additionally, international organizations in the African region have corporate governance policies that encourage diversity reporting and progress on gender diversity (Natividad, 2015). Several participants from South Africa and Mauritius noted that such policies often subjected women to comments regarding their competence, suggesting that women's presence on the executive team puts them at risk of tokenism. The "paying their dues" or "earning your place" mindset was present at the executive level, with women having to justify their presence more than their male counterparts. Most women asserted themselves through their competence and hard work. However, some were concerned that when organizations focus on representation and meeting diversity targets, women can be prematurely appointed into senior executive roles which may result in it being a glass cliff position (Ryan

& Haslam, 2005). The glass cliff phenomenon acknowledges that some women break through the glass ceiling but are placed in precarious leadership positions where the chances of failure are high. Premature appointment of women into senior executive roles may increase the risk of failure for women, and when women fail it reinforces existing stereotypes that women are unsuitable for leadership positions. Being the sole woman on the executive team increases the visibility of women but also their visibility when they make mistakes. The women from this study reported that they were cautious and worked twice as hard as their male peers on the executive team because of the scrutiny they were under.

These barriers are similar to previous findings regarding interactional differences between male and female executives and leaders in Western contexts. However, a unique difference in the South African context was that men and women are not a racially and culturally homogenous group, suggesting that they may have less stereotypical views regarding women in leadership roles. However, this research suggests that gender stereotypes remain firmly entrenched.

Intersectionality within the South African context implies that executives are expected to understand the racial, ethnic, and historical differences of team members and adapt their verbal and non-verbal communication styles to be able to build rapport and interact effectively with their peers and team members. Kilroe (2009); Myeza and April (2021) and Shefer (2002) reported that there is a multitude of cultures and cultural nuances to gender belief systems in South Africa and (Kilroe, 2009) in her study amongst male and female Black South Africans aged between 20 and 30 years old reported that religion, culture, class, family and levels of educational attainment shaped how men treated women in the South African society. This aligns with findings from this research. However, the participants (both White and Black women) suggested that they understood the challenges perhaps more than their male counterparts and that as women they needed to be more mindful of these cues and navigate through these cultural nuances in their interactions with employees and peers. At the same time, women from South Africa acknowledged that there is a fluidity in the interpretation of masculinity in South Africa and referred to this fluidity as the progressive male leader which they described as men who were more fair, tolerant, and respectful of men and women and held gender-neutral values in the workplace and at home.

7.2.4 Accelerating the progress of women into senior leadership roles

This is the final phase of the model which discusses the way forward in transforming society and organizational structures and cultures into gender-diverse and inclusive spaces. Women from this study suggested that equality and diversity can be achieved through emphasizing a shared vision towards diversity and inclusivity, establishing targets and accountabilities for gender equality, and constructing organizational contexts that empower both men and women to aspire and progress into leadership roles in a gender-neutral and enable greater leadership effectiveness.

Men as champions of gender equality

“Men often play a crucial role as ‘gatekeepers’ of the current gender order through their responsibilities as decision-makers and leaders.” (Flood 2007, p 10)

Most women from the study recognized and expressed the need for the critical role of men as champions for gender equality. South African women in particular described men who promote gender-just practices and voluntarily mentor young women as progressive men with a progressive leadership style. All the participants from this study also expressed that the mandate for gender equality starts with the commitment from the CEO. These women claimed that unless the CEOs visibly champion equality by placing gender equality on the strategic agenda, thus creating accountabilities, support, and resources for women, the conversation will continue but without any concrete changes. According to the McKinsey Report (Moodley et al., 2016) approximately 90% of CEOs in Africa are men. De Vries (2015) explains the different power dynamics between male and female executives and how male executives can use their positional power for gender change initiatives. Men can advocate for gender equity because they already belong and are accepted at the executive level. It costs less for men to be champions because they are already accepted and perceived as credible. While women as champions may be discounted and perceived by others as women fighting for women rather than for fairness and equality for all.

The difference between rhetoric and action was noted with leaders, including women who promoted gender equality but had senior teams that were predominately male. From the narratives, it appears that it may come down to an individual choice – do I support gender equality or not? Some women support the gender equality agenda through empowerment

strategies and performance management systems they utilize in their leadership role. These women serve as role models for younger women, act as formal and informal mentors, and coach and sponsor younger women. However, there were comments about meritocracy, ensuring that gender diversity initiatives do not disadvantage men, and around the choices women make in their mid-career. Many women were more optimistic about their male peers who had working professional spouses and commented that these peers were their allies and supported them when they commented on situations they perceived as professionally unfair and even championed gender equality during meetings.

Many women expressed that in their role they coached and uplifted other women into middle management positions and helped them progress into executive roles. de Vries (2015) reported that being a female leader and often the only female leader on the executive team was described as bringing high visibility and vulnerability for many women. Maintaining a sense of femininity in a male-dominated culture, experiencing feelings of a lack of choice about representing women, and dispelling the existing narrative around women's capabilities in executive positions was reported as hard work (de Vries, 2015). Men, however, do not have to do all this gender work. They are already accepted and when they champion gender equality, their decisions and actions are unquestioned and often accepted and supported by other men. For women who champion gender equity, they are considered as the outsider and may be perceived as acting in self-interest, while men who champion gender equity initiatives use their formal and informal power to challenge the status quo without risking their position (de Vries, 2015). High ranking female executives in male dominated environments, while highly visible and effective, may have limited formal and informal power to address systemic gender inequalities. Despite this, many women from South Africa expressed how they were working alongside their formal role to address gender equity issues at the organizational and societal levels. These women acknowledged that other women looked up to them as role models and emphasized the critical importance of their role and visibility of successful women in leadership for younger women. Establishing gender equality committees, celebrating National Women's Day, working on gender equality policies, and contributing to HR programs on gender equality awareness and education programs were some of the initiatives that many women were working towards in their capacity as leaders to promote a more gender equal workplace.

This study found that both men and women have a critical role in promoting equality and inclusion in the workplace. Equality and the positioning of equality on the strategic agenda

is a personal value – superiors and peers either support equality or not and when the organizational landscape changes, gender equality and diversity initiatives become vulnerable and can be quickly undermined, despite the legislative framework. McClelland and Holland (2015) investigated leaders' descriptions of responsibility for changes related to gender diversity in STEM departments in public universities and reported that male leaders with high personal responsibility often listed male colleagues as concurrently responsible for gender diversity initiatives and that men needed to change their attitudes. Conversely, male leaders low on personal responsibility often listed females as key parties responsible for gender equality initiatives and that it is women who must adjust their attitudes and expectations demonstrating that “gender diversity would happen once women changed, by altering their family expectations and adapting to the more masculine behaviors expected” (McClelland & Holland, 2015, p. 221).

Macro-level Stakeholder approach

According to Freeman (1984, p. 46), stakeholders are “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives.” In this definition, stakeholders are broadly defined in an organizational context and nowadays organizations are affected by numerous complex problems, including skills shortages, talent acquisition and management, anti-discrimination legislation, ethics and corporate governance, and diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Many Mauritian women commented that the shortage of women in executive positions cannot be redressed by the private business community only and insisted that government and non-government organizations, higher education institutions and the local community must work together to transform social-cultural stereotypes. Equality was described as not only a female concern, but a societal concern that protects both men and women.

South Africa and Mauritius have introduced several reforms which have increased girl child enrolment and retention rates at all educational levels. Mauritius has one of the highest levels of girl child enrollment and retention rates in Sub-Saharan Africa (GGGR, 2022). Mauritius and South Africa introduced legislations that protect the rights and freedoms of men and women in society. This study confirmed that reaching the senior management level was a slow and arduous process for women. Many of the challenges women experience emerge from the patriarchal mindset and deeply embedded social and cultural stereotypes that remain prevalent in South Africa and Mauritius. Access to education and anti-discrimination legislation alone fails to challenge the power and gender inequalities that are deeply embedded

in society – a social transformational approach is required (Manzi & Heilman, 2021; Mathur-Helm, 2005; Nkomo, 2015).

Although the women from this study thought that today's society is much more open to women participating in the labor force, the participants explained that in the corporate context, promotion and leadership roles for women were more challenging due to the difficulties of balancing work and family life, the presence of the glass ceiling, and societal and cultural expectations of the role of women within society. The study indicates that society sends many mixed messages to women about their careers, corporate behavioral expectations, and their responsibilities as mothers and wives/partners.

Many Mauritian participants suggested that changing the mindset of society towards equality must be initiated through the education system. Mauritius has a single-sex secondary school education system. Single-sex education systems allow girls to flourish in a safe environment, free from harassment: however, single-sex education systems in patriarchal societies inhibit girls and boys from developing the social capabilities to interact with each other (Cin et al., 2020). Work environments are mixed gender, and single-sex schools can contribute to the development of submissive gender identities. Aikman et al. (2011) reported that gender stereotypes are embedded in the educational system and home environment and propagated through school textbooks (Michel, 1986), and in the allocation of household chores within the family set-up, and these gender role stereotypes are then carried forward into the work context. Marland (1994) and Michel (1986) reported that sexism in schools' limits girls' professional goals and can inhibit girls and women from fully utilizing their intellectual, emotional, and occupational capabilities.

Many participants from this study suggested that private sector organizations and government, through the Ministry of Education and NGOs, must work together to examine the conditions of the education system and understand how these aspects shape and perpetuate gender stereotypes. Carretero and Nolasco (2019) reveal that 75% of future teachers could, albeit unwillingly, transmit sexist beliefs to their students in the school environment and suggest that teacher training programs should include content on gender and sexism. All stakeholders must work together to review textbooks and curricula, and develop awareness campaigns at schools, universities and workplaces to communicate the conceptualization of gender equality, emphasizing that gender equality applies to both men and women.

At the organizational level, CEOs and HR practitioners can work together to review the organizational policies and practices that restrict women and women's career ambitions and progress and develop partnerships with schools and universities to promote diversity and inclusivity in male-dominated occupational roles. For instance, in South Africa, the celebration of National Women's Day provides a joint platform for the government and business sectors to demonstrate the success of women in leadership and to promote public awareness of the role of women in the formal and informal sectors. Government and business partnerships in South Africa co-sponsor research and engage in discussions on voluntary initiatives adopted by corporations towards inclusivity and diversity. An example of collaboration between government and corporations is Vodacom South Africa. Vodacom introduced the Vodacom Mobile Education Program at a community level in partnership with the Department of Basic Education. The program includes training programs for teachers because they recognized that teachers are at the forefront of transforming gender stereotypes. Together with partnerships with Microsoft and Cisco, Vodacom's strategic partnerships have increased the number of female intakes in technology studies to 55% (Netshitenzhe, 2017). Adams and McPhail (2004) reported that government-business partnerships geared towards accelerating equality have positively impacted on initiating equal pay reviews, the introduction of flexible work arrangements and reducing occupational segregation.

Strategic Human Resources Approach

South African participants emphasized the importance of CEO commitment to diversity and inclusion by articulating a clear vision, coupled with real accountability for delivery, that is cascaded down to middle management to create a gender diverse and inclusive organization. The McKinsey Report (Barsh et al., 2013) stated that CEOs have a critical role in committing the resources required for organizational-wide cultural change, and collaboration with HR professionals and the executive team need to set strategic gender diversity goals at all levels of the organization and hold supervisors, line managers, middle managers, and senior managers accountable for monitoring and reporting on diversity progress. It was also suggested that accountability at all levels of gender, cultural, age, and disability diversity would contribute to greater awareness of demographic profiles at each level and trigger interest in understanding why so few or no women are applying for promotions. Extant literature has reported that only when there is a planned, systematic organizational cultural change that combines a top-down and bottom-up approach which incorporates CEO commitment, will the number of women

advancing into senior management increase (Anzai et al., 2011; Hakim, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010).

The participants from this study stressed that women follow a different career pathway from men and therefore HR professionals should work with line managers and female employees and conduct internal research to understand the workforce profile and where diversity gaps exist. Research aimed at developing an understanding of why diversity gaps occur would identify organizational practices that inhibit women's career progress. CEOs and the executive team can establish internal and external task-teams and work with industry experts to identify the barriers to diversity and inclusivity (Barsh et al., 2013). Leadership training for all managers, male and female, can incorporate review systems of team dynamics and HR professionals would need to dedicate more time to monitoring recruitment drives and reporting outcomes.

A frequently cited challenge that women experience is the lack of social capital. They stated that women's only organizational forums can help women network with other successful women inside the organization and help young women connect with those who can provide mentorship and sponsorship. Additionally, men's achievements and success receive higher levels of exposure and visibility than the achievements of successful women. Men's achievements are often reported in company newsletters and meetings, but successful women's visibility remains limited in corporate South Africa and Mauritius. Human resource development professionals could develop platforms where women can interact with influential persons in the organization and build their social capital (Nakamura & Yorks, 2011). Company-initiated and sponsored women's forums and gender forums could help increase the visibility of successful women. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) reported that exemplars of successful women and visible role models can prompt other women to increase their career aspirations. The women noted that being supervised by a female partner or executive early in their career positively influenced their career goals and ambitions.

Reviewing and auditing hiring processes was another area for change described by the respondents in this study. Designing hiring processes at all levels (entry and top management) that include mixed gender selection panels, redesigning and using selection tools that evaluate candidates' values, and selecting candidates that value diversity and equality and development, and recruitment policies that stipulate a minimum number of female applicants in the screening process were key suggestions participants proposed. Johnson et al. (2016) found that when the

number of women in the final selection pool increased the probability of a women being hired also increases. If token women reach the final selection pool, the likelihood of being hired lowers, implying that if managers increase the final selection pool to include at least two women, the chances of a women being hired increases.

Many women from this study also suggested that organizations must take into account that women at some point in their career would need to scale back, not sacrifice, their professional role to accommodate other personal commitments, such as starting a family or taking care of elderly parents, without long-term career penalties. Some women made similar suggestions and mentioned that at the organizational level, investigating why women leave and having honest conversations with women during the hiring process about career management and the career path available in the organization could contribute to shaping young women's career aspirations. Other comments from South African and Mauritian women suggested that it would be useful to work with women early in their careers to map a career plan that incorporates personal and professional goals and identify the type of support that women would need to assist them to meet those goals – this could be the way forward in creating a female leadership talent pipeline. Previous findings (Benard et al., 2008; Cabera 2009; Hewlett & Buck-Luce 2005) amongst professional women reported that women experience career penalties, and perception of such penalties prevents women from returning to work after career breaks.

7.4 Conceptualization of Leadership

The section addresses the research objective: “How do women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualize leadership?” The study did not seek to compare and contrast male and female leadership styles or conceptions of leadership, but rather to understand how women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualize and enact leadership in a corporate environment.

7.4.1 Leadership context

The context in which one leads came through as an important part of how leadership is understood and enacted. Past research on leadership in Africa and South Africa (Bolden &

Kirk, 2009; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Walumbwa et al., 2011) has reported that an individual's leadership style is contingent on the circumstances that the individual faces, their professional experience, their identities, power relations, and their subjective experiences. The high level of race, ethnic and cultural diversity, combined with the political history, the legacy of apartheid, and the post-apartheid era in South Africa, strongly influence how leadership is conceptualized and enacted in South Africa. The women from South Africa described the leadership context as a leadership model in transition because of the evolving dynamics of both the country and the region. Although South Africa has transitioned from apartheid to democracy, the organizational, cultural, and social transformation is ongoing. In the business context, all women described leadership behavior as shifting away from the traditional command-and-control style towards development, inspirational, and servant leadership styles. South African women distinguished between progressive leadership and traditional leadership behaviors. The women identified leadership enactment as balancing the need to redress social inequalities created by the legacy of apartheid and collectively contributing to the construction of a racially harmonious and gender-equal society within which organizational cultures respect and value racial and gender diversity. South African women emphasized that being fair and just, treating people with respect irrespective of their race, gender, or other differences, embodied the progressive leadership mindset. Race and gender equality and the commitment to constructing diverse and inclusive organizational and team cultures are concerns for leaders across the world (Barsh et al., 2013). However, a distinct difference highlighted in this research is that these contextual diversities require leaders in South Africa to develop enhanced adaptability skills and become attuned to the sensitivities around how different people experienced the injustices of apartheid (Myeza & April, 2021). The traditional patriarchal leadership behaviors embedded within the different cultures were described as outdated and rejected by all participants, with many also commenting that while patriarchal leadership behaviors persist among men, they found ways to call out individuals who spoke or acted inappropriately. They acknowledged that challenging sexism and inappropriate behaviors was overwhelming, stressful, and risky because they were often the only woman or one of two women in the team. However, they believed that accepting such behaviors only reinforced the masculine culture in the team. They would observe how their complaints were addressed and if other team members (men and women) supported them. They were aware that voicing their concerns created awareness of the hidden challenges that women experience.

Mauritian women described leadership as evolving from a traditional authoritative style towards an expert, referent style with components of transactional and transformational leadership styles. Mauritius is a postcolonial, culturally and ethnically diverse country and the historical journey from freedom from slavery and indentured labor to independence in 1968 created a bureaucratic hierarchy of power between men and women and the different ethnicities within the Mauritian society. Stimulating sustainable economic growth through foreign direct investment and building human capital through government policies, including access to free education (for boys and girls from primary to tertiary education) and free healthcare, was mentioned as important symbols of effective leadership in Mauritian society. From the interviews, there was a commonly held view that Mauritius was a successful economy and a wonderful place to live, compared to their experiences working in other regions in Africa. Women in Mauritius had more freedom and advantages than women in other developing countries. Additionally, working in multinational organizations which provided opportunities for international mobility (overseas training, travel, studying and living abroad) gave an international perspective and global cultural awareness dimension in their leadership conception. Mauritian women often commented that Mauritius experienced steady socio-economic growth and success and attributed the country's success to stable political leadership and innovative entrepreneurial leadership.

The ability to lead in a culturally diverse context was described as a critical difference between Western leadership and African leadership behaviors. South African women accepted that the mechanics of leadership was the same irrespective of where leadership was enacted, but in Africa and specifically South Africa, the context created a dynamic leadership style that emerged from living, working, and leading in a culturally diverse environment that is far more complex because of the apartheid regime. The participants commented that the depth of diversity within the African continent extended beyond race, gender, and age. Leaders in Africa lead people from diverse educational backgrounds, socio-economic backgrounds, lived life and work experiences, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some participants commented that leadership behavior in South Africa was also influenced by people's varying exposure to the apartheid system. Myeza and April (2021) reported in their study on atypical leaders in South Africa that Black women in leadership positions adapted their leadership behaviors according to race, suggesting that they were more supportive of young Black people than White employees. Women from this study made similar comments around how their leadership behaviors included transforming the corporate image from a White male leadership

demographic to a racially- and gender-diverse demographic; others noted that leadership enactment involved pushing the race and gender agenda by creating opportunities for women and people of color to advance in their professions. Nkomo (2015) reported that during the apartheid era, Black South Africans were denied managerial and professional positions and this advantage continues in the South African corporate context where the White male is still the principal leadership image.

For women from Mauritius, international exposure, and the political and socio-cultural context shaped their concepts of leadership. Participants commented that Mauritius is an ethnically diverse environment and the institutional frameworks, such as the competitive education system, single-sex secondary education, and socialization systems of strong family and cultural expectations, influence leadership behaviors. Some women commented that the history of Mauritian leaders' (political and business) behaviors and how these contributed to the country's sustained economic progress improved the quality of life and standard of living of the Mauritian people. This influenced how they understood leadership and they identified that the key differences between leadership in Mauritius and the rest of the world lay in the familial nature of organizations and organizational cultures. They described the Mauritian organization as a family where everyone looks out for each other – much like a benevolent culture and enacted leadership in a similar style.

The findings from the South African and Mauritian contexts confirm previous research findings that how leadership is understood and enacted is influenced by the context in which one leads. Jepson (2008) reported that the dynamic interaction between the immediate social context, the cultural context (national and organizational), and historical factors influence leadership behaviors. Thus, research that focuses specifically on the context, such as this research, adds to our understanding of how context shapes leadership behavior.

7.4.2 Leadership conceptions and enactment

The findings from the study highlight that South African and Mauritian women demonstrate transactional, transformational and Ubuntu leadership behaviors.

7.4.2.1 Mauritius

Transactional leadership behaviors were more pronounced amongst Mauritian women. Transactional leaders manage by clearly explaining task requirements to employees, monitoring their progress, and rewarding them for successfully completing tasks or correcting them when they do not meet task requirements (Bass, 1998). This can be attributed to the participants' early career experiences in patriarchal organizational cultures and the traditional centralized decision-making process prevalent in these organizations. Mauritian women described their early experience with leaders who were highly task-oriented, where leaders provided strong stewardship and closely supervised subordinates, provided task direction, and disciplined employees when tasks were incorrectly performed. Some women expressed that some of their superiors ruled with fear and reflected that at the time, they rejected this concept and committed to themselves that if ever they became leaders, they would not model strictness and fear-instilling behaviors.

Despite their desire to enact leadership differently as their professional career progressed, they enacted some command-and-control behaviors whilst conceptualizing leadership with an entrepreneurial mindset. This points to the complexity of simple or single conceptions of leadership as someone is moving into more senior organizational roles. Some women commented that their entrepreneurial behaviors and mindset contributed to their career success and reflected that in Mauritius the success of many well-established private sector organizations started off as family-owned small business enterprises with an entrepreneurial mindset; these businesses gradually developed into large business corporations. In their descriptions of leadership, creating a vision, sharing the direction of the company with employees, encouraging learning and innovation, teamwork, and team spirit were central to their conceptions. This aligns with research on entrepreneurial leadership behaviors (Agbim et al., 2013; Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991; Gupta et al., 2004; Strubler & Redekop, 2010; Suri & Ashley, 2008). Mauritians consider leaders as critical people who give direction and provide stewardship. Similar descriptions were reported by Simpson (2018) when participants commented on what the future of leadership looked like. Participants from Simpson's (2018) study envisioned leadership as incorporating behaviors such as innovation, risk-taking, and constructing a culture of continuous change. Interestingly, Simpson's study reported that participants did not believe that these qualities were widespread in Mauritius; rather, they believed that the current leadership behaviors need to be transformed to become innovative and change orientated. This suggests that there may be a gap between the espoused ideal and current leadership practices.

The women in this research reflected that they now enact leadership with more focus on teamwork and collaboration and emphasized building high-trust relationships with employees and using interpersonal skills and exchange as part of their leadership enactment. Mauritian women summarized the role of a leader as someone who is expected to set direction and collaborate with team members and promote a learning and development culture that encourages risk-taking and innovation. Leader–follower exchange should not be restricted to monitoring performance and taking corrective action when standards are not met, but rather should involve behaviors that demonstrate empathy, participation, inclusion, and teamwork. Simpson’s (2018) exploratory study among civil servants in Mauritius, as noted above, found that Mauritians held a strong preference for collaboration and collective leadership behaviors but that the bureaucratic structures and socio-political context serve as barriers to collaboration. Participants in Simpson’s study also detested the fear-inducing behaviors that were still present in the civil service.

The Mauritian participants in this research also noted leadership behaviors that aligned with developmental leadership perspectives. The findings from this study demonstrate that a leader’s role involves helping employees grow by creating an atmosphere where employees feel supported and receive feedback necessary to succeed in their jobs. Mauritian women focused primarily on informal on-the-job support to successfully accomplish job tasks and this involved delegating and learning through projects, giving employees autonomy to complete projects, and providing feedback on employees’ performances on each project. On-the-job support, such as explaining the job requirements, coaching an employee on how to complete the project, and monitoring progress through formal and informal discussions, were how they understood and enacted leadership. Some commented that they observed employees and when they demonstrated high performance, they recruited these high performers into their teams and allocated challenging job assignments that developed their current and future capabilities. From the experiences of Mauritian women, the role of structured leadership development programs and career guidance is still under construction in Mauritius. Thus, formal coaching, mentoring, and executive development was less embedded in their conception and enactment of leadership. These women remained focused on firm objectives but acknowledged the importance of structured formal development and career management programs. Many of the Mauritian participants who did not study, and work abroad relied largely on themselves and conversations with friends and family within their networks for their professional guidance.

7.4.2.2 South Africa

South African women's conception and enactment of leadership emphasized the well-being of their employees; most asserted that a leader's role centered on creating an environment where people felt valued and were working towards common goals that satisfied their personal and professional needs. For South African women, title, position, and status were seen as unimportant and they described their role as serving others and bringing about growth and development for everyone. They emphasized that leadership was not about self-interest, rather it was about doing something and contributing to something that was greater than themselves. This included caring for and nurturing others, building inclusive team cultures, acting with integrity and fairness, being honest, giving back to the community, and meeting organizational goals. South African participants emulated peers and superiors who visibly enacted and supported fairness, equality, and high ethical standards and such leaders served as role models. In these women's leadership conceptions and enactment, before any task can be completed, the leader must understand the person expected to perform the task and ensure that the person understands their role and has the necessary resources (skills and support) to meet their individual goals and the team objectives. Laub (1999, p.81) described the enactment of servant leadership as placing "the good of those you lead over the self-interest of the leader." Previous studies have conceptualized servant leadership behaviors as a demonstrated concern for others, meeting the needs of followers, creating a high trust and fair culture where people can reach their potential, and a collaborative culture where people teach and learn alongside each other and work towards the benefit of the organization (Jaramillo et al., 2009a; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Rieke et al., 2008;). These women understood leadership as a role meant to serve and empower others to grow professionally and personally in a psychologically safe environment. They emphasized that leadership for them was not about position or title but about serving a bigger purpose of developing the next generation of leaders and implementing and executing projects that contribute to the greater good of society and the organization.

Ubuntu (as discussed in section 3.5.2) reflects a caring for the whole and working together to achieve something greater than oneself philosophy. The women explained that in their teams they trusted each other, supported each other, and worked interdependently through sharing information and learning from each other. The study participants identified how they worked with each other to achieve results and constantly reflected on how their individual and team performance impacted the bigger system. This shows a shared responsibility and shared

leadership enactment. They worked with others to create a collaborative vision based on mutual trust and respect. In situations where there was a misalignment with people's objectives and the team objectives, they counseled and provided support to help the person find a position that suited their aspirations and matched their competence, even if that meant letting the person go or moving them to another role. Ubuntu represents a leadership conception founded on the expression "I am because you are" and enacting this value as a leader means that your behaviors must be directed towards building deep levels of trust, seeking consensus and being respectful of others. Mangaliso (2001) and Ncube (2010) reported that within the Ubuntu philosophy, well-being and concern for people were essential values. The Ubuntu way of life was embedded in all the women's conception and enactment of leadership in South Africa, including building consensus through high trust relationships with employees and peers, respect, collectivism through teamwork and getting to know people and understanding where they come from and what matters to them. Only when one understands this, in their view, can a leader intrinsically motivate and inspire others.

Servant and Ubuntu leadership behaviors place the well-being of others at the heart of leadership conception and enactment. The leadership behaviors associated with the transformational and development leadership perspective are consistent with the values of the servant and Ubuntu leadership. South African women's enactment of leadership was expressed as a two-way communication process that involved building trust, being honest about what one can and cannot do as a leader, and having the ability to help followers grow and guide them toward achieving their personal and professional goals. A second common set of leadership behaviors noted by the participants was the importance of challenging assignments, autonomy, responsibility, accountability, and giving feedback. Several emphasized that they did not set people up for failure and stated that their primary role as a leader was to create opportunities for learning and professional advancement of subordinates. Hudson (1999, as cited in Gilley et al., 2011, p. 388) described developmental leadership as "the process of equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities they need to grow, develop, change, and become more effective." Previous research on developmental leadership (Gilley et al., 2010; Hudson 1999) has reported similar finding and described developmental leaders as those who treat employees with respect, build a team environment that is free from fear, encourage innovation and change, and ensure that employees have the resources and autonomy to be successful. These women's enactment of leadership involved skillful communication and honest discussions with each team member to "get to know" their career aspirations, their background, and family status,

and through discussions set personal and professional goals. Enactment leadership behaviors supported employees' career development by organizing off-the-job training and development activities and on-the-job development by serving as mentors and coaches and allowing employees to shadow them at executive meetings. For South African women empowerment encompassed several factors, including ensuring that employees held the right skills and capabilities to perform their jobs, setting clear and specific task goals and objectives, providing employees with information relevant to their job and their career development, and monitoring their performance. Furthermore, supportive leadership behaviors also involved introducing employees to useful networks and alliances that enable them to make important contacts throughout the organization.

Finally, most women from this study recalled that their first promotion into a management role was directly after they implemented significant change interventions in their respective organizations. Some women emphasized that implementing change is what leadership is all about. These comments resonate with elements of the transformational leadership style. Individual consideration is where the leader demonstrates high levels of individual attention to followers and treats every follower fairly, listens to them and acts as a mentor or coach (Bass 1995). These leaders also stimulate followers to take risks, reflect and question their beliefs, values, and expectations, and the beliefs and expectations of their leaders and the organization, and to rethink and challenge assumptions (Bass, 1995). Given the extent of diversity within teams, the women acknowledged that they used several constructive communication practices to engage and build trust with employees. They avoided confrontational conversations and opted to create a space for dialogue, allowing people to share their ideas without the fear of reprisal. To achieve these conditions for communicating, they set boundaries that focused on strategic objectives, the team mandate and the organizational strategy. This often meant adapting their approach to the person and understanding the person's background and what drives and motivates their behavior and as noted above, working with the employee to identify the role or position that would best meet their needs. Many women commented that sometimes the outcomes of these discussions lead to employees being transferred to other departments or moved into new roles where their skills and competencies would be better utilized.

7.4.2.3 Gender role perceptions

Previous research has reported that men and women have opposing leadership styles and different perceptions of the pathway into senior leadership positions and the opportunities and barriers for career progression (Eagly et al., 2000). Exploring the differences between men's and women's leadership styles was not an objective of this study, but the findings show that South African and Mauritian women held mixed feelings on the differences between their own leadership behaviors and the leadership behaviors of their male and female peers.

Most South Africa and Mauritius women felt that men primarily focused on profits and meeting targets, whereas because of their role as mothers, their ability to nurture, work collaboratively, be inclusive and participative, be in touch with their emotions, and work hard and persevere, women brought different strengths into the corporate context and the executive team. Mothering skills were seen as useful and contributing to their career success in business because they could act as peacemakers and mediate between team members when conflict occurred.

However, some South African and Mauritian women suggested that they rejected such generalizations, and that differences between men and women did not exist and if they did perceive differences, interestingly they attributed such difference to innate biological and personality factors. Other participants claimed that the socialization processes were different for boys and girls from birth to adulthood with men receiving more encouragement to take risks, to be competitive and aggressive, and suppress their emotions, while for women these traits were generally discouraged. It was cited that the slow progress of women into management and senior management roles can be attributed to how men and women behave in the organization. For instance, many South African and Mauritian women observed that, unlike men, women often doubted their capabilities and this lack confidence and ambition were reasons why women did not apply for promotions; men were much more confident and applied for promotions even when they did not meet all the criteria. Women felt that they had to be more data-driven, position arguments with facts, and ensure that they suppressed their emotions when communicating and presenting ideas. These behaviors suggest the women are acutely aware of gender stereotypes and consciously adjust their behaviors to minimize the negative impact of these stereotypes on their career progress. The manner in which they talk about biological, personality and socialization differences aligns with gendered perspectives of leadership, as reported in previous studies (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Hede & Dingsdad, 1994).

7.5 Summary

The primary aim of this research objective was to understand how women conceptualize leadership. The findings from this study point to the different influences that have impacted how women develop their leadership confidence and style. Women's early life exposure and early career experiences were found to significantly influence women's concepts of leadership. Most women from this study used words and phrases like "teamwork," "encourage," "develop," "help people grow," "set direction," and "create a vision," suggesting that high involvement and high participation leadership behaviors were central in their concepts of leadership. In their descriptions of their own leadership conceptions and enactment, South African and Mauritian women never used words that suggested coercive leadership behaviors and never simply issued orders to their employees. Words like "fear," "strict" and "hard" were used to describe their superiors at the early stages of their career in both countries. South African women described these as traditional leadership behaviors and commented that Africa is transitioning towards a progressive leadership model that emphasizes the values of servant, Ubuntu, and transformational leadership styles.

Mauritian women commented that the leadership style is evolving from a command-and-control model towards a participative and team-oriented model. However, when reflecting on how their subordinates would describe their leadership behaviors, several women used words like "dictator," being results-focused, hard, and strict to describe themselves – language that aligns with command-and-control leadership behaviors and an agentic masculine leadership style. These opposing expressions are extreme and suggest that how leadership is conceptualized and enacted may be located somewhere in between. There is wide acknowledgment among Mauritian women that teamwork, team spirit, nurturing employees, and helping employees grow to reach their potential and communication is very important in their conception of leadership, but the reality of how they enact these leadership behaviors in the corporate environment is unclear. It suggests that they may be conforming to the existing culture rather than seeking to change current leadership behaviors that are recognized and rewarded.

The impact of context on leadership conception and enactment was another significant finding from this study. South Africa and Mauritius are decolonized countries and colonization

created social inequalities that persist today. Many leaders are trying to redress these injustices and inequalities. For South African women the context was more evident in their conception and enactment of leadership. Their commitment to diversity and inclusive practices, developing people, respect, being fair, communal, and consensus building is deeply entrenched. This is due to the historical impact of colonization and the apartheid regime in South Africa. During apartheid, African values, identities, and cultures were suppressed and knowledge about leadership was based on Western models of White male leadership and organizational structures (Nkomo, 2015). Black leaders today (men and women) are committed to dismantling these leadership beliefs and assumptions and constructing new leadership beliefs and assumptions that reflect Black leadership and identity (Myeza & April, 2021; Nkomo, 2015).

7.5 The broad context in South Africa

This study found that the external business environment in South Africa and the legacy of apartheid has impacted both women's and men's careers. While few participants mentioned gender or any other direct forms of discrimination, the women from this study did infer that there were times when the organizational culture was abrasive, sexist, and discriminatory. Furthermore, BEE requirements escalated some participants' careers into senior management while for others their careers plateaued, and they were no longer candidates for senior management roles because they were White. This contrasts with the experience of senior White women in Western contexts.

7.5.1 Feminism and the intersection between race and gender

“...the idea that social identities such as race, class, and gender interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences.” (Showunmi et al., 2016).

Feminism and intersectionality and the questions around intersectionality were not the key focus of this study; however, the participants from South Africa spoke about race and gender, suggesting that how women experience leadership was associated with their race, their gender, background, and past experiences. South African and Mauritian participants spoke about advocating for policy changes that promote diversity, inclusion, and equality. Through their participation on executive teams and diversity, inclusion, and equity committees, they

organize and collaborate to create a fairer and more inclusive workplace for everyone. These women actively create awareness of the systemic gender inequalities that persist in corporate and create safe spaces for women to develop and progress in their career. These actions align with intersectional and feminist theory that aim to address the complex dimensions of social justice and identity.

South Africa has a unique context given its historical political and social legacy and the majority of women described their teams and executive environments as still being predominantly White male. Several South African women described being the only women (White) or the only Black woman on the executive team as lonely and isolated. Other participants described that in the South African context, being a Black (male or female) appointed in an executive leadership role was complex due to having to cope with race, gender and cultural diversities.

The Black race is multicultural and there is a rich diversity within the race. Black people also share a collective experience of oppression and discrimination, and struggle to retain their social identity and at the same time adapt to and identify with the White male dominated environment (Myeza & April, 2021). Prior research has reported that perceptions of leadership are influenced by the context and experiences, and enactment of leadership can vary depending on race and gender (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012; Myeza & April, 2021; Nkomo, 2011;). Black people who advance into powerful and influential leadership roles understand the difficulties that Black people face in accessing opportunities for education, training, development and promotion and can feel an innate need and commitment to balance the scales through sponsoring, mentoring, and providing opportunities for Black men and women to advance in their careers and navigate through race, gender, and cultural intricacies to build a pool of competent Black leaders in business.

BEE legislation created some advantages for Black men and Black women with regards to gender quotas and limited the opportunities for White women in public sector organizations; however, the presence of Black people in executive positions in private sector companies is still limited (CEER, 2022). Many competent Black professionals (men and women) opt out of the corporate environment in South Africa to start their own businesses because they perceive that executive positions in corporate South Africa are reserved for White male South Africans. Being accepted into the executive team as a woman, and being accepted as a Black woman, produces its own set of stereotypes and expectations that women are expected to decode,

understand, and enact. Their descriptions revealed different enablers and challenges with diverse outcomes for women and their professional development. For some women in their early and mid-career, their male superiors and peers looked beyond these differences and mentored and sponsored these women for leadership training, development, and promotions. While for others, being a senior manager and managing and leading a team largely composed of White males with established cliques and agendas was a different experience and required a certain level of adjustment.

Similar to South Africa, Mauritius is a multicultural and diverse country; however, unlike the responses given by South African participants, intersectionality was not highlighted, despite Mauritius's cultural context.

7.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the main findings of the research presented in Chapter 5 and 6 were discussed in relation to existing literature, highlighting the points of connection and contrast.

The findings of research objectives two, three, four, and five, depicting the career trajectories of women's senior management careers and the enablers and obstacles women experience throughout their career in the corporate context was presented in the second section of the chapter. A conceptual model, *Pathways into Leadership*, was developed from the main findings. This model articulates female senior managers' experiences of transitioning into senior leadership and provides a framework for discussing the research findings in relation to existing knowledge. The *Pathways into Leadership* model illustrates how South African and Mauritian women constructed sustainable and steady career progression into senior leadership positions and the key enablers and barriers they encountered along the journey. The model posits that women experienced the transitions across four phases, and transitions at each phase came with facilitators and impediments of negotiating the changes that accompanied each new role. The "Building the Foundations," "Steppingstones" and "Reaching the Destination" phases depict women's career phases from early career and professional activities to reaching a senior leadership position, and the "Accelerating the Progress" phase illustrates the future strategies necessary to facilitate the progress of women into senior leadership positions. The second section of the chapter focused on the first research objective which addressed the importance of context in shaping conceptions and enactment of leadership, providing a standpoint that

leadership conception and enactment is shaped by historical contextual and cultural factors. South African women conceptualized leadership as transformational, servant-oriented and developmental, while Mauritian women conceptualized leadership as transactional, team-oriented, and entrepreneurial.

Several points of difference from existing literature identified in this chapter indicate the contributions of this study to theory and practice. These are the focus of the final chapter of the thesis. The contributions of the study and the limitations of the study are summarized, the implications of the study for individual and organizational policy and practice are considered, and finally the future areas for research arising from this study are presented.

8 Conclusion

“Passion opens doors even when such doors are invisible and look like brick walls.”
Professor Thulisile Nomkhosi Madonsela, 2019 (Law Trust Chair in Social Justice and Law
Professor at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa)

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis by providing an overview of this study and the significant findings regarding women’s experiences of transitioning into senior management positions. The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of women’s leadership conception and experiences of progressing from corporate middle management positions into senior management positions in two developing country contexts.

Chapter 2 established the background of the study. The historical, political, and social-cultural factors (pre- and post-independence) that impacted women’s labor force participation in South Africa and Mauritius were considered. Characteristics of the political and cultural landscapes and the education systems were examined, providing the context relevant to the women in the study. Professional women’s participation in South African and Mauritian corporations and key issues relating to their career success were reviewed.

Chapter 3 provided a review of the academic literature relevant to women’s careers in leadership. This chapter focused on three areas of literature relevant to the topic: career development, leadership and women in leadership, and the barriers and enablers affecting women’s career advancement into leadership positions. A synthesis of this literature identified that there is little known about women who transitioned past the glass ceiling into a senior leadership position in the corporate context in developing countries and that there is a gap in the literature regarding an understanding of the career pathways women follow to reach senior leadership positions in developing countries and the intersection between gender, leadership, and context.

Chapter 4 outlined the research design. The research questions and objectives were identified, and the philosophical assumptions were described. To achieve the research aims, a qualitative research approach, informed by a constructivist ontology, was adopted. The study was based on phenomenology and interpretative epistemology. Women who successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions have unique experiences to share. Therefore, the

research question, “How do women from South Africa and Mauritius transition into senior leadership positions?” was the focus for the interviews.

Chapter 5 reported on the findings from 14 in-depth interviews with South African female senior managers from a variety of sectors. The interviews provided an understanding of how South African women conceptualized leadership and their career transitions and pathways from their early careers through to their appointment into senior leadership positions in corporate companies.

Chapter 6 reported on the findings from 14 in-depth interviews with Mauritian female senior managers from a variety of sectors. The interviews provided an understanding of how Mauritian women conceptualized leadership and their career transitions and pathway from their early careers through to their appointment into senior leadership positions in corporate companies.

In Chapter 7, the findings reported in Chapters 5 and 6 were discussed in relation to the existing literature. The discussion of the findings was guided by the conceptual model that emerged from the findings – the *Pathways into Leadership* model. This conceptual model describes the career trajectory and transition experience of women and how to increase the representation of women in senior leadership positions in four phases. The first three phases show that women’s career journeys involve building their expertise through acquiring qualifications and this process follows a linear pattern; however, building the capabilities, relationships, and experience required for transition into senior management and leadership positions is non-linear and multidimensional. The fourth phase of the model discussed how the participants envisaged increasing the representation of women in senior leadership positions. The model applies to both South African and Mauritian women, although at each stage there are some differences in how the foundations are constructed and the steps that pave the way into senior leadership positions. Finally, a discussion was provided on how women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualized and enacted leadership.

This final chapter summarizes the similarities and differences between South African and Mauritian women’s career pathways into leadership and their conceptualization and enactment of leadership. The main contributions that emerged from this study and the limitations and practical implications are also summarized.

8.2 Research focus

This research study set out to explore the experiences of women senior leaders who had successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions in corporate South Africa and Mauritius. After establishing that there is a scarcity of scholarly research on women's career experiences in corporate leadership in developing country contexts and that their experiences were likely to be different from those of women from Western contexts, an exploratory study to investigate the career experiences of women who successfully transitioned past the glass ceiling into senior leadership positions was undertaken. The main research question was: "How do women from South Africa and Mauritius transition into senior leadership positions?"

To address the research question and achieve the study objectives, a qualitative research approach based on phenomenology, an interpretative research methodology, was used to capture the lived experiences as understood by the participants. According to van Manen (1997, p. 42), "To do phenomenological research is *to question* something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is 'really' like". This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of women's career pathways into senior leadership and the factors that contributed to their success in a corporate context. The study was also interested in how women from developing countries conceptualized leadership and their leadership styles. The research focused on the phenomenon of how women in South Africa and Mauritius conceived leadership and what's it like to be a female leader in the South African and Mauritian context. This study reaffirmed that women's careers and leadership experiences were gendered and diverse and that the context in which they experienced and enacted leadership was different; therefore, understanding how women transitioned into senior leadership positions would make visible their career experiences, thereby expanding and extending the current understanding of women's career development and success in senior leadership.

8.2.1 Women's career paths and transitions from graduation to appointment into a senior leadership position

Women's career patterns and decisions were influenced by individual and organizational factors. At the individual level, the triggers for career transitions were self-initiated and motivated by the need to learn, pursue challenging work assignments and to

pursue further studies. At the organizational level, career transitions were triggered by the regulatory frameworks and being selected for leadership development programs (in South Africa), organizational restructuring (in Mauritius), CEO attitudes, and motherhood. Motherhood was found to be a significant event that influenced women's career patterns.

Career transitions were a continuous process, represented by the *Pathways into Leadership* model. The career transitions occurred within three interrelated contexts: the broad societal context, the organizational context, and the individual context.

Women's career development and transitions occurred over three phases: "Building the Foundations," "Steppingstones", and "Reaching the Destination," with a fourth phase "Accelerating the Progress," depicting the societal, organizational, and individual level actions necessary to facilitate the progress of women into senior leadership positions. These phases do not have a specific timeline or duration and may occur at different stages of women's careers, highlighting the complex and fluid nature of their careers.

Factors that influenced women's career decisions and pathways began from their early life experiences and interactions and laid the foundations for their career decisions; therefore, they must be considered to understand the career choices and the factors that shaped their career paths.

The activities that paved the way forward into managerial positions encompassed a range of individually driven and organizational support that built women's technical and leadership capabilities and developed women for promotion into senior leadership roles. The transition from a middle manager into a senior leader was found to be a major jump in responsibility due to the level of visibility and accountability that accompanied the role. Furthermore, the pressures women experienced arising from the expectations of integrating into male-dominated cultures and managing the demands of multiple roles posed challenges for women and required them to identify appropriate support and develop coping strategies that led to personal growth, change, and leadership effectiveness.

Even once women are appointed into senior leadership roles in South Africa and Mauritius, they must still continuously negotiate gender stereotypes and cultural contexts and develop a leadership identity that emphasizes relationship-building and authenticity. Being authentic, exceeding performance standards, and dedicating time to building relationships with peers, staff, and superiors contributed to women amassing the influence and power needed to become effective leaders.

8.2.2 Factors enabling South African and Mauritian women's career transitions

Career transitions and experiences were influenced by different factors at each phase of women's careers. The interaction between early life experiences, personal attributes, organizational factors, and contextual factors shaped women's career and leadership success. The degree of influence of these factors varied as women progressed through each phase. During the "Building the Foundations" phase, socio-economic status, family values, and education developed the motivation for achievement and career resilience necessary to pursue professional careers and acquire the qualifications for professional growth and promotion.

Being raised by parents with a gender-neutral mindset and equal opportunity values developed the desire to pursue higher education and jobs in male-dominated occupational roles. At the individual level, career choices were not deterred by their gender.

At the contextual level, socio-economic status positively shaped participant career choices. By virtue of their middle and high socio-economic privilege, the women in this study had access to higher education, networks, and sponsors. It is acknowledged that, in turn, low socioeconomic status limited access to higher education, occupational choice, and career guidance and support.

At the "Steppingstones" phase, a combination of personal attributes, meaningful interactions, and leadership development training contributed to increased self-awareness of leadership potential and aspirations and the desire to accept challenging work assignments that increased visibility and promotability.

At the individual level, women focused on acquiring advanced professional qualifications and technical expertise and expressed a strong preference for merit-based performance evaluations. Building and maintaining meaningful relationships with sponsors, mentors, superiors, and colleagues contributed to accessing new roles and challenging work assignments. Building relationships and networking helped them traverse through each career transition. Sponsors, mentors, and supportive spouses provided the socio-emotional support and guidance required to integrate their identities as women, professionals and leaders.

At the organizational level, organization-sponsored structured leadership development training allowed women to develop the skills and capabilities necessary for leadership roles, and supportive superiors enabled women's career success by providing the social and

emotional support required to build their influence and credibility and become effective leaders.

Several factors prevented the progress of women into senior leadership positions. At the societal level, historical and political factors add to the complexity of inter-racial/ethnic and inter-gender interactions, and the intersection between gender, race, and socio-economic status can either facilitate or constrain the career mobility of women. Cultural expectations deeply embedded in the social context render women vulnerable to both gender and cultural role expectations that obstruct their opportunities to engage in professional activities that build the capacity and relationships necessary for promotion.

At the organizational level, gendered organizational cultures that continue to favor men constrain the career progress of women. Poor attitudes of superiors towards women and motherhood as well as the broader organizational structure, policies, and practices that reinforce the glass ceiling block the advancement of women into higher-level leadership positions. At the individual level, self-doubt and the pressure to conform to agentic behavioral expectations challenge women's acceptance and credibility as leaders.

8.2.3 Conceptualization and leadership enactment

Leadership conception within the corporate context in Mauritius is shaped by the success of the political leadership post-independence, the success of the entrepreneurial activity, the presence of international companies, international mobility and experience, and the diverse ethnic context. The legacy of apartheid, the Ubuntu philosophy, early experience of leadership, and the diverse racial and cultural landscape of the South African population influenced leadership conception within the South African context.

Leadership enactment behaviors are multifaceted and complex and encompass initiating change, connecting with others, and influencing others in a collaborative and team-centered style. For South African women, collaboration and relationship building were enacted through engaging in career development planning and mentoring and sponsoring roles for younger men and women. These were the leadership behaviors that South African women experienced in their early careers. For Mauritian women, collaboration and connecting with others was enacted through teamwork, exchange, and establishing the vision and direction of

the team and department. However, their experience with leadership was very different from their conception of leadership.

Early experiences of leadership behavior shape employees' future leadership behaviors. Mauritian women emphasized the functional dimensions of leadership behaviors and effectiveness as they experienced it early in their professional careers. South African women, on the other hand, emphasized the relational and development dimensions of leadership behavior which they experienced in their early professional careers.

Leadership conception and enactment in South Africa and Mauritius are undergoing a transition, shifting away from the traditional command-and-control leadership behaviors towards progressive leadership behaviors that enable social transformation towards equality, diversity, and inclusion.

8.2.4 Summary of the similarities and differences between South Africa and Mauritius

- South African participants came from a higher socio-economic status compared to the Mauritian participants. Socio-economic status facilitated access to higher education, participants had more autonomy over their occupational choices, and access to career counseling and guidance from their family and school community. In contrast, Mauritian participants' occupational choices were constricted by their limited access to higher education institutions and many participants had very limited access to career counseling and guidance.
- Regulatory frameworks in South Africa require that organizations monitor and report on investments in career development, training, and leadership development programs that targeted people from previously disadvantaged groups. When first implemented, these regulatory requirements led to organizations making significant investments in structured training and leadership development programs. While Mauritius has introduced legislation and established the Equal Opportunity Commission, there is no strict surveillance of gender representation in Mauritian companies.
- South African women had greater access to structured leadership development training. This was not the case for Mauritian women. International experience and mobility were significant enablers for Mauritian women's career success, whereas for South African

women, being sponsored and mentored by influential persons higher up in the organizational hierarchy was a critical enabler.

- Both Mauritian and South African women transitioned several times in their careers, but the nature of and the triggers for career transitions were remarkably different between the two cohorts. South African women experienced more inter-organizational mobility while Mauritian women experienced more intra-organizational mobility. Mauritian women experienced greater international mobility than South African women.
- The impact of motherhood on career patterns was another significant point of difference between South African and Mauritian women. South African women transitioned into consultancy or changed jobs after maternity leave. Mauritian women returned to work after maternity leave.
- Perceptions of the impact of taking a career break after becoming a mother were vastly different between South African and Mauritian women. In Mauritius, career breaks were seen as the end of a women's professional career.
- Gendered organizational cultures were common in both countries.
- Global cross-cultural awareness and understanding were found to be enablers for career success for Mauritian women, while awareness and sensitivity of the historical impact of apartheid on the Black people as well as understanding the cultural diversities between the various sub-cultures within Africa and South Africa were critical for women from South Africa.
- The intersection between race, gender, and socio-economic status was acknowledged and impacted women's career experiences in South Africa.
- At the senior management level, isolation, the pressure to conform to masculine leadership styles, and feelings of being left out challenged South African women. To cope with these exclusionary behaviors, women from South Africa relied on professional women's networks as a safe place for support.
- Being a 'good wife' and 'good mother' and meeting the demands of a senior leadership role in order to satisfy the need to build an independent professional identity challenged Mauritian women. To cope with both expectations, Mauritian women with care responsibilities worked a double shift. They worked a full-time leadership role at work, returned home and worked a care shift and thereafter worked another work shift late in

the evening. They experienced immense guilt over prioritizing their career over childcare.

- The differences between men's and women's leadership styles were attributed to biological, personality, and socialization processes rather than gender stereotypes by South African and Mauritian women.

8.3 Contributions to knowledge

Women's career progress into senior leadership positions in business is a dynamic and continuous journey. The *Pathways into Leadership* model demonstrates that women transition from middle management positions into senior leadership positions in three phases and at each phase women engage in multiple activities that prepare them for senior leadership roles and pave the way forward.

The outcomes of this research project contribute to the existing literature in several key areas. First, the findings increase our understanding of professional women's career journeys from their early career to their appointment into senior leadership positions from a developing country perspective. Second, by providing a detailed description in the *Pathways into Leadership* model of the activities and factors that contributed to women's career success and progress in business, the findings from the study can serve to inspire young South African and Mauritians and develop the next generation of female leaders. Third, the impact of context on career success and leadership behavior provides a sound insight into how women navigate cultural and social constraints to reach senior management positions in corporate male-dominated spaces. Finally, this study contributes to the wider field of women's careers in leadership and how women from developing countries conceptualize and enact leadership.

This study is one of a few to explore the career progress and success of South African women who successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions. To date, no studies on women's careers in senior leadership in the corporate context in Mauritius are available. Most studies based on South Africa focus on the barriers to women's career success or the factors enabling women's career success in education. Very few studies have focused on women's career progress in the corporate context (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009, 2011; du Preez, 2012; Glass & Cook, 2015). The specific focus of this study has identified several factors that enable and

restrict women's advancement into senior leadership roles within South African and Mauritian corporate organizations.

This study fills a gap in our knowledge about the career journeys of women from South Africa and Mauritius who have successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions in the corporate world. It is one of the first studies to holistically study the career journeys of women in senior management positions in Mauritius.

It contributes to the existing literature on intersectionality theory by showing that historical and the sociocultural contexts have a significant influence on women's career decisions and shape women's conceptions and enactment of leadership, highlighting that legislative reforms alone are not enough to achieve gender equality. The apartheid era in South Africa and colonization in Mauritius created racial and gender inequalities that divided society. These historical events are interwoven into women's career experiences and leadership styles.

Although the women from this study thought that today's society is much more open to women participating in the labor force, the participants explained that in the corporate context, promotion and leadership roles for women were more challenging due to the difficulties of balancing work and family life, the presence of the glass ceiling, and societal and cultural expectations of the role of women within society. The study indicates that society sends many mixed messages to women about their careers, their corporate behavioral expectations, and their responsibilities as mothers and wives/partners. The transformation of the social-cultural context is in progress in South Africa and Mauritius and this study demonstrates that it is possible for women from developing contexts to move beyond the patriarchal restrictions that have subjected all women to an inferior status in society and advance into senior leadership positions.

8.3.1 Practical implications

This study extends HR development theory by demonstrating the importance of structured career management planning and leadership development programs on women's career transitions across the three phases of the *Pathways into Leadership* model. This research also reaffirms the importance of meaningful relationships and interactions that facilitate women's access to training opportunities and challenging work assignments and that emphasize women's visibility and promotability and increase their power and influence in their

leadership roles. This study also revealed that women require unique psychosocial support and HR practitioners and managers must identify the nature and types of support women lower down in the hierarchy need and provide support for female professionals. HR practitioners should organize career events that include the participation of successful women in corporate leadership, organize formal mentoring programs, and create platforms where women can share their experiences. Previous studies have demonstrated that mentoring helps women progress in their careers, helps them earn higher salaries, and increases job satisfaction and retention (Allan & Eby 2004; Roemer, 2002). Allan and Eby (2004, p. 130) explained that “mentors feel compelled to provide greater psychosocial mentoring to women because they believed that women need (or want) the friendship and affirmative aspects of mentoring to a greater degree than men.” Implementing formal mentoring programs as part of holistic leadership development programs to support professional women would contribute to their career progress.

In the South African and Mauritian contexts, the impact of historical and cultural factors affects career choice and the meaning of career success. The complex cultural and historical background makes measuring career success through objective measures such as promotions and salary less appropriate in these contexts. More subjective measures were found to contribute to the definitions of career success by the woman from this study. At the organizational level, CEOs and HR professionals must design and implement career management programs that assist women and men in establishing a broader definition of career success, moving away from the traditional definition of success and a linear, vertical progression, towards conceptualizations that include feelings of authenticity and satisfaction with multiple life roles.

8.4 Limitations of the research

There were limitations during the research process that are discussed below.

A qualitative research methodology was adopted to achieve the research objectives – understanding the lived experiences of women and their career transitions from middle management into senior management. At the beginning of the research process, I anticipated that it would be challenging to find participants from South Africa and relatively easy to

identify and secure participants in Mauritius. because I live and work in Mauritius. Interestingly, the converse was experienced.

My experience with accessing participants in Mauritius was very different to what was expected. When approached to participate in my study, many Mauritian women refused. My understanding and experience of Mauritian history and cultural background were a challenge. As a South African woman, I found it easier to access and build rapport with South African participants. South African women spoke openly about sensitive topics such as sexism and race and the impact of the regulatory framework on their careers. Most Mauritian women were cautious in their responses, and I had to constantly remind them that the data would be confidential before they revealed their experiences. I realized that it would be a challenge to research a sensitive topic, such as gender, in Mauritius, within a context that has deeply held cultural norms and expectations and a small island economy where everyone knows one another or is connected to people in powerful positions. If I had had a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural landscape, I may have been able to access different perspectives of experiences of sexism or racism in Mauritius.

The study focused on the experiences of women who successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions in South Africa and Mauritius. Insights from women who tried and failed were not included in the study. Most of the South African participants were from a middle or high socio-economic status and had access to personal sponsors and networks. South African women with low access to education and skill acquisition, who demographically are from the low socio-economic status category were not represented in this study. This study revealed that societal and organizational-level factors influenced women's career progress, further research on women in lower and middle management who did not get promoted or resigned from their professional positions would give additional insight into women's career experiences.

The data collected is retrospective – the participants had already successfully transitioned into senior leadership roles so in recalling their career journey, the participants may have downplayed the barriers they faced during their careers.

The findings from this study cannot be generalized because of the small sample size and because they are limited to the South African and Mauritian contexts.

8.5 Future research

The findings from this research and the limitations acknowledged earlier identified several areas for future research.

The *Pathways into Leadership* model illustrates the four phases of women's career transitions in two developing Sub-Saharan African countries. It would be useful to extend the research on how to utilize this study's findings to craft policy – both at a societal and organizational level – and act as a catalyst for developing career pathways for women from less privileged backgrounds.

A study on why men and women engage or do not engage in sponsorship and mentoring younger people in developing country contexts may also be useful. This study revealed the significant impact of sponsorship and mentoring on career success, thus a follow-up study on the availability and accessibility of sponsors and mentors for men and women in the corporate context would extend our understanding of why women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions.

This study also revealed that motherhood was perceived as a critical impediment for women and women's professional careers in Mauritius and supportive spouses were emphasized as enablers for career success for South African and Mauritian women. Further research on professional men's perceptions of parenthood and the role played by husbands/partners on the career decisions and aspirations of professional women would provide more insight into the intersection of culture, gender, and race/ethnicity in South Africa and Mauritius.

Motherhood was a consistent trigger for a career transition; therefore, at the organizational level, an investigation on the presence and/or absence of family-friendly policies in private sector companies in South Africa and Mauritius and the impact of family-friendly policies on attraction and retention of professional women after maternity leave would further extend our understanding of women's careers.

Women from this study emphasized that leadership conception and enactment are under transition in both Mauritius and South Africa. Exploring the conception and enactment of leadership from a male perspective as well as from a staff perspective would extend the body

of research on leadership conception in developing country contexts, especially Mauritius where there is a paucity of research on leadership conception and enactment.

8.6 Conclusion

This exploratory study adopted a qualitative research methodology with a constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology to construct an understanding of the lived experiences of women senior managers and their transition into senior leadership positions. Data were collected from 28 senior leaders from diverse industries in South Africa and Mauritius. The narratives were analyzed to develop an in-depth understanding of the career transitions of women from their early careers until their appointment into senior leadership positions. The enabling factors identified by these women are represented in three phases in the *Pathways into Leadership* model. The differences between South African and Mauritian women's career journey were summarized. The study also revealed that South African and Mauritian conceptions of leadership were shaped by historical and cultural contexts and that leadership involved collaborative, transformative, and developmental leadership behaviors. Leadership enactment behaviors were different between South African and Mauritian women. South African women revealed a deep commitment to social transformation and development for the next generation of female and Black leaders in South Africa. On the other hand, Mauritian women stressed the importance of vision, innovation, and meeting targets as important in their leadership enactment.

Furthermore, the study found that changes at the individual, organizational and societal levels are important to develop a gender-equal and inclusive society and organizational culture. This research began as a wish to understand the experiences of successful women in leadership and the decisions and activities they engaged in to advance their careers to reach senior leadership positions. At the beginning of the research, I was unsure as to whether to study South African women or Mauritian women only, as I am a South African, but my professional work experience started in Mauritius and I currently live and work in Mauritius. I believed that there would be vast differences between the two countries. After completing this research project, I realized that professional women, whether South African or Mauritian, face tremendous socio-cultural barriers in their professional careers. I realized that while both countries are democratic with laws meant to prevent all forms of discrimination, the cultural expectations women must

overcome to establish themselves as leaders, and more importantly as female leaders, place additional pressures on women which men in patriarchal societies do not experience.

Through the data collection process, I developed a deeper understanding of the incredible commitment and persistence women must have in order to overcome the cultural barriers they encounter at work, at home, and within society. Listening to these women describe their lonely journey, emphasizing the impact of supportive relationships they experienced along their career journey, and openly sharing their difficulty with reconciling their identity as good mothers and wives and leaders, I felt a sincere appreciation towards all the participants for trusting me and sharing their experiences with me. My respect for and admiration for the participants from this study and other women who successfully transitioned into senior leadership positions increased my commitment as a lecturer to help younger women studying management to plan their careers and develop their leadership capacity.

From the women's stories, I realized that the journey was not an easy or straightforward one, and that there are a multitude of cultural expectations women are in conflict over, and sharing stories on how women navigate through these can inspire younger women from similar cultural backgrounds and experiences to aspire to building a career in corporate leadership. As a result of this research, I have started to purposefully talk more openly about culture and cultural stereotypes that restrict young women's career aspirations in lectures and use examples of successful female corporate leaders from the African region to increase the visibility of successful women, because this study has highlighted the importance of visible role models for professional women's career success.

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Section 9 Appendices

Appendix 9.1 – The Ethics Approval Letter



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and Development

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28-Feb-2017

Name: Ros
Cameron
Department/School:
School of Management
Email:
Ros
.Cameron@curtin.edu.au

Dear Ros Cameron

RE: Ethics approval

Approval number: HRE2017-0075

Thank you for submitting your application to the Human Research Ethics Office for the project **Exploring the transition to senior leadership for women: a comparative study of female senior leaders from South Africa and Mauritius**.

Your application was reviewed through the Curtin University low risk

ethics review process. The review outcome is: **Approved**.

Your proposal meets the requirements described in National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.

Approval is granted for a period of one year from **28-Feb-2017** to **27-Feb-2018**. Continuation of approval will be granted on an annual basis following submission of an annual report.

Personnel authorised to work on this project:

Name	Role
Ramrekha, Shubashni	Student
Cameron, Ros	CI

Standard conditions of approval

1. Research must be conducted according to the approved proposal
 2. Report in a timely manner anything that might warrant review of ethical approval
- of the project including: proposed changes to the approved proposal or conduct of the study
 - unanticipated problems that might affect continued ethical
 - acceptability of the project major deviations from the approved proposal and/or regulatory guidelines
 - serious adverse events

3. Amendments to the proposal must be approved by the Human Research Ethics Office before they are implemented (except where an amendment is undertaken to eliminate an immediate risk to participants)
4. An annual progress report must be submitted to the Human Research Ethics Office on or before the anniversary of approval and a completion report submitted on completion of the project
5. Personnel working on this project must be adequately qualified by education, training and experience for their role, or supervised
6. Personnel must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any financial or other interest or affiliation, that bears on this project
7. Changes to personnel working on this project must be reported to the Human Research Ethics Office
8. Data and primary materials must be retained and stored in accordance with the [Western Australian University Sector Disposal Authority \(WAUSDA\)](#) and the [Curtin University Research Data and Primary Materials policy](#)
9. Where practicable, results of the research should be made available to the research participants in a timely and clear manner
10. Unless prohibited by contractual obligations, results of the research should be disseminated in a manner that will allow public scrutiny; the Human Research Ethics Office must be informed of any constraints on publication
11. Ethics approval is dependent upon ongoing compliance of the research with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#), the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#), applicable legal requirements, and with Curtin University policies, procedures and governance requirements
12. The Human Research Ethics Office may conduct audits on a portion of approved projects.

Special Conditions of Approval

None.

This letter constitutes ethical approval only. This project may not proceed until you have met all of the Curtin University research governance requirements.

Should you have any queries regarding consideration of your project, please contact the Ethics Support Officer for your faculty or the Ethics Office at hrec@curtin.edu.au or on 9266 2784.

Yours sincerely



Dr Catherine Gangell

Manager, Research Integrity

Appendix 9.2 - Participant Information sheet and participant consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

HREC Project Number:	HRE2017-0075
Project Title:	Exploring the transition to senior leadership for women: a comparative study of female senior leaders from South Africa and Mauritius
Principal Investigator:	Dr Ros Cameron, Research Fellow School of Management
Student researcher:	Shubashni Ramrekha
Version Number:	1
Version Date:	01/17/17

What is the Project About?

A review of literature on women in management and leadership by Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) found that there is limited research on women in management and leadership in Africa. While there is extensive research on the barriers and challenges that women face when pursuing senior management positions (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Cross, 2010; Powell & Butterfield, 2003), there is little qualitative research on the individual experiences of those women who successfully transitioned into top management positions (Nkomo and Ngambi 2009s).

This aim of this study are to investigate the experiences of women who succeeded in breaking through the glass ceiling and attaining senior leadership positions. Africa is an important continent to study this topic as there is a paucity of research on African women managers and leaders (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Second, 67 percent of women from Sub-Saharan Africa are employed in agriculture while only 5.8 percent and 26.4 percent are employed in industry and services sector respectively (International Labour Office, 2008 p 26). The study will also compare and contrast the assumptions and lived experiences of women, from South Africa and Mauritius, to identify areas where these experiences are similar, where they are different, and the consequences and outcomes of their success. South Africa and Mauritius are two Sub-Saharan African countries and are both ranked as upper-middle income countries. Both countries are culturally diverse countries and have more young women enrolled in tertiary level education and are amongst the top performers in empowering women through education in the SADC region (Southern African Gender Protocol, 2015). The findings that emerge will be compared and contrasted with existing literature to build a conceptual framework that includes strategies and practices to encourage and foster the transition of women into senior management roles.

Who is doing the Research?

The project is being conducted by Shubashni Ramrekha and will be supervised by Dr Ros Cameron. .

The results of this research project will be used by Shubashni Ramrekha to obtain a Doctor of Philosophy at Curtin University and is funded by the University.

There will be no costs to you and you will not be paid for participating in this project.

Why am I being asked to take part and what will I have to do?

This is a research study and we are inviting you to participate in the study because you have held or currently hold a senior management/leadership position in your organisation. Approximately 30 women will take part in this study. The student researcher will conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews with each participant and 2 focus group interviews in South Africa and Mauritius separately. The duration of each focus group interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes and will be centred around the career transitions women are likely to undergo when pursuing senior management/leadership positions; the strategies that can be used to facilitate the progress on women into senior management/leadership roles in business organisations; and the organisational policies and practices that are required for the advancement of women into senior management/leadership

Each qualitative, semi-structured interview will be approximately 60 minutes. Due to the nature of semi-structured interviews the student researcher has a set of questions to help you relate your perspectives, however, during the course of the interview additional questions may be asked. Interview questions will ask about your career decisions and opportunities, the strategies you used to overcome organisational and societal barriers throughout your career and your experience in senior management/leadership positions. Common themes present in the interviews and focus groups will be analysed and compared between each participant. The study will take place at a mutually convenient location. For instances where participants cannot travel for the interview, Skype interviews will be arranged.

We will make a digital audio/video recording so we can concentrate on what you have to say and not distract ourselves with taking notes. After the interview/focus group we will make a full written copy of the recording.

Are there any benefits' to being in the research project?

There may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research. The research will give you an opportunity to share your experience and discuss your ideas of how to increase the participation rates of women in senior management and leadership.

We hope the results of this research will allow us to:

Create new contemporary career models for women from Africa that organisations could implement.

Identify the policies and practices that are required to improve the participation rates for women at senior levels thereby creating a gender diverse workforce.

Are there any risks, side-effects, discomforts or inconveniences from being in the research project?

Apart from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or inconveniences associated with taking part in this study.

Who will have access to my information?

The information collected in this research will be re-identifiable (coded). This means that the stored information will be re-identifiable which means we will remove identifying information on any data or sample and replace it with a code. Only the research team have access to the

code to match your name if it is necessary to do so. Any information we collect will be treated as confidential and used only in this project unless otherwise specified. When reporting the data, pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy and any identifying information within the transcript will be changed in such a way as to protect the identity of the participant while maintaining the meaning of the conversation. The following people will have access to the information we collect in this research: the research team and, in the event of an audit or investigation, staff from the Curtin University Office of Research and Development.

Electronic data will be password-protected and hard copy data (including video or audio tapes) will be in locked storage.

The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for 7 years after the research has ended and then it will be destroyed.

The results of this research may be presented at conferences or published in professional journals. You will not be identified in any results that are published or presented.

Whilst all care will be taken to maintain privacy and confidentiality of any information shared at a focus group or group discussion, you should be aware that you may feel embarrassed or upset if one of the group members repeats things said in a confidential group meeting.

Will you tell me the results of the research?

We will write to you at the end of the research (in about 36 months) and let you know the results of the research. Results will not be individual but based on all the information we collect and review as part of the research.

Do I have to take part in the research project?

Taking part in a research project is voluntary. It is your choice to take part or not. You do not have to agree if you do not want to. If you decide to take part and then change your mind, that is okay, you can withdraw from the project. You do not have to give us a reason; just tell us that you want to stop. Please let us know you want to stop so we can make sure you are aware of any thing that needs to be done so you can withdraw safely. If you choose not to take part or start and then stop the study, it will not affect your relationship with the University, staff or colleagues. If you chose to leave the study we will use any information collected unless you tell us not to.

What happens next and who can I contact about the research?

We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

Dr Ros Camreon, tel: 08 9266 9153, or email at Ros.Cameron@curtin.edu.au, or

Mrs Shubashni Ramrekha, tel: +230 57513393, or email at: shubashni.ramrekha@student.curtin.edu.au

If you decide to take part in this research we will ask you to sign the consent form. By signing it is telling us that you understand what you have read and what has been discussed. Signing the consent indicates that you agree to be in the research project. Please take your time and ask any questions you have before you decide what to do. You will be given a copy of this information and the consent form to keep.

At the start of the semi-structured interview and the focus group you will be asked if you have understood the information provided in the information sheet.

The following statement must be included in every information sheet:

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HRE2017-0075). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email hrec@curtin.edu.au.

CONSENT FORM

HREC Project Number:	<i>HRE2017-0075</i>
Project Title:	Exploring the transition to senior leadership for women: a comparative study of female senior leaders from South Africa and Mauritius
Principal Investigator:	Dr Ros Cameron, Research Fellow School of Management
Student researcher:	<i>Shubashni Ramrekha</i>
Version Number:	<i>1</i>
Version Date:	<i>17/01/2017</i>

- I have read the information statement version listed above and I understand its contents.
- I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project.
- I voluntarily consent to take part in this research project.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.
- I understand that this project has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee and will be carried out in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
- I understand I will receive a copy of this Information Statement and Consent Form.

Participant Name	
Participant Signature	
Date	

Declaration by researcher: I have supplied an Information Letter and Consent Form to the participant who has signed above, and believe that they understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of their involvement in this project.

Researcher Name	
Researcher Signature	
Date	

Note: All parties signing the Consent Form must date their own signature.

FOR USE IN PROJECTS WITH IMPLIED CONSENT

Please insert the following tick box at the top of your questionnaire.

- I have received information regarding this research and had an opportunity to ask questions. I believe I understand the purpose, extent and possible risks of my involvement in this project and I voluntarily consent to take part.

<input type="checkbox"/> I do	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not	consent to being audio-recorded
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<input type="checkbox"/> I do	<input type="checkbox"/> I do not	consent to the storage and use of my information in future ethically-approved research projects related to this (project)
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Appendix 9.3 - Interview Guide

RQ 1 (a): How do women from South Africa and Mauritius conceptualise leadership?

1. What is your personal definition of leadership?
2. Does the term African leadership mean anything to you?
3. What in your opinion contributes to effective leadership, especially for women?
4. Several studies on women in management and on leadership claim that women's style of leadership is different from men. In your leadership experiences have you found that to be true? If yes, share with me some stories to illustrate that.
5. What makes leaders successful and supports them be considered as credible? What characteristics do credible leaders, especially women exhibit?
6. What do you consider to be the characteristics people in Mauritius/South Africa consider to be important for women as leaders?
7. Share with me any story about leading change or bringing about transformation and that illustrates a successful transformation effort.
8. Do you have any strategies that you use for empowering people you lead?
9. Can you share with me any stories behind your success in leadership?
10. How do you think others describe your leadership?

RQ 2: To what extent do personal characteristics, attitudes, values, cultural identity and gender identity influence careers in business leadership for women from Mauritius and South Africa?

1. Can you describe your journey into senior leadership?
2. How would you describe your success as a leader in the business context?
3. Can you share with me how you transitioned from middle management into a senior leadership role?

RQ 3: What influence do institutional practices, policies and structures have on the career decisions and career progress for women from Mauritius and South Africa?

1. Can you share with me any formal and informal developmental experiences?
2. At what point in your life did you receive training in leadership?
3. Why do you consider such a person a great leader?
4. Can you share with me some of the individuals who encouraged your pursuit of career in business leadership?
5. How have these individuals influenced you as a leader, and how has their influence opened doors for you?
6. Can you share with me if you have people that you are mentoring now inside or outside your organisation?
7. How did you react when it dawned on you that you are a leader?
8. How did early experiences direct you toward seeking other leadership experiences?
9. What experiences have been very important to your development as a leader?
10. What are some of your earliest leadership experiences such as in school or business?
11. Tell me a story that illustrates some of your early experiences in business leadership.
12. Looking back over your life, what would you say are some lessons you have learned about leadership in the business context that you would want to pass on to others?
13. If we were sitting here with a 25-year-old woman aspiring for a senior leadership position in business, what are some things you would want to say to her about leadership, perhaps things you wish someone had told you when you were 25?
14. Can you provide an exemplar – a company you have work for that developed an innovative practice aimed at developing your career or aimed at removing a roadblock/obstacle along the way? What was this practice?

RQ 4: How do women from Mauritius and South Africa gain acceptance in, and integrate into male-dominated organisational environments?

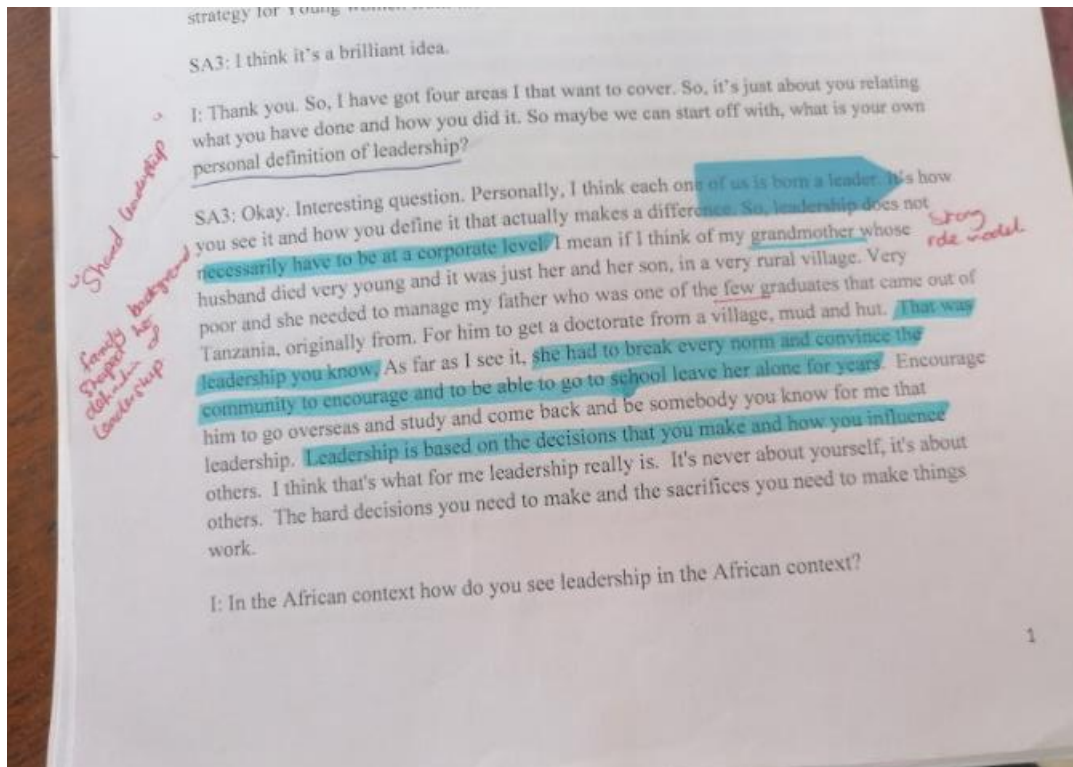
1. Once you reach the top, can you describe your experience?
2. Can you share with me some of the challenges you faced and how you overcame these challenges?
3. What strategies do you use to handle cultural challenges?

4. What strategies do you use to deal with challenges related to your authority as a female leader?
5. How has your earlier training and development helped you in your leadership position?

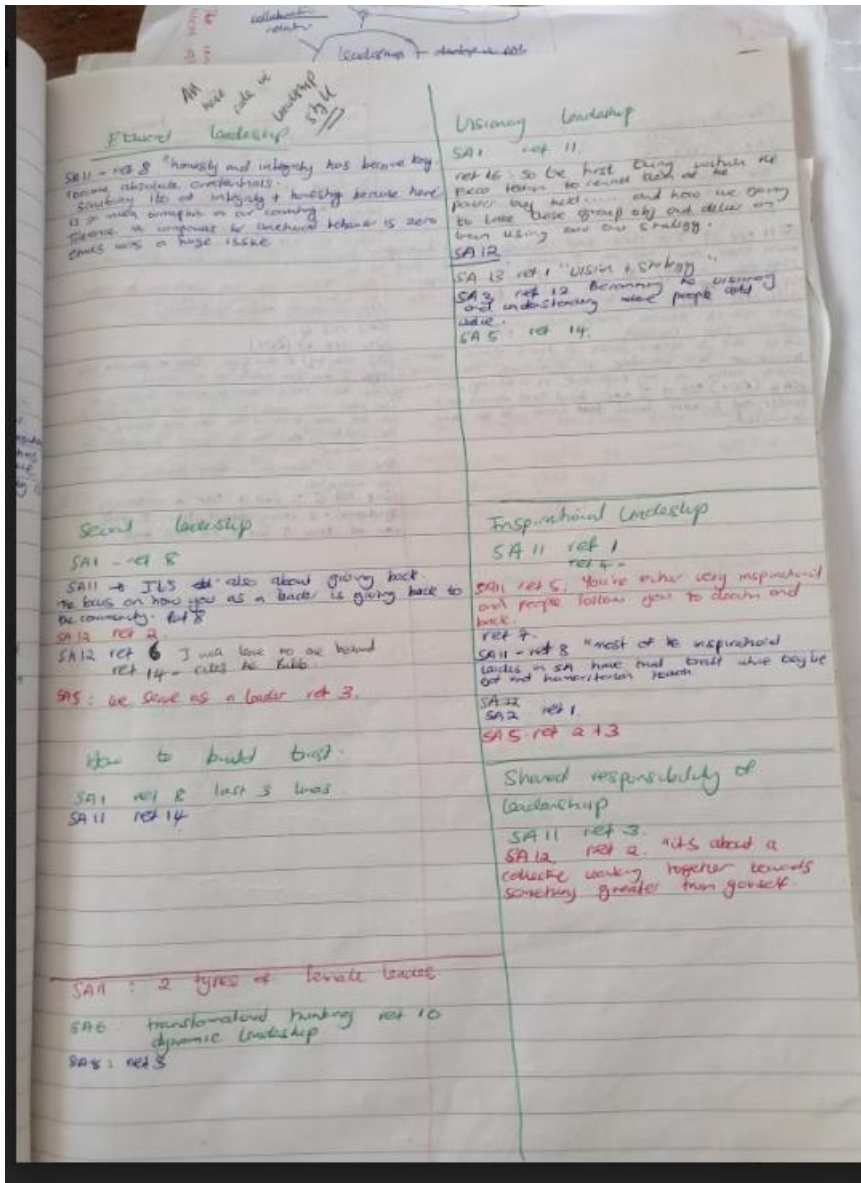
RQ 5: Which empowerment strategies and policies are most needed to effect change in the status/progression of women, from Mauritius/South Africa, into senior management/leadership positions?

1. How do you intend to influence the leadership culture going forward?
2. What advice would you offer HR practitioners and CEO's on how to improve the number of women in senior leadership positions?
3. What advice would you provide to your company or the industry to keep talent such as yourself?

Appendix 9.4 - Sample Data Analysis: Initial coding



Appendix 9.5 - Sample Data Analysis: Summaries for each research question



Appendix 9.6 – Data Analysis: Example of NVivo coding showing nodes

Name	Files	References
Advice to a 25 year-old womanr about leaders		18
At what point in your life did you recieve traini		9
Can you describe your journey into senior lead		21
Can you share with me any formal and informa		23
Can you share with me some of the sentiments		6
Challenges you faced and how you overcame t		22
characteristics for women to succeed in their c		9
Characteristics people in Mauritius OR South A		15
Did that person encourage or discourage you i		16
discriminatory practices in the organisation		2
Does the term African leadership mean anythin		14
External organisational and situational factors		8
Family and childhood experiences		20
First superior		12
Gender composition of the workforce		10
Glass cliff		1
How did early experiences direct you toward s		5
How do you communicate with people		6
How do you deal with the work or personal ne		12
How do you intend to influence the leadership		20
how do you manage work family balance		8
How do you moniter staff		3
How do you think others describe your leaders		19
How has your earlier training and development		9
How have these individuals influenced you as a		5

Name	Files	References
RQ 1	14	198
Bad leadership	3	
Broad South African conte	13	
change	9	
Characteristics of women	7	
Definition of leadership	13	
Effective and credible lead	11	
empower and communicat	12	
Influence of the mother rol	0	
Leadership Style	8	
leadership traits	8	
male perceptions of wome	1	
Male vs female style	12	
reference to the mother ro	4	
role model	5	
SA corporate context	9	

Name	Files	References
RQ 2	14	182
authentic	4	
boundaryless	5	
career identity	8	
career motivation	9	
career pattern	11	
career success	11	
early career	10	
encourage or discourag	7	
individual actions	11	
inheritance	2	
kaleidoscope	5	
networks and sponsors	11	
personal characteristics	7	
PEST context	12	
protean	5	
self awareness	5	
support-family-org	12	
traditional	2	
values	1	
work life balance	9	

Appendix 9.7 – Sample Phenomenological Themes

Concepts	Participants description	
DIVERSITY	Looking at the diversity within the African continent and SA specifically	SA1
	I think diversity and inclusivity are a major thing because you are dealing with so many different types of people on a daily basis and if you are not sensitive. I mean look at Americans for example, they are not sensitive at all. Look at Trump, he calls a spade a spade and makes people angry and gets away with it. In SA you would never get away with it.	SA4
	We live in a quite diverse country here	SA13
	I think it's exceptionally difficult to {define} in this environment to put a word or to describe it. Because we're so diverse there's no one true culture, there's no one true way that people lead or manage others and the doesn't necessarily come from a racial background, because you have people of colour and people of non-colour who are very sort of self-intuitive. It depends on the circumstances, the context, the environment, how you've been raised as a person. I have met Black people who are very receptive to being kind and caring and cautious and white people who come from very conservative environments. Through my career I have had very vast cultural differences.	SA6
LEGACY	History that stills plays a big impact Our political landscape leaders are just horrible and if you look at what's happening in [] I can just imagine that happening in SA.	SA1
	We deal with legacy ... and also that diversity and inclusivity are two key considerations. African leaders need to understand legacy because we've got a complex history and maybe a newer history to the rest of the world.	SA4
	It's a broader definition in terms of the impact of one's leadership and again the legacy. In South Africa in particular we have the legacy of apartheid where people of colour were excluded from certain opportunities and so leadership involved empowering those previously disadvantaged.	SA2
	South Africa has a very unique background with apartheid and then democracy.	SA7
TRANSITION	You also have an environment that is fast changing to adapt to the new South African context in terms of where the country is going and we've had in mind an understanding that you have probably not just 11 ethnicities in the country, but also a lot of people coming from outside of SA, Africa and also Europe. African leadership is around what being fit for purpose at the time. In terms of where we are from a developmental environment. I think it's being focused on where we are as a nation and as a continent. From that point of view, I think we have started seeing some elements of a changing perspective, it's about the future thinking of leadership in terms of how do we build that mold, in terms of coming in for the future.	SA1
	I think leadership overall has transitioned quite a bit in SA. I think over the last 20 years' leadership has truly evolved into a space where things like inspirational leadership, leadership by example has become key. In the business arena I think leadership has transitioned, I think people have realized that the old way of leading, by force and by direction is just not cutting it anymore.	SA11

	That's an interesting question. I think quite traditionally, leadership in Africa has been something that is quite patriarchal. There's quite a sense of patriarchy in leadership ...but it is slowly changing, where leadership is becoming someone that can mobilise and inspire an organisation. They are starting to look for younger blood, for people that motivate or inspire, that gets things done. I think the definition is slowly changing but still very male dominated.	SA5
	Who lead exceptionally differently, it's sort of modern age leading. So you are not that authoritative dictator giving instructions.	
Changes in terms of the integration of women in senior leadership roles	It is changing. It's definitely changed from the time I started. Especially in terms of transformation	SA9
	I think we are about, I would say, 15 years behind the curve. Seeing how we've inspired junior people. And they are coming along the ranks. When I left [], of my six managers, four were females and two were males. So it changed over time. I think probably in the next ten years, as these female leaders start coming through into those positions, you will see more at the Board level. But once that open and come in, you've got to change the entire playing field.	SA11
	Going forward, we need more diverse leaders. Gender point is challenging. But you've got the Broad-Based Black Empowerment. Women leadership is a compliance thing – company needs points. People don't follow their leaders; they see it as a compliance thing and a "tick the box" exercise. But there is some moving towards women leaders getting appointed on merit.	SA7

Reaching the destination
Enabling factors
South Africa

Enabling factors	Responses
Spouse/Partner	<i>"He was very supportive. I mean I couldn't have done the things that I was able to do had he not supported me. It meant that I was away from home a lot of the time and he also has a career of his own. He's in the banking industry and there was a time that he was also traveling a lot, but he was very supportive. He was quite hands-on with our sons (SA14).</i>
Supportive CEO and peers	call it backing and people who continue to just believe in me. And see what, what potential I could be, which sometimes I couldn't see that myself (SA10).
Executive coaching	<i>At one point I became unpopular for being outspoken. So, I think it is a skill that one learns as you go along with coaching (SA2)</i>
Professional women's forums	<i>And it helps talking to other female leaders (SA11).</i>
Mentoring	<i>I said to my CEO, I need a mentor. And he said great, and we actually got an external mentor.</i>
Networks	<i>I think having a strong network of advisors for me worked very well. To have a soundboard and to be very stable, fair, and transparent (SA12).</i>
Family	we were grown up where there should be no difference and you can literally do whatever you want and I think that's what I brought into my career and working in and studying a male-dominated degree.