

THE C- FACTOR: CRITICAL COMPETENCIES AND CHALLENGES EVIDENCED BY CEO WOMEN

By

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AUGUST 2016

DECLARATION

I Samantha Sandy Smith declare that The C-Factor: Critical Competencies and Challenges Evidenced By CEO Women is my own unaided work both in content and execution. All the resources I used in this study are cited and referred to in the reference list by means of a comprehensive referencing system. Apart from the normal guidance from my study leader, I have received no assistance, except as stated in the acknowledgements.

I declare that the content of this dissertation has never been used before for any qualification at any tertiary institution.

I Samantha Sandy Smith, declare that the language in this dissertation was edited by Rika Weiss

Samantha Sandy Smith

Date:

Signature

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the critical competencies and challenges evidenced by women in senior leadership roles, particularly women occupying chief executive officer (CEO) roles. Their differences from other women in senior leadership is also explored.

Prior studies have indicated that there is an under-representation of women in top leadership positions especially at a chief executive level (also known as the C-Suite). In this phenomenological study, I engaged with participants at a subjective level to inquire into and explore their unique feelings and considerations in order to gain a better understanding of and provide an all-inclusive perspective on the critical competencies women in such leadership roles are required to have and the challenges they experience.

I explored the narratives of 23 participants who had risen to the highest levels in their career trajectories; of these participants, 14 were women (five of whom were chief executive officers) and nine were men. The information the executive women provided during the interviews was evidence of their success, efficacy and tenacity. The inclusion of male participants in this qualitative study ensured that dense and rich data could be obtained given the fact that most leadership positions in organisations are still occupied by men.

My findings confirmed the findings of research scholars that women of today occupying leading positions in organisations still face the challenge of having to cope with hindrances such as stereotyping, cultural perceptions, political barriers, gender bias, work-life balance, remuneration partiality, glass ceilings and inadequate support structures. However, contrary to the existing literature, which focuses on prevailing competencies that are best suited to leadership, my research paid particular attention to competencies exclusive to women in senior leadership positions. My study also explored significant facets of competencies at chief executive level in respect of three dimensions, namely, business capability, relationships and traits.

Key words: career trajectories; C-Suite; CEO women; executive women; challenges; competencies; leadership phenomenology; men; senior leadership

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CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

How are some women able to overcome impediments and reach high-ranking levels in their respective career trajectories while other women cannot seem to break through the barriers they encounter? This conundrum made me curious about successful women in business leadership roles. What marks women like Indra Nooyi (the chief executive officer (CEO) and Chairperson of PepsiCo), Ursula Burns (CEO and Chairperson of Xerox) and Mary Barra (CEO and Chairperson of General Motors) arise to such levels of prominence? I wanted to know more about the calibre of women who emerge as leaders of distinction and about the competencies that set them apart from others. My inquiring mind was stimulated and I was inspired to embark on a study exploring how the competencies of CEO women differ from those of other women in senior leadership roles and how women in senior leadership positions deal with the challenges they face.

Research has indicated that the paucity of women in senior leadership roles stems from various reasons. Firstly, the channels that feed the roles for women are challenging; there is a problem bridging the gap between what is workable and what still needs putting into practice. Secondly, according to the 360° assessment women lack vision. Vision in this context refers to the capacity to identify new opportunities, be acquainted with new trends and create a new strategic direction for originality. Thirdly, cultural and socioeconomic aspects affect the role of women in the working environment (McKinsey & Company (2012).

Therefore, to be successful, a leader must have extensive leadership abilities, aptitudes, and competencies, which are usually gained during the course of a person's life (Madsen, 2007) and such an individual, would be regarded as talent. Poorhosseinzadeh and Subramaniam (2013) cites the following different definitions of talent from their studies: talented people are 'the best and the brightest' ; talented people are able to refurbish the utility of an organisation and; talent is the capacity to use knowledge, ability and outlook to create exceptional standards from existing resources.

Organisations must have access to talent pools in order to survive. Organisational change requires leaders to exhibit new knowledge, capabilities and proficiency (Shahmandi, Silong, Ismail, Samah & Otherman, 2011), especially where globalisation is noted.

Talent management is pertinent to business because organisations need to preserve human capital in the midst of globalisation, technological advancement and competitive markets (Nujjoo & Meyer, 2012).

Literature on leadership has revealed the incongruity and inconsistency about women leaders as pointed out by Elliott and Stead (2008):

- The number of women in leading roles is increasing, but women are still not experiencing impartiality as far as compensation is concerned;
- Literature has seemingly indicated the relevance of female characteristics, however theory and practice has not discontinued to embrace masculine principles as the preferred model;
- The policies and procedures within the workplace creates an impression of equality and impartiality despite the fact that female leadership encounters remains side-lined and omitted by male dominated beliefs and a fixation with customary values is still embraced;
- Female leaders are appointed to give the impression that women are empowered, but in effect, the domination of male leadership is maintained.

In essence, it should however be noted that women in senior leadership roles have the ability and potential to affect change in organisations through exercising various competencies and simultaneously women in senior leadership roles have an awareness of the sacrifices that is made to successfully occupy such a position.

A description of competencies involves a behavioural approach to emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence and it is believed that a person who possesses emotional, social and cognitive intelligence competencies can be an efficient and skilled leader (Boyatzis, 2011).

With reference to the inadequate female representation in the upper echelons referred to earlier, it is reasoned that this may stem from both psychological and interior/exterior dynamics (Yeagley, Subich & Tokar, 2010).

Optimum cognisance should be taken of the need for both men and women to occupy executive leadership roles as they have diverse and complementary competencies and leadership preferences. The presence of both in the C-Suite is important and each has a significant role to play (McKinsey & Company, 2012).

Figure 1 below depicts the percentage of women who are in CEO positions, Board Directors and Board Chairs as at August 2012 in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and United States. A comparison is noted between the percentage of women who occupy leading roles and as it can be seen Australia has the least percentage of women who occupy executive positions. Figure 1 further illustrates that in 2012, merely 16% of women were Board Directors in the United States, 5.3 % of women were Board Chairs in South Africa and 6.1% of women in Canada held CEO positions. In Israel, 5 % of women hold CEO and Board Chairs roles.

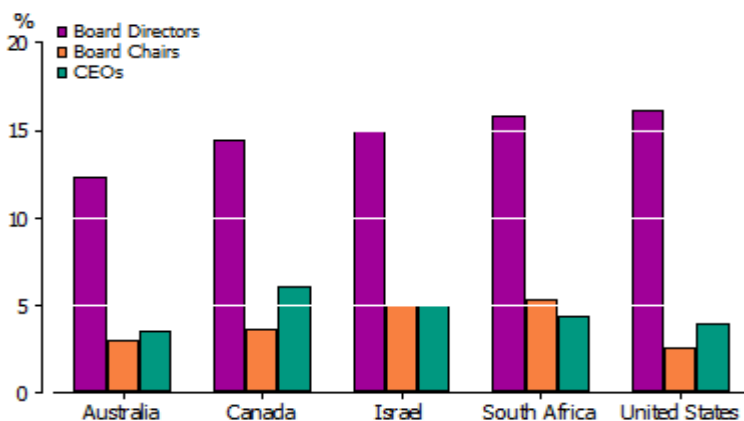


Figure 1: international comparisons: women who were board directors, board chairs and ceos(a)(b) – 2012

Source:

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Dec+2012#ENDNOTE30>

Skade (2015) reports that according to a census of South African women in leadership, just 2% hold CEO positions in JSE-listed companies. Merely seven of the 293 JSE-listed companies surveyed have women in CEO positions. Still, only 34 companies obtained the status of top performing companies, signifying that more than 25% of women occupy

positions as directors or executive managers. As far as representation at board level is concerned, most women are appointed to non-executive directorship positions. Furthermore, women comprise 11.6% of directorship and chairperson positions, of which 9.2% are chairpersons and merely 2.4% are CEOs (Skade, 2015). In addition, Skade (2016) reports that the percentage of women in senior leadership roles has declined from the 27% reported in the previous year and that it has even shrunk below the average of 26% noted between 2004 and 2015. Skade (2016) asserts that 'this does not augur well for the advancement of women'.

The problem statement for the current study was formulated against the background sketched in the introductory section.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Due to the lack of women in CEO leadership positions, a distorted view has been created of what an awe-inspiring, high-achieving woman of substance is like. There is evidence that a woman who aspires to become a CEO but faces the prospect of never realising her dream may experience feelings of inadequacy and indignation. From research, it is known that there is underrepresentation of women at all levels in the corporate pipeline and that women experience hurdles in progressing in their careers and being appointed to senior leadership positions even though organisations need female leaders to operate optimally at premier levels (McKinsey & Company, 2015).

By not making the most of women's capabilities, organisations do themselves a disservice. It has been proven that women can impart distinctive talents and approaches to companies and can contribute to increased returns on investments (Appelbaum, Audet & Miller, 2003).

This study was embarked upon based on the need identified to explore the critical competencies and challenges of women in CEO positions. Historically women lacked presence in the C-Suite.

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The main purpose of this study is to explore the critical competencies and challenges of women in CEO leadership roles.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study sought to address the following research objectives:

- To examine what competencies are critical for women in CEO leadership roles
- To explore the challenges that are real to women in these positions
- To disclose the qualities of women who occupy leadership positions in the C-Suite

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The results of a study are contingent upon the type of research design and the methodology used. The study used an interpretive approach, an approach that is suitable when the aim is to clarify subjective explanations and inferences that stem from the social action (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The elementary principle of an interpretivist paradigm is that the researcher should gain a thorough understanding of the whole phenomenon in question. A good interpretive analysis can be presented by means of interpreting the closely accumulated data through empathic understanding and the objective is to place the real life events and phenomena into perspective (Blanche, et.al., 2006).

Phenomenology falls under the umbrella of interpretive analysis (Blanche, et.al., 2006).

As stated by Creswell (2007) the primary attempt of data analysis is to recognise similar themes in the descriptions and experiences of participants. Creswell makes the following suggestions, which has been employed in this study:

- Identify statements that relate to the topic. Distinguish relevant information from non-relevant information and subdivide the relevant information further.
- Group statements into 'meaningful units' to categorise the phenomenon.

- Seek divergent perspectives and explore the numerous ways in which participants have experienced the phenomenon.
- Construct a composite and develop an inclusive description of the phenomenon.

Purposive sampling was best suited for this study, which was undertaken with a specific objective in mind. The area targeted for exploration was the career trajectories of CEO women with the aim of exploring the critical competencies and challenges of these women and ascertaining the qualities of C-Suite-level and non-C-Suite-level women executives

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Using the existing literature as a cornerstone, this study considered certain significant concerns regarding women in senior leadership roles in an effort to understand and clarify them. The motivation for this study stemmed from the realisation that society has certain expectations of men and women. Society believes that men display leadership abilities and possess the drive that effective performance calls for and that women tend to display feminine attitudes, which restrain effective performance (Boldry, Wood & Kashy, 2001). Ayman (2004) is of the opinion that current literature gives attention to the skills needed for effective leadership but pays inadequate attention to the skills needed to become a leading light.

This study is pertinent because research has indicated that there is underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles (Budworth & Mann, 2010; Catalyst, 2011; Lewis-Enright, Crafford & Crous, 2009; Michelle, Ryan, Haslam & Postmes, 2007) even though there are many talented women in the world. Men still dominate executive positions, do most of the decision-making and have considerable influence as leaders (Smith, 2002). According to Blanton (2005), men maintain CEO positions for virtually twice as long as women in the USA.

When people think about the position of a CEO, a male person comes to mind (Buckalew, Konstantinopoulos, Russell, El-Sherbini, Saint Mary's College of California, 2012) but, with all due respect, there is a need to understand the value of women at an executive level

and to recognise that they are capable of taking ownership to ensure that organisations reach desired outcomes.. Since the global environment in which organisations operate is characterised by factors such as competition, performance, revenue, talent and well-being, there is a need for effective leadership, and leaders must have all the necessary attributes to deal with these factors successfully. For this reason, the critical components of effective leadership should be explored. It is also fitting to reflect on the works of Hopfl and Matlal (2007) in which they state that organisations continually express themselves in terms of lack given the challenge of improving and keeping abreast of times in order to remain relevant.

A favourable outcome or an unfavourable outcome in an organisation is contingent upon the leadership of an organisation. Only when the strategy of the business is driven by its leadership can it reach its objectives. Since leadership outlook and behaviour have an impact on both employee and organisational balance, it is essential to scrutinise the critical components for effective leadership, especially as regards women who occupy executive leadership positions.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

1.7.1 Delimitations

A comprehensive discussion on the career trajectories of all women lies beyond the scope of this research. The aim of this study is to explore the critical competencies, challenges and qualities of CEO women.

1.7.2 Assumptions

The following assumptions are made in this study:

- Participants will be honest in communicating the critical competencies that ensure success at an executive level and will not keep their knowledge and intellectual

resources to themselves in order to safeguard their assets and the ways they differ from non-executive women.

- It will be possible to identify the strategies and behaviours necessary to combat challenges faced by women in executive leadership roles.
- All participants are adequately skilled and have not been placed in 'window-dressing' roles.
- All participants may have a similar approach to work-life balance but they will differ markedly in being fit for their respective roles as CEOs, directors, divisional heads and senior managers.

1.8 DELINEATION OF KEY TERMS

1.8.1 Leadership

After years of scrutiny, the term leadership has still not been adequately defined since likeminded organisations have different ideas about what leadership entails (Horey & Fallesen, n.d.). A general explanation of leadership by the aforementioned authors is that leadership entails 'influencing, motivating and inspiring others through direct and indirect means to accomplish organisational objectives' (Horey & Fallesen, n.d.)

1.8.2 Competencies

Competencies comprise the fundamental skills or a behavioural building edifice that is innate in situational-based roles. A role in this context is defined as a variety of settings where groups of competencies are executed on top-level leadership levels. Competencies define the specific behaviour skills and capabilities that influence efficient leadership settings (Appelbaum & Paese, n.d.).

1.8.3 Executives

Executives are people employed at senior levels in organisations who have the responsibility of managing and systematising the accomplishments and working environment of their organisations, executing the visions of their organisations and making sure their organisations remain relevant in a global market (Tropman & Wooten, 2010).

1.8.4 'C-Suite'

C-Suite is a term used to refer to an organisation's key management officials. The letter C stands for 'chief' to refer to positions such as chief executive officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer and chief information officer. The C-Suite is recognised as the leading and prominent group of people in a firm who takes on huge levels of responsibility.

1.8.5 Directors

Directors are individuals who occupy senior roles in organisations and are accountable for the financial supervision of their organisations and for ensuring that these organisations function within their budgets.

1.8.6 Senior Managers

Senior managers are individuals who oversee their teams, policies and procedures within their organisations to ensure that business objectives are reached through people.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STUDY

Chapter 2: Women in executive leadership roles

This chapter outlines the situation relating to the lack of women in senior leadership roles, particularly at a CEO level, and alludes to the situation that men still occupy leading roles in organisations. The research themes relating to executive women are also classified.

Chapter 3: Critical Competencies and Challenges

This chapter shed light on the definition of competencies with particular reference to the C-Suite. A Taxonomy of the leadership competencies and meta-competencies are portrayed and alludes to two theoretical perspectives, namely Social Identity Theory and Self-Determination Theory.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the study's research design, research methodology and coding of data. Ethical matters relating to the study are also addressed

Chapter 5: Clarifying the competencies required for CEO women

The themes that emerged from the data are dealt with in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Clarifying the challenges of executive women

In this chapter, I record the challenges facing executive women.

Chapter 7: Findings

I expound on the findings of my phenomenological study and support them by referring to existing literature.

Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusions

In this chapter I share some of my recommendations for further study and draw conclusions based on my findings

Chapter 9: Personal Reflections

In this chapter I reflect on my research journey

1.10 CONCLUSION

In this introductory chapter, I contextualised the current study, its purpose, research objectives, methodology and significance, and reflected on its limitations and assumptions. I also delineated the key terms used in subsequent chapters. To conclude, I provided an overview of the remaining chapters in this research study.

In Chapter 2, I expound on women in executive leadership roles, with particular reference to CEO women.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP ROLES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Women hold 4.6% of CEO positions in Standard and Poor's (S&P) 500 companies (Catalyst, 2015). It is well documented that female representation in business leadership is rare, and academics are at variance about the whys and wherefores (Sidani, Konrad & Karam, 2015).

Silverstein and Sayre (2009) record that women worldwide control at least 64% of consumer spending. Building on this finding, mention can be made of the thought-provoking confirmation provided by different sectors that performance improves if there are more females in senior leadership roles. Research also indicates that corporations comprising more women in upper echelons are gainful and report higher yields (Devillard, Desvaux & Baumgartner, 2007). Moreover, women are found to play a critical role in business, and their presence impacts directly on both the quantity and quality of the financial prosperity experienced by the population (Ghaleh, Pirsahab, Shakeri, Alami, Sohaei & Zerafat, 2015).

2.2 OCCUPATIONAL RANKS OF EXECUTIVE WOMEN

*"There is a big difference
between diversity and inclusiveness.
Diversity is about counting the numbers.
Inclusiveness is about making the numbers count.
Whether it is about individuals or companies or countries,
the conversation has to shift from talking about whether
diversity affects performance to talking about the
conditions under which you'd expect diversity
to have a positive effect on performance".*

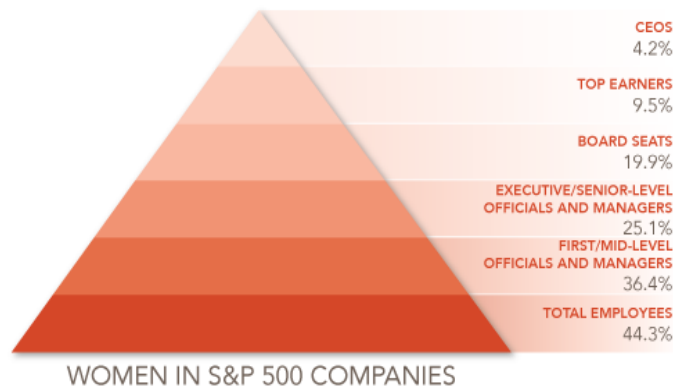
Professor Boris Groysberg, Harvard Business School, January 2013

Akpinar-Sposito (2013) refers to the works of Fagenson who has stated that the progression of women in management could be associated with women’s individual characteristics, organisational dynamics and society’s communal influences.

According to Wu (2001), boards fulfil symbolic roles, which is the reason why many women opt for self-employment and entrepreneurship instead of sitting on boards as decorative directors (Rowley, Lee & Lan, 2014). In Japan, women in the workplace are known as ‘shokuba no hana’, which means office flowers.

In Norway it is legally required that 40% of company boards must consist of female members, but according to an article in *The Economist* (2011), merely 10% of executive directors are women, many of whom are inexperienced and do not add any worth. In contrast, specific measures taken in countries such as South Africa, Rwanda and Uganda, have been effectual and have resulted in companies’ profiting extensively from governmental coordination.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the percentage of women in various categories



Sources

Catalyst, Women CEOs of the S&P 500 (2016).
EY Center for Board Matters, 2015 Top Earners in S&P 500 Companies, Unpublished data.
Catalyst, 2015 Catalyst Census: Women and Men Board Directors (2016).
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Unpublished 2014 S&P 500 EEO-1 data.

S&P 500 is owned by S&P Dow Jones Indices, LLC.
Updated: 14 June 2016

Figure 2.1. Women in S&P 500 Companies

Table 2: Definitions

Pyramid Tier	Definitions
CEO	The principal executive officer. Typically, these individuals have the title of Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
Top Earners	The individuals listed in the summary compensation table for companies in the S&P 500 index at the time of their 2015 annual meetings as disclosed in proxy statements filed with the SEC. For analysis purposes, this means that a company can have up to seven top earners reported.
Board Seats	The members of the board of directors for companies in the S&P 500 index at the time of their 2015 annual meetings as disclosed in proxy statements filed with the SEC. Analysis is based on board seats and not individuals. Directors can serve on more than one company's board. For example, an individual director who serves on the board of Company A and Company B would hold two board seats and be counted twice.
Executive/Senior-Level Officials and Managers	Individuals who plan, direct, and formulate policies, set strategy, and provide the overall direction for companies, within the parameters set by the boards of directors. Typically, this includes individuals within two reporting levels of the CEO (e.g., COOs, CFOs, line of business heads, presidents or executive vice presidents of functional areas, chief information officers, chief human resources officers, chief marketing officers, chief legal officers, management directors, and managing partners).
First/Mid-Level Officials and Managers	Individuals who typically lead major business units and report into executive/senior-level management. Includes those who oversee the delivery of products, services, or functions at group, regional, or divisional levels within the parameters set by Executive/Senior Level management (e.g., vice presidents and directors; group, regional or divisional controllers; treasurers; human resources, information systems, marketing, and operations managers).
Total Industry Employees	The aggregate of all part- and full-time employees.

Source: Catalyst. S&P 500 Pyramids: Methodology. New York: Catalyst, 2016.

2.3 RESEARCH THEMES RELATING TO EXECUTIVE WOMEN

2.3.1 Dining in the C-Suite

The visibility of women in the upper echelons are progressively limited. Eagly and Carli (2007, p.1) states, “When you put all the pieces together, a new picture emerges for why women don’t make it into the C-Suite. It’s not the glass ceiling, but the sum of many obstacles along the way.” Accordingly as cited by Eagly and Carli (2007) effective remedy cannot be applied to the problem relating to the dearth of women in executive leadership when this problem has been misdiagnosed. From literature, it can be stated that women do occupy managerial ranks, but men still conquer executive leadership roles in organisations (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). In view of that Eagly and Carli alludes to the highly compensated executives of Fortune 500 companies, namely, “chairman, president, chief executive officer and chief operating officer” whereby merely six percent are women

Most women occupy positions which includes “clerical, personal services and sales” as recorded by MacDonald (2004). Accordingly, Martin (2003) asserts that there is a tendency for women to inhabit lower structural positions that support gender proclamation. Men still obtain top leadership positions in both “masculine and feminine industries” which indicates that admittance into executive leadership roles is problematical throughout locales (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

Stainback, Kleiner and Skaggs (2016) suggest that gender norms and expectations are birth through daily exchanges. This area of inquiry is not only prevalent in South Africa. There are also findings that points to the lack of women in executive leadership roles who resides abroad. In Europe, only 1.8 percent of women are CEO’s (Catalyst, Women in Europe, 2010) and in India, merely eleven percent of senior management are women (EMA Partners International, 2010). Added reading also advocates that women of colour are further disadvantaged and are less likely to inherit top-level leadership roles (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

According to psychological research, gender stereotypes and social roles have distorted the expectations people have in outlining, “What being a leader is and what being a woman entails.” (Atewologun & Doldor, 2013). Women are still stereotypically depicted as being disadvantaged according to Baron (2010) and it is suggested that women come to be assertive, courageous and manage their feelings (Khuwaja, Akhtar, Qureshi & Shah (2015). Moreover, Vanderbroeck (2010) asserts that perception can impede career advancement if it is not ratified in a seemly manner. Atewologun and Doldor (2013) believe that psychological research should strive to scrutinize the actions, acuties and attitudes of people who are privy to dine in the C-Suite.

Joan Acker (1990) posited that organisations are gender inclined, replicating and aping benefit to male counterparts which expounds on the importunity of inequality in the working environment, this account however lacks the lucidity in determining how change is likely (Stainback, Kleiner and Skaggs, 2016).

Literature indicates that women fail to embrace crucial opportunities, either because they feel hesitant to do so or because they assume family obligations will hinder them if they accept such opportunities. For this reason, men have much more leadership experience (Hyter & Eldridge, 2014). The research of Ryan and Haslam (2009) also indicates that women’s ownership of CEO positions is inclined to be of a shorter duration than that of their male counterparts.

Despite the fact that research has drawn attention to obstructions pertaining to gender equality in management and leadership, current research have explored the performance of women at senior managerial levels and leadership roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007; Barreto et al., 2009; Bruckmuller et.al, 2013, Bruckmuller et al. 2014 & Sabharwal, 2013).

Cormier (2007) advocates that it is no longer an irregularity to have women in executive leadership roles in our prevailing business world. Furthermore, Cormier claims that women with degrees are more numerous than men, which has been noted in twenty-one of the twenty-seven first world countries. This is suggestive that high potential leaders in the twenty first century are likely to be women. It has been noted that approximately forty

percent of women had achieved their bachelor degrees in the USA and in 2012, this percentage had increased to sixty percent (USA Congress Joint Economic Committee, 2010). Following Hurley and Choudhary (2016), enhanced education affords women to be better placed in professional, management and associated professions.

In a survey conducted by the Health Management Academy of Executive Leaders, it is reported that durable leadership is paramount for organisational efficacy in the 21st century (Wells & Hejna, 2009). Organisations are promoting the wrong kind of leadership if certain leadership competencies are not adequate for organisational success. However, researchers must be mindful that women's leadership inclinations and competencies will not necessarily emulate those of men (Adjorlolo, Fisher, Habbel, King, Liota & Looney, 2013).

It is important to take note that research has revealed that the startling dynamic restricting women from attaining executive leadership roles is that women 'lack distinct, critical leadership experience in fundamental areas required at executive levels' (Hyter & Eldridge, 2014).

Furthermore, research indicates that women tend to be nominated for leadership positions when there is a great risk of organisational disaster, an occurrence that has been noted in the USA (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2008).

Bruckmuller et al. (2014, p. 207) also allude to the tendency to assign women to lead organisations 'in crisis situations' owing to the fact that women possess the 'soft skills' required to manage people. Such working environments are exceedingly stressful due to the ever-present prospect of management failure (Hennessey, MacDonald & Carroll, 2014). In contrast to some women who may experience high-risk conditions as stressful, high-powered women may see such conditions as opportunities to prove their leadership skills and to climb the corporate ladder (Hunt-Earle, 2012).

2.3.2 “A seat at the table”

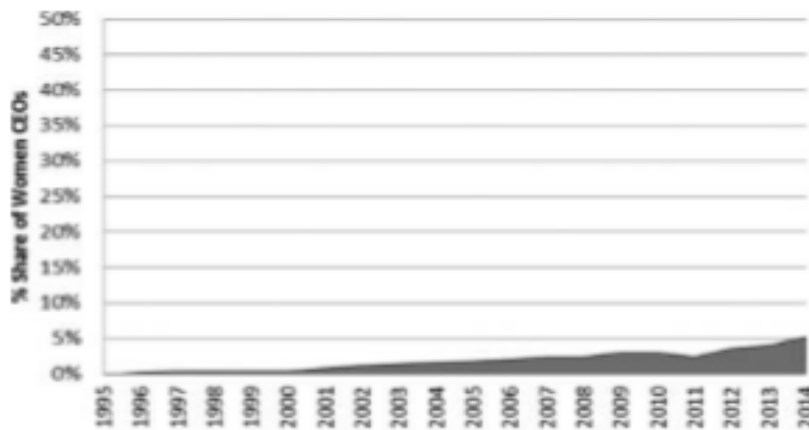
In a review titled ‘Women Matter’ by McKinsey & Company (2007) a comparison is drawn between 45 companies that have no women in executive leadership roles and 13 companies that have approximately 30% women in executive leadership roles (Palmer, 2014). Furthermore, Palmer conducted a study, which has indicated that there is enhanced financial return when women have ‘a seat at the table’. Palmer further cites evidence obtained in a Credit Suisse Research Institute study titled ‘Gender Diversity and the Impact on Corporate Performance’ undertaken in 2012 that organisations with gender diversity boards outnumbered organisations that lacked gender multiplicity panels by 20%.

By drawing on the concept of executive women in leadership, Hurley and Choudhary (2016) allude to the prominence of a handful of female CEOs, namely, Mary Barra (CEO of General Motors), the first female to head an automobile corporation, and Marillyn Hewson (CEO of Lockheed Martin). Egan (2015) is of the opinion that these women CEOs are exceptions rather than the rule.

Hurley and Choudhary (2016) indicate that women comprise merely 24% of CEOs of Standard and Poor’s (S&P) 500 companies. This situation can be ascribed to several obstructions, including the ‘glass ceiling’ and ‘glass cliff’ occurrences, career intermissions (for example, motherhood), the absence of role models or coaches and the volition to refrain from work-life stressors (Matsa & Miller, 2011; *The Economist*, 2009). According to Bjerk (2008, p. 980), these factors are not necessarily indicative of gender categorisation or ‘explicit discrimination’.

In the same vein, Parker, Horowitz & Rohal (2015, p. 13) note the difficulty women experience in making headway in obtaining senior leadership roles in organisations because of their diffidence. Statistics made available by the Catalyst organisation in 2015, women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies comprised only 5.2% of all CEOs. Parker et al. (2015) further convey that the share proportion of women who are CEOs lingers once the CEOs of Fortune 1000 companies are noted.

Figure 2.2 depicts the slow progression of women to the more senior chain of command as far as business leadership is depicted (Hurley and Choudhary, 2016).



Source: Catalyst (2015), www.catalyst.org

Figure 2.2. Share of Women CEOs in Fortune 500

2.3.3 Presence in the C-Suite

According to Brief and Smith-Crowe (2016), organisations are entities with discernible restrictions, chain of command, rules, processes and communication channels.

Kleiner (2003) asserts that outcomes within businesses are returns— people act together and reason about matters in order to meet the requirements and urgencies set out by certain important individuals or core groups in organisations who are knowledgeable and have impact and power. Furthermore, Kleiner alludes to three rudimentary principles pertaining to the core group theory. The first principle is that ‘An organisation’s direction is the aggregate of the decisions made within its boundaries. In other words, organisations do not just move where the top of the hierarchy tells them to go. They move where the decision makers, at every level, send them’ (Kleiner, 2003, p. 667). Kleiner asserts that pronouncements made at top management level are evident and understandably persuasive. The second principle is that ‘Organisations strive to fulfil the perceived needs

and wants of a core group of key people' (Kleiner, 2003, p. 669). Kleiner proposes that core groups are the energisers and drivers of an organisation. The third principle is that 'We can know and change an organisation only by knowing and influencing the perception of its core group' (Kleiner, 2003, p. 672). Kleiner posits that the characteristics and principles of a core group are indicative of an organisation's stance.

All organisations have a chain of command, which is accompanied by power, status and the right to make decisions (Zuckerman, 2010). According to Anderson and Brion (2014), power is an aspect that is unique to influence, esteem and leadership, moreover because people are receptive to others who they think are greater in capability, acumen and proficiency.

Top management positions go with legitimate power (Emerson, 1962), which can be a dynamic force in organisations (Brief & Smith-Crowe, 2016). Coercive power entails manipulating subordinates through penalties and rewards, which involves inducing subordinates through approval and preferment (Brief & Smith-Crowe, 2016).

De Wit and Meyer (2004) believe that leading others requires power in order to influence them. Power refers to the implements available to leaders to sway others. Consequently, the capacity to be a frontrunner necessitates the use of power since power and influence are key factors in leadership (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2006).

In general, the potential influence of leaders may stem from their position and their person (Phondej & Yousapronpaiboon, 2015). A leader's formal function in a firm and his or her particular character, knowledge, skills and relationships place him or her in a position of power.

Martin (2003) asserts that even though women acquire entrance to power positions it is likely that their ability to bring about change at lower levels is somewhat curtailed due to their willingness to conform to gender expectations or existing organisational norms relating to strength (Acker 1990, Berrey, 2014). Correspondingly, Maume (2011, p. 289) proposes that females in leadership roles are not adequately influential: they cannot

influence the line of business of their subordinates or relate to authoritative males at the top of the ranks.

On the other hand, Stainback et al. (2016) are of the opinion that women in the upper echelons are remarkable given that they have experienced and combated stereotyping. They may well have adequate resources to make an impact on transformation as their presence increases. It has been demonstrated that when there is a larger pool of women on corporate boards, there is more female representation in lower-level management roles (Skaggs, Stainback & Duncan, 2012).

According to Anderson and Brion (2014), research indicates that a number of factors forecast the acquisition of power, which include personal competence, social interaction and physical, personality and demographic features. These authors posit that competence results in the attainment of power since competence is a respected resource, that a strategic position in social interactions results in power because of the access and control over information and people, and that a competent appearance creates an impression of a person that has talent and personal characteristics (such as dominance) that are associated with leadership. However, Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari (2011) advocate that factors such as race and gender contribute to power loss in the case of females. Furthermore, Anderson and Brion (2014) posit that although women are regarded as possessing less interpersonal power, they compare well with their male counterparts as far as positional power is concerned.

2.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the lack of women in senior leadership roles, especially in the C-Suite and referred to the fact that men still occupy influential roles. The classifications of themes applicable to the C-Suite were also noted.

In the next chapter, the critical competencies and challenges relating to role players in the C-Suite are reviewed

CHAPTER 3: CRITICAL COMPETENCIES AND CHALLENGES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Competence is defined 'as the skills, knowledge, attitudes, attributes and values required in performing a task and the ability to apply them in the work environment.' (Lombard & Crafford, 2003, p 45). Spendlove (2007) defines competencies behaviours that are influential in the delivery of desired consequences or outcomes.

The structures of leadership preference and growth practices may be identified by capabilities such as knowledge, skills, abilities, other characteristics (KSAOs), responsibilities, roles and competencies (Horey and Fallesen, n.d). Moreover, according to Briscoe and Hall (1999) competencies tend to be a customary technique that is used to recognise the prerequisite for leadership roles since an association is made for these fundamental depiction of accountabilities.

In human resource management studies, competencies have been defined as a concept that alludes to the behavioural actions of people that result in competent performance and as people's capabilities to meet a collection of outwardly approved criteria (Ahadzie, Proverbs & Olomolaiye, 2008; Cheng, Dainty & Moore, 2003; Tett et al., 2000; Trivellas & Reklitis, 2014). Trivellas and Reklitis (2014) add that competency refers to the behavioural proportions that aid competent actions whereas competence refers to the capacity of an individual to adhere to particular criteria that have been established.

King, Fowler and Zeithaml (2001) identify competencies as characteristics that give organisations a competitive edge. These authors propose that a competency must be valuable, rare and difficult or costly to imitate

3.2 COMPETENCIES FOR THE C-SUITE

Three clusters of competencies have been identified by Dulewicz and Higgs (2003; 2005) namely intellectual (IQ), managerial (MQ) and emotional (EQ) competencies. These

classifications, which are discussed below, are based on a large body of knowledge derived from leadership literature.

3.2.1 Critical Competencies

Based on information gathered from organisations (regardless of their size, revenue and association with unions), Tubbs and Schulz (2006) have compiled the following taxonomy of global leadership and the meta-competencies needed for giving efficient direction

Figure 3.1 particularises fifty competencies, which have been clustered under seven meta-competencies, which are cited, from Tubbs and Schulz (2006)



Figure 3.1. Taxonomy of leadership competencies and meta-competencies

Source: Abridged from Tubbs (2005)

The seven meta-competencies depicted in Figure 3.1 comprise fifty competencies (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006). The seven meta-competencies identified by Tubbs and Schulz (2006) are discussed below.

- **Metacompetency I: Understanding the Big Picture**

Leaders who are knowledgeable about the whole organisation can earn respect. Other skills include employing efficient compensation plans and ethical practices, utilising technology and applying global sensitivity.

- **Metacompetency II: Attitudes are Everything**

Organisational success is influenced by factors such as appreciating diversity, believing in the organisation's vision and dynamically chasing that vision and showing self-assurance and confidence in other people.

- **Metacompetency III: Leadership, the Driving Force**

This area of competency comprises competencies such as mentoring others, delegating efficiently, leading with empathy, establishing trust, going against outmoded methods and being a role model.

- **Metacompetency IV: Communication, the Leader's Voice**

Efficient communication competencies include emotional intelligence, skilled use of language, presentation skills, interviewing and active listening skills as well as good negotiation skills.

- **Metacompetency V: Innovation and Creativity**

Examples of competencies in this category include creating an environment that is supportive of innovation, stimulated decision-making, the reframing of new ideas and the cultivation of creative capabilities.

- **Metacompetency VI: Leading Change**

Competencies in this area comprise effecting transformational change, creating an environment for continuous learning, establishing support mechanisms, managing change processes and supporting individual and structural change in organisations.

- **Metacompetency VII: Teamwork and Followership**

Competencies in this area consist of directing organisational politics, reward systems, team incentives, empowerment and problem solving.

With reference to laying down criteria for the selection of leaders, Hiller, DeChurch, Murase and Doty (2011) point out those criterion selections have implications for inferring leadership since diverse kinds of data and intensities of benchmarks may yield different findings about a particular leader. Austin and Villanova (1992) state that the aspect of criterion challenges relating to job performance has been well researched, but Day (2001) points out that it has not been well documented in leadership literature.

Hiller et al. (2011) suggest that leadership influences essential criterion, which include obligation, contentment, perception, inspiration, social responsibility and behavioural practices. Furthermore, these authors state that possessing the properties of leadership should lead to efficacy and results.

Attitude is key as far as leadership is concerned since efficient leadership pertains to inspiring and motivating individuals and, most importantly, to influencing people's mood positively (Lord & Brown, 2004; Yukl, 2010).

The behavioural component of leadership is also important. This includes both 'actual behaviours and observable or reported processes of specific actions' (Hiller et al., 2011).

In a collaborative study conducted by Egon Zehnder International and McKinsey & Company (2011), it is advocated that there is no standard skill set for success, but that teams must display a number of competencies, in particular the capability to see further than the current situation and discern future growth opportunities, if they want to achieve outstanding growth.

Building on what has been said thus far, the statement by Hiller et al. (2011) that there are important differences in the kind of competencies and expectations that senior leadership calls for, can be confirmed. Moreover, Ibarra, Ely and Kolb (2013) assert that occupying a leadership role, attaining new skill sets and adapting to the role are only part of being a trailblazer because it also implicates the necessary identity transference. There is incongruity between how women are perceived and what attributes people tend to associate with leadership. The act of incorporating leadership into one's individuality is a struggle for women since trustworthiness in a culture that is not acquainted with women has to be recognised (Ibarra et al., 2013).

The tendency is for women to be judged according to benchmarks set for men. Lyotard (1989, p. 114) observes that women do not display order, rationality and sagacity, and unless women become 'homologues of men' they fail to acquire critical leadership skills.

However, Zenger and Folkman (2012) have found that both men and women can enhance their leadership skills and capabilities in all areas. According to these authors, women get higher scores than men in the following competencies:

- Inventiveness
- Exercises self-growth
- Lofty levels of integrity and truthfulness
- Develops other people
- Co-operation and team work
- Results orientated

- Encourages and inspires others
- Builds relations
- Resolves problems
- Communicates strongly and frequently

3.3 LEADERSHIP IN THE C-SUITE

Critical competencies for effective leadership may be understood in terms of four common groupings namely, intellectual skills, relational skills, business skills and tactical skills (Morgeson, Campion & Mumford, 2007). A study directed by the Corporate Executive Board (2001) indicated that the leadership competencies ought to be at higher levels. Sparks and Gentry (2012) have identified the following leadership competencies: displaying resourcefulness, effecting change management, building and mending relationships and balancing personal life and work. Researchers, which include Lyness and Judiesch (2008), accept the significance of these competencies.

However, it must be determined if certain leadership competencies are generally recognised or whether they are tailored to a particular culture (Sparks & Gentry, 2012).

Furthermore, it must also be discerned if certain leadership competencies are generally recognized or tailored to a particular culture (Sparks and Gentry, 2012).

Leadership involves steering an organisation with coherence to reach an intended purpose while influencing followers accordingly. Northouse's (2007, p3) defines leadership as 'a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.'

Dorbrzanska (2005) advocates that leadership is regarded as the capacity to direct and navigate the autonomy of humans. Humphrey (2002) alludes to the emotional aspect of leadership whereby leaders acknowledge the emotional states of people within groups induce those emotions and manage such emotional states accordingly. However, leadership comprises several dimensions, and generally, it is thought that individuals who

possess leadership abilities are unusual, talented and exceptional. The literature reports that leadership comprises influencing and motivating facets (Dess & Picken, 2000; Vroom & Jago, 2007). Northhouse (2003) proposes that leadership is a course of action that has some kind of influence over people within a group in pursuit of a shared vision and objectives.

Schafer (2008) believes that leadership is essential for establishing the achievements and results in both profit and non-profit organisations. Murphy and Johnson (2011) have concluded that organisations in general are obligated to show evidence of leadership effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness emanates from the notion of leadership and various meanings have been attached to it over time (Ramchunder & Martins, 2014). Hollander (1978) defines leadership effectiveness as 'the accomplishment of the recognized objectives of cooperative action, which initially depends on influence'.

Leadership also encompasses particular skills and capabilities. Maccoby and Scudder (2011) believe that flexibility in relation to situational demands is an important skill for leadership. There are various schools of leadership that have been recognised in the last century, in particular those who support the idea that differences in leadership styles are suited to varied situations, resulting in higher performance (Muller & Turner, 2007).

Recently, the competency school of leadership has come to the fore, advocating the amalgamation of all former schools of thought since they all deal with personalities, deeds and emotional intelligence competencies (Trivellas & Reklitis, 2014).

In retrospect, researchers have used the term 'competency' as an alternative to the term 'competence' and vice versa (Trivellas & Reklitis, 2014). However, researchers have indicated that a distinction should be drawn between the two concepts.

Tropman and Wooten (2010) posits that leadership comprise seven concepts that begins with the letter C, hence the phrase '7C-context' as explained below

Characteristics

Characteristics are the individual traits of an executive. In this context, one would be mindful of aspects such as age, gender, culture, and the congruency that exists between these features and those of the organisation. Additionally, a CEO has to possess a combination of both leadership and executive characteristics. Strength of character and willpower, combined with humility, are essential characteristics, and a good fit with the required competencies is very important.

Competence

Competence is described as the required familiarity and capability needed for the task; it also refers to the ability to apply both attributes rather than merely owning these aspects. “Competencies involves knowledge and skills”

Conditions

Conditions pertain to the makeup of the organisations, for example the organisational edifice, climate, strategy and process. Every component ought to have ‘integrity’

Contexts

Context refers to external stimuli that may influence an organisation, such as the economic climate and demographic modifications as well as the ways in which the organisation could affect the environment

Change

Change is a ‘dynamic element’ to the spheres of the above. Innovation and invention prompts change in an organisation so when the environment changes, the executive must be capable of adjusting to the situation.

Adjorlolo et al. (2013) indicate that women employed in single-gender organisations tend to display great levels of supposed competence, but this does not suggest that they are confident in effecting methodical change at complex levels. On the other hand, women in mixed-gender organisations tend to experience confidence in the organisation but do not relate to individual and organisational skills that pertain to malleability. This is indicative of a competency gap since women are not able to translate individual skill sets at an organisational level (Adjorlolo et al., 2013).

Collaboration

Collaboration is about the network that the executive forms. This is seen as the 'social capital' of an executive. Leadership roles require accessibility to the right contacts who are in a position and willing to assist. Relations among executives are characterised by shared attributes such as trust and respect.

Crucibles

Crucibles refer to the capacity of an executive to adjust to difficulty in a situation through knowledge and by being robust. Emotional intelligence is thus considered important because the person is able to detect feelings, affinities and biases, which permits effective execution to deal with situations. Salovey and Mayer (1990) refers to five features of emotional intelligence:

- (1) Self-awareness- awake to one's feelings in a given moment
- (2) Management of one's emotions so the response stems from self-awareness
- (3) Creating self-motivation- the emotion aligns with the goal
- (4) Recognition of others' emotions-empathy
- (5) Managing relations- dealing with the emotion of the person that one is engaged with

George (2000) advocates that organisations are faced with changing variables; therefore, leadership necessitates more than task and procedural competencies. Similarly, Riggio et al. (2002) point out that proficient leaders demonstrate diverse intelligence approaches and are able to manage a number of situations effectively. As individuals move up the

ranks, emotional intelligence becomes as necessary as IQ and technical skills (Carmeli, 2003; Coleman et al., 2002; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003). Groysberg, Kevin, Kelly and MacDonald (2011) add that functional and technical abilities are less central at a C-level; what is essential are business rudiments and leadership proficiency.

Studies have indicated that effective leadership stems from various aspects, which include experience, personality traits and organisational environments (De Mascia, 2015). As stated by Gerber (1987) leadership qualities have frequently been affiliated with a masculine persona. In essence, as believed by Hopfl and Matilal (2007) studies have not adequately examined women leadership methodically.

In contradiction to this approach, Eagly (2007) believes that the kind of leadership should direct such studies. A meta-analysis of the leadership styles of both men and women indicated that female leaders are prone to participate in transformational leadership behaviours (Eagly, Hohannesen-Schmidt & Van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Transformational leaders tend to be charismatic, compassionate and motivational with a communal, reciprocal and participative attitude (Jogulu, 2010). Transformational leadership is more effective compared to other forms of leadership, yet women in leadership are appraised less positively than men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, researchers agree that, in general, hurdles and impediments restrict women in embracing leadership roles (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

3.3.1. Connective Leadership

Connective leadership refers to the association among individuals and a group with a view to achieving mutual objectives. This type of leadership establishes links among people and is mindful of the objectives of other people. A wide range of behavioural strategies plays a role in connective leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 1992).

This form of leadership is grounded in association (Gilligan, 1982) and the establishment of networks that hold people jointly accountable. Connective leadership is an approach that regards accountability as a joint effort and there is no selfishness towards others in a

network. This perspective embraces both transactional and transformational behaviours (Tichy & Devanna, 1986), encompasses more than individuality and charisma (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) and transcends competition and group effort (Badaracco, 1991).

Taking care of and accepting responsibility for others come naturally to women. Men are regarded as having matured and achieved individuality once they have parted from the motherly figure (Lipman-Blumen, 1992). Furthermore, Lipman-Blumen alludes to research in the field of psychology that has found that women take responsibility for keeping groups together, irrespective of their families or work teams.

Powell (1993) posits that there are three perspectives on the dissimilarities between genders, the first being that there are no distinctions between men and women managers. The second perspective is that males are better managers, and the third is that there are stereotypical distinctions relating to the softer side of women in managerial positions.

Moreover, Fagenson (1990) advocates that women in CEO positions tend to be more masculine whereas Powell (1993) asserts that all managers seem to adapt to their relevant working environments. This perception is further clarified by Takala and Aaltio (2007) who suggest that stereotypical opinions and approaches about males and females are held by people in general, which cause them to be oblivious to recognising that both genders are capable and talented.

3.3.2. Strategic Leadership

Strategic leadership, according to Ireland and Hitt (2005), is the ability of a person to expect and visualise, uphold flexibility, think tactically and collaborate with others to implement transformation that will initiate a sustainable future for the organisation.

According to Appelbaum and Paese (n.d.), top-level leaders in strategic leadership settings will engage in nine roles

Navigator

The navigator has the capacity to manage intricate issues, difficulties and opportunities in order to take the necessary actions. For instance, navigators have a sense of urgency, applicability and significance and are able to detect root causes promptly.

Strategist

The goals of the strategist are in harmony with the vision of the broader organisation. The strategist considers the future and makes decisions that enable the organisation to realise its vision. For example, the bigger picture is understood and the identification of risks is mitigated through appropriate actions.

Entrepreneur

The entrepreneur is cognisant of markets, products and services that require creativity and a fresh approach. For instance, premeditated risks are taken and new possibilities are considered.

Mobiliser

The mobiliser accesses the means and sustenance that are required to realise multifaceted objectives. For example, the mobiliser controls and incorporates organisational resources and makes use of networking approaches to assist with the realisation of objectives.

Talent Advocate

The talent advocate attracts, grows and retains talented people who have the required skills and potential to meet both present and future organisational needs. To illustrate, the talent advocate will offer developmental opportunities for an ability that has been identified and will relentlessly secure high-potential talent.

Captivator

The captivator imparts trust and takes possession of organisational strategy and ownership. For example, the captivator changes people from being passive to being committed and displaying energy.

Global Thinker

The global thinker maximises organisational performance by incorporating information from all sources and understands cross-cultural encounters and individual difficulties.

Change Driver

The change driver gives attention to continuous development by creating an environment that is conducive to change, detecting the need for change before it becomes necessary.

Enterprise Guardian

The enterprise guardian takes risky decisions at the expense of emotions and personal relationships.

Reynolds (2004) states that 21st-century leaders are required to be more involved and should ensure that the future impact of their interventions on their organisations takes preference over strategy and vision. Building on this finding, Reynolds accentuates the need for strong leadership in organisations.

The first phase in understanding proficiency in executive leadership is to establish what the job profile is and to link that with the needs of the organisation (Wells & Hejna, 2009). According to these authors, 21st-century leaders must have the competencies mentioned below, and Klimecki (2010) supports their view as follows:

External Awareness

Leaders must be able to build a solid network within the industry to allow for the exchange of information, the acquisition of knowledge about market relevance and the making of informed decisions. Leaders must have a sensible outlook on both internal and external affairs.

Self-awareness

Leaders must know their strengths and weaknesses. Leaders depend on feedback and support from others around them.

Delegation

The most effective leaders tend to delegate decisions and are available to attend to problems.

Decision-making

Good leaders know how to appraise information and only contribute according to their expertise.

Talent Management

Executive leaders must implement talent practices and develop a culture and mind-set for harnessing skills.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the competencies that literature has identified as necessary for leadership roles



Figure 3.2. Competencies for 21st Century Leadership

Source: Wells and Hejna (2009)

3.4. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR CRITICAL COMPETENCIES

Insightful findings that Elliott and Stead (2008) have arrived at relate to four imperative 'dynamic inter-related factors' that serve as a cornerstone in the lives of prominent women. These factors are rearing surroundings, single-mindedness, engagements and associations.

3.4.1. Upbringing

The manner in which women are brought up tends to shape the way they deal with leadership. Features related to their childhood, involvements, happenings and positions in a family or community have a bearing on how women perceive leadership (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

Scholars assert that who we are becomes embedded during our childhood (Caffarella & Olson, 1993; Hennig & Jardim, 1977). Infantile affiliations, evolving happenings, prospects and experiences (that comprise hardships and painful occurrences) shape each person (Cooke, 2004), and some influences and personal events during childhood serve as defining moments (Madsen, 2007).

3.4.2. Surroundings

Social, historical, cultural and political contexts play an important part in shaping women's leadership roles. These contexts can encourage the development of certain traits such as tenacity, strength of mind and character, desire and ambition, traits which may become central frameworks for behaviour and may explain why women are motivated to do things (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

3.4.3. Single-Mindedness

Focus and passion are crucial to achievement as evidenced by remarkable women such as Rebecca Stephens, Betty Boothroyd, May Blood and Tanni Grey-Thompson. These

attributes give birth to purpose and energy and form the essence of having ambition (Elliott & Stead, 2008).

3.4.4. Engagement and Association

Forming the necessary networks and associations is important for leadership, especially during difficult times. Specialised associations become intricate as the careers of women advance (Elliott & Stead, 2008). Efficient leaders depend on strategic networks and reliable associates to achieve results (Santana & Pappa, 2015). Moreover, networking fosters enhanced personal and professional outcomes (Gibson, Hardy & Buckley, 2014).

A large body of research has accentuated the significance of leadership development for organisational success (Charan, Drotter & Noel, 2001; Fulmer & Goldsmith, 2001).

Learning is contingent on two facets, according to Reynolds, namely, the willingness to learn and the influence of the work environment. Examples of effective learning programmes are mentoring, coaching and 360⁰ feedback.

The 360⁰ feedback programme is a fundamental instrument that creates consciousness and self-knowledge of one's bearing on others (Day, 2001). This programme can challenge self-perceptions and detect areas for improvement (Conger & Toegel, 2003) and can furnish participants with feedback regarding their leadership scopes, which can also help women, deal more effectively with gender stereotypes.

According to Santana and Pappa (2015), managing organisational complexity, thinking, and acting strategically are the two most important competencies for women to develop.

Much is expected of women who occupy executive positions, and, unfortunately, their experiences are not always positive. One of the primary displeasures they experience is that they feel like castaways regardless of their accomplishments. Based on this awareness, the next section provides a review of the literature that reports on the hurdles women in executive leadership roles experience.

3.5. CHALLENGES IN THE C-SUITE

Kolev (2012) has documented findings that suggest that executive women surpass their male counterparts concerning several variables, such as delivering excellent work, setting goals and mentoring personnel. The question that arises is, 'If women are so great, why [aren't] more of them ... running big companies?' (Sharpe in *Businessweek*, 2000 as quoted by Kolev, 2012).

It is now well established that the exposure women have to leadership is unlike that of their male counterparts (De Mascia, 2015). Even though men and women display dissimilar leadership potential, organisations tend to gauge all leaders according to characteristics applicable to male-dominated environments (Vanderbroeck, 2010).

The perspective of a UK Board is that worthy headship entails contributing to board decisions through modest sway and influence as an alternative to 'beating the table or being the person who's leading from the front' (p. 47). In accordance with this point of view, the abilities suited to a CEO may not be becoming to a credible non-executive director (a context in which harsh leadership is not required) (Atewologun & Doldor, 2013).

Lord and Hall (2005) advocate leadership development by way of experience, in other words, effecting 'qualitative changes' by increasing knowledge as the leader advances from being a novice to an expert. In order to attain tacit knowledge one needs exposure through experience. The development of tacit knowledge is a method of exercising inherent knowledge that assists in solving actual practical problems (Sternberg, 1981). Tacit competencies are difficult to replicate and are context specific (King et al., 2001).

Eagly (2012) believes that the 'glass ceiling' does not need to be a perplexing issue given the fact that women in all organisational ranks are destined to face challenges. Eagly proposes that stereotyping that generally exists around the capability of women and the preconceptions about women force women to work harder. Note should be taken of research evidence that decisions about promotions at the top levels of organisations tend

to be biased, resulting in women in male-dominated environments being disadvantaged (Duong Thuong & Skitmore, 2003; Eagly, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 1994).

3.6. CLASSIFYING THE CHALLENGES

3.6.1. Career Formation

The career paths of women tend to be described in terms of the difficulties associated with harmonising work and family commitments (Brumit Kropf, 1998; Schreiber, 1998). This 'double burden syndrome' (McKinsey & Company, 2007), which highlights that women have to fulfil workplace and household obligations, is particularly apparent in African and Asian contexts. Women tend to be held accountable for social obligations and they cannot be persuaded that they are taken seriously and are granted the same opportunities as men to exhibit their capabilities (De Mascia, 2015).

Women experience more stress managing their career and family obligations (Padma, 2010). They need to take more time off from work to attend to obligations, and this may result in career interruptions and hindrances in acquiring necessary experience (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The research conducted by Cheung and Halpern (2010) indicates that children require their fathers to provide constancy and be accountable because men are generally regarded as the breadwinners of the family, whereas the converse is true for women.

Findings by Mercer (2010) indicate that work-life balance is the third largest barrier to women's advancement. A number of women are executives as well as mothers and their responsibility to cherish their husbands and children and to fulfil their executive roles may cause them to experience tension, which may have an adverse effect on their roles in the workplace (Buckalew et al., 2012). Parker (2009) reports that one third of women attribute their restriction to attain top management roles to family obligations and accountabilities. Halpern and Cheng (2008) state that women who occupy executive roles are very direct in communicating their main concerns and that their day-to-day decisions are directed by the needs of family and work.

Achieving work-life balance can be defined as the capacity to fulfil work and non-work responsibilities evenly (Jyoti & Harsh, 2016). According to Greenhaus (2010), striving for work-life balance may be viewed as an undertaking that will result in experiencing gratification and reduced conflict in both spheres. To this, Jyoti and Harsh (2016) add that gratification is grounded in one's perception. In addition, Shobitha, Poulouse and Sudarsan (2014) state that work-life balance comprises being involved in two spheres and living up to the expectations of both. On the other hand, Gulbahar, Amjad, et al. (2014) posit that work-life balance is associated with the urgencies that a person decides on.

Gunkel (2007) suggests that gender has an effect on the situation at home and at work since household chores are seen as the responsibility of women regardless of employment status. Jyoti and Harsh (2016) refer to a conceptual framework consisting of three groups of perception (employee perception, organisational perception and social perception) that affect the work-life balance of both employees and the organisation (see Figure 3.3).

3.6.2. Employee Perception

Research by Rehman Ajmal (2012) has shown that a perception of work-life balance depends on the life stage of an individual. Furthermore, it is believed that a workforce is required to select which situations to deal with instead of to respond to predicaments that are either work or home-related (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). Jyoti and Harsh (2016) indicate that people define success based on perception regardless of their professions.

3.6.3. Organisational Perception

Jyoti and Harsh (2016) state that organisations ought to consider their reactions to employees who prioritise family above work. There is a tendency to stress the importance of being physically present and to pass remarks about the obligations of those absent from the workplace. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that organisations want their employees to put their work first as they want to maintain their competitive edge in the market.

3.6.4. Social Perception

It is believed that women are emotionally connected to their families and often abandon their careers to spend more time with their families and to avoid feeling guilty if they neglect to do that. This results in frustration and in due course women experience the impact of career interruptions (Jyoti & Harsh, 2016). These authors believe that society must be mindful not to restrict women to domestic domains: their career development must be promoted and not impeded due to social norms.

Figure 3.3 illustrates the perceptions that has been formed

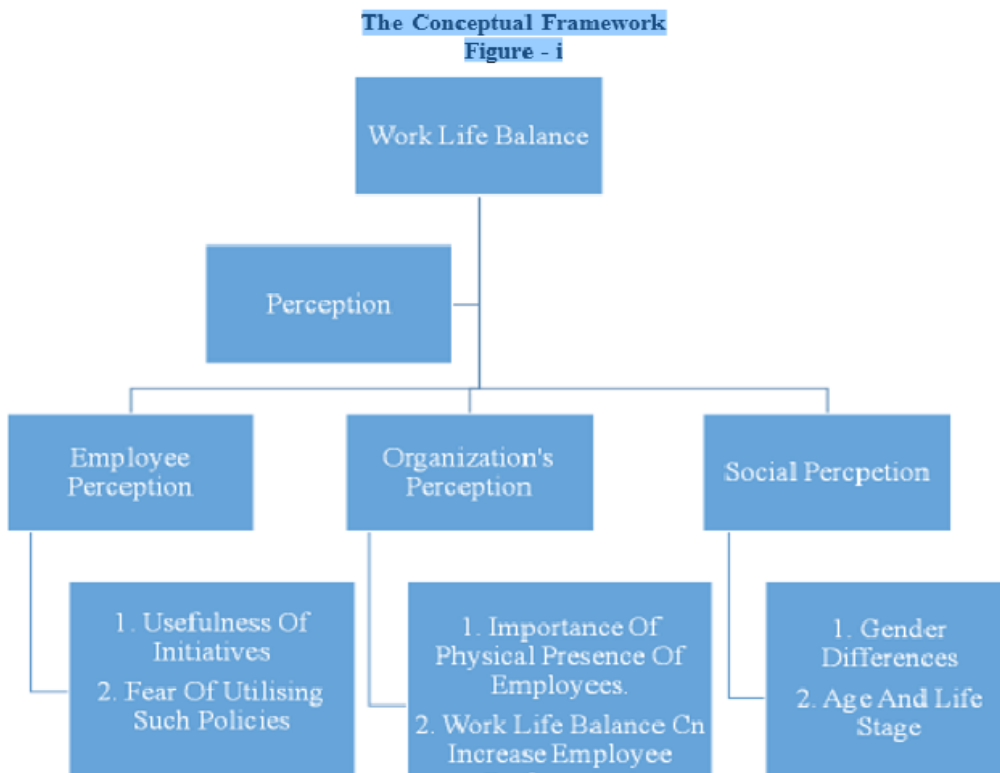


Figure 3.3: Conceptual Framework

Source: Dave & Purohit / The Clarion (2016)

3.6.5. Organisational Culture

In the past, many organisational structures were developed to accommodate men as women were not considered for leadership roles, and the perception that men are better suited to leadership roles has created a cycle in this respect (Ibarra et al., 2013). Some of these structures pose hurdles to women. For example, late working hours or meetings in early morning hours can be seen as a bias against women who have family commitments (Wentling, 1996). Organisations should guard against disadvantaging women in ways such as these.

According to the study conducted by McKinsey & Company (2015), women are still underrepresented in the corporate pipeline, and gender inequality is evident in high-ranking leadership roles. Organisations should ensure that women have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The gender representation in the corporate pipeline has been depicted in Figure 3.4

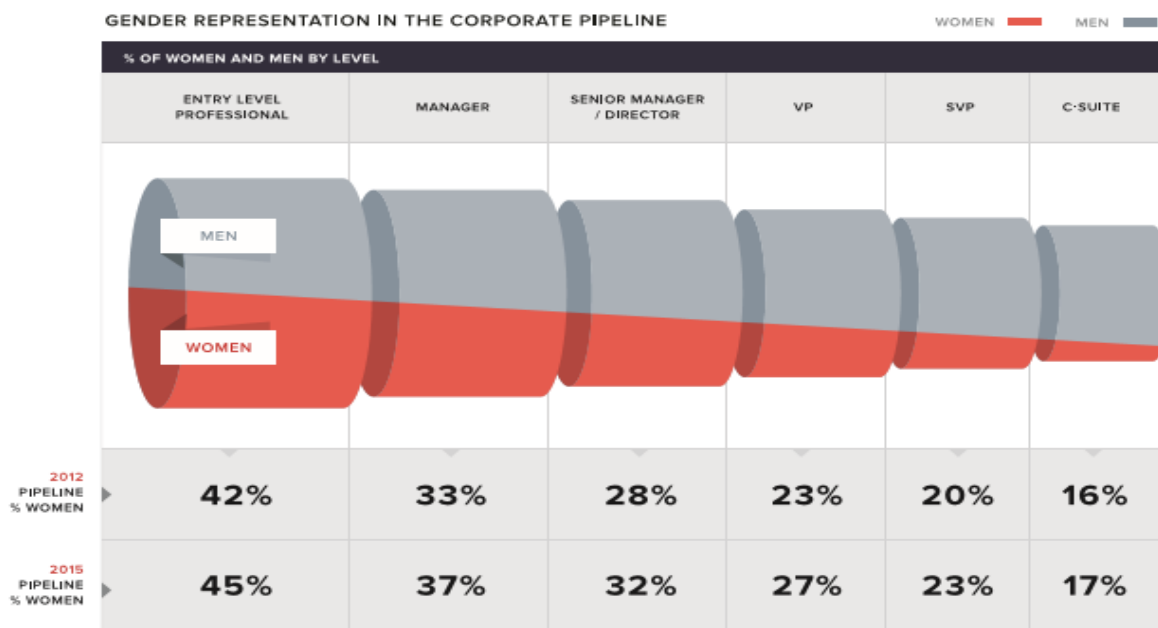


Figure 3.4. Gender Representation in the Corporate Pipeline

Source: Women in the workplace: Corporate Pipeline (McKinsey & Company, 2015)

3.6.6. Gender Bias and Stereotypes

In a report published by Catalyst (2004), it is stated that there is not much difference between the qualities of men and women who occupy senior roles in organisations. However, according to Lyness and Heilman (2006), research indicates that women are required to work harder to be regarded as being as capable as their male counterparts are. Women are confronted by the dilemma of either being liked or being acknowledged as capable since women who display virile characteristics are disliked (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007) whereas women who display womanly characteristics in a male-dominated environment are regarded as too sensitive and timid (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Meredith (2009, p 14-16), the CEO of The Dealmaker, considers the advantages and disadvantages of being a woman in business from the perspective of a 'work diva' to illustrate the differences between men and women. Descriptions of five of these characteristics are quoted from her book in Table 3.

Table 3: Advantages and Disadvantages of being a woman in business

Advantages of being a woman in business	Disadvantage of being a woman in business
'There is an old adage that women don't make good soldiers, but when they do become soldiers, they are far more ruthless and fearless than their male counterparts'	'Men are the incumbent power holders. They hold down the big jobs and are in positions of power, they make the key decisions-and they seem to have a private club from which women are excluded'
'Women have 'feminine wiles'- they are generally more intuitive, cunning and manipulative than men'	'Men are more prepared to put their jobs first, so their professional commitment is perceived to be greater than that of women, particularly women with children'
'Not all women are destined for motherhood. When a woman puts her career first, she is usually more committed than most men would ever be-she will happily work long hours, sacrifice her	'Men are far more ready to invest in themselves to elevate their levels of business knowledge and skill-they attend courses and read the business books, financial magazines and trade journals,

private time and be prepared to do work that is well beneath her capabilities to get ahead'	while women are busy lamenting, 'I don't understand all this financial stuff', or 'I'm no good with numbers'
'When it comes to human relations, women are perceptive, insightful and flexible, which is why they are better at dealing with conflict and effecting change in the work environment'	'Men who are confident are seen as confident, whereas women who are confident are seen as aggressive and pushy'
'Being the sensitive sex, women are better able to read the subtleties and nuances of situations. They pick up details like body language, ulterior motives, hidden agendas and vibes that men tend to miss'	'The glass ceiling is a reality- women have to not only work harder, but also smarter, to be taken seriously in the business world'

3.6.7. Networking Shortfalls

Leadership is reliant on both competencies and capability, but forming relationships are also important (Cormier, 2007), and women do have supportive structures in place (Cormier, 2007; Michelle et al., 2007). Women tend not to share or disclose their accomplishments when interacting with both men and women: their approach is to be modest or to downplay their endeavours for fear of not being well received if they disclose too much about what they have achieved (Cialdini & De Nicholas, 1989; Daubman & Sigall, 1997). Modest people do not draw attention to themselves but emphasise the accomplishments of others instead (Wade, 2001). Berg, Stephan and Dodson (1981) have found that women do not often draw others' attention to their achievements whereas men do so regularly. This finding suggests that men and women have different interpretations about sharing their success and the way in which they believe it will be received by others (Budworth & Mann, 2010).

Rowe and Crafford (2003) draw an analogy between poor networking in a work environment and the ill relationships in the tale of Cinderella between Cinderella and her stepmother and sisters, which are reflective of a frail supportive structure. These authors

support the opinion expressed by Kanter (1997) that 'The higher one goes in an organisation, the less likely bureaucratic policies apply and the more critical one's informal network becomes'. Informal networking can serve to facilitate leadership possibilities, for example, sharing information and recommendations for possible opportunities, furnishing feedback and emotional support as well as forming a reputational impact (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1985; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1993; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Westphal & Milton, 2000).

A different perspective offered by De Mascia (2015) is that women experience difficulty in networking in environments dominated by men. Women have less effectual contacts whereas men tend to have a circle of influential associations (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Meredith (2009) quotes the following statement made by Cynthia Chin-Lee: 'A personal network is like a safety net, hanging beneath the high perch of the tightrope walker'. Meredith adds that networking is as critical as the quality of a woman's network, both of which enable a woman to ascend the corporate ladder at a rapid pace.

3.6.8. Personal Challenges experienced

It is essential for women to hold their own and to be self-assured about their performance and ambitions (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Lewis-Enright et al. (2009) believe those women's own sentiments, poor self-esteem, secretive feelings of inadequacy and caginess can be a hurdle to success. Men are inclined to be more confident than women (Bengtsson, Persson & Willenhag, 2005), particularly where financial matters are concerned (Barber & Odean, 2001; Correll, 2001). Research has substantiated that women also seek recognition of their competencies, knowledge and proficiencies and that women like to assist other women and that they look up to other women (Burke, 1994; Mattis, 1993; Rindfleisch, 2000).

Nevertheless, there are women in executive roles who do not want other women to progress through the ranks, and the concept of the alpha female syndrome has been developed to describe such women. An alpha female tends to be abrasive and she does

not want to work with other women and would rather promote men than women. In some leadership environments, women are harsh, resistant and jagged (Cherne, 2003; Gini, 2001; Johnson & Helm, 2011).

The literature provides evidence that women in the workplace do not have adequate support structures and are not trained, educated and groomed while ascending the corporate ladder (Cherry, 2001; Johnson & Helm, 2011; Klenke, 1996).

3.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The meaning of a leader tends to be influenced by beliefs and the attitude towards women is that of affability, passivity and emotive individualities that are attributed to women that eliminate women for leadership roles (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011).

According to Boatwright and Egidio (2013) patriarchal and hierarchical climates discourages women to seek leadership roles due to a feeling of being adversely evaluated by peers. This dread, experienced by women can be attributed to views about gender status and gender stereotypes (Ridgeway, 2004). Ridgeway also believes that socially constructed organisations can be impacted by external conditions, which includes political and economic influences. This edifice of a leader identity may generate optimistic or pessimistic coils, which can be explained from literature.

3.7.1. SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed a theory known as the Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory permits a richer understanding given the fact that people classify their environment as they express themselves as others (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004).

According to Cannella, Jones and Withers (2015, p 438) the Social Identity theory asserts that the social classes where individuals fit into provide perspective into how these people describe themselves. Identification is therefore regarded as the process by which individuals arrive at a particular perception about themselves since identification affects

behaviours and deeds of people at an individual level (Cannella, Jones & Withers, 2015, p 438).

Social identification may be derivative from the regard of group identification (Tolman, 1943). Studies of group identification views identification along four dimensions, namely, through perception, achievements and disappointments experienced in a group, and identifying with a group as one would relate to a person (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

As indicated from the discoveries of Cannella, et.al (2015) researchers have given considerable attention to how individuals construct their identity as an organisational member. Organisational identity can therefore be regarded as the extent to which an organisational member believes that he or she has identical attributes relevant to that organisation. (Cannella, et.al., 2015; p 438). According to Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) the individual's attitude and mannerisms are influenced greatly when there is a strong identification with an organisation. As believed by Golden-Biddle and Rao (1997), the extent to which a director identifies with a firm is an indication of the likelihood that a director will have the interest of the firm at heart.

It is further posited by Ashforth and Mael (1989, p 27) that there is inadequate research conducted on how social identity come about. However as believed by Van Maanen (1979) origins of self stems from interpreting the reactions that others have towards us in social engagements. Furthermore, it has been stated that socialization has a direct impact on internalisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

On the contrary, there is confusion pertaining to organisational commitment and organisational identification. (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p23). These authors indicate that commitment is the acceptance of an organisations goals and values

Singh and Vinnicombe points out that the Social Identity Theory is inclined to acknowledge higher performance amongst the 'in-group' and women have to work harder than men do. Men also tend to dare women more than their counterparts when gender is a leading feature.

According to the Social Identity Theory, three logical progressions are noted pertinent to an individual's presence as being part of an in-group or out-group. This affiliation is contingent upon prospective occurrences that can be associated with partiality and judgement as noted below.

Social Categorisation

The act of ascertaining which group one wants to be affiliated with

Social Identification

The explicit empathy shared in a particular group based on shared norms and attitudes group members display. Social identity is heightened when in-group members are treated better than out-group members are.

Social Comparison

The perception of self that is collected with that of other group supporters

Organisational cultures tend to “carry a claim to uniqueness” as organisations imply that they are unlike each other (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These researchers feel that identification is inclined to be specific to a group and management is aware of how the identity of an organisation can affect relevant key players.

3.7.2. SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

Motivation is defined as having the impetus to do something (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54). According to these researchers, people differ in the levels of motivation they exhibit. The self-determination theory (SDT) distinguishes between several types of motivation based on the intent that leads to a particular action (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The fundamental types of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is involved when people do something because they find it interesting whereas extrinsic motivation plays a role when people do something because it will have certain outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT uses traditional empirical techniques to determine human drive and personality although it uses an organismic metatheory to accentuate the essence of human beings' internal resources and behavioural self-regulation (Ryan, Kuhl & Deci, 1997).

Empirical practice have revealed three needs (proficiency, affiliation and self-sufficiency) that are important for the optimum functioning of progress, assimilation, social development and individual well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The paradigm of intrinsic motivation refers to concepts such as integration, mastery, spontaneous curiosity and consideration, all of which are important for cognitive and social expansion and require supportive environments. A lack of optimum challenges, an absence of affiliation and inordinate parameters interrupt natural realising and organisational inclinations (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

There are significant dissimilarities between SDT and other theories. SDT postulates that there are basic psychological needs that must be fulfilled for optimum functioning and well-being, and it expounds on the regulatory procedures that motivate a course of behaviour. Other theories focus mainly on the energisers of motivated acts, whereas SDT addresses both of the central motivational questions, namely, how behaviour is invigorated and how it is directed. Additionally, SDT differs from the other theories in the manner in which it has progressed and has been formulated. In addition, numerous investigational paradigms and psychometric instruments have been established along with the theory in order to permit for the continuations of tests and amplifications. SDT is, therefore, framed in a manner that recommends an extensive collection of researchable problems and it offers methods for testing many of these enquiries. Intrinsically, although Miner (1990) has disapproved of the 'humanistic' theories because of their absence of empirical support and SDT is one theory

that would fall within Miner's definition of humanistic, it has received a huge amount of empirical validation (Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 343).

According to Conger and Kanungo (1988), the level of a person's emotional condition is contingent upon their expected level of personal competence. Accordingly, emotional urges that stem from apprehension, melancholy, tension and pressure decrease the level of one's self-efficacy (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, p. 479). As further cited by these authors, when people perceive that they have the capacity to cope adequately with an occurrence, their need for power is satisfied. On the other hand, the need for power is unfulfilled when people perceive that they lack the capability to meet both physical and social environmental demands. In this regard, reference can be made to the statement of Moen (1992) that women can uphold principles of work and family as they have a co-operative approach to their roles. Nevertheless, women experience more strain to achieve a balance between work and family responsibilities.

Self-leadership defines how individuals manage themselves through utilising particular behavioural and cognitive strategies in order to affect personal competence (Neck & Houghton, 2006, p. 270). Strategies directed at behaviour seek to deepen a person's level of self-awareness with the intention of guiding behaviour; these approaches comprise exercising self-observation, establishing personal goals, fulfilling oneself through rewards and self-cueing (Neck & Houghton, 2006).

According to the self-regulation theory, self-assured people persevere when confronted with challenges whilst reaching for the realisation of their goal, whereas individuals who lack in expectation opt for alternative approaches or abandon their pursuit (Neck & Houghton, 2006, p. 276). These authors also assert that self-regulation can be enhanced through self-talk and imagination.

The self-concordance model of pursuing a goal has been developed as an addition to the self-determination theory. This model adopts the approach that behaviour that is driven by a goal is activated through various motivations (Koletzko, Herrmann & Brandstatter, 2015, p. 140). Furthermore, studies on self-concordance and goal orientation advocate that not

all subjective goals are preserved and may at times be selected due to perceived external stressors rather than internalised wishes (Koletko et al., 2015).

The social cognitive theory draws attention to the significance of self-reactive effects on gratification and efficiency (Neck & Houghton, 2006, p. 279). As indicated by Bandura and Cervone (1986), the connection between goals and performance is facilitated by self-influencing factors such as self-fulfilment, personal efficiency and the monitoring of standards that are internally established.

The next section encompasses overcoming the hurdles that women in leading roles face. Challenges are managed when people, particularly women are willing to confront impediments rather than choosing to do nothing about predicaments.

3.8 OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES FOR EXECUTIVE WOMEN

Studies have pointed out that researchers are becoming aware of the need to bring about changes in top-level management (Budworth & Mann, 2010). It is advocated that leadership education must be based on the character of all leadership contributors who dynamically form their domain (Barker, 1997). Barker proposes that education is intended to bring to mind fundamental norms, integrated values and leading behavioural configurations so that an understanding of their impact is evident for decision-making and directing human behaviour.

A collaborative study done by Egon Zehnder International and McKinsey & Company (2011) has recommended the following route to address the problems that executive women experience:

- Competency gaps must be bridged through talent deployment.
- The competencies and levels of skills must be secured through leadership development.
- The competencies of current leadership and those individuals who can be regarded as talented must be assessed.

Barker (1997) advocates that there is a need to theorise leadership differently and to arrive at an awareness of what leadership is and how to deal with it.

Ibarra et al. (2013) recommends the following three actions that may assist women in embracing leadership roles:

Educate Men and Women about second generation gender bias

Second-generation stereotyping in organisational processes might not be easy to discern but by being alert to stereotyping, it is likely that change can take place. Gender bias produces a setting in which the growth and capacity development of women are hindered.

Create Identity Workspaces

A non-threatening environment is critical for the accommodation of women's leadership persona. Research has indicated that although competence and likeability are appreciated in men who are skilled, the reverse is true for women. Successful high-potential women are less liked; therefore, a non-toxic environment that allows for education and trialling is crucial for the development of their leadership identity.

Facilitate Leadership Purpose

Women leaders should be enabled to pay attention to goals and should be facilitated to learn what steps must be taken to reach their objectives. They should not concentrate on gender stereotypes, their physical appearance and having 'an executive presence'. They should have a bigger purpose, namely to enhance the vision of the organisation.

According to Wittenberg-Cox (2010), women must be given an opportunity to increase their networking skills through networking events, employee resource groups and sponsorship programmes such as mentorship programmes.

3.9 CONCLUSION

Based on existing studies, which have provided a thorough understanding of what competencies entail and how they are related to leadership, this chapter clarified the definition of competencies and focused on the competencies required in the C-Suite. Furthermore, a taxonomy of leadership competencies and meta-competencies was discussed. This chapter also shared perspectives on leadership as a competency and considered two theoretical perspectives, namely Social Identity Theory and Self-Determination Theory. In conclusion, the challenges facing women executives and the ways in which these barriers could be overcome were dealt with.

In the following chapter, I discuss the research methodology for this current study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a calculated framework or plan that navigates research doings to make sure that sound inferences are made (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2010). The qualitative design could be utilized as an implement to assist the researcher to reveal the empirical world (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). As further indicated by Sellitz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1965, p. 50) a research design is a well-considered plan that navigates the undertakings of research in order to ensure that inferences are sound

The purpose for a research design is to make certain that the research study justifies a specific objective that can be accomplished with obtainable resources (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2010).The research design usually comprise the research approach, the research strategy and the research methodology.

4.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

Mouton and Marais (1990, p. 12) asserts that individual researchers “hold explicit beliefs”. The research problem statement, purpose statement and research objectives in this study is best suited to a qualitative approach to explore the phenomenon of the competencies and challenges of CEO women. I wanted to acquire a rich understanding from the subjective involvements and experiences of CEO women and therefore realized that a survey or questionnaire would not fully capture the personal involvements of these women, hence the pronouncement of a qualitative research design and methodology.

4.3. RESEARCH PARADIGMS

A paradigm is defined as “an all-encompassing system of practice and thinking, which defines for researchers the nature of their enquiry.” (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2010).

Building on this definition, the following quote sheds further clarity as cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985:15) “Paradigms represent what we think about the world (but cannot prove). Our actions in the world, including the actions we take as inquirers, cannot occur without reference to those paradigms: “As we think, so do we act.”

Stanage (1987) takes the view that a paradigm sculpts the way an individual thinks and serves as a model the individual can follow to take action. Alternatively, a paradigm may be specified as the act of yielding to a view. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157) agree with this view and expand on it by stating that a paradigm may be defined as ‘a basic set of beliefs that guide action’.

Paradigms comprise classifications of interconnected practice and philosophy that outline the nature of a researcher’s investigation by means of three scopes: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Blanche et al., 2006).

Table 4.1 depicts the three types of paradigms with particular emphasis on this study as an interpretive study.

TABLE 4.1: POSITIVIST, INTERPRETIVE AND CONSTRUCTIONIST PARADIGMS

	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Positivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable external reality • Law-like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective • Detached observer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimental • Quantitative • Hypothesis testing
Interpretive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal reality of subjective experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathetic • Observer subjectivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactional • Interpretation • Qualitative
Constructionist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially constructed reality • Discourse • Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspicious • Political • Observer constructing versions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deconstructions • Textual analysis • Discourse analysis

Source: Blanche, Durrheim & Painter (2006, p. 6)

4.3.1. Ontology

Ontology is a philosophy that deals with the nature of actuality. There are two facets to ontology, namely objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders, et.al, 2012). As further stated by Maree (2012) that which exists or can be known is termed ontology

4.3.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is a philosophy that examines what knowledge can be considered acceptable in a field of enquiry (Saunders, et.al, 2012). Furthermore as indicated by Maree (2012) epistemology refers to how a person recognises truth and consents to an association between the “knower and the known”

The researcher who believes that a particular enquiry is constant and fixed adopts an objective and disconnected epistemological standpoint towards that reality. In contrast, should the researcher believe that the reality of an enquiry comprise the subjective experiences of people than an interactional epistemological outlook toward that reality would be taken and methodologies such as interviewing would transpire.

I embraced interpretivism as the epistemological perspective most suited to the study, Since my interest gravitated toward the lived experiences of CEO women. I also wanted to enquire after their personal experiences in order to discern and acquire a deeper understanding of their career trajectories.

Interpretive paradigms give attention to the comprehension of how people experience their world. In order for the researcher to fully appreciate this experience, dynamic engagement is required to interpret that domain (Locke, 2001).

Interpretive inquiry seeks to apprehend the occurrences through the meanings that individuals ascribe to them, which stems from the following assumptions (Maree, 2012):

- **The life of people are comprehended internally**

Interpretivism concentrates on the subjective experiences of individuals, the manner in which people “construct” the social climate through exchange and how engagement transpires among people.

- **The social lifespan is uniquely a product of humans**

The premise is that when people are in their social settings, there is a better prospect to comprehend the impression they have of their own deeds.

- **The mind of people is purposive and unique**

Insights are acquired when understanding how meaning is constructed from another person’s perspective.

- **Acquaintance of the social environment impact human behaviour**

Theory enables researchers to connect the intangible and the actual framework

- **The social environment co-exists with human knowledge**

Our exposure, experiences, knowledge and shared meaning direct our outlook.

The researcher is the instrument who engages with the individual in an empathetic way and employs listening and self-reflection skills. The researcher should eliminate any form of subjective preference.

Constructionist researchers believe that reality is fluid and adjustable and may opt for a more apprehensive and debatable epistemological standpoint. The primary drive of constructionist research is to demonstrate how portrayals of the social world are created in dialogue and to reveal how these constructions of reality make certain actions probable and others improbable (Blanche et al., 2006). This study does not, however, employ this philosophy because the problem, purpose and research objectives of this study are best suited to an interpretive outlook.

4.4. DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STRATEGY

4.4.1. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative approaches to research have to do with exploring ‘why’. The focus is on people and the researcher interacts and observes the participants in their regular settings. All qualitative approaches share two characteristics: the focus is on the phenomena that transpire in natural settings and on the capturing and studying of the intricate existences that are involved (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). Additionally, the purposes of a qualitative research may include one or several of the following factors (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014):

- Description: The researcher may reveal the multifaceted nature of certain circumstances, settings, practices and people.
- Evaluation: The researcher is able to review the value of specific procedures, applications or novelties.
- Interpretation: The researcher is able to acquire new perspectives concerning specific occurrences, develop new impressions about the singularity of the phenomenon and discover problems associated with it.
- Verification: The researcher can test the validity of specific conventions, assertions, sweeping statements and philosophies.

In a qualitative research, attention is directed at the quality and depth of information instead of at the latitude of the information (Maree, 2012). Qualitative research seeks to define and understand instead of to quantify the involvements and sentiments of people in human terms.

Using a qualitative approach in this study has some benefits. As cited by Miles and Huberman (1994), when qualitative data is properly collected it provides a ‘focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what “real life” is like’.

Leedy and Ormrod (2014) refer to the works of several authors who advocate the following criteria for appraising research:

- Purposefulness: The research question drives the methods used to collect and analyse data, rather than the other way round.
- Explicitness of assumptions and biases: The researcher identifies and communicates any assumptions, beliefs, values and biases that may influence data collection and interpretation.
- Rigour: The researcher uses rigorous, precise and thorough methods to collect, record and analyse data. The researcher also takes steps to remain as objective as possible throughout the project.
- Open-mindedness: The researcher shows willingness to modify hypotheses and interpretations when newly acquired data conflicts with previously collected data.
- Completeness: The researcher depicts the object of study in all of its complexity.
- Coherence: The data yields consistent findings, such that the researcher can present a coherent portrait.
- Persuasiveness: The researcher presents logical arguments and the weight of the evidence suggests one interpretation to the exclusion of others.
- Consensus: Other individuals, including the participants in the study and other scholars in the discipline, agree with the researcher's interpretations and explanations.

Usefulness: The project yields conclusions that promote better understanding of the phenomenon, enable more accurate predictions about future events, or lead to interventions that enhance the quality of life.

4.5. ASSESSING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The trustworthiness of a study involves a collaborative partnership between the researcher and the participants and as a researcher, it is critical that one embraces a sensitive perspective and records phenomena as truthfully as possible (Maree, 2012). In the current study, I established rapport with the partakers, the interviews held with the participants were recorded, and I listened attentively to how the participants responded to the questions posed. In line with Saunders, et.al (2012, p 389) my approach to the questions

increased the reliability of the acquired information and I refrained from asking bias questions.

The model posited by Guba (1981) suggests that there are four features of trustworthiness that are applicable to both qualitative and quantitative studies. These features are noted as follows:

4.5.1. Truth Value

As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985) truth-value ascertains if the researcher has instilled confidence in the discoveries that has stem from the study. This aspect merely considers the confidence that the researcher holds given the truth of the discoveries and from a qualitative outlook 'truth value is subject-oriented, not defined a priori by the researcher' as indicated by the works of Krefting (1991). During the interviews, it was observed by the researcher that the participants were knowledgeable about what literature has indicated about the paucity of women in senior leadership roles and from a phenomenological perspective, it was noted that women are capable of leading roles but barriers seem to inhibit the career trajectories of most women.

4.5.2. Applicability

Applicability pertains to the ability to take a broad view about a population given the outcome of the discoveries from the study (Krefting, 1991). The researcher gathered from added reading and conversations held that a dearth of women in senior leadership roles is a concerning factor worldwide and is not a problem that pertains to South Africa only.

4.5.3. Consistency

The third feature as noted by Krefting (1991) contemplates whether the reliability of the data would stand if the study had been simulated with the identical participants. This study illustrates the consistency of this research as posited by Krefting. The quality of a study is

contingent upon the reliability and objectivity of the researcher (Saunders, et.al., 2012, p 231).

4.5.4. Neutrality

The fourth feature concerns itself with the degree of being unbiased during the research procedures and the results that are yielded as believed by Krefting (1991) and further to the concept of neutrality Guba (1981) asserts that neutrality pertains to the extent that the outcomes have utility from the participants and not of the researcher's partialities, impetuses and perceptions. My role in this current study was that of an external researcher since I needed to identify with the participants within their respective organisations (Saunders, et al., 2012, p 195).

According to the works of Carcary (2009, p 15) the findings of a study are "auditable when another researcher can clearly follow the decision trail used by the investigator in the study. In addition, another researcher could arrive at the same or comparable but not contradictory conclusions given the researchers data, perspective and situation."

The following factors are succinctly indicated for the relevance of the current study as advocated by Shenton (2004).

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is crucial in establishing trustworthiness.

In order to ensure the credibility of this study I took the time to acquaint myself with the various organisational cultures applicable to the participants. I was mindful that each sector has its own cultural fit and that the participants would relate to their world and experiences.

I established trust with the participants by clearly indicating what my study entailed as a researcher and initiating the interview by alluding to the participants' former success based on my added reading about their achievements, which set a comfortable and professional

atmosphere for the interview that transpired. This approach was also communication to the participants that I had taken time to acquaint myself with who they are. As cited by Shenton (2004, p 66-67) participants can share their ideas and experiences without bringing their credibility into disrepute.

A thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The information gathered through engaging with the participants considered critical aspects that portray the relevance and merit of the current study. This criterion was met by gathering information from both men and women who are in senior leadership roles.

Transferability

Transferability pertains to the degree to which the conclusions of a study can be applied to other contexts (Shenton, 2004, p 69). The results of this current study is applicable to a wider population since it is noted that the paucity of women in the upper echelons are not just apparent in the South African context.

Dependability

The current study is telling of the fact that if the study reoccurred with the same participants in the equivalent environments similar conclusions will be noted (Shenton, 2004, p 71)

4.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Schwandt (2007) defines methodology as the 'theory of how an inquiry should proceed'. In accordance with the works of Davidson (2000) and Jones (2001), a phenomenological methodology would be the most suitable approach for this study as it seeks to grasp the perceptions, standpoints and considerations of a given situation from a person's perspective.

In essence, phenomenologists are of the opinion that a researcher cannot be disconnected from his or her own presumptions and that the researcher should not create such an impression (Hammersley, 2000).

There are five common qualitative research designs, but this study employs a phenomenological approach in order to understand the points of view of the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

4.6.1. PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Phenomenology is a methodology that was initiated in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century and is rooted in the fields of psychology and philosophy; therefore, it has connotations with philosophers such as Gadamer, Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Satre (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012).

Phenomenology pertains to an individual's perception and the meaning the person attributes to an event in comparison to an occurrence that exists apart from that person (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). Furthermore, in phenomenological research, a researcher seeks to describe the phenomenon being studied in a clear-cut manner, abstaining from any pre-given basis (Giorgi as cited in Groenewald, 2004). According to Welman and Kruger (1999, p. 189), 'the phenomenologist is concerned with understanding a social and psychological phenomenon from the perspective of people involved'. In essence, the focus of this methodology is to gain an understanding of the distinctive experiences of people by exploring the gist of a phenomenon (Petty et al., 2012).

A researcher that makes use of a phenomenological approach takes an interest in the involvements of people who are experiencing or who have experienced the subject of research (Greene, 1997; Holloway, 1997; Kruger, 1998; Kvale, 1996; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Robinson & Reed, 1998). In order to explore the essence of a person's experience, the researcher sets aside subjective views of such an experience (which is termed 'bracketing' as cited by Petty et al., 2012) so as to gain an enriched understanding.

In this study, the researcher inquired into the critical competencies of executive women in senior leadership and the challenges they had experienced or were experiencing in order to be recognised as executive leaders. The researcher wanted to gain an insight into the participants' points of view about their experiences in their unique and often complex business situations (Saunders et al., 2012). The phenomenological approach served to address the questions pertaining to the participants' perceptions about the critical competencies needed for women in executive positions, the challenges they faced due to a possible lack of these competencies, and how they could overcome these challenges through acquiring the necessary competencies so that they could perform their responsibilities optimally.

Phenomenological scrutiny requires quality engagement with participants. In this instance, the sample consisted of participants who were carefully selected from a group of executive women who had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989). For the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling method was required. An invitation to male counterparts (also executives) offered a fresh approach to the research question.

4.6.2. SAMPLING

It is generally not feasible to involve the entire population when conducting a study due to two primary limitations, namely, cost and time (Maree, 2012). Sampling theory serves to propose ways of depicting 'scientific' samples which are random and characteristic of the populace and from these outcomes one is able to make inferences about the population in general (Maree, 2012). A population refers to the whole group or set of members. A population does not necessarily refer to people (Saunders et al., 2012).

This study consisted of 23 participants. Fourteen of these participants were women who were subcategorised according to their occupational positions, namely, chief executive officer, head of a division, director and senior manager. Nine participants were men in executive roles. The purpose of including male participants was to gather insights and

consider the perspectives of men in order to add to the pool of knowledge and data to meet the research objectives.

There are different kinds of sampling methods. The two main methods of sampling are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Different sampling designs may be suited to different circumstances (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014).

For this study, non-probability sampling was used since the elements were not contingent upon the statistical principle of randomness (Blanche et al., 2006). Non-probability sampling comprises three forms, namely, convenience, quota and purposive sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

As this study was done with a particular objective in mind, purposive sampling was chosen as the most suitable. The target for scrutiny was executive women in leadership positions, as the aims were to explore the critical competencies and challenges of executive women and to ascertain the distinction between C-level and non-C-level executive women

Table 4.2 provides a biographical overview of the participants

Table 4.2: Biographical Overview of Participants

Women Participants	Gender	Industry	Designation
Pseudonym			
Ruth Hendricks	Female	Financial	Chief Executive Officer
Kim Tarr	Female	Commerce	Chief Executive Officer
Victoria Roden	Female	Financial	Chief Executive Officer
Gail Parker	Female	Logistics	Chief Executive Officer
Pam Scheepers	Female	Consulting	Chief Executive Officer
Amy Grobler	Female	Financial	Head of Direct Property Investments
Sue Troup	Female	Financial	Head of Diversity and Transformation, Corporate Social Investment, Employee Wealth and Wellness
Jane Khumalo	Female	Auditing	Head of Advisory
Melinda Ghanne	Female	Consulting	Director
Tanya Snyders	Female	Transport	Director
Sandra Chopra	Female	Auditing	Director
Jo-Anne Bjelos	Female	Auditing	Director
Elsie Watson	Female	Financial	Senior Manager
Brenda Souls	Female	Construction	Senior Manager
Male Participants	Gender	Industry	Designation
Pseudonym			
Luke August	Male	Consulting	Chairman
Zain Kahn	Male	Auditing	Chairman of Policy Board
Anthony Gaffoor	Male	Commerce	Non-Executive Director of Netcare Group Non-Executive Director of JSE
Matthew Crowage	Male	Commerce	Executive Coach
Wayne Edwards	Male	Property	Chief Executive Officer
Ben Davids	Male	Financial	Organisational Development Specialist
Charles Timm	Male	Financial	Managing Director
John De Villiers	Male	Automotive	Chief Executive Officer
Victor Adams	Male	Agricultural	Provincial Head of Agriculture

4.6.7. DATA COLLECTION

Data refers to distinct information that a researcher extracts from the environment and the researcher can gather it from various sources. In this research study, data was obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B).

Since this study was qualitative in nature, the material used by the researcher was closely connected with its environment (Blanche et al., 2006). Qualitative researchers attempt to derive meaning from feelings, experiences and phenomena in their natural context.

The initial contact with the participants was made by means of sending emails to their assistants to explain the purpose of the research study and to enquire if the participants would be willing to engage in semi-structured interviews. Both the male and female executive officers volunteered to participate in the study. The participants who were contacted share the following qualities:

- They are passionate about their work.
- They are experienced, knowledgeable and highly esteemed in their respective roles.
- They are true to themselves.

In order to acquire an understanding of the career path and experiences of the executive women I read up on their accomplishments and started their individual interviews with questions specifically aimed at identifying key career milestones and core capabilities. I also asked questions about critical competencies and challenges experienced at an executive level. Furthermore, I interviewed the executive men in order to get an insight into their opinions concerning critical competencies at CEO leadership level and their thoughts on the challenges noted by executive women

4.6.8. DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES

The gathering of data is essential in research, since the data is intended to contribute to an improved understanding of a theoretical framework (Bernard, 2002). Selecting the source of data as well as the manner in which data is obtained is a core component in research and should be done with sound judgement, given the fact that no amount of analysis can compensate for data that has been inadequately collected (Bernard et al., 1986).

Saunders et al. (2012) define a research interview as a 'purposeful conversation between two or more people, requiring the interviewer to establish rapport, to ask concise and unambiguous questions, to which the interviewee is willing to respond and to listen attentively'. Furthermore, Saunders et al. state that interviews enable the researcher to acquire both reliable and valid data that has applicability to the research questions and objectives.

Interviews can offer expedient information since the researcher is able to ask questions pertaining to the following (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014):

- Emotional states
- Specifics
- Drives
- Present, past and standards for behaviour
- Explanations for deeds and outlooks
- Views and perceptions about facts

Interviewing is a more natural approach to engaging with people and as a result, it is well suited to an interpretive approach (Blanche et al., 2006).

In a structured interview, the researcher poses a standard set of questions and in a semi-structured interview, the researcher may pose individual or tailored questions as well as standard questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

In this study, an unstructured interview was conducted with each of five chief executive women, three women who were heads of their respective divisions, four women who were directors and two who were senior managers. The nine male participants interviewed were in executive leadership roles.

An unstructured interview is not formal and may be referred to as an in-depth interview (Saunders et al., 2012). Unstructured interviews were used in this study to adequately examine the experiences of the participants concerning the critical competencies required for women in senior leadership roles and to explore the challenges experienced by these women. The researcher and the participants collaborated to 'arrive at the heart of the matter' (Tesch, 1994, p. 147). During each interview, the researcher was cognisant of words, pauses, questions and occasional sidetracks during the conversation. The intent was to focus on actual occurrences and to put phenomena into perspective. The imperative for a good interpretive enquiry is to remain close to the data and to interpret it with empathy (Blanche et al., 2006).

The reasons for selecting the method of semi-structured, in-depth interviews (which were applicable for the current study) were as follows (Saunders et al. (2012) :

The objective of the research

The research questions served as a basis for understanding the reasons, opinions and attitudes of participants, in this case of executive women. Probing questions could be asked to get the participants to elaborate on points that had been made. A semi-structured interview permits the researcher to accumulate a rich set of data in a methodical manner.

Creating personal exchange

Personal contact has advantages over questionnaires and the researcher has more control of the reliability of data that is collected.

The nature of the interrogations

The following situations are suitable for a semi-structured or in-depth interview (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008 and Jankowicz, 2005 as cited in Saunders et al., 2012):

- (1) A number of questions need to be responded to.
- (2) Intricate or open-ended questions need to be answered.
- (3) The order and rationality of enquiry need to be modified.

Time required and the totality for the process

The researcher must communicate with the participants who volunteered to take part so that all expectations are understood and time for completion of tasks is adequately managed.

Interviews in a qualitative study are hardly ever structured; they tend to be semi-structured or open-ended, directing attention to central questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

The interviewer was mindful of the following approaches during the interviews (Seidman, 1991):

- The interviewer spoke less and listened more.
- The interviewer followed up on what the participant had communicated.
- The interviewer explored and refrained from probing.
- The interviewer asked open-ended questions modestly.
- The interviewer asked for actual information and kept participants focused on questions.

4.7. DATA ANALYSIS

According to Braun, Virginia, Clarke and Victoria (2006, p. 6), thematic analysis is a method used to identify, explore and record patterns or themes contained in the data. Thematic analysis classifies and defines the data set.

Thematic exploration entails examining the data set. In this study, a number of executives were interviewed individually and patterns of meaning were identified from the data obtained. The questions guided the analysis and coding of data and care was taken that the essence of a theme captured something meaningful with regard to the research statement (Braun et al., 2006).

4.7.1. STEPS FOR IMPLEMENTING DATA ANALYSIS

I used the following steps proposed by Blanche et al. (2006) to analyse data thematically:

- Step 1: Familiarisation and immersion

As the researcher, I engrossed myself in the information obtained using interview scripts, brainstorming and drawing diagrams. Furthermore, I reviewed the notes and interview scripts several times to gain understanding of and familiarise myself with the content.

- Step 2: Inducing themes

I identified categories and themes arising from the data that had a bearing on the research question. Secondly, I thought about and classified the progressions, meanings, tensions and inconsistencies of the material gathered. Thirdly, I sought to achieve an optimum level of complexity by subdividing extensive themes into smaller themes.

- Step 3: Coding

I rearranged the data to be analytically relevant by assigning codes and making sure the data was suited to the themes. A line, sentence or paragraph was coded that related to a

particular theme. I used various ways of coding the data, for example, by using colour marker pens, making photocopies and subdividing and clustering categories. The texts were also moved around. Coding comprised dividing a text domain into characterised, expressive pieces with the intention of grouping coded material together under code headings and further examining each group as a collection and comparing them to other groups.

- Step 4: Elaboration

The researcher explored the participants' accounts of occurrences in a direct, sequential order and structured the data to derive good accounts. Exploring themes more closely (which is known as elaboration) serves to obtain deeper shades of meaning that were not captured originally. This is also a chance to revise the coding system or, alternatively, to revert to Step 3.

- Step 5: Interpretation and Checking

The researcher interpreted the data to come to a final result reflecting the participants' frames of reference. Interpretations were checked and the necessary corrections were made. During this process the researcher reflected on the role she had assumed when collecting the data and on the manner in which she had interpreted the data

4.7.2. Coding

Coding is defined as a way of arranging and grouping comparable coded data into families or classes (Saldafia, 2009). There are different kinds of coding which is discussed below

4.7.3. Initial Coding

I classified the data according to conceptual aspects, each aspect making up a unit. I classified the responses of the participants in relevant units, being mindful of classifying the responses of females and males and considering participants' designations. For

instance, I highlighted a sentence or a paragraph and placed it in a particular unit. The classification of data enabled me to ascertain impressions, patterns, relationships and themes (Saunders et al., 2012).

The following questions may be posed in the course of an initial coding process (Charmaz, 2006):

What does this data examine?

What does the data propose?

From whose perspective does the researcher consider the data?

What theoretical grouping does a particular datum point to?

4.7.4. Focused Coding

The second main stage in coding is called focused coding and it entails using most of the data to select, combine and expound on the bigger sections of data (Charmaz, 2006).

4.7.5. Axial Coding

According to Charmaz (2006), axial coding involves the classification of units into subdivisions.

In this study, I used the notes I had made after the interviews and found them most helpful in recognising classifications. I scrutinised the data collected according to the list of groupings, which enabled me to do the classifications.

Axial coding serves to classify and combine huge quantities of data and reconstruct them in a renewed manner after open coding has been done (Creswell, 1998).

ATLAS.ti 7, a computer software program that can be used to appraise texts and visual and audio data, was used for this qualitative study.

4.7.6. Selective Coding

The concluding stage of the analysis was to consolidate the data and demarcate a core theme or classification. I thought it would be most fitting to group the competencies and challenges separately to fully extract the richness of the data in this qualitative study. To do this I used manual coding and constructed basic families of competencies and challenges.

4.8. RESEARCH ETHICS

Ethical clearance was sought from the University of Pretoria prior to any engagement with participants in order to ensure requirements were complied with. The researcher reviewed the Code of Ethics for Research of the University of Pretoria and confirmed conformity with ethical principles.

Various disciplines require research involving human matters to observe certain ethical standards, and researchers must carefully consider the ethical effects of their intents each time people are the focus of exploration (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

There are also ethical considerations for qualitative research. Ethical worries are the greatest when people are involved. Two principles are commonly implemented to ascertain if research is ethical (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001):

- **Autonomy of and respect for the dignity of participants**

The identity of participants must be protected. This was a requirement for the current study because the participants voluntarily gave consent to take part and their credibility as executives had to be guarded. Autonomy in this current study was very important to uphold because the women in CEO positions are public figures and I had to ensure that they were respected as a person, not only for the position they hold in their respective organisations.

- **Nonmaleficence**

A researcher must make sure that participants are not harmed in any way. The research ensured that trouble and harm were curbed.

An important element of ethical research is informed consent, which entails that the agreement of participants to take part in a research study can only be obtained if they have a complete understanding of what the process entails and what the potential effects may be (Blanche et al., 2006). Informed consent usually comprises the following (Blanche et al., 2006):

- Provision of adequate information
- Participant proficiency and comprehension of participants
- Voluntary decision to participate or withdraw
- Formalisation of consent

In addition, Leedy and Ormrod (2014) propose the grouping into four clusters of ethical issues in research:

- **Protection from Harm**

Research participants should not be vulnerable to physical or psychological harm. The peril to those engaging in the research study should not surpass the usual risks of daily living. Participants must be aware of any degree of psychological discomfort ahead of time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

Consequently, the researcher of this study did not expose participants to situations that were marked by mortification, anxiety, pain or stress. The researcher maintained the discretion, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Given the calibre of the participants, it was important to protect the reputation of these individuals and their organisations.

- **Voluntary and informed participation**

When participants are specifically enlisted for participation in a research study, the nature of the study that will be conducted must be communicated to them and they must be given the option of agreeing to participate or not. Furthermore, participants must be given the option to withdraw should they wish to disengage from the study at any point in time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

The following information must be specified on the informed consent form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014):

- The goals and nature of the study
- The activities and duration
- An indication that participation is voluntary and that a participant may withdraw
- Probable risk/discomfort that a participant may be subjected to
- Prospective benefits of the study
- Upholding of confidentiality
- Researcher's details
- Contacts about the study that participants may require
- Delivery of detailed information regarding the study
- Location to sign and date the letter agreeing to the terms

The researcher of this study furnished the participants with the necessary information pertaining to the research process, purposes, accompanying risks and benefits as well as with a statement clarifying that a participant could ask questions or withdraw from the research at any time without repercussions.

Moreover, the manner and context in which the researcher revealed the information were modified according to the participant's individual aptitude (acumen, rationality, development and use of language) to understand the research. The researcher respected the right of the participants to participate in the research willingly and the right to establish their engagement in the data collection, which included the right to decline to respond to

specific questions, not to furnish the requested data, to make revisions to their consensus or to withdraw their consent (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Saunders et al., 2012).

- **Right to privacy**

The participant's right to privacy must be respected. The research report must be accessible in a manner that does not disclose the identity of the participant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). Easter, Davis and Henderson (2004) confirm that information pertaining to the participants must be kept confidential.

The researcher of this study made sure that confidentiality and anonymity were assured, partly with the aim of increasing the reliability of data collection. The researcher undertook to share only information the participants had agreed to share, allowing for legal compulsion. Accordingly, the researcher of this study approached the proposed study from a participant-orientated point of view. Furthermore, the researcher made sure that all data was re-named and that individual identification was impossible. The collected data was stored on electronically secured devices with password access, and non-electronic data was locked in a safety cabinet at the residence of the researcher.

- **Honesty towards professional colleagues**

Research findings must be reported in a truthful manner and must not be falsified. Data may not be fictional to back up a conclusion from the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). The researcher of this study undertook to comply with these ethical requirements.

4.9. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I described the research design and methodology used in this study. I specified my epistemological standpoint and explained how data was coded. The ethical matters relating to the study were also addressed.

The following two chapters report on the results of the analysis: Chapter 5 discusses the themes identified relating to the competencies of a CEO woman whereas Chapter 6 discusses the challenges faced by women in senior leadership roles.

CHAPTER 5: CLARIFYING THE COMPETENCIES REQUIRED FOR CEO WOMEN

“It’s easy to run to others. It’s so hard to stand on one’s own record. You can fake virtue for an audience. You can’t fake it in your own eyes. Your ego is your strictest judge. They run from it. They spend their lives running. It’s easier to donate a few thousand to charity and think oneself noble than to base self-respect on personal standards of personal achievement. It’s simple to seek substitutes for competence--such easy substitutes: love, charm, kindness, charity. But there is no substitute for competence.” (Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead)

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapters 5 and 6 focuses on the participants in this study, 14 of these participants are women and 9 are men, all in executives leadership roles. Pseudonyms are used in both chapter 5 and 6 when quoting the words of the participants to protect their identities. Many of their commentaries are cited *verbatim*, and their words are inscribed in italics and in colour to refer to female or their male counterparts. Pink ink in particular is used to cite the words of CEO female participants. In this chapter, I explore the critical competencies of CEO women and in chapter 6, I explore the actual challenges that leading women are experiencing.

I respect the participants in this study for their sincerity and commitment to the exploration of their personal career trajectories. I also recognize my own subjectivity in this explanation, which was a filter for understanding what I disclose.

5.2. CAREER TRAILS

In order to understand the feat of CEO women I needed to get an insight into the career path of a high-ranking woman in an organisation. The CEO women who participated in this study had been occupying their leading positions for between two to nineteen years. Most of them had worked in at least three different companies and the duration of their employment varied. All the CEO women had a record of successful accomplishments. Victoria had been the deputy CEO of her organisation for seven years before being appointed as a CEO four years previously. Pam had held several different HR positions over a period of eighteen years: she was an HR director from 2011 to 2014 after which she decided to establish her own organisation. These examples serve to explain why it was decided to follow the approach of inquiring into the roles that had propelled these successful women into their current positions. In my exploration of the critical competencies of CEO women, I considered the commentaries of both male and female participants.

When I inquired into the career pathways of the CEO women, I found that each participant had their own personal explanation of the roles that had facilitated their experiences. From the observations I made in this phenomenological study, I realised that the occurrences in the lives of the CEO women were unique.

Mentors play an important role, which explains why it is important for women to have mentors. As indicated by Cormier (2007, p 267) relationships are crucial for career advancement, marketing new ideas and for development. Cindy's comments depicts the influence that mentors have:

“Mentors play and enormous role in anything anybody aspires to become or any role they have at that point.”

Brenda, a senior manager concurs with the importance of having a coach and a mentor and states the following:

“Make sure you identify a coach and a mentor that’s walked the path before you so that you can learn quickly and it doesn’t take you the same amount of time that it took them to get there.”

Further to what these participants said about having a mentor and a coach Amy depicts why it is so important to have a mentor and a coach and the value of her words really allows one to understand the different roles that a mentor and a coach offer:

“So it is very important to make sure that you have a coach, because a coach helps you with how to manoeuvre through life, a mentor, a mentor gives you some technical skills so that you might not see what you don’t have and you have to have a sponsor. I’ve always made sure that there is one person someone saying that I knew what I wanted to do. So if there is an opportunity that a person can sponsor you. As not in sponsor with money but sponsor you for this opportunity and those three things combined, it is a very powerful combination in business as guided collusion for you. Because if you have a mentor but you’ve no sponsor, your coaching and mentoring are not going to get anywhere. If you have a sponsor but you don’t have a coach, then you fail. If you should have a coach and a sponsor but no mentor you’re not going to know how to do things so you’re going to struggle.”

Gail, a CEO of a logistical organisation had an unconventional uptake to her career trail; she indicated that she did not enjoy taking directives that stated how her time should be utilized while Pam, also a CEO was concerned about becoming stagnant as a former director and expressed her decision to start her own company. It has been stated that women have their identifiable ambitions, desires, motivations and capabilities (Cormier, 2007, p 268). Ruth alludes to the importance of having a purpose and expresses herself as follows:

“So the CEO position was not what I was looking for, I was looking for making a difference, because someone had said when you’re growing by making a difference all these achievements are not important, what’s important is the product of your research.”

Joanne, a director has a different experience and attributes her career success to a family setting that encouraged and nurtured her potential. She advocates that being receptive to values that are imparted during childhood and applying them in pursuit of achieving is truly important.

“I think mainly the first sort of success if I can call it that is really having or growing up in an environment that cultivated focus in the bigger picture and realizing your full potential. So a family, a mother, and a grandmother, especially the women in my family really did ascribe to cultivating that sort of thinking. So I suppose you know the different successes was also being open to those values that were instilled during an upbringing and taking it forward and realizing that there was a bigger picture that was out there more than just a little town that I had come from.”

The career path for CEO women can therefore be likened to building blocks. One step leads to another. This pattern is traced by the comments of female participants in senior leadership roles, who has not reached the c-suite yet. These women communicated that their basis stemmed from the bottom and they worked their way up. Elsie, the senior manager expressed it best:

“Sometimes if you grow too quickly you miss the fundamentals that only experience teaches you, So I think I’d say to an upcoming executive, you not going to step into the role or become a person that wants to sit around the table overnight, I’d say that sometimes the senior positions are not the easiest to step into but you’ve got to earn your stripes.”

Two of the directors started their career right from the bottom of the organisation and the skills that they acquired had given them a platform, which allows them to function optimally within the organisation. Sandra’s career within an auditing firm started during the second part of her articles and this exposure enabled her to engage at various levels, which strengthened her ability in varying situations. She reminisces eagerly:

“I think in this profession really is to start all the way at the bottom because I think from almost... uh well may be not in the first 18 months as a trainee but I think when you start

entering your second proportion of your articles, it's the last 18 months, um I think then decide well is this for me or is it not. I think the key reasons being what starts to happen is the fact that you start getting exposure to different clients and different views and I think also you know unlike other professions where you would not at a junior level interact with senior executives, this profession allows you to do that. So I think you know all those kinds of things builds you in the type of person you going to be. You either going to handle the situations, some of them good, some of them bad but almost from the beginning each one for me is the stepping stone to where I am to-day."

Tanya portrays the following experience that propelled her success in her career.

"I think every single position that I have taken from the onset of my career gave me certain skills and exposure to-to an organisation that ultimately assisted me in being able to do what I currently do. So I cannot actually say to you there are two or three positions in my career that drove my progression but almost want to put it to you that every single position that I have occupied from the lowest level in an organisation equipped me with a certain skill set that I currently use."

These women have unique career experiences but ultimately they have reached a level of success, which they are very unpretentious of. Both men and women in leadership roles evidence this modest quality.

Luke phrased the importance of humility as a CEO by stating

"You need to remember it's all about humility, its treating people that report to you with respect. It is about you being true to your clients and whatever objectives your shareholders have assigned to you, you know, do it with humility. I guess you know people are easily put off by arrogance and the strength of the CEO lies in his/her humility where they grounded and here they decisive."

As agreed by Cindy, the right attitude is required from the c-suite

“You can be proud without being arrogant, you can be proud of your children, proud of what you have achieved but there is no place for arrogance; it’s a big turnoff on any Board.”

5.3 CRITICAL COMPETENCIES OUTLINED BY PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the study were asked to explain what competencies were critical to their roles as executive women. The competencies they pointed out pertained to three dimensions: business capability, relationships and personal traits. These dimensions were applicable to both male and female participants. Having acknowledged that leadership qualities were the most important, participants added that not only technical competencies but also soft skills were necessary. Competencies refer to the proficiency of knowing what to do and how to come across in a given situation. Male and female participants had similar outlooks regarding competencies. Most of them indicated what competencies they believed were necessary for males and females whereas one male participant, John, indicated as follows that he did not see a difference between males and females as far as competencies were concerned:

“Nothing different than what’s for males.”

Bearing in mind that this was a phenomenological study, the researcher listened to the actual words expressed during the semi-structured interviews and noted the critical competencies identified from the perspectives of the participants.

The researcher asked the participants what men and women could do to better develop the critical competencies required for women in leading positions. The aim of this question was to establish which competencies required refinement as far as women at a CEO level were concerned. The female participants alluded to gender differences as a crucial factor and they felt that men and women had to talk to each other as they came from different circumstances. This indicated that communication between genders was necessary and that men needed to be receptive to women in senior leadership roles. It was proposed that skills transfer programmes had to be established, that men and women had to be given the same opportunities and that they should complement each other.

Luke believed that no distinction was necessary between critical competencies for men and women and those women did not need to develop specific competencies. According to him, men and women worked towards obtaining the same qualifications and positions in organisations and although all people thought differently, the same competencies were required for effective performance regardless of gender.

Luke expressed his outlook as follows:

“I don't think it's a matter of critical competencies. You know I mean if you go to study, you all study the same things. There's not a BCom degree for men and a BCom degree for women. We all do the same degrees. So it's not a matter of different competencies in the work place. It's a matter of, yes we are different we - we - we tend to think a little bit differently in terms of what solutions to the problems are. Um but then again if you take one man and another man they think differently in terms of solutions as well. One woman and another, the thoughts are different. That's what makes us different and that's what makes for things around a boardroom table or an executive table.”

However one of the findings differed. Gail believes that women must be empowered and urged on to make advancement. This approach is reminiscent of the personal responsibility women must embrace to develop themselves. She expressed herself in the following manner.

“You've got to empower them, but how can you can take a horse to the water and they really don't want to drink. There's nothing I can do so I feel feed that horse salt and make them thirsty to want to develop themselves.”

On the contrary, Sue, Head of Diversity and Transformation, Corporate Social Investment, Employee Wealth and Wellness made a profound statement in response to the question. She holds the opinion that development programmes, merely directed at women implies inadequacy about women. She suggests that both men and women can benefit from developmental programmes and besides, not all women require the same level of upskilling.

“I suppose what – what one needs to as a manager is to, and you know I don’t want to say women need specific competencies and specifically you know I think everybody does and one of my kinda bug bears about women only development programs is that they – they create the impression that women are somehow lacking. So we need to fix them by saying that. You know I think that managers and whether those managers are men or women uumm to engage with their employees uumm around career paths and career plans and then co-create with that employee about the critical experiences that are going to be necessary in order for that individual to acquire the appropriate skills and experience. I have to say I am very reluctant to say this is how you create the competencies that women need. I think different women need different competencies.”

I will now direct my attention to the critical competencies that I have classified in this phenomenological study. Through listening to what participants said I was able to organise the themes that were prevalent. I started by classifying the responses of the male participants as depicted in Figure 5.1. I then categorised the responses of the female participants as outlined in Figure 5.2. Based on the themes that emerged I was then able to confirm what the critical competencies are for women in CEO positions.

Figure 5.1. Categorising the Critical Competencies required for Executive Women according to the Male Participants

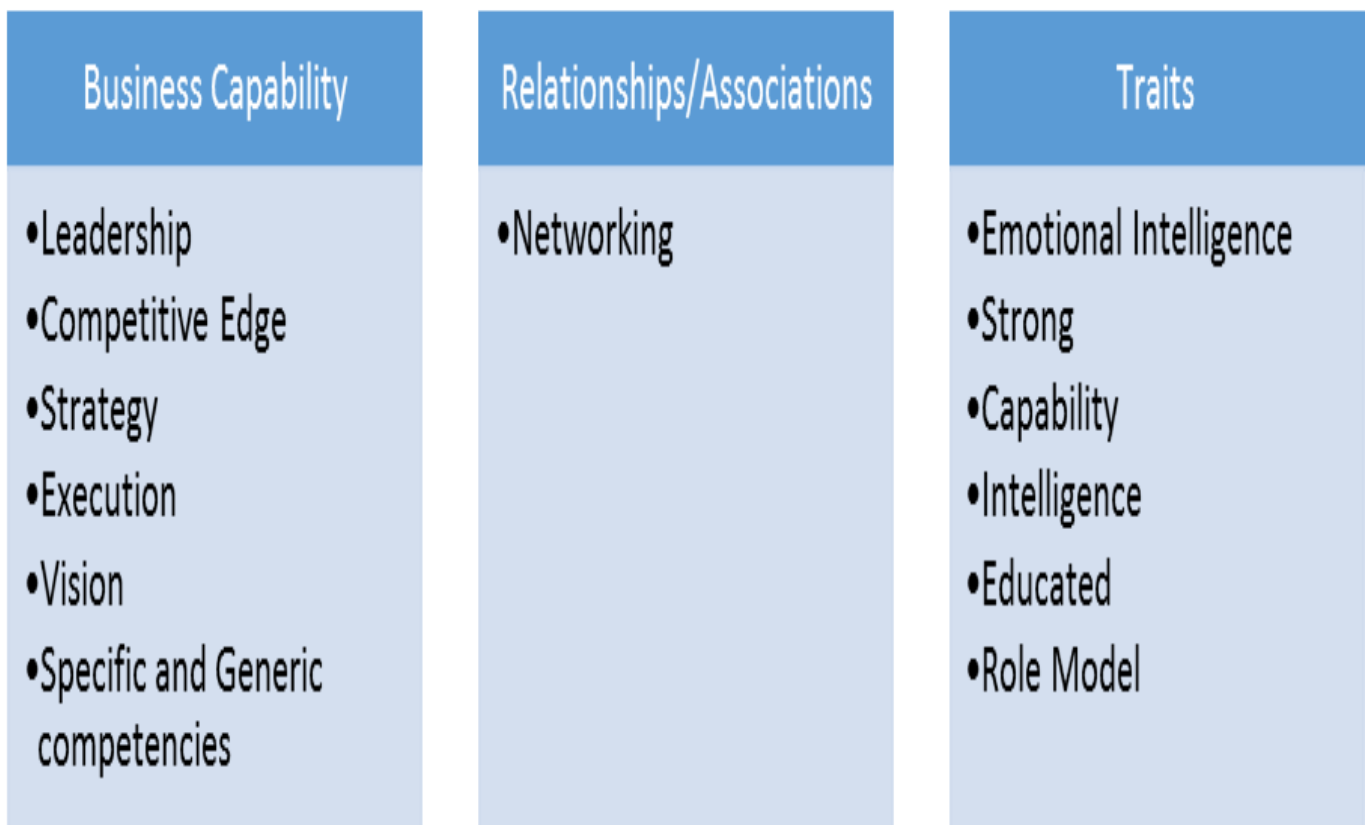


Figure 5.2. Categorising the Critical Competencies required for Executive Women according to the Female Participants

CEO	Head	Directors	Senior Managers
Business Capability			
Visionary outlook	stakeholders	Client expectations to be met	Understand the bigger picture
Strategist	Think strategically about the future and anticipate some of those needs	Strategic thinking and planning	Strategic thinking
Read broadly		Intelligent conversation/ updated knowledge	
Technical-track that you have delivered	Technical astute	Technical/operationally	operational
People /human side	Soft skills/people skills	People management	Communication skills
Takes the most difficult decisions and is responsible for those decisions The buck stops at the CEO	Creative solutions	Intercultural competencies	Problem solving/analytical skills Multicultural engagement
Academically inclined	EQ	Multiple intelligences(IQ, EQ)	EQ, Social Intelligence
Scans the environment, Focus on delivery Big on performance	Business Acumen	Business acumen even globally	Speak the business language
leadership	Leadership	Leadership and management skills People must trust in your ability	Management skills
How the organisation is set up to roll forward	Execution/Execution plan Focus	Change management Globalization Deal with political environment in the work place policy and change policy Influence broadly, globally, influence Power to change things Decision making/ informed judgement calls	Planning, organizing, executing projects Trust and delegate
Relationships/Associations			
		Legacy Networking	
Traits			
Strong Must have substance Internal locus of control	Resilience	Personality to deal with client/relationship with client Ability to listen	Mental toughness

5.3.1. Business Capability

The participants displayed a thorough understanding of the prevailing characteristics necessary for business capability, such as leadership ability, a strategic outlook, performance, engagement with stakeholders and adequate reading to keep abreast of current occurrences and technologies. However, one of the findings of this study was that the female participants at CEO level did not think that being a woman influenced business capability. Their approach and strategic outlook were not different from those of their male counterparts: both felt getting things done through people and the manner in which things were done were important. The participants understood that the wellbeing of their organisations rested upon their shoulders given that a CEO influenced the continued sustainability of an organisation. Throughout the interviews it was obvious that the CEOs did not think superficially but that they merely assumed certain competencies were obvious and needed no elaboration. Among others, these competencies included decision-making, time management and discipline.

The interview with Ruth revealed that she was a strong supporter of Steven Covey who had written a book on seven habits of highly effective people and she stated that the seven principles noted in this book had enabled her to become who she was. She corroborated the opinion of the other CEO participants that they were not inclined to list a set of competencies and elaborate extensively on only a single facet:

“So everything else that you have in your life is irrelevant because the most important thing is that your foundation has to be strong. Your foundation as a human being and your discipline-Do you love? Do you care? Do you have integrity? You know, do you have a passion for something? Are you accountable? Are you responsible? The mere fact that I’m reading everything that happens in the world on my topic that is that I am a seeker of the latest innovations that is taking place. So being a passionate learner makes you by nature someone who wants to constantly innovate.”

Victoria's comment does however encapsulates the essence of business capability for our understanding

"I think this question of seeing the wood for the trees, strategic tea leaf reading is about seeing the wood for the trees. Knowing, being able to scan the environment appropriately, accurately and saying: "Well, ok, I know that sounds, looks noisy, and looks confused but actually the thing that you taking out is the following. I think another competence for me is this cheerleading point. It's this issue to enthuse people authentically with the hope and confidence and excitement about the future."

Regarding a visionary outlook Victor stresses the importance of a visionary outlook as a leader:

"You must just be a visionary and have the ability to articulate your vision to the next person. You being a visionary on your own will not get you anywhere. If you a visionary but being able to articulate your vision to others so that they can buy into your vision. Share that vision with them. Then you will be able to say even though we facing challenges here and now. Firstly, it is worth it cause where we going and where we are going looks more than much better where we are now. But I think those are the qualities that any leader needs but more specifically women eventually need to consider."

With a visionary outlook comes the responsibility of leadership and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, leadership is a prevalent theme that came to the fore

I asked the CEO women what critical competencies are required at their level. Their feelings pertaining to leadership is as unique as their personalities:

Gail shared her recollection of leadership

"I am of this firm belief that leadership comes naturally. Um, if you come from a good background where you have been exposed to it um and my dad being an avid businessman and my big hero. I would observe his leadership skills and how he acquired additional languages to be able to interact with his staff and clients and what have you. So

one of the main, main aspects would be leadership and obviously getting onto your human side. Understanding who you dealing with whether it's a client or whether it's an employee.”

According to Cindy, one has to be clear about leading roles

“At executive level you know you’ve got to decide is it a management role, is it a leadership role and not all Board positions are leadership roles and I think it makes no sense for me to divide it into what competencies do you need to be a very good manager of guiding people, what competencies do you need to have to be a very good leader. And that’s, you need a divide and you need both at Board level in my opinion, you can’t just have a bunch of leaders you know, leading everybody into battle but no one is helping the sheep get there, so the management role is really .. I can speak from my own experience; I said earlier, I’m not a good manager, I don’t like getting involved in the minutia of what people need to do and showing them how, I’m happy to teach but then I expect them to get on with it and that is more symptomatic of a leader.”

Victoria believes that organisations differ in their expectations of leadership

“If you think that you are at any level of leadership um going to be getting an organisation to do what you want it to strategically to do and it all comes out of your desk, you've lost the plot completely. I mean clearly and different people have different forms of leadership. For me I like really delegating. I don't like to micro manage. But I am very big on performance. So if we say it will blue it will be blue. If we say we will deliver on Tuesday at 10 o'clock it better be delivered on Tuesday at 10 o'clock or before but definitely not at 10 past 10. It doesn't work for me. So you've... you know you need to drive in - in that... you have to develop a view about how you deliver that is not about you. It about how you set the organisation up to roll forward increasingly fast and increasingly turbulent world. Are clear about where it is going and then you step back because when you step back and let the organisation go then you can scan the environment again. They busy delivering, you scanning the environment and you can ooohhh just a little bit here. You know.”

From a director's perception, Melinda indicated that

"You also need both leadership and management skills in a Director role, where as a CEO role your Leadership skills should be perfect and your Management skills not used as regularly."

The male participants made the following statements concerning leadership:

"Well firstly she must have the necessary skillset ... just because a CEO is not a manager. A CEO is a leader. There's a big difference between leadership to management you know and therefore she should be able to lead and take the organisation to a level where they've never been before and create the necessary circumstances so that they can get there uh beyond their wildest expectations. Leadership is the key thing. Leadership qualities is also important for a woman to feel comfortable in her own skin. Uh you know and build a team around her so that her strengths can augment the weaknesses of the team but her own weaknesses can be augmented by the strengths of her team, which means she must feel threatened by the presence of somebody, another lady, who is much more literate financially than she is."

Victor esteems a leader who is efficacious and describes such a leader as follows:

"My boss is a leader first and foremost and an absolute brilliant and one of the brightest leaders. They know what they want and-and I forget that she is actually a woman. I just see a leader and I honour and respect her and take direction from her."

5.3.2. Relationships/ Associations

As already mentioned, the participants regarded relationships (which may take the form of mentoring or coaching) as important.

However, most of the male participants stated that there was a 'boys club'. Men are inclined to build strong networks but women do not seem to network as effectively as men do. Men relate to each other through sport, topics of conversations and shared interests. Although most women enjoy conversing with others they still do not acquire influential networks. In responding to questions about critical competencies, the female participants did not accentuate the importance of networking to the same extent as their male counterparts did. Nevertheless, they are fully aware of the importance of relationships. One of the participants mentioned that she was a private person and preferred spending time with her family.

"I'm very protective of my personal life.....because I want to spend time with my family and when I'm on my death bed I'm not going to worry about whether I was seen at that cocktail party."

Contrary to this view, Ruth shares her outlook regarding networking, a concept that she has truly embraced.

"We talk about networking, networking it is not about just giving each other business cards or getting you know contacts. It's truly to use the power of the group to help each other. Because it is that input that you need to make sure that you know how to navigate a society"

Melinda, a director also recognises the importance of networking while most of the female participants never said much about networking.

"Your ability of networking, probably one of the key abilities you need when you work on this level. It's not what you know it who you know on that level. Obviously, you must prove

what you know and that level has become critical to begin to network to build up a support structure.”

Two of the male participants explain why men take the time to build relationships. I refer to these two participants in particular because they share their views thoroughly in comparison to the other male participants who concisely point out to networking.

“So the boys club must fall. As men in senior leadership roles we tend to prefer other men because we can relate to each other, we can talk about golf, we can talk about soccer, we can talk about this and that. So naturally we tend to draw to those other things executives bounce off ideas to you.”

“. In the networking space it is uh... you see sometimes when we network we only want to look for business opportunities. We don't want to look at personal opportunities. The focus of networking is there for personal growth opportunities. Setting up a meeting, paying for yourself and say I want to meet with so and so who happens to know much more than myself about the new trend that is emerging in the HR space.”

In essence,

Sue shared an interesting perspective on research done in her organisation based on what are the challenges that women face and in particular, what are critical success factors that has led to men to succeed verses what women see as important, she cites as follows:

“And this is absolutely fascinating. Because uumm there were about 5 success factors men and women had to rank them and the men said that networking was the most important uumm and the women said networking was the least important. (Chuckle) Women said that hard work was the most important and men said hard work was the least important. So you know it may be that the way in which women understand success factors, that's actually a barrier. I think, look I am not saying that hard work isn't important but that as long as women think that hard work alone is going to get them to the top that they not going to get to the top. Network, having a mentor, having a sponsor, uumm you know those kinds of things are critical and I think women uumm in the corporate sector find

it hard to access the same kinds of networks that men do. uumm and I think that is absolutely a significant limiting factor.

5.3.3. Traits

People generally assume that men are tougher than women are. However, when I engaged with the female participants it became obvious to me that these women were not easily intimidated and had the self-confidence to strive to reach their career objectives. Zain stated the following in this regard:

“The competencies are basically whatever the man is doing they can do it. So I don’t think you need other competencies other than being a tough business. So at the end of the day they supposed to be as tough as their male counterparts.”

Ruth is a strong woman that is an example of the commentary made by Zain.

“Nobody helped me for a long time, I had to fight people to help me, I had to demand to get paid the right salary, I had to fight to become the CEO. Nothing changed so it really take resilience and really a dedication for goals to an outcome that nothing would stand in my way.”

Resilience is a common characteristic shared by all participants. I explored this characteristic and noted the following:

Victoria stated the following:

“You know I don't know that there is really a magic distinction but top performing executives CEO or others do have that resilience, do have that proven track record of delivery, aren't victims.”

Gail shares her approach to resilience

“The male dominance thing -there's very little we can do about that. So I've come to the conclusion where I just ignore any male that intimidate or feel that I will lose myself. Then I just do what I have to and I don't really take notice of - of um side line cheering. Unless you are on the running track with men that is the time I take notice of people.”

Jane indicated that

“So you really have to break through and believe that you can achieve much more than what you think your potential is. So it's really starts with uh it really starts with that belief that self-belief that you can, you are capable and you can achieve more but at the same time it has to do with the resilience because this is a challenging role and as you said that you can really harm your ambition to uh give up easily. So you have to have the resilience when you face those challenges to just learn from the experience, take the moment to reflect. Then... and say, you know what was it that you could have done differently? What was your part in this whole experience cause often one wants to blame external factors and not really reflect upon yourself and say what part did I have you know in that whole scenario and what is that I can do differently next time and pick-up the pieces and be able to move on without being engaged and a bit discouraged to say this is not meant for me because this is a challenging role. So you have to have that level of resilience to able to build up.”

One of the research objectives was to explore the qualities of CEO women. The participants do not draw attention to themselves as a person but advocates that teamwork is important. It is however noted that the purpose of this study suggests that CEO women are different or do things differently from those women who do not make it to CEO roles.

Khuwaja, et.al (2015) refers to psychology and suggestions that there are three facets of attitudes. I used the three facets noted in the works of Khuwaja to further explore these qualities of CEO women. The first facet is the cognitive or mental attitude to search and enquire after something.

Victoria relates to the cognitive facet by stating the following:

“I’m a well academically qualified. I work extremely hard to make sure that the grey matter in my brain is properly trained um and I’ve been in the right place at the right time. Been given a lot of responsibility at a very young age. I’ve not been afraid to do different things. I’ve been involved in lots and lots of diverse things. So whether that was when I was a lawyer, mining contracts, whether I was um did a lot of mining contracts then. I am not afraid of hard work.”

Ruth has advised:

“What I find is that people don’t read enough so the one thing that I do a lot is that I’m constantly reading every day. So I am a, not really a bookworm but I read about everything that is happening around the world in my industry, so always, you know on the latest innovations that is happening.”

The second facet of an attitude as proposed by Khuwaja, et.al (2015) is the affective approach, denoting the feelings one has Victoria has indicated that:

“What you can’t be is an executive that doesn’t have substance. You got to have an internal locus of control. If you there and you think I’m scared by being here or I’m not sure if I’m good enough or if I’m not sure, just put that aside and be the best you can be, be you, you have a much better chance.”

The third facet of attitude as stated by Khuwaja, et.al (2015) is that attitude has a behavioural part Gail explains this facet as follows:

“Ok for me that is absolute, absolute confidence in yourself, number one. And confidence in what it is that you are either selling or promoting. In my case it is commodities. Um you have to know your field and you have to know that before you can enter any boardroom or any organisation you first sell and sell before you sell what you actually there for. So if you are confident in who you are you’ve won half of the race.”

There are a number of women who would like to reach success in their respective careers. I asked the female participants what successful women could do to uplift upcoming women, I asked the male participants to what they believed women in senior leadership should do to enrich upcoming women. Both male and female participants expressed their perspectives to the following question:

“What guidance would you give to young women who are also aspiring to have a seat at the table?”

I directed specific attention to the guidance given by women in senior leadership roles. It was noted that women can give the necessary guidelines as seen by their response below but in actuality, to what extent are they willing to assist other women. The male participants also know that women do not support each other very well.

According to Elsie, a senior manager, you must be knowledgeable in your field:

“I think sometimes uh be a lady in particular feel they need to be almost uh assertive to the point of becoming aggressive and sometimes um I believe you don't have to be aggressive to make your opinions, to have your voice heard or to state your opinion. Sometimes you need to just do your homework. I think you need to know your facts. I think you need to know your numbers. You need to speak the business language. HR executive, the biggest challenges is that they don't identify with the business language and when they sitting at the table the operations procedure soft skills only they waste money. Staff recruitment and staff training is all about money spend. Um and we don't speak the business language. So my advice is just to know the company, understand the business language, to be patient.”

Matthew simply proposed that women should *“Be supportive and share your experience, create opportunities not division.”* while Ben also shared a similar sentiment *“ I think that they can tell success stories of their path. How it worked out for them. What made the difference in their particular area? They can tell positive stories. They can share them with other women. I think what's also important that they share their challenges and share*

some of their obstacles they met along the way and what - what made the difference to them into overcoming those particular obstacles. I think that those women can identify and help identify the competencies, which made the difference in term knowledge, skills, behaviour and emotional intelligence. What were those competencies that helped them achieve the heights which they were able to achieve?”

Wayne indicated *They (women) need to start networks, formal or informal. And just on the networks it's easy for the males just to quickly after a hard day's work just to say you feel like having a drink down the road and I am not saying everyone must get involved with alcohol or drinks helps them to socialize and then the problem is the ladies have to rush out back home because of their dual responsibility at home as well and that's why I mentioned earlier in our whole conversation that it's hard for the ladies to juggle in between and that's the reason why the higher they climb the harder it is to develop family structures. So networking is important. Formal or informal they need to start working on that subject.”*

Victoria states inspiringly to conclude

“So put up your hand, lean in when you given the opportunity. It's not about shouting shrilly, it's about quiet delivering in a manner that people can trust. That's what people must do. You build your competence; you get fit for greater responsibility as you build more and more. Not build your CV, build your fitness. And then - then I think when the time comes people will notice. The worse thing to do is do something you not passionate about. So don't do this in an area because you mother said so or because you saw Nicky doing it. Do it because it's what you want to be excellent at. You want to wake up every morning thinking about. That's what I would say.”

5.4. **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I referred to the themes that had emerged from the data. I discussed the dimensions of business capability, relationships/associations and traits. I also drew attention to the importance of leadership skills, the need for women to network and the personal traits, such as resilience, that women in CEO positions employed.

In the next chapter, I will classify the challenges that women in senior leadership roles face.

CHAPTER 6: CLARIFYING THE CHALLENGES OF EXECUTIVE WOMEN

“Be First And Be Lonely.” (Ginni Rometty, Chairwoman and CEO of IBM)

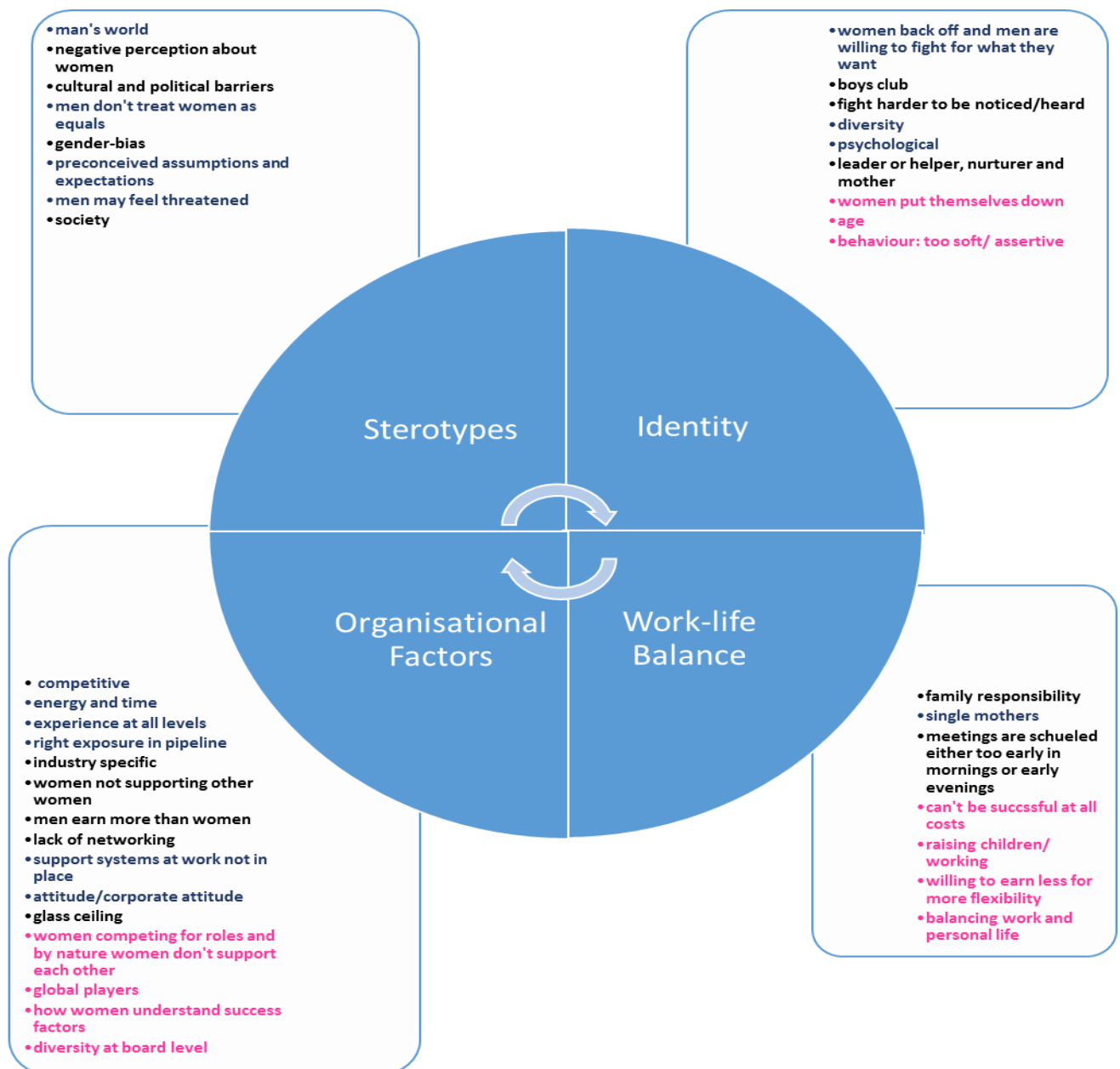
6.1. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter dealt with the competencies applicable to CEO women. The focus was on the efficacy that marked the success of these women. By including the male counterparts, evidence could be obtained about the characteristics of both male and female executives at a CEO level, and it was established that the same qualities were required of them. Chapter 6 explores the actual challenges women in senior leadership roles experience.

The women in the study are in top-ranking leadership positions. Although they have achieved success in their careers, my analysis indicates that stereotyping, perceptions, cultural and political barriers, gender bias, work-life balance, remuneration, glass ceilings, inadequate support structures, diversity issues and interrelationships are salient themes in their lives.

Figure 6.1 illustrates the challenges faced by women in senior leadership roles

Figure 6.1: Categorising the challenges women experience at an executive level



Key

Challenges expressed by women

Challenges expressed by men

Challenges expressed by both men and women

6.2. STEREOTYPES

6.2.1. A man's world

Some of the female participants expressed the view that it was still a man's world, as a result of which they had to work twice as hard to prove their worth. However, one CEO woman did not hold that view and I got the impression that she had a lot of self-confidence and took charge of what she did or believed. Her response made me realise that it is important to be aware of our perception because it will influence the manner in which we relate to people, things or events.

I asked a Victoria the following question: *'How do you thrive in a male-dominated environment?'* Her response was as follows:

"Well as I say I don't relate to it in gender terms. You need to ask somebody who looks at it that way. I mean I do think some women find it difficult to find voice, appropriate voice. I think this happens to be a very diverse organization. Diverse in all of its ways, organisation but I do think some women in some organisation do find it tough to be heard. To sit at the table and as Cheryl Sandberg would say you lean in. I would say they have to force themselves to lean in. It easy to be the person sitting on the side physically sitting on the side. You actually (demonstrates) lean in yourself. You got to ask someone who looks at it that way. I just don't look at it that way."

The other responses concerning the challenges facing executive women are noted below. Based on the experiences narrated it can be gathered that some men still hold certain opinions about women but that the female participants are not deterred by these opinions.

Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer and Hebron (1991) state that feminine identity is often linked to behaviours such as shopping, which is 'the ultimate form of self-expression'.

Ruth and Gail, both CEO women, indicated that they could relate to the above statement:

“I was in a meeting with one of my, with a group of colleagues and an International Consultant came in and we were talking about ... they made a comment like “I’m sure that you might rather go shopping” so you know what I Only a man would have made that, as a woman you would have never made a comment like that towards a man. So you know what I’m saying.... very patronising, why, because I’m a woman you know they feel that they need to, you know, like a little girl that needs to be told what to do. Or if I would get very, let’s say annoyed ok and say I’m a person, then the thing that I’m a person. So when I say that... you have to just ignore them.”

“Specifically my arena of work it's a male dominant arena and you tend to be underestimate all the time. The women have to go the extra mile to prove themselves constantly, which I think is unnecessary if um certain... especially the male species our there can just accept the fact that we can do things as better if not better than them. I mean it has been proven on numerous occasions”

I thought it would be insightful to hear from men, so I asked the male participants what the current stumbling blocks they could easily remove from women to expedite the advancement of women in leadership roles.

According to Luke: “Sjoe! You know that's a difficult one um. I - I, you know in my experience um one... there's no shortcut to being a successful executive. You need to have gained experience at all levels that there are moving up to the point that you are a successful executive. You may be familiar with some of the work that's been done um. One of the authors uh and one of the one of the very well known authors uh and you know leading thinkers is a guy called Drotter He's written a book about the leadership pipeline... Now I think that for any person who wants to become a successful executive um moving through the different levels of managerial responsibility it is of critical importance. Yes, so one thing that can be done um is to give any person whether it be a man or a woman and

any person of any race the right exposure each in that pipeline. So that when they get to an executive position they can be successful.”

Matthew refers to the sensitivity that some men have towards the progression of women and proposes that men should recognise women are equal and not see women as a threat. From a historical perspective, most women occupied roles in clerical, nursing and teaching fields and advancing in the organisation to senior leadership roles was unheard of. A number of women were ‘housewives’ or worked half day so men always flourished in their respective careers.

“Men can stop playing boys games and acknowledge that women are equal, Men need to manage their esteem and realise it is not attached to a women’s success or advancement above their own, change rigid approaches to accommodate the female role, which does include motherhood etc. Be welcoming of diversity in the form of feminine intuition and a gentler approach at times.”

6.3. NEGATIVE PERCEPTION, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL BARRIERS

The culture of the organisation can be largely influenced by perception and attitudes regardless of gender since perceptions influences thinking which may have an impact on the working environment (Kiser, 2015). Some organisations are predominately male and their perception about women may be rigid. Anthony explains this issue as follows:

“The other challenge that you also must be very upfront with is South African society's very patriarchal in nature um there are certain professions you know where historically these been a male dominant uh environment uh where there should be engineering field was very much male dominated. Few entrants there in the workplace that there was almost this mucho environment which women don't always embrace you know. Certain women takes pride in their femininity and professionalism and they don't need to prove anything to all these macho mucho antics men sometimes tries on. So - so - so uh..... can be uh kinda of an impediment some guys even feel threatened you know because of employment equity that women might sometimes advance quicker themselves in the

workplace. So we got to sensitise men to that reality and then educate them and engage them constructively on the importance of uh you know levelling the playing field and they don't need to feel threatened about that.” “Well the world of work has changed. You know uh - uh and uh I don't (pause). I – I think in South Africa um in the last employment equity commission report. It's was a serious wake-up call and lot of companies have now been put on terms uh to make sure that uh you know they really work toward impeachment of women to the workplace. One of the challenges women are going to face to is to - to assert themselves in own name and right in and not be ready to just be planter because the employment equity numbers look good so we have to put you in as a woman. Women, the challenge is to rise up you know to the occasion and really ground them self and undergrad themselves with the requisite you know skillset and uh also be honest enough when they not ready, to decline, and not to be you know uh in a hurry to advance knowing fully well that they setting themselves up for failure. There a lot of women out there very ceremonial in very plant positions. The pay check looks good, the perks look good but the contribution and needing is actually not so profound because the women was not honest to say I am not ready yet you know. And very sure there's this value and you know their whole dignity gets twisted because uh they - they - they took too big a quantum leap and uh I've seen it happen in many places uh.”

6.4. IDENTITY AND GENDER BIAS

Some of the participants have indicated that they are frowned upon if they assert themselves and if they do not assert themselves according, they are not taken seriously. They may come across as being aggressive if they behave in a manner that is not seen as appropriate for a woman. Women have multifaceted roles and it is necessary for people to discerning of the various roles a woman may assume.

Pam expressed herself as follows in this regard: *“Um, a lot of challenges around how a female should act or how a woman should actually be in a highly male dominated environment because if you are the type of women that you're assertive you know you kinda frowned upon. If you the kind of person that is too soft and people orientated and you know the type of person to listen and resolve people's issues um it's also frowned*

upon. You're seen as you too soft and you'll never get that higher level. You need to strike that balance between being assertive, be flexible to what extent should you be"

Melinda made an interesting point concerning age: *"Secondly most women reach that level of maturity in their career at a later age. At which we are only taken seriously when we are a bit more mature. Where Gentleman probably reach that level of maturity at an earlier stage. Men reach this level around 10 to 15 years earlier than females do. The Thing is, on a high level what bothered me the most, men are treated in terms of what they promise where women are treated in terms of what they have already delivered."*

6.5. WORK- LIFE BALANCE

When the participants were asked about their work-life balance, all agreed that this was a challenge. Some alluded to the difficulties experienced when children were still young. One of the participants indicated that she had to cancel planned events and realised later in her life that she should have declined right at the outset. Another participant indicated that her children were grownups (and professionals as well) so she was enjoying the opportunity to do her own thing. The following question was asked concerning work-life balance:

Question: *How do you manage your personal life to accommodate your career as an executive woman?*

Sue, Head of Diversity and Transformation, Corporate Social Investment, Employee Wealth and Wellness mentioned that she is fortunate and is aware that not all women are in a fortunate position as she is

" Look, I'm – I'm very lucky. I am in a position to employ a living housekeeper who drives and his been with me since my son was 2 months old and he is now 17. So – so, ja, so that's kinda of how I - I manage it. Uumm. I work very hard when I'm at work. I don't take work home with me uumm and – and I'm pretty strict about that. I mean obviously there's the occasional emergency you know and - and I have to. But on the whole I don't. I get to

work very early. I be out of here by 5 o'clock and I go home and I then you know I'm with - with my son. But obviously without my housekeeper you know. I obviously, I don't know what women do who have to you know carry their kids to extramural or umm. So I am fortunate and I know not all women are in that kind of position."

Elsie, a senior manager believes that it is a difficult feat

"So the myth of work/life balance is precisely that. It's a myth. I don't think you can ever get to 100% balance. I think something suffer along the way because unfortunately it is what it is. I do think however if you've got a very strong support group it's easier to do the things that you need to do. I think your challenges compounded if you single, as single mom"

Sandra, a Director believes that a support structure is needed.

"Look I think I am very lucky um the point that my husband is very supportive. He's always supported the way I want to get stuff. I think the key understanding between the two of us is that we need to communicate well with each other to make sure that um if I am going to be late at work he needs to leave early to deal with the kids or vice versa. I think it's that making sure that understanding between the two of you that the gear you can't achieve at work what you want to achieve if you unhappy at home."

Tanya, a Director shared a different outlook but also mentions that a support structure is needed.

"Look in, in terms of I think the reality is I don't. I work myself to death. Because I have to compete in a world and I have to work harder... Uuumm. I decide what is important and not from - from a personal point of view but if you ask me about how do I balance my lifestyle. I have no life. Uuumm I have and I am going to say to you now fortunately I have children or a child that is grown-up. So there's -there's less demand from me from that point of view. I was lucky when I was younger to have a very good support structure in place to enable this."

Meanwhile Gail ensures that she gives attention to her daughters even though she has a demanding schedule, she does however all attest that a good support structure is needed.

“That's a tricky one. I've got a good support structure at home. I travel often. So I've manage to get the 25% quadrant balanced. It took me years and I finally found that if I spend 5 days away from the house I will make sure that I have 5 days that I can spend with the girls. If I spend 4 days actively away from the house or factory I make sure that I, I catch-up or I makeup or I must Skype or I assess and take them on vacation whenever we can and it helps to have an amazing platform that I have to be able to do that.”

The participants are fully aware that some women want to get married and have children. Women are also more advanced in education in comparison to the woman in the past. Participants do what they can to meet this work-life dilemma and as far as possible strive not to neglect their families. The participants all agree that a support structure makes it a bit easier to be an executive as well but with that said women are also not fairly remunerated in comparison to their male counterparts in leading positions.

6.5.1. Remuneration

As stated by the US (USA) Census Bureau (2010), women earn are paid just about 77 cents to every dollar earned by a man. In retrospect, we live in a country that is highly patriarchal, where the men was the primary breadwinner. This is no longer the case, since most women are also working to support the household and it must be noted that some women are single parents.

Anthony commented on the concept of remuneration and stated:

“Remuneration is also another thing uh.... You where uh - uh historically uh the women were not always... A lot of company structures are still skew towards superstars out there and attract these male superstars with high bonuses or stuff should always as you know uh this is what I want to say is uh there's sometime even discriminatory practices in the way the packages are structured.”

6.5.2. Women's Approach towards each other

It has been indicated that some female managers work contrary to the interest of other women in the organisation (Hurst, Leberman & Edwards, 2016). Implied aggression by women can manifest through various ways and means, for example interfere with the career of another woman, holding feeling of resentment, lack of collaboration, spiteful blather, indirect affronts and belittling behaviour which may negatively impact the woman (Brock, 2008; Brock and Grady, 2009; Marvin et al., 2014).

I posed the following question to male participants to see if they relate to what former research has indicated about how women relate to each other.

Question: “What can successful women do to further uplift and clear the path for upcoming women?”

Zain's response was noted as follows:

“I am speaking to somebody and they said once certain women come right on top they actually kick the stepladder away and there is nobody else that can come up. And I've seen that so many times that people get there they not trying to assist or train the people coming up the ladder. As far as they concerned they don't want any competition. I see it so often and it's actually sad. And that's the deal the female's got. Once they get there on top, there at the bottom they not going to get up there in a hurry.”

It was briefly mentioned by another male participant, *“Women face the passive aggressive nature of other women who feel small by their colleague success.”*

During my interview, it became apparent that former research had not changed much to what the male participants said from their experience. It is unfortunately noted that women, not only men can stand in the way of another person's career.

I asked the female participants to share some insights regarding their expected challenges within the next five-ten years and the following responses were of interest concerning women:

Amy shared her perspective:

“I think one of the challenges that are going to come in the next while is that there will be more women that will be competing for roles and women by nature don't support each other, women by nature actually put each other down because if we support each other there would be many more of us in these roles but it is just, I don't know, it is something that we have to learn and that we have to like the old boys club we need to stick together like the old girls club. I think women should get their skills together, I think women are going to continue to struggle.”

Brenda, a senior manager stated her opinion:

“Um. I think that another challenge would be the lack of accessible role models um for women compared to men. So I think that you would find more and more female leaders um I think that um the accessibility to those types of role models for younger women would still be a challenge in the next few years.”

My next approach was to discover why women would behave in such a manner given the fact that women are the caregivers, the more sensitive gender who has an appreciation for friendships and relationships and I found the answer from one of the male participants as I consider the question posed about the challenges women in executive roles experience

“Ja, look I think ... executive roles are very competitive. Um whether you are a man, a woman, um or regardless of what race you are. I think they're very, very competitive. And so they require an enormous commitment and a very significant uh amount of a person's energy and time um and so I think the one thing that's common regardless of race or gender is that just those executive jobs are hugely challenging and demanding on your

time and energy. Um I think if you overlay some of those challenges which women face and certainly I see that in our business.”

Further to the above response, Elsie, stated the following: *“I think that the biggest challenge women have that we have to compete twice as hard. So the problem is that you'd find is that or you'd constantly have in the back of your mind that you need to prove your worth, you need to prove your seat around the table. . So um at our um executive level we were only two females, myself and another female”*

This behaviour is indicative of competition which can cause hostility among females and it is stated that a woman's socialization and her experiences during childhood forms her, so the enquiry lies in the ability a woman has to adjust the adopted behaviour that was established at the initial stages of development (Hurst, Leberman & Edwards, 2016).

According to Litwin (2011), women hardly ever disclose their expectations concerning relationships, which results in increasing the probability for misinterpretation and conflict. Furthermore, it is posited by Litwin that females want a more interpersonal approach from managers who are female than from male counterparts which makes it intricate for women who prefer a more “manly” leadership approach.

One of the male participants indicated, *“I obviously speak to other colleagues of mine who are female senior leaders. They always say they are always amazed at how women don't come to them for advice or coaching or mentoring.”*

I then proceeded by exploring what successful women can do to further uplift and clear the path for upcoming women. The following responses from Anthony was noted in particular since I discovered that CEO women are resilient.

“Successful woman should have a much more outward focus and an inward focus. Outward focus it's a question of what opportunities are there to uh sensitise the next generation. Uh About you know uh their careers, their growth path and so on. And listen

you know why you've been invited to a big conference or speak you tell them what the corporate structures are. Right around you there might be people. I chatted up so many people, waiters and waitresses, people that are putting petrol in my car, only to discover that this person has quite a good education but there are no jobs and linking them to those opportunities to make sure that they get at least space opportunity to earn income in a career path most probably end in leadership position. So have an outward focus, be sensitive out there so that it's not just about me, my and I. You can enhance their effort but uh it's investing in people sometimes you know makes a difference in their lives because not all of them can afford it. My thinking.”

6.5.3. Glass ceiling

The participants in this study are strong women, they have communicated that they read extensively which is indicative of their relevant knowledge, they have displayed characteristics such a tenacity, resilience, remaining true to who they are, staying focus and are particularly clear about what they want and do not want. Waber (2014) has indicated according to Fortune 500 companies that only 4.2 percent of women are chief executive officers. From the works of Scharr (2012), it is noted that women advance to middle management levels but then further promotion is hindered whereas male counterparts are benefited as far as promotion is concerned.

I posed the question to both male and female participants to explore what their uptake is pertaining to the glass ceiling. The responses were quite interesting, given the designation of the participants.

Question to Female Participants “What is your uptake on the glass ceiling and the impact it has on women?”

According to Elsie, a senior manager:

“So I believe there's certain roles, unfortunately, your softer ones. Your finance sometimes, not always, but your HR sometimes, your legal, sometimes your regulatory positions tend to be earmarked for females. Where you have your other hard-core uh

positions. Sometimes your CSO roles, your sales roles, your IT roles often it seems to be most times earmarked for men and that does effectively um create a bit of a glass ceiling. In the organisation I was in um, it was just a take that they prefer to have men in most of the roles and consequence of that was there was effectively for the longest time because the take was that the position could only be filled by a man. So that is the real and also there's instances where you get the old boy club.”

Amy (Head of Property):

“I think that glass feeling is only as surreal as we make it. I think glass feelings are put in there by ourselves because actually we don't really believe that we are good enough to get through it. I see it all the time, I see it every day, women doubt themselves they should not do that. We have all the ability to crack that glass ceiling but something holds us back and it is something within ourselves and if you really want to go you can go and there is nothing that is holding us back but our own beliefs and our own disbelief in we're not quite good enough and we have to get over that. Our most important duty as mothers is to not raise guilty next generation of daughters”

As believed by Jo-Anne (Director): “I think women to an extent still experience that glass ceiling in certain organisations where they can only progress to a certain level and after that feel that um no matter how much effort they put they don't progress higher than that.”

Participant 2 (CEO) “I don't think I'm, you see I'm not somebody who feels there is a glass ceiling. Maybe because I'm a bit thick skinned and I just refuse to let gender hold me back. You know you have baggage if you believe it exist, you know this from your studies but it never occurred to me there was a glass ceiling.”

Question to male participants: “Do you believe that the glass ceiling is still real for women?”

The male participants agree that some glass ceilings are industry specific, for example, construction, an environment that tends to be male-dominated. Some of the male participants also believe that women tend to place limitations of themselves and their thinking can serve as a barrier. In this instance, I did not state the names of the male

participants who responded to the question to product the organisations for which they work.

“I should think so you know because boys club is very, very much still intact. It still feeds off past relationships whereas you know some of these men works there becomes deeply entrenched. Uh but as you know I see great women emerging from nowhere regardless and I’ve been exposed to some of them and it’s just amazing how they’ve risen above all these hard...”

“yes! but this is because of historical views. It is because of historical views and certain uh-uh of our religions, certain of our cultures looks at it that way um and those are the things that come into play.”

“I think the answer for me personally is yes and is also no.

Yes: because certain industries are still perceived to be male dominant.

No: women can set limits on themselves by thinking too small, because they often lack the confidence to go all the way.”

The two approaches from a CEO’s outlook is encapsulated below.

Gail believes that the glass ceiling is still prevalent in certain industries, but can be eroded

“Absolutely, I still think certain, but not all, certain positions is given it to women as - as uh window dressing. But I believe that any woman, if they really put their minds to it, can get above that position and that glass ceiling can be exploded. It doesn’t have to be a gap.”

Cindy’s tenacity was reiterated through her response:

“I don’t think I’m, you see I’m not somebody who feels there is a glass ceiling. Maybe because I’m a bit thick skinned and I just refuse to let gender hold me back. You know you

have baggage if you believe it exist, you know this from your studies but it never occurred to me there was a glass ceiling.”

6.5.4. Diversity

One of the CEO participants made an interesting point regarding diversity. The point she made was that life may be different for women in organisations but are we alert to the experiences of people with disabilities. Are we mindful of the experiences of people of colour? Are we aware of the experiences of white males? This was a different perspective that points to the significance of a person’s presence. However, the challenges that senior leadership face, as indicated by Luke alerts us to the fact that there are massive challenges at a macro level and Luke states:

“You know it is very difficult to be a part time executive, it’s a very all encompassing, very demanding and challenging role which an executive has.”

The setting in workplace is altering and it is necessary for organisations to confront gender diversity matters as cited by Kiser (2015). Research conducted by Budworth and Mann (2010) posits that behaviours that assist men in succeeding and advancing may not be identical for females who seek the equivalent opportunities.

Victoria responded to the challenge of diversity that may be experienced futuristically as follows:

“From a gender specific perspective I think the challenges are to be diversity at board level because executives eventually end up maturing from executives in to board levels... So I think that for women going forward its going... the challenge is going to be about, especially at senior levels, how do you help the diversity discussion in a manner that and how do you lead by example delivering in this difficult world that we saying because if you don’t deliver you can’t help the diversity conversation.”

6.5.5. Inadequate Support Structures

The participants agreed that support structures were very important, be it in the form of a spouse, grandmother or helper. Having someone to assist with something or attend to a task while the participants were at work is seen as necessary. Elsie states the following from personal experience:

Previously I didn't have that support you know. I've got somebody that can pick him up at soccer or pick my daughter from music lessons before I didn't have that support and so um the... something uh... you know you can never have 100% 50/50 balance. There's always that various stages of your career an area that you need to sacrifice and then um other times you seem to relatively balance it out but it's a difficult feat. It's a conscious decision you gotta make all the time.

6.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I outlined the challenges facing women in leadership positions. As corroborated in the literature, some of the factors hindering the career progression of women of today are stereotypes, identity, organisational factors and work-life balance.

In Chapter 7, I discuss my findings in relation to the findings in existing literature.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I discuss the main findings from the study as stated in the aforementioned two chapters. I assess my findings by relating the findings with the relevant literature. The intention of this study was to explore the critical competencies of CEO women and to explore the actual challenges that are evident to women in these senior leadership roles. Furthermore, I also wanted to understand the qualities of women in CEO roles

7.2. DRAWING FROM PAST EXPERIENCES

The participants indicates that their previous positions equipped them with the necessary skills at each level. One of the CEO women also indicated that it was important to have a solid record of accomplishment of former successes of the prior positions as they journeyed through their respective career paths.

7.3. COMPETENCIES FOR PRESENT POSITION

My analysis brought three avenues in the CEO sphere to the fore, namely business capability (with an emphasis on leadership), relations and personal traits that are applicable to the c-suite. At a CEO level, it is automatically assumed that a person has the competencies expected from a woman in a senior position but who has not yet reached a CEO level. However, the approach of a CEO is more orientated towards leadership, environmental factors, vision and strategy. It is postulated that the thinking, approach and perceptions of CEOs are significantly different, as they have to make tough decisions.

Essentially, critical competencies refer to the assets and talents that permit an organisation to maintain its competitive edge in a volatile market (Ireland & Hitt, 2005, p. 69). Intellectual capital is unique to organisations. The participants indicated that they read extensively and kept abreast of current technologies. Knowledge is key to strategic

leadership, greater execution and performance and the creation and building of relationships (Ireland & Hitt, 2005).

Leadership came strongly to the fore as the primary skill because it takes effective leadership to steer an organisation and make it successful. As posited by Ireland and Hitt (2005, p. 68), a CEO is directly responsible for the direction of an organisation.

According to Nyukorong and Quisenberry (2016, p 72) there is inadequate research that has been done on most senior leaders that verify the executive leadership abilities that supports efficacious strategic-level leadership. These authors also posit that not many studies that focused on the characteristics of effective leaders display the individualities that can propel senior leadership to lead an organisation successfully. However, as cited by Cormier (2007), women leaders define success as being involved and receiving recognition for their contribution, exhibiting good leadership, experiencing a sense of achievement, financially remunerated, having a balanced life and feeling satisfied. Moreover, women in leadership aspires to make a difference, live with sense of balance, lead with respectability, engage with colleagues and plan for what lies ahead (Cormier, 2007, p 269).

Relations are important at a CEO level. Gibson et al. (2013) assert that networking facilitates the progression of personal and professional opportunities. Networking refers to the exchange of interests, information and influence (Gibson et al., 2014). The male participants in this study stated that networking was important. Existing literature confirms that women do not have the influential networks that men have. The male participants in the current study alluded to networking activities such as golf or soccer that allowed them to communicate with one another. A few of the female participants acknowledged the importance of associations such as mentoring, coaching and networking. According to Cormier (2007), 'success is a social phenomenon' and both social and business networking opportunities promotes evolving and growth opportunities for women.

The participants also highlighted the question of attitude and alluded in particular to resilience as one of the traits they possessed. According to Khuwaja et al. (2015), men in

leadership positions tend to have more resilience than women. Khuwaja et al. add that effective leaders, both men and women, possess characteristics, which includes achievement, assertiveness, self-confidence, and risk taking.

7.4. ENDURING CHALLENGES

The challenges that women in senior leadership face has not been curtailed at a rapid rate. The participants still experience the negative influence of stereotypes. They choose to combat this challenge by ignoring this phenomenon and pressing on. Men in general still perceive women as wives and mothers and do not really recognize women as equal partners. As indicated by Ghaleh, et.al (2015, p 186) adverse stereotypes portray females as inferior to males.

The Conference Board of Canada (2013) has reported that men in senior positions do not seem to be bothered with endorsing women into management roles. In consequence, if men have the capacity to promote and advance in the upper echelons and the organisation lacks fostering a culture of diversity than women will remain behind (Kiser, 2015).

By and large, there are different stereotypic traits pertaining to gender as stated by Takala and Aaltio (2007) .As suggested by these authors women display the following traits

- Tenderness
- Loquacious
- Attentive to the feelings of others
- Absorbed in their own appearance
- Well-ordered in their ways
- Sturdy requisite for security
- Communicative of warm feelings
- Discreet
- Don't use abrasive language

Whereas men display the following traits according to Rosenkranz and Brannon:

- Vigorous
- Competitive
- Overriding
- Makes decisions effortlessly
- Self-governing
- Rational
- Undeviating
- Deeds of a leader
- Determined
- Distinguish feelings from ideas
- Daring

Perception, cultural and political barriers also serves as challenges for women in senior leadership roles. The cultural and social influence *of women magazines should not be taken too lightly as cited by Summers, Eikhof and Carter (2013)*. It has been indicated that magazines may be supporting conventionality and the impact of women's magazines cannot be seemingly benevolent (Summers, et.al, 2013). Furthermore, Dave and Purohit (2016) has stated that the perception of society is reflected in the organisational and social culture and society must come to an awareness that women are not restricted to the homebased dominions.

Organisations have their own culture, values, knowledge and capabilities and these familiarities are central to organisations, hence the resistance to sudden change (Boguslauskas & Kvedaraviciene, 2009). It is customary for certain organisations to conduct meetings early in the morning or in the evenings which becomes a strain for women who also have domestic responsibilities, such as taking the children to school, attending sporting activities that their children are involved in and being a support to her husband who experiences his own difficulties. Perceptions that are noted in certain cultural background also places strain on high-ranking women, because there may be a perception that it is a woman's duty to cook and clean and some men are not receptive to the idea of domestically inclined activities, this is however not the case for all men.

Moreover, as believed by Sheaffer, et.al (2011) men are thought of as possessing characteristics such as drive, insistence, keenness and self-confidence that relates to managerial accomplishment which may account for the lack of women in leadership roles given the perception that if men are more competent than women than invariably women will not advance to the degree that men do (Kiser, 2015).

Women have professional and personal identities. The workplace in the twenty-first century involves the understanding of women's professional identities, which is important for comprehending gender and gender equality as believed by (Summers, et. al, 2013), who also asserts that traditional stereotypes tend to influence the perception that the public may hold about women. As believed by Kelan and Mah (2014), identification pertains to the manner in which people construct their identities with reference to specific groups.

Work-life balance is also a hurdle for women in senior leadership, since women have also started to contribute to the wellbeing of the organisation. Balance is important, but professional obligations can cause women to make major compromises. As indicated by Dave and Purohit (2016) it is essential to preserve a meaningful life without an opportunity cost.

Women are generally less compensated than their male counterparts are and the probability of advancing is not to the same extent as men.

How women relate to each other is important. It has been noted from the participants that women, generally do not support each other. According to Kelan and Mah (2014), there is not enough role models which accounts for the scarcity of women in leadership roles.

The glass ceiling is indicative that women lack opportunity to prove themselves and from research it is known that women also perform at the same standard as men and in some cases, women outperform men (Buckalew, et.al; 2012). As suggested by Sabharwal (2013), women in managerial positions are appraised less favourably and have inadequate support from peers and are subject to criticism even though they are in the same leading

roles as their counterparts. From the participants, it is noted that women do believe that glass ceiling exist but for the minority of the participants this train of thought is not entertained.

7.5. THE QUALITIES OF CEO WOMEN

In essence, the defining difference between those women in the C-Suite and those who are not is the calling that is best suited to such a person, coupled with the drive and efficacy that makes such a woman exceptional. This perspective stems from the understanding with all participants that one needs the entire package for success, these involve the competencies and the ability to overcome impediments with inadequate support at times. In essence, resilience was a key factor.

In line with the categorization of competencies, the following dimensions are noted from literature from a behavioural outlook:

Thinking pertains to facets such as ‘analytical ability, judgement, acuity of understanding, vision and organisational awareness’ (Heinsman, de Hoogh, Koopman & van Muijen, 2007, p 416)

Feeling relates to ‘empathy, sociability, cooperation and relationship management’ (Heinsman, de Hoogh, Koopman & van Muijen, 2007, p 416)

Power comprise ‘initiative, direction, persuasion, decisiveness, responsibility and stress resilience’ (Heinsman, de Hoogh, Koopman & van Muijen, 2007, p 416).

7.6. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I elaborated on my findings based on a phenomenological study. I supported my findings by referring to literature. The qualities of CEO women stems from this phenomenological perspective, therefore my understanding in this regard is not contingent to former research. I do however acknowledge the critical competencies that CEO women have and the endurance they have to fulfil their potential and aspirations.

Furthermore, I am also mindful from the interviews held with the participants that supports the findings of Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) which posits that women in leading roles may not support other women who come up through the ranks, thus preserving their significance in these leading roles.

The following chapter presents the conclusion of the study, discussing the limitations of the study and making recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1. INTRODUCTION

I conclude this chapter by revisiting the objectives of this research study and bringing to the fore that the title for my dissertation is still applicable and worthy of further scrutiny

History has greatly affected the impression of women within society. In retrospect, women who worked were perceived as 'immoral and unfeminine objects of pity' and were accused of being neglectful mothers because women were expected to be wives and mothers (Domenico & Jones, 2006, p 1). The question that resonates is what does it take to accept the merit of a woman at an executive level? Despite this conundrum young women may benefit from knowing what career options are available to them by acquiring insight into these women's career aspirations, career trajectories and career interests' who have achieved success in leading positions. Young women would also be furnished with an understanding of the criteria that necessitates respect in these leading roles.

The research objectives in this study was

- To examine what competencies are critical for women in executive leadership roles
- To explore the challenges that are real to women in executive positions
- To disclose the qualities of women who occupy leadership positions in the c-suite

The perspectives of both men and women brought a wealth of knowledge to what this qualitative study wants to achieve through the research objectives.

Consistent with the findings, from literature, there is under-representation of women in CEO roles within organisations. This dearth of women in senior leadership roles is a problem that is globally noted. The responsibility of being a CEO is great and it takes an exceptional woman to persist her career with self-worth. As believed by Nyukorong and Quisenberry (2016, p 81) emotional intelligence permits a leader to acclimatize to cultural, political, physical and social contexts.

8.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The participants in this study were men and women in senior leadership roles. I did not engage with former CEO women who had first-hand experience of being a CEO so I could not determine if their competencies differed from the competencies of women who were CEOs at the time of the study.

8.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research study was a qualitative, phenomenological study, which only focused on women in senior leadership roles, particularly CEO women in South Africa. Future research could examine the potential of women in middle and lower managerial positions globally and establish what marks them as talented, what critical competencies they are able to master and what challenges they are able to manage successfully.

Engaging with women at a global level could provide added insight into the differences and similarities among CEO women in different countries. This is however likely to be a costly endeavour.

8.4. CONCLUSIONS

This research study referred to existing literature that highlights that there are not enough women in executive leadership roles. According to Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011), impediments that are still real include stereotyping, élite networks, masculine traditions, the glass ceiling, rigidity and reluctance to relocate and personal barricades. There is still a need for succession planning that is pertinent for women, flexibility and work life balance, cultural adjustments within organisations, and suitable mentoring and coaching that fast track growth and development for women (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2001, p 51).

Having explored the opinions of the male participants about the critical competencies of and challenges experienced by executive women I have concluded that women are capable of occupying leadership roles at a senior level but they often have to pay a high

price to get there, particularly if they are single mothers. “Achieving professional status may be more difficult for women than for men” (Domenico & Jones, 2006, p 1)

Another conclusion I have reached is that society in general will need to revisit its perspectives about women and reconsider existing stereotyping. As indicated by Domenico & Jones (2006) traditionally, society assumed that a woman’s place was in her home, caring for her husband and children. On the contrary as cited by Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) there are women in senior leadership roles who are protective of their positions and are disinclined to share their accomplishments with other women in order to remain irreplaceable in their working environments.

In the following chapter, I share some personal reflections on my study.

CHAPTER 9: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I look back on my academic journey with a great deal of joy, but it was certainly not an easy road to travel. I worked and studied, keeping my eye on the goal – to successfully complete my MCom degree and ultimately qualify as an industrial psychologist.

Of course, I would not have been successful without the support of various people. In particular, I think of the times when I communicated with Dr Carrim and I will be ever thankful for her encouragement. Dr Carrim is calm, accommodating and always willing to assist.

My dissertation allowed me to engage with well-respected people in their respective industries and it was certainly both a privilege and an amazing experience that I will treasure. I would never have had the opportunity to meet with the participants of this study if I had chosen another topic. I was highly impressed by the unhesitating willingness of the participants to take part in my study and share their insights about the world of executives. I certainly gave my undivided attention to the wise words of these individuals and took note of their experiences. Amelia shared her remarkable perspectives and Kim expressed some interesting viewpoints and graciously presented me with two autographed books of hers. Colin, Toni and Joelene were kind enough to phone me and saved me the expense of making telephone calls to interview them. I think of every participant who chose to remain unidentified. You have contributed toward the success of my journey and I salute you for your dedication and passion for what you do.

I think of the hard work, commitment and perseverance it takes to face and overcome life's challenges, and I recollect the sacrifices made in order to obtain this achievement. Life is truly a test at times and a revelation at other times.

The thought of knowing that 'all things are possible for those who believe' is truly inspiring. I look forward to becoming a professional woman and being a person that other younger women can look up to. This journey has taught me that every woman has her own

experiences in life. We all have happy and unhappy experiences, but the courage to stand up and press on is what makes people, both men and women, successful.

It is indeed an honour for me to witness that my dream has become my reality.

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Consent Form

Research conducted by:
Miss. S. Smith (15270752)
Cell: 072 900 4117

Dear Respondent



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Economic and
Management Sciences

Informed consent for participation in an academic research study

Dept. of Human Resource Management

CRITICAL COMPETENCIES AND CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP ROLES

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Samantha Smith, a Masters student from the Department of Human Resource Management at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the critical competencies and the challenges experienced by women in senior leadership due to the lack of those competencies

Please note the following:

- This study involves an anonymous semi-structured interview. Your name will not appear on any published documentation and the information you give will be treated as strictly confidential. You cannot be identified in person based on the information you give.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions posed within the interview completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than an hour and a half of your time.
- Should you agree to participate in the study, the researcher will contact you to arrange a suitable date and time for the semi-structured interview.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings upon request.
- The data will be stored in the formats of hand written notes and audiotapes
- Please contact my supervisors ,Prof Stanz (012)420-3074 and Dr N. Carrim (012)420-2466 if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign the form to specify that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Respondent's signature

Date

Appendix B: Data Collection Instrument

Questionnaire for semi-structured interview

Open-Ended Questions for Female Participants (Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operations Officer, Director)

Starting the interview

In retrospect, you have achieved success in many roles throughout your career, ranging from being and presently....

1. Which roles propelled you to becoming the....
2. What characteristics are required for such a role?
3. What hinders women from occupying the role of a CEO in a given organisation
4. (Question asked with exception)

Have you considered the prospects of becoming a CEO? What competencies would you than have to display that is different from your current role?

5. (Question asked with exception because of the eminent position held by participant)

What make you a woman of distinction?

What competencies distinguishes the role of a Deputy CEO from a CEO ?

How does the challenges of a deputy CEO differ from the challenges of a CEO?

How do you thrive in a male dominated environment?

How did you acquire the competencies to bridge the gap from a deputy CEO to a CEO ROLE?

Question

6. Discuss at least three challenges that women in executive roles are currently experiencing. What challenges do you foresee in the next 5-10 years for women in executive leadership roles?
7. How does a woman combat those challenges
8. What competencies are critical at an executive level?
9. What progressive stages across your career enabled you to successfully master critical competencies required at an executive level?

10. In retrospect, were there some experiences that were more significant than others in establishing the competencies you acquired?
11. What should both women and the organisation do to better develop women concerning critical competencies
12. How do you manage your personal life to accommodate your lifestyle as the

Conclusion

13. What is your uptake on the glass ceiling and the impact it has on women?
14. What guidance would you give to young women who are also aspiring to “have a seat at the table

Open-Ended Questions for Female Participants (Senior Managers)

In retrospect, you have achieved success in many roles throughout your career, ranging from being and presently....

1. Which roles propelled you to becoming the senior manager?
2. What progressive stages across your career enabled you to successfully master critical competencies required at a senior level?
3. What competencies are required for your current role?
4. In retrospect, were there some experiences that were more significant than others in establishing the competencies you have acquired?
5. What should both women and men do to better develop women concerning critical competencies
6. How do you balance your career and personal life?
7. What challenges do you foresee in the next 5-10 years for women in executive leadership roles?
8. How does a woman combat those challenges?

Conclusion

9. What is your uptake on the glass ceiling and the impact it has on women?

10. What guidance would you give to young women who are also aspiring to “have a seat at the table”?

Open-Ended Questions for Male Participants (Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, Director, Managing Director, OD Specialist)

1. Given the current political and economic landscape, what are some of the challenges that you believe women in executive roles are experiencing?
2. What are the current stumbling blocks that men can easily remove as soon as possible in order to expedite the advancement of women in executive leadership roles?
3. What challenges do you think women in executive roles are likely to experience within the next 5-10 years?
4. In your view, how should women combat these challenges?
5. What competencies are critical for women to succeed at an executive level?
6. Do you believe that the Glass Ceiling is still real for women?
7. What should both men and women do to better develop women concerning the critical the competencies required at an executive level?
8. What can successful women do to further uplift and clear the path for upcoming Women?