

PERCEIVED ENABLERS OF UPWARD MOBILITY OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN A FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATION



Perceived Enablers of Upward Mobility of Female Employees in a Financial Services Organisation

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of
Philosophy in People Management

Organisational Psychology Section in the School of Management Studies

Faculty of Commerce

University of Cape Town

2018

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Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks and profound appreciation offered to:

God, for guiding me through this important milestone in my life.

Dr Chao Feramo Nkhungulu Mulenga, my supervisor, for your encouragement, knowledgeable advice and most of all patience, throughout this journey.

My organisation, without whom, active participation in UCT programme and the study would not have been imaginable.

Thank you to all the participants who availed themselves to participate in the in-depth interviews, your collective contribution to this study has been priceless.

Lastly, to my family, friends and colleagues who provided consistent wisdom and support in my pursuit of academic, professional and personal excellence.

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Abstract

Research purpose: The purpose of the study was to identify enablers of upward mobility into middle and senior management positions among female employees in a particular organisation of the financial services sector.

Motivation for the study: In the South African context, it was demonstrated that although women comprised 51.2% of the adult population in 2016 (numbering approximately 28.53 million and were supported by progressive legislation and had a 45.8% representation in the workforce, they occupied a relatively low percentage of management positions. South African research on enabling factors that are important for the career progression of women has been conducted in national banks, South African business schools and the education sector. The findings revealed that enabling factors for the career progression of women include supervisor support, education, social networks, top management support and family-friendly policies. Identifying such enabling factors is important since there is strong evidence that the promotion of women into management roles is not only morally right but can also increase business performance.

Research design and method: The research design was descriptive. A cross-sectional qualitative approach was used to collect the primary data. Data analysis was exploratory. Since the aim of the study was to investigate perceptions of female employees in middle and senior management positions through their lived experiences, in-depth one-on-one interviews with 15 female employees were completed. Purposive sampling was used to secure the research participant sample. The results from the qualitative data were collected and analysed using content analysis. Themes extracted were used to report the findings of the study.

Findings: The results show that organisational support structures (i.e. supervisor support and career development), employee competence (i.e. education and social networks) and strategic interventions (i.e. top management support and family-friendly policies) are important factors for the career progression of women in the financial services sector under investigation.

Practical implications: The enabling factors identified in this study can be used to enhance interventions for the advancement of promotion of women into senior management positions.

Contribution: The findings of the study indicate that organisational support structures, employee competence and strategic interventions are important factors for the career progression of women, adding to the discourse of the promotion of women into senior management positions.

Chapter One:

Introduction and Review of Literature

The South African Women in Leadership Census report (Business Women's Association of South Africa (BWASA), 2015) represents a real head count of women in leadership positions (executive managers, directors, chief executive officers [CEOs] and chairpersons) in all companies listed on the Johannesburg Securities Exchange (JSE), their subsidiaries and state-owned enterprises. According to the report, although South Africa is a top performer among the BRICS countries with almost double the percentage of women represented at CEO level (21.9%) compared with China (11.1%), women still lag behind their male counterparts in middle and senior management positions. Across the South African public and private sectors, only 2.4% of CEO roles, 9.2% of chairperson positions and 29.3% of top management positions are held by women. This underrepresentation of women in these positions has been attributed to a number of barriers, ranging from those that impede their vertical career progression, thus creating the so-called 'glass ceiling', to those that persist after women have reached leadership positions, forming the 'glass cliff' (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Jackson, 2001).

Statistics South Africa (2016a; 2016b) reported that although women comprised 51.2% of the adult population, numbering approximately 28.53 million, they occupied a relatively low percentage of management positions. Working women are supported by progressive legislation and have a 45.8% representation in the workforce. The latter is further supported by the Commission for Employment Equity 2015/2016 annual report (Department of Labour (DoL), 2016a) in which the workforce profile by gender at top-management level in both the private and the public sector revealed a higher representation of males at 79.9% and 69.4% compared with female representation at 21.1% and 30.6% respectively.

South African research on the enabling factors of female progression has been conducted in national banks (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mathur-Helm, 2006), South African business schools (Kaiye & Singh, 2013) and the education sector (Shober, 2014). The findings revealed that enabling factors for the career progression of women include supervisor support, education and social networks. Identifying such enabling factors is important since there is strong evidence that the promotion of women into management roles is not only

morally right but can also increase business performance. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, reports that the Standard & Poor (S&P) 500 and Fortune 500 companies with the highest number of women at directorship level outperformed the companies with the lowest number of female directors in their returns based on sales by 16% and on their investment per capita by 26% (ILO, 2015). The ILO (2015) report cited a 2014 study by Credit Suisse that revealed that companies with more women than men at top-management or board level obtained higher returns and higher valuations. Further studies have shown that companies with gender-balanced teams showed better financial results (Davies, 2013; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Grant Thornton International, 2016; ILO, 2016; Johns, 2013; McKinsey & Company, 2016; Smith, 2016). Lastly, gender-diverse boards are reported to enhance corporate governance because they can draw from a broader source of talent, expertise and experience. This can assist in improving business and socio-economic decision-making outcomes and innovation (Adams & Funk, 2012; Committee for Economic Development, 2012; Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

In addition to moral and business reasons, South African organisations have a legal obligation to achieve equity in gender representation at all occupation levels as directed by the Employment Equity Amendment Act (No. 47 of 2013). As such, the financial services sector is required to comply with labour legislation and to implement gender and racial transformation by hiring women, people of colour and persons with disabilities. This is aimed at increasing opportunities for the entry of designated groups (including women) who were previously excluded from participating in the sector, thus accelerating employee mobility in the workplace and meeting the growing demand for skilled labour in the sector (Finance and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority (FASSET), 2016).

Problem Statement

Historically, the global overview of women in management reveals that significant inroads have been made internationally and in the socio-political spheres of society to advance the agenda of gender equality. However, 30 years on, equality legislation worldwide continues to grapple with the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making positions in organisations (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Dezso & Ross, 2012; ILO, 2016; Kaiye & Singh, 2013). Recent findings in the Grant Thornton International business report (Lagerberg, 2016b) show that of the S&P 500 and the Fortune 500 USA-listed companies, 486 had a female board member. Regarding the companies listed by the UK Financial Times Stock Exchange 100

Index (FTSE), 330 out of 350 companies have followed suit, while on the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India (Stock index CNX), 174 out of 200 companies had female representation at board level. The report further indicates that although steady progress is being made, the majority of the women were appointed in non-executive director positions, limiting their responsibilities to policy-making and external planning protocols (Lagerberg, 2016a; Smith, 2016). Interestingly, the outcomes of the report showed that across the three above-mentioned economies, \$655 billion could be foregone in profit in terms of opportunity cost when companies insist on male-only boards (Lagerberg, 2016b).

The ILO (2016) report, *Women at Work Trends 2016*, shows that over the last two decades (1995–2015), the gap between female labour-force participation and the occupation of managerial positions by women has widened. The participation rate of the global female labour force has decreased from 52.4 % to 49.6 %, and some countries such as Canada, Germany and Spain report a decline in the share of women occupying management positions. Conversely, certain countries in Central and Eastern Europe (45% female CEOs), Latin America and the Caribbean (40% female CEOs) have seen a steady narrowing of the gap between women's participation in the labour force and their occupation of managerial and decision-making positions (DoL, 2016a; ILO, 2015, 2016). According to global statistics provided by Credit Suisse (2016) (as cited in Catalyst, 2017) analysed more than 3 000 global companies and revealed that women accounted for a mere 14.7% of board seats in 2015.

Similarly, on the African continent, the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making structures prevails. According to the McKinsey & Company report, *Women Matter: Africa*, of the 210 listed companies on the African continent that were analysed, only 5% of CEOs were women (Omarjee, 2016). Omarjee (2016) further reported that women representation across the corporate hierarchy, including the financial and professional services industry, progressively diminished as women progressed upwards (see also Davies, 2013). Women representation was highest at the non-managerial level at 62%, followed by 29% at the middle management level and dwindling to 33% at senior management level.

Research Objective

The objective of this study was to explore the organisational support structures, employee competencies and strategic interventions that are perceived as important by female employees in middle and senior management positions.

Research Question

Which organisational factors are perceived as important for female progression into senior roles in an organisation?

This section provided context to the research study, evidence to substantiate the problems encountered by organisations, the research question and the framework upon which the study was based. The following section presents a review of the literature on the enablers of the upward mobility of women. In addition, the organisational context of the research study is presented.

Review of Literature

Career progression of women. Career progression of women is described as the upward mobility of female employees along a career pipeline or pathway in an organisation (Johns, 2013).

Although significant inroads have been made through progressive legislation to integrate women into management structures such as the Employment Equity Amendment Act (No. 47 of 2013), the underrepresentation of women in higher positions persists. There are a number of invisible and artificial barriers referred to as the glass ceiling that hinder women's career advancement. Lewis-Enright, Crafforda, and Crous (2009) show that internationally, an increase in the education of women and their participation in the labour force have not translated into increased representation in higher positions in the workplace. The Grant Thornton International business report (Grant Thornton International, 2016) found that globally, the level of women in leadership positions rose to 24%, demonstrating an increase of 3% between 2011 and 2016.

In South Africa, Klover (2014) found that the number of senior positions filled by women declined from 28% in 2012 to 26% in 2014, while the percentage of women in leadership positions remained unchanged between 2007 and 2014. This implies that over this period, more than 70% of businesses in the country did not have female decision-makers in senior management positions and fewer women than men were advancing into leadership positions. According to FASSET (2015), women tend to occupy lower ranked positions such as clerical and support staff and continue to fulfil management positions considered to be feminine (e.g. human resources (HR), marketing, corporate social responsibility).

The discourse on women in leadership positions in general and the financial services sector in particular highlight different factors perceived to enable or hinder career progression. Factors perceived to enable the upward mobility of women include organisational support structures (i.e. supervisor support and career development), employee competence (i.e. education and social networks) and strategic interventions (i.e. top-management support, family-friendly policies and career progression of women) (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

Organisational support structures. Organisational support structures, specifically supervisor support and career development, are reported as factors that may foster the career progression of women (Mathur-Helm, 2006). A review of literature on women's equality in the workplace by Kossek and Wu (2017) found that supervisor support for women is a necessary prerequisite for career advancement and for the improvement of women's skillsets. A study using an international sample of nine female employees by Crawshaw and Game (2015) found that the role of line managers in providing career planning and development opportunities is positively related to perceived career growth opportunities, employee trust in the organisation and turnover intentions.

Supervisor support. Supervisor support is described as an individual's perception of the degree to which a supervisor creates a supportive work climate (Paterson, Luthans & Jeung, 2014).

According to Paterson et al. (2014), a direct supervisor of employees plays the important role of creating an enabling work environment for employee career growth. Expressing concern for the well-being of subordinates and helping them with their career development are seen to create the perception of a safe environment. Employees are more likely to be assertive, self-sufficient and decisive as their levels of confidence increase and as the assurance that they have supervisor support at their disposal is gained. This knowledge enables them to be unconcerned about taking calculated risks and subsequently to engage in successful collaboration with other individuals (Paterson et al., 2014). Likewise, there is evidence to suggest that a supportive environment created by a supervisor can predict career progression outcomes for women through increased visibility of talented women by senior colleagues, access to resources and identification of career opportunities for employee growth (Campbell & Smith, 2014; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014). For this reason, supervisor support is seen as an important factor for the career progression of women.

The section that follows focuses on the role of career development regarding the career progression of women.

Career development. Career development is defined as the extent to which professional and personal career guidance and planning are accessible to an employee (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

A study by Beeson and Valerio (2012) on women leaders found that career development is an enabler for improving the proportion of women reaching middle and senior management positions. In order to develop and retain a diverse and skilled workforce, line managers are progressively required to play the role of enabling organisational career-development activities for women such as coaching, mentoring, formal and informal training initiatives and ‘stretch’ assignments that challenge and broaden the capabilities of female employees (Johns, 2013).

Helms, Arfken and Bellar (2016) found that female employees should be encouraged to demonstrate greater individual planning, personal development and career management since all three aid career mobility into managerial roles. Walsh, Fleming and Enz (2016) conducted a study in the USA that involved women executives in the hospitality industry. They state that when organisations invest in communicating and implementing clear career development programmes for the advancement of women and track female progression against targets for the advancement of women, this contributes to the development and upward mobility of female professionals (Walsh et al., 2016). For this reason, career development is seen as an important factor for the career progression of women.

Employee competencies. A study by Cimirotic, et.al (2017) on factors that enable female executives to reach leadership positions found that most women classified their professional skills (education, training and qualification) and social skills (social networking) to be among the key factors for their successful advancement into higher management roles.

The following section focuses on the role of education, training and qualification level for the career advancement of women.

Education, training and qualification. Education, training and qualification is described as the sum of education, qualifications and the focused training required to execute a task or responsibility (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

When examining the glass ceiling phenomenon in four South African major banks, Mathur-Helm (2006) found that women executives increasingly understood the importance of

acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills through education, qualifications and focused training to strengthen their chances of advancing into management positions. The importance of possessing higher qualifications is seen in statistics provided by FASSET (2015); in 2015, the majority of female managers in the risk and insurance sector had post-school qualifications. This reinforces the role that education and qualification has in enabling the upward mobility and the increased representation of skilled and qualified women in management positions. Another study by Beeson and Valerio (2012) examined how companies and executives can accelerate the advancement of women leaders. It was found that education and focused training were necessary to assume high-profile roles such as customer-facing and line positions, which historically have been training grounds for male senior managers and executives (Beeson & Valerio, 2012).

Langowitz and Godwyn (2013) determined among business college alumni that education (e.g. leadership development programmes) plays an important role in women's early career success and leads to better leadership opportunities in the later stages of their careers.

The following section focuses on the role of social networks in the career progression of women.

Social networks. Social networking is described as human socialisation practised through informal and formal activities that contribute to career outcomes (Johns, 2013; Kaiye & Singh, 2013).

Cimirotic et al. (2017) sought to identify the enabling factors for attaining leadership positions among female executives in the management accounting departments of Austrian firms. They found that women executives attributed their skills regarding interpersonal and social involvement with senior managers and external networking platforms as contributory factors for their move into managerial roles.

Beeson and Valerio (2012) explored how companies and executives could accelerate the advancement of women leaders and found that collectively, social capital, social networking and other job-related relationships were perceived to aid the career development of women. The inclusion and participation of women in formal and informal networks with peers, managers and other individuals were also perceived as beneficial. The benefits included opportunities for lateral and vertical career progression and the acquisition of organisational influence, which is important for executive advancement (Helms et al., 2016).

Helms et al. (2016) argue that traditionally, the socialisation of women has not taught women adequately to be purposeful in their networking, which would enable them to build

social capital to further their careers (see also Kaiye & Singh, 2013). Unlike men who traditionally tend to choose social contacts based on goal attainment and relationships that will challenge them and prepare them for executive-level leadership, women historically choose social relationships based on similarity of traits, likeability and empathy towards the contact. As a result, women managers who reinforce and perpetuate homosocial relationships that are less beneficial in aiding their managerial career mobility are less likely to be seen as committed to their employer's cause and more likely to receive less support from their male peers and be excluded from important networks (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Helms et al., 2016). Studies advocate women to take ownership of their careers actively and to seek, interact and participate proactively in the development of their internal and external professional contacts and networks in order to enable their progression into decision-making positions (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Helms et al., 2016; Kurlowicz, 2014). For this reason, social networking is seen as an important factor for the career progression of women.

The following section of the chapter focuses on strategic interventions for the career progression of women.

Strategic interventions. Top management support and family-friendly policies are perceived as possible strategic interventions to dismantle barriers to the advancement of women into managerial positions. A study on the importance of mentoring and sponsorship in women's career advancement by Helms et al. (2016) shows that women who seek and secure the support of an influential member of senior leadership (i.e. sponsor) who is responsible for providing career guidance and access to niche networks are more likely to advance in their careers than women who do not have a sponsor.

The study by Beeson and Valerio (2012) on women leaders found that family-friendly policies in organisations are perceived as enabling the career mobility of women since certain women are prevented from assuming roles with increased responsibility because of family commitments.

The following section focuses in more detail on the influence of top management support on the career mobility of women.

Top management support. Top management support describes sponsorship activities conducted by an influential senior member of leadership to assist the career progression of women (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1991).

Top management commitment in supporting the rise of women into the top echelons of management is crucial (Helms et al., 2016; Johns, 2013). A study by Helms et al. (2016) on the importance of sponsors in the career advancement of women found that men are 46% more likely to have a sponsor than women and that men are more likely than women to have a person who is influential in decision-making to support them. In an article on the importance of women finding a sponsor to advance their careers, Elmer (2013) states that acquiring an influential member of top management is critical for women's career mobility. Sponsors for female employees can provide access to high-profile work, teach women to adopt strategic and goal-orientated approaches to their careers, obtain referrals and upward support as well as provide general job-related information to which women otherwise would not be privy. Thus, sponsors advocating female employees would likely accelerate the advancement and promotion of women significantly (Elmer, 2013; Helms et al., 2016).

The following section focuses on the influence of family-friendly policies on the career mobility of women.

Family-friendly policies. Family-friendly policies refer to the provision of tangible support such as working conditions, services and paid leave to ease the combination of work and family demands for employees (Kurlowicz, 2014).

Butts, Casper and Yang (2013) conducted a study on women managers who were single, married or cohabitating and were responsible for dependents. The authors found that women who had dependents valued the availability of work-family policies such as dependent care services and financial assistance for dependents and made use of the services to manage their work and family responsibilities better.

Alleviation of work-family conflict for women has been offered as a possible support system to minimise the glass ceiling and enable female upward mobility into managerial positions (Global Network for Advanced Management, 2017). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) state "work-family conflict occurs when demands at work make it difficult for individuals to meet responsibilities at home. Also demands at home can make it difficult for individuals to fulfil responsibilities at work" (p. 80). Although both work and family demands can coexist, individuals often experience tension arising from the need to participate in both work and family roles simultaneously. This concerns mainly female employees because they are more likely than their male colleagues to assume family responsibility, irrespective of their marital status and nature of family relationships (Helms et al., 2016; Hobbler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2011; Kurlowicz, 2014). Sabharwal (2013) demonstrates that as a means to cope with work

and family demands, women in senior executive roles tend to take on less demanding work assignments, resulting in career stagnation in minor roles.

Another way of addressing the tension between work and family roles is to reduce the number of working hours. Research by Durbin and Tomlinson (2014) on the career trajectory of 27 women in public, private and non-profit organisations revealed that female employees who had opted for reduced working hours were perceived by managers and colleagues to be less committed to their employers' cause and as a consequence, they were allocated reduced roles with little or no direct subordinates to manage.

Organisational Context

The context of the current study is an organisation in the financial services sector in Cape Town that provides life assurance, asset management, banking and general insurance to more than 15 million customers in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia. Gender transformation has been set as an organisational strategic goal. The organisation has over 20 000 employees, with 58% of the employees being female. The 2013–2018 target growth rate for female representation in key roles (i.e. referring to the top executive positions within the group) has been set at 30%. As of 2016, group-target tracking stood at 17%; however, only a 2% year-on-year actual growth rate has been achieved. Similar to global and local statistics, females occupy a relatively low percentage of management positions in the organisation. This research focuses on a particular business segment in the organisation that consists of 5 800 employees, of which 3 944 (64%) are male and 2 088 (36%) are female. All segments are required to align with the overarching company's gender and diversity growth targets. Invariably, this segment contributes to the organisational gender and diversity goals by maintaining traction on its succession plan priorities and recruiting and selecting for a diverse workplace while fulfilling the legislative Employment Equity Amendment Act (No. 47 of 2013) and the Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment policy imperatives (DoL, 2016b). In 2013, the organisation's strategic priority on gender parity was adopted in order to increase female representation in key management roles significantly. Although some progress has been made to achieve the latter, progress has been slow.

PERCEIVED ENABLERS OF UPWARD MOBILITY OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN A FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATION

Table 1

Comparative Gender Changes at Management Level from 2013 to 2017

	MALE							FEMALE						Grand Total
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Foreign National	Male Total	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Foreign National	Female Total		
Senior Management	2013	8	18	16	135	2	179	5	5	7	33	50	229	
	2016	13	20	19	81	2	135	13	4	9	12	38	173	
	% change	63%	11%	19%	-40%	0%	-25%	160%	-20%	29%	-64%	0%	-24%	-24%
Middle Management	2013	55	46	42	264	7	414	32	51	26	162	4	275	689
	2016	61	49	33	140	6	289	52	53	31	101	2	239	528
	% change	11%	7%	-21%	-47%	-14%	-30%	63%	4%	19%	-38%	-50%	-13%	-23%
Junior Management	2013	579	292	252	849	31	2003	461	267	166	495	20	1409	3412
	2016	709	282	265	737	23	2016	757	275	185	377	13	1607	3623
	% change	22%	-3%	5%	-13%	-26%	1%	64%	3%	11%	-24%	-35%	14%	6%

As seen in Table 1, from 2013 to the current year of 2017, female representation in middle and senior levels of management in the organisation has been increasing but gaining traction at a slow pace. Attracting and retaining a gender-diverse workforce is a competitive advantage for the organisation. It allows a deeper understanding of the organisation’s client base and enables the organisation to address future clients’ financial needs adequately. The organisation’s client base is transforming socio-economically. It has been demonstrated that women control US\$8 trillion of assets globally, and this is anticipated to increase to US\$22 trillion by 2020 (Kurlowicz, 2014; Sahoo & Lenka, 2016).

Increased female representation in management positions allows an organisation to draw from its existing talent pool of female employees who possess critical skillsets and experiences that can be utilised to meet and exceed business objectives and improve the brand image of the organisation and its employer brand (Kurlowicz, 2014). In addition, Haack (2014) reports that increased female upward mobility into key decision-making roles may encourage other women to follow a similar path: “[T]heir [female] presence can send empowering messages not only to women who encounter other women leaders ... but may also encourage women to pursue international careers” (p. 40). In order to assess how the progression of female employees into management positions in an organisation could be increased, it is important for the business to identify the support that such employees require (i.e. identify the enabling factors) (Haack, 2014).

This chapter provided an introduction and a review of literature of the study. The following chapter focuses on the research methodology of the study with the aim of understanding the perceived organisational support structures based on the lived experiences of the female employees. In addition, the employees’ competencies and the strategic interventions that may influence their vertical progression into middle and senior management positions are presented.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the perceived enablers of upward mobility of female employees in a financial services organisation. The organisation is one of five business streams of the company. The company operates in a sub-set of the financial services sector in particular, the insurance, assurance and asset management industry. A cross-sectional qualitative research design utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data. The data on which this study is based was collected in Cape Town over a period of a month and a half. The study involved 15 participants drawn from the organisation. Chapter Two describes the research approach and design used for this study. Descriptions of the sample, data collection, procedure method, measures used and ethical considerations are presented. The data analysis techniques and methods described in this chapter ensured that reliable and valid qualitative data was extracted and reported.

Research Design

The research design followed a descriptive qualitative approach. A cross-sectional qualitative study was conducted to collect primary data. The data analysis was exploratory. Since the aim of the study was to investigate perceptions of female employees in middle and senior management positions through their lived experiences, in-depth one-on-one interviews were completed and where feasible, through telephone meeting at a time and location suitable to the interviewees. According to Bryman (2016), in-depth interviews are favoured over focus group discussions whenever qualitative results are required. Due to the sensitive nature of the lived experiences to be shared by participants in this study, this approach was employed. One-on-one interaction minimises respondent discomfort in providing information from a personal perspective that would otherwise not be openly communicated in a focus-group setting but is pertinent to addressing the research question.

Research Participants

Purposive sampling was used to secure the research participant sample. This non-random sampling technique (also referred to as homogenous sampling) facilitates the isolation of particular participant characteristics that can assist in exploring perceptions of

enablers that aid the promotion of women into senior management positions. The target group was selected based on the participants' ability to communicate knowledge, experiences and opinions in a clear and reflective manner (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Due to ease of access to the sample, the financial services organisation was selected. The cohort consisted of professional, full-time employees who were permanent members of staff in middle and senior management and were based either at Head Office or at a regional office. The management level was used to delineate management responsibility and seniority. The number of female employees sampled was determined by the willingness and availability of participants to engage in the study until saturation had been reached. This meant that sampling ceased once no new comprehensive understanding could be obtained by continuing to sample and no new material information or changing themes could be acquired (Etikan et al., 2016). A pre-selected list of participants was provided by the Human Resource Support and Administration Department of the organisation, and the researcher randomly selected the participants to be interviewed. The researcher approached each interviewee directly using email and teleconference facilities.

Procedure

To obtain ethical clearance for the study, the research proposal was presented to the HR Executive of the organisation. The research proposal outlined the following aspects: the objectives of the study; the research design; benefits of the study for the organisation; and ethical considerations. A request to access a list of female employees in middle and senior management positions to answer the research question was also submitted. Once verbal approval was given by the HR Executive, a confidentiality agreement was signed by both the researcher and the Executive (on behalf of the organisation) granting the researcher permission to collect and analyse the organisation's data (see Appendix 1). After the organisation being sampled granted ethical clearance, the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Application form together with supporting documents (i.e. written permission from the organisation, research proposal, interview consent letter, interview questions and schedule) was submitted by the researcher to the ethics committee representing the faculty for review. The application form was then submitted by the faculty representative to the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee for their approval. Once written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the ethics committee (see Appendix 2), the researcher was able to approach the organisation's Human Resource Support and Administration Department for access to the list of female

employees in middle and senior management positions. The duration of the interviews were 30 minutes. Data collection took place over two months.

Ethical Considerations

To fulfil the confidentiality agreement of the company, the study cannot reveal the name of the company. Therefore, the research simply refers to the broader organisation as the ‘the company’, ‘the organisation in the financial services sector’ and regarding the particular business stream in which the study was conducted as ‘the organisation’.

Informed written consent was sought from all participants before they were asked to partake in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary (see Appendix 3). No harm to the research participants was caused through their participation in the study. The latter was achieved before commencing with the interview by explaining the nature and purpose of the research to each participant and providing assurance that their identities would be kept confidential. Participants were required to agree (both orally and in writing) to answer questions and to provide any material information warranted for the purposes of the study. The latter was important to obtain relevant and information-rich cases to assist in answering the research question. Participants also needed to provide permission for their conversations to be recorded since this facilitated accurate data collection for content analysis at a later stage and allowed the researcher to focus on listening and responding to the participants during the interviews. Participants were assured that the recordings would only be used for the purpose of the study, and only the researcher and university supervisor would have access to the transcribed interview data.

Measures

Dr Babita Mathur-Helm was contacted via email by the researcher to request permission to use research questions from her original study conducted in 2006. Written permission was given to the researcher to use the questions, and the author was cited accordingly.

The seven-item semi-structured interview guideline developed by Mathur-Helm (2006) was used to guide the interviews that explored the reality of the career progression of women managers. Demographic data was provided in the pre-selected list of participants to be interviewed.

One question focused on the career progression of women: “In your opinion, what are the contributory factors that may enable women to progress in leadership positions and what can be done differently to achieve gender parity?”

A question and a request regarding organisational support structures focused on participants’ perceptions of supervisor support and career development: “How would you describe the type of support that you have received from your line manager and how has this aided in your career advancement?” and “In your time with the organisation and leading in your function, describe the experiences you have had with career planning and ways in which this has assisted in supporting your career goals.”

Questions regarding employee competence were posed. Firstly, the questions focused on the roles that education, training and qualification level play in women reaching middle and senior management positions (Mathur-Helm, 2006): “At the academic level, what has your education, training and qualification journey been? In your opinion what role and influence has your education had to enable you to progress in your career? Do you intend to further your studies, and if so, how will the latter assist in furthering your career objectives?”

Secondly, a question and a request were posed that related to the roles that formal and informal social networks and events play in women reaching middle and senior management positions (Mathur-Helm, 2006): “At the social level, what priority have you given to formal and informal social networking activities? If at all, describe how the latter has been useful to your career progression.”

A strategic intervention question and a request focused on the types of mechanisms that facilitated the advancement of women into top management positions such as top management support and job-family support: “In your experience, how has the role of sponsorship at top management level, if at all, assisted in your career advancement?” and “Describe the nature of the job-family support that is available to you and that enables you to participate in the workplace and advance in your career.”

Data Collection

The data collected was analysed using thematic content analysis. Content analysis is a practical method used to explore the experiences of a sample when the data is used for descriptive purposes (Weber, 1990). Advocates of content analysis assert that the inductive technique is used rather than deductive quantitative techniques in order to make inferences through the systematic and objective identification and interpretation of descriptive data

without reference to inferential statistics (Weber, 1990). The content that was collected through the interviews was transcribed, analysed and coded: (i) to determine trends in the behavioural and psychological state of the participants; (ii) to determine intentions and reflections of patterns of individuals, groups and societies; and within context (iii) to determine the pervasiveness of factors that affect upward mobility of women in the organisation (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Weber, 1990). The texts of the in-depth interviews were classified into three main themes, namely organisational support structures, employee competencies and strategic interventions. According to Weber (1990), each theme may consist of one or more words or phrases based on the precise meaning of the words (i.e. grouping synonyms together) or based on words sharing similar connotations (e.g. grouping several words that refer to a common concept and meaning). To strengthen reliability in this study, the word was the basic unit of measurement that would be consistently classified into the four categories. Data that did not directly fit into one of the four categories was classified into a separate category. Based on the relevance of the data to the study, a decision was made by the researcher to create a separate category to classify the data based on the principles of inductive content analysis (Weber, 1990). Once categorised, interpretation of the themes, trends and comparability of data belonging to the appropriate category was undertaken. Weber (1990) states that in order for valid interpretations and inferences to be derived from the categories, strict adherence to the classification rules is imperative to ensure that the interpretation of results is consistently achieved with repeated application per interview.

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected and transcribed, the researcher probed for patterns and themes. A coding schedule was developed for theme extraction from each interview. The study classified the responses into three main coding categories: demographic data, main themes and sub-themes. The analysis and interpretation of the data continued until the themes were sufficiently developed and no further insights could be gained from the data (Weber, 1990). To analyse this data, the principles of inductive content analysis were used. Again, once categorised, interpretation of the themes and trends and the comparability of data belonging to the appropriate category took place (Weber, 1990). This approach is comprehensive and is most applicable when there is little known about the study phenomenon (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). An explanation of the themes follows.

Demographic data. The first step of the analysis was to identify the gender and management level of the respondent. Gender and management level were required since the study is premised on female employees and their career progression at middle and senior management level. This was followed by identifying the race, tenure and age of the respondent by consulting the sample list provided by the HR Executive and further verifying the information directly with the respondent.

Main theme and sub-themes. After the demographic data was identified, the extraction of the main and sub-themes was documented and analysed (Weber, 1990). The first main theme was organisational support structure. This consisted of the sub-themes, supervisor support and career development. The supervisor support sub-theme sought to determine the type of support that participants had received from their direct line manager and how this support had aided their career advancement. The career development sub-theme was determined by the experiences described by participants in career planning and the ways in which career development had assisted in supporting their career goals.

The second main theme was employee competence, which consisted of the sub-themes education, training, qualification and social networks. Education, training and qualification was determined by identifying incidents in which reference to education and career mobility was made by the participants in the interview script. Social network was determined by the participants' descriptions regarding the priority given to formal and informal social networking activities and their descriptions of how the latter may have been useful in their career progression.

The third main theme was strategic intervention. This consisted of the sub-themes, top management support, family-friendly policies and career progression of women. The sub-theme, top management support, was coded when the participant clearly articulated the actions demonstrating management support received from an influential senior member of leadership or sponsor to aid their career progression. The sub-theme, family-friendly policies, was characterised by the participants' descriptions of management and family support such as human support, work practices and access and utilisation of workplace facilities that aided their upward mobility. Lastly, career progression of women was coded based on the participants' expressed opinions on the contributory factors that may enable women to progress in leadership positions and their statements regarding what can be done differently to achieve gender parity.

Because the coding was conducted solely by the researcher, intercoder reliability tests were not needed.

PERCEIVED ENABLERS OF UPWARD MOBILITY OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN A FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATION

This section elaborated on the research methodology, focusing on the research design, procedure, ethical considerations, measures, data collection as well as analysis. The following section presents the results and discussion on the perceived enablers of upward mobility of female employees in a financial services organisation.

Chapter Three: Results and Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore perceived enablers of the upward mobility of female employees in a financial services organisation. This chapter demonstrates the findings of 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews and presents a discussion for each section of the research findings. One interview guide was used for all interviews to ensure consistency of the data collected. Data collected from the interviews was transcribed, and thematic analysis and data coding methods were used to identify and structure themes from the obtained data. The findings are presented according to the themes identified, and the emerging themes observed are included in the discussion section. Chapter Three is organised in the following manner: (i) findings per theme from the interviews are presented; (ii) a table with relevant and representative quotes is included after the presentation of findings for each section; and (iii) a discussion of each theme is incorporated.

Demographic Data

Participants for the sample included 15 staff members at middle and senior management level who were working full-time in the organisation. Seven participants were in middle management positions (see Figure 1), and these comprised one white participant, three coloured participants and three black participants (see Figure 2). Eight participants, comprising two white respondents, one coloured respondent, one Indian respondent and four black respondents were in senior management positions (see Figure 3). Nine participants have been permanently employed by the organisation for an average of three years, three participants have been employed for an average of eight and a half years, one participant has been employed for 17 years and two participants have been employed by the organisation for an average of 18 years.

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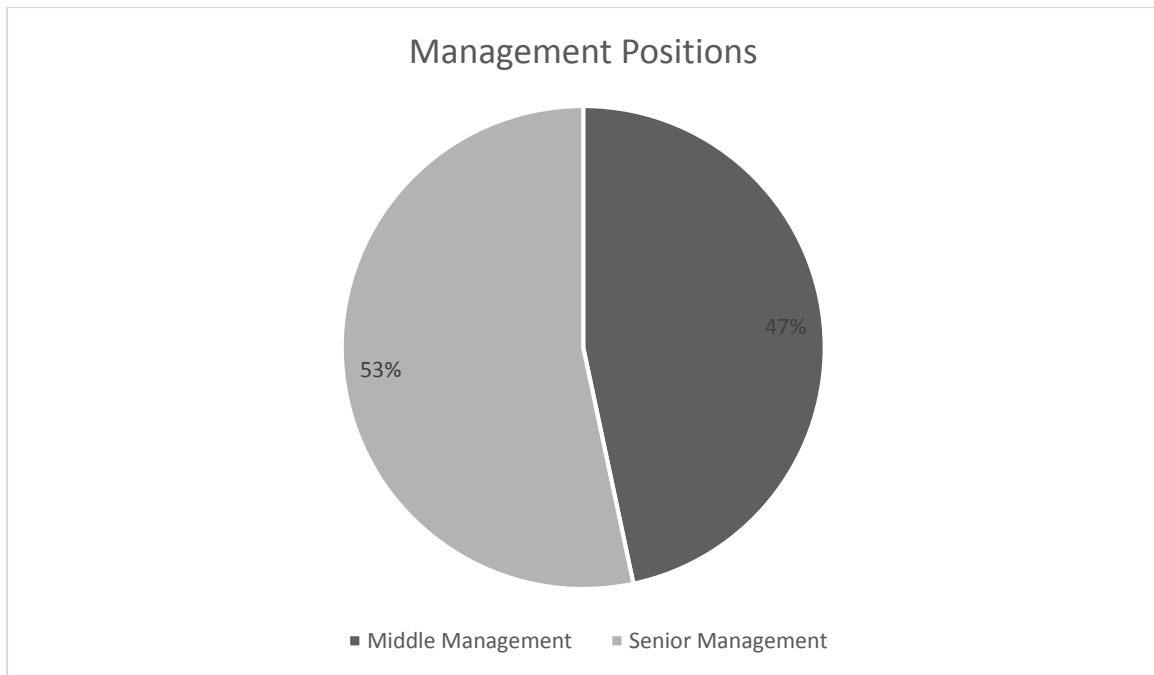


Figure 1. Sample representation of middle and senior management positions

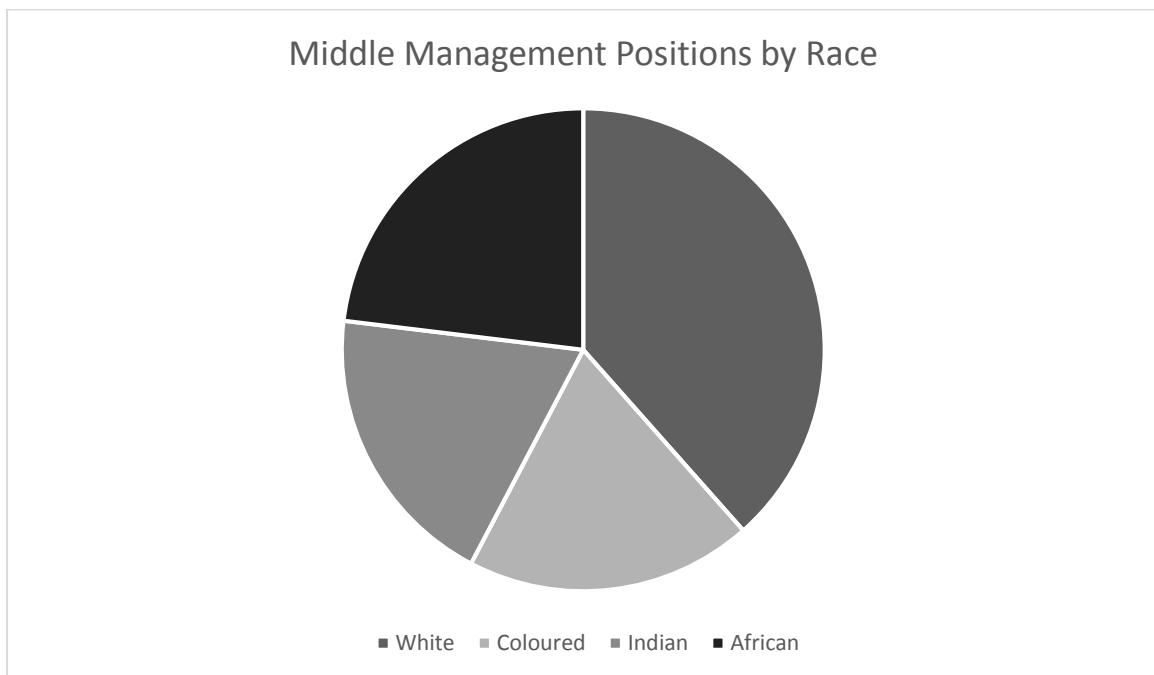


Figure 2. Sample representation of middle management positions by race

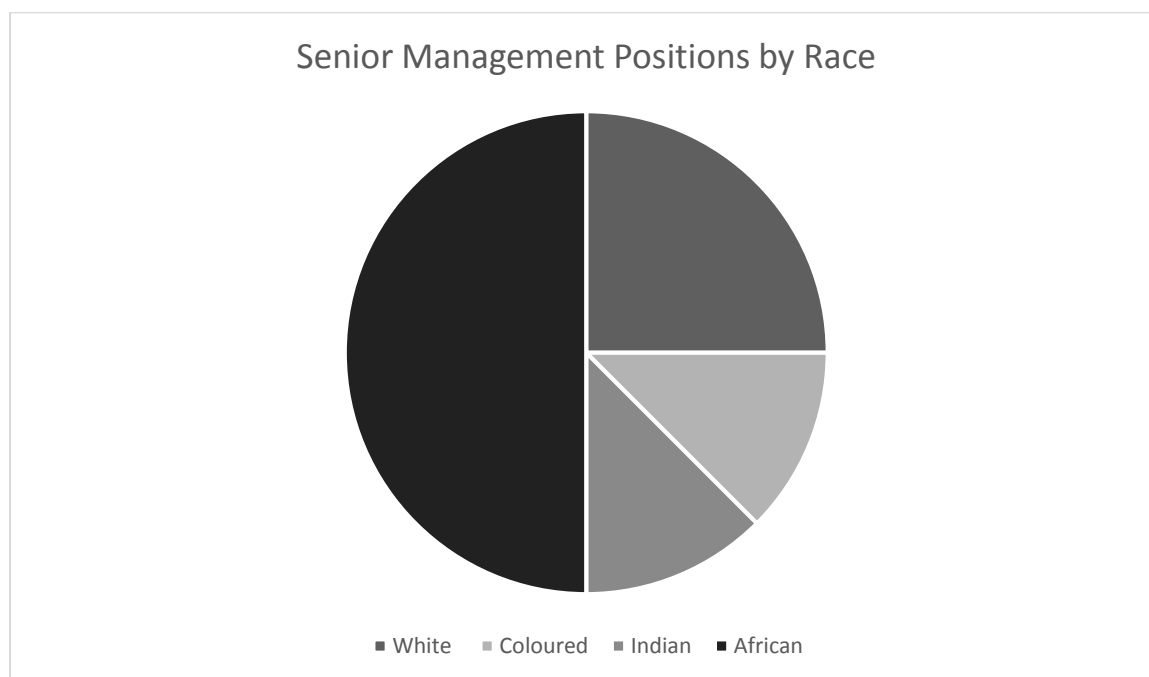


Figure 3. Sample representation of senior management positions by race

Career Progression of Women

Participants were asked to provide contributory factors that enable women to progress in leadership positions and to suggest what can be done differently to achieve gender parity. The 15 participants acknowledged the importance of the progression of women and gender parity in leadership positions. Two participants felt that the widening gaps in pay between gender in organisations need to be addressed decisively at senior leadership levels, thus indicating that the principle of ‘equal pay for work of equal value’ should be applied fairly for men and women executing the same or similar work responsibilities. Eight participants reported the importance of addressing the pervasive organisational culture of rewarding the masculine approach to leadership demonstrated by some female leaders. This is evident in the observed trend in the organisation that promotes women who possess characteristics, attitudes and temperaments commonly ascribed to men progressing up the corporate ladder (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010).

Two participants emphasised the importance of women in leadership positions receiving transference of knowledge and skills through coaching by mentors and sponsors in the organisation. Three participants reported the increasing value of having male counterparts as advocates and allies of women leaders. Examples cited include acknowledgement by male counterparts of ideas contributed by women, their willingness to collaborate more effectively

on work outputs and their demonstrated support of practices that advocate equal representation of men and women in the workplace and in leadership positions.

An emerging theme highlighted by three participants was the acknowledgement of employees who may have no interest in advancing their careers. These participants reported that women employees who wish to progress in their careers need to demonstrate their aspirations by negotiating with the appropriate senior members of leadership for stretch assignments and leadership opportunities.

Examples of participants’ experiences of contributory factors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Experiences of Career Progression

Career Progression		Participant Quotes
Question: “In your opinion, what are the contributory factors that may enable women to progress in leadership positions and what can be done differently to achieve gender parity?”	<i>Address gender pay gap</i>	“One, no more gender pay gap. Right? Because, the more and the longer we perpetuate a pay gap where, if my partner and I were at university at the same time, but as we are progressing he’ll make more and more than me. So when we come to a checkpoint or turning point where we decide one of us needs to stop, what is the right decision? Who is going to stop? It will more likely be the person who is making less. So that’s something we need to be very vigilant about and cannot have it in our organisations.” (Participant Four)
	<i>Address masculine leadership style among female leaders</i> <i>Address gender pay gap</i>	“She doesn’t have to be this hard confrontational—you know, I need to hold my own with the men. She is her gentle, feminine self So that is very encouraging; you can really see a shift from where we were ten years ago and where we are moving.” (Participant Six)

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Career Progression		Participant Quotes
		<p>“I think when a woman gets in higher positions, they kind of forget that and err ... take on more a male role instead of a female role. You can be female and be a leader and be quite good at it. It’s quite nice actually.” (Participant One)</p> <p>“I think there is a perception that for women really to progress to executive levels or senior leadership levels that they need to conform to what is quite a masculine picture of what a leader looks like.” (Participant Eleven)</p>
	<i>Male counterparts as allies</i>	<p>“So for me, it’s about when I gauge [<i>sic</i>] with my male leaders or management counterparts, the ones that are prepared to listen or take a step back and allow that ego to stop fighting, is the ones that you get real traction with and you get real solutions with.” (Participant Six)</p> <p>“It’s a man playing that ally/advocacy role, right? To say, gender gaps are wrong. To say, ‘such and such ... you know you have interrupted K every single time she has tried to say, to make a point in this meeting. K just said that. You are not listening.’ Then it’s not about having an axe to grind or a chip on your shoulder. How do we in our community of men create the right kind of advocacy and allies?” (Participant Four)</p>

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Career Progression		Participant Quotes
	<i>Communicated ambition to progress into management positions</i>	“Put your hand up, and I think people need to know that you are ambitious and you are interested.” (Participant Ten)
	<i>Leadership coaching</i>	“Before I get appointed, those people that have exited the business could be paired up with me since they still sit with the wealth of knowledge and experience. Why am I not having them as a coach for instance in terms of my development because we need that transference of skills? So you put me in this role, and I have to amass my own experience. You know what I mean. A person that has been in a role, in this role, and that understands the mechanics of this role and that understands the psyche of people that are working in this environment would help me a great deal. Because it builds my confidence, and confidence goes a long way in ensuring leadership.” (Participant Fifteen)

Career progression of women discussion. The discourse on women in leadership positions in general and the financial services sector in particular highlights the different factors perceived to enable or hinder the career progression of women. The presented findings show interesting contributions made by the sample. Firstly, eight participants reported that addressing an organisation’s culture of rewarding the masculine approach to leadership demonstrated by some female leaders is required to aid career progression and gender parity for women. Managerial success is more readily ascribed to male-type leadership

characteristics, for example, strategic prowess and achievement orientation, and gender stereotyping of the managerial position leads to the perception that to be a successful leader, women are required to demonstrate these ascribed male characteristics to a greater degree (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). Women managers tend to be evaluated less favourably and are subjected to greater scrutiny and criticism despite performing the same leadership roles as men (Hobbler et al., 2011; Sabharwal, 2013; Walsh et al., 2016).

Kezar and Wheaton (2017) suggested a remedy for an organisation's culture of rewarding a masculine approach to leadership by stating that a move from applying only the traditional top-down leadership approach to transforming the organisational culture gradually is required. Senior leaders of the organisation need to recognise and reward a situation-based approach to leadership by creating a safe work environment that recruits, develops and promotes women. The characteristics of such leaders include being prepared to engage in participative decision-making, to develop followers and to build strong interpersonal relationships while still being assertive enough to influence team action and task delivery. Situation-based leadership is considered to be an effective approach in addressing gender stereotypes, improving employee efficacy and creating greater inclusivity among members of leadership teams, their subordinates and the organisation in general (Kezar & Wheaton, 2017).

Career progression of women can be improved by having male counterparts as advocates and allies who visibly demonstrate their support for gender-parity practices—counterparts who advocate equal representation of men and women in the workplace and the advancement of women into leadership positions.

The results also demonstrate an emerging theme in which employees' interests and competences should be taken into account in the recruitment, selection and training of suitable candidates for leadership roles. Past studies advocate women to seek leadership opportunities proactively and to inform and involve an appropriate senior member of leadership to garner the requisite support (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Elmer, 2013; Krivkovich et.al, 2017).

Collectively, the present findings support the proposition that an enabling organisational culture and access to workplace support structures together with women's competence and knowledge assist in women's progression into leadership positions. The results could be attributed to acknowledgement of the need for the financial services sector to invest continuously in initiatives such as social cohesion workshops, provision of workplace facilities and development of human capital. This would assist in addressing an organisational culture that continues to preserve gender imbalance practices at management level, particularly

since the financial services sector continues to be governed by a male-dominated culture that is largely influenced by male values, attachments and attitudes (Wyman, 2016).

Organisational support structures. Participants were asked what type of support they had received from their line managers and how this had aided their career advancement. Eleven participants indicated that they had received line management support, and this had aided their career progression.

Supervisor Support

Supervisor support through one-on-one structured coaching conversations between the employee and the supervisor was confirmed by 11 participants, and this aided in identifying and creating opportunities for the career progression of participants. Four participants indicated not to have received line management support to assist their career progression.

Examples of participants' experiences of supervisor support are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Experiences of Supervisor Support

Supervisor Support		Participant Quotes
Question: "How would you describe the type of support that you have received from your line manager and how has this aided in your career advancement?"	<i>Experiences of supervisor support aiding career progression</i>	"Yeah, so I think I've been lucky; I have had supportive managers. I haven't had managers who sort of pushed me ... hmm ... like completely profiled me and said, 'Okay, you want to be the senior member of the organisation [which I don't want to be], so, we are going to get you there definitely.' But I've always had managers who've been supportive of me personally and they have helped to open opportunities for me." (Participant Four)
	<i>Experiences of supervisor support aiding career progression</i>	"A significant contribution. In terms of growth, in terms of support, development, personal growth, he was a phenomenal line manager. I do think that he is probably in the top half a percent of management skills and also that my personality profile and his personality profile match very well. He is not the type of person to tell you what to do; he leads entirely by example and he is very patient if you take a while to kind of follow his example." (Participant Six)
	<i>Experiences of supervisor support</i>	"The first aspect of it is obviously playing a more of a coaching role into ensuring that you are settled into the

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Supervisor Support		Participant Quotes
	<p><i>aiding career progression</i></p>	<p>role, that you are appraised in terms of the strategy of the organisation and as well as the strategy of the particular division that you are employed under. Obviously cascade down to the strategy that you will co-create with your team and obviously creating an alignment across the board and across the value-chain. So that would be the role that they play primarily. The second part of it is the role that they play in just ensuring that they provide you with exposure. Okay, so exposure in other parts of the business, challenging you in terms of some of your fears, in putting you in some situations or environments that would help to stretch you and obviously grow you and provide with that kind of exposure that you would require in preparation for your next role. So that's kind of the supervisory role that my manager has played in my life and also just the, allowing me the space to run.” (Participant Fifteen)</p>

Supervisor support discussion. The results showed that supervisor support is perceived as an important factor in the career progression of women. A supportive environment created by a supervisor can predict career progression outcomes for women (Paterson et al., 2014). These are achieved through one-on-one structured coaching conversations between line management and employees, increased visibility of talented women created by senior colleagues and identification and creation of career growth opportunities that stretch employee

capabilities for career progression. Supervisor support is an important enabler of the career progression of women and provides support for the research question. The findings of Mathur-Helm (2006) and Paterson et al. (2014) demonstrate that when supervisors create a working environment that is conducive to employee performance, the prospects for the career progression of women are improved. This results of the study could be attributed to the organisational citizenship behaviours of the supervisors towards the employees such as building trusting relationships that are strong enough to show belief in the employees' competence in accomplishing high-profile assignments and giving employees advice on how to advance (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Krivkovich et al., 2017; Paterson et al., 2014). The role of a supervisor in creating an enabling work environment that encourages and motivates women to attain career progression is critical (Mathur-Helm, 2006; Krivkovich et al., 2017).

Career Development

Participants were asked to describe their experiences with career planning and the ways in which these had assisted in supporting their career goals. Eleven participants indicated that career planning aided their career progression. This was accomplished through career development discussions with their line managers, which were facilitated by the participants clearly articulating career aspirations and goals in their career conversation sessions. In addition, the allocation of a mentor, receipt of on-the-job coaching and access to career-development training programmes promoted career progression. Four participants indicated that in their experience, limited career development took place as an outcome of the career planning process.

Examples of participants' experiences of career development are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Experiences of Career Development

Career Development		Participant Quotes
Question: “In your time with the organisation and leading in your function, describe the experiences you have had with career planning and ways in which this has assisted in supporting your career goals.”	<i>Experiences of career planning aiding career progression</i>	“So it’s aided, it’s definitely for not against. It’s been encouraging and motivating. And I felt like it wasn’t just a conversation just for the sake of having a conversation. It was engaging. I got lots of guidance in terms of what I need to focus on, what I am doing well predominantly.” (Participant Two)
	<i>Experiences of career planning aiding career progression</i>	“When I reflect on the conversations I have had, I have been quite explicit about where I want to go ... hmm ... and also some of the competencies I was trying to Okay, I have always had the conversation not about attaining a role size, it’s about gaining a competency towards my longer terms objectives, and I think that was also then constructive.” (Participant Three)
	<i>Experiences of career planning aiding career progression</i>	“I think everything that I have done in terms of work has always been aligned to where I want to go in my career, and the career conversations have been quite good. From a development side and progression point of view, I can say I have progressed. I came here as an Intermediate HR Consultant and then I did a psychometric assessment, and I got progressed to a Senior HR Consultant or HR Business Partner.” (Participant Eight)

Career Development		Participant Quotes
	<i>Experiences of career planning aiding career progression</i>	“So for me, career planning or the conversation about my career has played a huge role in ensuring that we put the right timelines and secondly, and most importantly, also what would be required in terms of whether it is exposure, it’s a certain skillset or whether it is educational requirements, you know, that would help me in that ladder that I would like to climb.” (Participant Fifteen)

Career development discussion. The results showed that career development is seen as an important factor for the career progression of women. Proactive, individual career planning, personal development and career management aid career mobility into managerial roles. The results provide support for the research question and for the findings of Mathur-Helm (2006), which demonstrate that through women’s own efforts to grow and develop, progress into top management levels is feasible. Such efforts involve accessing organisational support structures such as participating in career development programmes and being included in the formal success plans of the organisation (Mathur-Helm, 2006).

The present findings could be attributed to the career development process within the organisation. For example, the standard performance management practice in the organisation requires all line managers to ensure that the Personal Development Plan (PDP) is incorporated into the discussions regarding the performance management review of each staff member. The performance review in which the employee’s performance is evaluated against business objectives occurs three times a year. The support structure aims to provide line managers and employees with a standard performance-management guideline to review employee performance, to identify the strengths and developmental areas of the employee and to track the PDP against agreed deliverables and timelines to aid career planning and progression.

Also, employees who have recently assumed middle and senior management responsibilities are offered an opportunity by their line managers to be paired with a mentor with the requisite competencies and knowledge to assist them in developing business acumen,

leadership and people-management skills throughout their tenure with the organisation. Depending on the employees' seniority in the organisation, they are also encouraged to participate in either the middle or senior management accelerator programmes to improve their general knowledge of managing at strategic and operational levels (Johns, 2013).

Employee Competence: Academic Level – Education, Training and Qualification

Participants were asked to outline their education, training and qualification journey and describe the role and influence that their education had in enabling them to progress in their career. In addition, participants were asked if they intended to further their studies and if so, how this would assist in furthering their career objectives. Fifteen participants felt education and training facilitates the gaining of experience in order to be considered and appointed into the next level of management.

Eleven participants had plans to further their studies in their current function. Four participants had no formal plans to further their studies in their current function and were either focused on continual learning to acquire a completely different skillset to complement their current knowledge or had decided not to pursue further education at all.

An undergraduate degree refers to post-secondary education and includes academic programmes up to the level of a Bachelor's degree. Fourteen participants have an undergraduate degree.

A postgraduate degree refers to postgraduate education and includes specialised academic programmes up to the level of a Bachelor Honours degree, postgraduate diploma, Master of Administration, Master's degree (by coursework or research or both) or Doctoral degree. Ten participants reported to have obtained postgraduate qualifications, and four were studying towards a postgraduate qualification. Four participants had obtained a Certificate in Financial Planning. Three participants had acquired a Master of Business Administration (MBA), two participants had obtained postgraduate degrees in management studies and one participant had acquired a postgraduate degree in financial auditing and compliance.

Three participants had been nominated by their line managers to acquire postgraduate qualifications in a Management Advancement Programme. One participant was currently enrolled in a Senior Leadership Programme.

Three participants (with financially related postgraduate qualifications) were appointed as Management Director, Executive General Manager and head of a function and were permanent members of executive committees.

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One participant who had a national diploma and had completed short courses relating to financial services had progressed through the company into a senior management position. In her view, lack of a tertiary degree was not an inhibiting factor in her career advancement.

Examples of perceived influence of education and qualification attainment on career progression are reported in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceptions of Education and Qualification Attainment on Career Progression

Education, Training and Qualification		Participant Quotes
Question: “At the academic level, what has your education, training and qualification journey been? In your opinion, what role and influence has your education had in enabling you to progress in your career? Do you intend to further your studies and if so, how will the latter assist in furthering your career objectives?”	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	“When you work in an insurance company, you know, understanding insurance helps a heck of a lot and so, I think that actually has helped me to progress a bit more quickly because in insurance company you’ll technically find that the people who are leading it are people who are actuaries.”(Participant Three)
	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	“So my career—because I am at one of the biggest life and investment firms in the country that employs and values actuaries, I think it helped a lot that I had the preferred or one of the valued qualifications in the context of this organisation.” (Participant Four)
	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	“The organisation paid for my MBA in 2002/2003 So that has really helped me a lot in my career. Not so much in of the qualification, it did help me move into my current role because I

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Education, Training and Qualification		Participant Quotes
		know a lot of people view it that if you've got the balance of all the technical understanding and insight with management qualification and learning as well. So the fact that you have got a combination makes a difference in how people perceive your skill and your ability." (Participant Six)
	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	"So I think education is important. I think, you know, you need at least some level of qualification (a degree) to get you into the relevant field, and then I think you need to continuously develop yourself, learn on the job training and then also in terms of formal learning so that these things can make you a better person in terms of the role you want be in." (Participant Eight)
	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	"I think it's a combination of education and your education on the job, which will give you the basis to move into the role that you want." (Participant Nine)
	<i>Perceptions of education and qualification attainment on career progression</i>	"No obviously, I think education is important. I think it shapes the way you think, it helps you with, to be able to analyse things in a way that somebody who has not been exposed to it would not be able to.

Education, Training and Qualification	Participant Quotes
	<p>So, having said that, I think a combination of both education and experience is important though. Because just being educated without the relevant experience is also just not good enough.” (Participant Ten)</p>

Education, training and qualification discussion. The results showed that at an academic level, education, training and qualification is an important factor for the career progression of women. Past studies (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Langowitz & Godwyn, 2013) have highlighted the importance of education in assisting women’s career advancement. The findings of Mathur-Helm (2006) indicate that women executives increasingly understand the importance of acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills through education, qualifications and focused training in order to improve their chances of advancing into management positions. The present findings demonstrate consistency with previous studies.

The participants in the study were aware that attainment of education, qualification and focused training is important to gain work experience, which assists women’s advancement into top management positions. Fourteen participants who had undergraduate degrees and occupied middle and senior management positions have remained at these management levels and not progressed further. One participant who had attained a national diploma, not an undergraduate degree, was able to advance to a senior management position. She attributed this to her cumulative work experience, the usefulness of her social networks and her ability to build working relationships at all management levels. Four participants who had obtained postgraduate qualifications specialising in finance have moved up the organisational hierarchy either to lead the entire segment or a function of the segment, and all are permanent members of their executive committees. This further confirms that education and focused training together with workplace experience typically aid the career progression of women.

The results could have emerged as a result of the legislative requirements governing the financial service sector (e.g. Financial Services Board and FASSET) that require multinational organisations to up-skill employees, particularly designated groups (including women) who were previously excluded from participating in the sector. The company

continues to participate actively in the FASSET levy-grant system for workplace skills development, which not only has a direct bearing on the quality of skills supplied to the sector but also accelerates the upward mobility of skilled and qualified women into higher management positions.

Social Level: Social Networks

Participants were asked to prioritise formal and informal social networking activities and to describe if and how the activities have been useful in their career progression. Twelve participants assigned high priority to formal and informal social networking activities in aiding career progression. These 12 respondents found that participating in formal industry bodies in particular was valuable in gaining knowledge and building relationships with different stakeholders in the industry.

Although three participants acknowledged the importance of formal and informal social networks, they did not place high priority on developing and maintaining social networks to aid their career advancement. In their view, social networks opposed their personal values, and they believed that career progression is attained through hard work rather than socialising with work colleagues. The participants did not feel comfortable engaging in social corporate networks with individuals who were unfamiliar to them. These participants had not experienced the translation to career progression.

Examples of the perceived influence of social networks on career progression are reported in Table 6.

Table 6

Social Networks and Career Progression

Social Networks		Participant Quotes
<p>Question: “At the social level, what priority have you given to formal and informal social networking activities? If at all, describe how the latter have been useful to your career progression.”</p>	<p><i>Perceived influence of a social network on career progression</i></p>	<p>“It absolutely has helped. I think the internal social network and the external social network has helped me in terms of giving me perspectives. It gives you a lot of perspectives in terms of the people I socialise with that might work at competitors, might work with industry bodies and just having the other view, in terms of how they are thinking about problems. ... So how I have leveraged my social networks from a career progression perspective, I think I haven’t been deliberate about it, but it has happened by default because I am someone who believes in relationships, and I am not good at small talk, so I don’t have a lot of shallow relationships.” (Participant Six)</p>
	<p><i>Perceived influence of a social network on career progression</i></p>	<p>“So I’ve gotten a lot of my work through my social connections ... and chances are if I was to progress career wise, it would still be social networks.” (Participant Ten)</p>
	<p><i>Perceived influence of a social network on career progression</i></p>	<p>“Oh definitely. ... It also opened a lot of doors in terms of having the right conversations with the right</p>

Social Networks	Participant Quotes
	<p>people and creating that level, not only on a stakeholder level where my job is concerned, but it also allowed me to create value and loyal relationships with people where I know I can depend on them when something is needed whether it is in a working or even personal perspective. So you use them to your full potential.” (Participant Twelve)</p>

Social network discussion. The results from this study showed that at a social level, the participation of women in formal and informal social networking activities with peers, managers and external industry bodies is beneficial to their upward mobility. The more useful the social networks were perceived to be in aiding career progression, the higher was the priority given to nurturing formal and informal social networks. Past studies (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Helms et al., 2016; Kurlowicz, 2014) make recommendations for organisations to promote and encourage women to seek, interact and participate proactively in the development of their internal and external professional networks to support their progression into decision-making positions. The present study findings provide support for the proposition that the participation of women in formal and informal social networking activities is beneficial to their career progression. However, this contradicts the findings of Mathur-Helm (2006) that declare:

[Twenty-five] percent of the sample stated that they have not participated in social network activities ever in their career. They find most corporate entertainment venues such as sports stadia suites, golf courses or pubs, where business dealings are made, unsuitable for most women as they are geared towards male managers. (p. 25)

The three participants in the present study who did not prioritise social network activities highly believed that career advancement is attained through hard work and relationships built on demonstrated trust rather than through commentary on the social setting itself, which is designed to suit their male counterparts. These participants believed that

socialising in social corporate networks with work colleagues and unfamiliar individuals conflicted with their personal values and considered social network activities to be unbeneficial to their career progression. These results are aligned with the findings of Kaiye and Singh (2013), which indicate that unlike men who traditionally tend to choose social contacts based on goal attainment and relationships that will challenge them and prepare them for executive-level leadership, women historically choose social relationships based on similarity of traits, likeability and empathy towards the contact. As a result, women managers who reinforce and perpetuate homosocial relationships that are less beneficial to their managerial career mobility are more likely to be excluded from important networks and less likely to be seen as committed to their employers' cause (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Helms et al., 2016). At the organisational level, human and investment capital should be directed at developing and implementing initiatives designed to empower female employees to be more achievement-orientated in their social networking activities. This will assist female leaders to use their social connections and relationships to maximum advantage in support of their movement into top management roles.

Strategic Interventions: Top Management Support

Participants were asked how the role of sponsorship has aided their career progression. Seven participants believed having top management support was crucial to support their career progression. Of the seven participants, two participants felt that top management support is valuable when there is mutual maintenance of the sponsor and mentee relationship. Two participants acknowledged that a senior member of leadership needed to be at a specific management level in order to apply reputation and credibility in support of their career mobility into middle and senior management. Three participants said focusing on specific developmental areas with their senior member of leadership assisted in faster career growth.

The study found that eight participants did not consider top management support to be advantageous to their career progression. Of the eight participants, five participants expressed discomfort with the concept of having a sponsor to aid career growth, and three participants felt they did not want to be treated as a "project or to be owned by a third party"[Participant five].

Examples of participants' experiences of top management support are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Experiences of Top Management Support

Strategic Interventions		Participant Quotes
Question: “How has the role of sponsorship at top management level, if at all, assisted in your career advancement?”	<i>Experiences of top management support</i>	“Yeah, a sponsor is invaluable at a big corporate. If you don’t have one, you are just part of the masses and nobody really pays attention to you. No matter how well you are progressing and no matter how well you are doing, there isn’t someone championing you at the right levels; you are kind of dead in the water. Hmm ... and you know with that, in order to develop that you need trust, you need time ... hmm ... both from the person that is sponsoring you and yourself as well to be able to prove that.” (Participant One)
	<i>Experiences of top management support</i>	“Yes, so you ... I think a sponsor is very important ... hmm ... and I think I have benefited from that in many ways because sometimes it’s informal. You don’t appreciate it, but it does happen. So I have had the sponsorship in a sense that there is people who either ... er ... people who then hired me into the organisation. I think they played a very strong sponsorship role for me ... hmm ... people who particularly hired me for a particular role played a very strong

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Strategic Interventions		Participant Quotes
		<p>sponsorship role for me, but it was always sponsorship that was warranted. It's not like it was just a given; you had to work for it, always.” (Participant Three)</p>
	<p><i>Experiences of top management support</i></p>	<p>“It's also about the person believing in you, and the belief comes from something. You having done something meaningful together or assisted in some kind of impactful work product; they trust that you will do the things that you say you will do. They can vouch for you, so that is something that I have always had. I had it with my first Head of Department. She wasn't even my line manager at that point in time. And she would say all sorts of nice things about me in rooms that I wasn't in such that senior people took interest and were also sort of would say things based on the fact that she was using her reputation and her credibility to promote and increase the profile for me. So that was very, very helpful early on in my career because I came from the outside and it helped me network in this organisation. And it spread like wild fire.” (Participant Four)</p>

Top management support discussion. The results showed that top management support is beneficial to the upward mobility of women. Seven participants believed having top management support was crucial in supporting their career progression. Several studies (Elmer, 2013; Helms et al., 2016; Johns, 2013) highlight that access to an influential member of the leadership team is critical to women's upward mobility. The present findings provide support for the proposition that top management support is an enabler of the upward mobility of women. This is consistent with Mathur-Helm (2006) who reported that "about 75 percent sample [*sic*] had access to mentors and that the lack of access to female role models and mentors was one of the contributing factors to women's struggle in reaching top management levels" (pp. 10, 14). The current study demonstrated that top management support is most effective in the upward mobility of women when there is mutual maintenance of the sponsor and mentee relationship. Senior members of leadership teams need to be at specific management levels in order for their reputation and credibility to benefit the career of the mentee. In addition, the focus of the relationship needs to be on addressing specific developmental areas to assist faster career growth. These results can be closely linked to one of the execution processes emanating from the performance management practice previously mentioned in the career development theme. The organisation under study is investing significantly in pairing senior members of leadership (with the requisite competencies and knowledge) with female leaders in order to assist employees in developing business acumen, leadership qualities and people-management skills for their career progression.

Family-Friendly Policies

Participants were asked to describe the nature of the job-family support that is available to them and enables them to participate in the workplace and advance their careers. Nine participants had access and made use of job-family support to aid their career progression and participation in the work place. Ten participants had ample management support to manage work demands and family commitments, thus aiding career growth. Of the ten participants, eight participants were allowed to work flexi-time, and their work demands were adjusted through individual negotiation with their line managers. Two participants mentioned that the provision of onsite facilities by the organisation (e.g. onsite crèche, prayer room, company mall, onsite breastfeeding rooms) aided in improved management of their family and work demands, resulting in increased work performance and ultimately, career progression.

Five participants felt that their job-family support is not adequate to support their upward career mobility. Of the five participants, two participants cited limited access to work flexi-time and limited autonomy over their work outcomes. Three participants indicated that they did not have adequate management support to balance their work demands and family commitments in order to aid their career growth and believed that this support is reserved for a select group of employees.

Examples of participants’ experiences of job-family support are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Experiences of Job-Family Support

Family-Friendly Policies		Participant Quotes
Question: “Describe the nature of job and family support available to you that enables you to participate in the workplace and advance in your career.”	<i>Experiences of job-family support</i>	“So I think that G and CA are supportive. They’ve been supportive in terms of my family, especially from ... so when I joined I wasn’t a mother, so I could work non-stop, but ever since I became a mother, so ever since I became pregnant, I’ve been supported. So my maternity process to even coming back and just easing me back into being at work. And if [her son] is sick and I need to rush home, they are fine with it. And if I need to work from home I can. So from a management point of view, support is there.” (Participant Eight)
	<i>Experiences of job-family support</i>	“There are so many facilities. I have just had a baby recently, and I made the decision that I only want to breastfeed her. So I didn’t want to do bottle feeding; I didn’t want to formula. Obviously, returning to the

Family-Friendly Policies	Participant Quotes
	<p>workplace really creates quite a lot of challenge where that is concerned. So at x company, we actually have a breastfeeding room where you can go and express in The other thing that I thought was really amazing when I started working here is that they have a prayer room, which is really great and I think it was literally, it takes me five minutes to go and pray, which saves me a lot of time when I get home. And also, I can actually do my prayers at the allocated times as opposed to having to catch up when I get home. So that's another thing. I guess the other things are also really great. So the fact that there is a school, a crèche down the road; there are lots of things. There's a gym and like the banks, the stuff in the mall and whatever. So all of the stuff helps." (Participant Thirteen)</p>

Family-friendly policies discussion. The results of the current study showed that family-friendly policies were perceived to be an important factor for the career progression of women. The findings indicated that ten participants have access to at least one type of job-family support structure. Identified factors included: flex-time work; manager and employee negotiation of work deliverables; access and utilisation of workplace facilities; and personal support (e.g. spousal or extended family support) to manage work and family obligations, thus aiding career growth. These results provide support for the proposition that family-friendly policies are perceived to be an important factor for the career progression of

women. This is consistent with the findings of Mathur-Helm (2006), which demonstrate that because job-family policies and practices were acted upon in the organisations under study, the participants in her research had access to at least one type of career or work-related support. This assisted women in managing their work demands and family commitments and pursuing top management positions (Mathur-Helm, 2006).

The results of this study can be attributed to the approach that the organisation has taken to employee wellness, which is one of actively addressing the needs of women in the workplace. For instance, the organisation conducts an annual employee-engagement survey. The 2015 results demonstrated the need for a structured policy to be introduced to support women interested in advancing their careers and male employees who required more time to attend to family commitments while balancing work demands. In response, in 2016, the organisation launched the “We Care Wellness” policy and programme that was aimed at providing a structured approach for line managers and employees to manage requests regarding access and utilisation of workplace support structures. The results of recent employee-engagement surveys have shown that the introduction and implementation of the programme has generated an increase in female workers using the option to work remotely in order to attend to family needs (5% versus 2% in 2014) and an increase in women being promoted into higher management positions upon their return from maternity leave (3% versus 1% in 2014). However, additional work needs to be undertaken with line managers to ensure the policy objectives are implemented consistently and fairly for staff members.

Limitations

The study has limitations. In terms of the sampling procedure, purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. This non-random sampling technique (also referred to as homogenous sampling) facilitated the isolation of particular participant characteristics that would assist in addressing the aim of the study. The target group was selected based on their ability to communicate knowledge, experiences and opinions in a clear and reflective manner. The cohort consisted of professional, female employees at middle and senior management level who were full-time, permanent or fixed-term contract employees based either at Head Office or at a regional office. This limited the ability to generalise the results to a larger population of interest. Therefore, increasing the sample size by including participants from the broader organisation and other companies in the financial services and insurance industry could

increase the number and variety of responses. This would enable the results to be generalised to larger population groups and to be applicable in different contexts.

Future Research

Consideration could be given to conducting in-depth interviews with female employees from various professional backgrounds, age groups and ethnicities to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the enablers that they consider to be important to the career progression of female employees in organisations generally.

Including interviews with male employees could assist in gaining insight into the enablers of upward mobility of female employees from their perspective. For example, using a quantitative approach such as a questionnaire that examines the strength of the relationships between variables could assist in triangulation and improve the results of the study.

Implications

South African research on such enabling factors has been conducted in national banks (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Mathur-Helm, 2006), South African business schools (Kaiye & Singh, 2013) and the education sector (Shober, 2014). The findings revealed that enabling factors such as supervisor support, education, social networks, top management support and family-friendly policies are important factors for the career progression of women. This study contributes to the identification of such enabling factors in the financial service industry, specifically the insurance sector. This is important since there is strong evidence that the promotion of women into management roles is not only morally right but can also increase business performance, employee efficacy and access employee knowledge and experience for organisational competitiveness.

Conclusion

Historically, the global overview of women in management reveals that although significant inroads have been made internationally and in socio-political spheres of society to advance the agenda of gender equality, equality legislation worldwide continues to grapple with the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making positions in organisations. The results of the current study showed that organisational factors such as supervisor support, career development, education, social networks, top management support and family-friendly policies together with organisational interventions that foster the development of the identified enablers

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are important for the career progression of women. It is evident from the study that future research should focus on the organisational factors that organisations must consider to aid the upward mobility of female employees into senior positions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Confidentiality Agreement



OLDMUTUAL

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17 March 2017

Dear Miss Malilda Moyana

Confidentially Agreement

1. Confidentially Clause

During the course of conducting research in **Old Mutual Life Assurance Company (South Africa) Limited, Reg No: 1999/004643/06** (hereafter referred to as "Old Mutual" in this section) and particularly in dealing directly with employees of **Old Mutual Personal Finance**, the researcher may be given access to, discover or become aware of information which if it was to become public knowledge might damage the Old Mutual brand and public reputation or Old Mutual's dealings with its clients or employees.

Without in any way limiting the generality of the foregoing the definition of confidential may include:

- Financially confidential information
- Marketing information
- Information which **Old Mutual Personal Finance** has entirely in its own discretion designated as being "Confidential information"
- Time sensitive information if may require that it is embargoed until certain conditions are met.
- Privileged information
- Private confidential information: private personal information relating to clients or employees.

2. Signatory agreement

I (Full name & Surname) Malilda Moyana hereby agree to the above confidentiality clause and fully understands the impact of disclosing such information mentioned in the confidentiality clause. Furthermore in my research I will ensure that the name "**Old Mutual Life Assurance Company (South Africa) Limited, Reg No: 1999/004643/06**" or any legal entities of "**Old Mutual plc**" and "**Personal Finance**" and, any other information that may be damaging to the brand and public reputation will not be disclosed in the reporting and findings of my research. In the event of such disclosure, **Old Mutual Life Assurance Company (South Africa) Limited, Reg No: 1999/004643/06** may take legal action against the signatory.

Signed:
Date: 17 March 2017

Appendix 2: Research Approval from the EIR Committee of the Commerce Faculty



Lecturer: Organisational Psychology, Management Studies, Commerce Faculty

Mrs. Carmen Field

Room 4.31, Leslie Commerce Building, Bayswater Hill,
Upper Campus, UCT, Rondebosch, 7700
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 3225 Fax: +27 (0) 26 640 9414
E-mail: carmen.field@uct.ac.za
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03 April 2017

Ref: MS001_2017

Matilda Moyana

Project title: Perceived enablers to upward mobility of female employees into middle and senior management positions in a financial services organisation

Dear Researcher,

This letter serves to confirm that this project as described in your submitted protocol has been approved.

Please note that if you make any substantial change in your research procedure that could affect the experiences of the participants, you must submit a revised protocol to the Committee for approval.

Kind Regards

Carmen Field

Ethics in Research Committee, Management Studies, Faculty of Commerce


Appendix 3: Informed Written Consent Template



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

Igniting Knowledge and Opportunity



Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in the following study which aims to investigate:

Perceived enablers to upward mobility of female employees into middle and senior management positions in a financial services organisation.

The purpose of this study is to identify perceived enablers to the upward mobility of female employees.

You are part of a selected sample of employees who are requested to participate in an in-depth interview. We know how valuable your time is and appreciate your efforts. Your participation in the interview should take you no longer than 15-30 minutes. Your inputs will play a valuable part in our efforts to gain important insights into women in management in the financial services sector.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. All information will be treated in a confidential manner and used exclusively for the purpose of the study. No individual names will be recorded or published. You will not be requested to supply any identifiable information, ensuring anonymity of your responses. You can choose to withdraw from the research at any time for whatever reason, in accordance with ethical research requirements. The results will be utilized as an input for further strategic interventions to minimize glass ceiling within the Financial Sector.

Please note that by participating in the interview, you are granting us permission to use your biographical information and responses to analyse the data and report on the findings of the study. You also grant us permission to record the interview, to ensure accurate data collection for content-analysis at a later stage.

Interviewee Signature of Consent: _____
Date: _____

If at any time during or after participating in this interview, you feel the need to call for professional guidance or support, the segment has a confidential 24-hour personal support service (Employee Well-being) available to all employees free of charge. Toll-Free: 0800 006 068.

Researcher: Mrs Matilda Moyana | mmoyana@oldmutual.com
0 21 509-5161 (Office)
079 611 7925 (Cell)

Signed by candidate

PERCEIVED ENABLERS OF UPWARD MOBILITY OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN A FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATION

Appendix 4: Interview Guide Template



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
FACULTY OF COMMERCE
 Igniting Knowledge and Opportunity



Perceived enablers to upward mobility of female employees into middle and senior management positions in a financial services organisation.

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of our conversation today will be about your lived-in experiences in relation to your career progression in middle/senior management. The four areas that will be the focus of our discussion will be as follows:

1. Organisational Support Structures: Supervisor Support and Career Development
2. Employee attributes at two dimensions:
 - Academic Level (Education, Training and Qualification)
 - Social (Social Networks)
3. Strategic Interventions
 - Top management support
 - Family-friendly policies
 - Career progression of women

Do you give me permission to commence with the interview ____X____ and do you grant me permission to record our discussion to ensure accurate data collection for content-analysis at a later stage.

1.1 Organisational Support Structures-Supervisor Support
 Lets begin our conversation about supervisor support. How would you describe the type of support that you have received from your line manager and how has this aided in your career advancement?

1.2 Organisational Support Structures-Career Development
 In your time with the organisation and leading in your function, describe the experiences you have had with career planning and ways in which this has assisted in supporting your career goals.

2 Employee Competence-Professional (Education, Training, Qualification level)
 The next part of our interview, will focus on aspects of employee competence. At the academic level, what has your education, training and qualification journey been? In your opinion, what role and influence has your education had in enabling you to progress in your career? Do you intend to further your studies and if so, how will the latter assist in furthering your career objectives?

2.1 Employee Competence-Social (Social Network)
 At the social level, what priority have you given to formal and informal social networking activities? If at all, describe how the latter have been useful to your career progression.

3 Strategic Interventions (Top Management Support)
 We will now focus our discussion, on strategic interventions. How has the role of sponsorship at top management level, if at all, assisted in your career advancement?

3.1 Strategic Interventions (Family-Friendly Policies)
 still keeping within the theme of the discussion, Describe the nature of job and family support available to you that enables you to participate in the workplace and advance in your career.

4 Strategic Interventions (Career progression of women) (Open-ended question)
 We have almost reached the conclusion of the interview. In your opinion, what are the contributory factors that may enable women to progress in leadership positions and what can be done differently to achieve gender parity?

This brings us to the end of the interview. Following the conclusion of the interview, you are welcome to obtain a copy of the research report once it is completed. Thank you for your valuable time ____X____ and for the opportunity to have this discussion with you.

Interview questions adapted from the contribution made by Mathur-Helm, B. (2006). Women and the glass ceiling in South African banks: an illusion or reality? Women in Management Review, 21 (4), 311-326.