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WOMAN-TO-WOMAN EMPOWERMENT IN THE CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT OF ESWATINI

BY

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A RESEARCH PROJECT

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in the

FACULTY OF COMMERCE LAW AND MANAGEMENT

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UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

Supervisor: **Dr Grant Sieff**

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DECLARATION

I, ___**Nomahlubi Sikiti**_____, hereby declare that this proposal for the Masters in Business Administration Degree in the Faculty of Commerce Law and Management submitted to the Wits Business School at the University of Witwatersrand has not been submitted previously for any degree at this or another university. It is original in design and in execution, and all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

Student ……NN SIKITI…….. **Date** …29.02.2024……

ABSTRACT

This study was pursued to find and establish characteristics of woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate world of Eswatini and how these characteristics may contribute to economic redevelopment and business growth. Women empowerment has been the conversation for a while but there have been little said about women empowering each other and how that benefits an organisation. With women having been the marginalised group in society, this study sought to find what women are doing to empower each other, what hinderances they face in the journey, and what benefit they bring to business by empowering each other.

The research was conducted based on transformational leadership theory and behavioural leadership theory, linking it to the shine theory. The research followed the qualitative research design with a focus on interpretivism and the narrative type of research study, data was collected through interviews from a sample of 15 women who occupy different levels of authority within their organisations. The data collected was then coded utilising thematic analysis and to develop the overarching themes of the study.

The key findings were that there were still a few women represented in positions of power in the country which in effect led to the difficulty in evaluating woman-to-woman empowerment and the benefits it has yielded for organisations. The women that were found to be involved in empowering activities, were involved in such outside of their organisations mostly directed to young girls and then a few to women in professional groupings.

The study concluded that because women are still underrepresented in leadership, it is important for company executives, men included, to advocate for and foster beneficial relationship amongst the women at all levels of their organisations by encouraging fellow female empowerment as the inclusion of women in leadership brings about diversity in decision making which benefits the organisation.

Keywords: ***women empowerment; woman-to-woman empowerment; Eswatini, corporate and business environment, business growth and economic redevelopment; shine theory; transformational leadership theory***

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Women empowerment is a very important subject of discussion in evolution and the fiscus, it gives women the power to take charge of their destiny and rip the benefits from all resources better available to humanity (Mahbub, 2021). Women's liberationist started this conversation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; starting off with the fight for women's rights to vote and recently on conversations to empower women and move them away from the stereotypes that the world has pegged on the gender and what its role in society entails (Mahbub, 2021).

Eswatini being a country that takes pride in its rich culture and history subscribes to the notion that the male is the head of the home (Together Women Rise, 2023) and as expected the inclusion of women in leadership just as in many other economies is still lacking. Important to note is that there is no history of government or state laws that have prevented the girl child from formal education, this indicated by a gender parity index of 1 across primary, secondary, and upper secondary school enrolment (UNFPA, 2023); as much as this can be the individual choices of certain households. The Eswatini government has, for decades sponsored children of *emaSwati* (citizens of Eswatini) for tertiary education, which is a gateway to professional work, in tertiary institutions in and outside the country (Ministry of Labour & Social Security, 2021). The sponsorship comes in the form of a loan given to all qualifying candidates based on their high school examination marks, regardless of gender, which they are meant to pay 50% of in instalments once they start employment. With the population of the country currently at about 1.2 million and females making most of that figure, 51% females to 49% of males (World Bank, 2022), and the history of education not being limited to a certain gender, there is still resonant misrepresentation of women in positions of power (Nkambule & Perumal, 2024).

Organisations like the United Nations have over the years come up with initiatives to continue the conversation on women empowerment, starting programmes and coming up with strategies and guidelines that endorse and advocate for women inclusion in all spheres of life (UN Women, 2021). Despite the many and great strides and progress that has been made by such

organisations and the business world at large on the subject, (Mckinsey & Company, 2022) report that there is still great marginalisation of women in positions of power.

UN Women (2021) has gone on to say that the subject of woman-to-woman empowerment still has a long way to go as it is composed by and is greatly influenced by the historical marginalisation of women in society. But they have put it forward that they have seen elements of the subject matter in a different structure, including their own sustainable development goal number 5, countries focusing on women groupings and empowering them in their local communities, mentorship opportunities for women with industry professionals, and solidarity movements amongst women for assistance on the ground.

Acknowledging that there are females rightfully occupying top positions and positions of influence in the corporate world, even though few and far in between (Nkambule & Perumal, 2024), this research seeks to find how these representatives are using their placement in these positions to uplift other females to ensure the growth of the pool of women leaders.

1.2 Research Problem

Women empowerment and female inclusion have been the conversation in the business world for at least the past few decades; in the public and private sectors and across all levels of leadership in different organisations (RuizCantisani, et. al, 2021). With all this, we are still seeing very few female representatives in boards and the C-suite of companies (Jendia, 2019), which in effect has led to very little having been written or published on woman-to-woman empowerment or women empowering and supporting each other as literature search has revealed. Men are still advancing far more than their female colleagues and counterparts, which brings about the notion that there are still some things that males in leadership positions are doing for themselves and their fellows in the workplace for which females have not caught on to or are rarely practicing (HBR, 2018). The ground has been prepared in terms of the awareness and advocation for female inclusion, as evidenced in the enaction of the country's National Gender Policy of 2010 (UNDP, 2013). What then can women do to foster woman-to-women empowerment to catalyse the process towards equal representation in leadership?

In the country's recent elections, a woman was appointed into the position of Deputy Prime Minister, the second female to hold this position; having been the first female to land the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in the previous legislature (Eswatini Government, 2023). In the corporate space, 50% of the people at the realm of the

banks operating in the country are women (Eswatini Banker's Association, 2023). This goes to show that women are capable of political and business leadership and have been entrusted with business growth and economic redevelopment. Understanding the difficulties and struggles that women in leadership have gone through, this research seeks to find what they are doing or have done to ensure they support the women who come behind them. Gender inequality in leadership is in its most basic form unfair, and by women being refused leadership, they are being denied the opportunity and willpower to make an impact in the world they live in (AAUW, 2016).

With the belief that women should be just as active in the fight for inclusion, this research paper intends to investigate how women who have advanced in their careers have been instrumental in the growth, support, and empowerment of at least one other female below them and how, by contributing to the advancement of females in their workplaces are contributing to company success.

1.3 Research Questions

a) How has the history and culture of the business and corporate environment in Eswatini affected woman-to-woman empowerment?
b) What has been the role of women in leadership in empowering female employees that come behind them?
c) Why do women in leadership find it difficult to empower junior female employees in their organisations?
d) What initiatives are women leaders involved in to empower other women?
e) How has woman-to-woman empowerment contributed to firm growth and business success?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

a) Identify how history, the hierarchical nature of the business, and the male domination of corporate leadership has hindered women developing each other.
b) Explore the position of women in corporate leadership in empowering fellow females in their organisations.
c) Analysing the effects of attitudes and beliefs on women leaders and its impact on woman-to-woman empowerment.

d) Evaluating women's involvement in empowering other females in the corporate and business world of Eswatini.
e) Explain how women in empowering each other contribute immensely to firm growth and economic redevelopment.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Despite women empowerment having been a relevant topic in the business world for the past few decades, research reveals that women representation in leadership positions is still lacking (AAUW, 2016). We have seen Fortune 500 companies, the likes of General Motors, United Parcel Service, Citigroup, and Oracle; with women at the helm and changing the age-old narrative that only men are capable of leadership (Investopedia, 2023). We have also witnessed international organisations like the United Nations coming forward and pushing the phenomenon of women empowerment and inclusion in positions of power (UNDP, 2013). However, this has not been enough to advance women in a lasting and meaningful way. With all that has been done by the business world and international organisations alike, this research seeks to investigate the role the "lucky" few have played in promoting and ensuring the advancement of their fellow sisters to guarantee they follow them into leadership and positions of power. Scherer, (2021) brings about the theory of the "queen bee syndrome" which she mentions has played a role in preventing women from advancing in their careers, because once a woman makes it into power, they behave and want to be treated in a way that resembles the treatment to a queen in a beehive. The Bible verse "to whom much is given, much is expected" (Luke 12:48), echoed in the saying "with great power, comes great responsibility" being applied in this case advocates that women in leadership need to be aware that they are put in leadership not only to enjoy the benefits but also to pave a way for others who come after them, and thus progressing the fight towards female inclusion.

As already reflected in the paper and as will be shown, there is enough literature in academia and otherwise about women empowerment but the same cannot be said when it comes to women empowering other women or woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate environment. This research agrees with available literature that society and culture have led to women not holding positions of influence and authority, for which positions are mostly held by men who are also the ones appointed as traditional leaders (Mungiria, 2013). With culture being an influence in the promotion of women into decision making roles, it, in effect,

negatively affects women empowering each other and this paper will investigate such effects and their impact.

What this study also sought to do is analyse the responses given from participants and identify commonalities in their individual experiences and journeys which can then help junior female employees relate and realise that they are not so far off from women who have made it through. Furthermore, the research sought to assist in preparing junior female employees for the journey that lies ahead of them and how they can become better leaders to the next generation. Also, to make them realise what, if anything about their behaviour poses a difficulty for women leaders to extend a helping hand and assist them in the journey to change and make the workplace a better environment for all women regardless of rank.

The conversation on women empowerment is rife in economies the world over, and non-governmental organisations, not for profits and United Nations agencies have been instrumental in sparking the conversation but there are very few scholarly articles that delve into the subject of women empowering one another especially in the African context. This study aimed at contributing to scholarship by focusing on this subject and explore how women can help each other in their professional paths. Furthermore, the study sought to start the conversation about the important role women play in effecting and inspiring change in others to stop going about life operating in an individualistic manner but magnify the power of understanding one another and genuinely trying to help. On a broader spectrum, the study intends to shine a light on "women for women" dynamics for company executives and policy makers in extension, for them to be aware of the issues of woman-to-woman empowerment and come up with strategies and policies to improve women empowerment and inclusion by supporting such initiatives.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

a) The research scope was limited to private institutions in Eswatini predominantly in the Mbabane – Manzini corridor and did not include the public sector even though the Eswatini government employs about 60% of the professional working population. This was done because the structure of the corporate environment in Eswatini is less traditional and hierarchical than the public sector.
b) The study also focused on females in the workplace in general and did not take into consideration the different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities; regardless of sexual

orientation and which gender they identify with because there are already few women in leadership and segregating them further would not have given much to work with.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Business growth/success – this refers to a business financial stability and potential for growth, its achievement of set goals and objectives, creating value and satisfying its customers together with its level of adaptability, application of innovation, and impacting stakeholders in a good and positive way (HBR, 2019)

Behavioural leadership – is a type of leadership style that opines that leadership is about specific behaviours and actions of leaders and that they need to exhibit these behaviours to drive performance in their teams (Mango, 2018).

Corporate environment – relating to a large company; of or shared by a whole group and not just of a single member; relating to a business, especially a large business.

Eswatini – a country in Southern Africa (Britannica, 2024)

Shine theory – a theory on female interactions with another that proposes that women become more successful if they work together and celebrate each other's accomplishments (Ziwica, 2019).

Transformational leadership – is a type of leadership that inspires positive change within an organisation by going beyond just the achievement of predetermined goals and milestones but looks to improve both employees and individuals by influencing them to achieve to the best of their abilities and they themselves be agents of beneficial change in the organisation (Alessa, 2021)

Women empowerment – is a concept of affirmative action that champions putting an end to discriminative actions against women, giving them equal access to opportunities and giving them the liberty to make their own decisions for their own lives (Desai & Garg, 2022).

Women-to-women empowerment – focuses on women lifting each other up and is related to women empowerment but has the specific focus on women encouraging, supporting, and magnifying other women's individual and collective achievements (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

1.8 Organisation of the Study

This research paper is organised into 6 chapters. The first chapter gives an introduction to the study by exploring its background and presents the problem that has inspired the study and what the research questions are. It goes further looking into the objectives and the importance of the study. Lastly the chapter speaks to the delimitations in conducting the research and the delimitations of the methods applied. The second chapter reviews related literature about women empowering one another and utilises the same literature to create a basis for this research by bringing forward the propositions that underpin the study. The following chapter explores the methodology that framed the study and goes into detail on how the data for this study was collected and analysed. The next two chapters present and discuss the results, linking them to the research questions formulated and the propositions that have been put forward. The final chapter ends and wraps up the paper by going through what it set out to do and if that was achieved, recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature that is available and has been published concerning the subject matter. In this section, the study sought to find consistencies and divergencies with what this study aimed to do. It looked at what had been written about the concept of woman-to-woman empowerment and related that to the questions the study seeks to answer and formulated propositions based on that. It further introduced the theories that form the basis of the study which will be explored in the research paper.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 The Kingdom of Eswatini

Eswatini, previously known as Swaziland until 2018, is a country in the southern part of Africa, neighbouring the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique (Britannica, 2024). With the King serving as head of state assisted by the recently appointed Prime Minister, the country is one of three kingdoms in Africa, and is the only remaining absolute monarchy in the continent (LA Times, 2019). The country has the native language SiSwati, and English as the two official languages with the city of Mbabane serving as the country's capital city, and a survey by ESEPARC (2023) has concluded that the Mbabane-Manzini corridor, on which this study was conducted, is the geographical location concentrated with commerce and business activity. The monarchy serves as sovereign ruler over the state, then there are two legislative houses of government; the house of assembly (21% of which are women) and the house of senate (47% of which are women) in which the current deputy Prime Minister sits (Parliament of the Kingdom of Eswatini, 2023).

Despite efforts by legislature, non-governmental groupings and parastals to advance the inclusion of women in leadership positions, women still occupy subordinate positions in society and their representation is still unjust (Nkambule & Perumal, 2024). Based on women's level of education in the country, they have the potential and are fully equipped for business and corporate leadership, but factors like the culture and indoctrinated beliefs about women in the workplace, stand in their way (Bimha et. al, 2018).

2.2.2 The Corporate and Business Environment in Eswatini

The Kingdom of Eswatini provides a safe and peaceful environment for business, offering ease of market access to the Southern Africa region, competitive infrastructure, sturdy industrial relations, and firm investor protection policies (SADC Business Council, 2021). Despite efforts by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry to smoothen the conducting of business in the country, companies, through the Central Bank of Eswatini's Company Survey Report (2021), reported to have been faced by challenges in doing business, including the country's regulatory and at times inconsistent regulatory structures, inefficiencies by government, competition, and taxation issues. The report also brings forward opportunities that companies were excited about, which include the prospects of diversification, access to new markets, increased efficiency, revised legislation, and economic growth. The country is also ideally placed between South Africa and Mozambique, which grants it access to the ports in these countries and its good rail and road infrastructure make exporting a lot easier (EIPA, 2019). Eswatini also has a properly educated workforce which is testament to the over 80% literacy rate, and there is very little difference in the literacy levels of men and women (89.5% and 89.1% respectively) as reported by the World Bank (2024).

With the literacy levels of both genders almost mirroring each other, one would be inclined to think that this is reflective of both genders' representation in positions of influence in the business and corporate environment as well, but that is not the case. According to the Ministry of Labour (2021), women make up 52% of the labour force in the country but are mostly occupying junior and subordinate positions in business and executive positions are reserved primarily for the men. The ILO (2021) also confirms this underrepresentation and puts it forward that women's career advancement is limited due to traditional and cultural norms and that the gender pay gap in the country is in the regions of 17%. Through these adversities and difficulties that face business and professional women in the country, there are women who have been rightfully placed in influential positions in boards and as leaders of organisations, like in the case of the women leading three of the six banks operating in the Kingdom and the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister. On the quest to ascertain the role of woman-to-woman empowerment in the country, this research will endeavour to find what these women, who have made it to the top, have done to also uplift other women to rise to the positions they themselves occupy.

2.2.3 Background of Women Empowerment and Organisational Practices

The Oxford dictionary defines empowerment as "authority or power given to some to do something;" it continues to define it as "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights". It follows then that women empowerment will be the process of giving to women the liberty to make their own decisions, for the own lives and allowing them to mould their own destinies (Purnamawati & Utama, 2019). Habitually, women have been side-lined, worse still if you are a woman of colour or are transgender (Mahbub, 2021). The women empowerment conversation started off with feminists at the time fighting for women's rights to vote and lately the fight has been about pushing for an equitable society by giving equal opportunity to all, regardless of gender (Mahbub, 2022).

One would think that since this conversation has been going on for a while, things are most likely to have changed; but that is not the case. It is true that more women are occupying leadership positions than ever before, but also true is that female representation still lags far behind their male counterparts and the gender-pay gap is rife (World Economic Forum, 2016). The 2018 Fortune list reported that women CEOs made up less than 5% of the Fortune 500 companies (Appelbaum et. al, 2019). The report acknowledges that the statistics on women representation have improved over the years amongst Executive Committees of Fortune Global 100 companies, which was also confirmed by Deloitte in their 2022 "Missing Pieces" that in as much as business's strides in the quest for equal representation across genders is erratic and unpredictable, 45% of women and previously marginalised groups held memberships in different company boards.

In the past, according to (Bharadwaj & Shanker, 2021) men have played the leading character in society, that of the provider to the home as women carried the responsibility of household duties like raising and taking care of the children and looking after the upkeep of the home. This, according to the literature has been one of the prime reasons why women have lagged in their professional journeys when compared to men. Socio-economic changes in society including opportunities for higher education and globalization has allowed for women to shed off the "taking care of home" stigma and has opened the doors for them to make a mark in the corporate world where we have seen women occupying positions of power in fields that were historically thought of as only for men (McKinsey & Company, 2019). This has greatly changed the lives of women across the world and has given them an opportunity to build and form their own personas and career paths away from what was thought of as the traditional role

of a woman (Maemunah, 2023). But, even with these great strides that women have made and challenges they have had to overcome, there is still the issue of managing the work and life balance which their male counterparts do not have to deal with (Deshmukh, 2018). The issue of pregnancy and raising children which women find very difficult to balance out with the pressures of being a professional (Bharadwaj & Shanker, 2021).

Companies, in their way of doing things tend to punish women who have children or are planning on having them and will even further penalise those who are of childbearing age regardless of whether they are planning to have children or not (Appelbaum, et. al, 2019). Many women will forgo their career advancement to afford them the opportunity to spend time with their families, and those who will attempt to have it all will tend to struggle with giving the requisite attention to both family and their professions (Bering, et. al, 2018). Even though the number of families with two working parents has continued to grow, the social norms of whose responsibility it is to take care of the home have not changed as much (Singh, et. al, 2018). In the USA, there are 4-6% more Millenial and Generation X women who hold a bachelor's degree than men, but of these, men of the same generation hold more than 10% of full employment (Pew Research Center, 2015).

2.2.4 Organisational Structure and its Influence on Women Leaders

As little representation as is, women do make it to senior positions in the workplace, but they are still working in a gendered environment and the dominant organisational culture is one that will associate masculine behaviours with leadership because ultimately men and the mark of machismo have historically modelled leadership (World Economic Forum, 2016). Women come into these leadership positions but will be denied by the organisational norms to lead in a way that comes naturally to them and will be forced to follow the accepted way of leadership, which is more masculine, but make it very difficult for them to put up this act whilst at the same time they are expected to maintain the genuineness of a leader (Eagly & Carly, 2007). The professional environment is still based on, and resembles ideals from over 50 years ago, which is not today's reality (Zahid, 2016).

As the world is slowly engaging in the debate of whether women and men should be categorised according to their sex roles, that is predominantly still the case. Women are understood as having more collective behaviours and men more self-serving behaviours (Appelbaum, et. al, 2019). It is considered normal for a man to be free and independent but once a woman shows

any signs of being stern, confident, and competitive; they no longer fit into the conventional box designed for them and are considered deviants (Ebrahimi, et.al, 2019). Some women may find it easier to behave in a masculine way but because they are not men, this has the potential of further denting the representation of women in their natural characters within the professional space (Townsend, 2020). Women are then required to act macho enough to be afforded a seat on the table but not too much to lose their feminine identity which is a difficult card to be dealt with (Jones & Solomon, 2019). Ellemers (2014) cites one incident of Ann Hopkins who was a star performer and contributed immensely to her company's bottom line but was not given partnership in her firm because "she did not dress and behave in a sufficiently feminine way" and was told she needed "a course in charm school."

Proposition I: Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for each other.

2.2.5 Women's Attitudes towards Female Leadership

What becomes even more interesting is that females tend to be more censorious of other females who assume the more masculine personas; a study that sought to assess leadership features found that in 43% of these characteristics, only females had judged their female counterparts as less productive (Sindell & Shamberger, 2016). Chesler & Chesler (2001) quantified this in mentioning that as much as women compete just like men do, the competition amongst women is mostly targeted at other women, and that makes it even harder for women to take care of one another in the organisational hierarchy.

There is also enough research that points to the belief that women are likely to have an attitude towards female rather than male leadership. In their research, Parks-Stamm et al. (2008) posits that most women are not comfortable being compared with women doing very well in their jobs because they find them unpleasant. But women who see themselves in these roles and are working towards similar success are envious and less likely to form an attitude towards the successful ones. Another study conducted by Warning and Buchanan (2012) where videos of female and male managers were created and studied, it was found that both genders swayed towards male rather than female leadership. They found that the fairer sex may accept that a female counterpart is a good leader but would not want to be led by them. What was even more interesting is that as a woman stays longer in the workforce her preference and liking towards male leadership grows (Rhee & Sigler, 2015).

It is with this background then that one is inclined to believe that the absence of representation for women in executive positions within their companies is not because they are not compatible or lack the inspiration and yearning for these positions; it is the status quo that leads to them being less inclined to C-suite advancement when compared to their male colleagues. Those who have the hope and zeal to make it then conform and exhibit masculine characteristics which distances them from giving care and support to those who come behind them (Sumra, 2019), the "queen bee syndrome." Thus, working women are always occupied with being against each other and end up competing for the already inadequate number of seats in the executive suite (Derks et al. 2016).

One of the ramifications of having only a limited number of positions being occupied by women in the executive suite is that these women are the subject of intense scrutiny and projection especially by those occupying lower positions within the organisation (Kelan, 2012). Women in junior positions have high expectations of career advancement from the senior females, which is not at all easy, taking into consideration everything else that comes with a role at the top (Hurst et. al, 2017). On the other side of the coin, women executives also have their own expectations of the women they lead; they want them to work hard and show initiative and not expect to be handed promotions on a silver platter (Derks et al. 2016).

Other studies have suggested that women in higher positions are happy being placed there and are not at any point engaged with the thought of bringing other women up and having more women occupy these positions, they are thought of as being left uneasy by other women moving up to their level. Duguid (2011) found that women in high positions experience competitive and collective threats; competitive in that another woman may become better than them thus exposing their own inadequacies and collective in that women occupying similar stature may intensify the undesirable typecasts related to the female gender. This shows that women are faced with a lot and with them at different levels of power within the organisation, are most likely to have totally different expectations of each other and these expectations may not be easy to fulfil given the operating environment of the organisation (Hurst et. al, 2017). It will not only be until each women gets the understanding of the gender related expectations they exert on each other and the support of the organisational structure that this can be resolved.

Derks et. al, (2011) suggested that as women work in this male-dominated world they can either work together to improve the situation in the gendered society they live in through collective action or mentally remove themselves from the collective, and work on their individual

contribution instead. Maume (2011) supports this notion and posits that women can either be engaged in developing the women junior to them or subscribe to the male domination in the organisation which results in them supporting men over women. And of interest, he continues, is that by reporting to a female manager, only men's careers are boosted and not women's.

To sum it up, there is evidence to show that women's working relationships are complicated, intricate, and evasive with much influence from the organisational design. Women can lean towards encouraging and supporting each other's career development (Sealy, 2010) but they can also move away from supporting those that come after them in the organisation (Mavin et. al, 2014). Women, especially in high positions are toiling under immense pressure from several sources including being required to perform at their best abilities, individual expectations to justify them getting into these positions, the responsibility of career advancement for other women and blaming themselves for not fitting in (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

Fred Swaniker, a serial entrepreneur who hails from Ghana and has founded the African Leadership University amongst other organisations is quick to admit that he is not self-made. He attributes his success to his superior, three levels up from his position at the time, Jon; and speaks so highly of him because Jon exposed him to leadership and went on to be one of the first funders for his first business venture. We all need "Jons" in our lives. But how many women have had such an experience, particularly from another women? For decades, women have been complaining about each other; that they refuse to be supportive; that once they get to the top, they pull up the ladder and that they become ruthless as soon as they get to have a taste of influence and power (Wittenberg-Cox, 2021). Tiger Tyagarajan, the CEO of Genpact said that women should start rooting for each other, because men hear these complaints from women about women and it influences their insight on women matters.

However, it is unrealistic and unfair on women to expect that they carry the responsibility to uplift each other alone because as we have seen, men are still the ones dominating positions of power and it is that power that promotes people and not gender (Wittenberg-Cox, 2021). The expectation is not on men to promote and advocate for women inclusion, but it is leaders who have the duty to do that (Jain, 2023). She continues to put forward that the expectation is also not for women to push female agendas more than they would for their male associates as that would be another form of prejudice. From the literature presented in this part of the paper, the reality is that men have it a lot easier when they need to push for equality and gender balance;

women on the other hand will be accused of being self-absorbed and pushing a feminist ideology (Ibara et. al, 2013).

Proposition II: Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership positions.

Proposition III: There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.

2.2.6 Women for Women

Another thing is that women have been outsiders when it comes to leadership positions, it has been difficult for them to feel protected and recognised within these positions and that builds up some insecurities because they feel they do not belong, and insecure people generally will not have the desire to help others (Smith et. al, 2019). Yes, it is great and wonderful to see another woman send the lift down and offer support so others may move on up with her but what all spheres of business have failed to recognise is that the ladies at the top are also too engaged with survival and proving themselves worthy of these positions (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Wittenberg-Cox, 2021 posits that there is light at the end of the tunnel because with every passing generation, more and more women are gaining power and are becoming easy and more relaxed about it, enough to have the confidence to support other women. She speaks about one of the first leadership handovers from one woman to another at Xerox in 2009 where the outgoing CEO at the time chose Ursula Burns to take over her role, making her the first woman of colour to lead a Fortune 100 Company. Kristalina Georgieva who is the managing director at IMF used to occupy the role of interim president for the World Bank, after having held several other executive positions within the organisation and the European Commission (Forbes, 2023). Ursula von der Leyen who now heads the European Commission used to be a Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in the administration of Angela Merkel, who was a powerful woman in her own right (European Commission, 2024). Also, there is a growing number of projects initiated by women looking to offer support and provide opportunities for women ranging from venture capital sponsorships, leadership courses, return to work support and MBA programs (Forbes, 2023). Tracking back to Swaniker's story, just because someone has not had the opportunity and privilege to have a Jon in their lives, certainly does not mean that they cannot be a Jon to somebody else.

Ultimately, a workplace where both female and male colleagues are cognisant of the gendered environment they live and operate in and are well equipped and comfortable to create a gender balanced workforce and clientele is what is required in the future (Funk & Parker, 2019). These types of organisations can rightfully claim to be of excellent and grand stature because it is also in these organisations that learning, and development opportunities and promotions are given out in a fair and just manner and the formula is clear and objective (Warren et. al, 2019).

Ronder-Suder (2020) shares her personal account on her experience of women's interactions amongst each other and she has experienced it all. She has seen women treating each other very badly in the workplace, female leaders who were cruel and ruthless and to an extent bullies. She has also seen women gossip and say unspeakable words about another female colleague if she is seen to be assertive and bold but find no fault if that behaviour is experienced from a man. Her female colleagues would refuse to accept great ideas from another women no matter how mind-blowing and revolutionary these were but were very quick to take on ideas from a male colleague without so much as a thought to it. They even went to the extent of accusing other females in the organisation of sleeping their way to the top claiming that was how they had achieved the top positions they occupied. The question becomes, if women are treating each other so poorly, how are men supposed to take them seriously in their fight for equivalent pay and similar treatment? Women need to realise that if they are to get any closer to winning this fight, it needs to start within and with them, women need to support each other (Groza et. al, 2020).

According to research done by Ladders (2018), about 70% of females in the C-suite have a story of being harassed at work by other females and such occurrences have affected them and to an extent delayed them climbing up the corporate ladder. Suder (2021) reveals that women in the corporate space gain a lot more from collaborating with other ladies rather than competing with them. In fact, a study done by the Harvard Business Review (2018) found it true that professionals, regardless of the gender, benefit from having well connected contacts spanning different demographics, but women who, beyond that, have a tight knit group of female alliances are highly likely to get C-suite positions with a lot of power and even more money in terms of remuneration and benefits.

Ronder-Suder (2020) continues to state that as much as she has seen despicable behaviour of women against others of the same sex, she has also witnessed numerous other cases of women leaders who give the necessary support to others in the corporate space and in life in general.

These women are usually the ones doing very well in their individual spaces and are part of the population that set the right example to other women of being empathetically truthful in handling matters within the workplace, which is quite important. (O'Neil et. al, 2018). These women believe there is no need to attack other women when they have made mistakes but instead, they see the need to inspire others to be honest in a gentle manner, which translates to being real and gentle in their way of assisting and correcting each other's behaviours (Elias, 2018); continuing to put forward that the more women are supportive and encouraging of each other, they garner more help and reassurance themselves.

Women that exhibit good and exemplary behaviour in the workplace also believe that chatter and speaking badly of others only shows your own insecurities and weaknesses and that dealing with issues in a mature and friendly way works out for one in the long run (Zahoor et. al, 2019). They choose not to compare themselves with other women as they see no need to do that because each woman has their own individual journey, and no two journeys will be similar (Grow & Yang, 2018). Sisterhood is their mantra, and they always have other women's backs whether in their presence or not; they do not participate in talking badly about other women and if they do they will offer some good attributes about the women being discussed to try and change the others' minds and be exemplary of what not to do in the workplace (Campos-Garcia, 2022). Moreover, they participate in women networking initiatives as they believe they have something to offer; and in these events they encourage leaving ones professional standing at the door and participating in their natural element as just plain women, sisters, aunts and mothers because doing so allows everyone to be relaxed in the environment to speak their mind, be their authentic selves and be exposed to other sisters so they can get the help they need (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

Even though it is still a long way to go to have women adequately represented in positions of power, these women are positive that there is enough room for each woman (Elias, 2018). The notion that C-suite positions are not adequate leads women to operate from the position of distress and self-doubt which works against moving women forward, but telling themselves there are abundant opportunities and ample resources to distribute amongst all of them fosters an optimistic mindset and a positive outlook on life (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). What Suder (2021) has also witnessed is women putting other women on, if there is an opening somewhere and another woman is looking for a move, these women will help her get all the information she needs on that position and help her prepare for the interview. They also do not make assumptions about others but will approach them and find out their standing on issues and

probe if there is still any misunderstanding without being judgemental (Eagly & Carli, 2018). What these women also say is that it matters a great deal provided they can execute, that they do intentional hires of other women who fit the requirements and they see the potential of an added benefit looking at the inclusion of women in executive positions to acquire a stronger voice and the much-needed action towards more female representation (Parmer, 2021).

Proposition IV: Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.

2.2.7 Women empowerment and Women Supporting other Women.

According to Grey & Grenier (2019) in a publication for "Great Place to Work Institute" on the subject of "Empowering Women for Innovation and Business Success" backing the "We Empower" initiative of the UN Women, European Union, and the International Labour Organisation:

a) The character and value of executive organisational leadership is very important in fostering inclusive workplace environments because they set the example and emphasise the significance of women being counted in business success by satisfying all stakeholders.
b) In workplaces where women are treated fairly, they feel valued and respected as human beings not only as workers, and are greatly empowered, feel recognised, engaged, and prepared to make a meaningful contribution to company success than those in other workplace environments.
c) Fairly considering female workers for training and development opportunities has a positive impact on business growth.
d) Organisations that are committed to improving gender equality and inclusiveness contribute immensely to innovation and employee engagement.

Furthermore, women placed into positions of power work hard to fit into the masculine and gendered workspace and go on to change the beliefs and structures of the organisation from within, to the benefit of themselves, other women, and the organisation in its entirety (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Dezso & Ross (2012) argue that including females in executive positions improves the conduct of all managers within an organisation and is a good influence on women occupying junior positions, in turn benefitting the organisation. In the public sector, Ladam et. al (2018) posit that women that run for office or are involved in politics in one way or another,

are seen as a shining example by women starting out in their journeys and raise the volume on women's political voices, thus improving diversity, equality and inclusion.

Semeshkina (2022) with the experience of the hardships of being a businesswoman puts forward that for women to succeed and make it in their business and professional lives, they need to be exposed to other successful women to draw inspiration from. Women will face challenges in the workplace, but the presence and exposure to female mentors, sponsors and role models presents them the chance to be educated and, in that way, improves them personally and professionally to tackle organisational challenges with much zeal and a positive outlook (Forbes, 2023).

Proposition V: By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to employee engagement and business growth.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This research paper suggests the assessment of woman-to-woman empowerment from the point of view of two theories of leadership, namely, the behavioural leadership theory and the transformational leadership theory. It also puts forward the shine theory as a basis for exploration of the subject matter and this theory will be closely linked with behavioural leadership in this study.

2.3.1 The behavioural leadership theory

Behavioural leadership theory declares that rather than being born, leaders are made; putting much emphasis on the observed behaviour of a leader, it opines that certain leadership behaviours can be taught and learned to secure productive leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2020). This theory places much importance on what leaders do and how they behave so that they can influence their subordinates to work for company success and puts it forward that if people put in positions of authority "walk their talk," they, to a great extent, shape the behaviour of their teams (Mango, 2018). The way these leaders think has a bearing on how they behave and if they possess a growth mindset by believing that competencies are learned and developed rather than fixed and cannot be changed, that permeates to their teams and is directly linked to the leadership behaviours they will exhibit (Kouzes & Posner, 2019).

2.3.2 The shine theory

Tolay (2020) says that this theory advocates that women stop looking at their successful, gifted, and intellectual female counterparts as a peril or posing a risk to their advancement but find ways to collaborate and work with them. She continues to say it is based on the notion that "I don't shine if you don't" and promotes the idea that it will come to be that women increase their participation in leadership positions and trump organisational stereotypes only if they intentionally cooperate and work together. KPMG (2015) puts it forward that an overwhelming number of women in leadership agree that same gender role models, colleagues, and professional networks have contributed immensely to their leadership journeys; and about 67% of them attribute their greatest lessons learnt to have been from other females. Avery (2019) agrees with these views and says that it is not at all surprising, seeing as the business world has been largely male dominated, it is women who can probably better recognise and understand the struggles of fellow females and give the support that they need. She continues to say that vulnerability is integral for those wishing to become entrepreneurs or leaders in business because in situations where vulnerability is not encouraged, there is no opportunity and vision. According to Ziwica (2019), the queen bee syndrome (the concept that women fail to get along with one another and those who progress pull the ladder up when they get to the top (Tolay, 2020)) is an established myth, but in today's world the rise of the 'otters' is celebrated. An otter, according to the Oxford dictionary is a mammal that feeds on fish and can live in sea and land and symbolises peace, kindness, friendship, and family. In the context of women supporting other women, the otter symbolism signifies practical ways on how women can support each other. The metaphor of otters is used to point out that female otters hold hands in a group whilst resting in land to stop them from wandering and getting lost at sea and makes clear the suggestion on how women can be prosperous if they work together (Ziwica, 2019).

2.3.3 Transformational leadership theory

This theory, in what it advocates for, largely separates itself from most leadership theories and what leadership has been thought of to be in that it opines for leadership to go in congruence with the achievement of the greater good (Khan et. al, 2016). Executives and managers practicing this type of leadership are confident, courageous, open to making sacrifices for the betterment of the organisation and motivate for complete participation and contribution by all by using methods that are inclusive of but not limited to understanding, compassion, and

creativity to lay the ground for everyone in the organisation to feel included and to spur participation (Kapur, 2020). In the case of transformational leadership, organisational leaders have the view that any type of transformation must benefit human capital and they pay attention to the needs of employees, working to the best of their abilities to fulfil them. In this theory of leadership employees are granted the freedom, privilege, and opportunity to freely communicate their thoughts and ideas and are not made to feel they are always operating under the roving eye of their superiors (Burk et.al, 2018)

This type of leader, by sharing their power and through delegation of duties contributes more to team success than autocratic and vertical leadership and fosters the notion that leadership needs to be effective and transformative in a way that contributes positively to employee engagement and economic redevelopment of the organisation and the business community at large (Friedrich et. al, 2016). Through their force of personality, the ease in which they can influence and motivate others and equal consideration of everyone, transformational leaders are able to improve individual and in extension, team performance beyond what is expected whilst at the same time making significant changes in the companies they work for (Hay, 2016). A transformational leader seems to be the type of leader that is needed and is suited for the world we live in today, which is characterised by uncertainty and complexity (Hasib et. al, 2020).

2.2.3 Application of theories to the study

Effective and productive leadership characteristics are seen as an integral part of an organisational structure and culture and the type of leadership a company has can determine success or demise.

Behavioural leadership sets out the roadmap for the culture of an organisation, drives employees to better themselves and instils the spirit of collaboration amongst team members, at the same time improving communication, building trusting relationships and improving employee accountability. This theory's application to the study will assist this research in analysing the behaviours of female leaders and how it influences the behaviours of women who are junior to them in their organisations.

Transformational leadership is important to this study because as the role of women is explored and how they influence other women in the professional and business space, it is also important

to look at it in the view of the type of leadership that most researchers and scholars alike are pitting as the type of leadership for the future, a type of leadership that will work in congruence with the everchanging demands of the workplace.

The shine theory plays a crucial role to the study as it speaks directly to some of the research questions and has been pinned against these questions to find if women celebrate and are supportive of each other.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

The review of previous work done on subjects related to the study reveals that women empowerment is still a sore subject for many corporations and important to note is that some women in leadership have realised the importance of fellow female empowerment which is one of the aims of this study. It was an uphill battle finding appropriate literature regarding how woman to woman empowerment has contributed to firm performance and growth but the literature available in relation to this does indicate the positive influence that women empowering each other may have on the improvement in company growth especially in the softer skills of leadership.

Through the literature this study has also identified the hypotheses that will govern this study which will be explored based on the behavioural leadership theory and transformational leadership theory.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research's objectives were to explore woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate world of Eswatini; to get an understanding of how history together with the hierarchical structure of organisations and male domination has hindered women developing each other; to analyse the effects of attitudes and beliefs on women leaders and how those impact woman-to-woman empowerment; to evaluate women's involvement in empowering other females in the corporate and business space in the country and finally, to get an understanding of how women through empowering each other and displaying proponents of the shine theory, contribute immensely to business growth and success. These objectives were fulfilled through the answering of this study's research questions.

In this chapter the research will lay down the plan and foundation of how it went about the process of finding answers to the research questions, the data collection techniques that were applied in the study, the data that was being mined and how it was analysed to get to the findings and conclusions of the study.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study was based on the subjective environment of women supporting other women and sought to prove or dispel the propositions made in the literature review, namely:

a) That organisational culture and structure have made it difficult for women to support each other.
b) That women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership.
c) That there is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but female ones as well.
d) That some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but such cases are far from being the norm.

e) That by empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to business success.

This study was underpinned within the constructs of interpretivism and sought to get an understanding of the women in the study, their actions, and behaviours and what influences them rather than looking out for known truths and narratives through straight forward measures (Schwandt & Mertens, 2021). Everyone is different and has their own view of the world that is influenced by the lives they have lived and the experiences they have gone through and in interpretivist paradigm application these experiences of participants which determine the success of the research come out in what they say and how they say it (Silverman, 2017).

Utilising the interpretivists approach in uncovering woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate world of Eswatini, the study will seek to answer the paper's research questions by getting a deeper understanding of the participants experiences, what drives and motivates them. It is important that the differing views of women in business and employment in Eswatini are documented to give a view of the women's thoughts rather than normal and acceptable behaviour, for which could have been derived through a positivist approach. By so doing, it will also be cognisant and ensure to move as far away as possible from the bias and inclination to generalise, that comes with this approach, it will also ensure and secure the validity of the findings in the conduction of the study.

3.3 Research Approach

The interpretivist and the narrative research were the approaches that were adopted in conducting this study. Interpretivism is a logical research approach that highlights the understanding of lived and personal experiences and how people view the world around them (Qutoshi, 2018). Interpretivists posit that reality is a subject of lived and encountered experiences, that people's actions are linked to the meanings they attach to things and phenomena, and that understanding people's culture and what they believe is integral in understanding why they do things the way they do (Kurowska & de Guevara, 2020). The narrative research approach goes further from analysing spoken words but looks out for the story in the narration of an answer to a question to uncover deeper meaning on how people translate their experiences of the world through the stories they relay (Ntinda, 2018). These research approaches fit into the study as it sought to find elements of woman-to-woman empowerment in corporate Eswatini, and the individual views of each respondent's experience

and interpretation of the world in relation to the subject matter were sought. The research questions were also open ended to allow for participants to relay their narratives and views in their own words and according to their experiences and encounters without being limited to predetermined answers and views.

3.4 Research Design

The research design selected for this study was the qualitative research design in collecting, analysing, and interpreting the data that was gathered because this type of design, beyond finding meaning from the words that respondents use to answer questions, delves even deeper to pair these words with the behaviours of respondents, whilst also incorporating the non-verbal reactions of participants as they are asked and as they answer questions (Basias, 2018). Rather than the focus being on the figures and statistics that would be the result of a quantitative research, this study's research questions could only be answered by understanding the participants point of view from their lived experiences, the factors that influence their behaviour and analysing that against other participants' views to give a multi-dimensional picture of their lived experiences, whilst also being open to the possibility and likelihood to probe further to ensure proper understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The qualitative design also allows for the conductors of a research to play a role in analysing and interpreting the data and places much importance on transparency in the whole exercise (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019).

The qualitative research design was beneficial to the study because it gave clear and detailed data and allowed access to answers that could have been hidden were a different research design selected. It was also flexible in that it gave participants the chance to tell their story and gave them a voice to communicate their views in a way that was comfortable to them as some of the questions had the potential to trigger emotions because of past experiences. Even though this design was better suited for this kind of study, it also had the potential of bias and diffusion in data interpretation such that the views of the participants were not recorded and analysed to their exact meanings. It was also challenging and time consuming to analyse the amount of data received from the interviews.

3.4.1 Population and Sample

This research endeavour had its main purpose as exploring woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate sector of the country of Eswatini. It follows then that the population that was targeted were women who are active participants in the business and corporate worlds of the Eswatini economy.

The research was based on exploring the roles women play to empower fellow females in the professional space, it sought to get the practical experiences of women in their professional spaces and how female leaders and junior alike have expressly supported them in their journey. The only people who would have these experiences and would have encountered and lived them are the women in the workplace who have worked with other women. For the purposes of this research, it was not necessary that these women have a direct reporting relationship, or even work for the same organisation, but it was more about taking the woman as an individual who works and interacts with other women professionally, and finding what has been their experience in terms of women supporting each other.

The women in the sample were divided into two, those that were at executive and board level in their businesses or workplaces and those that were at supervisory or middle-management level, because to get an understanding of the subject matter based on the views of the participants, slightly different questions needed to be asked to different women occupying different levels within their organisations.

3.4.1.1 *Sample, Sampling technique and Sampling frame*

A sample of 15 women in the corporate and business environment in the Mbabane-Manzini corridor in the Kingdom of Eswatini were chosen as participants in the research, and out of these, women that had worked for more than one organisation in their professional life were preferred to those that had worked at just one institution. The sample size was regarded as appropriate and reflective of the general view because at 6 and 4 interviews with the junior and senior women respectively, no new themes and views were coming up; and as per Islam & Aldaihani, (2022), data saturation would have been reached at the instance where one more interview does not come with anything new when compared to what had already been acquired. The demographic location of the sample was inspired by the fact that all major corporates in the country have their head offices between these towns and within their radius (ESEPARC

2023). Purposive sampling was applied looking at the dynamics of the study that what was required was to find the possibilities of woman-to-woman empowerment and how that had an impact on the growth of businesses. This sampling technique was suitable for the study because within these corporates the study was in the pursuit of determining the relationships between women at different levels of the organisational hierarchy, it was likely that their experiences and their interactions with each other may be vastly different. This sampling technique was also good for the study as the participant needed to be of a certain level and certain characters, so random sampling would not have been appropriate.

3.4.2 The Research Instrument

The study made use of an open-ended interview schedule to try and answer and give light to the questions posed at the beginning of the research. Also, because the research sought to get a deeper understanding of the lives of participants and their lived experiences, it was ideal for them to be interviewed so they can narrate their stories using their own words and it had to be an interview so they can speak to their hearts' content without being limited by line spaces on a piece of paper.

The interview questions posed to both groups in the sample were slightly different because the experiences of women in differing levels of the organisational structure are not the same; so, some of the questions had to capture the essence of experience from someone who had not reached the ultimate level of leadership and someone who had already lived and experienced that level.

3.4.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data was gathered through structured interviews with the allowance to move out of structure to further probe a point to ensure it is clearly understood. The questions were grouped according to the research questions they endeavoured to answer, and the propositions submitted for the research.

CONSISTENCY MATRIX OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN					
Research Question	**Literature Review**	**Hypotheses/Propositions/Questions**	**Source of data**	**Type of data**	**Analysis**
1. What have been the effects of the history and culture of the corporate environment in woman-to-woman empowerment??	Appelbaum, et. Al, 2019; O'neal, 2019; Zahid, 2016; Eagly & Carly, 2007; Townsend, 2020, Ebrahimi, et. al, 2019; Jones & Solomon, 2019; Ellemers, 2014	Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for each other.	Actual interview with open ended questions	Qualitative - nominal	Narrative analysis
2.What has been the role of women in leadership in empowering female employees that come behind them?	Sindell & Shamberger, 2016; Warning & Buchanan, 2012; Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Sumra, 2019; Hurst et. al; 2017; Derks et. al, 2016	Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership positions.	Actual interview with open ended questions	Qualitative - nominal	Narrative analysis
3.What difficulties are women in leadership faced with in their quest to empower junior female employees?	Wittenberg-Cox, 2021; Jain, 2023; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000	There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.	Actual interview with open ended questions	Qualitative - nominal	Narrative and phenominological analysis
4. What initiatives are women leaders involved in to empower other women?	Smith et. al, 2019; Wittenberg-Cox, 2021; Ronder-Suder, 2020; Suder, 2021; Elias, 2018; Grow & Yang, 2018; Campos-Garcia, 2022; Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021; Eagly & Carli 2018; Parmer, 2021)	Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.	Actual interview with open ended questions	Qualitative - nominal	Phenominological analysis
5. In what ways has women empowerment contributed to firm growth and business success?	Grey & Grenier, 2019; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Ladam et. al, 2018; Semeshkina, 2022.	By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to employee engagement and business growth.	Actual interview with open ended questions	Qualitative - nominal	Narrative analysis

Table 1: Consistency matrix for research design

Communication was sent out in the form of an e-mail to the prospective participants which had attached in it the information about the research, the participant consent form, and the interview questions. If a participant was willing to participate in the research, they were then required to sign a consent form. The consent form was to make sure that participants understood what the research was all about, and that they could either agree or not to take part. It went on to them agreeing to be recorded and that their direct quotations could be used in the research and that their participation would be made anonymous. After these agreements were made, the participants were then requested to set out some time in their schedules for the interview.

On the date and times of the interviews, the parties got into a Microsoft Teams call with the respective participant, exchanged pleasantries, and began the interview. Permission would once again be sought from the interviewees if the session could be recorded, to which all agreed to the affirmative, then the interviews would begin.

3.4.4 Data Analysis Approach

The method of thematic analysis in qualitative research was applied in the data analysis of this study, this done by reading, analysing, and interpreting the patterns that participants' responses drew (Williams & Moser, 2019). This method of data analysis made allowance for a special relationship with the data and allowed them to pick out themes and some insights that could not have been discovered if other methods were used. Thematic analysis helps a researcher uncover themes that keep showing up in the data, discover the slight differences within those themes and helps them connect these themes to the research's objectives and questions to find answers and reach a conclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2019). They place emphasis on six essential steps to follow in the conduction of qualitative data analysis which were thus followed in this research by repeatedly listening and reading through the content recordings and utilising that to code the data, then bringing these codes together into relevant themes. These themes were also reviewed against the data collected and the research questions, objectives and propositions made at the beginning of the study to ensure they are still a reflection of participants' views on the one hand and ensure congruency and agreement on the other.

Benefits that came about because of the flexibility and adaptability of thematic analysis in answering research questions were taken advantage of during the analysis, as patterns in the data were discovered, which also gave a deeper meaning of the subject matter and allowed for reflection and being open to different and differing points of view. The data collected was read through repeatedly, finding the common concepts and key words in the responses received and grouping them according to codes that were as far as possible most appropriate and closest to the messages the respondents had conveyed. Furthermore, these codes were filtered by creating categories which was the third phase of data analysis. From these categories common themes were identified which reflected the general view of the average participant.

3.4.5 Trustworthiness of Data Analysis

3.4.5.1 *Credibility*

Credibility of data speaks to the level of accuracy in data analysis and places much concern on data being free from the biases of the researcher or analyser (Lebel et.al, 2018). To certify credibility of the data analysis in this study, the responses as given by the respondents were analysed as is, from the transcription, and if as the interview progressed it could not be made

out or understood what the respondent was saying, they would verify, or probe a question even further. To go further and ensure a response was understood, the responses that had been given by other participants prior were to ascertain the views of another participant. The participants were given access to the questions before the interviews, and at the beginning of each interview, there would be a quick run through of the questions to lay out what the interview sought to find. Participants were given the freedom and were at liberty to stop the interview and seek clarification should the need have arisen and at the end of each interview were given another chance to ask questions of their own. The respondents were also made aware that they would be contacted should the need arise to clarify a point or probe even further.

3.4.5.2 Dependability and Confirmability

Hai et. al (2020) refer to dependability of data as the uniformity and steadiness of data collected and posit that to confirm dependability, if someone else would have conducted a study parallel to that of this research, would they land at the same conclusions? For dependability, the research gathering was done only through open-ended questions so that respondents were able to respond in their own words and with as much as they could say. all respondents to the interview were agreeable to being recorded, so the interviews were conducted on and recorded on Microsoft Teams, downloaded, and stored on the application itself which is password protected.

Confirmability is the degree to which the analyses, interpretations and findings of a research can be confirmed by other researchers (Chung et. al, 2020). To safeguard against confirmability, all biases that may have been had, were put aside and the responses from participants were taken at face value and for just what they were, and the data was analysed without any prejudgment or typecasts. Also, a record of how the responses were deduced to reach the final findings was kept showing how certain decisions had to be made based on the respondents' answers.

3.4.5.3 Transferability

Transferability, going hand in hand with data credibility, dependability, and confirmability, points to the range at which the findings of this study can fit and be relevant in other populations and environments; and poses the question as to how far findings of one research can be applied in another context and grouping of people (He et. al, 2022). To guard for transferability, the research utilised the qualitative research design with interviews as the instrument to collect data. The interview placed the participants at liberty to answer the questions posed in their own

way and their own vocabulary. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed and were performed by conductors of the research; and at any point that a response was not clear, there would be further probing of the point; even in times when a respondent was unsure about their response, the question would be repeated and explained, its background and what it sought to find from them.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was classified as medium risk when it came to ethical issues because the line of questioning and questions posed to the respondents were likely to be triggering and capable of raising issues deep ingrained into their emotions, whether issues that have been dealt with or not.

To deter any potential issues of discomfort respondents may have had towards participating, the study was completely and unequivocally based on voluntary participation and further referrals beyond the sample size would have been given the same treatment as well. Respondents were fully informed on the background and aims of the study, so they were fully equipped to make the decision whether to participate or not. They were also assured of complete and absolute anonymity and confidentially and that the results would only be communicated or reported in an ethical manner and with nothing that may jeopardise their identity being revealed.

3.6 Summary of Research Methodology

This research endeavoured to discover woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate environment of Eswatini, with the objectives to investigate women leaders' actions towards empowering fellow females within their organisations; to understand the influence of history, hierarchy and male domination in women empowering each other; to analyse the effects of attitudes towards women leaders in woman-to-woman empowerment; to evaluate the extent to which women are involved in empowering other females and to understand the benefits to an organisation of women empowering other females. The study was conducted on the proponents of qualitative research design with alignment to interpretivism and narrative research because the research sought to get the daily experiences of females in the working environment and for them to tell their stories. The sample were women who are active in the corporate and business sectors of the country, and purposive sampling was applied as the participants needed to be of

certain level of experience. Data was gathered through interviews which were conducted on an online platform via audio connection and was analysed through the application of thematic analysis where the responses were coded and categorised to eventually come to the themes of the study. This was done to get to the findings of the research which are expanded on in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter moves on to present the results of the research that was conducted wherein structured interviews were carried out with 15 female participants to get their views and experience when it comes to their interactions with other females, especially females who have been put in a position of power. These interviews were conducted online through the Microsoft Teams channel where the interviewer, who was the conductor and responsible person for the research, and the interviewees or participants were connected via audio on the platform. These interviews were recorded and transcribed; for which these recordings were replayed, and transcriptions read through to arrange the data into categories that would answer the research questions and propositions of the research.

4.2 Presentation of research findings

The motivation for this research was to find, through the lived experiences of the respondents and what they have seen in their professional or business journeys, if the women that have been a part of their professional life have made it easy or difficult for them to thrive in their respective spaces. Because the research sought to get into the nitty-gritties of the relationships or interaction amongst relatively junior female employees and senior female employees, it was necessary to divide them into groupings where as much as the questions posed were similar, one question that was asked to the junior group was not asked to the seniors and two questions presented to the seniors were not asked to the others.

From the questions that were posed to the population, 254 codes were identified from the words they were speaking. These descriptive codes were then grouped into 21 categories, which were further brought together to ultimately come up with 5 themes.

Each one of the participants was put under the groupings as mentioned above based on the position they occupy in their respective careers; no other distinguishing factors like age, experience, qualifications were used. The reason for doing so is that in as much as these other dynamics may play a role in the interactions between senior and junior female employees, the

research questions could be answered and attended to without any focus given to these other factors or dynamics.

Before discussion of the research findings, it would be worthwhile to go back and recap the study's propositions.

I) Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for one another.
II) Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership positions.
III) There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but from females as well.
IV) Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.
V) By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to employee engagement and business growth.

The prevalent themes of the study will be presented and discussed with the recollection and based on the propositions made in the literature review.

4.2.1 Proposition I – Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for one another.

To get an understanding of the participants views on the effects organisational norms on them empowering each other, a question was posed to understand their experience based on what they had seen and lived in the organisations they have worked for and how it has helped them or deterred them in empowering each other.

4.2.1.1 Theme: Policies, Strategy & Leadership

All the interview participants saw the organisations as unequivocally carrying much responsibility in advancing issues of women empowerment and specifically women empowering each other. The overarching feeling was that the organisation has the power to set the tone for its employees, promote it and advocate for it so that everyone follows suit.

"Definitely culture plays a role, what it symbolises and how it is socialised will in effect filter down to what is prioritised and what is not."

"A culture that fosters mentorship, coaching, collaboration and inclusivity are quite helpful."

"Cultures that promote people taking up space and creating opportunities for themselves give them the confidence to thrive for more, but cultures that make one feel inadequate will strip off their confidence."

"A negative corporate culture also pushes one to work better so they can attain a position of power to change the narrative once they're in leadership."

The state and companies themselves have also been seen as having played a role in moving ahead the conversation on women empowering each other, but the efforts that have been done are still being seen as not enough.

"There has been a great mindset shift in society, a lot of work being done at grassroot level but yet still more to be done."

"The country is making strides, we have women leading 3 banks in the country, one being an international bank."

4.2.2 Proposition II & III – Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership positions & There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.

To uncover the participants' perspective on their duty as female leaders in organisations and what could be expected of them and linking that with how junior women in the organisations have encountered them as leaders, both groups were probed on their interactions with other women in their respective organisations to find out if the relationship of responsibility and support was present.

4.2.2.1 Theme: Trust

The element of trust came about quite a few times in the responses that the ladies gave, and it predominantly culminated in areas that involved comfort with one another, supporting each other and the practices of mentoring and coaching.

The level of comfort that each respondent shared with their colleagues or females in leadership in general came out as one of the drivers of interactions or none thereof. It appeared that once

one was comfortable with a female colleague then that would be breeding ground for better and beneficial interactions but if that was not the case, there would be no interaction at all, even going further to avoidance of any type of interaction.

When the participants were asked if they felt empowered by the female leaders in their organisation, most of the responses were to the negative, with some responses being blatant as "*not at all*." or "*I do not see it possible*." What was interesting and may be a need for further probing is that the women felt uncomfortable with any interactions with women within their organisations but were more relaxed towards interactions with women outside their organisations. It would be interesting to find out what about the women who work closely to one within the same confines is unsettling compared to those that work outside your organisation.

"I am not keen on getting mentored or coached by the senior lady leaders in the organisation because it opens me up for scrutiny, and I don't trust that what we converse about will not work in my disadvantage later on."

The comfort and trust element did not seem to come up only with junior female employees projected towards their senior female leaders, but it popped up in the conversation about how these senior leaders are ploughing back and giving advice to those that come behind them, so they do not make the same mistakes. None of the female leaders were involved in anything that resembles mentorship or coaching within their organisations, but a few of them were involved in giving back through organisations or avenues that they pursue outside the organisation, which brings about the notion brought about earlier that there seemed to be more willingness to give back outside your organisation than within.

The awareness is there, that as women who have made it further on in their professional journey than the average female has, need to pave the way, and make space for more of them to join the table:

"…women struggle with a lot internally, professionally and familywise just to make it, so we need other women to make sure we don't suffer."

"If one woman is doing better, they can be an inspiration to the other and show them the way."

"It is important that the fortunate ones fight for the less fortunate."

Another discovery relating to trust was the ability for one to stand confident in one's abilities with the exuberance that it is their efforts, qualities and hard work that led to them being in such positions of power. There was a general feeling amongst most of the respondents that society and the organisation itself has made women believe they are being appointed into positions because of their gender and not because they are worthy and deserving:

"Women have proven themselves as deserving to be counted in corporate leadership, they have gone to school, equipped themselves with the right skills and have gone out to compete for the same jobs that men are gunning for, and the best candidate must win. Gender should not determine who gets the job or not."

"Setting out to get a female for a job, or a male for that matter; undermines that person's capabilities as the other people who were gunning for that job will always look at them as having been hired because of their gender."

This then builds about an attitude towards the woman who has landed the position; and the women themselves not believing in their capabilities and being confident that they have some learnings to offer to those that come behind them. Instead of that women being an inspiration for others to aim high and cultivating fertile ground for women empowerment in general this becomes a pain point, and the empowered woman concentrates on her job and worries very little about bringing others to the top.

4.2.3 Proposition IV – Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.

For this proposition, the study went beyond the relationships and interactions of women with one another and endeavoured to find the specific actions of the respondents and what they are doing to empower the other.

4.2.3.1 Theme: Background, History, Experience

One's background and history, together with their personal and professional experiences came about as playing an integral part in how they socialise with the idea of women empowerment and furthermore, women being intentional about empowering other women in the professional space.

Background and History in that there were references made to childhood stories and how some of the participants were raised which they would then attribute to having been an important part in allowing them to explore and try conquering the world without any fear. One respondent spoke about her mother who was a matriarch of a woman, fearless and believed she could do anything she set her mind on, who left the corporate world and ventured into business, also getting involved with women rights groups. It is no wonder then that such a woman would also raise her children, especially daughters in the same way and instil in them the same beliefs that she has. Also, looking at it from another angle, the children as they grow up are exposed to what their mother is doing, breaking boundaries and breaking barriers, and they themselves mould their lives around that because they have seen it happening first hand and know for sure that it is possible.

The organisation and society also come into the fray under this theme because of the beliefs and values of an organisation that have been deeply ingrained into their people, their processes, and their procedures. It is agreeable and is the status quo according to all the women interviewed that man still dominate in the positions of power, but the organisation, based on what has always been done and the culture ingrained within its structures, still treats women as outsiders in leadership positions.

"Earlier on in my professional career, I was told by a female leader seeing my determination and hard work, that she was very impressed with my work ethic and my never die spirit and that it would take me far, but I would unfortunately have to work twice or even 3 times more than my male counterparts. That was close to 15 years ago now, but it still stands even today, different company, different industry, different position."

Another respondent talking about a time when she went on her first board excursion:

"I sat in that table being so unsure about my every move, what conversation to start or if I should even speak? Not knowing what drink to order, should it be water, wine, or whisky; but surely whisky was the best option as most people in the table (mostly men) were drinking whisky."

A person's experience and maturity levels also seemed to play a role in how their interactions were or would be with other females in an organisation. The more experienced and older you were, was the more you were seen as a better leader, and it follows that young women leaders were not seen as the best of leaders.

"Women leaders who are more mature and have a lot of experience in the workplace become better leaders because they are likely to have seen the transition from no female representation to more and more females in the boardroom and because of their empathetic and motherly nature, would not want to make another woman's child suffer as they did."

"Older women are natural homemakers, and they bring that into the professional space, not only do they connect with the people they work with through work, but socially as well, they want to talk about children, family and even share recipes, in that way they build better teams than men can."

"You can quickly tell if a team is led by a woman, they tend to work together, are more considerate of each other and treat each other as family members, and in that situation a company benefits because that scenario breeds productivity."

There was also the sense that women are better employees when looking at the benefits to an organisation for empowering women, in that women are loyal and will stay and give their best to an employer, the feeling was that women stick around way more than their male counterparts do. That women give way more than they are paid to do so without complaining when men put in a similar situation would run to the fact that whatever is being asked is not in their job description. And that women generally multitask; they can have a handle on a lot of things at once without any of them suffering; so in that way promoting the inclusion of women in leadership positions would benefit an organisation immensely.

4.2.3.2 Theme: Personal motivation

Most of the respondents, especially the women occupying senior level positions in their respective organisations placed a lot of importance on the individual's (the woman herself) capabilities being responsible for her moving up the ladder. As much as there seemed to be a clear understanding on the concept of women empowerment and what is symbolises, there was the notion that it is still being seen as women being handed opportunities and positions undeservedly:

"It is important, but the women need to be willing to learn and take ownership of the journey and learnings."

"Those being empowered need to be ready for it and be intentional about it."

"They should not wait to be empowered by others; they need to make it their personal goal as well."

"I don't think it has a role in women advancing other women, it is just one's personal choice."

Listening and relistening into the conversations, the emotions, the non-verbal cues, as much as it was not part of the questions being asked, you could tell that in their responses the women are dispelling the notion that women will be hired into positions of power to fulfil quotas. They were saying, they have worked very hard to get to where they were, even more than the men in similar positions; and it is unacceptable to them that they will be thought of as being given positions because of a fad or movement. In extension, they are saying that women that are coming up the corporate ladder need to take ownership of their journeys and work hard to get into the positions they want.

To drive this point even further most of the senior women saw the inclusion of women in leadership as more about bringing diversity to a team, diversity of ideas, outlook, and opinions more than balancing out the gender scales.

"Women and men are equally capable, but inclusion of different genders would bring in some diversity in the thinking and decision making."

"A company will benefit if all people can participate, as they bring different experiences, backgrounds, and mindset to widen the scope."

"Promotions should be on merit and not based on gender."

The women do not want to be seen as being done a favour and want to change the narrative by also inspiring those that they lead to work just as much so they are not thought of as not worthy or undeserving.

The issue of personal choices came about in the discussions about the culture of an organisation and what role it must play on the subject where some of the point made was as much as culture has a huge role to play, culture is not only for the organisation, but each person has their own culture. Thus, beyond what is expected from the organisation and its structures, individuals themselves need to foster a progressive and accommodative culture, be open to the change that the world is coming with.

4.2.4 Proposition V – By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to economic redevelopment and better employee engagement.

To obtain the participants' outlook on the benefits to an organisation of women supporting and empowering each other, participants were probed on the gains and benefits they bring about in their contributions, different leadership styles and work ethic as compared to their male counterparts.

4.2.4.1 Theme: Collective Effort

A greater number of the respondents did not carry the view that they, as women, have the requisite characteristics in their professional careers that will lead to company growth and success, but the general consensus was that as much as they do bring differing views and perspectives to that of the males in the organisation, it is not a guarantee that only their involvement in company leadership and direction will lead to its success.

"Women and men are equally capable of leadership that could lead to company success, the inclusion of different genders in positions of power brings about the needed diversity in the thinking and decision making."

"A company will benefit if all people participate, as they bring in different experiences, backgrounds and mindsets on the table to widen the scope."

"It is important that women leaders empower their female juniors whilst we haven't reached the balance in gender representation, but I am more on empowering everyone within the organisation as female domination would also be an imbalance."

"Women can be empowered by mentorship and educating them on their capabilities, and that the world is ready for them; but empowerment should also be directed to the men in organisations, for them to prepare themselves and embrace the movement to gender equity."

The respondents were aware that females are still underrepresented in positions of influence and power, but what also came out in their responses is the awareness that they cannot walk the journey alone and the realisation that as they grow and into leadership, they still need the participation and involvement of men in the working environment.

4.3 Comparison of Literature Review and Findings

COMPARISON OF LITERATURE REVIEW AND FINDINGS				
Research Question #	**Research Question**	**Proposition #**	**Proposition**	**Findings from the study**
ONE	What have been the effects of the history and culture of the corporate environment in woman-to-woman empowerment?	**ONE**	Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for each other.	All participants viewed the organisation and the way that it has been known and experienced as having an integral role to play in women empowerment and more precisely in the advocation of women to empower other women.
TWO	What has been the role of women in leadership in empowering female employees that come behind them?	**TWO**	Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership positions.	Women have mostly relied on them playing the exemplary role to inspire other females within their organisations, they believe that by them having gone against the odds of organisational culture to make it to leadership positions, it should serve as motivation to those that come behind them.
THREE	What difficulties are women in leadership faced with in their quest to empower junior female employees?	**THREE**	There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.	There is an overwhelming level of mistrust amongst women in the professional space, regardless of the level they occupy, especially if they work in the same organisation. There were no elements of bad attitudes towards female leaders but it was apparent that women in the workplace are not comfortable with each other.
FOUR	What initiatives are women leaders involved in to empower other women?	**FOUR**	Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.	Not a lot of the respondents were involved in empowering activities directed to other women and those that did had the background of being reaffirmed had their confidence built since a young agee. Some women believed that women should put in the work for the to be empowered, empowerment opportunities were not just going to be handed to them but they need to have the personal motivation to go out looking for them.
FIVE	In what ways has women empowerment contributed to firm growth and business success?	**FIVE**	By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to employee engagement and business growth.	The promotion and inclusion of women in positions of power was not seen as the surefire recipe for organisational success. The participants believed that in order for an organisation to grow and be successful there needed to be gender equality for diversity in thought and it needed to be led by capable and qualified people, and not just women.

Table 2: Comparison of literature review and findings

4.4 Summary of Findings

The research findings revealed that 100% of the participants felt organisational structures had played a huge part in the advancement of women in the workplace and furthermore had greater influence in women empowering each other. The women leaders interviewed did not think that they had a sense of duty to empower other females who look up to them but had the view that by them attaining the positions they hold in organisations it should serve as empowerment, which was then confirmed by only a few women being involved in intentional women empowerment activities that were not linked to their job deliverables. It was not confirmed by this research though that women have bad attitudes towards each other, but what was clear is that there exists an immense level of mistrust amongst women in general and they are not comfortable enough to be vulnerable with each other in the workspace. Testament to women's

nurturing and collective behaviours, they believed that for an organisation to succeed, it does not only need the promotion of women into leadership, but also needs the promotion of men as well for equal representation. The following chapter discusses these findings in reference to the propositions of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the primary research findings that have been presented in the previous chapter and further comparing them with studies that have been done before which were discussed earlier in chapter 2.

The findings of the study will be discussed with the purpose to link them to the propositions made in the literature review and with reference to the research questions posed in the introductory chapter, further linking them to the overarching themes derived from participants' responses as presented in chapter 5. The objective of the study was to explore woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate world of Eswatini, the propositions being:

a) Organisational structure and culture have made it difficult for women to stand up for each other.
b) Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership roles.
c) There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.
d) Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.
e) By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to a business's economic redevelopment and business growth.

The research questions that influenced conduction of the study were:

a) How has the history and culture of the business and corporate environment in Eswatini affected woman-to-woman empowerment?
b) What has been the role of women in leadership in empowering female employees that come behind them?
c) Why do women in leadership find it difficult to empower junior female employees in their organisations?
d) What initiatives are women leaders involved in to empower other women?

e) How has woman-to-woman empowerment contributed to firm growth and business success?

5.2 Discussion of research findings by research propositions

Following below will be a discussion of the research findings linking them to the propositions put forward in chapter 2 and linking them to the research questions that influenced the study.

5.2.1 Discussion of proposition 1 & 2: Organisational structure has made it difficult for women to stand up for each other and that Women leaders are not concerned about fellow females' empowerment once they get into leadership position.

It is no doubt that the history of the organisation and how we have known it has played a pivotal role in the interactions amongst employees within the organisation and more specifically, the interactions amongst its women. The nature of the organisation is male domination (World Economic Forum, 2016; Zahid, 2016), that is what we have known and that is what we have been accustomed to, and as the times are changing and women are slowly taking up space in the corporate environment, they are left at odds and with competing demands. Firstly, they need to prove to everyone that they are worthy of the positions they have been placed in; the bosses who have hired them, the colleagues whom they now sit in the same table, everyone else looking up to them for guidance and the general society (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

With all these demands and expectations from all the corners of their professional lives, no matter how good of multitaskers they are, they are likely to drop the ball somewhere or have one expectation suffer for the promotion of another; and unfortunately, in that time all will still be watching and judging. From the evidence collected in the study, it is apparent that women leaders are being expected to do and give more, open themselves up to their teams, learn how to lead instantly, whilst at the same time doing the job diligently; similar views as shared by Sindell & Shamburger (2016) and Chesler & Chesler (2001). What is puzzling is that as much as their junior female employees want this out of the woman leader, they are not willing to open themselves up to their leaders, they are not comfortable showing their weaknesses or being vulnerable in their leaders' hands, confirming submissions made in Parks-Stamm et. al (2008) that most women are not comfortable being pitted against other women who are doing well in their jobs. With the competing needs and the organisational culture taking a while to

become gender balanced, it follows then that women will appear as not having time to empower others.

All the participants in the study had clear knowledge of the idea of women empowerment and what is symbolised to them, but only a few were actively and intentionally involved in pursuing it or ensuring that it is done. The findings indicated that the knowledge of this ideology is there but there does not seem to be the duty towards one another to say if one woman has made it, she must make a way and pave the platform for others. They do not seem to believe that a woman can be shunned from opportunities because of her gender, but contrary to the views of Hurst et. al (2017) that women in leadership are expected to advance the careers of junior female employees, the women leaders interviewed believe that if one is capable and works hard to achieve the best for themselves, then surely the positions will flow through. The same women though, were pointing it out that they have had to work twice or three times more than their male colleagues, which reflects that they have seen that women have been downtrodden in the professional space; so to level the ground and get better treatment for women that are coming up, would it not be the noble thing to empower them so that they do not have to go through the same struggles?

Some of the women were involved in activities to empower others within their organisations but these were the basic one on one conversations with their team members, filling in of personal development plans and asking about what their career aspirations are; there was no intentional mentoring or coaching or any sort of responsibility that they have towards their direct reports. As little as the empowerment activity was amongst the women, it dispels the notion by Wittenbeg-Cox (2021) that senior women leaders pull the ladder up on reaching leadership and that they are threatened by females ascending to their level, because there is a semblance of assistance they give to their juniors, of course with the expectation that the female junior employees themselves are capable, qualified and willing to play their part, and diligently so. Going against the views by Hurst et. al (2017), junior female employees themselves were not found to be looking for inspiration or handholding from their senior female leaders and this was reflected by that only one female respondent had a mentor within their organisation (but this woman leader works at head office level in a different country). This culminates in the theme of trust which was presented in the previous chapter and begs the question about junior female employees having confidence to bear their entire career goals to their senior leaders and believing it will move them forward, or the senior female leaders themselves believing in their leadership capabilities to extend a hand and assist someone in the journey of their career.

Company structures and cultures came out to be seen as having an indisputable impact on the way that employees will interact with one another and likewise in the subject matter of women empowering each other. This also extended to government and company policies, their strategy, and the leadership itself, to say that what a company or the government will put forward as priority, will trickle down to the rest of the population.

From the study's findings it was evident that all the women interviewed had a similar view in that government and companies alike have done quite a lot in the recognition of women as capable and worthy to be considered for leadership positions confirming that the efforts through government policies on gender equity had been seen at play. They also spoke in the same voice to say that in as much as all these efforts were being experienced and appreciated, it was not meant to be that way from the onset so there was still a lot to be done. Three out of the five commercial banks in the country are currently being led by women and for the second time since the country's independence, a woman has been elected to the position of deputy prime minister, facts that were echoed by some of the respondents. A mammoth task still lies ahead for the country to reach a level of gender balance across all positions in all spheres, but great strides are being made which gives women the confidence to stand and be counted, and the propensity to encourage others to do the same.

5.2.2 Discussion of proposition 3: There is still an overwhelming negative attitude towards female leaders, not only from male junior employees but females as well.

The study points out that women believe that females are capable of leadership and to a certain extent even better than their male counterparts if they can be taught the softer skills of leadership as that was seen by many to be the one thing that stands in their way. The research conducted by Parks-Stamm et. al (2008) was confirmed in this research because the women are living with the realisation that they need assistance from those that have walked the journey ahead of them in the organisation but were not looking for sponsorships or mentoring and coaching from these women, likely from the fear and discomfort of being compared to them.

Women in leadership were being watched with a roving eye by their female counterparts because a lot is expected out of them and because they are already being dealt a lot of pressures for occupying a seat at the top, they most likely fell short of these expectations; sentiments also brought forward in Kelan (2012), that women are the subjects of much scrutiny especially by those junior to them in the organisation.

The study pointed out that there seems to be a lack of trust between female leaders and their junior female counterparts, especially placed within the same organisation. Buchanan (2012) confirmed this and found that most women and men within organisations prefer male rather than female leadership. Junior female employees were found to be fearful of opening up to their managers or leaders because they did not believe that such conversations would not come back to haunt them in different settings, which explains the finding that a majority of the women do realise they need mentoring and coaching from a woman who has moved ahead of them career wise, but they go outside their organisations to find these skills and support.

It also came about in the findings that in as much as all the junior females interviewed saw women as capable of business and corporate leadership, they still made mention that the women leaders in their different experiences lacked empathy in that they viewed their work as just work and they lacked the softer skills in leadership like compassion, understanding, delegating and flexibility. This was also a revelation in Townsend (2020), Jones & Solomon (2019) and Ellemers (2014) that women are expected to abide and follow the aggression and machismo world of work as it has been known, but at the same time be in their natural and feminine state, which is a lot to ask of them. The junior female respondents put it forward that they cannot rely on their female leaders enough to confide in them about their work or even personal matters when the general expectation is that they would be the ones who understand such matters even better. It was also pointed out that these female leaders do not practice objectivity when making their decisions but make decisions based on their emotions, and once these decisions or their minds are made up, there is no turning back, no matter what facts are brought to the table. Women leaders have also been experienced as having a not so good manner of approach which goes against Appelbaum, et. al's (2019) views that women have been experienced as having more collective and inclusive behaviours when compared to males. The lack of manner of approach then alienates their female juniors in such a way that they would prefer being led by a man instead of a woman.

5.2.3 Discussion of proposition 4: Some women have been intentional in empowering other females, but the cases are few and far in between.

Wittenberg-Cox (2021) states that things are getting better by the day for women in the professional space and as the generational wheels turn, there is more representation of women in executive leadership (a notion fully supported by all the participants in this research), and

that as they get used to these positions they build more and more confidence, enough to lend a hand to other women and help them climb up the ranks as well. Not a lot of that was seen though in this study, which may be attributable to the fact that Eswatini is a third world country and as much as there is a significant shift for the better in the concept of women empowerment, the country still lags in economic development compared to other jurisdictions.

The awareness and cognition were there though, that as women, they need to be more present and intentionally so, for other females and give the necessary support, celebrate each other's wins, and fix each other's crowns as per Appelbaum et. al (2019) on the collaborative characters of women. There was no indication in the findings to give the confirmation that the women interviewed were still being subjected to gossip and unspeakable words by other females in the workplace as stated by Ronder Suder (2020), but there was mention of unempathetic female leaders that are just concerned about the work, performance, and deliverables, who lack the humane skills of leadership together with concerns of jealousy amongst the women.

The results of the study point us towards the direction that there are not many initiatives that women are partaking in to empower other women especially those in the same organisations as they are. The awareness and the sense of duty was there as most of the participants conceded to the notion that those that lead the way should be involved in lifting others up, which was a step towards a better situation as reflected in the study by O'Neil, et. al (2018). Wittenberg-Cox (2021) echoes these sentiments and says that as an increasing number of women are considered and appointed into leadership positions, they become confident in their abilities which rids of any insecurities on their capabilities and will likely encourage them to pull others up. A few of the participants were involved in women empowerment initiatives outside of the working environment, which include giving motivational talks to young girls and being members of women's rights organisations.

Some of the respondents alluded to that their work ethic and hard work should also be seen as fostering empowerment and being an inspiration to others, but there was the appreciation that there should be some intentionality on their end and a level of responsibility that they take up towards the empowerment of females who are looking to grow in their professional journeys which were also the views of Elias (2018).

5.2.4 Discussion of proposition 5: By empowering junior female employees, women leaders contribute greatly to economic redevelopment and better employee engagement.

The findings from the study confirm the views by (Grey & Grenier, 2019) that an organisation's leadership that advocates for an inclusive workplace sets an example and is significant in women feeling valued and seen in the workplace so much to inspire that in those that follow in their footsteps. It also goes on to confirm that women who are respected and appreciated in the workplace will show characters of loyalty to an organisation by giving what is required and even more than expected when compared to others who are not treated the same. As per the study done by McKinsey & Company (2010), this research was also unable to find a clear link between a company's overall financial performance and the promotion of women into positions of power and could furthermore not confirm the assertion made by the same that companies that perform better financially were more likely to have more women in their leadership than those who did not perform to similar levels.

The research showed that through the inclusion of women in positions of power within an organisation, there is growth because it brings about a variation in thinking, ideas, and ways of doing things. It also certified that if women are seen by others as moving up the ladder and being recognised for the work they put in, it inspires others to do the same so they can also be acknowledged and endorsed for similar positions; to which Dezso & Ross (2012) concur, and say that including women in leadership serves as an inspiration to all, especially junior female employees. A Forbes (2023) study found that exposure to female mentors and role models improves the personal and professional lives of other women which goes in line with outcomes of this research that a company would benefit through equitable female inclusion in that it would be seen by the outside world as being an equal opportunity employer, and in that way raise its perceived value as an employer of choice within an industry or the general business community.

5.3 Conclusion to Discussion of Research Findings

The findings having been discussed reflect that there are a lot of demands on women in the workplace and especially when they are put in positions of leadership, and very little support given to them to handle such. With the workplace and industry still very much male dominated women are thrown into leadership and expected to handle the demands of being in power whilst still being soft and gentle and exhibiting their feminine characters. This had led to women being

too engaged in proving their capabilities to the powers that be and not paying attention to the struggles of those who look up to them, which has opened a gap between them and junior females, a gap, as per the study, that has been filled by mistrust and discomfort with one another. The study has also shown that women have the awareness that they are underrepresented in leadership, and something needs to be done, but as much as both leaders and juniors believed that they need to assist each other in their individual journeys, there was a strong view that female juniors need to equip themselves to render themselves capable of consideration.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

6.1 Recap of Problem statement and Research questions

This research was conducted at the backdrop of women empowerment, more precisely, women empowering other women. What had been observed by this study is that women empowerment and the recognition and inclusion of women in powerful positions had been the conversation in the business world for a few decades; but the inclusion of females in executive positions in the private and public sectors was still lacking. Which brought about the notion that there are some things being done by males in the professional space that women may not have a handle on, which results in them still progressing much quicker than their lady counterparts. With this background, the research sought to find out how women who had advanced in their professional journeys were giving back and being active in the growth and advancement of other women below them in the organisational structure; and how that contributed to the greater good of an organisation.

The research questions of the study were to understand how history and the traditional norms of the organisation has affected women in empowering each other; to analyse the role of women in corporate and business leadership in Eswatini in empowering fellow females; to identify the challenges women in leadership are faced with in empowering other female employees, to find out what initiatives women are involved in to empower other women and in what ways women empowerment contributes to the greater good of an organisation.

6.2 Conclusions regarding research question 1

It is no doubt that organisational structures and cultures have a huge role to play in women empowering each other, but the traditional structures and cultures of organisations have thwarted women in contributing as they should in empowering other women. Although appreciation was given to the movement for better women inclusion through government policies and legislation, the organisations internally still operate with immense male domination which means women are still being viewed as outsiders in leadership and there is very little support and mentorship given to them to equip them for leadership. This research has contributed to literature already available in that in as much as the efforts by legislation

towards gender balance have been visible, there may be a need to trickle these down to expectations and quotas for female representation as that is what has worked for government as well.

6.3 Conclusions regarding research question 2

As evidenced in the research, women have barely been seen to be empowering other women in the workplace, but we have also seen how having a reference point as a woman in leadership can be a great source of inspiration and an important driver towards gender equality. A takeaway from this study regarding these findings is that even in leadership, women still need to be supported and shown the way by those who have walked the journey before them, which in most cases will be the men in the organisations. Female junior employees themselves need to upgrade themselves through learning and development to make it easier for women executives to look towards them for future leadership.

6.4 Conclusions regarding research question 3

As stipulated that women still face the cultures and norms within organisations that are not ready for them to be in leadership, they also are confronted with the pressure to conform and lead the way men have led, which alienates them from their true selves. These women also encounter numerous expectations from everyone within the organisation whether junior or senior males and junior women themselves. The theme of trust amongst females as uncovered in the research showed itself quite a few times in the participants' responses, and much needs to be done by both parties to ensure that they cultivate fruitful and mutually beneficial relationships with one another. What the study's findings suggest is that women need to be gentler and understanding of each other in their quest to company leadership as ultimately, they need each other to win the fight.

6.5 Conclusions regarding research question 4

There was very little that women were involved in to empower junior females in their organisations outside of the normal requirements of a manager to subordinate relationship

which opens the opportunity that can be brought about by the cultivation of good relationships amongst women in different levels of the organisational structure.

6.6 Conclusions regarding research question 5

The respondents' view was that company success will not only be achieved by inclusion of women in positions of power but through the involvement of everyone in the organisation. They also voiced out that a company does not just need women to succeed, but it needs all the human capital to be qualified, capable and working towards the same goal, which brought about the collective and nurturing behaviours of women, in that they do not only look out for themselves, but for others as well.

6.7 Recommendations

As shown in this study's literature review and findings of this study from the respondents' point of view, women are still underrepresented in positions of power in the business and corporate spaces, this is even though more women than men are in employment currently. Despite the challenge of underrepresentation women have continued to work hard and some have been considered and placed in leadership positions. The findings have also reflected that very few women are actively and intentionally involved in the empowerment of other women in their workplaces and outside. The following recommendations are made to the women in corporate Eswatini, the men who work with and lead them, corporate businesses, government and non-governmental organisations, and the society at large on how they can contribute to making woman-to-woman empowerment in their workplaces and in the country a reality.

6.7.1 Women in the workplace

First and foremost, women need to be kinder to one another, because as the research conducted has shown that women are still repressed in the general society. Women leaders need to be more visible to those they lead, share insights and experiences of their own journeys to the top, and the learnings thereof. As female leaders, they have the capacity to set the tone and direction of what women leadership should resemble, and they should live it and lead in that way. They also have the power of influence based on the positions they occupy, the people and resources they have access to and can command to further the recognition and upliftment of women in

their workplaces. It is also essential for them to act as mentors and coaches to the women they lead and they, themselves go out to look for mentoring relationships from women who have walked the journey before them.

Women occupying junior positions need to be cognisant of the struggles of women in general, especially those in leadership, enough so to support them in their journeys. They need to be more open about their own daily struggles as women in the professional space, be willing to be vulnerable with their women leaders and colleagues to get the support they may need. One way to achieve this would be for mentoring, sponsorship, and coaching engagements within the workplace. Another would be opening the space for women interactions in and outside the workplace so that each groups' issues and difficulties are communicated and addressed, as these may just be hinderances to them being happier at work and working hard enough to be considered for higher positions. This can be in the form of a women empowerment group in the organisation where meetings are held to have discussions on women matters, wherein speakers from outside the organisation can also be invited to share their experiences and advice.

6.7.2 Men in the workplace

The men in the organisation, which the literature reviewed has shown occupy most of the leadership and executive positions need to be aware that traditionally and practically, the C-suite is no place for a woman, so that when a woman is promoted or appointed into these positions they can assist and support them in their induction, leadership, and professional journeys. Men in leadership could also assist the course by mentoring the young men in the organisation to prepare them in readiness for women leadership and equal representation of genders across all spheres of the business. By the men in power supporting women leaders and cognition and acceptance of female leadership by junior males, women leaders will be relieved from dealing with the difficulties and stereotypes of women leaders and have enough time to lend a hand to the women that come after them.

6.7.3 Corporate businesses, government, and non-governmental organisations

Government, NGOs, and corporate businesses need to work together in advancing the conversation on woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate space and in society. As revealed in this study, government and NGOs have individually and collectively come up with and advocated for policies and legislation that call for the recognition and upliftment of women as equal to men in society and the workplace. Corporate businesses need to jump onto the bandwagon and work together with these organisations and government to adopt and align their

policies. Corporates can also support the formation of woman-to-woman empowerment groups within the organisation and enact internal human resource policies calling for mentorship and coaching relationships amongst female members in their staff.

6.7.4 Society

Based on the findings of the research, it was evident that a woman's background and upbringing have a role to play in their confidence and abilities to be of help to others. Society, families, and schools in particular, need to instil the notion of kindness to other females in the early stages of raising the girl child. Girl children need to be taught to support one another, and that another being placed in a "better" position does not automatically mean they cannot achieve the same. If this is done at the elementary stages of life, it is more likely than not, that woman-to-woman empowerment issues in the workplace will be a thing of the past.

6.8 Suggestions for further research

a) A mixed methodology study going deeper into the contributions of women in the workplace and how their different characteristics from those of men have benefited corporations in Eswatini.

b) A qualitative study on the effects and benefits of female-to-female mentorship, sponsorship, and career guidance in corporate Eswatini.

c) A qualitative study on exploring the reasons women in Eswatini corporations do not see having a female mentor or sponsor within their organisation as beneficial.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Potential Participant

Subject: Invitation to Participate in research study exploring the role of woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate environment of Eswatini

In my journey to fulfilling the requirements of my Master of Business Administration degree with the University of the Witwatersrand Business School, I am conducting a research study titled "Woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate environment of Eswatini." The primary objective of the study is to find if women, in the subject of women empowerment that has been the conversation for the past few decades, are supportive of each other across the leadership ranks in the corporate or business space in the country.

Based on the position you occupy within your organization and your experience in the corporate/business world of Eswatini, you have been identified as a potential participant and I would appreciate you taking some time to off your schedule to have a conversation on the subject by having a sit-down interview to answer the questions that follow. Your participation in the study will contribute immensely to bringing to the fore and raising awareness on the importance of women standing up and supporting each other. It will also help advance the conversation on women empowerment from how the organization of today or the world at large is advocating for women issues; to what women themselves are doing for each other.

The conversation and your responses will be kept completely private and confidential and will be used solely for research purposes.

Should you wish to participate or have questions or require further clarification, you can contact me on:

Email: 1277599@students.wits.ac.za

Mobile: +268 76119756

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you and the possibility of working together on this research endeavor.

ANNEXURE B: Participant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
RESEARCH TITLE: An exploratory study of the role of woman-to-woman empowerment in the corporate and business environment of Eswatini.

A research by: Nomahlubi Sikiti

I ….....
agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:
(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…..... ***(signature)***
…..... ***(name of participant)***
…..... ***(date)***

…..... ***(signature)***
…..... ***(name of researcher)***
…..... ***(date)***

ANNEXURE C: Interview Guide (Female Leader)

Section A:

1. What does the concept of women empowerment mean and symbolise to you.
2. Do you think women have been empowered enough and why? (give examples)
3. Do you think women have a duty to empower one another? And why?
4. In what ways would you like to be empowered by other women in your professional and personal journey?

Section B:

1. Do you think organisational culture and structure have a role to play in empowering women?
2. Do you think organisational structure/culture factors have a role to play in women advancing other women?
3. What organisational structural/cultural factors can you identify as helping or hindering women in empowering each other?
4. What practices would you recommend for organisations to start or continue to help women empower each other?

Section C:

1. What initiatives are you involved in or practices you advocate for to empower junior female employees in your organisation?
2. What initiatives are you involved in or practices you advocate for to empower junior female employees in other organisations?
3. To get to the position you occupy currently, were you, at any point in your journey empowered by a female leader?
4. Do you think it is important for women in leadership to empower those that come behind them?

Section D:

1. Do you think women empowerment contributes to the greater good of an organisation? In what ways?
2. Do you think women empowering each other contributes to the greater good of the organisation? In what ways?
3. What other ways besides those mentioned above do you think an organisation can benefit from women empowering one another?
4. In your empowerment or none thereof by other women, how do you think your organisation has lost or gained?

ANNEXURE D: Interview Guide (Female Junior)

Section A:

1. What does the concept of women empowerment mean and symbolise to you.
2. Do you think women have been empowered enough and why? (give examples)
3. Do you think women have a duty to empower one another? And why?
4. In what ways would you like to be empowered by other women in your professional and personal journey?

Section B:

1. Do you think organisational culture and structure have a role to play in empowering women?
2. Do you think organisational structure/culture factors have a role to play in women advancing other women?
3. What organisational structural/cultural factors can you identify as helping or hindering women in empowering each other?
4. What practices would you recommend for organisations to start or continue to help women empower each other?

Section C:

1. Do you think women are capable of corporate and business leadership?
2. What are your thoughts and beliefs about women leaders?
3. Do you feel empowered by the female leaders in your organisation?
4. What do you think women leaders can do to garner the support or continue being supported by junior female staff members?