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# The value of transitional coaching for women managers post maternity leave in the South African business context

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# The value of transitional coaching for women managers post maternity leave in the South African business context

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**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Business Executive Coaching**

**Johannesburg, 2019**

# ABSTRACT

Women are a critical resource to organisations, yet they are often not given the adequate support during their transition back to the workplace, post maternity leave. Whilst there are policies in place that afford women a leave of absence to care for their new-born baby, the lack of reintegration support structures may lead to women feeling discouraged and resigning from their current roles.

The research study explores the value of transitional coaching to first time mothers post maternity leave, as they reintegrate into their organisations. A social constructivist approach was utilised, and the coaching sessions incorporated a narrative psychology coaching approach.

The respondent group was made up of six first time mothers specifically at management level, that have returned to work post maternity leave in the last two years. A qualitative research approach was utilised and the data was manually coded by using constant comparative analysis or the coding of key words. Each participant completed a pre-session interview guide, received three coaching sessions and provided close out feedback on the value that they received. The coaching sessions aimed to support the new mothers as they identified goals for themselves and worked on tangible outcomes towards attaining these goals.

The key themes that emerged from the research study noted that women are personally impacted during maternity leave (physically, financially, psychologically, hormonally, emotionally and socially). They struggle with balancing the priorities of their new-born baby's needs whilst also managing deliverables at work. Guilt (work and baby) as well as elements of perfection and control also created more anxiety and stress for these new mothers. Role identity, especially in taking on the new role of mother, was another key theme that emerged.

All the participants found value in the coaching sessions and each of the participants successfully implemented an action plan to realise their identified goals. All participants noted that there was a lack of organisational practices and processes to support women as they reintegrate into their previous roles post

maternity leave. The recommendations provided are offered towards organisations, new working mothers, line managers, business coaches as well as the media, as they have a pertinent role in shaping societal norms and gender roles.


## KEY WORDS

- Coach
- Coachee
- Maternity leave
- New mother
- Reintegration
- Transitional coaching

# DECLARATION

I, _____, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Business Executive Coaching at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Name: Signature:

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 20…..

# DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my dear daughter, Rhidaya and my husband, Yatheen. You are my source of strength.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my family and dear friends that walked this journey with me.

A huge thank you to my research supervisor, Dr Hilary Geber for her continued support.

Thank you, Terri Carmichael, for your guidance and patience.

A special thank you to syndicate two, an amazing group of friends.

Thank you Venessa Mogatusi for your wise words and undying belief in me.

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My deepest gratitude to the brave women who shared their most vulnerable stories and inspired me to complete this research report in celebration of their post maternity transitions. You have all further encouraged my love for coaching.

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

GROW: Goal, Current Reality, Options, Way Forward

HR: Human Resources

Stats SA: Statistics South Africa

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

This aim of the research was to implement an action research study with a group of first time mothers, who have returned to work post maternity leave, in the last two years. The research explored the experiences faced by women managers in South Africa as they reintegrated into the organisation post maternity leave.

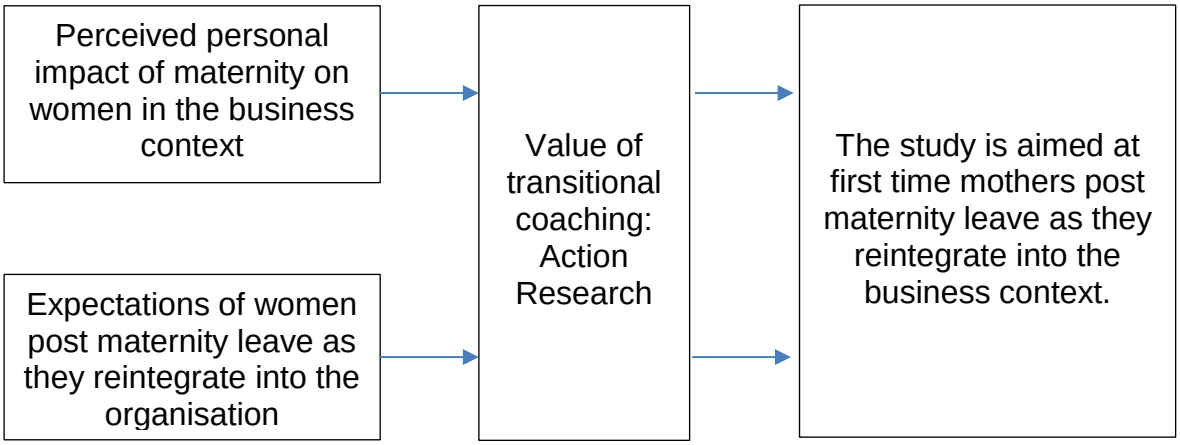



Figure 1: Diagrammatic view of research topic

## 1.2 Context of the study

Women in the workplace have faced the dilemma of balancing careers and family responsibilities for decades. The Labour Law (Department of Labour, 2014) grants women:

- Four consecutive months of maternity leave, however depending on the policy of the organisation, this could be unpaid leave resulting in a financial burden for the expectant mother.
- Time to recuperate for at least six weeks after the birth, unless deemed acceptable to return to work by a midwife or medical practitioner.
- Fair employment opportunities free from discrimination due to pregnancy.

Statistics in 2017 indicate that 22% of the board representatives in South Africa are female of which 7% are executive directors (Erasmus & Fajardo, 2017). This statistic notes a poor representation of senior women at executive levels. Whilst this is not solely as a result of the negative impact of maternity leave, the research report aims to analyse some of the implications of maternity leave on women's careers.

Women find it diffcult to return to work after maternity leave as they have to deal with missing their children, balancing work and family, financial constraints and managing employee and stakeholder relationships (Brand & Barreiro-Lucas, 2014). This is worsened by negative stereotypes associated with pregnant women like their lack of interest in their current role at work or assumed likelihood that they will not return to work (Brand & Barreiro-Lucas, 2014; Lyness, Thompson, Francesco, & Judiesch, 1999)

Brand and Barreiro-Lucas (2014) highlight that women experience difficulties with their physical, mental and financial wellbeing as they recalibrate and reintegrate into the workplace. This can be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to work performance; as when businesses believe that it is an impossible task for women to manage work and home post giving birth, when women do struggle with the adaption, it confirms the belief (Halpert, Wilson, & Hickman, 1993). This is compounded by the change in attitude from colleagues and line managers during this return period (Brand & Barreiro-Lucas, 2014).

The role of being a mother is programmed into the internal psyche of women whilst they also face the desire to progress in their identity as career women (Apostu, 2017). Women struggle to excel in both worlds and as a result they often experience guilt due to shortcomings in either arena (Apostu, 2017). According to Efthim, Kenny, and Mahalik (2001), women are more likely to internalise shame based on their perceived schemas of gender roles. These schemas represent the traditional role ideologies against which we measure ourselves (Efthim *et al.*, 2001). The research will analyse the perceived impact of maternity leave on women managers on their return to the workplace.

## 1.3 Research problem

Women managers that return to work post maternity leave, after having their first child, may require support to adjust to their new context to allow them to transition more effectively. Within the organisational context, defined outcomes and schedules are offered to on-boarding programmes (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). The aim of these is to integrate the recruit to their role, the team, as well as the values and culture of the organisation prior to joining, as well as within the first few weeks of starting a new job (Kumar & Pandey, 2017). Maternity leave however, is not seen as an off-boarding and on-boarding process. Women should feel supported as they reintegrate post their maternity leave back into their organisations. Often, the support and coaching techniques evolve as the needs of the mother-child relationship changes.

Figure 2 provides a graphical view of ranked coaching requirements as conducted by Sherpa who surveyed coaches, clients as well as human resources, training and other professionals that are interested in leadership development. This survey is conducted across the world. As noted in figure 2, the highest noted purpose for coaching is leadership development, whilst assisting with a transition is lowest. Maternity coaching is a form of transitional coaching helping the coachee to deal with the changes in their lives and create a plan of action in managing these changes, whilst reintegrating into the business context.

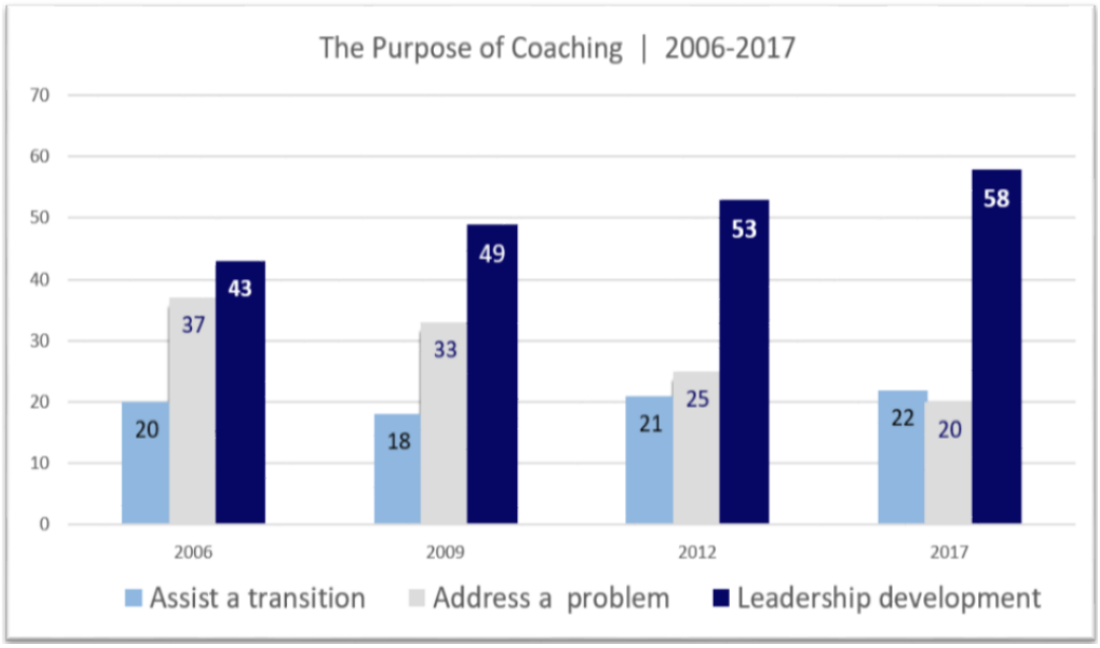



Figure 2: The Purpose of Coaching 2006 – 2017 (Sherpa Executive Coaching, 2017)

First time mothers require help from partners and extended support systems to manage household and caregiving chores as they adjust to motherhood (Leahy-Warren, McCarthy & Corcoran, 2012). This support contributes to the psychological well-being of the new mother which is of crucial importance in avoiding post-natal depression (Leahy-Warren *et al.*, 2012). First time mothers that have limited support and greater challenges either at work or in their personal lives may experience difficulty in transitioning to motherhood and reintegrating back to the workplace post maternity leave.

According to O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005), the following phases are broadly categorised for women in their careers:

- Career phase 1: Idealistic achievement: The early career phase (ages 24-35) in which women are aspirational and believe that they can make a difference by impacting others positively. They have self-belief that they can work through organisational issues and triumph.
- Career phase 2: Pragmatic endurance: In this phase (ages 36-45), women are more pragmatic in their view of the world of work. They understand the impact of relational factors like work colleagues, seniors, spouses and

family. They also find themselves in a more demanding role hence begin to question their role and value to those around them.

- Career phase 3: Reinventive contribution: In the final phase (ages 46-60), women find themselves reinvigorated and as most have advanced in their careers, they are more willing to take a stand for fairness and justice. They know who they are and what they represent, and they are drawn to contributing in meaningful ways.

Debebe (2011) further states that in managing these phases, women display incongruity between work and personal roles. Within their careers, they struggle when they display feminine behaviours misaligned to the organisation or masculine behaviours that disrupt the gender role requirements (Debebe, 2011). These phases provide a generalised view of the career phases of women with maternity leave often occurring between phase one and two. The shift in attitude of women within these phases is thus relevant from aspirational to pragmatic, and coaching can help compartmentalise the aspects causing the shift.

Recent reports on the milennial workforce are also considered. The general characteristics of these milennials include instant feedback, connectedness, self-confidence, technological and social astuteness (Zabel, Biermeier-Hanson, Baltes, Early, & Shepard, 2017). Given this view, most milennials may be more driven and ambitious in phase one, pushing them into senior roles before they settle down and start families. A further note, the phases outlined above seem to end around 60 years, however with life expectancy increasing, some retirees are taking on bridge work and continue to earn a salary post retirement (Beehr & Bennett, 2015).

## 1.4 Research objectives

The research aims to explore and synthesise the experiences of women managers as they reintegrated into the world of work post maternity leave. An output of this study was the implementation of an action research transitional coaching intervention.

The following objectives are outlined for this research report:

1. Explore the social and personal pressures that women face when returning from maternity leave;
2. Explore possible guidelines and support required to help women fulfil optimal roles in business whilst understanding the experiences post maternity leave;
3. Implement an action research study by providing transitional business coaching to first time mothers who have returned to work after maternity leave in the last two years.

## 1.5 Research questions

1. What is the perceived personal impact of maternity leave on first time mothers in the business context?
2. What are the organisation's expectations of women managers post maternity leave as they reintegrate into the organisation?
3. How can business coaching help support these women as they return to the organisation?

## 1.6 Conceptual framework

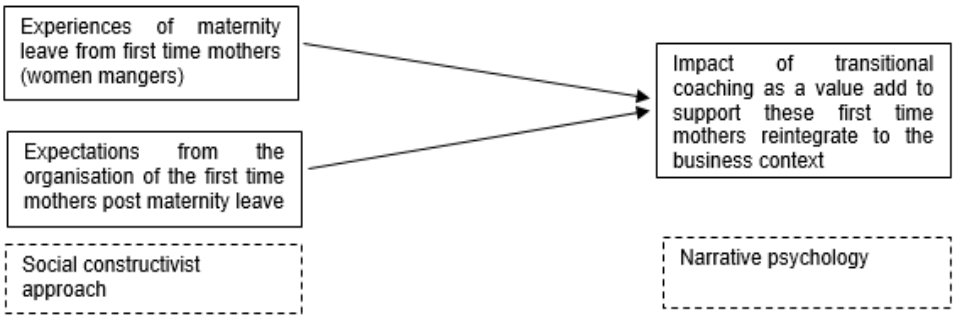



Figure 3: Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework outlines the key variables of this research report which explores the experiences of first time mothers as they go on maternity leave as well as the expectations of the organisation as they reintegrate back to their roles at work. These are explored in relation to the value of transitional coaching to support the first time mothers.

## 1.7 Significance of the study

The field of study pertaining to maternity leave and the impact on the female employee, is steadily growing internationally, however there is less research in South Africa (Brand & Barreiro-Lucas, 2014). Women bring diverse thinking to the management teams on which they serve (Stephenson, 2004) but lengthened maternity leave can result in negative consequences for their career advancement (Rossin-Slater, 2017). A business case exists to help minimise the transitional issues associated with maternity leave and reintegration into the workplace via business coaching, which is aimed at minimising the attrition of female staff that have children.

The study aims to contribute to the field of organisational effectiveness, as it offers relevance to line managers and women returning to work after maternity leave. In so doing, it aims to offer suggestions to organisation's to support women post maternity leave which can positively impact organisational culture, as this can send a message of openness to women that plan to have children. The study also offers recommendations to line managers, organisations, new mothers that have jobs, business coaches that coach women post maternity leave, as well as the media that portray stereotypical societal roles of men and women. This research report addresses the underpinnings of social constructivism in the creation of a person's social identity to understand the constructs at play for mothers in the tussle between work and home.

## 1.8 Delimitations of the study

The research study focussed on first time mothers that have reintegrated into the world of work post maternity leave, in the last two years, within the South African

context. During the first two years of the child's life, they are highly dependent on the mother. This phase offered enhanced insights as the mother is constantly adjusting to the needs of the child. Feedback from the coaching process, from the point of view of the women and the researcher, was analysed together with suggestions on how reintegration could be successful.

The study excludes the following:

1. Paternity leave and its role or impact to the women on maternity leave
2. The marital status of the women
3. Feedback from line managers

## 1.9 Definition of terms

Coach: The term coach refers to a business or executive coach in the context of working with managers and leaders. The role of the coach is to leverage tools, methodologies and techniques throughout the coaching process to support the client in making meaning (Rogers, 2012). Coaches may be either internal (within the organisation) or external.

Coachee/Client: These terms are used interchangeably and refer to the recipient of the coaching services. Within the context of this research study, the coachees/clients are women who have returned to work post maternity leave (the participant group).

Maternity leave: The period of absence from work taken by a woman after the birth of her child.

New mother: A mother that has given birth for the first time.

Reintegration: The transitional period post maternity leave when the new mother is back at work.

Transitional coaching: Business coaching provided to support the coachee through a transition.

## 1.10 Assumptions

The assumptions for the purposes of this study are that the respondents will reflect normal perspectives and experiences. It is also assumed that the women that receive coaching have an understanding of the labour law and organisational policies in relation to maternity leave.

It is assumed that the respondents are able to identify the personal encounters experienced with maternity leave. It is assumed that all respondents are familiar with coaching principles, however a basic outline of the coaching process and methodology will be provided. It is assumed from a paradigmatic stance that women that return to work post maternity leave may not show that they need support. This is suggested as the role of childbirth together with balancing personal and work priorities is a reality for lots of women and many do so without discussing the support that they may require.

Chapter one provided a view of the research topic with an outline on the objectives that the research aims to achieve as well as the questions that the research will answer. Chapter two is provides a literature review on the research topic.

# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

The research explores the transitional experience of women post maternity leave as they reintegrate their workplace. Coaching is the process by which behavioural change is facilitated through self-awareness provided in the support of working with an experienced business coach (Joo, Sushko, & McLean, 2012). Pregnancy is a process in which women undergo physical, hormonal and psychosocial changes and are then faced with an infant that is solely dependent on their caregivers for survival (Newman & Newman, 2017). This means that the transition for women occurs on a level that can be seen (physical changes) and those that are not so easy to detect or understand (hormonal and psychological level).

The recorded live births in South Africa for 2016 was 10.6% less than 2015 with the majority of the births registered to women in the 20-29 age group, with a total 783 322 out of 969 415 births in the 20-39 age group (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). The age group of 20-29 is seen as the early career of professional women and from mid to late 30s, women are seen as beginning to establish themselves in their careers. If pregnancy is most likely to occur in the age group when their careers are too established, the impact of this in terms of maternity leave, reintegration and role expectations (mother, wife, career woman professional) is noteworthy.

The population rate in South Africa grew by 26 million in 1975 and 57 million in 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). There has been a decline in the average annual percentage growth from 1960 to 2009 with a slight increase between 2010 – 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). The decline is a result of low fertility rates as seen in table 1, from 6.1 to 2.4 in the period of 1960 - 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). The dwindling fertility rate is as a result of a targeted approach towards educating people on family planning and reducing teenage pregnancies (Statistics South Africa, 2017a). With decreasing birth and fertility rates, more caution on pregnancies is noted within the female population.

Table 1: Population growth rate (South Africa) (Statistics South Africa, 2017a).

| Period | Average annual % change | Period | Average annual % change |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960–1969 | 2,6 | 1990–1999 | 2,1 |
| 1970–1979 | 2,6 | 2000–2009 | 1,2 |
| 1980–1989 | 2,4 | 2010–2017 | 1,5 |

Sources: Stats SA, World Bank and calculations

According to data in an International Social Survey Programme which took place across 24 countries (representative sample of men and women) in 2002 and 2012, there are noted benefits of having a working mother for male and female offspring (McGinn, Ruiz Castro, & Lingo, 2015). Professionally, women raised by working mothers are more likely to work, more likely to attain higher positions, tend to work more hours, and have slightly higher salaries than women whose mothers did not work (McGinn *et al.*, 2015). There are personal benefits for men raised by working mothers, as they allocate more time for their families, whilst women raised by working mothers allocate more time to their jobs in comparison with children raised by mothers that did not work (McGinn *et al.*, 2015).

According to figure 4, women represent the majority of the professional workforce, in the age group of 21 to 65, especially in the older categories.

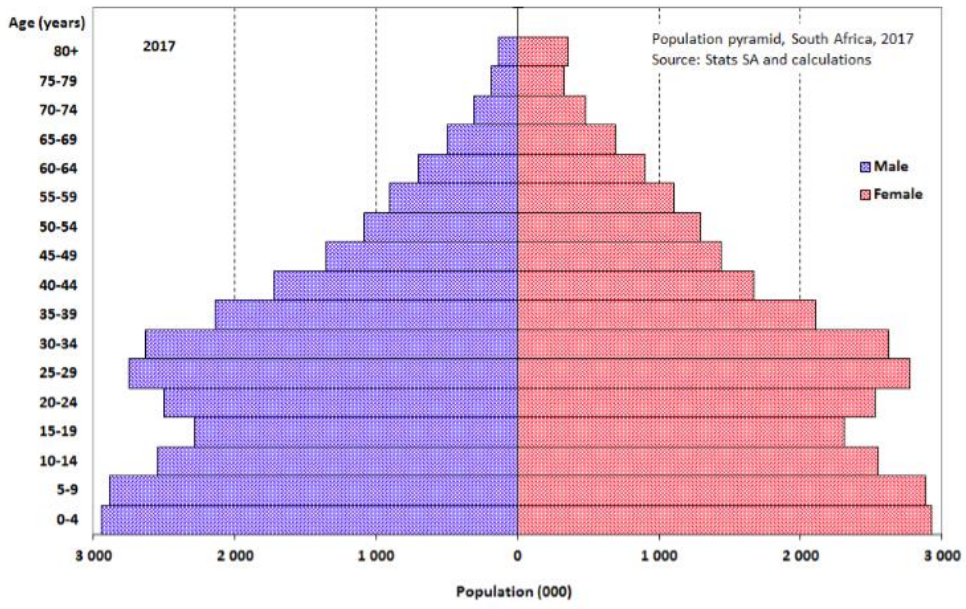



Figure 4: Population pyramid, South Africa, 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2017b)

Incorporating and cultivating a gender diverse workforce reaps financial, risk and ethical rewards for boards (Stephenson, 2004). The positivity of their inclusion also sets the tone for female leadership as well as the attraction and retention of female talent (Stephenson, 2004).

The literature review addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived personal impact of maternity leave on first time mothers in the business context?
2. What are the organisation's expectations of women mangers post maternity leave as they reintegrate into the organisation?
3. How can business coaching help support these women as they return to the organisation?

## 2.2 Definition of research topic

### 2.2.1 *Identity formation*

The research incorporates a social constructivist view of knowledge and meaning making to analyse the post maternity experiences of women in the workplace. Jean Piaget, an evolutionary biologist noted that human beings adapt their intelligence to survive (Piaget & Cook, 1952). He observed children as they assimilate and internalise schemas around them allowing them to create hypothesised meaning in their world (Piaget & Cook, 1952).

In Piaget's theory, the individual is instrumental in the learning process whilst for Vygotsky, the impact of culture through internalisation is a contributor to the learning process (Blake & Pope, 2008). Further contributors to the theory are John Dewey and Jerome Bruner. Dewey proposed that learning should merge academic curricula in the context of cultures within in which children live to integrate school teaching with the context of home (Takaya, 2008). Bruner however, suggested that whilst culture is the construct for shaping people, the role of education is to offer alternate views to thinking than those influenced by one's culture (Takaya, 2008). An emerging theme across these contributors is the impact of context on learning and shaping individuals.

It is through this process of socialisation that women internalise their role of motherhood and strive to aspire to the ideal. The role of motherhood, household chores and child care is core to the role of women in the social order (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016). Women may resist coaching or help in being a mother so that they are not seen as less than in the eyes of society. This creates internal tension as they place tougher measures on themselves to achieve perfection (Stoeber & Damian, 2016) which can lead to emotional and physical exhaustion in striving to fulfil this (Deuling & Burns, 2017).

The impact of socialisation is also evident by men that provide minimal contribution to household and child rearing tasks so that they are not seen as feminine and by so doing maintain the social norm (Allen *et al.*, 2016). However women that contribute to the finances of the house (as providers) or care for their children as single parents may experience internal conflict as they are both providers and caregivers.

### 2.2.2 *Business and executive coaching*

Business and executive coaching can be defined as a relationship between a leader and a coach with the intention of improving the organisational performance of the leader (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Coaching includes a process of self-insight and learning. Kolb's experiential learning cycle the experience is the grounding for observation (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). The observation is reflected upon and then assimilated into abstract concepts (Kolb *et al*., 2001). Consequences for action are drawn from the abstract concepts allowing people to actively test these and to create further experiences (Kolb *et al*., 2001).

Cox, Peeters, Stanford, and Seifert (2013) proposed the experiential coaching model following Kolb's model. Differing from Kolb, this model places more emphasis on the transition between phases for the individual (Cox *et al.*, 2013). The first phase is the pre-reflective experience, and can be seen as all the content that the coachee refers to as part of the coaching session (Cox *et al.*, 2013). The second phase is reflection on the experience, in which the coachee reflects on the actual experience and begins to draw on the emotions of the events (Cox *et al.*, 2013). The third phase is post-reflective thinking; the phase where the

coachee applies metacognitive processes and critical thinking to analyse the event (Cox *et al.*, 2013).

Transition coaching is a field of business and executive coaching aimed at helping managers and leaders learn and move past the period of transition through the implementation of an action plan towards a desired state (Witherspoon & Cannon, 2004). Whilst the emphasis on this model is on transitions to a new position, reintegrating into work post maternity leave can also be seen as a period of transition. The role of the coach, timing of the intervention, stakeholder expectations, identification of the goals and plan of action are crucial aspects in the transitional coaching process (Terblanche, Albertyn, & van Coller-Peter, 2017).

## 2.3 Perceived personal impact of maternity leave on women in the business context

Women who go on maternity leave, remove themselves from their work context for approximately four to six months. This period allows them to bond with their new-born child as well heal from having given birth. In cases where no pay or a percentage of pay is given, women face a financial impact. This research aims to understand further perceived personal impacts faced by these women. The personal impact will be explored in terms of the physical, hormonal, emotional, financial, psychological and social changes these women experience.

### 2.3.1 *Stereotypes associated with pregnancy*

Often, women who go on maternity leave are seen as less committed to their jobs and a potential flight risk. Whilst legally, a women is not required to disclose her pregnancy and should not be prejudiced for being pregnant (Department of Labour, 2014), indirect professional behaviour, like leaving them out of staff meetings or declining them from travel opportunities or allocating menial tasks to them (Lyness *et al*., 1999), sends a message of phasing pregnant women out. If there are concerns regarding the pregnant woman's commitment, role

requirement or travel restrictions, these should be discussed transparently and in a supportive manner.

### 2.3.2 *Proposition 1*

Women who go on maternity leave and reintegrate into their workplace, are impacted personally.

## 2.4 The expectations of women post maternity leave as they reintegrate to the organisation

Each woman is different; she represents her own identity, her own vision and her own self-beliefs. However, as a cohort, events over the years highlight the struggles and successes that women have faced and continue to face. Whether it is a vote, equal pay, a seat at the boardroom table, or freedom of expression, historical actions have shaped the way women are treated (Morrell, Jewkes, & Lindegger, 2012). Organisations place expectations on women post maternity leave and women place further expectations on themselves when adapting to motherhood and reintegrating into the workplace.

### 2.4.1 *Previous research*

According to a longitudinal study by (Rowe, Barnes, & Sutherns, 2013), the aspects that contributed to maternal efficacy, the belief of the mother in her ability to 'mother', during the transition of the maternal process was explored. The study focussed on the services offered to mothers during their maternal transitional period and analysed whether this had a positive impact on their maternal efficacy (Rowe *et al.*, 2013). Women noted the value of having a support centre to encourage them during breastfeeding and the adjustment to motherhood (Rowe *et al.*, 2013). The value of a coaching relationship was a key finding as these mothers were supported through their transition. This is not a business coaching study however the value of having a coaching approach to women post maternity leave is highlighted.

Further research by Yasar (2017) as part of her Masters in Management: Business and Executive Coaching research report submission looked at the pre, during and post maternity leave support required for women in the South African business context. Through a case study analysis of an organisation that supported a transitional maternity coaching process in comparison with one that did not, the value of transitional coaching across the maternal process was noted. The role of the line manager was also noted as a relevant contributor to the success of the maternity coaching.

## 2.5 The value of transitional coaching to women post maternity leave

The focus of this research report is the reintegration process into the workplace and therefore pre and during maternity data is not included. A social constructivist view is included in terms of the meaning making process for working mothers.

Coaching is a process in which the coachee identifies and sets a goal or a desired state, which they map from their current state via a specific and measurable action plan (Rogers, 2012). The very nature of coaching implies transition or change, whether it is a challenge of paradigms or attaining a tangible goal, for example, setting up a new business.

### 2.5.1 *Transitional coaching*

Kurt Lewin posited that change occurs over three steps: unfreezing, changing and refreezing (Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2016). Whilst this has been critiqued for being over-simplified, it remains a significant starting point to understanding how people deal with change (Cummings *et al.*, 2016). This suggests that when we go through any change, we take action to deal with the change and 'refreeze' it in the transformed state.

Schneider and Goldwasser noted the impact on organisational performance when change was implemented and the role of line managers in ensuring the success of the change initiative (Elrod & Tippett, 2002). Figure 5 below provides

a graphical depiction of the change curve. The point of despair based as the acknowledgement of the effort and complexity required can be eased by support from management (Elrod & Tippett, 2002).

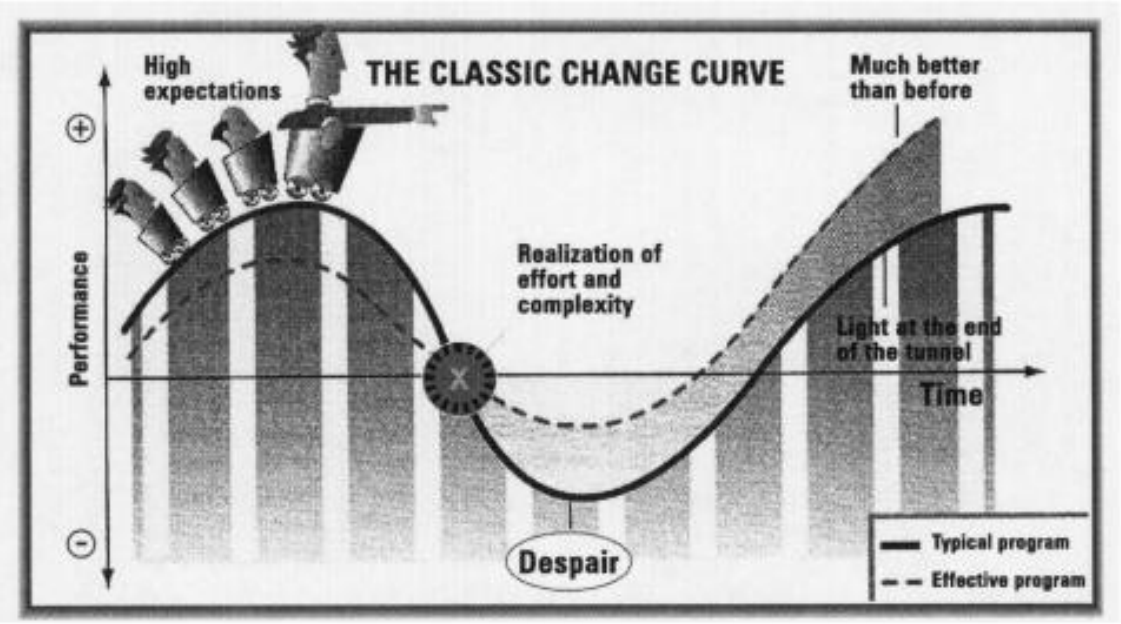



Figure 5: The Classic Change Curve: source (Elrod & Tippett, 2002)

There are five main levels in which transition can be identified during the post maternity period when a new mother reintegrates into the world of work, namely cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal, psychological and systemic (Terblanche et al., 2017).

- Cognitive level: New mothers develop new thinking skills to accommodate the needs of their new-born child when shifting their priorities (McLeish & Redshaw, 2019) whilst also readjusting their thinking patterns to understand the complex and ambiguous requirements of their roles at work (Terblanche *et al*., 2017).
- Behavioural level: New behaviours are required, such as flexible time, working after hours, unable to attend events and restructuring of workloads (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005).
- Interpersonal level: During the transitional period back into the world of work, new mothers will need to manage relationships with line managers,

colleagues and their partners to ensure that they can deliver on the needs of the new-born child.

- Psychological level: Psychologically, new mothers deal with a change in identity from woman to mother, and need to adjust to this change in role (McLeish & Redshaw, 2019).
- Systemic level: On the holistic level, the coachee needs to examine how the organisation's influences their thoughts, actions and behaviours (Passmore, 2007). As new mothers re-entering their jobs, they need to find a middle ground to serve the needs of the organisation without reaching burnout and emotional fatigue.

Transitional coaching can thus be seen as the support offered to people to help them adapt and deal with a current change through coaching methodologies and tools. This is effective when the coach is able to create a safe environment for the coachee to support them as they challenge their existing paradigms to allow new thinking (Debebe, 2011). The integrative coaching model, provides a view of the coaching relationship and the role of the coach towards supporting the coachee as they transform their thinking patterns (Passmore, 2007).

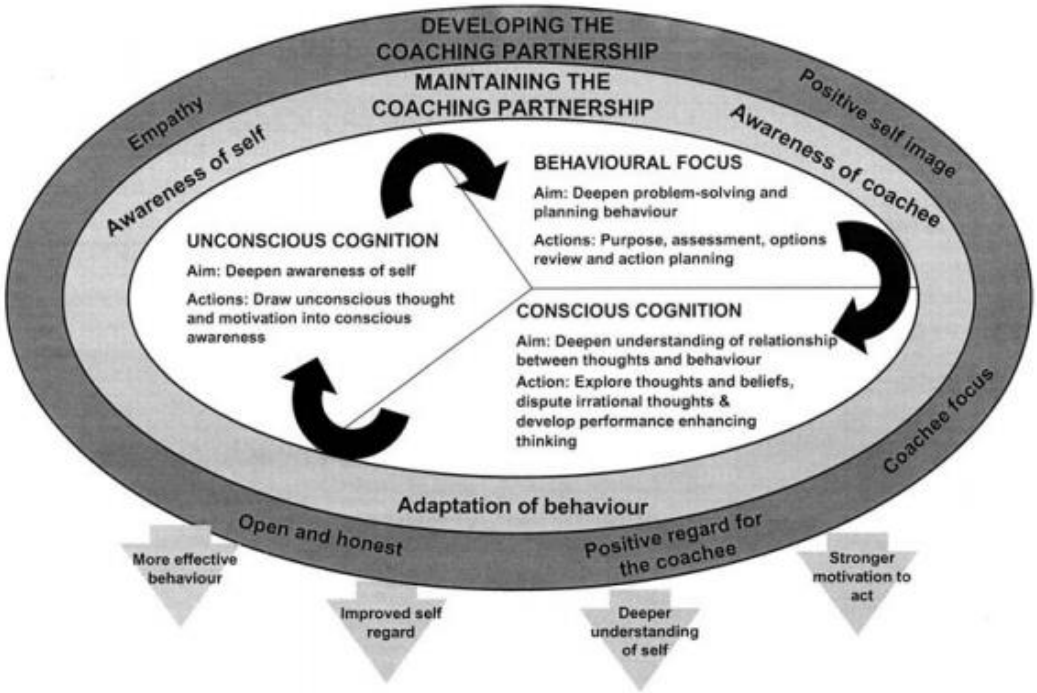



Figure 6: Integrative coaching model: Source (Passmore, 2007)

The research report incorporates existing thinking and methodologies on facilitating change to inform the action research to support women post maternity leave as they deal with the transitioning state of their body, multiple roles and impact in the workplace.

### 2.5.2 *Proposition 2*

Transitional coaching is a value-add to women to support them in reintegrating into the workplace post maternity leave.

## 2.6 The value of coaching to support line managers as they reintegrate female staff post maternity leave

Coaching methodologies and practices have gained momentum, and this can be seen in the way in which managers are tasked with responding to their subordinates (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). This is evident in managers leveraging listening, communication and feedback skills in a dyadic process to set targets and goals for performance (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). The concept of coaching within this research, holds at the core the idea that the coachee is resourceful and can therefore, with the support of the coach/ line manager as coach, make decisions to positively impact their lives (Rogers, 2012).

### 2.6.1 *The role of the line manager*

The role of the line manager is to understand the coaching principles and adequately deploy these in supporting the subordinate. In the case of transitional coaching for women reintegrating post maternity leave, an existential approach to understand the woman's current paradigms to positively challenge them and create new avenues, is an effective stance (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2014). An alternate approach is to integrate a narrative coaching style to delve into the stories of their lives and help them navigate their worldviews (Cox *et al.*, 2014).

However, there are elements that line managers struggle with when implementing a coaching style (McCarthy & Milner, 2013). These include but are not restricted to, managing the power dynamic of boss to subordinate, the aspect of confidentiality, the nature of giving and receiving feedback, as well deep listening and non-directive questioning skills (McCarthy & Milner, 2013).

## 2.7 Conclusion of literature review

Women represent an integral part of the workforce and offer diversity in their thinking and contribution (Stephenson, 2004). Culture is a core aspect of how roles are internalised (Blake & Pope, 2008) and as a result, does impact the experiences of women through maternity leave. Transitional coaching is suggested as a methodology to support both women and their respective line managers post maternity leave, as mothers reintegrate into the world of work. The research report addresses the impact of roles, expectations and identity constructs for women as they return to work post maternity leave.

### 2.7.1 *Proposition 1*

Women who go on maternity leave and reintegrate into their workplace, are impacted personally.

### 2.7.2 *Proposition 2*

Transitional coaching is a value-add to women to support them in reintegrating into the workplace post maternity leave.

Chapter two provided a review of the literature of relevance to this study. Chapter three will address the research methodology and approach taken for the study.

# CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a view of the research methodology by exploring the research approach and design that was used to address the research question. The population, data collection methods as well as the research instrument is covered. The chapter provides a view on the validity, reliability and limitations of the study. These aspects contribute to the approach of this research study, ensuring that it is conducted with academically sound principles.

## 3.1 Research approach

The research report is based on the qualitative feedback from women in management roles, who have taken maternity leave and reintegrated into their working context within a two year period. An interpretivist or constructivist paradigm was used as the research report aimed to understand the experience and backgrounds of these women through their realties (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Within this paradigm, lies the belief that through understanding the narratives of the respondents, the researcher is able to delve into their subjective world (Wahyuni, 2012). A narrative form of study was used to explore and analyse the experiences of the participants (Wahyuni, 2012). Key themes were coded by a constant comparative analysis approach (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

## 3.2 Research design

The overall research approach was an action research study aimed at six first time mothers in management who had returned to work post maternity leave within the last two years. Action research can be viewed as a process in which the impacted community or group of participants collaborate with the researcher through discussion, and co-create a solution in the hope of creating a societal change (Bennett, 2004).

Action research was a suitable research design for this project, as through the process of collaboration, deep insight on the perceived impact of returning to work

post maternity leave for women, was uncovered. This was implemented and tested as part of the research process.

Action research requires deep trust as the researcher and participants work very closely together (Bennett, 2004). The research report used a practical/mutual collaborative/deliberate mode as noted by Berg (2004) as the premise was on co-discovery of the issues at hand and joint partnership in having implemented a solution. This mode encouraged trust amongst the respondents as they had an equal stake in the implementation of the solution.

Action research can be time consuming as iterative feedback is required to enhance the research findings (Bennett, 2004). A further disadvantage is that often without the researcher driving the implementation, over time, interest and action fades (Berg, 2004). The purpose of this research report was to implement the research solution end-to-end, with a view of exploring the implications of the solution for this participation group, hence the sustainability is required until the project comes to an end, and to be taken further as an organisational need. However, not all action learning projects dwindle when the project terminates. This is evident in the MBA service-learning action research in which MBA students continued to work with their respective community programmes as a result of the personal shift they experienced, post the termination of the research project and module requirement (Carmichael & Rijamampianina, 2008).

Qualitative feedback from an interview guide from each woman, steered the transitional coaching model and methodology for implementation and testing. The participants were provided with transitional coaching over three sessions, lasting for a maximum of an hour, spaced at least two weeks apart. These were individual coaching sessions with feedback on the value derived from transitional coaching.

## 3.3 Data collection methods

The data collection was qualitative analysis, as depicted in figure 7, and was suited to the research questions and participation group. Primary data collected was collected as follows:

- Interview guide completed by the first time mothers as an introduction to their key experiences and challenges;
- Action research in the form of business transitional coaching to each woman for three sessions;
- Feedback from each participant on their experiences of the process as well as suggestions on how this can be implemented further.

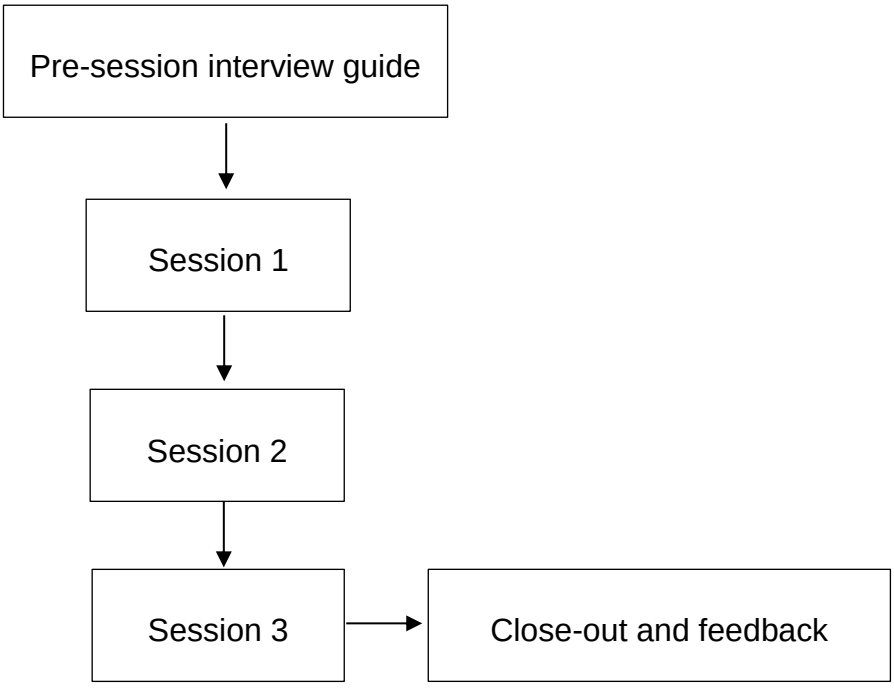



Figure 7: Data collection method

Secondary data was collected from published statistics and information derived from journal publications, coaching institutions, World Bank, South African labour markets and other noted data points.

## 3.4 Population and sample

### 3.4.1 *Population*

Population Group: The population for this research study was women managers that returned to work post maternity leave with the last two years within the South African business context as well as transitional coaches.

A qualitative approach was used for the six women that have returned to work post maternity leave. Structured open ended questions was positioned to all respondents in the group. Narrative psychology aims to explore the subjective reality of the participant, and by so doing brings to the fore the social constructivist views that they hold (Stelter, 2009). The social constructivist view through narrative exploration brought notions of role identity, cultural expectations and gender beliefs to the fore (Stelter, 2009) The coaching sessions with each participant addressed these principles to deeply understand their experiences when reintegrating into their jobs post maternity leave.

The focus of this research was on the journey of these women post maternity leave as they reintegrated into their jobs, in the context of their personal and professional roles. Triangulation, for the purposes of a qualitative study, proposes that if data from two or more sources concur on the resulted findings then the credibility of the conclusion is viewed as more credible (Tracy, 2010). The study incorporated feedback from 6 participants and was analysed in relation to current literature.

### 3.4.2 *Sample and sampling method*

The sample will be made up of a multi-cultural inclusion of participants, noted in table 2 below.

Table 2: Profile of respondents (N=6)

| Description of respondent type | Number to be sampled |
|---|---|
| First time mothers who returned to work post maternity leave (within the last two years) | 6 |
| Race | 2 Indian, 2 African and 2 White |
| Level in organisation | 2 Junior Management, 1 Middle Management, 3 Senior Management |
| TOTAL number of respondents | 6 |

## 3.5 The research instrument

The research instruments were: A qualitative pre-interview guide, three transitional coaching sessions and a close-out feedback session (qualitative questions). The transitional coaching and close-out feedback took place as part of the coaching sessions.

## 3.6 Procedure for data collection

The focus of this research report was the business context in South Africa. Key networks across industries were leveraged to connect with women managers (post maternity leave in the last two years). Once potential participants were identified an email (Appendix A) outlining the research outcome, process and timelines was distributed. Interested participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study over email. The researcher contacted each potential participant telephonically to further explain the research study and next steps.

The researcher confirmed a pool of six first time mothers that had returned to work post maternity leave in the last two years. Each participant received a pre-interview guide (Appendix B) prior to commencing with session one. A consent

form (Appendix C) was sent to each participant via email, which they were tasked with completing and signing. Coaching sessions took place face-to-face and via WhatsApp video call (only in cases where the participant had agreed and were comfortable). The researcher took notes during the session which included key themes, non-verbal cues and areas for further analysis. All sessions were recorded and the recordings were kept on a computer that was password protected and accessible only by the researcher. The close out feedback took place during the last coaching session and was guided by specific questions by the coach (Appendix D).

The ethical parameters for this study included confidentiality throughout the process, anonymity of participant information as well as secure storage and capturing of all data.

## 3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

Qualitative data is made up of unstructured content and uses codes to make sense and organise the core themes (Basit, 2003). The coding process occurred over the three data points.

In the case of the pre-interview guide and the close-out feedback, the key themes that emerged from the questions were reported on. These themes were analysed with regards to the overall data analysis. The data from the coaching sessions were categorised according to codes which created a conceptual scheme to be analysed and discussed further (Basit, 2003). The researcher chose to use a manual coding process (Basit, 2003) as codes from each session were incorporated into subsequent participant sessions, as part of the coaching process, to elicit deeper insight on a specific theme.

A constant comparative analysis or coding of key themes that arise from the data was used to analyse qualitative data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The codes were derived from the data as an inductive process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

## 3.8 Limitations of the study

The following are noted as limitations of the study:

- The South African business context is the target population and replicated studies will need to address the cultural context of the respective area.
- The study will specifically include management level (junior to senior) staff. Other staff levels are not part of the study.
- The time frame in which the process was co-designed, implemented and reported on, was tight and needed to take place within the year. The researcher has limited this to six female participants over three hours per person.
- The methodological limitation was based on the reliance of data from the women's post maternity transitional experiences and their perspectives which could not be further verified.

## 3.9 Validity and reliability

The action research approach is the core foundational methodology for the purposes of this research report, which is based on qualitative data. The validity and reliability measures are explained from this view.

### 3.9.1 *Validity*

Validity refers to the rigour and consistency with which the research was conducted (Noble & Smith, 2015). The clarity and structured layout of this research process, together with verbatim capturing of the interviews, contributes to the validity of the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Each session was recorded allowing the quotes to be derived directly from each participant.

A standardised set of questions was administered as part of the pre-session interview guide. A structured coaching process was offered to all participants. During each coaching session, feedback was requested from each of the participants on the value of the coaching model and process and the final coaching session requested overall feedback from each participant.

Credibility is maintained in qualitative research by sharing the findings and themes with the participants during the research process, allowing the participants to critique or support these findings (Tracy, 2010). During the coaching sessions, the researcher tested feedback and themes from other participants to test the validity and applicability to differing contexts. This created a further level of credibility when analysed in relation to the literature.

### 3.9.2 *External validity*

External validity refers to the extent to which the study is replicated in other contexts and thus requires the research design to be set up in a manner that allows for this (Zohrabi, 2013). Multiple participants were interviewed and included in the research, thus a variety of views were taken into account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The action research implemented offered new meaning for the participants through the process of coaching and is available for other researchers to test further.

The study incorporated the participant's explanations that showcased the emotive expressions of their situational contexts offering the reader a view of the challenges that they were facing. These thick descriptions provide a view of context merged with meaning contributing to the credibility of the data gathered (Tracy, 2010).

### 3.9.3 *Internal validity*

Internal validity addresses the extent to which the variables are researched and measured in relation to each other (Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). Multivocality is the process by which a qualitative study incorporates varying and multiple viewpoints allowing the participant's contributions to be aired whilst welcoming divergent views (Tracy, 2010). Rich data was incorporated from the diverse backgrounds of the participants, which in the case of this research study, offered insight into the social norms and expectations they were required to fulfil (Tracy, 2010).

Researcher bias was minimised by implementing a non-judgemental approach to the collection of data, which will be reported on in a fair and ethical manner (Zohrabi, 2013). As this is an action research study focussed on providing coaching, working in a confidential, ethical and non-judgemental manner was key to the coaching relationship (Rogers, 2012) and was maintained through the study.

### 3.9.4 *Reliability*

Rigorous and accurate record keeping was maintained (Roberts *et al*., 2006). The interview guide was completed by the participants and key themes that arose from this were tested during the coaching sessions. All coaching sessions were recorded, and a thematic analysis was derived from these data points.

## 3.10 Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents includes a multi-cultural and racial group of first time mothers who have returned to work post maternity leave. The target population is aimed at managers across the South African business context. Table 3 refers to the sample population. All participants had at least four years working experience and are in the age group of 25-50 years old. The children, at the time of the data collection, ranged between six to twenty months.

This chapter provided a view of the research methodology, research approach as well as an outline on the participation group. The aspects of validity and reliability in relation to this research study was covered. The next chapter will provide a view of the research findings.

# CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings as well as an analysis of the core themes which will be discussed in relation to the literature as outlined in chapter two. These will be presented from the following three categories: The pre-session interview guide, action research coaching sessions and feedback from each coachee on the value of the coaching.

## 4.2 Pre-session interview guide

The researcher contacted each participant to explain this study and the process going forward. The interview guide (Appendix B) was sent to each participant prior to commencing with the coaching sessions. This offered insight into each participant as well as provided a standardised analysis for core themes to emerge, which could be probed further during the coaching sessions.

Table 3: Participant profile – work experience and age of children (N=6)

| **Participant** | **Race** | **Age** | **Management Level** | **Years working experience** | **Age of child** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Indian | 36 | Senior Management | 14 years | 6 months |
| B | White | 32 | Middle Management | 11 years | 20 months |
| C | Black | 29 | Junior Management | 4 years | 7 months |
| D | Black | 28 | Junior Management | 6 years | 20 months |
| E | White | 28 | Junior Management | 6.5 years | 13 months |
| F | Indian | 37 | Middle Management | 15 years | 14 months |

## 4.3 Themes emerging from the interview guide

### Support from the organisation

When analysing the participation feedback, the support received from the organisation ranged from none at all, as business as usual activities were expected to continue to those who received limited flexi-time. Flexible time allowed the women to work from home, leave early or leave during their lunch break to express or breastfeed their children.

None of the women indicated any support from the organisation in terms of helping them reintegrate into their roles. One participant also noted that the organisation failed to highlight the correct policies to claim from the unemployment fund for unpaid leave and as a result she missed the window to claim for the additional month she had taken as unpaid leave.

### Line manager support

Line manager support seemed to be more evident when managers took the time to brief their subordinates on the expectations back at work and offered most of the participants flexible working hours. Two participants described the time taken by the line manager to ease them into business. One participant requested a less stressful role, which the line manager accommodated. Interestingly, participants who had received support from their line managers also received support from their teams.

### Greatest challenge: Personal and professional

The participants note the difficulty of adjusting to a new routine upon returning to work. The shift in their priorities, which now centred on the needs of their child, impacted on their availability and willingness to stay at the office for longer hours or work on additional projects. Most of the participants refer to the feeling of wishing that they could be in both places (work and home) at the same time however they note that they need the financial backing and stimulation that their job offers, resulting in a dilemma.

The participants also discussed the perceived stereotypes based on the change in behaviour of those around them. Many found that their co-workers (men and women) not necessarily those from their team, responded in a judgemental manner to them leaving earlier, or viewed them as no longer taking their work seriously.

Some of the participants had to manage difficult changes in their work environment like restructures in the team and different roles. One participant had to deal with post-partum depression as well as cope with her husband finding another job. All the participants talked about being pulled in two different directions and felt that they needed to be available and responsible in both contexts, regardless of whether they had help at home, like a nanny, or whether they had a team on which they could rely.

## 4.4 Action research – coaching sessions

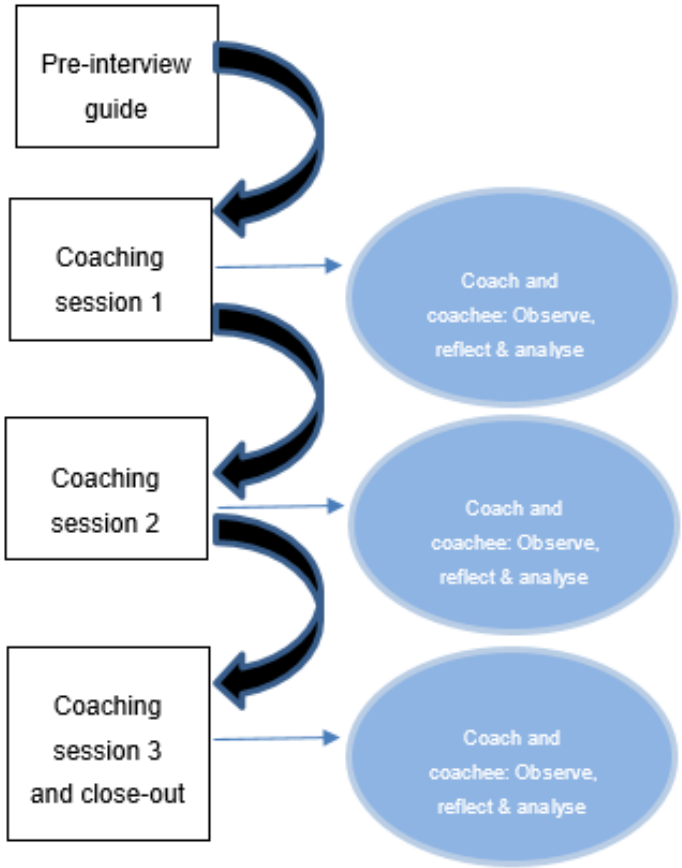



Figure 8: The action research coaching model

**Session one**

Session one aimed to explore the current state of the participants. This included an introduction to the coaching process as well an overview of the role of the coach and coachee.

**Role of the coach**

The role of the coach was explained at the start of the session. Some of the women had experienced some form of coaching before, however it remained vital to explain and set the scene for the coaching process that will follow. The coach is a sounding board offering the coachee the opportunity to reach moments of clarity through voicing their internal dialogue via tactical questioning offered by the coach (Rogers, 2012).

The session focussed on allowing each participant an in-depth view into their personal and professional lives based on their answers to the interview guide. Deep and active listening techniques were practiced by the coach. Relaxed and non-judgemental posture and body language were used to set the tone for these sessions.

**Findings from session one**

Initially, most of the women created the perception that whilst they had several priorities, this was in order and under control. As the session progressed, a trusting and safe environment was created allowing these women to open up further when probed on key themes that were emerging. It was only mid-way through the first session that many of the women began to uncover the true version of their current contexts and to verbally challenge their belief that they were not dealing with many aspects. Trust was therefore important to establish upfront by maintaining professionalism in the coaching space.

This session was the first time, for most of the women that someone had taken time to talk to them and have them explain what they were going through. In the case of women who had support, they lacked the role of a coach working with them through an action plan. One participant was very emotional when she was

asked to verbalise her action plan and way forward as this was the first time, in a very long time, that someone had checked in on her. She found that she had not taken the time to talk about herself and her thoughts as she was so focussed on being busy with her baby and readjusting to work for the last year.

> Participant D: *'It does get overwhelming, sometimes you want to get home and put your feet up and maybe take him after an hour or so. Unfortunately, I don't get that. And he's mine up until he goes to bed and only then at about eight, nine, only then do I eat, only then do I take a bath. And if there's any work that I've taken home, only then do I get to do it.'*

The balance required for the role of mother, wife and worker was a clear theme that emerged from session one. All participants spoke about juggling many aspects at once and just when they thought that all was under control, aspects shifted again.

> Participant E: '*It's like an emotional rollercoaster, where I guess things go well and then your child develops into a new phase and that shakes you a bit and you have to kind of adjust everything to that*.'

Women spoke about the guilt of missing their children. They realised that they could no longer give full attention to their roles at work. The difficulty in balancing work and home, and trying to be the best in both roles, was a clear struggle for the participants.

> Participant C: '*It's the guilt that says now I have a kid, before I had my kid I could work until eight, nine, whatever. You know that you don't have someone waiting for you at home.'*

Some women also touched on the stereotypes and challenges in their organisation as a result of their having a child. For example co-workers would notice the times that they arrived and left the office. Participant E repeatedly noted that her manager had made many broad comments stating that no staff will get reduced work hours.

In the tussle between balancing work and home, and the fear of not performing at work, many participants find themselves trying to prove their work ethic so that they are taken seriously. Participant E shared her story of going into early labour on her last day in the office.

> Participant E: *'So everything was going well in my pregnancy, so I had actually quite a good pregnancy but then I… same thing, I was actually feeling sick, but I didn't feel sick enough to stay at home.*

She then elaborated further.

> Participant E: *[I was] like fluey but knowing I'm eight months pregnant I probably should've been home, but I came to work, and it was a very just stressful day. Obviously with managing people and them not working as they should so that, that was just quiet a difficult thing through the day. And then at five o'clock my one manager ran in with the phone to a particularly difficult client and he said I am going to phone you back on Ms X's phone and so this was at five o'clock and I was trying to be good in my last month of leaving at five. So I literally should've walked out the door a minute before but I hadn't and I was sitting at my desk and I think its cos I had had quite a crazy day so I was trying to finish things off and he came to me and then phoned the client off my phone and then he said, 'Okay, Ms X will assist you further,' he looked at me and he said, 'I need to go' and he ran out the door, he went home and he left me with like a really high person in a certain company and just screaming and demanding something be done and if he didn't he'd phone the CEO. Just the whole thing of trying to deal with him and just the difficulty in that, I then went into labour. I think it was the stress of that or just suddenly after a stressful day and then just this client, and everyone's left, and he wanted it done by nine o'clock the next morning and some people only come in to work at nine. And saying well we can't do anything further for you and demanding that it get done.'*

Participant E recalled this event with tears, and she noted that this incident haunts her to this day.

> Participant E: '*I went to the loo just before I left, and I was bleeding. And then I drove home, I phoned my husband then I was crying saying I'm so sorry I don't know why I'm still at work. I had a doula and she then came straight over and she then monitored my stomach and said I was having contractions and said we need to take you to the hospital. So I went to the hospital and they tried to stop the labour but it was too late and I went into labour.'*

There was no apology or accountability on the part of the organisation. Participant E did ask for a change in manager post the event. Towards the end of the session she broke down at the thought that her job could have had far more serious implications for the birth of her child. We explored the need for her to go through post traumatic counselling and talk about the event as it impacted her parenting style of overprotecting her child and her guilt from the incident.

In trying to prove to their fellow colleagues that they value their jobs and take them seriously, some women ignore their instincts and work harder and longer in their corporate jobs. It is therefore not surprising that it did emerge as a theme that women were not seen to be taking their roles as seriously as they had done before having their child, however from listening to how much strain it placed on them and how hard they tried to manage these shifts, one would see that they valued their jobs and were trying to find the best solution for both worlds. The following quotes were taking from a session with Participant F.

> Participant F: *'If you had known me before I was pregnant, I'm the person here that arrives by quarter to six and I'm probably leaving at quarter to seven at night. I usually worked on a Saturday and Sunday because I loved what I did, not for any other reason.'*

The passion for their careers was noted across all women in the participation group.

> Participant F: *'This is, for me, very soul-fulfilling work. I don't see it as work. Every single thing I do comes from a deeper place. I can get lost in this world. That was where [my child] was this like, oh my goodness, I have*

*this responsibility and it becomes a real tug-of-war. I'm a better mother because I am doing soul-fulfilling work and a lot of it is related to him.'*

The role at work is not seen as just a job they fulfil but rather as an extension of who they are, while having a baby is also an important factor in their lives, which creates the feeling of a 'tug-of-war' when trying to balance both.

> Participant F: *'I had to put in very strict discipline measures for myself. I am not a structured human being. I am structured because I have to and because he forces me to be. I'm very creative and I'm very pie in the sky. I can lose time, it will disappear. And you can't lose time with a baby. So I've had to switch that part of my brain on a little bit and balance the creativity and that's been hard work.'*

The shift in the mother's routine and her readjustment based on the needs of the baby is also a common theme that emerged.

> Participant F: *'[My nanny], she's there by seven, quarter past seven, which means I can only get to work half past seven. Massive, I fought that inside me. I had inner turmoil for months because I never experienced, I've lost two hours of my day already. By the time people come in at eight o'clock I feel like I have conquered the world because I have been here since six o'clock. So my quiet and reflective time was being taken away, I felt. I felt, past tense. Then getting to work, then you are in the rush and you feel like you are catching up all the time. I hated it. I hated being feeling like I was rushed all the time. So now that's another emotional thing I had to deal with. I felt like I was on the back foot all the time. All the time. And then half past four is the latest that I wanted to be home which meant I had to leave at quarter to four. Again I felt like I was losing two hours of my day and then I had to like manage it.'*

A further theme was the sense of not being able to give their careers as much focus as prior to having the baby and the sense that they were 'missing out' at work due to the change in their work schedules to accommodate their babies.

> Participant F: *'It's just building blocks that have shifted, you haven't lost anything. So if I had to reframe, cos the emotional tug-of-war was like, oh my goodness I feel like I am losing career cos I only have so much to get done. In the meanwhile, I just have to sort of tick over cos all that's happened is for that four to six drive is him and then I can work afterwards so what is the problem? Then I realised that there's something called mother's exhaustion that nobody can explain to you and that even though your son goes to bed at six o'clock, you might as well get into bed with him at that point because there is a different type of energy that he requires and it is not a physical energy.'*

Taking on projects over their required workload and working well over the required time was no longer the norm as children were the top priority. The session also touched on the role of the partner and aside from one woman, who chose to have her child on her own, the theme of support from the partner was explored. Most of the women referred to their partners 'helping' where they could, as opposed to sharing the responsibilities of the child's routine as well as chores at home.

This was challenged in relation to each participant's need for control and perfection as well as their experiences with their parents during their childhood. The role of women as mothers and workers was a core theme that emerged. Women felt that they were given the maternity leave and had to now show up at work as they were afforded the time to adjust.

**Session two**

As the first session drew to a close, participants were tasked with defining an action plan that they would like to crystallise and work on for the remaining sessions. Session two started off with a check-in with each participant, a recap of themes from session one and a view of their action plan to support them as they work on their way forward.

**Role of the coach**

The coach supported the coaching process by drawing themes from the first session into session two. As trust and comfort in the process improved, participants opened up more during session two, allowing the coach to hold up a mirror to the participant to reflect on behavioural responses. The coach challenged assumptions and limitations of the participants in session one and used session two to support the participants as they recalibrated.

**Findings from session two**

Each participant utilised session one to debrief their current context and to then set goals for themselves to create a zone of comfort. In session two, the majority of the participants had acted on this with satisfactory results.

Participant A was struggling with an issue with her subordinate, which occurred while she was on maternity leave. Session one focussed on the context of the issue she had inherited as well as options to move forward. She closed off session one with an action plan and reported positive results in session two.

Participant C was very overwhelmed in session one. She was working tirelessly on a project and had managed to get it to a point of delivery, only to be allocated to another project late in the year that was poorly managed. This had broken her morale and she felt despondent about getting through a year's worth of work in a couple of months. The first session helped her to think through ways in which she could achieve success with the project whilst balancing the requirements of being a new mum. In session two, she had made remarkable progress and was ready to close off the year on a high.

Participant E was torn between being a stay-at-home mum and continuing to work long hours with help from her nanny. After working through her assumptions on what her manager may or may not allow, she requested reduced hours to cope with her stressful job and to be home at a reasonable time for her child. She was beaming in session two and advised that her manager had permitted the reduced hours.

The theme of multi-tasking between roles and role identity became more evident in session two. All of the women discussed the change in themselves, whether it was with work hours, commitment to deliverables or availability for friends and family. One participant summed up her understanding of the change in identity with a keen insight referring to the need for women to celebrate the evolved self rather than mourn the previous self.

**Session three**

The third and final session was split into two focal areas: Culmination of the coaching sessions and feedback from the participants on the value of the coaching process. The third session summarised for each participant their respective key themes and closed out on the action plan that they had set for themselves.

**Role of the coach**

The coach is an active participant in the coaching process as they walk the journey with their coachee (Passmore, 2007). The coach provides a more facilitative role by the third session providing the participant with feedback that is based on evidence that allows them to question their own decisions and actions.

**Findings from session three**

All the participants were eager for session three and had reported some positive growth on the action plans that they had set. This ranged from starting a new job, negotiating better work hours, rediscovering the love for blogging, finalising a daunting project, and dealing with issues with her subordinate.

It was encouraging to see each participant take charge of their lives and put forward means to ensure that they regained balance and a resolution for themselves.

> Participant C: *'I remember before, like I didn't know how to approach everyone, cos then I did try before but then everyone shut me out, and it was just… cos coming back from maternity everything was just, it was a just a proper, I don't know if it was a proper or whatever unarranged*

*restructuring and then again we were shortage of staff. So like you just have to jump wherever you can. And then it was difficult for me because then at that time I didn't understand why they did the restructuring, how it came about and what, what, like my role, what I'm supposed to do then. Then after this session then I was able to speak to everyone. And ja.'*

She then explained how her lessons from coaching were applied to the organisational context:

Participant C: '*What worked for me was to ask, to go into depth, to understand what people are currently doing and just to move with them whatever direction they're going to. So hopefully somewhere you will get lost but you get something that you truly like.'*

Participant C returned to a restructure and all the work she had done during her handover prior to going on maternity was reduced to nothing as she was handed a new project on her return which had a lot of errors that needed to be fixed within tight deadlines. She found value in talking about the issue during the coaching sessions, testing her assumptions and taking charge of challenging her manager and peers towards a better working model.

Participant D: *'I think you've covered the things, even the things that one, like I couldn't have thought about cos it isn't just not about how are you feeling but okay, now in terms of how are you feeling what is your plan. So it's about planning for this new role, you know. Because now when you go back to work after having a baby, it feels like a completely new role because now you're not the same person, you know. Stuff that I could never have thought of, I really cannot, I can't think of any ways to make that better. Because this process for me has been helpful.'*

Participant D was in the process of changing jobs and struggled with the fatigue of transitioning into the new job as well as dealing with the expectations of her child. The coaching session provided value for her to put a plan in place to help her manage these aspects.

**Feedback from participants**

Participants were asked for their feedback on the coaching model and process. The key questions and their overall responses are noted below:

**Did you find value from the coaching sessions?**

All of the participants found value from the session.

> Participant A: *'I think it was useful.'*
>
> Participant B: *'I think you've got a very good way of articulating your observations in a way that also helps me sort of connects the dots faster.'*
>
> Participant C: *'I remember before I didn't know how to approach everyone. After this session I was able to speak to everyone.'*
>
> Participant D: *'It's a platform where I can really say how I feel without stepping on anyone's toe. It's good to talk to someone, it's not always about the answers really, but it's about someone that can really say okay I hear you.'*
>
> Participant E: *'Thank you for helping me through the process even if it's just been asking questions… to challenge oneself, just because they're [line managers] saying that doesn't mean necessarily that they are gonna say no.'*
>
> Participant F: *'Thank you for this. This is awesome. I think you're sitting like on a gold mine here.'*

The feedback from each of the participants was very positive. One participant requested further sessions to ensure that her coaching journey continues.

**How many sessions should be offered as part of the coaching model?**

The general consensus amongst the participants were a minimum of three and a maximum of six sessions.

**When should the organisation offer transitional coaching to women that are about to take maternity leave?**

The responses to this question were very diverse:

Table 4: Participant responses on timing of the coaching sessions

| Participant A | Participant B | Participant C | Participant D | Participant E | Participant F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 months after returning to the organisation. | The initial chemistry session with a business coach should occur whilst pregnant. Session one should occur a week or two before coming back to work. | As soon as the woman is back from maternity leave. Within the first week that she is back at work. | A month after getting back to work. | Three to six months after returning to the organisation. | After conception and during the family planning period. |

**Should line managers be included in the coaching process?**

One participant said no, two said yes and the others suggested that line managers should be included only if they intend on taking the process seriously and will offer value to the coachee.

> Participant B: *'For my mind line managers should be very involved. If they actually want to help and support their employee, they should be, in my mind, they should be the one making sure that those things are scheduled, checking with them, supporting that person to make sure they are still going, when they're still back and then in the full swing of things. Cos ja I think having that support is really a psychological thing that would be immensely helpful.'*

The presence of the line manager in the coaching process can contribute to the psychological support of the new mother post maternity leave.

> Participant C: *Remember I can go to the line manager and speak whatever I want. However, they will be fine or they will be judgemental but I think if we bring them into the session they will be able to open up. Because remember when I go to them it's like me, I tell them one, two, three, one, two, three, they just answer, you don't know if it's an honest answer or if it's just to say I heard you just go. So I think if they come to the session they will understand more. Because then you will be able to ask some of the questions from them, they will be able to answer.'*

The theme of feeling judged by the line manager and colleagues is a common theme that emerged. The inclusion of a business coach could support the women express themselves to their teams in a non-judgemental setting.

**Summary of the findings**

The theme on the need for perfection was consolidated based on findings that the women expressed the need for control, strived for perfection in their roles as mothers and saw their partners as a support and not an equal in parenting of the child. The theme of striving for balance emerged through the women reporting that they juggled many priorities and had to multi-task across varying factors. The theme on sense of self emerged by the women's account on their shift in their sense of self (old and new), the guilt that they experienced as a result of missing out on work and home and the new role of motherhood that they had identify with. Table 5 below captures these themes.

Table 5: Summary of findings

| | |
|---|---|
| Control | Need for perfection |
| Striving for perfection | |
| Partner is a support and not an equal | |
| Multi-tasking (work, baby, home, husband, personal down time) | Striving for balance |
| Juggling priorities | |
| Mourning the loss of the old self | Sense of self |
| Embracing the evolved new self | |
| Guilt | |
| Role identity | |

This chapter provided a view of the key themes that emerged from the participant group based on the feedback from the coaching sessions. The study did not include a participant that did not find this process to be useful. The feedback from such a participant could provide constructive suggestions on ways to enhance transitional coaching for women returning to work post maternity leave. Chapter five will discuss these findings in relation to the propositions of this research study.

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the research findings in relation to the literature to contest or support the research findings. The chapter analyses each of the themes that emerged from the various data points. This analysis will culminate in discussion of the two propositions put forward in chapter two.

## 5.2 Discussion based on findings

The discussion of findings will be presented in the following order:

- Need for perfection: (control, striving for perfection and the view that the partner is a support and not an equal);
- Striving for balance: (multi-tasking: work, baby, home, husband, personal down time and juggling priorities);
- Sense of self: (mourning the loss of the old self, embracing the evolved new self, guilt and role identity).

**Need for perfection**

> Participant E: *'I print out a sheet and then I write what she must eat for breakfast, lunch and snacks and then I ask my nanny to say how many naps she had when she slept and all of that. And I have to do that, I have to write that out but then I get stressed about if I haven't done it and then I have to leave my nanny to use her own initiative and then it's not quite what I would've given her but she's happy and fine. So I guess I, I do then tend to stress unnecessarily, I would say by being so controlling.*

This theme of control, and in extreme cases perfection, was evident across most sessions. According to Stoeber and Damian (2016), there are two factors to consider in terms of perfectionism; perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns. Perfectionistic strivings refer to outstanding performance standards set for oneself whilst perfectionistic concerns refer to aspects of fear of making

mistakes or falling short in the evaluation between expectation and performance, which are based on negative perceptions of imperfect (Stoeber & Damian, 2016).

In all the participants, both factors were clearly noted. Women struggled between their own sense of perfection as well as the view that others would judge their actions as a working mother in both roles. Amongst working mothers, perfectionist concerns can lead to emotional exhaustion at work and a reduced satisfaction with their lives and themselves (Deuling & Burns, 2017).

Interestingly, in the same way that men may feel threatened by a female counterpart that earns more or satisfies the role of 'provider' (typically a role that men fulfil), women may also feel threatened by their male counterparts being more nurturing and a predominant caregiver (typically a role that women fulfil) (Allen *et al.*, 2016).

> Participant F: *'I came back in October that was five months later. Back to work when I felt myself at work was probably in January. It was about three months take away the holidays in between, it was about three months where I felt, I was mentally, the fog lifted, I was able to physically cope now, I wasn't getting tired as much. I wasn't distracted, I was in it. I was valuable, I felt productive. I was giving good conversation at my work, my delivery with my team. Everything started flowing.'*

Emotional exhaustion can lead to poor performance and can impact social and physical functioning (Stoeber & Damian, 2016). This can result in burnout and can spill into the relationship one has with their networks (Stoeber & Damian, 2016). New mothers often experience lack of sleep and erratic changes to their routine, which can lead to emotional exhaustion.

The respondents were stimulated in their current jobs and whilst there were deliverables that concerned them, they had the skills to solve these problems. In the findings, discussed in the previous chapter, participant F refers to her ability to get lost in her work. This concept is referred to as flow and occurs when one's abilities are met by the current task, which is challenging enough to feel stimulated and enhanced by an attainable goal in sight (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

As a new mother, the challenges experienced by these women changes as the new-born baby grows. The new mother is therefore constantly readjusting her skills to the needs of the child. As a result, she often experiences feelings of anxiety as the challenge exceeds her current skills (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This anxiety contributes to the new mothers need to measure up and feel perfect.

**Striving for balance**

> Participant F: *'I have noticed there's a movement that is I don't know. I don't know if single mums, cos I'm a single mum, if we're getting a lot of social exposure because single mums are starting to talk about it. So I am starting to hear, you know, you know the things that you say, like it's not very different to when you're married. So I go, okay, tell me. No, I mean I do everything for the baby, you know my husband doesn't do much. And then there's this competition that I find between me versus you. In my head I go, yes but you don't have the sole responsibility for this baby. You have a shared responsibility whether you physically do everything for your child, financially you've shared, emotionally you've shared. Those two are probably the biggest things that a mother carries.*

The participants noted that a huge stress factor for them was multi-tasking across many important priorities. The demands of running a house, bringing up a child, managing a career and nurturing relationships is indeed a juggling act for these first-time mums. Women are often required to fulfil these disparate roles with due diligence, whilst managing the required pressures of each (Balaji, 2014).

Most of the women indicated that they have flexible working hours. This meant that they could start later or leave work earlier. However, they continued to work later in the evenings when their children and chores were in order. Whilst this does provide availability for the women to be with their children, constant technology can also be a distraction rather than a liberating force (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). The flexible working hours could provide a false sense of balance for the working mums whilst contributing to their need for control.

The impact of strained work-life balance due to competing priorities can lead to physical, mental and emotional strain (Balaji, 2014). This is further impacted by the need for control and perfection, sense of guilt and the new mother's own measure of her success.

> Participant A: *'I think I'm just keep going, being busy, weekends are the only time we get to do errands and whatever for baby and for us and I've just become quite snappy when people, like family ask me to come over on the weekend. It's like I'm, I'm selfish now.'*

Amidst the various requirements expected of working mothers, some of them found ways to be selfish to allow them time to sort out errands and take time for their families.

**Sense of self**

As humans we categorise ourselves in comparison with other groups of people that share similarities with ourselves (in-group) and to those that are different to us (out-group) (Stets & Burke, 2000). The sense of self in terms of identity theory is categorised in terms of the fulfilment of the expectations of the role we hold and how we measure up in terms of performing in that role (Stets & Burke, 2000). The change in self from a pre-natal to a new mother has vast implications in terms of how the women now view their 'new' identities and as social beings, and how they begin to measure their performance in the role of mother.

> Participant E: *'I think it's just the guilt that obviously comes with being a mom, I think that is just a big thing, feeling guilty for, for leaving your child, even though they actually are perfectly happy and fine, you just feel like, I just feel like I need to be there to look after her or make sure she is, you know eating properly (laughs). I guess it's to try, I know it's silly but, to try and be the best for your child that you can be and it's sometimes hard if you're not with them. You don't know always what's happening. I think that's ja, which might link to being the perfectionist, which I generally am in my personality.'*

The theme of guilt resonated with all the participants and across coaching sessions. In exploring this theme, it was pertinent to also dive into cultural expectations and childhood roles of parental figures to understand the way in which the women interpreted guilt (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). Participants noted that they did not want to be seen as 'bad mothers' and based this on social expectations of their roles (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015).

> Participant E: *'So I guess for me to say then, please take her to the doctor, he [her husband] will then, but I guess it's just that also a part or feeling of missing out, so I want to actually be at the doctor appointment to hear what the doctor has to say. So I battle to then let my husband just go on his own, for example.'*

Guilt also manifested in terms of women feeling that they were missing out on the child's routine or next big step (Groysberg & Abrahams, 2014). Some felt that they wanted to be there to see their child grow instead of hearing of these milestones from the partner, nanny or caregiver.

> Participant D: *'I work in a very high pressure environment where we do have deadlines and if a client, if a deadline has to be met today at a certain time before you go home, that is, that is the reality. And I, I have left here after six because I needed to get something done. I do feel bad as someone who has a six month old waiting for her at home but I also, I mean, I also have another view that at the end of the day, I am trying to keep my job and what good is it to sometimes leave here at four and then to have the problems with clients tomorrow and then work problems and that kind of thing, when I have a young son to raise. So it depends on what perspective you look at it from, but at the end of the day we all need jobs, we need to be mummies and daddies and you know, but sometimes I really need to get some things done. And I've always been that kind of person from a work ethic perspective, always been one person who works late so I've really made some adjustments. I used to leave here half six, seven, that was standard every day and now I leave around four, five o'clock. Which means that half the time I leave stuff that's not done but its normal now (laughs). It's okay now, I will see it tomorrow.'*

The guilt was further experienced in feelings of inadequacy in roles at work and home (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015).

**Discussion based on session findings**

The coaching sessions provided the women with a sense of clarity and direction. As the women explored their narratives, they re-discovered old and new truths about themselves. The sessions provided a reflective space for each participant to challenge their paradigms and to set positive actions in place through the exploration of their narrative (Stelter, 2009). Reynolds (2011), further suggests that in moments of vulnerability, the reflective space provided by coaching urges participants to find ways to move forward.

The coaching process commenced during a vulnerable period for the women participants. As a new mother, they were dealing with new routines, lack of sleep, conflicting priorities, bodily changes and role assimilation. Business coaching was consequently instrumental for these women as it was focussed on their ability to manage and deal with these changes in the context of their work demands. It helped them construct paths for success in managing both roles.

**Reflections from the coach as the researcher**

The process of coaching shifts the coach as well because they are integral to the coaching journey. The non-verbal language resonated deeply with me. As the coach, I was highly aware of the participants' unspoken cues and attempted to support them with my pauses and nods as many of them divulged their deepest confessions of being a new working mother. Two of the participants burst into tears during the session and in reading their behaviour, whilst they apologised for breaking down, I gave them permission to let it out and to show emotion while doing so. It was refreshing to see their relief after the tears and in both cases, it pushed them towards a solution mode much faster as they had dealt with the emotion.

They often mirrored my body language and there was an ease with working with each participant. One participant did note that the session seemed selfish to her as she did all the talking and she knew nothing about me. She acknowledged that

she appreciated the deep listening as well as ‘the aha’ moments that the coaching offered her.

I also marvelled at the humour that the women presented. They were able to laugh as they reflected on the few months of being a new mum and returning to the world of work. It was this humour that helped connect us stronger as coach-participant, because in this was the ability to laugh and evolve. It was important that as the coach I had a set of coaching models, tools and techniques to draw from so to customise each session to each participant.

The role of the coach required an awareness of aspects that may have unresolved trauma thus requiring further counselling. This was seen in Participant E’s account of the stress causing her to go into early labour. She expressed the lasting impact this has had and the guilt that she still carries. I therefore advised that she attend counselling sessions to deal with the event and address these.

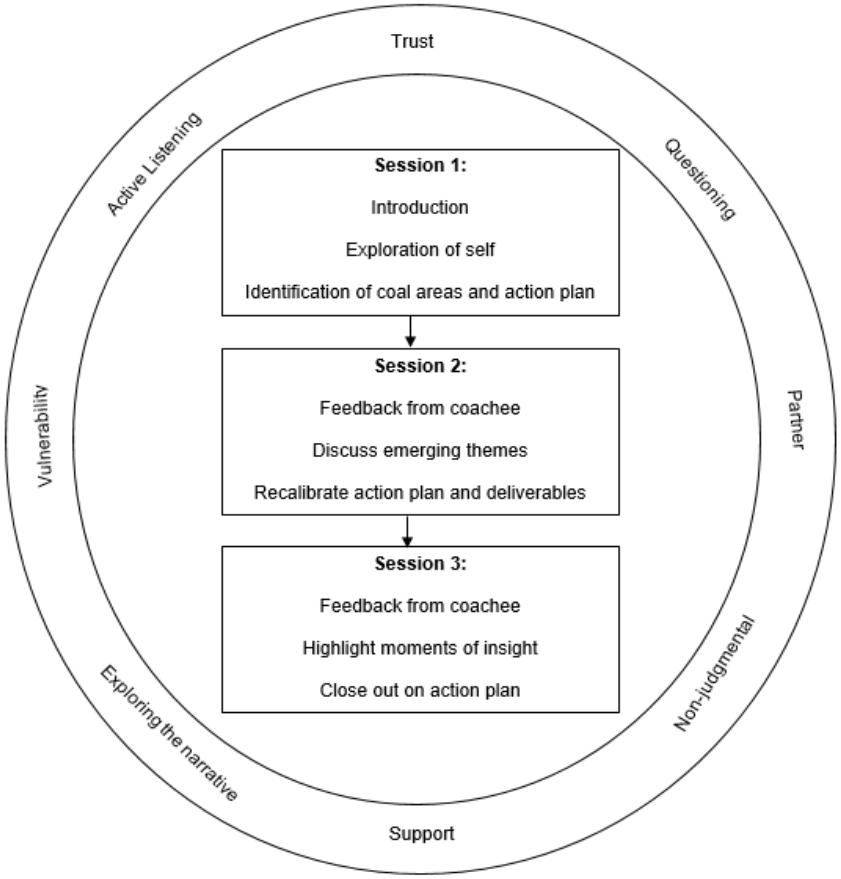



Figure 9: Key coaching characteristics based on the coaching model

## 5.3 Characteristics of the coaching relationship

Successful or effective coaching for the purposes of this research, refers to a supportive relationship of the coach to the participant to allow the first time mother to navigate through her varying priorities and find a solution to the factors impeding on a smooth transition at work post maternity leave.

The following characteristics were identified as key themes and contributed to the success of the coaching relationship based on feedback from the participants:

- Trust
- Active listening
- Questioning
- Vulnerability
- Partner
- Exploring the narrative
- Non-judgemental
- Support

### 5.3.1 *Trust*

Creating an environment of honesty, confidentiality and respect is key to commencing with the coaching relationship (Blackman, Hay, & Carter, 2015). The participants took time to warm up and began to share when trust was established.

> Participant D: *It's a platform where I say what I am really feeling without stepping on anyone's toes. It's good to talk to someone, it's not always about the answers really, in fact it's just about someone who can really say, 'Okay, I hear you.'*

The coaching environment centred around the participant feeling at ease to share their experiences.

> Participant E: *'You're very approachable so that was lovely and I guess how you are is what also made me open up.'*

The coach's style and manner contribute to creating a trusting relationship.

### 5.3.2 *Active listening*

Active listening has three main elements, which are: non-verbal cues to show an interest in the coachee's delivery, paraphrasing the coachee's response in a non-judgmental manner and using open questions to elicit deeper themes and insights (Kuhn, Bradbury, Nussbeck, & Bodenmann, 2018).

The researcher met with each of the participants face to face to establish rapport and in some cases used technology to connect for further sessions. The technology used was WhatsApp and included a video element so that the coach and participant could feed off each other's verbal and non-verbal cues. The use of technology is largely dependent on the needs and preferences of the coachee (King & Eaton, 1999). One participant was clear that face-to-face worked well for her whilst others were comfortable to use WhatsApp video calls to continue the coaching conversation.

### 5.3.3 *Questioning*

The questioning style was curious and gentle. The coach used the GROW model during the coaching sessions, an acronym that stands for Goal (coachee's goal), Reality (coachee's current reality), Options (options available for the coachee) and Way Forward (an action plan towards the way forward) (Brown & Grant, 2010). This process is not followed in an iterative manner and the coach used key questions to illicit thinking for each of the stages of the GROW process (Brown & Grant, 2010).

> Coach: '*So if, if you had to use the next three sessions to work on an action plan for something that you're struggling with or just to dig a big deeper into some concepts you've been thinking need some attention for you to help pull them apart, what would that be?*
>
> Participant D: *'Hmmm, I don't know. I don't know. I actually find that this has, I am tapping into certain things, I think that, that happened, that in the*

*back of my mind and maybe I'm not, I don't know how to phrase this. I think maybe for the first time, I'm actually talking to someone about this, sorry (begins to sob). I think it's normal, that you know, you have a baby, and you just need to get moving, you know you need to take each day as it comes and you don't get to sit with someone and say maybe this is how I'm feeling. Not that there's much that can be done but maybe just to voice it.'*

The questioning style opened up dialogue which in turn helped the participant find meaning in their thinking (Brown & Grant, 2010). Participant D first had to work through the emotion and as the session drew to a close, she concretised her action plan. The dialogue process allows the coachee to abandon the need for being right or find certainty and to explore alternate possibilities and new ways of seeing their world (Brown & Grant, 2010). The open and fluid questioning style allows the coach to meet the coachee wherever they are on their journey of self-exploration.

### 5.3.4 *Vulnerability*

An effective coaching relationship is an important factor for the coachee to achieve successful results (Leedham, 2004). The coaching relationship is co-created by the coach and coachee (Rogers, 2012). The skills of the coach are pivotal in providing the right response in the given situation. This is achieved by the coach's self-awareness and empathy (Passmore, 2007).

On one end of the spectrum, the coach is a container for the emotions of the coachee allowing them to feel vulnerable and holding the space for them (Rogers, 2012). One the other hand, the role of the coach is to provide the coachee with challenging questions so that they can critically question their own assumptions and interrogate their paradigms (Rogers, 2012).

### 5.3.5 *Partner*

Nancy Kline (1999), refers to the role of the thinking partner, which is a person that sits with someone as they think out loud through their many thoughts. The

partner holds the pauses and encourages the person to echo key themes through their thinking, allowing them to find moments of insight (Kline, 1999). The coach can be seen as holding a similar role with access to more resources and coaching techniques. The sole objective of the coach is to meet the needs of the coachee (Passmore, 2007). In the coaching relationship with the participants, the role of the coach was similar to that of a thinking partner.

### 5.3.6 *Exploring the narrative*

The women were asked to relive their handover at work, birth of their child, maternity period and transition back to work. Each experience carried emotion and each contained the elements of storytelling, namely a plot, sequencing, impacting factors and movement in relation to time (HaCohen, Amir, & Wiseman, 2018). These narratives provided the coach with a view of how they coped through the transition based on aspects of the story that they emphasised and the direction of the plot (HaCohen *et al.*, 2018). The narrative is pivotal in helping the coachee construct their realities and in so doing have moments of insight.

### 5.3.7 *Non-judgmental*

Within a personal and introspective process like coaching, verbal and non-verbal cues can lead to the coachee feeling judged. Creating a non-judgmental space and coaching relationship is a critical requirement from the coach. The coach needs to maintain a professional demeanour detaching themselves from the content whilst adapting their behaviour and responses to show empathy (Passmore, 2007).

> Participant D: *I've had these conversations with you and I have never had them in detail with anyone else. So I'm quite glad I had that out there. I'm not gonna feel judged at the end of the day.*

There are two elements to consider on the concept of judgement. The first element is that of the coachee judging themselves and the second is the coachee judging their future abilities like the goals they have set (Passmore, 2007). The

role of the coach is to move the coachee from a point of irrational judgement towards solution or goal focussed thought patterns (Passmore, 2007).

> Participant F: *'I think the real value is unlocking me in this space and allowing me to be me, with you. I know my personal thing. The people pleaser will come out, I need to talk, the social cues will have to come out, that person's gonna judge me. No matter how close you are to your sister, to your mother, there's judgement there, you know, and that's why coaching and psych sessions and therapies are so important cos it's non-judgemental. You [the coach] have no interest in judging me. It doesn't come from there right? You're interested in my health, in the best for me. You don't care about the other stuff, whereas family does because people come with their own ladders of inferences and their own structures of interpretation of the world.'*

The non-judgemental space is highlighted as a key factor in helping the coachee be themselves. This allows them to honestly reflect on their actions and behaviours, so that they can authentically address aspects that need to change and by so doing help themselves to move closer to their desired goals.

### 5.3.8 *Support*

According to (Sonesh *et al.*, 2015), a key attribute to shifting coachees, is the unconditional respect and appreciation offered from the coach. This support creates the container for the coachee to blossom. Once a supportive relationship is established, the coach is able to challenge the coachee in a constructive manner to facilitate deeper insight.

> Participant D: *'Nobody ever thinks about it, so like how are new mums feeling after going back, because everyone is expecting life to go on, but really nobody knows how one has to deal with juggling motherhood, and you know, still performing well at work, exhaustion, you know baby's needs and then everyone else's needs and then you just there trying to cope.'*

These characteristics of the coach were most valued by the participants. Further aspects like the coach's experience, other characteristics of the coach (e.g., self-management), the coaching contract, the environment and the process, also contribute to the success of the coaching relationship (Leedham, 2004) The coach should be aware of transference, projection or counter-transference by managing their thoughts and actions whilst maintaining a healthy coaching relationship (Boyatzis, 2002).

The coaching contract was discussed with each participant prior to the start of the first session, and was formally covered during session one. The coaching contract set the tone for confidentiality and outlined the roles and process going forward. The environment was a meeting room at the participants' offices, which were private and quiet, offering a conducive space to connect. Whatsapp video calls were also used which offered face to face connection once the coaching relationship was established.

## 5.4 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 1

Women that go on maternity leave and reintegrate into their workplace, are impacted personally.

### 5.4.1 *Gender stereotypes*

Maternity leave policies support the process of mother and child healing and bonding for the first few months of the new-born baby's life. However, women face gender stereotypes when taking maternity leave and are seen as relationship-oriented rather than achievement-oriented (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017). The choice of taking maternity leave places the mother in a predicament: Taking maternity leave makes her more family oriented and less career focussed, and not taking maternity leave makes her more career oriented and less family minded (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017).

Participant E: *'People do tend to look when you leave or I mean they haven't so much said it to me anymore but they'll be like, oh how was*

*your half day when you're going out and then laughing. But it's more, I think more being the looks like when you're leaving and then they'll look at the time and then look so back.'*

The participant group coached for this research study highlighted some of the work and personal stereotypes that they had faced. Participant E referred to the non-verbal behaviour, looks and comments she received from peers when she left work early, even though she had arrived early and worked a full day.

These aspects attest to the personal impact faced by women that reintegrate into the working world due to the gender stereotypes they face. In addition, the leave of absence requires women to readjust to projects and team requirements upon their return to their jobs (Lyness *et al.*, 1999).

### 5.4.2 *Balancing priorities*

As outlined above women experience pressure in trying to manage the new-born baby's needs, being absent from work and addressing household duties. The multi-tasking required to simultaneously manage all these factors can result in delays in response to situations as well as errors (Al-Hashimi, Zanto, & Gazzaley, 2015).

Participant D: '*Around half past six, I get home, I give him his bath and then I feed him and then he'll go to sleep at some point. Then sometimes I think in bed and I quickly sit in a tub of water. I hear him wake up then I have to quickly jump out (laughs) the water because, well, it is what it is. It has its moments. It really, really does get overwhelming.'*

New mothers feel overwhelmed juggling these aspects and from a neurological basis, multi-tasking creates bottlenecks in attention (Al-Hashimi *et al.*, 2015). This may explain why women decide to focus on one priority at a given time, often choosing their new-born baby over everything else. According to Becker (1985) and the allocation of energy model, new mothers may choose less intensive jobs as their new-born baby consumes so much of their energy. This contributes to

the stereotype that new mothers may not take their careers as seriously as other colleagues.

Children learn social and non-verbal cues from their parents as they develop their language (Reed, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2017). Children are also perceptive to disturbances to their natural flow of interaction between themselves and their caregivers (Reed *et al.*, 2017). Organisations that offer mothers flexible working hours do so with the expectation that they will work from home and follow up on deliverables allocated to them. This may interrupt the natural flow of child to mother interaction and could impact on the social cues they aim to create.

### 5.4.3 *Physical, hormonal, emotional, financial, psychological and social changes*

> Participant B: *'It definitely was spurred on by pregnancy and hormones. I found I got a lot, a lot overwhelmed me. So if I needed to get stuff done and there were lots of other levels on top of it like social, or housework or anything else, or keeping people happy it completely overwhelmed me.'*

She further explained her emotional outbursts.

> Participant B: *'Certain things will make me quite emotional and quite anxious over things that I knew wasn't, it didn't make sense, I knew I was being irrational and I attributed a lot of that to just being pregnant and hormones.'*

She also explained her inability to control these emotional episodes.

> Participant B: *'I knew I was being ridiculous and I just couldn't stop.'*

The health of the mother largely determines the health of the foetus (Chatterji & Markowitz, 2004). The gestation period produces physiological and hormonal changes on the expectant mother (Gennaro & Hennessy, 2003). The new

mother is further impacted by accommodating the new-born child from a financial, emotional and psychological perspective.

> Participant E: *'I do see the financial pressure of stopping work, that's huge.'*

According to a longitudinal research study of 1809 women through their pregnancy, and eight to twelve weeks postpartum, lack of finances as well as poor physical activity contributed to their poor health during pregnancy (Haas *et al.*, 2005).

> Participant B: *'When you're pregnant with your first child, everything's new and a lot of my support networks aren't in Jo'burg so I've got a very limited support network here.'*

Participant B explained the manifestation of stress during the postpartum period:

> Participation B: *'She [the doctor] did a biopsy and it was for hives, which is clearly stress and stress induced.'*

In "the postpartum period, lack of social support was the most consistent predictor of poor health outcomes" (Haas *et al.*, 2005, p. 48). The transitional coaching offered to women is provided during this postpartum period when women need support and a safe space to recalibrate.

### 5.4.4 *Summary of findings*

The impact on women when they go on maternity leave is experienced on varying levels from stereotypes on the basis of gender to the new balance required in juggling their priorities to the varying degree of change that they deal with (physical, hormonal, emotional, financial, psychological and social changes). Transitional coaching can support women with a safe space to air their concerns as well as discuss a plan to help them deal with their current situation.

## 5.5 Discussion pertaining to Proposition 2

Transitional coaching is a value-add to women to support them in reintegrating into the workplace post maternity leave.

### 5.5.1 *Effectiveness of coaching*

The effectiveness of coaching lies on a spectrum of value ranging from those that see this as highly valuable to those that question its validity (Briner, 2012). One of the reasons for questioning the value of coaching, is the lack of a standardised agreed upon regulation for the discipline (Briner, 2012). Another suggested reason is the need for more robust research in the field that proves the validity and credibility of coaching on the coachees (Briner, 2012; Schutte, 2019).

Business coaching draws from various practices like psychology, mentoring, counselling and training (Blackman *et al.*, 2015). The premise of coaching rests on the notion that the coachee has a problem to solve (Blackman *et al.*, 2015; Rogers, 2012) and the coachee is able to find a way to solve this (Rogers, 2012). The core aspects of business coaching are hinged on goal-orientation, self-reflection or self-awareness, contextual analysis (e.g. work, home, social settings), time limits (setting a time to achieving goals) and the impact of power and influence on relationships (Schutte, 2019).

According to a study by Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018), coaching can be ineffective if the coachee is undergoing extreme leadership derailment, which occurs when leaders fail to reach their leadership outputs and are demoted, fired, assigned to an unsatisfactory role, forced into early retirement, prosecuted or arrested (Inyang, 2013).

Alternatively, coaching can also be ineffective if the coachee has set goals that are not realistic and achievable or devotes little time to accomplishing them or has low pre-coaching motivation and these can impact negatively on their job performance (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018).

A willing coachee with realistic and achievable goals, and with the motivation to attain their desired results, is a crucial starting point to the coaching relationship. Self-efficacy and self-esteem are linked to personal validation of good performance on a task (Stets & Burke, 2000). The core of the self is derived from occupying a role and measuring oneself in relation to the expectations of the role (Stets & Burke, 2000). New mothers struggle with taking on the new identity of mother whilst categorising themselves in terms of the other roles they occupy.

Coaches should encourage a growth mind-set with their coachees where they encourage the belief that talents can be developed with personal effort and feedback from others (Dweck, 2016). Coaching can offer the space for a coachee to test their assumptions about themselves and their abilities fostering the growth mind-set.

> Participant F: *'You don't know what you don't know. I think most mums also these days are talkers and readers, so they find information but to put it into practice, that's where coaching helps cos someone keeps you accountable.'*

Effective coaching can support coachees to put into practice actionable steps that help them move towards their goals.

All coaches should undergo training aligned to agreed upon standards that cover the core aspects of criteria required to be an effective coach. As storytelling is a means for the coachee to explain to the coach their situational analysis, coaches should be trained to respond to fictional stories and suggest models and frameworks to support the characters (Eastman, 2016).

> Participant A: *'Because when you come back to work everything is so happy, how's the baby, everything is about the baby, everybody wants to know about your baby… now it's like nobody cares, work is work carry on.'*

Coaching is seen as effective for women post maternity leave as they may feel forgotten as they resume their roles at work.

> Participant E: *'I felt very blessed through this process, it's been wonderful, thank you.'*

The participants found value in the coaching and noted that the sessions were effective for each of them.

### 5.5.2 *Purpose of re-integration in an organisational setting*

> Participant F: *'It would be so cool if we had like an on-boarding centre, at any organisation, had like a walk-in centre and there was a maternity mums coming back where you dip in there first. Your IT gets sorted, your laptop gets sorted, then you back to your office. You know it's a catch place, if you wanna breast feed, pump, whatever, you go to the maternity centre, you come back afterwards. If you wanna have a nap cos you do that first month, you just wanna have like twenty minutes or even if it's three hours.*

On-boarding is the process by which new staff are socialised to the policies, procedures and culture of the organisation with the aim to accelerate the assimilation in the new environment (Klein, Polin, & Leigh Sutton, 2015). One of the key outcomes of on-boarding is to minimise the uncertainty and anxiety that the new recruit is experiencing (Klein *et al.*, 2015).

In the case of international assignments, successful reintegration back to the home country is facilitated by proper planning, dialogue on expectations and reintegration workshops (Pellegrini, Casalino, & Krause, 2016). These measures support the process of welcoming the assignee by ensuring that there is open communication allowing concerns to be managed proactively.

In both cases the aim is to foster a culture of care for employees and to ensure that positive experiences are encouraged. In the process of maternity leave,

often off-boarding and on-boarding support sessions do not take place in South African organisations, resulting in expectations and role clarification not being discussed with the women involved.

> Participant B: *'A lot of our internal systems don't speak to one another. So, you'll have the leave system, where you'll put your maternity leave in and your return date but HR won't actually necessarily have a line, a view of who's coming back each day, each week from maternity, only your line manager really knows that. So, there's a disconnect in terms of when do you have the different conversations with that mother. So for me, it would be about the expectant mom. So, you're pregnant, okay you've been informed, great, these are the workshops you can go to around just being pregnant, preparing yourself for leaving, having a strategy, having the right conversations, setting yourself up, making sure you feel, you feel confident enough to go and let work go, whatever, all that stuff, and then maybe even having that initial chemistry session when you're still pregnant because then you know exactly who you're gonna meet up with before you even come back.'*

There is a need for human resources to embed maternity policies and processes that are aimed at assisting the expectant mother prior to her going on maternity leave. The line manager is responsible in ensuring the pregnant staff member's administrative aspects are sorted prior to her going on maternity leave and support is offered upon her return to work, post maternity leave.

Reintegration is an important step for organisations to ensure talent is retained and staff feel a part of the bigger organisational purpose. Transitional coaching could therefore aid the process of reintegration supporting as a value-add for women post maternity leave.

### 5.5.3 *Summary of findings*

Transitional coaching enables new mothers with the space to reflect and the support to help them set and achieve goals to aid their reintegration back to work. Whilst people differ on the value that coaching offers, when coaching is facilitated

with a coachee that sets achievable goals and partners well with the coach, value can be derived. Transitional coaching is therefore a value-add to help new mothers reintegrate into the world of work.

The first step towards establishing a coaching relationship is a willing coachee (Rosha & Lace, 2018). The inclusion of transitional coaching for new mothers post maternity leave as part of a wellness campaign in an organisation, can add value, however it is important that this is offered as an optional offering as the coachee should decide whether they would like to be a part of this process.

As there is no generic standard to measure coaching in a systemic way, and it is often difficult to ascertain the return on investment and direct value derived from coaching (Rosha & Lace, 2018). Including an evaluation dimension to the coaching relationship from the perspective of coach, coachee and organisation is critical in understanding whether the coaching has been effective (Kahn, 2011).

Coaching is a process in which both coach and coachee need to create a trust relationship before commencing. The 'chemistry session', the first session with the coachee, is a critical requirement to ensure that there is a match between coach and coachee. This session is a quick connect session between coach and coachee in which they assess each other's personality, style and approach (Cilliers & Terblanche, 2010). These however do not guarantee that coaching will work for all coachees and as with most developmental offerings, there is no single solution that will work for everyone (Leonard-Cross, 2010).

Internal coaching has also grown as a means to contain costs of bringing in a network of external coaches (Leonard-Cross, 2010). The benefit of an external coach is that they are not part of the internal dynamics and being removed allows them to be seen as more trustworthy (King & Eaton, 1999). Organisations are tasked with deciding on a model that works best for their staff. A trained professional business coach, whether provided as an internal resource or by an external provider, should adhere to the ethical standards required to ensure that they conduct themselves in line with the coaching needs of their clients (Leonard-Cross, 2010).

Transformative learning occurs when one examines and critically thinks about one's existing frames of reference (current views) in order to assess the assumptions one carries (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006). In doing so one creates a heightened understanding of one's views and alternate patterns of thinking (Dirkx *et al.*, 2006). Transformative learning may include objective or subjective reframing which are task or self-oriented respectively (Dirkx *et al.*, 2006). In the case of self-oriented redefinition, the coach can support the coachee as they challenge their subjective frames of reference and find new meaning.

Transformative learning is key to the transitional coaching model and takes place on a level of self-analysis in the coachee's context of personal and professional role requirements. Argyris (1977) refers to this in terms of single and double loop learning. When the female staff member follows the rules and policies of the organisation when taking maternity leave and fulfils the role of mother and worker, then this is single loop learning (Argyris, 1977). When the female staff member questions the effectiveness of the maternity policies as well as the support offered in terms of her needs when returning to work post maternity leave, this is referred to as double loop learning (Argyris, 1977). Transitional coaching incorporating double loop learning will create moments of insight for the coachee, which encourages them to follow through with goals that serve them well.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the integration between literature and the research findings from this report. These support that women are personally impacted by maternity leave and transitional coaching is a value-add to help them reintegrate into their jobs post maternity leave. Chapter six provides the conclusions of the research objectives set out in chapter two as well as recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

The chapter addresses each of the research questions from chapter one by integrating the findings from the propositions with research on this topic. Recommendations for coaches, women returning to work post maternity, organisations, the media and line managers will be offered. The chapter ends with suggestions on further areas for research.

The literature notes the importance of women in the workforce, the integration between the progression of their careers with the timing of childbirth and the impact that this has on their personal and professional lives.

## 6.2 Explore the perceived personal impact of maternity leave on first time mothers in the business context

Organisational cultures are typically set up to reward male values of detachment from emotion in getting a task done and a distinction between family and work priorities (Lyness *et al.*, 1999). Staff that work longer hours may be seen as more available to take on tasks. Performance metrics and recognition of talent follows this philosophy resulting in women that take maternity leave having to work harder to make up for absences in their career.

Women that return to work post maternity leave feel guilty for the absence from work as well as for leaving their new-born baby in the care of someone else. Mothers that have flexible work hours have to manage technological invasions in their home life to make up for time away from the office (Reed *et al.*, 2017). This flexibility can also contribute to the guilt experienced as new mothers do not want to burden their teams and are already seen to have special privileges (North, 2016). Most companies do not offer onsite childcare facilities and place motherhood in the domestic realm outside of the organisation, creating the message that women that need support for motherhood duties are not part of the responsibilities of the organisation (North, 2016).

Pregnancy can be regarded as a time when expectant mothers have low emotional wellbeing and higher stress (McLeish & Redshaw, 2019). The participants noted the following aspects that impacted them personally in the business context:

- Financial impact: Participant B noted the financial impact of her husband being retrenched and having to renovate their house before the arrival of the baby.
- Physical exhaustion: Participant F noted the concept of 'mother's exhaustion' which is experienced when mothers receive physical exhaustion from managing various aspects of work, home and their baby's needs.
- Emotional exhaustion: Participant D noted that she was barely holding on and her emotional exhaustion led her to tears during the coaching session.
- Change in roles: Participant C was allocated to a new project upon her return after maternity leave and felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of what was expected of her.
- Hormonal changes: Participant B noted the hormonal fluctuations she experienced as a result of the pregnancy resulting in her feeling irrational when dealing with tasks.

The new mothers in this participation group were impacted personally during their maternity leave.

## 6.3 Explore the expectations of women post maternity leave as they reintegrate into the organisation

Female leaders contribute to the diversity of companies and this encourages idea generation, better communication and debate as well as creates a pipeline for junior female staff to aspire to leadership roles (Singh, Terjesen, & Vinnicombe, 2008). The inclusion of laws requiring more diversity at board and management levels have supported the inclusion of more women in senior roles.

Whist women face stereotypes with absence from work and shift in priorities when taking and returning from maternity leave (Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017), they

are also judged for their verbal and non-verbal language in the workplace much harsher than men (Allen *et al.*, 2016). Women that display more assertive behaviours are seen as displaying male specific characteristics however when men display these characteristics they are seen as motivated leaders (Allen *et al*., 2016). The expectation is that women will show more warm and caring characteristics, yet women that apologise too often and in the wrong contexts may appear to be unfit for leadership positions, as this may undermine their positional power (Allen *et al*., 2016).

The women in the research group noted that their line managers were supportive post maternity leave and afforded them flexible working hours to help them settle in. The organisation however, did not have practices in place to support women during this reintegration into the workplace. One woman spoke about a colleague having to express breast milk in an office storage cupboard and another referred to the expectation that she had her required maternity leave and upon her return, she should meet her required deliverables.

According to Ruderman and Ohlott (2005), women are likely to respond to a difficult situation by seeking social contact. A probable explanation for this is that girls are brought up to ask for help whilst boys are encouraged to solve problems on their own (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). Understanding the social pressures and rewarded behaviours offered to young boys and girls creates a better understanding of social roles when they are adults.

The expectation of social contact and support during a difficult time was expressed by all the women in the participation group. Participant D noted the constant feeling that she had in owning each role, without having personal time for her to release her stress. Participant E also explained her constant tussle between expectations at home and at work pushing her to work less hours to accommodate her priorities. Transitional coaching is a suggested option for these new mothers as the coach provides the role of support during this period.

## 6.4 Explore how business coaching can support women as they return to the organisation post maternity leave as first time mothers

The aim of business coaching is to support the first time mothers' transition and blend the role of new mother with the existing role of career woman. The role of a business coach is to understand the organisational context of their coachee. In the case of coaching new mothers, business coaches need to be aware of the traditional gender values of the organisation and the weighting of these in terms of skills and competencies (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). The participants in this study discussed the value that their organisations placed on long hours and high personal achievement. Women, in general, are motivated by a cooperative and team oriented environment (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). Coaching within an understanding of this context affords the coachee the opportunity to set themselves up for success.

Each of the participants in this study provided positive feedback on their experiences of the transitional coaching offered. Social support in the postpartum period is deemed as a contributing factor to the health of the mother (Haas *et al.*, 2005). Whilst the new mothers in this participation group noted the support structures that they had in place, each of them required the coaching space to help them discuss their feelings as well as set an action plan in place to manage relationships, priorities and deliverables.

However, business coaching can be an expensive offering for every new mother to attend. In cases where the organisation is not willing to pay for business coaching, it may be too costly for new mothers to pay for this on their own especially when new-born babies and medical expenses already impact new mothers financially. The new mother may also struggle to find the time for the coaching session given the demands on her from a work and family perspective. Business coaches that provide transitional coaching will need to offer flexible and cost effective models for new mothers to accommodate their financial and time constraints.

Group coaching is a process in which the coach manages rapport and dynamics at a group level to work with the coachees in achieving their goals (Brown & Grant, 2010). There are many benefits to group coaching, including greater accountability, increased commitment, enhanced communication skills, greater emotional intelligence, improved organisational cohesion and group trust (Brown & Grant, 2010). This could be explored as a cost effective alternative provided new mothers feel safe in a larger group to explore their narratives.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The study notes that new mothers are impacted financially, physically, emotionally, at an organisational level and hormonally as per the findings from the participation group. The value and benefit of transitional coaching as a support mechanism to new mothers was highlighted by all participants. Organisations in South Africa are lacking with regards to practices that support women post maternity leave, whilst some organisations, like law and audit firms abroad, seem to have maternity processes in place.

The key characteristics of a transitional coach as well as a proposed coaching model, for the purposes of supporting new mothers post maternity leave as they reintegrate into the world of work, was suggested as an area of specialisation with the field of business coaching.

## 6.6 Recommendations

### 6.6.1 *Organisations*

It is recommended that organisations encourage promotional and talent metrics whilst considering the impact of maternity leave, to encourage women to be well considered in all fields (Allen *et al.*, 2016). Networking and social activities should take place in a setting and manner that opens up the playing field to both genders allowing women to participate (Allen *et al.,* 2016).

Organisations should also create more flexibility for men and women and allow them to contribute jointly to managing work and home needs (Allen *et al.*, 2016). Interventions aimed at supporting women reintegrating into the workplace post maternity leave, need to be tested and evaluated to ensure that it evolves as the needs of employees change (Buckles, 2019).

Organisations need to encourage proactive measures to support women as they embark and return from maternity leave. Often human resource processes and systems are siloed creating disjointed data on maternity statistics making it difficult for this to be managed proactively.

### 6.6.2 *Line managers*

It is suggested that the well-being of a staff member has an impact on their performance at work as well as their overall employee engagement (Rampersad, 2008). Line managers are integral to the experiences of their direct teams. The women from the participation group noted that they received positive experiences from their line managers, which created a positive work environment during their transition. Line managers should be aware of the various factors impacting their female staff members post maternity leave and provide the support needed.

### 6.6.3 *Business coaches*

It is important for business coaches to test stereotypes, prejudices and assumptions based on the contextual analysis of women in relation to her role at home and at work (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). Self-awareness and self-reflection are important traits to ensure that the coach does not make assumptions and is cognisant of their responses to the emerging themes from the coachee (Boyatzis, 2002).

Business coaches also need to understand that the way in which women process information is different to men based on the physiology of their brains (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). Women differ in their communication styles, development requirements and relational connection to others (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2005). These aspects impact the way in which women establish and maintain

relationships, and as first time mothers, it will contribute to the anxiety that they experience when managing a change in priorities.

Business coaches also need to be aware of the other factors, for example hormonal changes, emotional exhaustion, lack of sleep and physiological changes that can impact on the coaching process. Affording these new mothers with the safe space to have moments of vulnerability is important to the success of the session.

### 6.6.4 *The media*

The media (movies, advertisements, books) often depict gendered roles based on societal expectations. These are generalised and popularised, setting norms for accepted behaviour and practices. Women are often portrayed as caregivers or having to manage work, children and home duties.

The media should reframe the way in which stereotypes are portrayed for men and women in the workplace and move towards creating new imaging around accepted practices for women managing children and work as well as dual parental responsibilities (Allen *et al.*, 2016). The inclusion of a more diverse and flexible parenting approach that showcases both men and women as dually responsible for raising children and managing careers will infiltrate into the thinking of society.

It is recommended that research studies like this one are published in journals that target optimising the organisational culture and people development agenda. The findings will be available to print, online and television channels encouraging them to challenge the portrayal of working mothers.

### 6.6.5 *New mothers in the world of work*

New mothers are encouraged to seek business coaching that specifically addresses the changes that they are going through with the aim of equipping them with the skills to manage the transitional period. New mothers often put their needs last and this frequently results in detrimental effects for themselves and by

extension, their families. Coaching is a healthy way for them to manage and work through their difficulties.

## 6.7 Suggestions for further research

This research report aimed to contribute to exploring the value of transitional coaching for first time mothers as they reintegrated into the workplace, post maternity leave. A phenomenological study that explores the full experience of the new mother tracking the pre, during and post maternity experiences, in the context of transitioning to the workplace, will offer valuable insight.

The value of transitional coaching to mothers who have had more than one child is a recommended further area of research. This research can contribute to the holistic value add of transitional coaching to all mothers when they return to work post maternity. It can also explore the different level of support needed across the pregnancies.

In this research group, one woman had a child outside of a relationship by exploring an alternate solution to having a baby on her own. In this instance, the mother is the sole caregiver for the child and has set up the necessary support system to nurture this child. While women are impacted personally during and post maternity leave, more and more women are choosing to have children on their own. With the advancements in medical science, there are safe and affordable options for women to explore.

According to Statistics South Africa, 47% of children between the ages of 0-6 years old were raised in female headed households (Stats SA, 2018). Whilst not all these women would have had the children via medical inseminations, it is noteworthy that almost half of the children in South Africa are raised in female headed homes. This is a further area recommended for research especially with a view on how best to support single mothers.

I am the researcher who is trained as a coach and I am a woman who has experienced maternity leave as a first time mother. As business coaches, the aim of the coach is to control the coaching process whilst the coachee offers the

content for the coaching session (Rogers, 2012). However, during the phase of building rapport, the coachees identified with the coach as we had both experienced the difficulties of the transition post maternity leave with our first born.

It is recommended that further research explores the impact of gender when coaching women transitioning to their roles at work post maternity leave. Another potential area of future research is on the value of the coaching by female coaches that have not had children.

The impact of cultural gender norms and its influence on maternal roles at work and home is a further area for research. This research report included a diverse cultural participation group of new mothers. During the coaching sessions, some of the cultural expectations the women faced was discussed, however a larger participation group is required for these factors to scrutinised.

The research explored the experiences of mothers during the birth of their new-born baby. The role of their respective partners and their experiences is an area for future research. An analysis into the value of group coaching or a peer network of new mothers supported by a business coach is a future area of study.

A doula is a non-medical practitioner appointed as an emotional support mechanism by pregnant women for the period of their pregnancy and into childbirth (Sugao, Yasumoto, & Shapkina, 2018). The doula provides the expectant mother with a safe space to voice their concerns and feelings of anxiety providing them with psychosocial support, a much needed requirement during this transition period (McLeish & Redshaw, 2019). The researcher recommends further research based on the doula support framework applied in the context of business coaching. A further area of study will be equipping doulas with business coaching skills to test the effectiveness of doulas as business coaches and the evolution of their roles as support to the expectant and new mother.

# APPENDIX A – Email to participants

Dear….

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of my research study.

The research is aimed at mothers (preferably first time), in a management role (junior manager to exec level) that have a child who is less than 2 years of age and have returned to work after maternity leave. The purpose of the study is to explore whether coaching can add value to you as a mum as you reintegrate into the world of work post maternity leave.

Please complete the attached questionnaire, which will help me acquaint myself with you prior to our first session. Kindly note that participant information will be treated with **confidentiality and anonymity**.

Once I receive the completed questionnaire from you, I will set up 3 free coaching sessions with you to explore your current context as well as create a framing for the way forward.

As part of the study, I will need to record and transcribe all sessions thus face to face will be ideal for the coaching sessions. However, we can explore Skype sessions following our first meeting.

I appreciate your time and contribution to this study and will gladly share the findings with you on completion.

Should you know of other interested participants that meet the criteria for the study, please do let me know.

Should you have any questions, please email me or contact me on 076 971 6975.
Kind regards
Sarika

# APPENDIX B – Pre-interview guide

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to take part in this research exercise.

The research is being completed as part of my requirements to complete a Masters in Management for Business and Executive Coaching degree at Wits Business School.

The research aims to explore the transitional experience of women as they return to work post maternity leave. Please complete the **questions that follow**, which aims to provide me with an overall view of you as a participant.

I will then connect with you to set up 3 coaching sessions which will be a conversational in nature, with a focus on your current context as well as your plans for the way forward.

Your feedback together with data from the coaching process will contribute to my understanding of key contributors to coaching women post maternity leave.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained with each interviewee/participant, however findings and trends will be published.

Regards,

Sarika Roy

076 971 6975

Sarika.r.roy@gmail.com

Full name:

_____

Age:

_____

Race:

_____

Current job title:

_____

Management level (e.g. junior manager, executive, etc.):

_____

Current company and length of time at this company:

_____

Number of years working experience (across your full career):

_____

Age of your child:

_____

What support did you receive from your company when you returned to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

What support did you receive from your line manager when you returned to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

What support did you receive from your team when you returned to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

What was your greatest challenge at work when you returned to your organisation after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

What was your greatest challenge at home when you returned to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

What was your greatest challenge personally when you returned to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

Are there any other challenges you have experienced upon returning to work after maternity leave?

_____

_____

_____

*Thank you for your honesty, we will explore your experiences further during the coaching sessions.*

# APPENDIX C – Participation agreement form

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your time and for agreeing to take part in this research exercise.

The research is being completed as part of my requirements to complete a Masters in Management for Business and Executive Coaching degree at Wits Business School.

The research aims to explore the transitional experience of women as they return to work post maternity leave. As part of the study, I will provide 3 coaching sessions which will be a conversational in nature, with a focus on your current context as well as your plans for the way forward.

Your feedback together with data from the coaching process will contribute to my understanding of key contributors to coaching women post maternity leave.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained with each interviewee/participant, however findings and trends will be published.

Regards,

*Sarika Roy*

**076 971 6975**

Sarika.r.roy@gmail.com

I, _____

hereby give permission to Sarika Roy to coach me as part of her research study. I acknowledge that my responses will be recorded and transcribed however anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained.

Date: _____

# APPENDIX D – CLOSE-OUT FEEDBACK

As part of this research report, I would like to capture your feedback as a coachee as you have completed your three sessions.

Kindly provide your views on the following:

1. Did you find value from the coaching sessions?
2. How many sessions should be offered as part of the coaching model?
3. When should the organisation offer transitional coaching to women that are about to take maternity leave?
4. Should line managers be included in the coaching process?

# APPENDIX E – ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

Protocol number: **WBS/BE873727/983**

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