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Business executive coaching and female leaders' authenticity

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Business executive coaching and female leaders' authenticity

A research report submitted by

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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 and Executive Coaching

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Wits Business School, Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

This research was inspired by observations on how female leaders in corporate organisations struggle to remain authentic, as they endeavour to navigate and succeed in these male-dominated corporate organisations. Authenticity is referred to as the ability of an individual to firstly be aware of them self and, secondly, always act in a way that is congruent with their core values.

The aim of this research was therefore to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity in corporate South Africa.

Qualitative research was used in this study, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 female leaders from different industries who had been coached. The findings were derived using thematic analysis.

The key findings corroborated previous studies on the challenges and barriers that female leaders continue to face in corporate that hinder their success as leaders and prevent them from consistently showing up authentically. Challenges such as the unfair sub-culture that permeates in corporate organisations, lack of support structure for female leaders and gender stereotyping continue to stand in the way of the development of female leaders.

Specifically, findings on executive coaching and enhancement of authenticity of female leaders revealed that executive coaching indeed is an effective tool that not only assists these leaders in heightening their self-awareness in their areas of development, but also helps them in being rooted to the core values and being authentic to establish their leadership presence in their respective organisations.

With the current realities of the challenges and barriers that female leaders face in corporate organisations, transformational changes need to take place. It is recommended that the Human Capital function and top executives accentuate business executive coaching and create safe environments for perpetual engagements through deep and nonconventional female-centred dialogues; led by both males and females, so as to adequately and sustainably address the ungoverned corporate cultures.

KEY WORDS

Executive Coaching

Authenticity

Female leaders

Leadership

Leadership development

DECLARATION

I, Thato Daphney Belang, 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 and 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 …… 2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my late parents, who always allowed me to my authentic self, even though they didn't understand my "different" self. My father played a significant role in planting in me, the seed for the value of education. There were moments where I felt discouraged and struggled to carry on during this journey, but both my parents' spirits kept me going. I will forever be grateful for your love, for allowing me to be me, and Mama for nurturing me in a caring and warm way that you did. Ke a leboga Bakgatla!

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We still think of a powerful man as a born leader and a powerful woman as an anomaly. - Margaret Atwood

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore the specific challenges and barriers that female leaders in South African corporates face in corporate organisations, and furthermore, to explore how executive coaching can develop their authenticity as female leaders.

1.2 Context of the study

This study was not focused specifically on female leaders who were undergoing or had experienced executive coaching specifically to enhance their authenticity, however it sought to explore how coaching for leadership development could develop their authenticity.

Authenticity can be regarded as a key component of authentic leadership; which refers to becoming aware of the true self (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005). Authentic leaders are defined as “those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character” (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004, p. 3). However, in this study, it is the authenticity of female leaders that was explored. This was in the context of female leaders living out their true selves in corporate organisations – despite the challenges and barriers that they may be facing, whilst being successful and influential leaders. Wulffers (2017, p. 13) defines authenticity as “the degree to which we are true to ourselves, despite external pressures, bearing in mind that we are in a material world where were encounter external forces and influences that might be very different from our own, our beliefs and values”. In their article, Chan, Hannah, and Gardner (2005), make reference to the philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980), who described

authenticity as being more than a feeling but fundamentally has to do with being one's true self.

Catalyst, an organisation that conducts research and provides practical tools, and proven solutions to accelerate and advance women into leadership, postulates that women have generally been facing several barriers to economic participation in the global community and this is increasingly being challenged over the years, (Catalyst, 2018b). Despite all the efforts by both government and the private sector to achieve gender transformation, there is still a notable underrepresentation of women in senior positions (Thornton, 2018). Globally, the percentage of women in the workplace is declining (Catalyst, 2018b). The whole, "think manager - think male" narrative has been part of the problem for many years, and to some extent is still is today (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017). It is a well-known phenomenon that is commonly referred to as the "boys club" inhibit most women leaders to feel secure and confident in their roles as leaders in organisations (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Moreover, with the history of men being predominantly in leadership roles, their "leadership behaviours" are seen as exemplary to women (Cook & Glass, 2014). As such, women then follow in these footsteps in a quest to be recognised and acknowledged as equally competent and effective leaders. This is consistent with the study by Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2016) which explains the *queen bee* phenomenon which refers to women leaders who adjust to the masculine culture in executive positions and in the process even alienate other women who are junior to them and therefore hinder them from advancing their careers.

According to Catalyst (2018b), the latest statistics globally show that women's work force participation rate is 48.5%; a decline from 51.4% in 1990. When looking at leadership specifically, women account only for 24% of senior roles globally, making women representation at senior roles a quarter of the total group (Catalyst, 2018b). Although the statistics on women representation at senior roles may be showing slow progress, in 2018, 75% of businesses globally have at least one woman in senior management; an improvement of 11% from 2017 (Catalyst, 2018a). Many reasons could be attributed to these statistics such as the gender

stereotype to leadership (Cuadrado, Garcia-Ael, & Molero, 2015). The same authors describe two types of these stereotypes; the first one being the incongruent feminine qualities linked to women and the masculine qualities that are supposedly required to be a successful leader. According to Cuadrado et al. (2015), the second stereotype relate to the belief about the desirable characteristics between males and females. Because of these stereotypes and others that may exist, women's successes are often disregarded and denied (Heilman, 2001). As such, the statistics cited above reflect the undesirable representation of women leaders that exists in the workplace across the globe. Figure 1 illustrates a comparison of proportion of women in senior roles globally between the year 2017 and 2018 respectively.

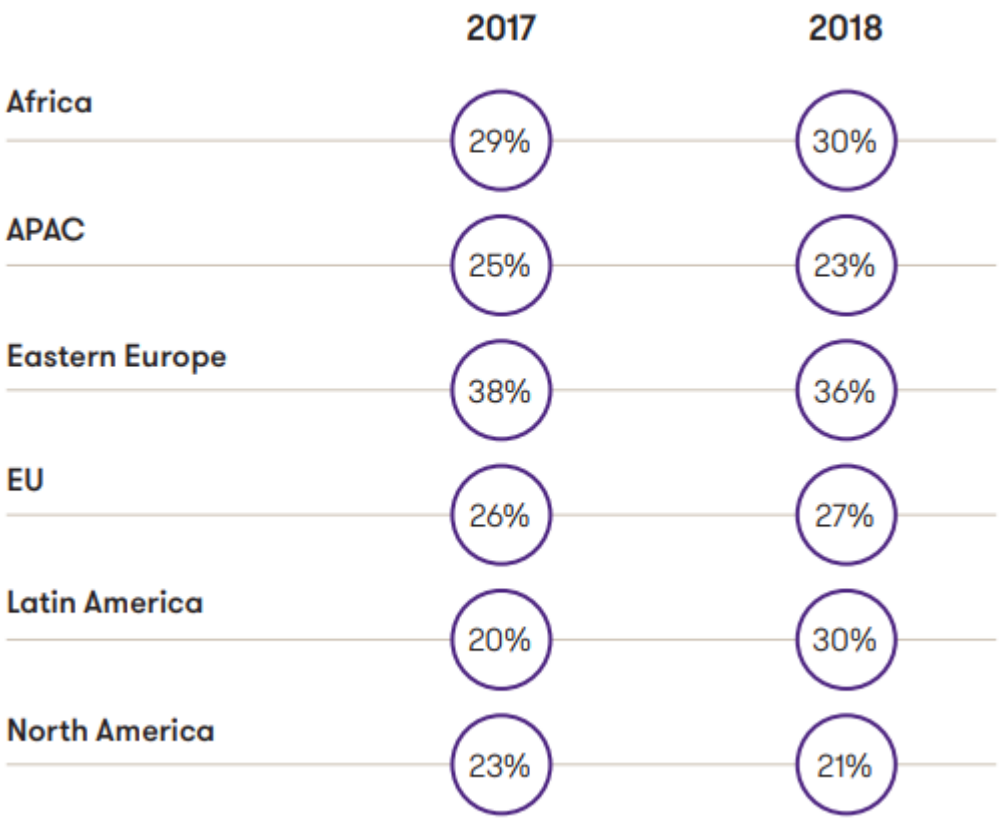

Figure 1: Proportion of senior roles held by women in various continents and sub-continental territories (Thornton, 2018).

Figure 1 shows a comparison between 2017 and 2018 on the proportion of senior roles held by women globally. In comparison with other continents, Africa shows a slight positive shift albeit not nearly enough women in the leadership positions. The same study revealed that 29% of senior roles are held by women and 18% of businesses have no women in senior roles in Africa (Thornton, 2018).

In South Africa, among other societal issues such as the patriarchal culture predominant in many African countries, the challenge of unequal society can be linked to the apartheid era and the consequences thereof (Sherer, 2000). The laws and regulations of apartheid had unfair discrimination of women embedded in them (Republic of South Africa, 17th CEE Annual Report, 2017). In 1994, South Africa became democratic, and there was a commitment from the incoming government to gender equality and women empowerment, among other things. Even so, attempts to redress some of the past issues resulted in more focus on racial inequalities and not so much on the gender imbalances (Mathur-Helm, 2005). This may infer that while policies have been drafted and implemented by both the government and many of the corporates in the private sector, gender equity challenges in leadership positions are still not being effectively addressed and therefore women are still being overlooked for leadership positions.

The latest key findings of the Business Women's Association of South Africa (BWASA) women in leadership report reveal that women comprise 51% of the total population but only 44.3% women are in the workforce of which the majority are at the lower levels of the organisation (Businesswomen's Association of South Africa, 2017). This is despite the government's effort to combat this through the policies and legislative framework, setting out gender equality as a founding principle. The Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill calls for 50% representation in decision-making positions. The following is the excerpt from the Bill:

"To give effect to section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, insofar as the empowerment of women and gender equality is concerned; to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of women; to align all aspects of laws and implementation of laws relating to women empowerment, and the appointment and representation of women in decision-making positions

and structures; and to provide for matters connected therewith" (Commision for Gender Enquiry, 2013, p. 1)

According to the Gender Report, there are still some notable challenges in attaining gender equality in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2017). In this report, the slow pace of achieving gender equality can be linked to the deeply entrenched patriarchal system and the non-implementation of the policies and legislative frameworks. The *glass ceiling* phenomenon is a terminology used to describe the negative impact on the career progression of women in the workplace (Saleem, Rafiq, & Yusaf, 2017). It can therefore be concluded that the *glass ceiling* (the unseen barriers) problem is indeed a reality for most women in the corporate world. According to Mathur-Helm (2006), extended working hours culture and demanding requirements are some of the barriers that prevent women from succeeding as leaders in the private sector in South Africa as they often have to manage many responsibilities in their households as well.

1.3 Research problem

Women still experience numerous challenges as leaders in corporates. These challenges include issues such as not thriving as leaders, the leadership development process not being suitable for their unique and inherent qualities, and the pressure of having to adapt to the male-dominated leadership standards. Studies have suggested that diversity in the leadership structure yield many benefits which include - quality decision making, creativity and innovation (Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003; Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2016; Kakabadse et al., 2015). These suggestions warrant a further probe in understanding the effectiveness of coaching for female leaders, and possible positive effect on their authenticity.

According to the research conducted by Catalyst (2004), businesses that continue to develop and advance women reap benefits including producing better products, achieving better financial results and making better decisions. Thus, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions remains a matter of concern.

Executive coaching has been regarded as one of the tools that contribute to advancing careers and for leader- and leadership development. The distinction between leader - and leadership development is described in Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee (2014) as follows; leader development has a focus on the development of an individual leader - and leadership development refers to the process implemented for leadership development involving multiple people. The aim of this research was therefore to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity in South African corporates.

1.4 Research objectives

The aim of this research was to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity. This aim is supported by the following research objectives:

1. To explore specific challenges and barriers faced by female leaders that lead them to seek executive coaching.
2. To explore what female leaders perceive to be the value of coaching in their leadership development.
3. To explore how executive coaching develops the authenticity of females in their leadership roles even if it was not the aim of coaching to do so.

1.5 Research questions

The overall research question for this research is:

What are the challenges and barriers facing female leaders in South African organisations, and how can executive coaching assist them to develop their authenticity as leaders?

The overall research question was supported by the following research questions:

1. What specific challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders lead them to seek executive coaching?

2. What is perceived to be the value of coaching in the development of female leaders?
3. How does executive coaching develop authenticity of females in their leadership roles, even when it is not the aim of the coaching to do so?

1.6 Significance of the study

Studies on leadership development have been widely conducted and there is wealth of literature available on leadership, with more than 165 000 academic articles reflected when doing a Google search on leadership research (Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenacci, & Burke, 2017). There, however, appears to be limited research on how coaching is effective specifically for female leaders, and the effects on these leaders in terms of developing or enhancing their authenticity. This study has also explored the challenges that women face as leaders and how they perceive coaching to be helping with addressing and navigating these challenges whilst remaining authentic.

The *glass ceiling* effect which creates barriers for women in advancing their careers is another contributor to the challenges females face in the workplace, which therefore inhibits their success as leaders (Mathur-Helm, 2006). A more recent study by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) on the effects of the *glass ceiling* on the career development of women in the private sector corroborates findings that the glass ceiling significantly affects the career advancement of women. The findings of this study, although done in Sri Lanka, is relevant in the South African private sector, given the findings of this study.

Women leaders face forces that prevent them from expressing themselves and their values in a liberal way (Oakley, 2000). This study may be beneficial particularly to the current female leaders who are progressing towards higher levels of influential positions such as board level.

Therefore, the empirical significance of this study may offer insights to female leaders on how to remain true to themselves, and therefore by being authentic, yield better results in succeeding as a leader, rather than trying to fit in or feeling the need to become like male leaders. Upcoming and aspiring female leaders

might also benefit from the findings of this study as they may gain insights on how to lead from an authentic self. This study hopes to contribute to providing guidance to the Human Capital and Learning & Development Practitioners when they design programmes aimed at developing female leaders in their organisations.

The theoretical significance of the study will contribute to the existing knowledge of leader development and more specifically development of a female leader in corporate organisations as such in the study. Furthermore, the outcome of this study may assist the educational leadership programme directors in academia and corporate education to make changes or enhancements in their programmes that are unique to female as leaders, allowing them to embrace their authenticity.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The focus was on females of all racial groups, at senior management level and higher leadership levels. The study was focused on executive coaching and the effects thereof on authenticity of females and excluded all other leadership development methods and or programmes such as mentoring that are used in corporate organisations. Further, the study did not consider the educational level, degree of leadership experience and background of the participants.

1.8 Definition of terms

The keywords for this study include the following:

- **Apartheid** refers to the system legalised and institutionalised race discrimination and segregation in South Africa (Lipton, 1986, p. 2)
- **Authenticity** is referred to as the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise (Kernis, 2003, p. 13). Authenticity has at least four discriminable components: awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational orientation (Kernis, 2003, p. 13)
- **Authentic Leadership** refers to a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral

perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008)

- **Coaching** is a partnership of equals whose aim is to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of the client's life. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices. Working to the client's agenda, the coach and the client have the sole aim of closing the gaps between potential and performance (Rogers, 2012, p. 7)
- **Glass ceiling**: The glass ceiling refers to an invisible and abstract but impermeable barrier that limits the career advancement of women (Burke, Burke, & Vinnicombe, 2005)
- **Executive Coaching**: a Socratic based future focused dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (coachee/client), where the facilitator uses open questions, active listening, summarises and reflections which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant
- **Female Leader**: A special place is occupied by the image of a female leader – a multidimensional concept that includes external visual characteristics, communication skills, cultural level, leadership skills, professional knowledge and skills, etc (Belyakova, Petrova, & Polyakova, 2017, p. 327)
- **Leadership** is a social and mutual influence process where multiple actors engage in leading-following interactions in service of accomplishing a collective goal (DeRue & Myers, 2014)
- **Leadership Development:** "expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes" (Eva, Cox, Herman, & Lowe, 2019, p. 2)
- **The Commission for Gender Equality** is established in terms of Section 181 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, to promote respect

for gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality.

1.9 Assumptions

The study assumes that the research participants have answered the questions truthfully and were not influenced in any way to participate in this study. This assumption is important as the opposite may impact the transferability of the outcome of this study.

An assumption made was that coaching has been deemed a type of a developmental tool for progression into different levels of leadership in corporate organisations.

There was also an assumption that generally, the main reference point to leadership (to be modelled) has been that of men. This study therefore postulates that a study on how a different view of leadership and that could better suit females may yield meaningful results.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this research therefore was to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity in South African corporates. This chapter focuses on providing context and insights from existing literature on challenges and barriers faced by female leaders, leadership development, as well as coaching effect, as a development tool, on female leaders' authenticity. The theoretical frameworks concerning these key concepts, guided by the research questions, are critically reviewed and explored as follows.

2.2 Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders

Some of the barriers faced by women in organisations are related to the gap that still exists between males and females in the senior management and executive roles (Chiloane-Tsoka, 2010; Dreyer, Blass, & April, 2007; Glass & Cook, 2016). It has been established that organisation culture plays a significant role in undermining the value of leadership played by women and subsequently the value they add at the macro level of the organisation (Kalaitzi, Czabanowska, Fowler-Davis, & Brand, 2017).

Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) concluded in their study that there is a significant effect of glass ceiling on the advancement of women's careers at executive level in the private sector. This refers to the unseen barriers that prevents or makes it challenging for women to advance further once they have reached a certain level of leadership.

The following sections will discuss more specifically the barriers and challenges faced by female leaders that were the focus on in this study. These include the effect of the organisational and social culture, work-life balance, lack of executive or network support, preconceptions and gender stereotyping, and an unequal access to opportunities.

2.2.1 *Organisational culture*

Organisational culture is regarded as a way of doing things in a particular context or environment; it sets values, norms and standards for behaviour (Azanza, Moriano, & Molero, 2013). There are two layers of organisational culture that exists in organisations; the visible and the invisible layers (Schein, 2006). Schein postulates that the visible layers are the tangible things that can be seen in the organisation, while the invisible layers refer to behaviour, patterns, and language. This research focuses on the invisible layer of the organisational culture.

Social support networks are perceived as platforms that provide sponsorship opportunities as well as critical knowledge in the organisation which is an advantage for career development (Cohen, Dalton, Holder-Webb, & McMillan, 2018). Organisation culture thus play a pivotal part in influencing how these networks are formulated – whether formally or informally.

Females in leadership positions report that their presence is often threatening to their male colleagues and the reason for this is the failure of men to reconcile their traditional stereotypical thinking and expectations of the roles played by females (Oakley, 2000). This demonstrates how issues of culture and how people are brought up can influence how they treat each other in the workplace and the subsequent culture it then creates in the organisation they lead. Yousaf and Schmiede (2017), Nemoto (2013), and Faulkner (2011) agree with this notion and add that cultural stereotypes go back to early childhood where children were taught and socialised with ideas of gender roles. Moreover, these teachings have been so entrenched that they are now evident in their behaviour as grown-ups where males are seen as dominant and women as subordinate (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

Because of women needing to stay at home more to take care of their small children after birth, it is increasingly challenging for these women to obtain the same merits as their male counterparts and compete on same terms with them (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017).

2.2.2 *Work-life Balance*

It appears that women who have family responsibilities such as household and childcare continue to have challenges with effectively accomplishing both their work and family duties (Bombuwela & De Alwis, 2013). Work life balance is referred to as “the maintenance of balance between responsibilities at work and at home” (Balaji, 2014, p. 3). In contrast, other studies have found that this work-life balance contributes to the individual’s well-being and their ability to perform well in their jobs (Agosti, Andersson, Bringsén, & Janlöv, 2019; Gervais & Millear, 2016; Gujirat & Kumar, 2018; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014; Suganthi, 2019; Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). The inability to achieve a good work-life balance by working women therefore poses a risk on their overall health and wellbeing as well as on performing to the best of their abilities in their job roles. In these contrasting studies, it is highlighted that in most cases women have the primary responsibility of running their households, including ensuring children’s needs been taken care of.

Yousaf and Schmiede (2017) found that some women sacrifice their careers for their household roles of wives and mothers, which can also affect their success in their leadership roles. This may be as a result of organisation policies, structures and practices that have been at play for years, distinctly separating paid work and family life (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2015). The inflexible policies thus make it more challenging for female leaders to be more successful in their leadership positions. These female leaders therefore find time-management to be their biggest challenge and would mostly benefit from, for instance, flexible working hours and environment (Kim & Wiggins, 2011; Raburu, 2015).

2.2.3 *Lack of executive and / or network support*

Mentoring relationships in corporate organisations? are often deemed important for career progression (Cohen et al., 2018; Moorosi, 2013). Mentors enhance the protégé’s sense of competence, encourage them, sponsor them, create exposure and visibility for them to attain their career goals (Ghosh & Reio, 2013). It has been observed, however, that males in more senior and influential positions are less keen to get involved in mentoring relationships with females as they don’t

have faith in their abilities and perceive them to be less promising candidates for development (Coleman, Bush, & Crawford, 2012; Kim & Wiggins, 2011; Tolar, 2012). In addition, there is found to be paternalism that interfere with the mentoring relationship between men and women, when the male mentors make assumptions that women who have young children will not succeed (Bickel, 2014).

This tentativeness of male leaders to mentor female leaders, poses an additional challenge for female leaders in that they have limited choice of same-sex mentors because of the underrepresentation of women in higher senior positions. According to Seibert, Sargent, Kraimer, and Kiazad (2017), a network of social relationships provides access to information, support and resources required for effective leadership. When females come together to form and participate in their own networks, unfortunately women's networks don't become as resourceful and effectful as men's networks (Kim & Wiggins, 2011). This is because women have less friends and acquaintances who are influential and resourceful (van Tubergen, Ali Al-Modaf, Almosaed, & Said Al-Ghamdi, 2016). The quality of these mentor-mentee relationships is often measured by the career and psychosocial support received from the mentors (Seibert et al., 2017). Furthermore, having networks both internal and external to their organisations allow female leaders to enhance their strategic skills, be more innovative and provide career guidance (Beeson & Valerio, 2012).

2.2.4 *Misconceptions and gender stereotyping*

One of the challenges that female leaders face is prejudice and discrimination in the workplace (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Cundiff & Vescio, 2016). According to research, female leaders are capable and experienced to take on the higher level of seniority but they are denied those opportunities purely on the basis that they are women (Bombuwela & De Alwis, 2013; Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004; Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Socially, females are associated with nurturing roles such as taking care of children and as such they are seen as being less committed to the work responsibilities and their careers (Cohen et al., 2018; Coleman et al., 2012) This

then becomes one of the reasons why females with family commitments would be overlooked for promotions and not trusted with more critical tasks / projects. Furthermore, when women act in a more firm and decisive manner, they are deemed hostile and abrasive as opposed to being assertive and competent.

These misconceptions even lead females themselves to believe that they are less competent than males and therefore less deserving of promotions although they put in the same amount of effort and achieve the same results (Cohen et al., 2018). In organisations where males are dominant, females are often prevented from speaking up and their inputs are suppressed (Oakley, 2000). According to the social cognitive theories, individuals get perceived in a certain way simply because of their gender (Sturm, Taylor, Atwater, & Braddy, 2014).

2.2.5 *Unequal access to opportunities*

Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) also refers to unequal access to opportunities as unfair promotion practices in the organisations. These practices usually favour men over women, regardless of their performance. High profile assignments offer growth and development and according to research, these assignments also provide an opportunity for career success (Cohen et al., 2018) This is also aligned with the outcomes of the study by Seibert et al. (2017) where challenging job assignments are linked to opportunities for promotion.

These opportunities however, are predominantly often available to men while women are provided with assignments with less risk, therefore restricting their opportunity to demonstrate their greatest potential and perform at their peak (Cohen et al., 2018).

2.2.6 *Proposition 1*

Female leaders face numerous challenges and barriers such as the glass ceiling effect, work-life balance, unfair practices influenced by organisational culture, and prejudice and discrimination from gender stereotyping that hinder them to be effective leaders.

2.3 Leadership development

Fundamentally, leadership includes a leader, a follower and the interaction through which they relate (Dansereau, Seitz, Chiu, Shaughnessy, & Yammarino, 2013). Leadership development is a process of preparing people for effectively engaging in a leading-developing and relational interaction (Dansereau et al., 2013; DeRue & Myers, 2014). Leadership development includes an understanding of where leaders come from and where they are going in order to be more effective in designing programmes and interventions to develop them (Dionne et al., 2014).

According to Day et al. (2014), development of individual leaders and developing an effective leadership process is much more than just simply making a decision on which theory to apply for such development to be effective. Leadership development aims to improve skills, general knowledge and behaviours of individuals (Cullen-Lester, Maupin, & Carter, 2017). In order to provide more context on leadership development. The following subsections will focus on the challenges of leadership development, different types of leadership development and coaching as a modality for leadership.

2.3.1 *Typical challenges in leadership development*

Developing leaders requires more than designing and implementing leadership development programmes (Longenecker & Insch, 2018). It is about helping leaders make a transformational shift to make impact in their organisations. Furthermore, it also requires continuous support from the executive senior leaders for the programmes to be effective and yield results. It seems that without active support from senior executives, the real success of leadership development interventions would not be as impactful (Kasemsap, 2016).

Leadership development programmes have predominately been conducted in more formal ways, including once-off classroom based training (Kempster & Iszatt-White, 2013). A question though is, how effective are these interventions? In their study; Sugiyama, Cavanagh, van Esch, Bilimoria, and Brown (2016) seek to explore if the general leadership development programmes enable participants

to go through deep shifts of self-awareness and how they relate with others for attainment of sustained business results.

One of the challenges in leadership development is understanding the participants' expectations of such programmes or interventions, and the challenges they might be facing (Gentry, Eckert, Munusamy, Stawiski, & Martin, 2013). Indeed, leadership development interventions need to be more contextual, by integrating the organisational culture, strategy and the expectations participants relative to their development, rather than just being a linear process (Hanson, 2013). Moreover, these programmes need to include variety of strategies such as real-life scenarios, role-playing to ensure sustainability in the participants' different environments (Nicolaidou & Petridou, 2011).

2.3.2 *Different types of leadership development*

There are different leadership development types, including mentoring, coaching and networking to assist individuals in becoming better leaders (Sugiyama et al., 2016). Modisane (2017), argues that leadership developers need to design and implement blended techniques and methods, such as combinations of coaching, programmatic leadership development programmes with immersive experiences that are appropriate for specific contexts and situations for them to be effective.

Mentoring can be used as an interactive learning for developing leaders and mentors play a vital role of provide both social and professional support (Moorosi, 2013).

Furthermore, it is found that executive coaching is a leadership development intervention that is often used and recommended (Modisane, 2017). Coaching is largely deployed when focusing on leader development, including the self-reflection which is regarded as cornerstone for the enhancement of authentic and ethical leadership (Coleman et al., 2012).

Networking has been acknowledged as another leadership development as part of the shift from traditional programmes that focuses on knowledge and skills (Cullen-Lester et al., 2017). Networking is referred to as a set of behaviours

required to manage social connections and gaining access to resources where both self and others benefit (Cullen-Lester, Woehler, & Willburn, 2016). These benefits include developing confidence in social skills, increase organisational knowledge, gaining political support and career opportunities.

2.3.3 *Coaching as a modality for leadership development*

Coaching has been used as a leadership development tool for improving personal aspects of self-awareness, learning and development and opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth (Aas, 2016; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2015). There are several definitions of coaching proposed over the last years and the following definitions are more relevant to leadership development:

"Executive coaching is distinguished from other forms of coaching by its emphasis on individual development within the context of the organisation and on the improvement of the organisation's performance through enhancing the leader's knowledge, skills, and practices" (Campone, 2015, p. 59).

"A Socratic based dialogue between a facilitator (coach) and a participant (client) where the majority of interventions used by the facilitator are open questions which are aimed at stimulating self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant" (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p. 74).

To this end, coaching is considered as one of the key approaches to leadership development and personal developmental aspects such as personal growth, resilience, self-confidence and self-awareness (MacKie, 2014). These are discussed in the following sections, in relation to the above coaching definitions.

2.3.3.1 *Personal growth*

The following quote by Bachkirova and Cox (2005) encapsulates how coaching enables personal growth and facilitates a reflective process through relating with others: "Coaching answers the needs of a growing number of people for personal development, however different their initial drives – psychological pain or the desire to become more successful professionally" (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005, p. 4).

According to the intentional change theory, there is a developmental process that takes place when a leader undergoes personal change, and thus provides a basis for executive coaching (Passarelli, 2015). The Intentional change theory model was reprinted from (Boyatzis, 2006) and it states that desired change takes place in a non-linear process which comprises five processes: (1) discovery of the ideal self, (2) assessment of the real self as compared to the ideal self, (3) formulation of a learning agenda, (4) practice and experimentation with new behaviours, and (5) the support of resonant relationships (Passarelli, 2015).

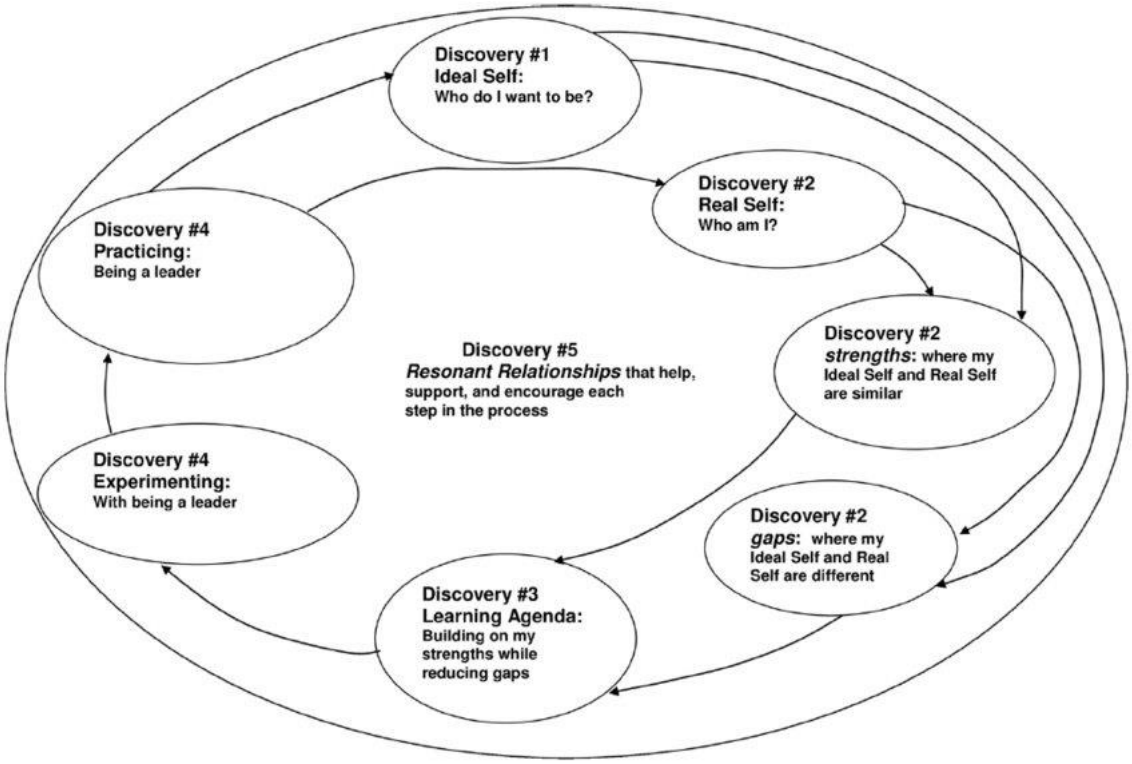

Figure 2: Intentional change theory. Boyatzis (2008, p. 304). Copyright 2008 by the American Psychological Association.

Discovery number 5 of the intentional change theory on figure 2 above aligns with the argument by Day et al. (2014) on the importance of resonant relationships on development of women leaders. The model therefore demonstrates how honing the relational abilities can support and encourage a leader in their development process. In addition, discovery number 2 of the theory which is assessment of the real self as compared to the ideal self, aligns directly with authenticity – the core aspect of this study.

This model further demonstrates the importance of not only focusing on the organisation but on the leader visioning process. It has been found that focusing on the organisation's vision that is consistent with the leader's personal values is integral to discovering their ideal self, leading to growth (Passarelli, 2015).

2.3.3.2 *Resilience and self-confidence*

Resilience is referred to as the ability or trait of an individual that helps them respond positively to adversity (King, Newman, & Luthans, 2016). It is a dynamic process through which the individual continues to display positive adaption regardless of the difficulty they are facing. This resilience can be developed through transformative and personal growth interventions (King et al., 2016). According to research, women have been observed to link failures to a lack in their abilities rather than a lack in the environment (O'Neil et al., 2015). This finding is due to the challenges faced by women in the workplace. According to Vanhove, Herian, Perez, Harms, and Lester (2016), the precondition for the demonstration of resilience is the presence of stressors. In their study, they hypothesised that coaching as a one-on-one format, is the most effective programme for building resilience (Vanhove et al., 2016). This concludes that executive coaching as a tool develops resilience and increases self-confidence.

2.3.3.3 *Self-awareness*

Self-awareness is referred to as the practice of accurate reflections on the self in terms of behaviour, individual values and beliefs and how it manifests on others (Showry & Manasa, 2014). It is an important aspect of leadership and therefore for self-awareness to develop effectively, a leader must also have both understanding and appreciation of how others perceive them, over and above their own self-understanding (Sturm et al., 2014).

Self-regulation allows people to behave in congruent with their personal beliefs and values. Thus, coaching practices increases self-awareness in female leaders and enable them to become more effective leaders (Marson, 2019).

2.3.4 *Proposition 2*

Coaching is a key contributor to leadership development through improving behaviour and engagement with others, providing space for deep reflections for self-awareness and enabling personal growth.

2.4 Coaching effects on female leaders' authenticity

Executive coaching has been acknowledged as a support mechanism for development of female leaders (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2002). The following sections will thus discuss the concept of authenticity as well as executive coaching as an instrument for developing female leaders' authenticity in a male-dominated environment.

2.4.1 *Authenticity of females in relation to leadership*

It is important to provide descriptions for both authenticity and authentic leadership. Authenticity is linked to the individual owning their own personal experiences that is aligned with their thoughts, values, beliefs and emotions; behaving in ways that are consistent with their true self (Bishop, 2013). Further, Waite, McKinney, Smith-Glasgow, and Meloy (2014, p. 284) illustrated the presence of authenticity in a leader as such: "the appearance of authenticity may impart attributes including genuineness, empathy, respect, trustworthiness, reliability, and believability". Authentic leaders are described as having a deep self-awareness and always exerting behaviour that is aligned to their core values, they are often guided by their internal moral compass and high ethical standards (Liu, Cutcher, & Grant, 2015). From these descriptions, it can be deduced that authenticity in a leader is a construct that can be observed, felt and developed.

Because women have been assimilated into the organisation culture, it is very challenging for them to successfully challenge the culture and always retain their true selves in the male-dominated organisations (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011). At its core, authenticity is about knowing, accepting and remaining true to oneself (Sims & Morris, 2018). Although there has been a call for a holistic approach to leadership development, traditional masculine values are often

privileged in assessing qualities of an effective leader (Höpfl, Hopfl, & Matilal, 2007). Many women agree to “play the game” with rules predominantly set by males, in an attempt to advance professionally and succeed as leaders (Levitt, 2010).

Oakley (2000) discusses the double-bind concept. She refers to it as a behaviour norm where it is very difficult for a person to win no matter how much effort they put it. In this context of authenticity of women, Oakley (2000) refers to the double-bind as the dilemma that female leaders find themselves in; when they become authoritative, take charge and tough like men in order to be taken seriously they are acknowledged as competent but get labelled as a she-devil. On the other end, when they act “feminine”, nurturing, emotional and natural selves then they are deemed incompetent and weak. This double-bind dilemma may therefore create additional work for female leaders where they have to prove that they are indeed competent as leaders (Beeson & Valerio, 2012).

2.4.2 *The role of coaching in developing female leaders’ authenticity in a male-dominated environment*

There are many constructs that can be linked to authenticity and the following constructs which include self-awareness, values and beliefs, and self-efficacy are deemed important and relevant when authenticity in the workplace in particular is discussed, as well as in regard to leadership (Dunn, 2019; Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010; Jackson, 2019; Oh, Cho, & Lim, 2018; Ostermeier & Cooper, 2016; Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

2.4.2.1 Self-awareness

Self-awareness is known to be one of the outcomes and benefits of coaching and it is the foundation for authenticity (Hanold, 2017). It is also an important aspect of leadership and influences the decisions of leaders and subsequently affect others (Sturm et al., 2014). Further, Sturm et al. (2014) conclude that in order to successfully develop self-awareness, individuals should not only understand themselves, but they also need an understanding of other’s perceptions of them and actually appreciate those perceptions. In a study by Sturm et al., (2014) to

understand how women leaders predict ratings on their leadership success by their male boss, the findings cautioned of these predictions to be misplaced. Women assume that it is because of the negative stereotypes on women leaders that they are rated poorly for their leadership abilities. Coaching thus unearths and brings such assumptions to the surface to help female leaders become aware of such beliefs to deal with them accordingly.

2.4.2.2 Values and beliefs

One of the levers of achieving a level of authenticity is aligning one's values and beliefs with their actions (Sims & Morris, 2018). This is congruent with the research by Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) and they postulate that effective leaders pursue goals that are aligned with their personal values, thereby developing a sense of purpose. Moreover, this purpose allow them to see beyond the adversities they may be facing and encourage them to take actions and risks for the benefits of deeper meaning for all (Ibarra et al., 2013).

2.4.2.3 Self-efficacy

When defining self-efficacy, Bandura (1994, p. 1) referred to it as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives". Drawing from this premise, Sloma-Williams, McDade, Richman, and Morahan (2009) analysed the development of self-efficacy from mastery experiences, social models, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states.

2.4.3 *Proposed framework for female leader development*

O'Neil et al. (2015) developed a framework for women's leadership development and contend that it is important for coaching to be customised for each woman based on factors affecting them individually. In their framework, they argue that there are factors affecting women's careers which executive coaches need to be aware of when dealing with women. Such factors create more challenges for female leaders and as such the notion of using the gender-neutral strategy for

development of women does not adequately address unique women's developmental needs and reality (O'Neil et al., 2015). Accordingly, women must be supported in defining their leadership presence, which is characterised by their unique way of engaging, voices and contribution; including their style of leadership, influence, self-confidence and authenticity (O'Neil et al., 2015).

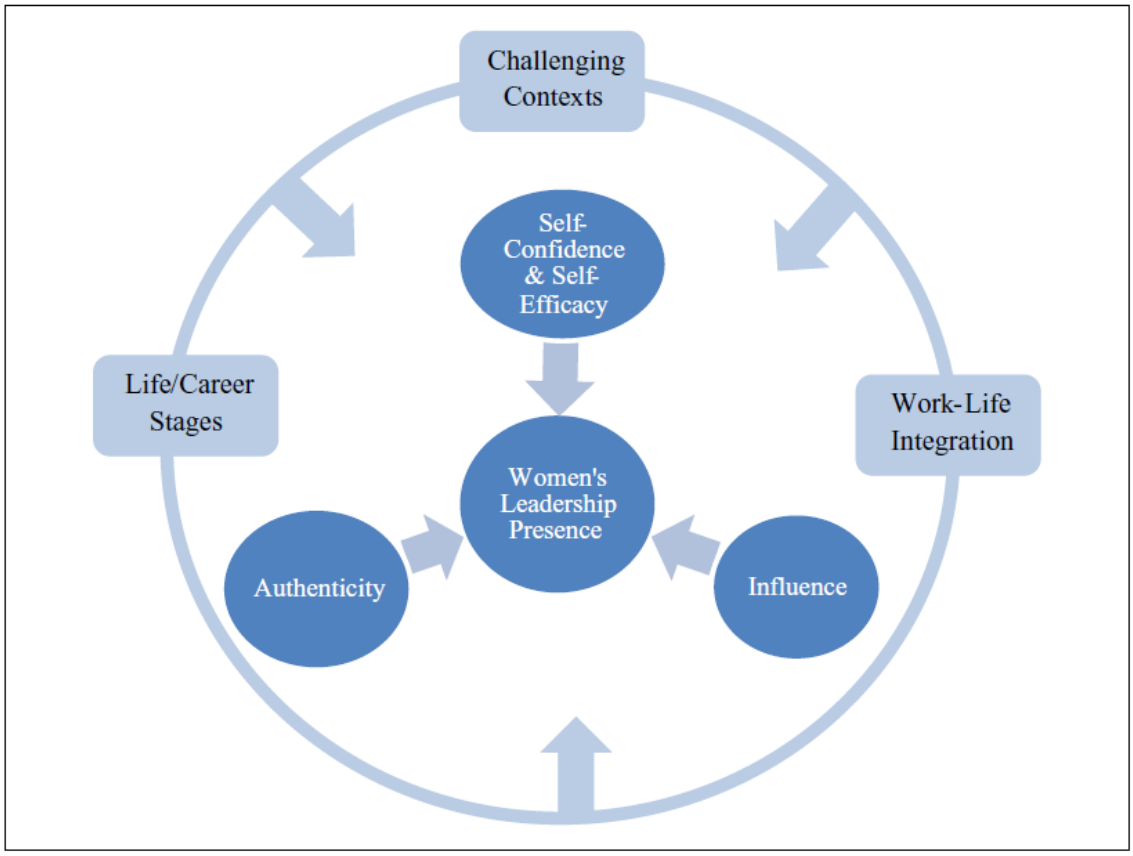

Figure 3: Framework for women's leadership development (O'Neil et al., 2015, p. 263)

Passarelli (2015) postulates that although leader development interventions should aim to leverage the individual's personal vision, these programmes are seldom aligned to this outcome. Furthermore, one of the objectives of executive coaching is to identify and work towards achieving the personal development of a leader through one-one-one intervention and although these objectives are often work-related, they also tend to focus on the leader's personal aspects (Passarelli, 2015). This study will be informed and anchored by this framework for women's leadership development by O'Neil et al. (2015) and thereby making

it the conceptual framework to which the findings, discussion and the recommendations will be referenced.

2.4.4 *Proposition 3*

Coaching can have a positive effect on the authenticity of female leaders. Through increasing women's self-awareness, cultivating their self-efficacy and supporting them in defining their leadership presence, executive coaching develops the authenticity of female leaders.

2.5 Conclusion

Although this study was not a comparison between male and female leaders, literature on challenges faced by female leaders in organisations reveal that females are generally more disadvantaged as leaders than their male counterparts.

Whilst there is considerable amount of literature on female leadership, previous research on leader development programmes specific for women still require further investigation and contribution. Coaching is evidently a tool that is widely being deployed for leadership development; for increasing self-awareness, building resilience for succeeding in leadership positions, thus demonstrating its value on leader development process.

The framework for women's leadership advocates for support of women in their leadership presence, relating to one of the aspects of authenticity of female leaders, where issues of work-life integration, challenging contexts and career-stages have an impact on their authentic leadership presence.

2.5.1 *Proposition 1*

Female leaders face numerous challenges and barriers such as the glass ceiling effect, work-life balance, unfair practices influenced by organisational culture and prejudice and discrimination from gender stereotyping that hinder them to be effective leaders.

2.5.2 *Proposition 2*

Coaching is a key contributor to leadership development through improving behaviour and engagement with others, providing space for deep reflections for self-awareness and enabling personal growth.

2.5.3 *Proposition 3*

Coaching can have a positive effect on the authenticity of female leaders. Through increasing women's self-awareness, cultivating their self-efficacy and supporting them in defining their leadership presence, executive coaching develops the authenticity of female leaders.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the methodology that was followed in this study to address the research aim and objectives of this study. The research approach is first introduced to give context on the type of study that was undertaken. This was followed by the research design, data collection methods, population and sample, and the research instrument that was used. The data collection procedure and analysis are discussed, followed by a discussion on the limitations of the research design. A discussion on the rigour in terms of trustworthiness of data treatment and ethical considerations, conclude this chapter. The golden thread throughout the entire research process is illustrated in a consistency matrix (see Appendix A).

3.1 Research approach

The research approach chosen for this study is qualitative as the nature of this study is exploratory and hence requires rich and in-depth data. It also allows for different perspectives and it is interpretive in nature (Anderson, 2017). This allows for data collection processes that provides the research participants an opportunity to freely express their own personal experiences and ascribing meaning for themselves in the process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Furthermore, the interpretivist research paradigm mostly informed the choice for qualitative research approach as it focused on understanding the world from the individual's subjective experiences (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). As one of the objectives of this study was to understand the challenges and barriers of female leaders in corporate organisations, this research paradigm encouraged the collection of the different experiences and perceptions of each female leader who participated in this study. The exploratory nature of this research also allowed for multiple interpretations of experienced reality (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

3.2 Research design

Qualitative research is inductive in nature, which means that a theory or phenomenon is being understood and or developed rather than being tested (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). This description is aligned with the purpose and objectives of this study. As such, rather than adhering to a specific qualitative study design, for instance such as a case study or narrative study, this study followed a generic qualitative approach. A generic qualitative approach is referred to as “a study that seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (Cooper & Endacott, 2007, p. 817). This definition can be aligned to Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2003)’s emphasis that there is a place for generic qualitative research which is not guided by explicit set of philosophic assumptions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the specific challenges and barriers that female leaders face in South African corporate organisations and how they perceive coaching to assist them in dealing with these challenges. The word “specific” on this description of the purpose mean subjective perspectives of the research participants, therefore can be argued that it fits adequately to the definition of a generic qualitative approach provided above.

Caelli et al. (2003) revealed that generic approaches have become more common and continue to be popular. Cooper and Endacott (2007) supported this because of the pragmatic nature of the generic qualitative research. A word of caution was however given by Kahlke (2014) on some of the pitfalls of a generic qualitative research design; including potentially not having rigorous and critical literature that provides guidance to methods of this research. The author argues that this method falls short in clearly articulating consistent theoretical assumptions.

3.3 Population and sample

The population that this study focused on, comprised female leaders who had been coached. These female leaders were of different ages, they were currently on senior management and executive levels, working for South African corporate

organisations. Jansen (2010) encourages researchers to consider having a representation of diversity in their sample in a qualitative study where a phenomenon is being studied.

3.3.1 *Sample and sampling method*

Purposive sampling is used widely in qualitative research and it is a deliberate choice based on what needs to be known by the researcher (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). As such, purposive sampling was used for this study and 15 females were initially selected for this research, already at senior management or above levels and had either been coached at some point in their leadership journey or were at the time of interviews still undergoing coaching and had completed at least five coaching sessions. According to Elo et al. (2014, p. 4), “there is no commonly acceptable sample size for qualitative studies because the optimal sample size depends on the purpose of the study, research questions and richness of the data”. Other researchers such as Trotter II (2012) and Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2016), Boddy (2016), have also reached the same conclusion on the sample size for qualitative research.

The research sample used in this study included females of all racial groups. These female leaders were either undergoing coaching on their leadership journey at the time of the interview or had previously had one or more coaching engagements. Although demographic data was collected, the researcher had subsequently decided not to use it in her study as this did not yield sufficiently rich and useful data for triangulation.

Participants on this study were approached directly using the current networks of the researcher from different organisations, as well as referrals from others. The selection of the sample in this study was to enhance the understanding of the challenges of female leaders as experienced by the participants and these individuals were selected to provide rich insight into the research questions, as proposed by Devers and Frankel (2000). Although 15 participants were initially selected for the study, only 11 interviews were held due to the unavailability of the other four identified participants.

Research participants were sourced across six industries, namely; telecommunications, financial service (including banking), manufacturing, mining and management consulting, and eight organisations in Gauteng, South Africa. Although all of these organisations are based in Johannesburg, South Africa, some of them are multinational companies and have business operations in other countries. These female leaders represented different racial groups including Africans, Coloureds, Indians and Whites in South Africa.

3.4 The research instrument

Based on the research questions for this study, semi-structured interviews have been selected and were used an instrument to collect data. Semi-structured interviews are useful for understanding people's perceptions on different issues (Alsaawi, 2014). The types of questions were open-ended questions to harvest rich information on the participants' perceptions, emotions and personal experiences. The researcher also asked additional questions based on the participants' responses to probe more and gain more insight.

The semi-structured interviews were outlined ahead of time in an interview guide, which presented the interview questions, and their respective links to the research objectives. This is because the questions asked in the interview should be designed with the intention to answer the research questions (Rowley, 2012). Nine questions were asked and were structured such that the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon is gained. One of the strengths of a semi-structured interview is its flexible nature; it allows for discovery of important information from the participants that may not have been thought of by the researcher (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). This was particularly important in this study as everyone contributed meaningfully to the research based on their individual experiences.

The research instrument was designed to align directly with the research questions (see Appendix B). All the interview questions were developed to answer specific research questions. As such, the interview guide was divided into three sections with each section addressing one research question. This is to

ensure that the purpose of the study is addressed by the interview questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A preliminary test of the interview questions was done by means of a pilot interview with the initial participant with similar characteristics as the research sample in this study (Dikko, 2016). This interview was subsequently used as part of the study as it was successful.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

As this study is not a case study in a particular case site, organisational permission was not be required. Each prospective participant received an e-mail with an informed consent (see Appendix C), detailing the purpose of the study, assurance of their confidentiality, the length of the interview, permission to record the interview and the choice of the participant to withdraw from the study at any point.

Interviews were used to collect data. The purpose of interviews in qualitative studies is to explore the experiences, views and beliefs of participants to a phenomenon (Gill et al., 2008). Specifically, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data in this study, rather than structured or unstructured interviews. Structured interviews follow specific set of questions in a manner that is predetermined, often with limited response categories (Stuckey, 2013). Unstructured interviews are performed with very little to no structure as they do not have any predetermined interview questions; which can be confusing for participants (Gill et al., 2008).

The interviews were pre-scheduled with the participants, approximately an hour each and they all took place at a venue agreed upon with the participants. This was to make it convenient for the participants and to also have the interview in the area they are familiar with and therefore comfortable and at ease.

All interviews were conducted in English as this is the accepted business language in South Africa although some of the participants may not use English as their first language at home and in their social settings. Participants were observed during the interviews for body language including signs of discomfort or

distress and the potential inconsistencies between what they say and the queues from their bodies (Cooper & Endacott, 2007).

The interviews were voice recorded, using a voice recorder and transcribing application that transcribes as the interview is being recorded (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). The grammatical errors of the participants were retained to preserve the authenticity of the participants and to also accurately represent lived experiences of the participants.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

Thematic analysis is a method of analysis that enables the researcher to search for and identify themes emerging as important to the phenomenon being studied from the collected data set (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). With thematic analysis, diverse and subjective views can be classified into themes and patterns from the data, linking them to the research questions (Alhojailan, 2012). The following six steps, as suggested by Clarke and Braun (2014), were followed during the analysis process:

Phase 1: Familiarise with data

In this phase, the researcher immersed herself with the collected data by going through all the transcripts and even listening to the recording where necessary, to ensure accuracy. This included making notes on the transcripts and highlighting items of potential interest.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

Codes are the building blocks to analysing the data. Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) describe codes as a way of labelling and tracking key features on the data. This phase involved coding interesting features of the data in a methodical way across the entire data set, then grouping data to each code (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Codes were relevant to answering the research question (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014).

Phase 3: Searching for themes

The next step was to collate the codes into more meaningful data and shaping them into patterns / themes. According to Clarke and Braun (2014), this is an active process where themes are well thought through to determine whether a set of data is answering the research question in a meaningful way. The themes were deliberately shaped in relation the three research questions.

Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

This phase can be referred to as the quality check where the derived themes are reviewed against the coded data and looking at the entire data set, and it is an iterative process. There is also a check to determine if the data is meaningful in support of the theme (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). In this study, the researcher completed this quality check through an iterative process by continuously reviewing the data and changing and refining the themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

A good thematic analysis should have themes that have a singular focus, do not overlap, are not repetitive and have a direct relation with the research question. Collectively, the themes started to form a coherent story from the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Clear names were generated for each theme in this study.

Phase 6: Producing the report

The writing of the report is important to ensure the clarity has been established in all the themes. The writing should start taking shape from the informal writing to a formal writing. The order in which the themes were presented was well thought of; where themes connect logically and in a meaningful way. In this study, this method of producing the report was followed.

3.7 Limitations of the design

Qualitative research is often criticised for having poor judgement on the soundness of the research as well as not being able to replicate the insights gained in the study (Kapoulas & Mitic, 2012). Limitations of the design highlights

conditions that may weaken the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The following limitations which are inherent in qualitative research are noted for this study:

- Researcher bias – By identifying the phenomenon to be studied, the researcher might have had expectations of the study results and therefore lead the participants in that direction (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006), and this needed to be guarded against.
- Qualitative research may not be generalisable because it is used for theory building and not theory testing (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2001). This study therefore relied on a few participants who were carefully selected based on the defined criteria as well as these participants' availability (Watkins, 2012).

3.8 Rigour in terms of trustworthiness of data treatment process

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study seeks to provide justification that due diligence has been done in the study including clear description of the collection, analysis and methods, (Williams & Morrow, 2009). Unlike in quantitative studies, it is much harder to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative studies.

Lincoln and Guba (1986) offered criteria to determine this trustworthiness as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Quantitative vs qualitative research criteria

Quantitative	**Qualitative**
External validity (generalisability)	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Internal validity	Credibility
Objectivity	Confirmability

Table 1 provides the different research criteria used in quantitative and qualitative studies and how the two serve different purposes: theory building (qualitative)

and theory testing (quantitative research). The next subsections will provide more context on these and discuss how trustworthiness was ensured in this study.

3.8.1 *Transferability*

The nature of qualitative research does not allow for direct transferability; which is the ability to transfer research findings directly from one study to the other (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). It is the likelihood that the lessons learnt from one setting or study may be useful in another similar study (Cope, 2014).

In this study, transferability was ensured by retaining and including the verbatim descriptions of the participants' experiences from recorded the interviews (Noble & Smith, 2015). Presentation of the interpretation of collected data was substantiated by excerpts of the participant's own words in direct quotations to convey a sense of the participant's emotions and feelings with descriptors were also provided (Anderson, 2017). This provided transparency of the research process followed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

3.8.2 *Dependability*

Elo et al. (2014) refer to dependability as the ability of the collected data and findings to remain consistent over time and even so in different conditions. A study is considered dependable when the processes and procedures to be used to collect and interpret data can be tracked by means of an audit trail (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011) .

To demonstrate dependability in this study, a sample of transcribes from recorded interviews are included in the audit trail (see appendix D). The field notes can be made available to a research auditor, who might wish to examine whether the findings, interpretations and conclusions of the study would have been supported by the collected data as described by Amankwaa (2016).

3.8.3 *Credibility*

Credibility refers to that aspect that provides the experiences and views of the participants through the accurate interpretation of those experiences by the researcher (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The credibility of the study provides confidence in the truth of the findings (Amankwaa, 2016).

It is a widely known fact that researchers bring an element of bias to the study, whether consciously or unconsciously (Bahn & Weatherill, 2012). As such, Noble and Smith (2015) consider credibility as having multiple realities existing (truth value) and the potential bias of the researcher in qualitative research. In dealing with this bias, Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) concede that triangulation can be used to have a comprehensive understanding of a phenomena. This bias is acknowledged in this study and to ensure credibility, person triangulation was used. Person triangulation refers to the collection of data from more than one level of people; variety of people (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). The sample was drawn from different corporate organisations and in different industries in South Africa. In addition, the sample was inclusive of female leaders with different number of years of experiences in leadership positions, including executive levels.

3.8.4 *Confirmability*

Confirmability is the extent to which the results of the study can be confirmed by other researchers (Anney, 2014). Also, confirmability is established when credibility, transferability and dependability have been established (Koch, 2006). In this study, a confirmability audit trail of all the data collection and data analysis was completed.

This audit trail was conducted through reviewing the following classes of data as discussed by Babbie and Mouton (2017).

- Raw data was analysed, which include recorded interviews transcripts: Figure D.1 on Appendix D shows how the researcher familiarised herself with the raw data from the interviews

- From the raw data, there was a data reconstruction made up of developed themes, findings, conclusions and final report (see figures D.2, D.3 and D.4 on Appendix D)
- Process notes were developed, in a form of methodological steps followed in the study. These are demonstrated in figure D.5

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical problems are inherent in qualitative research and as such there is a moral obligation of the researcher to conduct the research in a manner that deliberate in minimising the potential harm to participants of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Ethics is about doing good and avoiding harm (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

Although no serious ethical threats posed on the participants of this study were anticipated, precautionary measures had to be put in place to ensure no harm to the participants whilst protecting their rights and welfare. As part of the university governance process, ethical clearance was be obtained from the university ethics committee before proceeding with data collection. The ethics clearance reference and protocol number is WBS/BA1687732/348.

In the informed letter of consent (see appendix C), the details outlined ensures that the subjects of the study retain their autonomy in their participation and had the awareness and sufficient knowledge to judge for themselves the risks that might be involved in partaking in this study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). The letter includes issues of confidentiality and anonymity in protecting the participant's identities and wellbeing (Babbie & Mouton, 2017).

Further, when reporting the findings of the study, the names and identities of the participants were not revealed and were always kept confidential. In addition, as the data as collected, this data was safeguarded. All the transcribed files received from the professional transcriber were saved by means of a protected password to restrict access to these files.

To avoid unintentional plagiarism, the research report was submitted through the Turn-it-in system which checks and highlights areas where there may be similarities of text with other sources in the databases prior to publications (see Appendix E).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology and research design that was followed in this study. It started with positioning the qualitative research and the description of the research design. A generic qualitative study approach was presented, and the justification thereof was provided. Further, details of how data was collected through semi-structured interviews were presented as well as thematic analysis process followed to analyse the collected data. Rigour on the trustworthiness of the data treatment process (analysis) was assessed and finally, the ethical considerations were outlined.

4 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the research conducted. The aim of this research was to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity in South African corporates.

The research aim is supported by the following research questions (RQ):

1. What specific challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders lead them to seek executive coaching?
2. What is perceived to be the value of coaching in the development of female leaders?
3. How does executive coaching develop authenticity of females in their leadership roles, even when it is not the aim of the coaching to do so?

Although the researcher was aiming to interview 15 participants, unfortunately some participants dropped out of the study as a result of unavailability and only 11 research participants participated. The richness of the data was still obtained from the interviewed participants as the researcher did considerable probing in the manner that she asked questions during the interviews to unearth more insights.

The following section presents the findings for the specific research questions. The findings are presented and substantiated by responses from the research participants' interviews. To maintain the anonymity of participants and their organisations respectively, their names were replaced with RP1 – RP11; where RP is an acronym for "Research Participant" (see Appendix F).

4.1 Presentation of findings

The main themes which are key to the overall study are all linked directly to the research questions as displayed in table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of main themes per research question

Research question	Main themes
1. What specific challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders lead them to seek executive coaching?	1. Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders 2. Managing work/life integration
2. What is perceived to be the value of coaching in the development of female leaders?	1. Perspective on leadership 2. Coaching experience and effects on leadership
3. How has executive coaching developed authenticity of females in their leadership roles, even when it was not the aim of the coaching to do so?	1. Perspective on authenticity 2. Coaching's role in enhancing authenticity of female leaders

The following sections present the findings for each research question as summarised on table 1.

4.1.1 *RQ1: What specific challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders lead them to seek executive coaching?*

The table below presents the findings for RQ1. The researcher chose to highlight the management of work/life balance as a main theme, as it appears to generally be a considerable challenge for South African women.

Table 3: Findings for RQ1

Research question	Main themes	Sub themes per main theme in ranking order based on number of quotations
1. What specific challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders lead them	1. Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders	1.1 Organisational sub-culture 1.2 Male dominance 1.3 No support network structures for females 1.4 Unequal promotional and recognition practices 1.5 Assumed gender-based responsibilities

Research question	Main themes	Sub themes per main theme in ranking order based on number of quotations
to seek executive coaching?	2. Managing work/life integration	2.1 Gender roles / cultural social norms 2.2 Parenting role 2.3 Importance of a good support structure 2.4 Difficulty in maintaining a balanced life

The following sections presents the findings for RQ1:

4.1.1.1 *Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders*

An observation made by the researcher was that in most of the interviews the participants were relieved to be given an opportunity to talk about their challenges in corporate organisations. Based on the number of quotations, the main common challenges and barriers among the research participants are shown on figure 4 below. The number of quotations are specified above each bar.

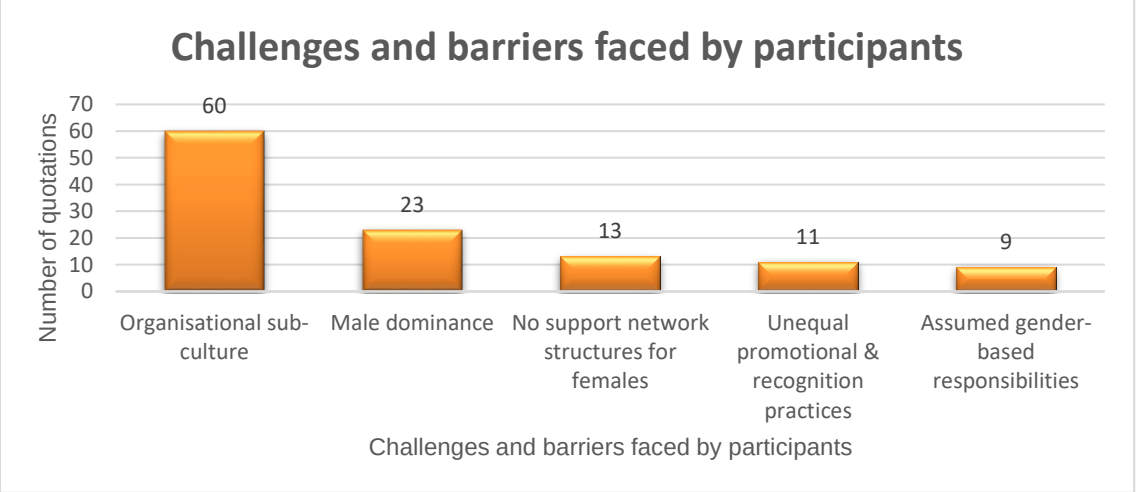

Figure 4: Challenges and barriers faced by participants

Challenges and barriers that seem to permeate corporate organisations by female leaders are presented below. These pertained to organisational sub-culture, male dominance, no support network structures for females, unequal

promotional & recognition practices and opportunities, and assumed gender-based responsibilities.

Theme 1: Organisational sub-culture

The main challenge referred to by the participants was the nature of the organisational sub-culture in which they found themselves. The difference between organisation culture and sub-culture is that organisation culture governs how people in an organisation behave, dress and conduct business. Most participants referred to the sub-culture as those behavioural practices and other norms that are not formally part of the culture such as values or policies but are somehow allowed in their organisations. They find these to be their biggest challenges as there is not much done in consequence of such practices. The excerpts below provide examples of such practise such as being undermined, having to prove yourself as a female leader, almost being forced to do "what the boys do", specifically referring to "the boys club" in order to progress, and not being heard as a female.

RP4: *"My only advantage is my credentials, because I've got a doctorate…it has helped me to appear, that they think "okay, no, she must be clever" since she's got a PhD".*

RP5: "*But as a female counterpart, you almost have to be questioned. You can see the, it's almost like, even if they don't question you directly, but it's almost like an undermine your abilities."*

RP7: *"And that's where women tend to see the most challenging, because where it's assumed that if you're female, first of all, the technical aspect is not there".*

In regard to the sub-culture of being excluded unless you fit in, the below excerpts paint a picture of some of the lived experiences that participants shared:

RP1: "*This is not for a woman…you don't belong here…I found myself chasing after the boys…I can't be going to the bar or to the golf course on the weekend when I actually want to spend time with my son…I have to do what the boys do in order to fit in."*

RP2: *"...there was a woman in there that said, you just have to have to have balls, and you have to be like they are."*

Despite this notion, one participant shared her observation on the shift that had started to take place in including females in decision making:

RP10: *"…I think in a dominated male environment such as mining, there was a welcoming of females around the decision-making table."*

It seemed as if the expectations to prove oneself was mostly not about the individual and their ability to execute on their work, but it was rather whether it was a male or female leader and sometimes even race.

RP1: *"And there has been the perception that if…you want to prove yourself as a female, you have to work twice as hard as your white counterpart, or you know, your black male counterpart, or maybe even five times harder than your, you know, white counterpart, and when the counterpart is male, then you have to make like 20 times harder".*

RP11: *"I've witnessed men explaining. You know, when a woman's talking, and a man will start trying to talk over the woman and try and explain what she's talking about; "mansplaining".*

Reports from participants indicated the none or little acknowledgements of female inputs in organisations; thereby not recognising the value that females add and bring to the table.

It was very interesting to see how the issue of being undermined as a female leader was described so emotionally by all participants who brought up the issue. Observations were made by the researcher during the interviews on facial expressions, use of hands and tones of voices, just how frustrating and emotional being undermined was making them. It was also noticed that even participants who were not necessarily experiencing this but had witnessed other females being undermined also shared the same level of frustration and injustice from those treatments.

All the challenges reported above indicated a culture of inequality between male and female leaders in corporate organisations. This seems to have a significant impact on how female leaders show up and their level of self-confidence as leaders.

Theme 2: Male dominance

Although the theme of the sub-culture was related to the male dominance in corporate organisations, it is important to highlight that the sub-culture was not necessarily a consequence of male dominance. There are practices that are informally allowed in organisations simply because organisations have followed the traditional masculine leadership in those organisations, even though they may no longer be male dominated. A barrier across the participants was the fact that their organisations are male dominated, particularly at senior leadership level. In sharing their challenge of male dominance in their organisations, participants reported that they were somewhat expected to behave as males did. This is illustrated by the following excerpts:

RP1: *"So yeah. And there's this thing that, you know, when you're in the mining industry, you have to have a thick skin, so to speak. It's male dominated, its aggressive."*

RP3: *"They think they're helping, but they're actually being patronising."*

RP7: *"I find that a lot of the challenges that I'm faced with, based on a very hierarchal male dominated, stringent corporate structure that didn't allow for, for an alternative way of thinking, which a lot of women do... because now you have to become like them to be part of them."*

These quotations illustrate that participants often have to prove themselves as valuable contributors in their organisations because of the male dominance in their organisations.

Theme 3: No support network structures for females

The challenge of not having formal structures that accelerate the development of female leaders in organisations seems to create another barrier for participant's

career progression. In the following excerpts, they explain how the absence of these networks make them feel excluded as the minority.

RP2: *"But I would be like, where are the women? Because most women don't play golf. But they don't do something that would involve women."*

RP4: "*First of all there's hardly any women. So, you don't have any female buddies. There's no girl club. There isn't. So, you're basically on the outside"*

RP7: "What *I have to do…outside of your everyday nine to five, is to establish networks that men don't have to establish. It comes to them, and for us we have to go to them, you know what I mean?"*

These describes unfair practices that participants have experienced and that have been normalised as some of the common actions that are often taken to exclude female leaders in organisations.

Theme 4: Unequal promotional & recognition practices and opportunities

According to the information in the below excerpts, it would seem that this challenge is usually hidden by some logic and an implication that female leaders are not ready for new opportunity while the similar approach is not taken for their male colleagues.

RP4: "*Obviously, they'll argue differently. But the criteria were very different. I was told, I didn't have enough experience to run that division. But the person who had run it previously had similar or less experienced than me, and they were male, and they were given the opportunity and I wasn't."*

RP8: "*But as a female, you get overlooked when the opportunities arise, these opportunities are mainly then given to males in the team.*"

These quotations illustrate that females do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts, irrespective of their skills, qualifications and competence.

Theme 5: Assumed gender-based responsibilities

The undertones surrounding certain responsibilities or tasks that are expected to be fulfilled by females was highlighted as one of the key challenges that participants often found themselves with. It came across as not being taken seriously for some participants.

RP8: *"I'm generally the only female sitting in a space of about 10 men that are sitting there. And I will be the person that people come in ask for stationary. So, it's just little things that really play off me. But again, I'm a senior manager in the organisation; I'm a senior leader. I've been placed in the situation where you're really not using me for my strengths and using me to almost pacify me and you think that being pacified when you're asking me to do stuff like that".*

Female leaders seem to have many common incidents that they have encountered as part of the barriers the continue to face in corporate organisations.

4.1.1.2 *Managing work-life integration*

The researcher chose to separate the specific challenges of managing work-life integration from other challenges because of the interest in understanding how female leaders are integrating their lives as this seem to be a challenge more specific to women. The findings below were found to be the most common amongst participants. Figure 5 summarises the main themes that emerged from the data.

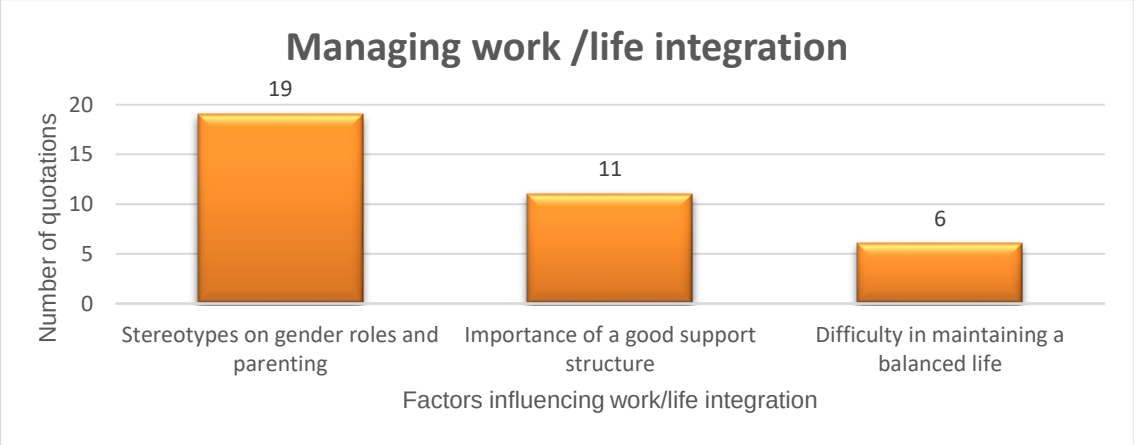

Figure 5: Managing work/life integration

In addition to describing their challenges and barriers they face in corporate organisations as female leaders, participants also shared factors that either impede or help in integrating work and life responsibilities, thereby achieving a balanced life.

Theme 1: Stereotypes on gender roles and parenting

The majority of participants (8 of 11) discussed stereotypes around gender roles and some cultural and social norms, and more specifically the stereotyping around parenting roles as the biggest hinderance to achieving some balance between work and social/home life, which participants experienced as burdensome.

RP2: *"And I must say when I got married, 15 years ago that traditional role thing, but why do I have to make food? I don't like making food. I found that very traumatic."*

RP3: *"And I think that also just the unfortunate realities of cultural norms, that still plays the bigger part of the burden of family responsibility on women…"*

RP6: *"The second challenge that I've recently picked up is obviously, when you become a mom....it was always a, I'm choosing between my child and my job."*

The burden of gender roles based on cultural/social norms and stereotype on the roles that women should play seem to have a negative impact on the female participants' careers.

Theme 2: Importance of a good support structure

When discussing some of the enablers of their work-life integration, many participants emphasised on the importance of having a good and strong support structure at home. The two excerpts below are examples that these participants referred to their own lives:

RP2: *"…by making sure that I have a good support at home. So, when we got a nanny, I made sure that she, she loves to cook, and then later she learned to drive. So, she now decides what we are going to eat, she buys the food that she*

makes the food she takes the children to school, she takes them to activities, there is no way that I wouldn't been able to cope without that."

RP11: *"If you have ambitions to grow, the reality is you sacrifice a lot...Now if you're in a position of leadership...it's even worse...but you need to have an extended family support structure and extended support structure that you can rely on."*

Some participants indicated that a good support structure seems to make it easier for them in balancing their work/life. Although participants were never asked if they have children or not, it was noticed that participants who indicated that they have children are the ones who stressed the need for a stable and solid support structure more.

Theme 3: Difficulty in maintaining a balanced life

Although more than half of participants (7 of 11) expressed their gratitude for the support structures they have at home, some also shared some difficulty in having a good balance of managing both home and work responsibilities. Some expressions that stood out were:

RP1: *"Sometimes I come back home with work things and you are just burdened, and who best to take it out on? I feel that it's not only with my son, but I feel that in my relationships in general. The reason I think most of them failed was because of that, because I was chasing the corporate ladder so much that you neglect to find that balance, you know, it was almost non-existent".*

RP10: *"I would prioritise the needs of the organisation and my work over my personal needs...there was very little that I had to do that impacted others; not being married and not having children or not having an accountability for others."*

The findings illustrate that having a seamless integration of work and home life is a continuous battle for most participants and therefore acknowledge that it is sometimes difficult to achieve a healthy balance between the two. A solid support system at home certainly plays a critical role in their lives and has also contributed to their leadership success.

From the findings, it appears that female leaders continue to face many challenges and barriers that hinder them to show up authentically and be effective as leaders. Organisational sub-culture that seem to not be governed which may be perpetuated by male dominance and gender stereotypes are found to be some of the primary challenges experienced by the participants.

4.1.2 RQ2*: What is perceived to be the value of coaching in the development of female leaders?*

The table below presents the findings from the participants' viewpoints on the value of coaching in developing female leaders.

Table 4: Findings for RQ2

Research question	Main themes	Sub themes per main themes in ranking order based on number of quotations
1. What is perceived to be the value of coaching in the development of female leaders?	1. Perspective on leadership	**Intrapersonal leadership** 1.1 Caring and empathetic **Interpersonal leadership** 1.2 Ability of a leader to influence 1.3 Leading by example 1.4 Building relationships / collaboration
	2. Coaching experience and effects on leadership	2.1 Heightened self-awareness 2.2 Improved relations with effective leadership 2.3 Personal growth 2.4 Improved self-confidence 2.5 Deeper and insightful reflections

Findings from participants' shared perspectives on leadership, as well as the effects of their coaching journey on their leadership are presented below:

4.1.2.1 *Perspective on leadership*

Participants' different perspectives on leadership could be divided into three levels of relationships: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal*. The themes that emerged

as participants provided their perspectives on leadership and reflected on their respective coaching journeys on their leadership development are presented on figure 6 below:



Figure 6: Perspective on leadership

The main themes that participants attributed to leadership were caring and people centric, ability of a leader to influence, leading by example and building relationships/collaboration are presented below:

Intrapersonal qualities

Theme 2: Ability of a leader to influence

A leader's ability to influence and empower others seem to have resonated well with most of participants in describing their views on effective leadership:

RP2: *"It's about enabling people to achieve those goals themselves it's about empowering people."*

RP7: *"I think you actually change and influence people's lives in ways that are incredibly impactful in in the direction that they have defined to take."*

RP10: *"So, my first starting point around leadership is, is that I believe it's a…it's a conscious choice that you take. I think it's a conscious choice that you take to*

influence people in such a way that you either motivate them or inspire them to do something to do something different."

The narrative above illustrates that a leader who is able to influence as well cultivate their growth by empowering them seems to be an important enabler for effective leadership.

Theme 3: Leading by example

A leader who aligns what they say with their behaviour seem to create a good impression of great leadership to participants. It is also apparent from the reflections from the interview excerpts below that leading by example also encourages and motivates others to do the same.

RP2: *"Also, leadership includes setting the example."*

RP10: *"…for the reason that I think you can lead without saying or doing anything."*

Interpersonal qualities

Theme 3: Caring and empathetic

Being a caring and empathetic leader seems to be the most important aspect of a great leader for most of the participants. The excepts below presents participants' views on what they believe leadership is fundamentally about:

RP3: "*So, it is more about the, the personal and behavioral attributes that that make a leader."*

RP5: *"…generally, you must be known as someone that's after the wellbeing of the people that you're leading."*

RP8: "*I think it's the ability to be flexible, resilient, I think it's the ability to be empathetic and understanding. I think it's a little bit of servant leadership"*

An empathetic leader who truly cares about the wellbeing of the people they lead, and consistently demonstrates this, seem to be the one who embodies effective leadership according to the participants. The sincerity of the participants as they

were sharing these views was observed and it showed how deeply they connected with what they were saying and really believed in this.

Theme 4: Building relationships / collaborating

The common response from the participants showed that as a leader, building relationships and collaborating with the people being led seem to be an important element of being successful and influential. Participants framed this as follows:

RP3: *"It's about an acknowledgement that you need a team around you in order to succeed; that your success is not yours alone."*

RP8: *"I like to connect with people…so I think that's a big part of leadership. I think you find it easier for things to get done when you are journeying with them versus telling them what to do."*

RP10: "*But I think a truly effective leader can transform people…through how they are and through their being and through the…connection that people have with that leader."*

It is evident from the above excepts, that the commitment of a leader to growing and developing others, is a poignant characteristic to not only contributing to other's development but to make an impact on them even beyond the leader's existence.

4.1.2.2 *Coaching experience and effects on leadership*

In this section, participants described how coaching has influenced their leadership development journey. Several themes emerged from this descriptions and are presented in figure 7 below:



Figure 7: Coaching experiences and effects on leadership

Participants shared their experiences on how coaching has affected their leadership roles and how it shaped them as better leaders. The top five themes that emerged from participants' experiences of coaching are: heightened self-awareness, improved relations with effective leadership, personal growth, improved self-confidence, deeper and insightful reflections, and are presented below:

Theme 1: Heightened self-awareness

An increased self-awareness seemed to be a powerful and profound outcome from the coaching experiences of most participants. This heightened self-awareness seems to have also enabled them to avoid pitfalls that may impede their successes. They provided insights on how coaching has had an impact on them in this regard:

RP1*: "But it actually ultimately forced me to look at myself to say, "who are you really?"*

RP5: *"So, it's, I mean, it's things that I think if I had not been through coaching and even mentoring that I would not have been immediately aware of, but now that I've got that, that enlightenment, I'm aware of it, and I avoid falling into those traps that are normally fall in the workplace."*

RP7: *"So essentially, she (my coach) was able to take an extract out of me; what my challenges, my stumbling blocks were, what I like, what I didn't like, what I*

was comfortable with, what I wasn't comfortable with, and where in the organisation I fit, based on all of that."

The participants seem to suggest that developing deep self-awareness seem to be the basis of how coaching adds value to one's development as a leader. As participants shared their experiences, it was powerful to notice how grateful participants were on the increase of their self-awareness as a result of coaching. Participants proudly shared their positive shifts that had begun to take place as the result of this heightened self-awareness.

Theme 2: Improved relations with effective leadership

As participants reflected on the contribution of coaching in positively impacting their leadership, they shared how firstly their relationship with their colleagues, teams and stakeholders improved, and then how they continue to show up better as leaders as a result of coaching. This is illustrated in the participants' narratives of their experiences:

RP7: *"And I said this to my coach as well. It, it actually changed the dynamic with my team positively…"*

RP10: *"...But when it comes to the impact that I can have on others, it is something that I that I hold exceptionally safe."*

RP11: "*And in applying those, not only did I then empower my people more. And then like I said, they just blossomed. But It also gave me a lot of free time to do more stuff like engagement sessions."*

These findings show significant impact that coaching has made on the participants' lives; both professionally and personally. They also reveal that coaching not only transformed participants as individuals, but it has also affected their teams positively. It was particularly interesting to hear that as participants became more effective leaders as a result of coaching, and the ripple effect thereof was evident in their business functions as well as areas of influence.

Another interesting factor to notice, was that although a few participants shared their initial skeptic on either coaching in general or in having a different coach

who uses different approaches, it was very interesting how all participants have become active advocates for coaching. In fact, some of them even mentioned how the only regret they have, is not having started with coaching earlier in their careers.

Theme 3: Personal growth

From the findings, a heightened self-awareness seems to have made it easier for most participants to learn to accept and embrace who they are, which contributed immensely to their personal growth. Part of this, was the realisation of how one's behaviour impacts others. These are illustrated in the excerpts below:

RP2: "*It helped me, I think, just see that I was enough*."

RP5: *"…because the skills that I get from the business coaching, I use them in my personal life."*

RP8: *"And really, I mean, without the coaching, I honestly don't feel that I would have been as resilient as I have been to tackle the problems, personally and from a career perspective."*

The effect that coaching had and continues to have on the lives of the female leaders is evident in these findings. As they were sharing these experiences and benefits, they also used an opportunity to deeply reflect on how their lives have significantly improved. Some of them even thanked the researcher for the opportunity for the interview, as they felt that it was another coaching session.

Theme 4: Improved self-confidence

The findings showed that one of the most common benefits of coaching on participants was improved self-confidence. As a result of some of the challenges they face, that they shared on RQ1, some participants had shared how their self-confidence was bruised. They courageously share in the following excepts:

RP4: *"It's (Coaching) given me more self-confidence. Because it has reinforced certain things about myself, which I started to lose."*

RP9: *“And I, I began to believe more in myself than what I used to, and it just affirmed that you know what, I'm capable.”*

RP11: *“I think coaching helped me find my center.”*

It is noticeable from the findings that coaching enhances leaders’ self-confidence. Reflections by the participants on how far they had come on working on their self-confidence were truly humbling and the appreciation on how coaching had unlocked appreciation of their abilities and capabilities.

Theme 5: Deeper and insightful reflections

It would seem that as a result of self-acceptance and increased self-confidence, participants were empowered to continuously do more meaningful and in-depth reflections on who they are and what legacy they are building:

RP8: ***“****And that has been a really profound experience for me, because you take the two seconds to take a step back and think, okay, if I could have handled this better, what could I have done, but you're not doing it in past, not doing retrospectively, you’re doing it in the moment”.*

RP 9: ***“****I think it's helped that I was able to find me. I struggled a lot to find who I am.”*

RP11: *“It is the introspection, understanding your life stages and understanding your triggers and understanding why you do what you do at such a deep level.... It transformed myself, my team."*

From these findings, it seems that coaching has positively built participants’ ability to introspect and reflect deeply, contributing towards being great and influential leaders.

Coaching seem to continue to play an important role in leadership development trajectories of the participants. As a tool that fosters reflection, it brings about increased self-confidence and self-awareness, thereby helping individuals improve their relationships with others.

4.1.3 RQ3: *How has executive coaching developed authenticity of females in their leadership roles, even when it was not the aim of the coaching to do so?*

The table below presents the findings for RQ3.

Table 5: Findings for RQ3

Research question	Main themes	Sub themes per main themes in ranking order based on number of quotations
2. How has executive coaching developed authenticity of females in their leadership roles, even when it was not the aim of the coaching to do so?	1. Perspective on authenticity	1.1 True to self 1.2 Vulnerability 1.3 Consistency
	2. Coaching's role in enhancing authenticity of female leaders	2.1 Rooted in core values 2.2 Improved self-confidence 2.3 Ability to influence 2.4 Increased self-awareness 2.5 The realisation for the need to coach men

Participants shared their viewpoints on the subject of authenticity and how coaching has impacted on their abilities to remain authentic as female leaders.

4.1.3.1 *Perspective on authenticity*

From the participants' narratives, the following themes emerged as illustrated in figure 8 below:



Figure 8: Perspectives on authenticity

Theme 1: True to self

It was very interesting to notice that when asked to share their perspectives on authenticity, being true to self was the main theme across all participants. They all shared how the incongruency in behaviour to one's true inner values prevents one from being authentic:

RP1: *"I think, really authentic is when you're genuine. And regardless of what other people's perception are, but you know, you're just genuine and you're just being true to yourself, and to that which you believe in."*

RP3: *"…not feeling that you have to sacrifice your own values, and what's important to you, in order to succeed or fit in at work."*

RP11: *"Always be true to yourself, your moral ethics and your principles. I find that, that that's all part of authenticity; stand your ground for what you know is right. And that gives you lots of strength and courage even in the face of the resistance."*

These findings illustrate that being true to yourself plays a big and important role in authenticity, including vulnerability as this seems to create credibility with their teams and those they engage with.

Theme 2: Vulnerability

In being true to the self, being vulnerable also seems to be an aspect of authenticity that participants felt strongly about. It appears that vulnerability is seen as a strength for a leader, as it allows for sincere connections with others. This is reflected in the excepts below:

RP8: *"But for me, the vulnerability aspect comes in when you're trying to connect with people. And I think when you're showing them that you're sincere. I don't think that you can be authentic without being vulnerable to be honest."*

RP11: *"…one of the important things I learned is to be vulnerable - appropriately vulnerable…it doesn't make you weak to share things that are weighing down you, in whichever way or form and you'll be amazed at what happens as a result."*

Being vulnerable as a leader seem to be characterised as a strength and a positive trait that ought to be developed. The findings suggest vulnerability as fundamental in forming trusting relationships and establishing deeper emotional connections with others and being sincere in doing so.

Theme 3: Consistency

It appears that for one to be authentic, consistency as a leader is important. The impact thereof is shown in the excerpts below:

RP4: *"For me, it's about being true to your values as a leader…because it means I can be consistent as a leader."*

RP9: *"If you're going to have like different facades, and be someone different all the time, it affects trust; people then don't trust you in the organisation."*

Although only two participants spoke about the need for consistency, it was the big difference in the number of years in leadership (two years and 11 years respectfully), and the two different industries of these participants (banking and manufacturing) that provided rationale for consistency as a leader to be a sub-theme and interesting.

4.1.3.2 *Coaching's role in enhancing authenticity*

In sharing their coaching experiences in relation to their authenticity, although the intention of the coaching was not for authenticity, the themes that emerged are presented in figure 9 below:

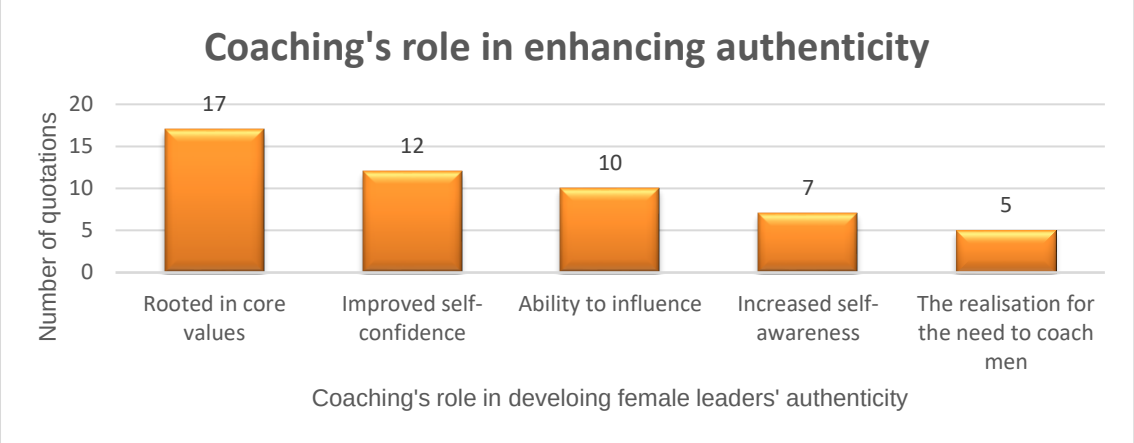

Figure 9: Coaching's role in enhancing authenticity

Theme 1: Rooted in core values

From the findings, it would seem that coaching is not only an effective tool to develop leaders, but it also provides a safe environment for one to authentically show up within different contexts and environments. This seem to also be linked with the strength of a leader to boldly be vulnerable and consistent in ways that are aligned to their highly regarded and deeply rooted core values, thereby gaining more respect from those they are leading and others around them. These are reflected below:

RP5: *"So, we tap into our natural characteristics and things that make us female, and we make sure that those things are the ones that help us get ahead."*

RP7: *"I found coaching allowed me to understand when to stand my ground. And a lot of women don't do that, a lot of women don't feel like they… they can stand their ground, and they can be heard, when there is an important thing to me to say."*

RP9: *You're able to be a consistent person, once you find you; what you believe in, and then be able to, to hold on to that and be stern on that. And not be a person way, you just go where the wind is blowing."*

From these findings, it would seem that coaching as a tool does amplify the authenticity of female leaders by empowering them to be firmly rooted in their core values consistently so. The findings also show that being vulnerable and acknowledging one's own shortcomings is recognised as a strength rather than a weakness, which most participants are now starting to embrace and practice often.

Theme 2: Improved self-confidence

It appears from the findings that coaching contributes to increased self-confidence as participants experiences growth and transformation from coaching. This is reflected in the excerpts below:

RP2: ***"****It makes me feel more confident. That whole thing of being enough and being valued."*

RP6: *"It's self-reflection but also being conscious of how you appear, you know and that also build on your self-confidence."*

RP9: *"It's just I think it's it really just goes back to believing in yourself. And if you don't know how to do it (believing in yourself), or what it means, then it's difficult for you to achieve the sense of being a good leader in an organisation."*

Linked to the themes from the research question on the effect of coaching on development of leadership, it should be noted how coaching has consistently emerged in having high impact on the increase of self-confidence for the participants.

Theme 3: Ability to influence

In acknowledging the existence of other approaches and tools to enable authenticity, participants highlighted the positive contribution that coaching can have on their ability to influence. In addition, it was highlighted that being

authentic allows one to embrace differences of others, making it easier for them to influence. The excerpts below demonstrate this:

RP8: *"And then I think there is so much value that coaching can add from an authenticity perspective…"*

RP11: *"But then making the time for it, allowed me the opportunity to take that step back and allow people to do things differently, to allow people to grow."*

It was interesting to note that one participant strongly expressed her belief on the ability to be influential as a leader, irrespective without reference to gender.

RP10: "*People must speak about me as a leader more than they must speak about me as a female leader."*

Findings from this study, has shown that although the goals of the participants' coaching journeys were not about the development of authenticity, the outcomes generally revealed a positive impact that coaching has had on embracing their authenticity. It is worth noting that participants' experiences of coaching yielded the similar themes to what have shared as their views on what authenticity is.

Theme 4: Increased self-awareness

A critical success factor to embracing their authenticity as female leaders seem to be an increased self-awareness and the conscious decisions of making a positive impact.

RP8: *"I think that's where coaching helps with that building that own self-awareness. What is your own brand? What are the things that are going to drive you what are the things you're passionate about? And then how do you live that on a day to day basis?"*

RP10: *"being able to be more comfortable in the calm and the quiet…and I think that quiet has made me a more authentic leader, more deliberate and more conscious."*

It is interesting to notice how self-awareness was a common theme across all three research questions in this study. Most participants shared that for them to

learn new behaviours and become better versions of themselves as leaders, was a result of a heightened level of self-awareness.

Theme 5: The realisation for the need to coach men

A surprising finding was that few participants strongly expressed the need to also ***coach men*** as an important contribution to the development of female leaders' authenticity. These participants firmly believe that a positive shift can only take place when everyone is involved:

RP3: ***"****You must coach the men to move out of their own biases and stereotypes and paradigms of what leadership looks like, and to embrace within themselves and in others the stereotypically feminine characteristics of leadership."*

RP9: ***"…****because we have all these initiatives and programmes for women in the bank, and how women should succeed and grow… you are really actually preaching to the converted, because we know what our issues are. And we know what we want to do and what we want to achieve, but the audience that need be there is not part of those discussions."*

RP10: *"If anything, I think, if men could go through coaching, and be… become more authentic, and acknowledge things like, I enjoy my power…"*

Findings reveal the importance of inclusivity in addressing the challenges that hinder female leaders to embrace their authenticity in corporate organisations.

The findings have indicated that the role of coaching in embracing authenticity of female leaders has been highlighted as an important element in leadership development.

4.2 Summary of the findings

This chapter provided a presentation of findings from the study. The main themes that emerged from interviews were presented in alignment to the research questions.

The main finding of this study for RQ1 is organisational sub-culture. This is the informal culture of organisations where certain behaviours are deemed not appropriate, but organisations have allowed it to happen. Participants feel that many of their barriers and challenges are perpetuated by this sub-culture; hindering them to truly embrace their authenticity. They feel that men talk over them, they often go against their authentic selves from the expectations to “fit in and their voices are generally not being heard or significantly ignored.

Other challenges and barriers that participants face in corporate organisations include dominance of males, the lack of support network structures for females in organisations, unequal promotional and recognition practices and assumed gender-based responsibilities. All these challenges have been highlighted to make it.

A key finding on RQ2 - coaching experience and its effects on leadership, which was discussed by the majority of participants is that coaching heighted their self-awareness, which led to their increased self-confidence and as a result, enabled considerable personal growth and to unapologetically embrace their authenticity. These seemed to have a direct and positive impact on their leadership.

The third finding which emanated from RQ3, which aimed to discover coaching’s role in enhancing authenticity of female leaders is being rooted in their core values and being consistent at that. Participants explained how their coaching experiences enabled them to see the ability of coaching (because of its nature) to really help females to remain true to themselves despite the challenges and barriers that women continue to face in corporate organisations.

5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the specific challenges and barriers that female leaders face in South African corporate organisations and furthermore, to explore how executive coaching could develop their authenticity as female leaders. This chapter provides a discussion of the research findings against what is currently available in literature.

The discussion of the findings focuses on the following research objectives (RO):

1. To explore specific challenges and barriers faced by female leaders that led them to seek executive coaching.
2. To explore what female leaders perceive to be the value of coaching in their leadership development.
3. To explore how executive coaching develops the authenticity of females in their leadership roles even if it was not the aim of coaching to do so.

While the participants in this study held different leadership roles, different level of experiences across different industries, each of the themes were common to them. The next sections are a discussion of the findings presented in chapter 4 of this report while reflecting on the literature presented in chapter 2.

5.1 Discussion of findings

The following discusses the research findings for each research objective.

5.1.1 *RO1: Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders that led them to seek executive coaching*

The challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders in corporate organisations in are multifaceted and are presented and discussed through five themes: organisational sub-culture, male dominance, no support network structures for females, unequal promotional and recognition practices, and assumed gender responsibilities as follows.

5.1.1.1 Challenges and barriers faced by female leaders

To understand challenges and barriers that female leaders come across in corporate organisations, the researcher conducted the interviews in a way that also triggered participants to share their own specific and personal challenges. The findings below are discussed:

Theme 1: Organisational sub-culture

The findings revealed that organisational sub-culture is the biggest barrier for female leaders in corporate organisations. The sub-culture from the participants' descriptions and experiences are linked to the informal culture of an organisation, where certain behaviours and practices such being talked over and being asked to do roles that are "deemed to be for women", although not appropriate, do take place and have been 'allowed' and have been normalised. This is aligned to literature by Schein (2006) on the concept of the invisible layers in organisations. According to Schein and other researchers (Fard, Rostamy, & Taghiloo, 2009; Nachmias & Caven, 2018; Pringle, 2014; Walker & Haiyan, 2019), these are underlying forces that are below the surface that manifest through patterns of behaviours, language, among other factors. In this study, patterns such as female leaders not being heard, and their voices being significantly ignored is prominent across different industries and is one of the main barriers that lead female leaders to seek coaching.

The expectation to prove oneself was the leading challenge shared by the participants. Most participants felt that there was some expectations for them to always prove themselves as leaders. They felt that this was only expected from them as females and it was not the case for their male colleagues. This perpetual expectation seem to create an overwhelming frustration on the participants as they always have to put in more effort in their work just to prove that they are also capable of delivering good quality work just like their male counterparts. This highlighted challenge in this study is consistent with research by Vial, Napier, and Brescoll (2016) who state that these expectations and assumptions that women are less competent leaders than men, had indeed created a culture of women having to work harder than men to prove their competence.

It can be argued that, it is because of the cultural stereotypes found in various research studies (Bierema, 2016; Cropley & Cropley, 2017; Oakley, 2000), that participants in this study felt that actions made by their male counterparts, were mostly conducted unconsciously. Participants who had the courage to confront the people who were treating them unfairly, noticed a sudden realisation of their behaviour and the impact thereof on these females. The researcher can therefore claim that gender stereotypes emanating from some cultural systems have an effect on female leaders in corporate organisations.

Theme 2: Male dominance

It appears from the findings that male dominance was prevalent in the participants' organisations and it poses a significant challenge for them as the minority in their specific organisations. Participants felt that because of male dominance, they often faced challenges of not "fitting in" as they believed it was the men's rules and way of doing things that set the standards. when they do not follow the masculine norms that dominate their organisations. This challenge is supported by Wahl (2014, p. 133)…"numerical domination of men in senior management positions has significance in terms of men's greater influence and power in organisations relative to women". Based on these arguments it appears that female leaders, therefore, do not have much influence and often struggle to be impactful as leaders because of the significant number of males in the senior leadership positions.

Male dominance might also be linked to the difficulty for women to shatter the glass ceiling or even appreciating their self-worth, as confirmed by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) when they postulate that because of the scrutiny and great criticism that females face as the minority in corporate organisations, they struggle to advance past certain levels of leadership roles.

Theme 3: No support network structures for females

As a result of the lack of support network structures for females in participants' organisations, many of them felt excluded. For many participants, being outside the closed networks of men, often excluded them from some important discussions and decisions as these often happen in these networks. Fitting into

the boy's club in corporate organisations as a female becomes a tough decision that one makes, for their career to advance. Being able to fit in or not, eminently excludes you from being part of the decision making, and essentially not having key people that can sponsor or vouch for you to be provided with growth opportunities (Morley, 2014). Most of them felt that they were being treated like they did not belong to their teams or with their male colleagues. Sugiyama et al. (2016) postulate that people in organisations feel included when they experience high levels of belonging as well as highly valued as unique individuals. This correlates with what was found in this study as many participants feel that they often have to chase their male colleagues and adjust to their way of doing things for them to feel included. This however meant that in the process they were losing their authenticity and they blended in to feel valued. The challenge of not having formal networks for women is also relevant in organisations where rules which excludes women from networks exists, in a form of inappropriate behaviours and/or activities that by their nature reject women (Sheerin, 2018).

In contrast, research by Forret and Dougherty (2004) postulate that women's networks are less effective than those of men's and therefore only men were really benefiting from these networks. In understanding why women's networks are seldom effective, Greguletz, Diehl, and Kreutzer (2019) concluded that women may have personal hesitation to joining these networks and modesty of females lead to their networks' ineffectiveness. It can be concluded that the main reasons why female leaders don't initiate women's network or are uncomfortable joining men's networks, might be as a result of the nature of these networks as well as their lack of self-confidence.

Theme 4: Unequal promotional and recognition practices

The findings revealed that females continue to face unequal promotional opportunities and unfair recognition practices in corporate organisations. Participants highlighted that they do not have the same opportunities as males in their organisations; they are seen as less competent.

In literature, Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) concluded that female leaders are often denied opportunities to advance their careers mainly because of their

gender. In other research studies, it has been discovered that in predominantly male-dominated environments, identifying team members' skills and competence is often linked to gender and female's expertise is therefore not recognised as a result (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Joshi, 2014).

This non-recognition emerges in the form of promotions and remuneration where a non-conformist is always negatively impacted. This finding correlates with Höpfl et al. (2007), who suggests that the women have long been unfairly treated and continue to not have influence on how the others value them. This could be as a result of no-conformance to the standards set by men in corporate organisations. The study by Schulz and Enslin (2014) also revealed the same challenges highlighted by the research participants in this study. What was evident from the study was that males either consciously or unconsciously impose masculine behaviours to the female colleagues. As a result, females often find themselves where they have to do things that they do not necessarily find interesting because they realised that if they do not (for example go to the golf course) then they miss out on some decisions that are taken there. Consistent with the findings of this study and the literature review, it is therefore noted that female leaders often get overlooked for promotions and opportunities for growth.

Theme 5: Assumed gender-based responsibilities

Findings confirms the argument that gender stereotypes have posed major challenges for many female leaders in corporate organisations. In this study, participants shared their frustrations of being given menial and non-creative tasks as a result of associations of roles that can only be associated with certain genders. According to Cundiff and Vescio (2016), the assumptions about gender-based responsibilities are part of the reason why there is underrepresentation of senior female leaders in organisations. In addition, males are more likely given key leadership tasks and responsibilities, making it detrimental for females to excel in their leadership roles and careers (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

5.1.1.2 Managing work/life integration

Findings from this study revealed three main themes for managing work/life integration: gender roles /cultural social norms /parenting roles, the importance of a good support structure and difficulty in maintaining a balanced life.

Theme 1: Gender roles / cultural social norms / parenting role

Findings revealed that most participants (particularly those who are parents), felt that as women they had additional responsibilities at home that are just as important as their careers that made it very challenging for them to have a seamless integration of the two main roles. They felt disadvantaged by this as many of them expressed how men do not have the same challenges, for example, when their children fall sick, and having to take longer maternity leaves to nurture their young children. This is consistent with Coleman et al. (2012) when they conceded that roles that females are socially associated with, often contributes to a delay in their career progression.

Theme 2: Importance of a good support structure

Almost all participants in this study emphasised the importance of having a good support structure in their lives as female leaders. Many of them practically shared how a stable and reliable support structure enabled them to still focus on their careers and put in the necessary additional effort and time to ensure that they accelerate in their roles. Support such as external family members, domestic helpers or Au Pairs and good friends enabled them to juggle their family/home roles as well as their demanding jobs in corporate organisations (Glass & Cook, 2016). In the study by Davis and Maldonado (2015), it was found that participants learnt and observed this family support structure from their childhood, where - in their traditions and culture, extended families are very influential in their lives. This support structure is fundamental in their leadership development journey.

Theme 3: Difficulty in maintaining a balanced life

Managing and maintaining a good balance between work and personal life seem to be a very challenging reality for most participants. These participants mostly

highlighted the sacrifices they made for work, including even their own health and general well-being (Pluut, Ilies, Curşeu, & Liu, 2018). In the study by Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013, p. 7), a similar finding emerged that “most of the female felt that while their male counterparts did not have the responsibilities for housework and childcare during their work life, they personally continued to have these responsibilities and that these responsibilities increased their stress level, the family structure has a great impact on career success”.

5.1.2 *RO2: Perceived value of coaching in females’ leadership development*

In the following section, two themes are discussed. The first theme outlines, broadly, the participants’ perspectives on leadership. In the second section, a discussion on how, for women, coaching affects leadership is presented.

5.1.2.1 Perspective on leadership

The four main themes that emerged were: caring and people centric, ability of a leader to influence, leading by example, and building relationships /collaboration.

Theme 1: Caring and people centric

Interesting perspectives on leadership by participants were found to be aligned to previous research conducted on leadership. Most participants felt that an important attribute of a leader is caring about the wellbeing of those that they lead. They are more in tune with the needs of the people, their development and being more understanding towards them. In line with Arnold (2017), for the participants, a leader who is deliberate about putting people first and deeply care about them, shows great leadership. In fact, care and empathy are important values for validating a person’s experience so that as a leader, you’re able to bring people on board with you (Selzer, Howton, & Wallace, 2017). This is an important attribute given that people are a key asset in any venture.

Theme 2: Ability of a leader to influence

Findings revealed that the ability of a leader to influence not only the people they lead, but other stakeholders in their business was a key finding from this study. Some participants expressed their belief that influencing others is a conscious decision that a leader makes through inspiring. It ought to be a conscious decision because literature teaches us that leaders have significant influence over people's health, future and happiness (Stewart, 2018). They also see that influencing taking place without a leader being necessarily being physically present or saying anything. This can "also help an individual become more effective in leading others, which benefits the organisation as well (Gipson et al., 2017). Another important aspect of this influence that was emphasised by participants in this study, was a leader who empowers people to be great and being the best version of themselves.

Theme 3: Leading by example

The theme of being influential as a leader, is followed by leading by example. This according to the participants is a demonstration of great leadership as it makes it easier for others to follow a leader when they do what they say or "practice what they preach". This ties in well with Kolzow (2014)'s PhD thesis that a leader is a person who, amongst others, leads by example. From this, it can be said that through leading by example, a leader also creates inspiration to people as they see the possibilities from them.

Theme 4: Building relationships / collaboration

Participants identified that for a leader to truly succeed, they cannot do things alone. Therefore, collaborating with others (including their teams) and building strong, trusting relationships with these people is important and something that they take very seriously. Many of them shared their own experiences of how they were able to realise their vision and goals through collaborations with others and by maintaining great relationships with them. Some of them even referred to it as creating partnerships for greater success. Operating in a world of complexity, with high dynamism, collaboration has the added effect of breaking "down traditional walls" (Passmore, 2015, p. 266). However, what underpins this is a leader with

both a back bone, to state a position, popular or unpopular, and a heart, to remain engaged to a relationship (O'Neill, 2011). This foundation lays a strong basis for building a relationship.

5.1.2.2 Coaching experience and effects on leadership

Theme 1: Heightened self-awareness

Findings revealed that heightened self-awareness was a common thread among participants as they reflected on their own coaching experiences. Most of these female leaders shared how coaching brought a deeper level of awareness on themselves as well as reinforced some of the things that they had already known. Many of these participants revealed that their coaching sessions were eye opening and it helped them realise their triggers, owning up their different emotions and how all that may have an impact on others. Not surprisingly, this links in well with literature that “being aware of blind spots is arguably more important for women than men” (Gipson et al., 2017, p. 41). This was specifically discussed in the context of multirater feedback and that women appreciate the opportunity to receive honest feedback that they can use for their development. Furthermore, some of the participants in this study defined this experience as transformational as a result of this heightened self-awareness.

Theme 2: Improved relations with effective leadership

The findings revealed that as a result of coaching, participants expressed how they started to see a positive shift in their relationships with others and therefore how they show up as leaders in general. They became more effective leaders, more influential and the positive impact that they can have on others. This requires a broadened but customised approach to others, to situations and/or scenarios (O'Neill, 2011). It also became a profound realisation for some participants to embrace the fact that leadership is much more than the titles that they might hold, and more about the values and principles that have a positive effect on others’ lives. This is important because it separates genuine leaders from narcissistic leaders who are not able to discern their interests from those of the organisation (De Vries, 2011).

Theme 3: Personal growth

As part of their overall gain from the coaching experiences, participants highlighted contentment with themselves as part of the continuous personal growth that they achieved as individuals. Participants were empowered to use the learnings from their coaching sessions not only in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. They saw improvement in how they engaged with others, started to have more positive thoughts about themselves and having more trust in their people and giving them more autonomy. This aligns with Des' example, in Kahn (2011)'s *Coaching on the Axis,* in which the former moved from anxiety-based engagements to comfortability between her personal power and context.

Theme 4: Improved self-confidence

Self-confidence was highlighted as an aspect that increased substantially as a result of coaching, for many participants. As part of self-acceptance, they started believing in themselves more and being bolder in their decisions, engagement and point of view. And this self-acceptance is possible through an honest reflection of one's strengths and seeing how these strengths are equal to the task at hand (Passmore, 2015). In the book, *Women's Way of Knowing* (1997), women found that they had to develop their mind, self and voice to develop their leadership skills (Selzer et al., 2017). This way, these female leaders became firmer, stood to what they believed in and were not shaken by different opinions.

Theme 5: Deeper and insightful reflections

As a result of pressures from their jobs and expectations to deliver results, several participants acknowledged that before their coaching journey, they hardly invested time in deep and meaningful reflections. Insightful reflections are possible through intuitive, emotive and personal strength (Selzer et al., 2017). They have started practicing this "powerful" habit (as described by one of the participants) during their coaching journey and they have seen exceptional results such as being more rational, having clarity of mind, being more deliberate, committed and being mindful. All of this makes for a present leader who's able to *occupy* and *hold* space for others at the same time (Dickerson, 2019).

5.1.3 *RO3: Coaching and the development of authenticity of females in leadership roles, even if it was not the intention of coaching to do so*

To understand how coaching develops the authenticity of females in leadership positions, participants shared their views on authenticity and then how, if at all through their coaching experiences, they started to embrace their authenticity. The discussion below is based on the reported views of the participants on authenticity based on their own experiences.

5.1.3.1 Perspective on authenticity

The study highlights three main perspectives on what authenticity is about. These include true to self, vulnerability, and consistency.

Theme 1: True to self

Being true to the self was found to be a common theme in understanding of authenticity in this study. All participants mentioned the need and importance of one to remain true to their core being, despite others' perception of them when describing authenticity. The findings suggest that a leader who truly values their authenticity will always attempt to stay true to their values and that this leader is mindful to act in a way that aligned to his/her values. This is consistent with Sims and Morris (2018) who emphasises the importance of beliefs and values as a core components of authenticity.

Furthermore, it can be said that if this true to the self, leader was to be in an organisation that does not align with their moral ethics, then they would rather leave that organisation to avoid being in conflict with their true north. The reported perspectives on authenticity are supported by previous studies that found that indeed authenticity is prompted when people behave in congruent with their values (Bishop, 2013; Harter, 2002; Liu et al., 2015; Sims & Morris, 2018; Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017).

In contrast however, Schlegel, Hicks, King, and Arndt (2011) view the true self as a subjective as it relates on how the individual personally values themselves and

therefore questions if the person in indeed being authentic. In addition it is seen on the person's own judgement of their behaviour (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2016).

Theme 2: Vulnerability

The ability of one to expose their vulnerability where necessary was highlighted as a strength as opposed to showing weakness and something that developed trust with others. A finding in this study, revealed that an expression of this quality gains more respect and created emotional connections with others as a result. Indeed, some studies support that being vulnerable certainly creates a level of trust with others and become more relatable with them (Ito & Bligh, 2016; Meyer, Le Fevre, & Robinson, 2017). It is seen as a positive trait when there is a willingness to be honest and open as well as acknowledging one's flaws.

Showing vulnerability can however be seen as weakness or as risky (Bruk, Scholl, & Bless, 2018). They continue to say that it may be risky because for some it may result in dismissal or not being considered for promotion. The same authors argue that vulnerability becomes a weakness when the displayer of such is inconsistent with the person's internal feelings and emotions.

Theme 3: Consistency

Participants expressed that authentic people are always consistent in how they show up because fundamentally they align with who they truly are. Aligned to these finding is that the consistency between what a leader says and do is a true reflection of their character and being an effective and authentic leader (Goffee & Jones, 2015).

5.1.3.2 Coaching's role in enhancing authenticity of female leaders

Five main themes emerged from the findings on the role of coaching in enhancing female leaders' authenticity. These are: rooted in core values, improved self-confidence, the ability to influence, increased self-awareness and the realisation of the need to coach men.

Theme 1: Rooted in core values

Findings from this study revealed that coaching played a significant role in participants' ability to live up to their true values. Core values are seen as those inner values that make who they really are and fundamentally drive decisions and behaviour of participants in this study. Participants described the peace of mind that comes with being rooted in their core values. In the research by Wald and Harland (2017), they link authenticity the individual's knowledge about their values and their true self. It can be concluded that part of understanding oneself and embracing their authenticity is discovery of their core values and then live according to those values and beliefs. Individuals need to be rooted in their core values and always behaving in that way that is consistent with who they are (Beddoes-Jones, 2015; Hewlin, 2015; Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015; Liu et al., 2015; van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). In these afore-mentioned studies, it is revealed that where there is misalignment between authentic people / leaders and the values of the organisations they work for, they very seldom compromise their core values, and they would rather opt to leave that organisation.

Theme 2: Improved self-confidence

Similar to coaching's effect on leadership, increased self-confidence has been linked to authenticity for participants in this study. Participants felt that through coaching, they had an increased belief in their performance as well as their leadership skills and effectiveness. It was revealed that having a strong sense of being enough and valued, enables one to be more authentic. The findings are consistent with the conclusion from the study by Jackson (2019) that coaching provides positive support and has influence in aiding behaviour change in women to embrace their authenticity more. This finding presented in section 4.1.3.2 is consistent with the framework for women's leadership development on self-efficacy (O'Neil et al., 2015). This framework asserts that through making a female leader realise their unique value to their organisation by focusing on their ideal self, coaching increases their self-confidence and self-efficacy. A leader who therefore displays a deep understanding of their competencies and abilities, is able to make a positive impact on others (Caldwell, 2016).

Theme 3: Ability to influence

The value of coaching as it relates to the ability to be influential was significant in this study. The link to authenticity was that as they become more authentic as females, they are able to strategically use their authenticity to influence positively. Interestingly, a study by Guillén, Mayo, and Karelaia (2018) suggests that people who show self-confidence are more likely to have more influence in the organisation. This suggestion indicate that embracing one's authenticity has a ripple effect on their leadership presence and their ability to influence as leaders.

Theme 4: Increased self-awareness

As a result of coaching, participants in this study felt liberated as they gained more insights on themselves. Participants linked this to authenticity in that one cannot truly be who they are if they have not become aware of who they truly are. Some participants expressed that this increased self-awareness reduces the burden of "expectability"; which they describe as the frustration of having to do things that are expected of them but are not aligned with their true self. They get to know at a deep level who and what they are, and what they can never be. This finding supports Caldwell (2016) in that through self-awareness, individuals get to establish their overall purpose and therefore prioritise more effectively.

Conversely however, van den Bosch and Taris (2014) argue that authenticity does not only have the aspect of self-evaluation (an internal trait), but in the organisation in particular, authenticity is a state and largely influenced by the congruency between the individual's core self and the work environment. Beddoes-Jones (2015) also supports this view, in that an organisation that advocates and encourages authenticity, must give individuals the liberty to be authentic their own way.

Theme 5: The realisation of the need to coach men

An interesting finding in this study was certainly the need for men to also be coached to become aware of their biases and stereotyping for understanding the role they play in enabling or inhibiting female leaders to embrace their authenticity in corporate organisations. Most participants expressed how the focus on

addressing the issues of inequality and other unfair practices in organisations is mainly on developing females, which is a great thing and highly appreciated, but they feel that the environment does not enable them to fully embrace their authenticity. For the most part, their male colleagues are still “blinded” by their own prejudices and continue to create barriers to female leaders being the best version of themselves.

From the findings, it can be concluded that, although coaching plays an important role in enhancing female leaders’ authenticity and therefore increase their leadership presence, there are some organisational contexts that always need to be taken into consideration. Such nuances include the behaviour (whether explicitly or subtly) of male leaders in the organisations. As such, an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration is certainly the inclusion of men in any effort to address some barriers that female leaders face in corporate organisations, including being coached on the very issues that inhibit female leaders to embrace their authenticity (Ngunjiri & Gardiner, 2017; Valerio & Sawyer, 2016).

5.2 Conclusion

The findings on this study confirm the positive role and value of coaching on leadership development as well as on the enhancement of authenticity, particularly on female leaders’ authenticity. This is largely driven by the challenges barriers that emerged from the study that female leaders continue to face in corporate organisations.

Below is the summary of conclusions on the research propositions:

5.2.1 *Proposition 1*

With regards to proposition 1: “*Female leaders face numerous challenges and barriers such as the glass ceiling effect, work-life balance, unfair practices influenced by organisational sub-culture and prejudice and discrimination from gender stereotyping that hinder them to be effective leaders*”; the study revealed

that women indeed face many challenges and barriers that make it really difficult for them to be effective leaders.

It can be said that until such a point that there is a deeper cultural transformation in organisations where unfair practices are radically challenged, addressed and people held accountable, women leaders will continue to have challenges in their organisations.

Female leaders increasingly find it challenging to achieve work/life integration. This is permeated by the many roles that they actively play in their families and society.

5.2.2 *Proposition 2*

Coaching is a key contributor to leadership development through improving behaviour and engagement with others, providing space for deep reflections for self-awareness and enabling personal growth.

The findings revealed that coaching has certainly improved their behaviour in terms of how participants show up as leaders. Through reflections on their coaching experiences, participants shared how they gained in the following aspects: personal growth, increased self-confidence and their ability to consciously and deliberately engage in deep and meaningful reflections. The results of these enable them to interrogate their engagements with others for positive influence.

5.2.1 *Proposition 3*

Coaching can have a positive effect on the authenticity of female leaders. Through increasing women's self-awareness, cultivating their self-efficacy and supporting them in defining their leadership presence, executive coaching develops the authenticity of female leaders.

It can be said that through heightened self-awareness, one is able to fully discover what their north star is and then start aligning their behaviours to this. By behaving consistently with their core values at all times, female leaders are able to be

develop their self-efficacy and therefore establish their leadership presence in corporate organisation. Through this presence, their unique voices are being heard, their taking up space in their own way and having influence in driving the key organisational objectives and performance. This conclusion from the study's finding, is consistent with the framework for women's leadership development positioned in section 2.4.3. Coaching also helps individuals to remain consistent in what they do and say, as well as the decisions they make.

An enlightening finding was the need to coach men in a bid to bring about positive change and therefore deliberately address the sub-culture in corporate organisations. It can be concluded that in order to break the barriers that female leaders face, male leaders also need to be included in the dialogue that take place for female's development, including coaching to make men aware of their blind spots.

6 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore the effect of executive coaching as a tool in the development of female leaders and how it can develop their authenticity in South African corporates. This chapter summarises the key findings of the research regarding the challenges and barriers faced by female leaders in corporate organisations in South Africa. Recommendations are also made for key stakeholders, followed by limitations of this study and concluding with recommendations for further research.

6.2 Summary of main findings

The main findings for each research objective are discussed, as follows.

6.2.1 *Challenges and barriers faced by female senior leaders that lead them to seek coaching*

Findings from this study revealed that organisational sub-culture plays a major role to the challenges and barriers that female leaders find themselves in. This informal and “accepted” challenge makes it difficult for female leaders to successfully navigate their organisations and feel accepted and respected as leaders just as their male peers and colleagues. This sub-culture ignores the unfair practices and treatments that females endure in corporate organisations. For the most part, they constantly need to prove themselves as competent leaders and this results in them having to put in more effort in their work with the attempt of being taken seriously.

A possible conclusion that can be drawn from this is that because of the traditional masculine culture in many corporate organisations, which results in female leaders being overlooked for promotions, and stretch opportunities, female leaders often find themselves in very stressful environments. They literally

become limited in giving their best, their creative thinking is stifled, and they are limited in their ability to influence.

It can also be concluded that the gender stereotypes in corporate organisations also perpetuates barriers for women. These stereotypes form part of the social and cultural issues that go back to early childhood where children were taught and socialised with ideas of gender roles.

A conclusion can be drawn that because of female leaders having to put in double the effort to prove themselves in corporate organisations, this also creates a difficulty in their ability to maintain a balance between work and personal life. They often have to make sacrifices in their families for their careers to progress and advance in the corporate ladder.

An interesting finding was that although it was the participants who are mothers who strongly emphasised the importance of having a good and stable support structure at home, it was not only females who have children who struggle with a healthy work-life integration. Most of the participants mentioned the need for support through extended family, helper or friends that make their lives more manageable as they find themselves with more responsibilities at work as leaders. It can be concluded that female leaders who have a reliable support system at home are able to better manage their work-life balance and put in the additional efforts required for them to succeed and be effective in their leadership roles.

6.2.2 *Perceived value of coaching in the development of female leaders*

Regarding the innate feminine values and qualities, it is not surprising that caring and being people centric was the main finding for this research question. This quality was reported to be one of the most important aspects of an effective leader by participants, at least from their own experiences. It can be concluded that a leader who genuinely care for others has a significant effect on their ability to be effective as leaders as people easily connect with you and therefore support your vision.

Putting people first and being empathetic and compassionate certainly makes a leader more relatable and therefore increases their success in influencing them as a leader. It can therefore be concluded that a leader who not only seeks to develop and inspire others to unleash their greatest potential, but also model what they say and lead by example, is considered an influential leader. Through this, together with their teams and by collaborations, these leaders are able to achieve greater performance for their organisations.

A finding in this study was coaching's significant value and contribution to the development of leaders. As one of the greatest benefits of coaching is to deeply interrogate one's thoughts, behaviours and decisions, this process naturally results in their self-awareness being heightened. As leaders, they become more aware of how their behaviours impact others around them and the environments within which they find themselves. It can be concluded that as a leader's self-awareness become heightened, they become more deliberate in the actions they take, become more inclusive in their approach as they realise the importance of building and maintaining trusting relationships with others.

Interestingly, it has been found that coaching is a holistic developmental tool in that it does not only improve individuals in their leadership roles, but they are able to grow personally as well. As they to accept themselves, become more self-confident and start taking charge of their lives, they become less anxious in the decisions they make. A conclusion can therefore be made that coaching help female leaders to increase their self-confidence and therefore develop resilience in the challenges they face in corporate organisations.

6.2.3 *Executive coaching develops authenticity of females in their leadership roles*

The ability of a leader to remain true to themselves despite the adversities they may be facing was undoubtedly the main finding on participant's perspectives on authenticity. By firstly identifying one's core values and then being conscious about acting in a way that is congruent with those values was found to be the foundation of being true to oneself and remaining authentic. What became quite

evident was that these leaders sought and still seek an alignment between their personal values and principles in the organisations that they serve and work for.

Furthermore, authenticity was linked with the strength that is seen in being vulnerable as a leader. Most participants shared how they saw in positive shift in the people they lead when they began to be “real” about their emotions, their shortcomings and where they didn’t have the knowledge for things. This vulnerability makes them gain more trust from others, but also created an environment where others felt safe to also become vulnerable. It is important however, that a level of consistency is maintained by leaders in their way of doing things. If this doesn’t happen, then their intentions can be perceived as inauthentic and therefore cause more damage than good.

With regards to coaching’s influence in enhancing authenticity, it was found that coaching really made it possible for the female leaders to remain rooted to their true values. Female leaders are able to stand firm to their beliefs and boldly live their lives aligned to their values, irrespective of where they are what role they are in. A conclusion is that through coaching, individuals may go through a process of self-discovery and therefore live out their authentic selves. This becomes liberating because these female leaders get know exactly what they can be and do and what they can never be. This helps them not be forced into roles that they are not suited for, in the name of advancing careers. Through increasing women’s self-awareness, and self-confidence, female leaders are supported in defining their leadership presence, as it aligns with the anchor of this study; the framework for women’s leadership development.

Executive coaching, through its nature of focusing on the individual needs and context, and how that relates to the ecosystem that individual finds themselves in, truly enhances the authenticity of female leaders in corporate organisations.

Similar to the coaching’s effect on leadership development, coaching also improves self-confidence in female leaders and therefore their ability to influence rises. It can therefore be argued that authenticity in a leader is a construct that can be observed, felt and continuously be developed.

6.3 Limitations of the study

A limitation in this study was the use of only a generic qualitative approach, which does not offer an opportunity for an intervention and a longitudinal study. The researcher could therefore not empirically assess the level at which participants were embracing their authenticity before they were coached and how coaching specifically, enhanced their authenticity as female leaders in corporate organisations.

Another limitation of this study was that it was only focused on female leaders in South African corporate organisations, although some of these organisations are multinationals and operate across multiple jurisdictions within the African continent.

6.4 Recommendations and implications

Based on the findings from the study, the following provides recommendations to each of the identified stakeholders in the leadership development and Coaching spheres.

6.4.1 *Recommendations for upcoming female senior leaders*

This study has revealed that there are many challenges and barriers that female leaders still face in corporate organisations that hinder them to embrace their authenticity. As such, the researcher recommends the following guidelines for upcoming female senior leaders:

- Become very clear and then proactive in own career trajectory for growth and development. These upcoming leaders must take complete ownership of their own career aspiration and remain consistent in their pursuit to achieve this. They need to frequently discuss, measure and monitor this with their leaders and the Human Capital team to gain support.
- Seek coaching as a developmental tool to work on own limitations, increase self-awareness and to help enhancing authenticity and developing resilience.

- Find a good mentor in the organisation who is influential and can also act as a sponsor. This will be someone who is committed to the protégé's developmental growth.

6.4.2 *Recommendations for the Human Capital and Learning & Development Practitioners*

Leadership development has been studied for many years and the world is generally rethinking ideas on leadership, however it is clear from this study that there is a need for contextual consideration when developing leadership plans for females specifically. This is because the reality of women in corporate organisation is still different from that of men.

From this study, it is clear that there is indeed a need for some workplace cultural shifts. The Human Capital community need to be deliberate about changing the environment to fully resolve the challenges that female leaders face. The informal culture that continues to infiltrate corporate organisation and creating barriers for female leaders (in fact females in general) must be governed through policies. They need to hold the executive leaders of organisation accountable for re-shaping this culture. To be successful, this culture needs to be filtered down from the top executives to the lowest levels in the organisation.

6.4.3 *Recommendations for Programme Directors in Business Schools and Corporate Education*

It is evident from this study that leadership development is more beneficial with context in consideration, for example by being cognisant of the needs both of the individual and the organisation. It is also clear that leadership programmes yield personal growth such as mental and behavioural shifts. Therefore, when the unique developmental needs of women are carefully weaved into the designs of these leadership programmes, this can significantly add value to both the individuals and the organisations they represent.

Another recommendation for the Programme Directors is to include executive coaching, if not already included, as an integral part of their leadership

development programmes as it apparent from this study that it a behavioural change catalyst and enables the individual to lead purposefully. In addition, through coaching women are able to refine their personal vision as leaders and then focus on those visions for meaning and purpose.

6.5 Recommendations for further research

Conduct an action-research and longitudinal study with the same participants to evaluate how female leaders embrace their authenticity before the coaching intervention and then evaluate or assess this after the coaching intervention. The purpose of the coaching would specifically need to be for enhancing and embracing female leaders' authenticity.

A similar study could be done, expanding to include female leaders within the broader African continent to probe on how the subtle differences inherent in the African context impacts on authenticity and the role of coaching therein. As the world is becoming more globalised, there is a need for more channelled focus on the African context with regards to the development of female leaders.

6.6 Conclusion

The challenge of authenticity of female leaders in corporate organisations needs to be a focal point for policy makers in the Human Capital function as well as the top executive leaders. Focused and nonconventional dialogues are necessary to start making transformational changes in corporate organisations. These dialogues must be held with the aim of empowering a broader range of African women leaders, to release and refine this leadership capacity, and translate this capacity into new behaviours for authenticity. This will fundamentally shape and cultivate an inclusive organisational culture.

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APPENDIX A: Consistency Matrix

Business executive **coaching** and **female leaders' authenticity**

Research objective	Literature Review	Propositions	Data collection method	Source of data	Type of data	Analysis method
Objective1: To explore specific challenges and barriers faced by female leaders that lead them to seek coaching.	(Cohen et al., 2018) (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017) Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013)	Female leaders face many challenges and barriers that hinder them to be effective leaders	Semi-structured interviews	Responses from semi-structured interviews Questions 1-3	Qualitative data	Thematic Analysis
Objective 2: To explore what female leaders perceive to be the value of coaching in their leadership development.	Myers (2014) (Bachkirova & Cox, 2005) (Passarelli, 2015) Day et al. (2014)	Coaching is a key contributor to leadership development.	Semi-structured interviews	Responses from semi-structured interviews Questions 4-8	Qualitative data	Thematic Analysis
Objective 3: To explore how executive coaching can develop the authenticity of females in their leadership roles even if it was not the aim of coaching to do so.	(O'Neil et al., 2015) Sturm et al. (2014) (Bandura, 1994)	Coaching can have a positive effect on the authenticity of female leaders	Semi-structured interviews	Reponses from semi-structured interviews Questions 9-11	Qualitative data	Thematic Analysis

APPENDIX B: Research Instrument - Interview Guide

Business executive coaching and female leaders' authenticity

Dear Participant

My name is Thato Belang and I'm currently a student at Wits Business School doing my Masters in Management: Business and Executive Coaching. For purposes of completing my degree, I'm conducting a qualitative research in exploring the challenges that female leaders face in corporate organisations and how coaching can assist in dealing with those challenges. I'm also interested in determining how executive coaching can develop female leaders' authenticity. Thank you for taking out your time to participant in this study and for agreeing that we can record this session. This session will be approximately 1 hour. I will start by asking you background demographic questions to get to know you better, after which I will ask you …….

Background and demographics of the participant

Racial group of Participant	
Marital status	
Date, venue and time of interview	
Industry	
Number of years in leadership position	
Role in organisation	
Number of coaching sessions experienced	

Research objective 1 - Barriers and Challenges faced by female leaders

1. What were the challenges that you have faced as a female leader in a corporate organisation in South Africa?

2. Can you think of specific incidents where you faced barriers as a female leader in your organisation? How did this impact your ability to be effective (including being influential) as a leader?

3. How do you manage work-life integration / balance as a leader?

Research objective 2 - Coaching and leadership development

1. What is your understanding of leadership and what do you think makes an effective leader?
2. What were the challenges you wished to address in your coaching journey?
3. What were the outcomes you wished to achieve in your coaching journey?

7. Describe your coaching experience in your leadership development journey?

8. How, if at all, has coaching helped you to become a more effective female leader?

Research objective 3 – Executive coaching and authenticity of female leaders

9. What is your understanding of authenticity in females?

8. How has coaching helped you, if at all, to develop your authenticity as a female leader?

10. More specifically, how has coaching helped you, if at all, to develop more self-awareness, self-confidence and self-efficacy as a female leader?

11. In your view, how can coaching assist in developing and embracing authenticity of female leaders in corporates?

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

2 St David's Place, Parktown

Johannesburg, 2193

South Africa

P O Box 98, WITS, 2090

Website: www.wits.ac.za

MMBEC INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Business executive coaching and female leaders' authenticity

Dear participant

My name is Thato Belang. I am conducting research for the purpose of completing my Master's in Management: Business and Executive Coaching (MMBEC) at Wits Business School.

I am conducting research to explore the challenges and barriers that female leaders face and how executing coaching can develop their authenticity. I am conducting a qualitative study with 15 participants to establish the experiences of female leaders in different corporate organisations in South Africa.

I am therefore requesting to have an interview with you. If you agree, I will ask you to participate in a one-on-one interview with myself for approximately one hour. I am also asking your permission to tape record the interview. This will assist me in accurately capturing the conversation.

Please note that **your participation is voluntary**, and you are not being forced to take part in this study. Participating in this study is solely your choice alone and if you choose not to participate in this study you will not be impacted in any way whatsoever. Also, if you do agree to participate, you are free to stop the process

at any time if you are not comfortable proceeding forward. If you do this, there are no penalties and you will not be prejudiced in any way.

Any study records that identifies you will be kept confidential to the extend permissible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by the people evaluating the work including my academic supervisor.

All the records will be destroyed after the completion and marking of my thesis. I will refer to you by code number or pseudonym in the thesis and further publication.

There are no immediate benefits to you for participating in this study, however I can send you the outcomes of the study when it is completed after March 2020.

This research has been approved by Wits Business School. If you have any complaints regarding the ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way, please contact the Research Office Manager at the Wits Business School; Mr Gift Nyirenda on 011 717 3125.

If you any concerns or questions about the research, you may contact my academic research supervisor, Dr Tineke Wulffers on +27 83 676 6084.

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in research on Business e*xecutive coaching and female leaders' authenticity.*

I understand that I'm participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue, and that this decision will in any way negatively impact me.

I understand that this is a research project which does not benefit me personally in the immediate or short term.

I understand that my participation will remain confidential.

……..

Signature of participant **Date:** ……

I hereby agree to tape-recording of my participation in this study.

……

APPENDIX D: Audit trail for Data Analysis

Raw Data

Figure D.1 below is a picture of the notes taken by the researcher during the interview. The researcher started grappling and familiarising with the data by highlighting interesting concepts and linking conceptual patterns.

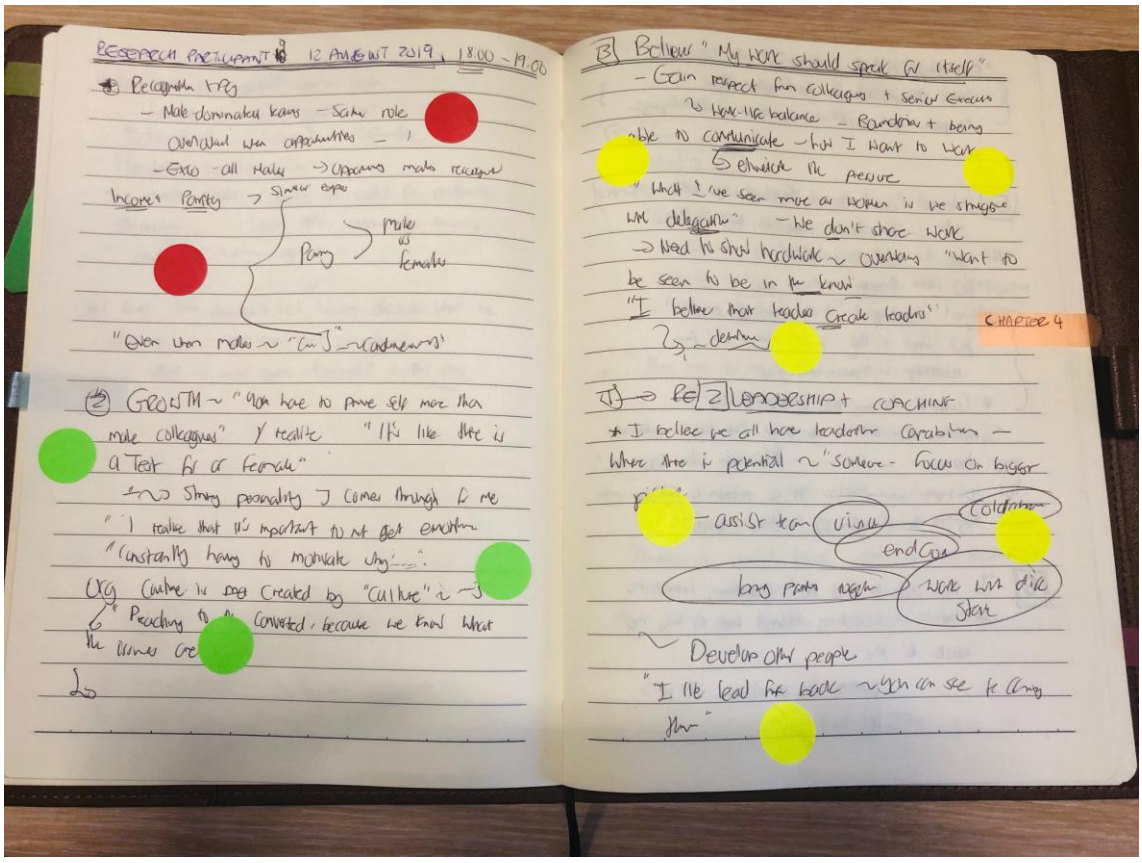


Figure D.1: Thematic Analysis - Highlighting key messages and patterns during the interview

List of Codes – Research Question 1

The table D.1 represents the results of the initial coding for RQ1 which was subsequently refined into initial themes through an iterative process of data analysis.

Table D.1: List of initial codes

List of Codes - Research Question 1		
CD1_RQ1_ Prove self	CD14_RQ1_Bureaucracy	CD27_RQ1_Not being accepted
CD2_RQ1_Do odd jobs	CD15_RQ1_Mansplaining	CD28_RQ1_Organisation culture
CD3_RQ1_Not taken seriously	CD16_RQ1_Gender parity	CD29_RQ1_Communication channels
CD4_RQ1_Not being heard	CD17_RQ1_Not recognised	CD30_RQ1_Lack of sponsorships
CD5_RQ1_Undermined	CD18_RQ1_Unequal opportunities	CD31_RQ1_Lack of promotions
CD6_RQ1_Not supported	CD19_RQ1_Boys club	CD32_RQ1_Inability to delegate
CD7_RQ1_Being sidelined	CD20_RQ1_Cultural norms	CD33_RQ1_Dented self-esteem
CD8_RQ1_Second guessed	CD21_RQ1_Being patronised	CD34_RQ1_Unncessary pressure
CD9_RQ1_Unappreciated	CD22_RQ1_Undermined abilities	CD35_RQ1_Lack of collaboration
CD10_RQ1_Jealousy	CD23_RQ1_Being questioned	CD36_RQ1_Exclusion from key decisions
CD11_RQ1_Family responsibilities	CD24_RQ1_Anniliated	CD37_RQ1_Disrespected
CD12_RQ1_Parenting roles	CD25_RQ1_Not being acknowledged	CD38_RQ1_Traditional roles
CD13_RQ1_Gender stereotypes	CD26_RQ1_Undertones	

Groupings of patterns

After the process of creating codes, the research started grouping similar concepts/patterns together. This is shown on figure D.2 below:

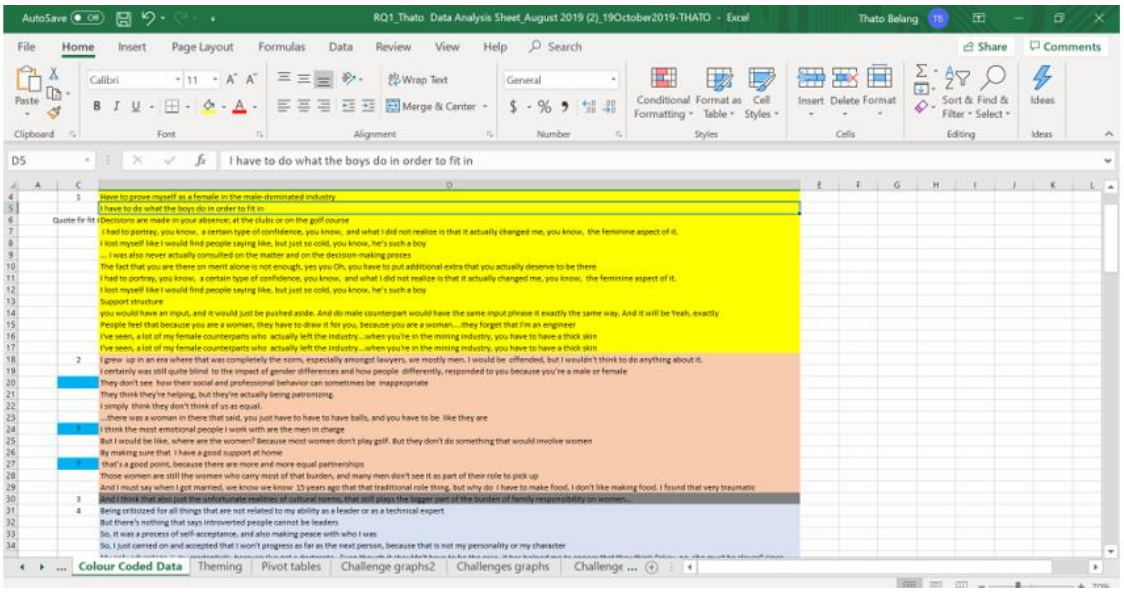


Figure D.2: Groupings of patters

Initial themes

Figure D.3 below illustrates the initial stage of manually developing themes. The researcher used different colour sticky notes for each research question and each developing theme to make it easier to move similar things around through an iterative process.

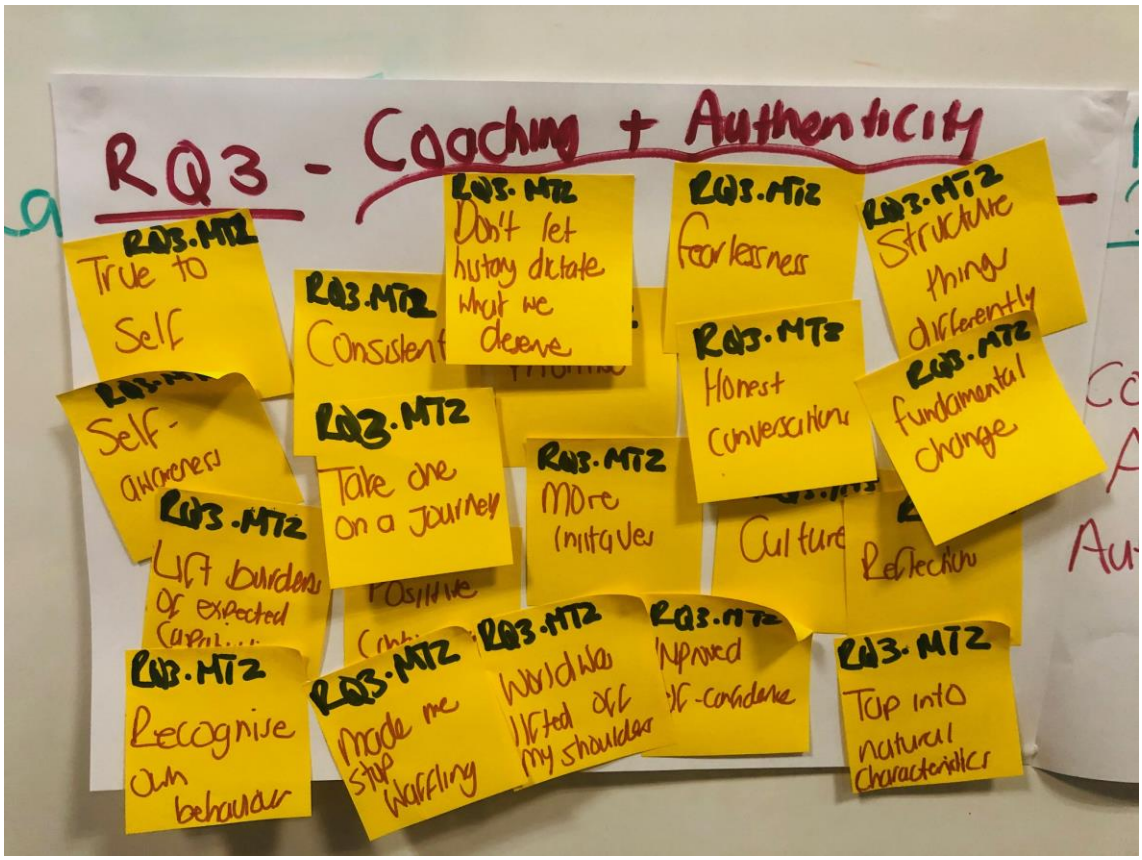


Figure D.3: Initial generated themes

Refined Themes

From the initial process of generating themes, these were further refined to the final themes that were used to start the presentation of findings chapter. Figure D.4 below illustrates this:

	Need to prove self	Male dominance	Fit In	Inclusion / exclusion fro	Support structure at wo	Undermining	Inequality	Recognition and Pay	Generatio	Changes
1										
2	**RP1,RQ1: there has been te perception that if, if, if you want to** prove yourself as a female, you have to work	**RP1,RQ1**: male-dominated industry'.	**RP1,RQ1:** I have to do what the boys do in order to fit in	RP1,RQ1: Decisions are made in your absence; at the clubs or on the golf course	RP1,RQ1:Support structu	RP1,RQ1: you would have an input, and it would just be pushed aside. And do male	RP2,RQ1: I simply think they don't think of us as equal.	RP8,RQ1: There is a perception that females shouldn't be paid as much as men	RP7,RQ1: The same challenge a	RP7,RQ1: we're going to
3	**RP1,RQ1:** The fact that you are there on merit alone is not enough, yes you Oh, you have to put additional extra	RP2,RQ1: I certainly was still quite blind to the impact of gender differences and how	**RP1,RQ1:** I've seen, a lot of my female counterparts who actually left the	RP1,RQ1: ... I was also never actually consulted on the matter and on the	RP6,RQ1: if you look at leaders today, then there are leaders because they have that	RP1,RQ1: People feel that because you are a woman, they have to draw it for you,	RP4,RQ1: My only advantage is my credentials, because I've got a doctorate.	RP8,RQ1: I think recognition and pay. But as a female, you get overlooked when		
4	RP5,RQ1: But as a female counterpart, you almost have to be questioned.	RP7,RQ1: I find that a lot of the challenges that I faced with based on a very hierarchal	RP2,RQ1:...there was a woman in there that said, you just have to have to have balls, and	RP2,RQ1: But I would be like, where are the women? Because most women don't play golf.	RP8,RQ1: And then obviously, in addition, having a good support system, because if you	RP2,RQ1: They think they're helping, but they're actually being patronizing.	RP7,RQ1: Because, you know, based on the culture of the organization, based on	**RP4:** Obviously, they'll argue differently. But the criteria were very different. I was told, I		
5	RP4,RQ1: My only advantage is my credentials, because I've got a doctorate. Even though it shouldn't have to	RP7,RQ1: the potential to deviate, becomes a lot tougher, the bureaucracy, the red	RP7,RQ1: because now you have to become like them to be part of them	RP4,RQ1: First of all there's hardly any women. So, you don't have any female	RP9,RQ1: I think it does differently because organizational culture is made by the people	RP5,RQ1: You can see the, it's almost like, even if they don't question you directly,	RP8,RQ1: these opportunities are mainly been given to males in the team.	**RP8:** But as a female, you get overlooked when the opportunities arise,		
6	RP9,RQ1: it takes you have to prove yourself more than your male colleagues, for you to be recognised, or for	RP1: So yeah. And there's this thing that, you know, when you're in the mining industry,		RP10,RQ1: If anything, I think in a dominated male environment such as mining, there was a	RP10,RQ1: But it also an understanding that there is an acceptance and an understanding	RP5,RQ1:...in fact the HR lady confirmed it, that it's, it's those people that, number	RP8,RQ1: So, for instance, like now, we're doing the same job, we've got similar			
7	RP11,RQ1: If you have ambitions to grow, the reality is you sacrifice a lot. And you want to prove your			RP1,RQ1: And, and then you go to the past so that, you know, you are part of the decision-		RP7,RQ1: And that's where women tend to see the most challenging, because	RP9,RQ1: it's constantly having to prove yourself, constantly having to motivate,			

Figure D.4: Refined themes

Manual process leading to discussion of findings

Figure D5 below shows the process that the researcher followed to move towards discussion of findings. From the findings, the researcher developed a storyline for each main theme. An example below is for RQ3.

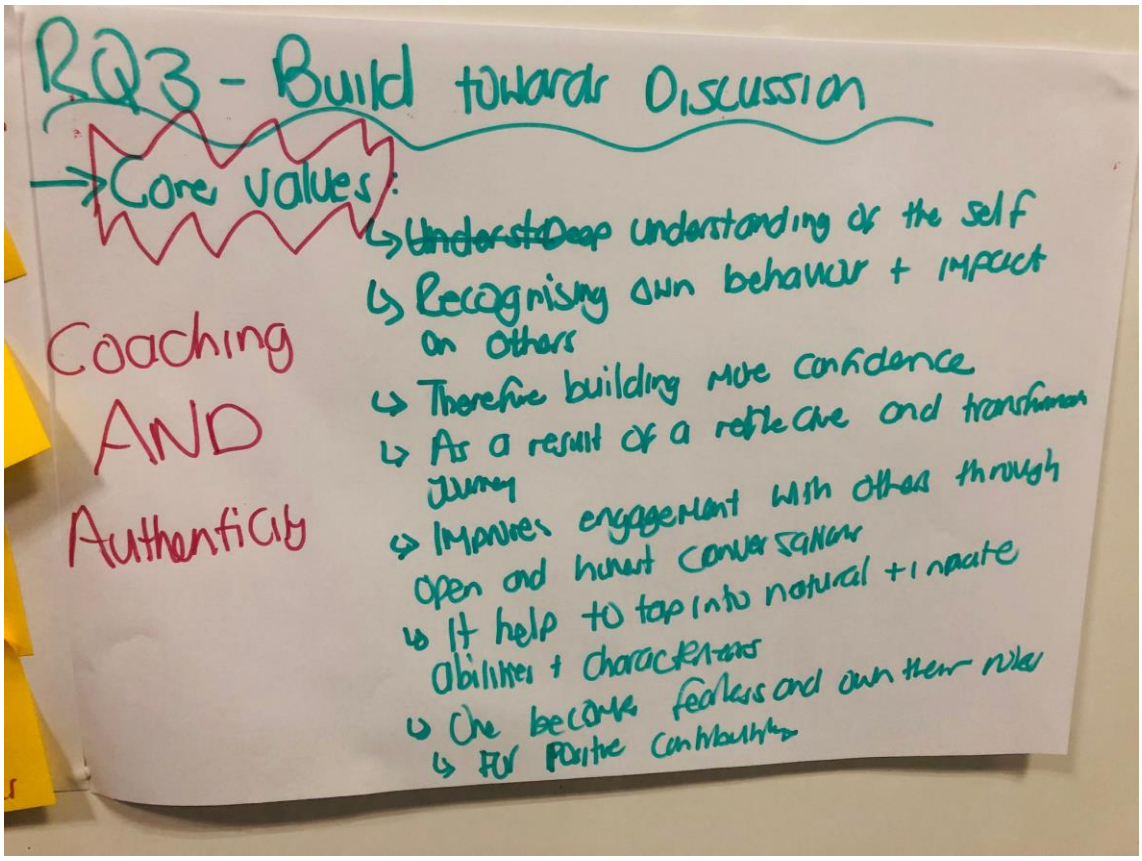
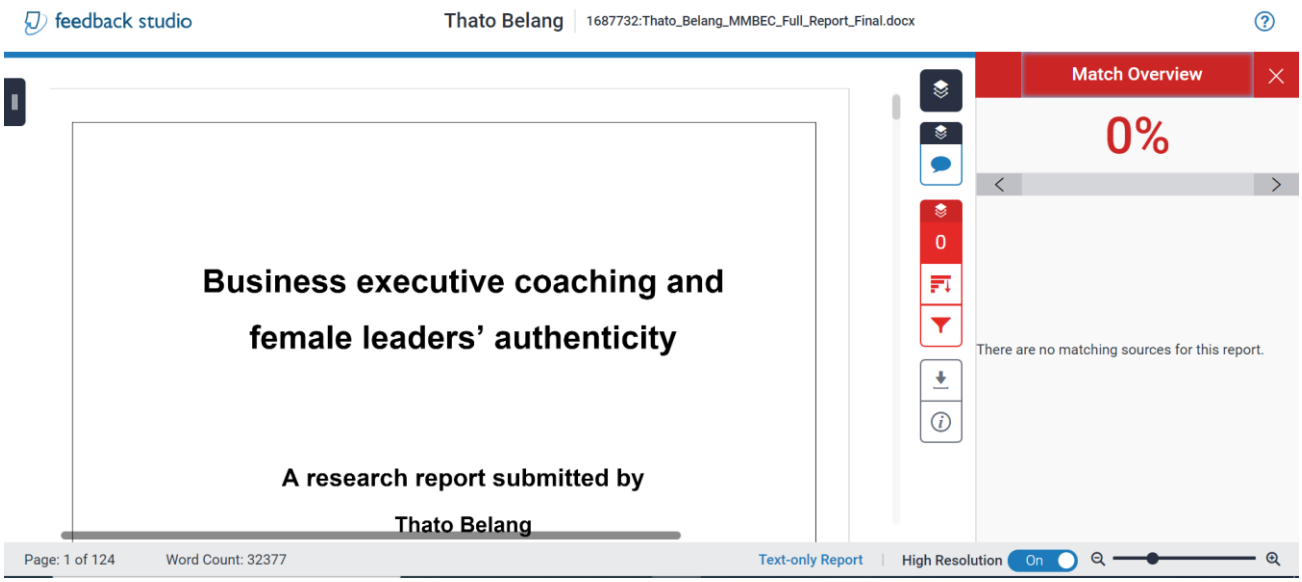


Figure D.5: Manual process leading to discussion

APPENDIX E: Turn-it-in Results

The researcher submitted the final research report in the turn-it-in feedback studio



APPENDIX F: Coding of Participants Names

To ensure anonymity of participants, the researcher assigned pseudo names to the participants' real names as she was analysing the data from the interview transcripts. Table D.2 below provides the summary of this coding.

Table D.2: Coding of Participants Names

No.	Participant Description	Pseudo-name	No.	Participant Description	Pseudo-name
1	Research Participant 1	RP1	7	Research Participant 7	RP7
2	Research Participant 2	RP2	8	Research Participant 8	RP8
3	Research Participant 3	RP3	9	Research Participant 9	RP9
4	Research Participant 4	RP4	10	Research Participant 10	RP10
5	Research Participant 5	RP5	11	Research Participant 11	RP11
6	Research Participant 6	RP6			