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Supporting the professional women's transition to motherhood through maternity coaching: a South African perspective

Aneshrie Yasar

Student number: 519370

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 Business Executive Coaching

Johannesburg, 2017

ABSTRACT

"The obligation for working-mothers is a very precise one: the feeling that one ought to work as if one did not have children, while raising one's children as if one did not have a job." – Annabel Crabb, Author of *The Wife Drought*

Women play a vital role in organisations, yet world-wide remain under-represented in key leadership positions. South Africa is no different. In addition, research indicates that professional women are 'opting-out' of the talent pipeline, further reducing the pool of women available to step in to senior leadership roles. Becoming a mother is life-changing, and when combined with a desire for a fulfilling career, role-conflict can occur. The guilt which accompanies role-conflict can often be overwhelming and may lead to professional women exiting organisations, taking with them valuable industry knowledge and expertise. Hence, retaining female talent is increasingly becoming a business imperative.

This study aims to contribute to the field of Business Coaching by researching Maternity 'Transition' Coaching in an organisational context. As such, the study explored four research questions aimed at providing a systemic view of the experiences of professional women during the maternity transition period, the line manager's role during this period, the influence of organisational culture on working-mothers, and the emergence of maternity transition coaching as a support mechanism in organisations.

Following a detailed review of the literature, the research methodology of a qualitative, multiple-case study approach was selected. Two organisations (cases) were researched using semi-structured face-to-face interviews with 15 respondents, as the primary sources of data collection. The research was further supported by an analysis of secondary data, both of which allowed for a full investigation of the research questions.

The key findings indicated that maternity transition coaching is a strategic necessity for organisations wishing to attract and retain female talent in the 21st Century. Transitional theory along with an understanding of life and career stages are important aspects of this genre of coaching. Coaching increased support at critical transition points, leading to the retention of the professional women in the study along with a more seamless re-integration with their careers. Further, it surfaced that line managers play a critical role in a successful maternity transition, and as such also require support. It was further concluded that a family-friendly organisational culture is an enabler to a successful maternity transition. Maternity transition coaching therefore supports professional women in their desire for a satisfying career and work-life integration.

DECLARATION

I, Aneshrie Yasar, 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 University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Aneshrie Yasar

Signed at Johannesburg

On the 31st day of March 2017

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my son Emre, who was the inspiration behind this research; to my husband for his love and support and finding creative ways to entertain our son all those Sundays so that I could study; and to my own mum for her continuous support, love and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest appreciation to all the people in the study who shared their personal stories so openly with me, in particular – the amazing working-mothers who are an inspiration for the next generation. A further thank you to all those who assisted with providing reports and supplementary data.

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To my dear friends, Caryn and Vanessa in the *Ditzes* case-study group - your encouragement, advice and much needed silliness at times were a source of great support. And for the special spaces of creativity, possibility and focus, thank you Tanya and Caryn.

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This research was only possible because of you.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EVP	Employee value proposition
FWP	Flexible Work Practices
SA	South Africa
WLB	Work-Life Balance
EXCO	Executive Committee
HR	Human Resources
MBTI	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®
MTC	Maternity Transition Coaching
NA	Not Applicable
ORG	Organisation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research was to explore the experience of professional working-mothers and line managers who had women in their teams during the maternity transition period, and the strategies some organisations deployed to support their female talent, in particular maternity transition coaching.

The research will therefore aim to explore:

- the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period
- the line manager's role of managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period
- the organisational culture and its influence on working-mothers
- the emergence of maternity transition coaching as a support mechanism in organisations.

1.2 Context of the study

Gender diversity in the workforce matters, with research demonstrating that women played a pivotal part in organisations (Curtis, Schmid, & Struber, 2012; Thornton, 2016).

Yet, across most countries world-wide, women remained under-represented in key leadership positions as compared to men (Dormehl, 2012; EuropeanCommission, 2012) and research reflected that professional women were exiting organisations (Cabrera, 2009a). According to the Grant Thornton International Business Report, only 28% of women occupied senior level positions in South Africa in 2012. As at December 2015, the representation declined to 23% - South Africa's lowest percentage to date. In addition, South Africa was reported as having 39% of businesses with no women in senior management (Thornton, 2016). This trend was further seen abroad where European Commission (2012) reports that gender imbalance on corporate boards remained an important challenge for all EU Member States, with the Grant Thornton report noting that 24% of senior roles were held globally by women, however 33% of businesses still had no females at senior management. Russia held the highest representation of women in senior management at 45%, while Japan ranked the lowest with 7% (Thornton, 2016).

Women, especially having entered into motherhood, experienced the triple-bind which referred to the multiple roles they undertook to perform well in the workplace, be a good mother and manage home responsibilities (Stange, Oyster, & Sloan, 2011). The increased role-conflict and related guilt impacted on work-life balance with many professional women opting to slow down or even drop out of their career paths following motherhood (Brown, 2010; Gilbert, Holahan, & Manning, 1981). This choice to 'opt-out' reduced the female talent pool – referred to as the leaking pipeline or 'brain drain' (Cabrera,

2009a; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). As such, retaining women in organisations has become a challenge (Curtis et al., 2012).

Organisations have realised that creating flexible work policies may aid the workforce in their quest to achieve better work-life balance, however the organisational culture as a whole needed to be supportive of this (Cabrera, 2009a; Thornton, 2016). A policy alone was not sufficient to demonstrate support for the professional working-mother. The manner in which flexible work practices were practiced in the organisation, especially by line management was critical (Drew & Murtagh, 2005). While there has been considerable research into the formulation of flexible work practices in organisations to aid work-life balance (Muna & Mansour, 2009), further research was needed to support the work already done by authors (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Millward, 2006; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) in the field of re-engaging professional women after motherhood.

In particular, further exploration was required around effective support strategies that organisations can utilise to retain their female talent in South Africa post motherhood. An emerging support tool being used in some organisations is maternity transition coaching. While research is still emerging in this particular genre of coaching, a few authors have indicated that women in their studies felt supported by their organisations as a result of experiencing maternity transition coaching (Bussell, 2008; Filsinger, 2012; Freeman, 2008) . However, the previous studies were limited to the working-mother's experience, and had not adequately sought out the line manager's influence and perspective during the maternity transition period. The researcher believes that the line manager's viewpoint was important to obtain as managers directly contributed to the support women experienced at work during the maternity transition period.

1.3 Problem statement

Many professional women faced a role-conflict after becoming mothers resulting in increased strain being experienced between work and family commitments. An imbalance led to unresolved guilt, with some women having exited the organisation in favour of the family-role, or remained in the organisation yet became less engaged with their career progression. Neither of these options were regarded as optimal in terms of talent management.

And while organisations have deployed work-life balance policies (such as flexible work practices), there has been little research which spoke to how line managers understood and effectively utilised such policies, with a link to retaining working-mothers. Further, managing professional women also required an understanding of the changing nature of roles which the women undertook after motherhood and its related impacts. The role of the line manager has been highlighted as being critical

to assisting the working-mother re-engage with her career post-maternity leave, and in a way which benefits the woman and the organisation.

Therefore, to enable the reengagement and retention of valued female talent, the support strategies that organisations utilised were explored, including understanding the line manager's perception of managing working-mothers in their teams. Further, maternity transition coaching has been emerging as a genre of coaching, which some organisations having utilised it as a means to support professional 'mothers' in the workplace (Bussell, 2008). The limited literature and studies in this field were explored to understand the findings from the evolving field of maternity transition coaching.

This research explores the narratives of the professional women who became mothers, line managers and the organisation with a view to describing the holistic perceptions and experiences of the respondents across two organisations – one which provided maternity transition coaching to their female managers, and another which did not. This research also provides guidelines for the further development of organisational practices to support women as they navigate the maternity transition period, and support for the line manager's role so as to improve the maternity transition experience in the future.

1.4 Main problem

Given this context, the main problem was to explore the professional women's work-life experience after motherhood, in particular the maternity transition: pre, during and after and whether those women who were exposed to maternity transition coaching found any value in going through the process. Further, it was to understand the line manager's role, experience and perception of managing professional women who went through the maternity transition period, coupled with a view of the organisational context of culture and talent management.

1.5 Sub-problems

The first sub-problem is to understand the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period.

The second sub-problem is to understand the line manager's role in managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period.

The third sub-problem is to explore the organisational culture and how it influences working-mothers.

The fourth sub-problem is to explore how maternity transition coaching acts as a support mechanism in organisations.

1.6 Significance of the study

Previous studies in the emerging field of maternity coaching in organisations (Bussell, 2008; Chivers, 2011; Filsinger, 2012; Parke & Bingham, 2012) all occurred overseas. Maternity coaching made an appearance in South Africa (SA) in 2013 and there has been no empirical research conducted on its usage in SA to date. The previous research conducted on maternity coaching occurred primarily in law firms and excluded the viewpoint of the line manager. The researcher therefore feels that this study is significant as it expands the research to two non-law firms in SA and will include the line manager's viewpoint. Further, as a case study methodology was chosen, it will allow for the comparison in similarities and differences in the experiences across the two organisations – one where maternity coaching was offered to the professional working-mother, and the other where it was not.

The body of knowledge may benefit from understanding the challenges that professional women experience in South African organisations after motherhood. Further, as maternity coaching is an emerging field of coaching (Bussell, 2008; Chivers, 2011; Filsinger, 2012; Parke & Bingham, 2012), the body of knowledge may further benefit from understanding how it is presently being used in SA and whether any benefits are being realised as a result.

The study may provide guidance to the field of talent management (Peters, 2003; Susan Vinnicombe, Doldor, & Turner, 2014) and Organisation Development (in which coaching forms a critical component of). Grant (2010) notes that in as much as coaching is utilised for individual change, its role is emerging further to enable organisational change. Organisations may benefit from understanding how to better implement its policies and strategies which relate to supporting their female talent, particularly through the transition period.

Further, managers in organisations may find the insights useful in understanding how to better support the professional women's transition back into her career after motherhood, and to also consider the support they may need as managers. The same applies to the women.

Finally, internal and external coaches, HR generalist functions and organisational development functions may benefit from understanding this emerging field in coaching and draw on the findings as needed.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The study focused on professional women in two corporate organisations in SA who returned to work after maternity leave.

There were two groups of women selected for the study: one group who received maternity transition coaching, and another group that had not received such coaching.

The researcher was reliant on the external Maternity Transition Coach to enable contact with the women in the one organisation where the coaching was being offered.

Women whose last-born child/children were younger than 5 years were included in the study.

Line managers who managed working-mothers in their teams, and an HR representative for the organisation were also interviewed so as to provide a systemic view of the maternity experience.

The maternity transition coach was also interviewed.

1.8 Definition of terms

The following definitions are considered relevant to this research:

1.8.1 Female talent

There is no universal definition of the term ‘talent’, rather it is guided by the specific organisational perspective (Tansley, 2011) and usually includes performance and potential. The terms high-potential or HiPo individuals would fall into this category. As such, these individuals would be marked as ‘talent’ in the organisations leadership pipeline which would likely see them exposed to additional learning, developmental and promotional opportunities. Female talent therefore refers to women who are high performers and who have the potential for further advancement in the organisation (Susan Vinnicombe et al., 2014). In the context of this study, talent has been linked to professional women in management roles.

1.8.2 Professional working-mothers

For the purpose of this research, professional women are regarded as those who hold leadership / management / specialist roles. These women are regarded as being skilled in their profession and more often than not, have tertiary education. The focus is on professional women who have become mothers and have returned to work after maternity leave. When the term ‘working-mother’ is used, the researcher is referring to professional women who have entered motherhood and remain in their careers post-maternity leave. Mothers with young children are the target population for this study. In the study, the terms ‘women’, ‘working-mothers’ and ‘professional’ women are used synonymously.

1.8.3 Work-life balance

Work-life balance refers to the initiatives that organisations have introduced to assist its employees with better reconciling work and family life commitments. Dependent on the organisation, aspects such as flexi-time, part-time working, tele-commuting (working from home/off-site) and family-friendly practices such as childcare facilities, coaching and counselling support through employee assistance programmes are included (A. McCarthy, Darcy, & Grady, 2010). For the purpose of this research, the focus is placed on practices which enable work-life balance, rather than the intricacies of work-life balance itself.

1.8.4 Maternity Transition Coaching

Maternity Coaching is a targeted type of coaching aimed at professional women who are undergoing a major transitional phase in their lives, namely becoming a mother. It first made an appearance in 2006 when offered at a UK Law firm. The coaching supports professional women with the transition across three maternity phases: pre-maternity, during maternity and returning to work. This type of coaching aims to not only support the women manage the transition, but ultimately to aids organisations in re engaging and retaining their female talent post maternity leave (Bussell, 2008; Chivers, 2011; Filsinger, 2012; Parke & Bingham, 2012). The researcher is expanding the term maternity coaching to position it within the realm of transitions, as it is a transition that the women undergo. Therefore, the term ‘maternity transition coaching’ is referred to in the study.

1.9 Assumptions

- It was assumed that the sample chosen was able and willing to share their experiences from their individual perspective.
- It was assumed that the women sampled would openly and honestly share their challenges as it related to them trying to navigate the maternity transition period, attain work-life balance, and provide their personal recommendations to improving the maternity transition experience.
- It was assumed that information shared would be quite personal for some of the respondents, due to the nature of the topic.
- It was assumed that the managers interviewed would share their experiences of working with women in their teams who had become mothers, that they had knowledge of flexible work practices and would be willing to share their experience of administering it.
- It was assumed that the organisations would be willing to participate.
- It was assumed that the organisations would be willing to share organisational policies and reports.

1.10 Structure of the Report

This research report includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduces the research and contextualises the study. The purpose, context of the study, the delimitations, assumptions and definitions relevant to this research are outlined in this chapter.
- Chapter 2 provides a conceptual framework of the research and a detailed review of existing literature which informed this research. The four research questions to be answered in this study close off this chapter.
- Chapter 3 details the research methodology which explains how the research and analysis was carried out.
- Chapter 4 presents the detailed findings of the research for both the organisations interviewed. The findings are presented by case under the chapter title: Within-Case Analysis. The findings are based on various sources – the primary data being interviews with professional women, organisational representatives, line managers and coaches where applicable; and secondary data consisting of archival records, information from the company's websites, emails, policies, reports and the researcher's field notes.
- Chapter 5 presents a Cross-Case Analysis of both cases which discusses the presentation of the evidence in the data by drawing out the similarities and/or differences in the cases, alignment of findings to the literature, makes interpretations based upon this and draws conclusions.
- Chapter 6 concludes the research report and makes recommendations to the organisations, coaches, women and line managers based on the findings. The chapter also provides suggestions for future research.
- The reference list follows Chapter 6. The Appendices contain the respondent letter for consent, interview questions and a list of the Code families with the number of linked quotations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter contains a literature review exploring the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period, the line manager's role in managing working-mothers, the influence of organisational culture in relation to the transition period, and a look into the emergence of maternity coaching as one of the support mechanisms in organisations. Figure 1 provides a framework for the literature review.

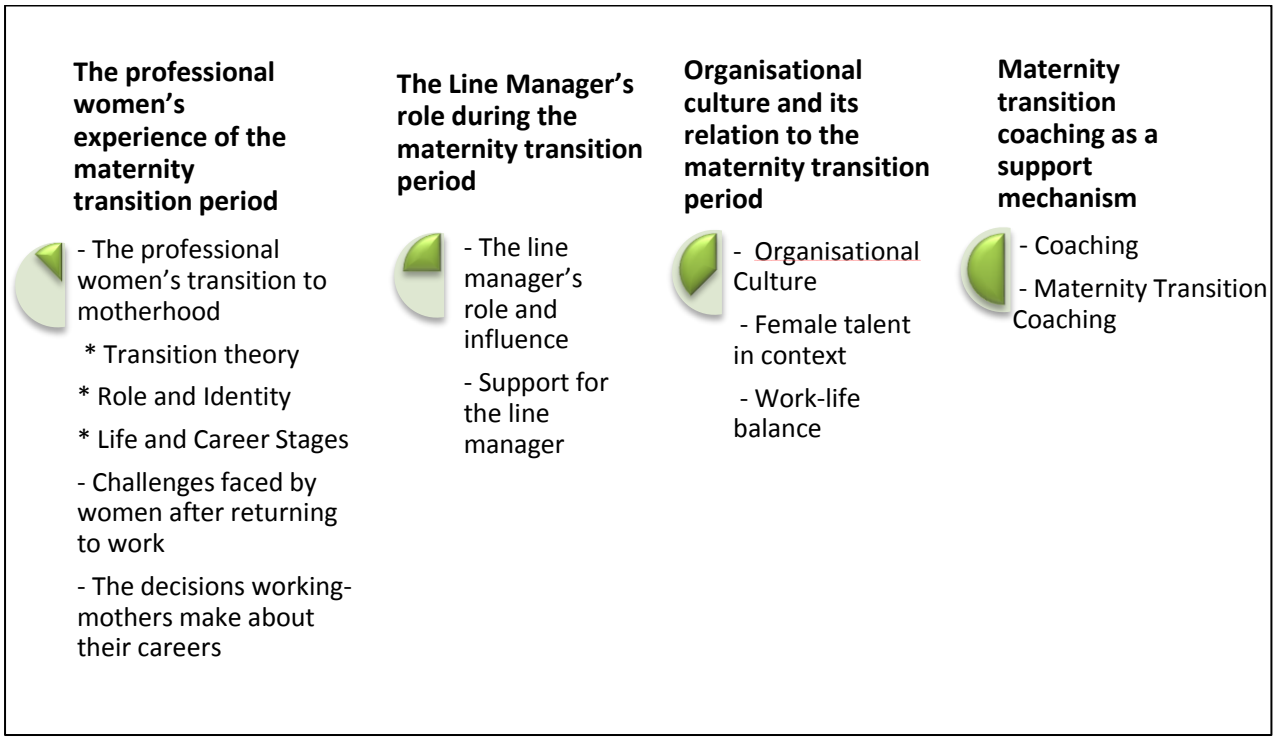


Figure 1: Literature review framework

2.1 Background discussion

Organisations benefit from having the skill and talent in their workforce. However world-wide, there is a shortage of female talent in corporate organisations from which to draw on to more senior and executive positions (EuropeanCommission, 2012).

Women go through certain transitional phases, the biggest of which is motherhood (Smith, 1999). An exploration into transition theory is therefore useful to undertake as it differentiates the transition from going through change (Bridges, 1980). Whereas change refers to the situation / event, transition deals with the internal psychological processes which a person goes through in order to make sense of the change (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011; Bridges, 1980).

A change in role (such as becoming a mother) becomes a time of reflection and evaluation of life priorities, especially when role-conflict occurs (Grady & McCarthy, 2008). This, coupled with work-life balance conflict leads many women to exit the organisation, or to remain but become disengaged with their careers. Given that many organisations and the women alike, invest heavily in education, training and skill competencies, it makes all-round sense to deploy effective strategies to retain this valuable talent.

The role of the line manager in managing women through the maternity transition period appears lacking in literature, yet managers play a critical role in the retention of employees.

Organisations have for many years crafted work-life balance policies, however research has shown that women do not find them meaningful in that there are barriers to utilising them (Crampton & Mishra, 1999). In order to re-engage women with their careers after becoming mothers, organisations need to find more effective ways of allowing women access to organisational support tools.

An emerging field of coaching that is presenting itself in organisations over the past few years is maternity transition coaching (Bussell, 2008; Chivers, 2011; Filsinger, 2012; Parke & Bingham, 2012). This aims to integrate professional working women back into their careers by working with them on navigating a successful transition in an organisational context.

2.2 The professional woman's experience of the maternity transition period

This section outlines the relevant literature around transition theory, role and identity change, life and career stages, the challenges women face upon returning to work and ultimately the decisions they make about their careers.

2.2.1 Transition theory

Transition theory refers to an area of adult development which centres on how people experience different points of transition in their lives (Anderson et al., 2011; Bridges, 1980; Schlossberg, 1981). Becoming a mother is one such transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The two theorists whose work fits in well with the concept of a maternity transition is William Bridges (Bridges, 1980) and Nancy Schlossberg (Schlossberg, 1981).

William Bridges developed the Bridge's Transition Model - a widely recognised adult transition model (Bridges, 1980). The model has been used by individuals and organisations alike to manage the transitional aspect when going through change (Bridges, 2003; Bridges & Bridges, 2017; Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Transitions is differentiated from change in that change is situational – it is the external event that is happening, e.g. the birth of a child, while transition is the inner psychological reorientation

that people go through in order to come to terms with the change – it is the letting go of the way things used to be in order to reorient to the way things are now e.g. embracing a new role-identity as a mother (Bridges, 2003). The author cautions that for change to work, transition has to occur (Bridges, 2003). Transitions are regarded as a process that occurs over time, and not at a point in time (Anderson et al., 2011; Bridges & Mitchell, 2000).

Bridge's Transition model (Bridges, 1980, 2003), as seen in Figure 2 below, proposed that transitions occurred in three stages with each one building on the next. The first stage of transition begins with 'endings'- people identify those aspects which they are losing / leaving behind, and which they will keep. This is the process of 'letting go' of an old identity or reality. The 'neutral' zone follows next and is an in-between time - the old reality has gone however the new one is not yet fully embedded. Bridges (2003) posits that this is the core of the transition process, as it the time when critical re-patterning and psychological realignments occur. This phase is described as uncomfortable as people are learning what their new roles will be and are creating new processes to craft a different identity. The third phase marks the 'new beginning' and is the expression of the new identity. It is a period of released energy towards a new direction with a shift in understanding and attitudes. Bridges (2003) posited that a successful transition is one where people are re-oriented and feel renewed with an understanding of their purpose.

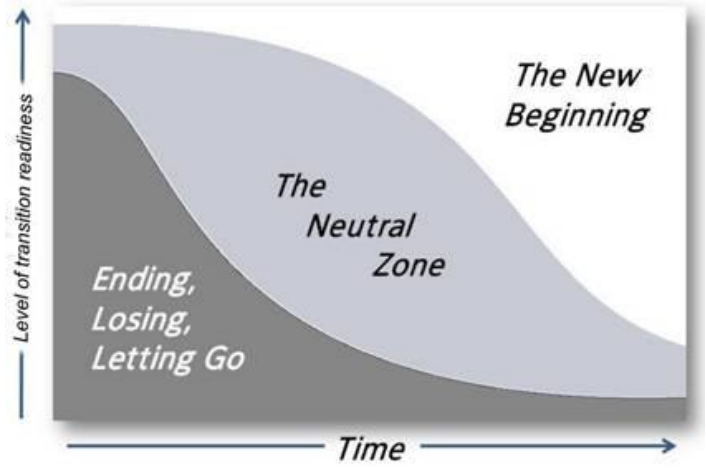


Figure 2: Bridge's Transition Model

Source: (Bridges, 2003, p.5)

Schlossberg developed Schlossberg's Transition Theory to help counsel clients involved in life transitions (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg defines transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2011, p.39). This transition theory has been successfully utilised in life and business contexts, with

the latest edition of Schlossberg's work (Anderson et al., 2011) updated to include evolving theories and practical applications to assist adults cope with transitions in the 21st Century.

Schlossberg's theory draws on the work of adult development theories and considers how cognition, personality and other characteristics evolve over an adult's lifespan. As such, the author posits that maturity in adults is dependent on "the individual's ability and necessity to invest, reinvent, and renew commitments as life circumstances change" (Anderson et al., 2011, p.39). While both Schlossberg (1981) and Bridges (1980) view transition as an internal process reflecting how individuals reorient themselves to the change, Schlossberg further considers the importance that self-perception plays in transition – that is, the way the individual perceives the situation and themselves within that situation.

'The Individual in Transition Model' outlines the adult transition process (Anderson et al., 2011). The model entails three main parts namely, a) Approaching Transitions (Transition Identification and Transition Process); b) Taking Stock of Coping Resources (The 4 S System); and c) Taking Charge -Strengthening Resources (which was not drawn in to the model). Figure 3 below depicts the Individual in Transition model (Anderson et al., 2011).

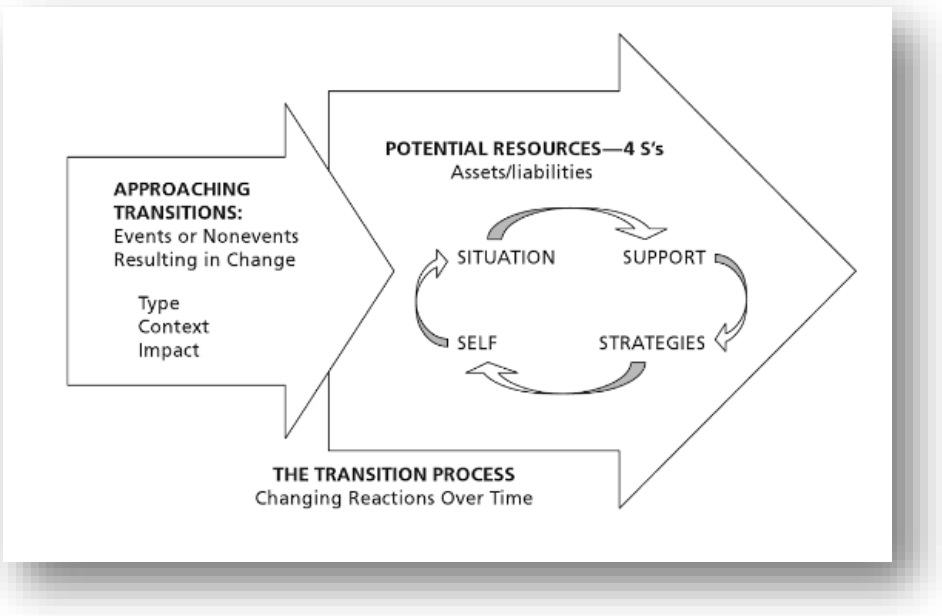


Figure 3: The Individual in Transition – Schlossberg's Transition Model

Source: (Anderson et al. (2011, p.62)

The first part of the model deals with understanding whether the transition is anticipated (occurring as expected), unanticipated (occurring unexpectedly / unscheduled), or a non-event (expected to occur but did not happen) - this provides context for the transition. Anderson et al. (2011) then emphasises that it is also important to understand how the individual perceives the transition to impact one's life.

The second part of the model looks at the Transition Process and in which phase of transition the person is located. While transitions are linked to an identifiable event / non-event, the transition is actually a process that extends over time (Anderson et al., 2011). Similar to Bridges (1980), Anderson et al. (2011) indicated that transition has three phases, namely 'moving out' (likened to Bridges 'endings'), 'moving through' (likened to Bridges 'neutral zone') and 'moving in' (likened to Bridges 'new beginnings').

A core component of the model is the 4-S system. The main factors which influences an individual's ability to cope during a transition are characterised by the 4-S system and is described as Self, Situation, Support, and Strategies (Anderson et al., 2011). The authors posit that a person's effectiveness in coping with transition depends on his/her resources across these four areas and are considered in terms of assets and liabilities. Each of the 4-S components is outlined below, with more emphasis placed on the Self variable as much of the core work with an individual resides here.

Situation considers everything that is occurring in the individual's life at that point in time. It looks at what the trigger is for the transition, the phase of the transition, the timing of it, the amount of perceived control the person has over the transition, any new roles the person is taking on, the anticipated duration of the transition, one's previous experience with a similar transition, and any other stresses the person is experiencing (Anderson et al., 2011).

Self: The concept of Self refers to the individual's inner strength for coping with the situation (Anderson et al., 2011; Schlossberg, 2011) and entails the individual's personal characteristics and their psychological resources.

Anderson et al. (2011) posit that personal characteristics encompasses the individual's personal and demographic characteristics, e.g. gender, sexual orientation, age and stage of life, health status, socio-economic status, and cultural identification. The authors suggest utilising a personality-preference assessment (such as the MBTI) as a way for people to understand how their preferred style processes and then impacts the world around them. The coach / counsellor / advisor is able to use this information to assist the client with making sense of how their personality preference both aids and hinders them (Anderson et al., 2011). When considering age and stage of life, the researcher considered career development phases (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005), the ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), as well as generational influences (Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012)

To describe psychological resources, Anderson et al. (2011) drew on the work of Pearlin and Schooler (1978, p.5) who described these as "personality characteristics that people draw upon to help them withstand threats" (p. 5). Included were ego development, outlook, commitment and values, spirituality

and resilience (Anderson et al., 2011). Ego development referred to the frame of reference which people used to approach the transition based on their level of maturity (Anderson et al., 2011; Loevinger & Blasi, 1976). A person's 'outlook' included aspects such optimism and self-efficacy (Anderson et al., 2011). To understand one's outlook, the work of Martin Seligman demonstrated the qualities of people that were able to rise above adversity and challenges and lead happier lives (Seligman, 2002, 2011). People with such characteristics displayed a greater ability to take control over their situations which spoke to their optimism. He argued that it was a person's explanatory style – the way they thought and spoke about a transition which provided insight in to whether they have a more optimistic or pessimistic outlook about things (Seligman, 2011). In terms of self-efficacy, the views of Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1982, 1995; Rodin, 1990) were incorporated around the notion of perceived control which accounted for the belief that people had in their capability to exercise control over one's motivations and behaviours. Commitment and values were seen as those aspects which determines a person's vulnerability, and links with the question "what is the main purpose in life?" (Anderson et al., 2011; Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). Finally, Schlossberg (2011) recommends that when working with transition, to draw on the concept of resilience which has been described as the ability to bounce back and grow stronger in the face of adversity, and to have the capacity to persist in demanding circumstances (Leiter & Maslach, 2005; Richardson, 2002).

Support refers to the various types of support which the person has (or does not yet have). Support structures include family, intimate relationships, friends, work-groups, networks and communities. Then there is the 'function' of support to consider which refers to the "how" of support - these include affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Anderson et al., 2011).

Strategies refers to the different ways people cope with a transition. Anderson et al. (2011) drew on the work of Pearlin and Schooler (1978) who posit that strategies are the concrete efforts of individuals to deal with the life strains which are encountered in different roles. The authors highlight three types of coping strategies namely, a) responses that modify the situation, b) responses which control the meaning of the problem, and c) responses that aid in managing the stress after it has occurred. To change the situation or reduce the stress, Anderson et al. (2011) recommend that individuals can seek out information, take direct action, inhibit an action or choose intra-psychic behaviour (i.e. from within the mind/self).

The final part of Schlossberg's model (Anderson et al., 2011) is not depicted in the graphical representation of the model (Figure 3), namely "Taking Charge: Strengthening Resources" – a successful transition is dependent on the person's ability to identify and increase their assets over liabilities - to create strategies to increase assets to support coping through the transition. People cope better when they remain flexible and utilise multiple strategies (Anderson et al., 2011).

While Bussell (2008) and Millward (2006) took the perspective of focusing on transitions in relation to the changing role (more the external / physical event), the transition perspective taken in this study also considers the psychological components in addition to the external changes. So whereas the physical transition looks at the move across roles / boundaries, the psychological considers how the person perceives their capacity to make those transitions (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The next discussion considers both the role and identity changes that occur as a result of the transition.

2.2.2 Role and Identity

Ashforth (2000) refers to a role as one of the various hats that a person wears during the course of a day - for example manager, spouse, colleague, friend and parent. A role transfers to an identity when it becomes internalised as a key part of how a person thinks about themselves, and in relation to the roles that a person holds in society (Millward, 2006). Therefore, identity is influenced by the individual's personal beliefs and values, as well as the social structures, environment, obligations and roles that the person lives within (Ashforth, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2003) . Adding to this, Weick (1995) posits that sense-making – what people value and how they inter subjectively make meaning of their activities / roles, is at the core of identity construction. Ashforth (2000) goes on to refer to role transitions, which is when an individual moves from one role to another, or changes direction towards an existing role. Transitioning in to a role can be enhanced by activating certain motives which Ashforth (2000, p.14) notes as a) one's self-definition of identity in the organisation, b) meaning (sense-making and purpose), c) control (mastery and influence), and d) belonging (attachment). The author posits that the more a role fulfils these motives, the greater the individual's propensity to embrace the role-identity and meet its criteria for success.

In relation to working-mothers, three core identities bear relevance to this study namely worker-identity, mother-identity, and the working-mother identity.

Worker-identity is positioned by Ibarra (2013) as the way one sees themselves in their professional roles and how they live their working lives, and what is conveyed about themselves to others. The image of the ideal worker is often the benchmark for this identity, as it epitomises an employee who prioritises the demands of the organisation over all else, thereby being seen as highly committed to work (Blair-Loy, 2009). To this end, Millward (2006) studied eight women through their maternity transition and noted that during the pre-maternity leave period, a key concern for the women was to maintain a viable worker-identity.

The onset of maternity leave and birth of the child ushers in the next identity, namely a mother-identity. The development of the mother-identity is influenced by societal constructs and ideals (Bailey, 1999) which has given rise to the term 'the good mother' – a term indicating women who prioritises home

and family over work by all means (Buzzanell et al., 2005). However, this places immense pressure on working-mothers to live up to this image and role expectations. Buzzanell et al. (2005) stated that these struggles are even more so challenging for professional women because their traditional 'mothering' role may appear at odds with their careers.

Returning to work signals in the working-mother identity. It is a time of readjustment and a bringing together of two identities to form a new one (Ibarra, 2013; Millward, 2006). It is also a time when some women feel caught between the identity of being an 'ideal worker' and a 'good mother'. To this end, Buzzanell et al. (2005) indicate that the professional women in their research positively reframed the 'good mother' image into a 'good working-mother' role so that it was better reflective of their lives, and not an image which left them feeling lacking.

2.2.3 Life and Career Stages

The 'career and family' role for women has replaced the 'traditional' role of staying at home to rear children (Schwartz, 1989 as cited by Geber, 2000). Becoming a mother is a major life transition for women, especially so for working women. Smith (1999, p.281) states that it is a time "when a number of significant personal, social and biological changes coincide". According to the 2009 research conducted by GEMSA – Gender and Media SA, the unseen sector is the 'care economy' which referred to the unaccounted work which occurred on the home front, most often by women. However, it is this unpaid care work which is deemed essential for society - for the reproduction and maintenance of the next generation of labour force. When women entered the paid economy, it did not lessen their contribution to the care economy, although it placed additional strain on time and resources. The authors argue that the lack of understanding around the importance of the care economy, has led to a lack of appreciation in the value of women's work in the economy overall (Lowe Morna & Jambaya Nyakujarah, 2010).

Hakim (2002) put forth the preference theory which posited that women have different preferences for working and this ultimately drives their decision as to whether or not to re-engage with their career. She grouped women into three categories – the adaptive, the work-centred and the home-centred women. Work-centred women are most likely women without children, or those that place extreme value on work and achievement - Hakim (2002) postulates that this group made up approximately 20% of women. The next group of women are referred to as the home-centred and here the women's primary focus is family. This group of women make up approximately 20% of women and prefer not to work opting to care for the family, even though they may have achieved qualifications in certain fields of work. While this may appear simplistic, it does lend an explanation towards why some of the highly educated and skilled women that Hakim (2002) studied opted to stay home after motherhood – their core belief being a home-centred one. The highest representation of women were seen in the

adaptive group, which accounted for approximately 60% of women. This group represented women who valued both family and work, and are committed to both. As such, they are often conflicted by one or the other role (Catherine, 2006; Hakim, 2002).

Empirical research conducted by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) explored the nature of women's career experiences over the life course. The authors note three distinct life phases with key characteristics that indicate the shift in focus/priority over the life course – idealistic achievement (early career phase); pragmatic endurance (mid-career phase); and re-inventive contribution (late-career phase). Figure 5 provides a summary of their findings. The authors further indicate that women's careers are different from men's careers in the following ways: a) the differing impact of family responsibilities on men and women's careers; b) women place a higher emphasis on relational aspects; and c) women are subjected to 'tokenism' which constrain their career progress. These career phases have important implications for both women and the organisation. The authors strongly suggest that organisations understand and support women's career and relationship priorities in order to retain them. They go on to say that when organisations understand these phases, and what they mean for their female workforce, appropriate support strategies such as coaching and mentoring can be deployed to support women through these transitions.

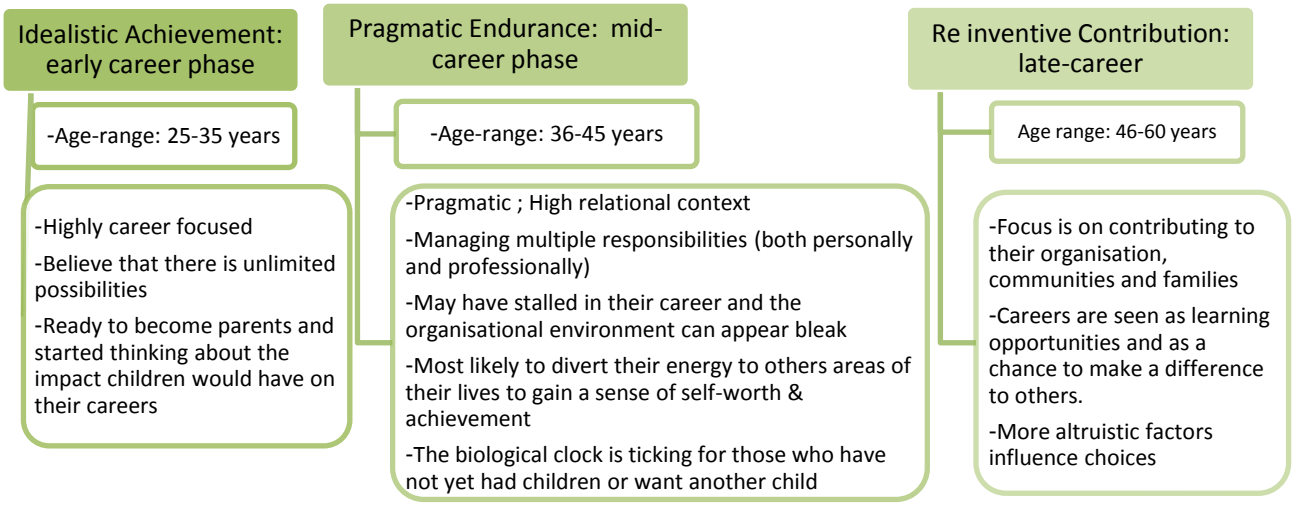


Figure 4: Career development phases

Source: (adapted from O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005)

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) support the view of O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) in that women's careers were non-linear and rather 'relational' noting that women do so to accommodate work-family balance. Women did not merely strive for attaining career goals, but rather considered how one decision impacted their relationships in other dimensions. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) then layered their ABC

Model against the three stages of career phases (early, mid and late-career) and their findings further corroborated the career development phases proposed by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005).

This led to the development of the of the ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers for Women (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) which set to explain women's career choices/transitions. The model is indicated in Figure 6 below. The model likens how a "kaleidoscope produces changing patterns and falls into new arrangements when the tube is rotated, in the same manner in which women shift the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects of their lives to arrange their roles and relationships in new ways" (p. 111). The authors argue that to obtain this integration of work and family, women also have to face three key career issues which they named the ABC Model namely: 'Authenticity – being able to be oneself even in the midst of flux'; 'Balance – being able to balance all the parts of one's life and still be coherently whole; and 'Challenge – being sufficiently challenged if one takes on a career option'.

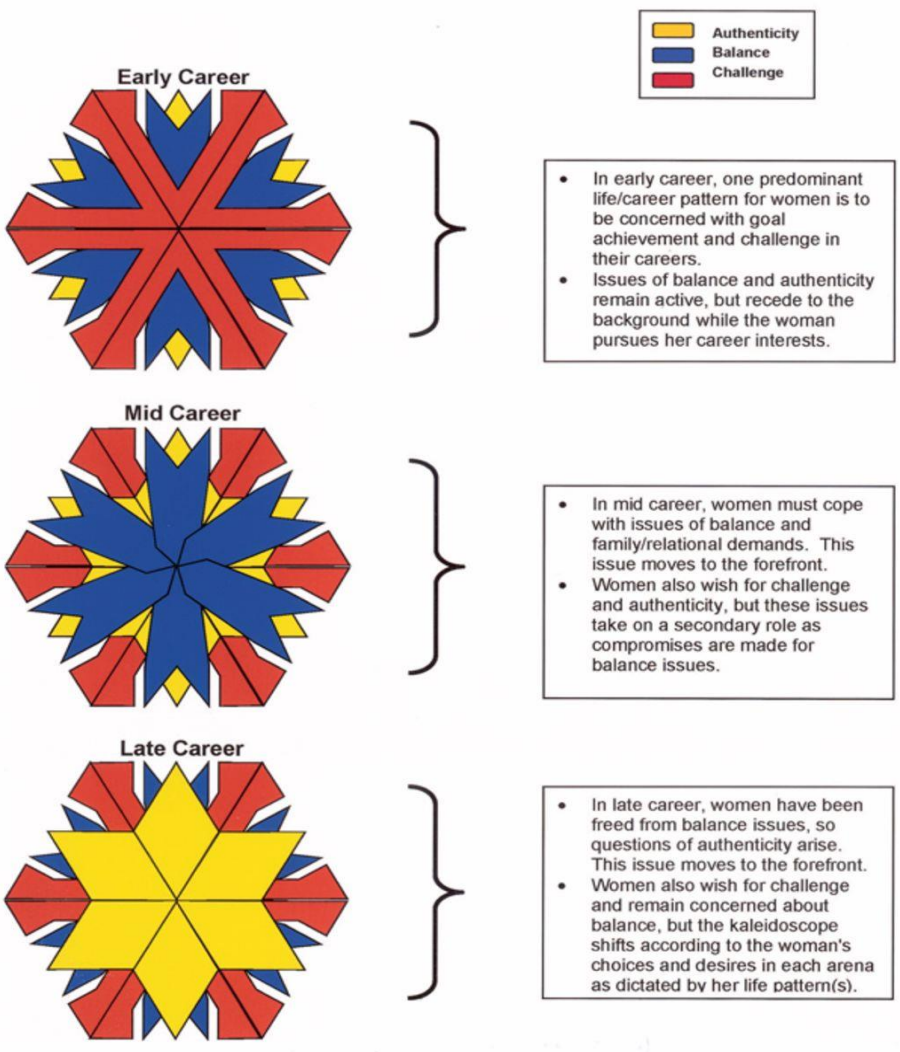


Figure 5: The ABC Model of Kaleidoscope Careers for Women

Source: (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 115)

Hall (1976, 1996) introduced the concept of the protean career, which she indicated is when individuals take a proactive role in managing their careers, as opposed to the traditional approach of relying on the organisation to do so. In doing so, the author posited that the career will be reinvented over time in relation to how the person and/or environment changes. The protean career, therefore lends itself to understanding women's careers. As the self-directed nature of a protean career often results in multiple career cycles, this can help women accommodate family responsibilities. Two central elements characterise the protean career: self-directedness and personal value congruence

Given the importance of personal values to protean careers, some studies have specifically examined the nature of the values that drive protean careers. Two values that emerged in Sargent and Domberger's (2007) study were: being engaged in work that makes a contribution to society and achieving work-life balance. Further, the protean career values continuous learning and mastery and as such, leads to individuals continually developing themselves (Cabrera, 2009b). To this end, Valcour and Ladge (2008) posit that women experience psychological success by fulfilling these personal values, regardless of whether they achieve the more traditional measures of success.

Consideration is also given to generational influences on careers. As such, in a study which surveyed 982 professionals, Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009) utilised the Kaleidoscope Career Model to determine whether there were any difference in needs for authenticity, balance, and challenge between the Baby Boom generation and Generation X. The findings revealed that Generation X professionals had higher needs for authenticity and balance as compared to the Baby Boomers, however both generations shared in their needs for challenge in their work.

It is also important to consider the millennial generation who are set to dominate the workforce by 2025 (HartfordBusiness, 2014). Research conducted for the Harvard Business Review polled 2200 millennial professionals across a number of industries to determine what they wanted from their employers (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). The main findings called for clear roadmap to success with a need for coaching, mentoring and candid feedback to support skills development and their need to learn self-management and personal productivity. Further, work-life integration and a strong values alignment were desired from their companies.

Then there is also the aspect of deferring the transition to motherhood to consider. Hewlett (2002) noted in her research that up to 42% of professional women in their mid-life phase (41-55 years) in corporate America were childless, and this was not because they did not want to have children. She calls it the 'creeping non-choice'. This is echoed by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) with regard to women in the mid-career phase who have potentially sacrificed having children in favour of their careers, but who are then confronted with a "re-evaluation of life, work and relationships" at this stage. In the same vein, Ranson (1998) noted that many women felt compelled to defer motherhood until they achieved

certain professional milestones. Women, in her research, felt that having children before making it to manager level would hinder their chances of promotion.

Brown (2010, p.487) goes onto to say that although it may appear that women make personal choices about their careers, deeper inspection revealed that subtle employer discrimination and work-life conflict drove certain “choices” following motherhood. And according to the women in Grady & McCarthy’s (2008) study, while their main priority were their children, careers were also important as it provided stimulation, enrichment and achievement from a work perspective. This speaks to the importance of achieving a balance between work and home life. Equally, this indicates that when women find meaning in their work, it can be extremely satisfying. This incidentally, is a core aspect that coaching explores – finding meaning and identity (Bush, Ozkan, & Passmore, 2011, p.58).

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2.2.4 Challenges faced by women after returning to work

One of the major challenges working-mothers experience upon returning to work is that of the dual roles they now perform, resulting in role-conflict (Gilbert et al., 1981; Grady & McCarthy, 2008).

Gyllensten and Palmer (2005) researched the stressors of working women and indicated that women are more likely (than men) to experience a role overload. They further indicated that ‘career-family’ conflict was one of the major stressors for working women with home stress impacting women more than men. Likewise, Grady and McCarthy (2008, p.601) cite numerous authors on the topic of role-conflict, referring to the conflict women experienced after motherhood. The authors note that conflict arose when the demands from the various aspects of one’s work and family life interfered with each other resulting in an imbalance. Gilbert et al. (1981) note that the reason working-mothers experience

this conflict is due to them attaining satisfaction from both their professional and maternal lives alike. They go on to state that depending on the value the working-mother places on her career, the conflict between balancing the career and the mother-role will be highly stressful. Sandberg (2013) makes reference to the core fear that many women face – that of being a bad mother, wife or daughter. The author goes on to state that without this barrier of fear, women can pursue both the personal fulfilment of being a mother as well as having a satisfying professional life. It does however require support and focus to create a culture supportive of this.

As such, Grady and McCarthy (2008) note that continuous levels of conflict can then lead to burnout and related issues such as emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal accomplishment and decreased psychological well-being. In addition, physical exhaustion due to sleep deprivation is a very real issue for mothers, particularly in the first year (Seignot & Clutterbuck, 2016).

Resulting from this role-conflict is the guilt that working-mothers experience. Carr (2002) notes the guilt that arises for women when she has to make a choice between family and career commitments. This is especially so when responsibilities require attention at the same time. Where women are the primary carers on the home front, they may find it difficult to merge their professional and personal lives to achieve fulfilment and satisfaction. Gilbert et al. (1981) state that these feelings of guilt emanate from an internal value system and are likely to increase when the role-conflict is felt.

Following on from these dual roles that working-mothers adopt, is their attempt at finding balance between work and home life. Work-life balance challenges features strongly with professional working-mothers. They are seen as wanting it all – the successful and fulfilling career and a balanced, happy home life (Grady & McCarthy, 2008) yet Hewlett (2002) states that this is rarely possible.

In the face of so many conflicting pulls, something has to be sacrificed. Cabrera (2009b) also notes that the women's role as primary caregivers makes it difficult to 'adhere to the norms of the traditional career model' as women have more non-work responsibilities than men. In this light, women are more likely to utilise flexible work practices once becoming mothers. Lewis, Gambles, and Rapoport (2007) make reference to the term 'face-time' which indicates being visible especially until late at night. This challenge plays out strongly with working-mothers when they attempt to utilise flexible work practices as their contribution is rather determined by 'face-time' at work.

Research conducted by Crampton and Mishra (1999) indicates that organisations had instituted a multitude of flexible working practices (such as flexitime, maternity and sabbatical leave and childcare facilities) however still practiced a working culture of long hours. This unfortunately did not favour the majority of working-mothers with regards to work-life balance. In addition, women who did utilise the flexible work practices were perceived as having a lack of commitment which ultimately reduced their

promotional opportunities. Rogier and Padgett (2004) agree with this and cite a number of authors (Almer & Kaplan, 2000; Waldfogel, 1998; Hammonds et al., 1997) who refer to 'career derailment' as a result of using flexible work practices. In the same vein, Blair-Loy (2009) highlighted that the identity change for working-mothers resulted in them ceasing to be seen as part of the group of committed and unencumbered employees.

Therefore it is important for organisations to review their structures and culture to determine aspects that would undermine formal work-life balance policies, which ultimately leaves those who utilise them feeling 'undervalued and marginalised' (Lewis et al., 2007).

Workplace support programmes in the form of a lactation policy / breastfeeding program and sensitisation to the workforce about pregnancy and lactation in the workplace, will assist in removing the shame attached to this (C. J. Gatrell, 2013). To this end, Bosch (2014) recommends that the employer must take fatigue into consideration when the woman returns from maternity leave, and also consider whether the woman is breastfeeding or not as this also has an impact on energy levels.

Millward (2006) explored the transition to motherhood in an organisational context and identified two main themes as a result of this transition namely a change in identity and a change in the psychological contracts.

The first theme, a change in identity describes the personal experience of becoming a mother where the woman's identity was also impacted by the perceptions of those around to her upcoming motherhood. Women in the study indicated feelings of being excluded and side-lined (gradually invisible), even before the maternity leave had commenced. With the onset of motherhood during maternity leave, women's 'mother-identity' formed and with it the feelings of guilt associated with having to leave one's baby soon to return to work. Then upon returning to work, women felt the need to revalidate themselves as both a valued employee and as a mother.

The second transition to motherhood is changed psychological contracts. The psychological contract, as defined by Guest and Conway (2002 p.22) is "the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship – organisation and individual – of the reciprocal promises and obligations implied in that relationship" (p.22). This comprises a set of expectations, obligations and promises about the terms and conditions of the exchange, and is often unspoken. In this regard, women felt there is a potential for being perceived as unable to fulfil performance expectations upon returning to work. Two subthemes are comprised within the psychological contract namely: perceived reasonable obligations to continue fulfilling performance expectations during the pre-leave period, and perceived unreasonable obligations to prove that one can continue to fulfil performance expectations on return to work (Millward, 2006)

Millward (2006) also found that women experienced a perceived lack organisational support both from their line managers and colleagues along with ‘unspoken prejudice’ and further guilt when wanting to utilise family-friendly policies. This is further collaborated by Lui and Buzzanell (2004) where women in their research felt that their former ‘promotable’ identities receded into the background once becoming pregnant.

Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010) indicated that the women interviewed in their research stressed the importance of having the ‘support and flexibility’ from their direct line managers. Even though an organisation may have family-friendly policies, it comes down to the understanding and practical implementation of those policies by line management that will determine the effective utilisation and success of it. This speaks directly to the culture of the organisation.

As a summary to the practical implementation of work-life policies, Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, and Sparrow (2010) noted that there are ‘deeply ingrained social assumptions’ about utilising these practices. Organisations do not seem to fully acknowledge the social change around the paternal parenting role and argue that for this reason, more mothers than fathers take up the flexible work options. They argue in favour of organisations supporting ‘gender-neutral’ work-family practices.

2.2.5 The decisions women make about their careers

Men’s careers tend to take on a more linear path whereas women careers are mostly non-linear and at times interrupted (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

In her article, ‘the opt-out revolution’, Belkin (2003) looked at why professional women were leaving their careers. This has since sparked further research into understanding the decisions professional women who become mothers make about their careers (Cabrera, 2007; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

According to Suisse (2012, p.26), the result of the double-burden is that more women choose to “opt-out” than men which “automatically reduces the talent pool that managers can choose from and limits the number of women available for board positions”.

The terms opt-in and opt-in-between (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2010) have since emerged to balance out the ‘opt-out revolution’ (Belkin, 2003) along with kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), boundary less careers, off-ramps and on-ramps (Hewlett & Luce, 2005), and protean careers (Hall, 1976).

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) believe that women leave organisations for a multitude of reasons, and not purely due to family. They introduced the Kaleidoscope Career Model which indicates three aspects that influence career decisions namely, authenticity, balance and challenge (the details of this were discussed earlier in the literature review). Based on the Kaleidoscope Career Model,

research by Cabrera (2007) indicated that the majority of the women's career focus had changed. Mid-career women were most interested in finding balancing and were leaning towards authenticity. Millward (2006) however indicated that a lack of organisational support was a critical reason why many woman chose to exit the organisation after motherhood (work and family commitments could not reconcile). Hewlett and Luce (2005) refer to the 'pull' factors (family needs and health issues) and 'push' factors (no meaning/satisfaction from work and lack of growth opportunities) that result in women taking an off-ramp from their careers. They also indicate that the decision to exit was a very difficult one for women to make as many had invested heavily in their education and skills.

Hewlett and Luce (2005) further noted in their study that although many women opted out of the workforce at some stage, most did return at a later stage. They referred to this as off-ramps from their career and on-ramps once again. This finding was further corroborated by Cabrera (2007). However, when women did decide to on-ramp back to their careers, they found it quite difficult to re-enter the workforce with their earning power decreasing upon re-entry.

Incidentally, the average career break noted was 2.2 years (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). In this regard, (Geber, 2000) noted that organisations who wish to retain their highly qualified and skilled female talent in the longer term, should reintegrate women back in to their careers after taking a career break.

It is interesting to note though from Hewlett and Luce (2005) that only 5% of the women that were interested in returning to work, would do so with the same company given the current support practices. This then brought on the term boundary less careers which refers to careers that 'cross traditional organisational boundaries', for example movement across employers through project or consulting work where flexibility was maximised. However, findings from the research conducted by Cabrera (2007) revealed that women experienced boundaries when pursuing careers across organisations.

Empirical research conducted by Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010) on 23 professional women, discovered that many mothers chose to 'opt-in between' (as opposed to purely opting-out or opting-in). They did so by working part-time, or flexible hours if employed full-time, or were involved in home-based entrepreneurial ventures characteristic of boundary less careers. The authors stated that opting-out was temporary therefore it was useful for organisations to understand how women used 'micro-strategies' to find balance between work and home life, and then to tap into that to create appropriate tools to re-engage female talent. Three distinctive points were found to influence women's career shifts: a) when furthering one's education; b) prior to starting a family; and c) actually experiencing becoming a mother – this in fact was where the majority of the women were located in the research. Further, Cooke, Mills, and Lavender (2010) found that women wanted to achieve independence and stability and as such, pursued their education and career advancement.

The role of the line manager during the transition period will be explored next.

2.2.6 The line manager's role during the maternity transition period

2.2.6.1 The line manager's role and influence

There appears to be a lack of literature around the line manager's experience of managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period. Most literature focuses on the line manager's role in relation to work-life balance and how they experienced, or implemented it (Allen, 2001; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Glynn, Steinberg, & McCartney, 2002; Maxwell, 2005; A. McCarthy et al., 2010). It is therefore within this context that the literature review is explored.

Research conducted by Hakim (2002) around women's preference for working after motherhood indicated that approximately 60% of women fell within the adaptive category of finding value in both work and home roles. Eversole et al. (2012) agree with Ahlrichs (2007) in that line managers must recognise the different life stages and differing needs, goals and motivators of their employees and be able to adjust accordingly. Managers fulfil a critical role in the retention of these female talent, particularly working-mothers (Schwartz, 1989) as well as the operationalising of WLB practices to support them (Maxwell, 2005). In this regard, Clutterbuck (2003) indicates the role of the line manager as key to culture change as they directly influence the environment for work-life balance. He posits that managers do so by role-modelling these behaviours in their teams which in turn demonstrates support for work-life balance. In addition, managers learn how to become comfortable with measuring the employees output – focusing on the outcome / achievement, instead of managing people's activities / inputs which results in valuing face-time.

Core to the line manager's role is the relationship with the employee. When line managers display certain behaviours, this positively influences this relationship and performance of the employee. Crabb (2011) posited that line managers who coach their staff could assist them to focus on their strengths and aligning to a purpose as well as manage their emotions – ultimately assisting the employee to understand their individual drivers and utilise that to increase their effectiveness in their roles. To this end, Hamlin, Ellinger, and Beattie (2006) provides insight in to coaching behaviours namely, being caring and supportive, creating a environment conducive to learning, enabling clear and open communication and providing feedback. In addition, much emphasis is placed on the role of communication with a considerable number of managers in a study by Glynn et al. (2002), highlighting the importance they placed on having open and honest discussions with staff. This enabled them to engage with members of their team on a personal as well as a work basis.

Empowering employees is a key role of managers. Honold (1997, p. 203) cites Kanter (1977) who defines empowerment as the granting power to employees who are at a less advantaged position in

the organisation – as such power is seen as being on a continuum from powerlessness to empowered. Key conditions that Kanter (1977) indicates in organisational empowerment entail access to information, access to resources, learning and growth opportunities and support from the organisation. The author indicates the role of management in creating these to improve employee empowerment. Spreitzer (1995) added a further dimension to empowerment by positing that psychological empowerment (which refers to the way employees perceive HR practices aimed at empowering them) is needed in order for empowerment efforts to be deemed successful. Coaching is a means by which to assist people with both empowerment and psychological empowerment.

Research conducted by A. McCarthy et al. (2010) looked at how line managers view and practice work-life balance policies. The authors' work is based on the theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen (1991) which indicates that a person's behaviour can be determined by their intention. The authors proposed a conceptual model depicting line managers' attitude, intention, behaviour and outcome towards work-life balance. They stated that managers' who had a positive attitude towards work-life balance programmes, had greater intentions to "adopt and implement" it, as compared to those with "less favourable" attitudes. Social pressure (subjective norms), to implement these policies and when managers perceived themselves as having more control in implementing it, also contributed to a positive implementation intention. Contributing towards a positive behaviour attitude, A. McCarthy et al. (2010) indicates that line managers' being aware of the policies and having the knowledge of it will aid them in implementing and managing these policies. They further add that a lack of awareness on the various HR policies leads to line managers being less effective in their roles. In addition, line managers' personal experience of making use of work-life balance policies will also influence their attitude either positively or negatively.

Maxwell (2005) indicated in her empirical research that line managers were significantly influential in implementing work-life balance policies. Some managers in her research indicated that they were reluctant to take on additional staff responsibility in managing the implementation of this policy. She further indicated that managers have to implement the policy so that it is not seen as being biased towards women only. The author does however acknowledge that "working-mothers in particular will benefit from WLB" (p. 188).

As part of an empirical study conducted at Oxford Brookes University (Doherty & Manfredi, 2006), a sub-set of the research entailed interviewing 35 managers to understand how leadership styles and attitudes towards work-life balance filtered down through different levels of management, and its influence on flexible work practices. For some managers, trust was one of the main issues as they were concerned about the possibility of staff abusing FWP or focusing on their personal needs over work commitments. The outcome of the study revealed that there were wider issues around communication and management styles, which ultimately impacted on working flexibly (Doherty &

Manfredi, 2006). Therefore, the line manager's role in fostering an environment of open communication was a key determinant in the effective use of flexible work practices (Glynn et al., 2002). In this regard, Mangeni and Slabbert (2005) posits that the mind-set-shift needed by managers in SA is to learn how to measure the employee's work output, and not focus on managing the person.

2.2.6.2 Support for the line manager

Line managers too require support during the transition period as they have an important influence on the overall success of the transition. As noted by Robertson and Cooper (2010, p. 331), "at the operational level, the leader or manager is in a uniquely powerful position when it comes to influencing the psychological well-being and engagement of others". To this end, Zeus and Skiffington (2000) posit that manager's emotional competencies and interpersonal skills are key to facilitating effectiveness in an organisation. As such, Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016) advocates that the line manager relationship must also be considered, and as such supported. Line managers may be uncertain about what to ask or discuss with their employee around maternity aspects, or what the 'unspoken' expectations are from the woman's perspective.

According to Glynn et al. (2002), it is the organisational context - comprising the nature of the business environment, the organisation's culture and the company's policies and practices – which sets the parameters for whether the manager is empowered to support WLB efforts. As such, the author recommends specific support for line managers, such as training and consultation. Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016) supports this view and recommends that workshops include educating managers on what to expect and plan for, how to help employees manage conflicting demands, discussing unconscious biases, cultural attitudes and changing perceptions – this can be done with via an external maternity coaching company who bring in heightened levels of expertise and insights from across industries, or led through the internal HR / Organisational Development function who have an intimate knowledge of the culture of the organisation, policies and context (Seignot & Clutterbuck, 2016).

Glynn et al. (2002) indicated that when managers felt empowered by the organisation to allow their direct reports flexibility, they empowered their staff to work in such a way so as to achieve personal and work goals. This aligned with Kanter (1977) view of empowerment. Conversely, when managers felt that the organisation did not give them autonomy to make such decisions, they were uneasy / not confident about allowing unusual arrangements, even if the organisation might have been open to it. Managers who do not feel empowered inadvertently communicated this to their team through their own uncertainty.

2.2.7 Organisational culture and its relation to female talent management and work-life balance

This section outlines the literature around the organisational culture and how culture ultimately influences on the professional women's attainment of work-life balance. It starts with an overview of organisational culture which leads to female talent management in the work place and continues with organisational support policies.

2.2.7.1 Organisational culture

Organisational culture is viewed by Schein (2010) as the way things are done in an organisation over time. Schein (2010, p. 21) places an emphasis on the "shared learning experiences that lead to shared, taken-for-granted basic assumptions" (p. 21), which in turn determined much of the behaviour of groups in the organisation. And through a process of socialisation, new employees joining the organisation learn these rules and norms which reflected the culture.

Schein (2010) posited that culture reflected across three levels in the organisation – through artefacts (observable aspects such as behaviour), espoused beliefs and values, and the basic underlying assumptions. He further argued that to truly understand the culture prevalent in a group / organisation, one had to first delve in to the shared basic assumptions to understand how the learning process occurred which resulted in the advancing of those assumptions. Only once this was understood, could the other two levels be better understood and worked with. Culture and leadership are inextricably linked, as the process of creating a culture begins when leaders create groups and organisations – leaders are the originators of the beliefs and values which eventually leads to shared assumptions (Schein, 2010).

The professional working-mother's life in an organisational context is often linked to aspects such as work-life balance, work-life conflict, flexibility, and a need for career advancement (Bilimoria & Piderit, 2007; Brown, 2010; Cabrera, 2007, 2009b; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Muna & Mansour, 2009). However, the traditionalist cultural view in organisations which upheld the image of the ideal worker who did not let familial responsibilities impede on work-time, did not fit in with the reality of the working-mother's life who required the flexibility to fulfil both work and non-work-related responsibilities (Cabrera, 2009b). Authors further asserted that organisations needed to develop a culture which was supportive of the need for a work-life balance (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Muna & Mansour, 2009), by changing the structures, policies and career models to enable more flexibility in the working lives of women (Cabrera, 2009b).

This would allow for the attraction and retention of female talent as the extent to which the organisation's culture supported flexible working, impacted on the decisions women made about their careers (Brown, 2010; Cabrera, 2009b). To this end, Bilimoria and Piderit (2007) postulated that work-

family conflict affected the attitudes of working-mothers as an inhospitable organisational culture was a barrier to women's career progression. As such, Bussell (2008) posited that maternity coaching was only a temporary solution if the organisational culture and inflexible work policies prevailed. Boninelli (2016) agreed and highlighted the need for organisations to focus on changing the cultural and business norms to enable women to successfully manage their family commitments and be able to take up leadership roles. To this end, the author argued that any accommodation provided towards women should be viewed as an "investment in a changed social climate in female talent", and not as an "unfortunate organisational cost" (Boninelli, 2016, p.10).

Research carried out by SHL (assessment and development specialists) concluded that senior executives who worked flexibly, performed better than full-time managers (Glynn et al., 2002). The value in this research is that it makes the case for different ways of working and provides evidence against the stigma attached to people who use WLB policies, namely being less committed. The authors go on to state that a shift in culture can occur with senior leadership role-modelling the use of these practices, as it opens up the options for others in the organisation.

A key consideration for women in terms of organisational culture is the emphasis placed on gender diversity. Commitment to gender diversity required accountability by senior leaders, sponsorship of high-potential women, an investment in focused leadership programmes aimed at enhancing female talent and transparent tracking of gender metrics (McKinsey&Company, 2016; Susan Vinnicombe et al., 2014). According to the 2016 Women in Workplace Report, there was a mismatch between what senior leaders stated and what employees experienced - 62% of senior leaders indicated that gender diversity was a priority, however only 28% stated that senior leaders encouraged candid discussion on the topic (McKinsey&Company, 2016).

Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016) indicates that if organisations are to promote family-friendly working environments, then a culture of inclusion needs to be fostered. This can occur when prevailing cultural attitudes, perceptions and biases are challenged, and supported with a new way of thinking and behaving.

2.2.7.2 Female talent in context

Peters (2003) credited women for their diversity of view and skill and also referred to them as the best source of talent available for the future. Organisations with more women in top management and executive positions tended to exhibit better financial and organisational performance (Devillard, Sancier, & Werner, 2013; Firme, 2004; Thornton, 2016).

Women have been regarded as the solution to the talent problem in this changing world (Peters, 2003). Globally, women are graduating from universities and graduate programmes increasingly more

than their male counterparts, however only a small percentage of these women have managed to enter in to senior leadership roles (Thornton, 2016). According to McKinsey&Company (2016), when women's careers are not adequately supported at the junior and middle management levels, there is less likelihood of them moving in to the more senior roles. The world population is aging and with it the talent population therefore it becomes even more important for organisations to retain and nurture the talent they do have (Catalyst, 2014). Cabrera (2009) referred to the loss of valuable female talent as the leaking pipeline, where female talent 'opt-out' (Belkin, 2003) due to wanting careers that were intellectually stimulating and fulfilling, and where they could still enjoy their home lives.

Over a decade later, women are saying the same thing. In fact, the millennial generation (both males and females) are demanding this of their employers (Deloitte, 2010, 2017; Eversole et al., 2012). With the rise of the millennial workforce set to dominate the workforce over the next decade, it would serve organisations well to reconsider their historic rules and policies so as to attract, retain and fully utilise this generation's offerings (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). According to Deloitte (2017) and supported by Eversole et al. (2012), nearly two-thirds of the millennial professionals surveyed in SA preferred the stability of full-time employment with the ability to work flexibly, followed by freelance / consultative employment. The survey results indicated that flexible work practices underpinned by a foundation of trust positively influenced organisational commitment. Those with a high provision of being able to work flexibly indicated a positive impact across a number of areas namely: productivity; well-being, health and happiness, engagement with work, overall levels of morale and motivation; and upon the organisation's ability to meet its objectives.

While Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) discussed generational influences in their study, it was likely too early to comprehend the impact of the millennial generation on the world of work at that point in time. Instead, the authors referred to the generation before, namely Generation X. Millennials not only require a road map to success, there is an expectation for their companies to provide it (Meister & Willyerd, 2010).

Research conducted in the field of talent management (Susan Vinnicombe et al., 2014) highlighted a number of recommendations for developing female talent in organisations. These include:

- Make gender diversity a focus in the talent management process: proactive gender talent management becomes a strategic priority for organisations to consider;
- Hold senior leaders accountable for supporting women's careers - this would require "genuine commitment from senior leaders" with "targets, metrics and accountability" assigned to senior leaders, and to be tracked thereafter;

- Have gender metrics as a key performance indicator linked to remuneration, which would allow for accountability from the senior leaders and the organisation would be able to ascertain “possible leaks and blockages in the female talent pipeline”;
- Challenge gendered assumptions including having unconscious bias training for managers and by reviewing all talent management processes;
- Nurture female talent through leadership development and access to coaching and which will aid them in developing leadership self-efficacy and their own leadership style;
- Make female talent visible to key decision makers –allowing women access to sponsors and through talent dashboards and packs, will also allow less vocal and non-overtly expressive women the opportunity to be recognised; and
- Adopt a holistic approach by embedding female talent conversations in day-to-day business processes, and not as an annual review.

Hewlett and Luce (2005) further indicates that those organisations who are able to optimise support policies for their female talent will have a distinct advantage over competitors. Flexibility, for example is regarded as a talent magnet with it being cited as one of the top three reasons that highly skilled workers consider when choosing an employer (Deloitte, 2010). To this end, Glynn et al. (2002) indicates that today’s professional women is committed to progressing their careers and finding fulfilment in their work, in addition to having a healthy home environment – women want both.

2.2.7.3 Work-life balance

This section discusses the literature on work-life balance as a support mechanism.

McCarthy et al. (2010) refer to work-life balance (WLB) as organisational initiatives aimed at enhancing employees’ experience of work and non-work demands. WLB grew from the organisations’ need to attract and retain female talent who needed to balance commitments on both fronts (Eikhof, Warhurst & Haunschild, 2007).

Hewlett and Luce (2005) and Lewis et al. (2007) note how WLB is the overarching support theme under which aspects such as flexible work practices fall. Rogier and Padgett (2004) postulated that organisations have been using flexible work practices as a means to help employees better manage the dual-role conflicts and thereby assist with stress reduction and burnout - the benefit to the organisation being employee job satisfaction, productivity, decreased absenteeism and turnover, increased organisational commitment. To this end, Fursman and Zodgekar (2009) posit that when employees do utilise flexible work practices, that they should not be negatively impacted in terms of their income, employee benefits or career progression. At the same time, employee needs to consider the effects to the business and ensure that there is no adverse impact.

This leads to the attraction and retention of talent in the organisation as they are seen to be family-friendly. Hewlett and Luce (2005) further posited that women found access to utilising WLB initiatives as more of a motivator than financial rewards. This indicates the significance women place on having support practices in place. A study, however by Fursman and Zodgekar (2009) supported the view that there is a link between working flexibly and feeling guilty. Their study revealed guilt was most like to be reported by those people who used flexible work practices, with many reporting working longer hours overall as a result.

Support policies include both legislative requirements such as maternity leave and family responsibility leave as well as non-statutory types such as flexible work practices including flexible work schedules and job-sharing. Flexible work schedules is the most popular in use which includes telecommuting/working from home, working at flexible times in the week/weekend, compressed work-week and working reduced hours/part-time (Grady & McCarthy, 2008; Rogier & Padgett, 2004). Meglich, Mihelič, and Zupan (2016) studied how part-time workers and the needs of the manager / organisation were both accommodated and a win-win situation was encouraged – the part-time workers experienced an improved WLB and managers retained an experienced and committed member of their team. To this end, Clutterbuck (2003) emphasises the role of the line manager in influencing a culture of WLB.

Glynn et al. (2002) adds that while WLB initiatives were traditionally used by women, particularly working-mothers, the changing roles of men (and fathers) in society necessitates a shift in thinking. Men are increasingly sharing family and home responsibilities, and as such should be encouraged to utilise WLB policies without the potential penalty of being viewed as non-committed (Blair-Loy, 2009).

Workplace support strategies also include coaching, mentoring, networking opportunities and learning and development. As with all these support strategies, it is important that coaching be aligned to the organisation's talent strategy (Stout-Rostron, 2009).

Some companies offer further support mechanisms. Bosch (2014) indicates that organisations who have a large female staff complement and who hoped to attract and retain staff, reduce absenteeism, and improve productivity, should consider assisting parents to manage their work and family obligations. She went on to cite several companies in SA who supported staff with their childcare needs and in particular with access to an on-site workplace facility (crèche) or by arranging bulk discounts with quality childcare centres.

Companies can also play a role in accommodating mothers returning from maternity leave who desire to continue breastfeeding, by including a lactation policy / breastfeeding program in their employee value proposition. To this end, Dinour and Szaro (2017) indicated that when mothers experienced

barriers to supporting lactation upon returning to work, they terminated breastfeeding much sooner than they would have wanted to. Further, educating the workforce and managers particularly about the returner-mother's needs will remove the 'shame' or embarrassment associated with lactation at work (Gatrell, 2013).

For mothers preparing to return to work after maternity leave, it can feel quite daunting. Having an ease-back in period is a newer concept which some companies are offering their returner mothers (McGregor, 2015). It is seen as a softer way to re-enter the workplace – a flexible way of getting back in to the swing of work, for example by working from home initially, then coming in half-days and reducing travel for at least the first 6 months. This increased support demonstrates an understanding for the returner-mum where the first few months after maternity leave is usually the toughest.

However, Boninelli (2016) cautioned organisations not to view such work accommodation efforts as "unfortunate organisational costs needed to placate a special category of employees" . Instead, it should be viewed as an "investment in a changed social climate and in female talent" (p.10).

2.2.8 The emergence of maternity transition coaching as a support mechanism

The literature in this section explores the emergence of maternity coaching in organisations. It begins with a discussion on coaching which then leads in to maternity transition coaching.

2.2.8.1 Coaching

Passmore, Peterson, and Freire (2012) argue that there is no one universal definition for coaching and this could be attributed to the multiple applications of this approach given diverse clients' needs.

However, an overarching definition from notable author John Whitmore helps set the scene for an understanding of coaching. Whitmore (2010, p. 10) viewed coaching as being about self-awareness and personal responsibility, and posited that "coaching is unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them".

Looking at coaching within an organisational context, Kilburg (2000) advanced that coaching should offer benefits to both the individual as well as the organisation. E. Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck (2010, p.1) concur and adds that coaching is a "human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the coachee and potentially for other stakeholders".

The definition of coaching offered by Kilburg (2000, p. 67) blends organisational consulting with psychological practice, and highlights the importance of relationships:

"A helping a relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction. And, consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client's organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement".

This view aligns with the research by Coutu and Kauffman (2009), who surveyed 140 coaches for the Harvard Business Review, coaching borrowed aspects from both the consulting and therapy worlds.



Figure 6: Coaching borrows from consulting and therapy

Source: (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009) HBR)

Stober (2006) further highlights the need for coaches to base its practice on humanistic psychology principles which look at how individuals can attain a full life which is in harmony with the true self. The underlying view is one of optimism in that people have the resources within already to grow. Stelter (2009) further posited that the coaching conversations strengthened the client's ability to reflect, and aids in the strengthening of one's self-identity. To this end, Brockbank (2006) makes reference to reflective dialogue with another (e.g. a coach) as a way of challenging one's assumptions and self-perceptions.

- Managerial coaching

The manager-as-coach is regarded as an important managerial competency (Beattie et al., 2014; Hamlin et al., 2006), in order to support one's team members in the accomplishment of their roles

(Goleman, 2000; Hamlin et al., 2006). The manager-as-coach can coach their employees on an individual basis, coach the team where outcomes are provided and the team dynamics are then managed, and peer coach where managers coach each other (Beattie et al., 2014). According to Grant (2016), managerial coaching evolved from the pure management of performance (regarded as the first generation of management coaching), to more of a developmental oriented approach where there was more focus on empowering employees (second generation of management coaching), to the latest approach where coaching is focused on enhancing both the performance and the well-being of the individual (third generation of management coaching). The last approach is an approach that would support the maternity transition in organisations.

- Coaching Professional Women

Literature focused on the coaching needs of professional women appears lacking. These sentiments are echoed by Stout-Rostron (2011) who indicates that research on gender coaching or gender diversity coaching is minimal. Whilst published literature promotes coaching a key strategy to assist women progress in to top management where the "glass ceiling" exists (C. Gatrell & Swan, 2008), Stout-Rostron (2011) highlights that there is a gap in literature around 'how' coaching can support this.

A further disparity in literature is whether women who do not display the 'alpha' characteristics can be developed through executive coaching to step in to leadership roles in the organisation. As such Stout-Rostron (2013. p.165) asks the question, *"how important is it for leaders to fulfil "alpha" executive characteristics, or are those characteristics no longer needed in today's world?"* This is important to consider as women search to find their own voice in leadership (Devillard et al., 2013; Sandberg, 2013). To this end, Peltier (2011) urges coaches to understand how women operate within the organisation, versus using a standard approach of coaching to help women 'fit in'. Likewise, Stout-Rostron (2011) indicates that coaches need to be aware of current and unfolding studies on gender diversity in terms of coaching women in organisations. Leimon, Moscovici, and Goodier (2010) in their book, Coaching Women to Lead, specifically advocates coaching for women as it provides them the space and time to think, given the hectic lives women lead with their multiple roles. The authors go onto state that coaching provides women in leadership the tool to build their confidence to challenge established patterns of thinking in the organisation and trigger change. This speaks to empowerment (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1995).

- Coaching skills

The specific skills of a maternity coach appear lacking in the literature, with the related studies focusing on the women's experience. However, Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016), whilst making the

case for mentoring, indicates that coaching skills are important in practice and include being able to use open-ended questioning, provide non-judgemental feedback and be empathetic – these are traits in alignment with Carl Roger's person-centred approach, which coaches are encouraged to adopt (Grant, 2006; Stober, 2006). Likewise, Rogers (2012, p.61) refers to 'rapport, congruence and empathy….as ways of being with a client'. The author goes on to indicate that true rapport can only occur when the coach unconditionally accepts the client by being curious and stepping into their emotional world.

Grant (2005) acknowledges that coaches often bring with them vast industry knowledge, expertise, and a psychological understanding of coaching. The author further encourages that coaches have an understanding of the client's context. As such, Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016) makes the case for mentors and coaches who are being up skilled for parental mentoring (or coaching), to be parents themselves. However, this raises the controversial topic of the coach as being the expert advice-giver. Grant (2005) compares Whitmore (2010) who highlights facilitating the client's self-discovery, against the view of Whitmore (2010) who emphasises the 'tell' / advice-giving approach. To this end, Grant (2005) postulates that coaching actually lies on a continuum between these two approaches. This view lends itself to the context of maternity coaching which could be considered as an approach that lies on such a continuum. Likewise, Grant (2005) posits that a skilful coach is able to move along this continuum of ask-tell to promoting self-discovery, and then know when to provide expert / specialised information.

2.2.8.2 Maternity Transition Coaching

"Transition coaching helps people recognise the phases of transition and act in the best ways to make the changeover successful" (Bridges, 2004, p.81).

The above statement positions the role of coaching in times of transition. Bridges (2004, p. 79) refers to a genre of coaching called transition coaching, in which he describes coaching as one which *"focuses on seeing a leader through their own transition and providing them with the capability to help others do the same"*. While the context of this statement refers to an executive or senior leader preparing for, or in the midst of a career transition, the premise can hold true for maternity transition coaching.

Given this context, maternity coaching is an emerging field in coaching that is being used to support women's transition to motherhood, attainment of WLB and a refocus on career aspirations (Bussell, 2008; Chivers, 2011; Filsinger, 2012; Parke & Bingham, 2012).

Coaching has long assisted individuals manage through transition points (Passmore et al., 2012). Motherhood is a major transition in a women's life, therefore maternity coaching works within the

context of transitions in the workplace to enable professional women develop strategies to cope more effectively. Schlossberg (2011) indicated that transitions in a work context is even more complex as the structure of work is ever changing and therefore guided related practitioners (e.g. a coach) to first understand change and how it affects one's client. To deepen the learning and understanding, she recommended applying this knowledge to one's own life and other client's going forward.

Maternity coaching was piloted in 2006 (Freeman, 2008) and the organisation reported an increase in the retention of their female talent as compared to the previous six years. Chivers (2011) concluded that maternity coaching has a valuable role to play in the supporting the retention of female talent. However Filsinger (2012) argues that as maternity coaching is such a new genre of coaching, it is not yet known how it will impact professional women's longer term reengagement with their careers.

Bussell (2008) refers to the transition period as one that does not merely end with the women returning to work after maternity leave, but rather an evolving one which continues until the child becomes independent. Workplace support is generally provided immediately post-maternity leave, but by implication, the 'danger period' of losing valuable female talent could be later on in the women's career (perhaps even after the second child). As such, the author recommends that organisations put measures in place to support women through the shifting transitional phases (such as by offering coaching at intervals throughout their career and not only at a maternity instance). Similarly, reflections of a partner and board member at KPMG who oversaw the Women's Network for the company, indicated that workplace support was as important around the two-year mark, if not more so, than the initial maternity leave support. Women were refocusing on their careers, yet it was also the time when planning for the second baby was occurring and concerns around coping and finding a balance were critical (Richards, 2013).

Bussell (2008 p.19) proposed seven transitional perspectives that women in her study underwent: 1) Career is the primary focus, 2) Career remains the primary focus, 3) Working Contortionists, 4) Realistic Pragmatism, 5) Realism – professional brakes have been applied, 6) Disengagement and Disenchantment, 7) Reflection and Reinvention . She noted that these phases were not linear as not all women followed the same sequence. The relevance of this study demonstrated that women experienced shifting perspectives towards their work, similar to the kaleidoscope careers which Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) posited. As such, coaching interventions needed to consider these shifts and adapt accordingly. Doing so, assists the women to manage re-entry to work resulting in the retention of the working-mothers (Bussell, 2008).

A potential gap in Bussell (2008) study was the theoretical consideration of the term 'transitions' and its implications were not considered. Transitions were viewed as a change in phase (a situational context), whereas Bridges and Bridges (2017) and Schlossberg (2011) postulate that transitions

refers to the inner psychological reorientation which occurs in order to make sense and cope with the change.

Chivers (2011) surveyed 168 women on their return to work post-maternity leave and the women predominantly expressed feelings of dread, anxiousness and guilt – which she likens to a triple-bind, lack of confidence, lack of skill usage and being without contact for a period of time. She further added that when there is a significant life event, a 'crisis point' emerges between three to nine months after the impact (in this case the women's return to work) and it is here that support is critically needed. The author goes onto note enablers for each of the barriers that women face, and these formed part of her maternity coaching programme.

Themes of role-conflict, guilt and changed identity (Carr, 2002; Millward, 2006) are all aspects that the working mother is able to explore further in the coaching conversation. This is indicated through finding meaning and identity (Bush et al., 2011, p.58). Further, coaching conversations can explore the ingrained social assumptions that Burnett et al. (2010) discussed and how this impacts on the working mothers work-life balance efforts.

Filsinger (2012) concluded from her research that maternity coaching influenced the reengagement of mothers with their career development after maternity leave. She noted that it did so on an emotional level (the women felt valued and encouraged by the organisation that invested in their reengagement), and on a practical level (confidence in requesting flexible work practices, deciding on which working pattern to return to) and in terms of long-term career reflection (provided a space to reflect on their career path and development). However, Filsinger (2012) noted a limitation in her study in that obtaining the line manager's perspective would have been valuable to understand the entire system's influence on the mother.

The importance of line manager's support towards return-to-work transitions was clearly evidenced across the research. Several studies have also identified the discord between an organisation's family-friendly policies and the actual practices at the individual management level (Bussell 2008; Liu & Buzzanell 2004). However across the maternity coaching studies, with the exception of Parke and Bingham (2012), the organisational 'practical' perspective (colleagues or line manager) was missing from the sample.

The process followed in the various studies' maternity coaching programmes differed however there were three common phases of contact with the women: pre-maternity, during maternity (before returning to work), and a post-maternity session. Gaining an understanding of the elements of these coaching programmes and how to possibly standardise core aspects would benefit this field.

Further, the maternity coaching studies by Bussell (2008), Freeman (2008) and Filsinger (2012) all took place in law firms therefore one has to take into account the culture and nature of that industry, and understand how it may differ to other industries.

In terms of coaching skills, the specific skills of a maternity coach appear lacking in the literature, with the related studies focusing on the women's experience. And to date, there has been no empirical research in the field of maternity transition coaching in SA. This study therefore aims to also add to the body of literature in this regard.

2.3 Conclusion of Literature Review

The question which Schlossberg (1981) posed, i.e. *"how can we understand and help adults as they face the inevitable and non-predictable transitions of life?"* (p.2), bears relevance to this study which also seeks to understand how coaching can support the maternity transition process. The life phase of becoming a mother is potentially the most significant transition a woman can go through, ushering in a change in role and self-identity (Smith, 1999). William Bridges work (Bridges, 1980, 1986; Bridges & Bridges, 2017; Bridges & Mitchell, 2000) in the field of managing transitions provides an understanding of the psychological phases that people go through when undergoing a change. Nancy Shlossberg's transition theory furthered the work in the field of human transitions (Schlossberg, 1981), by introducing the 4-S System - four factors which influence transition and provides a structure for analysing and coping with the transition (Anderson et al., 2011).

Women, especially in the mid-career phase are a time when many women are at the peak of their careers, and it also the period of childbearing and childrearing (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). However, this period is categorised by multiple conflicts (role-conflict and work-family conflict), and as such women are seeking more work-life balance (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Women may feel a sense of disillusionment with the organisation by not being able to fairly access support mechanisms in aid of them finding balance. As such, their energy and attention becomes focused elsewhere in favour of recognition and renewed vigour (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Women may not necessarily exit the organisation, however could become disengaged from their careers and ultimately the organisation loses its female talent prospects. It becomes important to therefore assist working-mothers to develop a better understanding of their role-conflicts. It will need to be viewed against the organisation's views on flexibility, the working women's degree of career commitment and the beliefs she has about life roles (Gilbert et al, 1981).

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) indicate that even though organisations agree to the importance of offering support in order to retain female talent, their research found that the practical support was lacking. In this regard, they recommend that organisations focus their efforts on ensuring women receive ongoing

coaching and mentoring. They go on to say that management's understanding of the career phases of women and what it means to integrate both work and home-life aspects is important to the successful implementation of WLB strategies.

Literature pertaining to the line manager 's role during the maternity transition period appears lacking. Therefore links were made to those managerial skills and competencies (Zeus & Skiffington, 2000) which would aid in a successful maternity transition namely; operationalising WLB practices (Maxwell, 2005; A. McCarthy et al., 2010), fostering a relationship of trust(Doherty & Manfredi, 2006), creating the environment for effective communication (Glynn et al., 2002; Hamlin et al., 2006), coaching the employee (Crabb, 2011) and empowering employees (Kanter, 1977).

Line managers directly influence how WLB policies are utlilised in the organisation (Clutterbuck, 2003). One of the enablers to WLB is being able to work flexibly. In practice though, flexible work practices are more punitive than they are helpful. Crampton and Mishra (1999) and Gilbert et al. (1981) both indicate that the organisational culture plays a critical role in how women are viewed once they utilise this practice. Of importance is the line management understanding and implementation of these practices (A. McCarthy et al., 2010). An organisation can have good intent when crafting these policies, yet it fails when the managers responsible for approving its usage, lack understanding and support of it (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The line manager's attitude towards WLB policies determines their adoption and utilisation of it, therefore organisations need to ensure managers are made fully aware and buy-in to the policies (A. McCarthy et al., 2010).

The literature further outlines organisational culture (Schein, 2010) and its influence on the talent management and WLB of professional women (Bilimoria & Piderit, 2007; Susan Vinnicombe et al., 2014).

One aim of coaching is to help women reconnect with meaning and identity (Bush et al., 2011) and coaching conversations help women understand and work through their role-conflicts. Maternity coaching has a valuable role to play in the supporting of female talent (Chivers, 2011) yet the research has yet to demonstrate the long-term retention benefits of female talent.

An area that still requires further development in maternity coaching is to ensure that all aspects of the work system that have an impact on the professional women's life are factored into the coaching programme. The majority of the studies did not include the line manager's perspective in the process, and literature has already indicated the strong influence management has in aiding women's access to flexible work practices (Allen, 2001; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Glynn et al., 2002; Maxwell, 2005; A. McCarthy et al., 2010).

Finally, the researcher is expanding the term maternity coaching to position it within the realm of transitions, as it is a transition that the women undergo. Therefore, the term ‘maternity transition coaching’ is referred to in the study. In the context of this study, a transition is successful when the women re integrates back in to work, and when they can envision a fruitful future for themselves in the organisation and as a working-mother.

Using a multiple-case study approach, the research questions will be explored and answered, concluding with a framework for implementing maternity transition coaching in organisations. The research questions are:

Research Question 1: What is the professional women’s experience of the maternity transition period?

Research Question 2: What is the line manager’s role in managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period?

Research Question 3: How does organisational culture influence working-mothers?

Research Question 4: How does maternity coaching act as a support mechanism?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research paradigm

“The paradigm… influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. It is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research” (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, p193) .

An interpretivist-constructivist paradigm underpinned this research as it best suited the exploratory nature of the research questions. Creswell (2013) referred to this paradigm as constructivism / social constructivism or interpretivism. The intention of this paradigm was to understand the world of human experience, where reality was socially constructed, and in which the researcher relied on the participant’s views of the situation (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

This approach suited this research as the experience of the women during the maternity transition period, could not be fully understood in isolation - it had to be seen in the context of the women’s work environment. In support, Stake (1995) referred to the holistic treatment of the phenomena where the context of the phenomena was critical for understanding the reality of it. The author added that researchers operating from this paradigm appreciated the uniqueness of the individual cases in its context and ultimately their role in constructing the reality of experience. As such, it was deemed important by the researcher to obtain the line manager and organisational viewpoints as it provided further context to the women’s experience.

Qualitative data was best suited to the interpretivist paradigm (Frankel & Devers, 1999; Noor, 2008) as the aim was to explore and understand the meaning that groups or individuals assigned to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2013; Malterud, 2001). Qualitative inquirers supported an inductive style of looking at research, focusing on individual meaning and the importance of depicting the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

3.2 Research design

Merriam (1998) indicated five types of qualitative research - generic qualitative study, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study (p.11).

A qualitative, multiple-case study design was selected for this research. As the aim of this study was to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the professional women’s maternity transition experience and perceptions of workplace support through this period, a qualitative case study approach fit the purpose. The organisational system was studied in that the women, line managers and HR were interviewed, along with multiple archival records and the researcher’s field notes which

allowed for a holistic view to be gained of the phenomena in context. Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007, p. 245) defined case study research as:

“a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes”.

Yin (2014) suggested taking on a multiple-case design (rather than a single one) noting substantial analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases. A ‘two-case’ case study was conducted for this research. Yin (2014) recommended a case study approach when research was conducted within an organisational context and when exploratory questions formed part of the research questions. Previous studies on the topic of maternity transition coaching focused primarily on the women’s experience, and had not accounted for the organisation’s or line manager’s perspective (Bussell, 2008; Filsinger, 2012; Freeman, 2008). As the intention of the research was to understand the women’s lived experience in the context of the organisation, a case study approach was selected.

3.3 The design of the case study

A conceptual framework is indicated in Figure 8 below which outlines the multiple-case study design undertaken in this research. Following ethical clearance, appointments were sought out to meet the various respondents to conduct the data collection. The primary data was obtained through recorded interviews which were then transcribed, inductively-coded and analysed, firstly within each case, and then across both cases. The Cross-Case analysis presented themes from the research which led to answering the research questions. Triangulation of the data from multiple sources assisted with the validity of the research. A suggested framework for supporting professional women during the maternity transition period in organisations was developed, and is presented in Chapter 6.

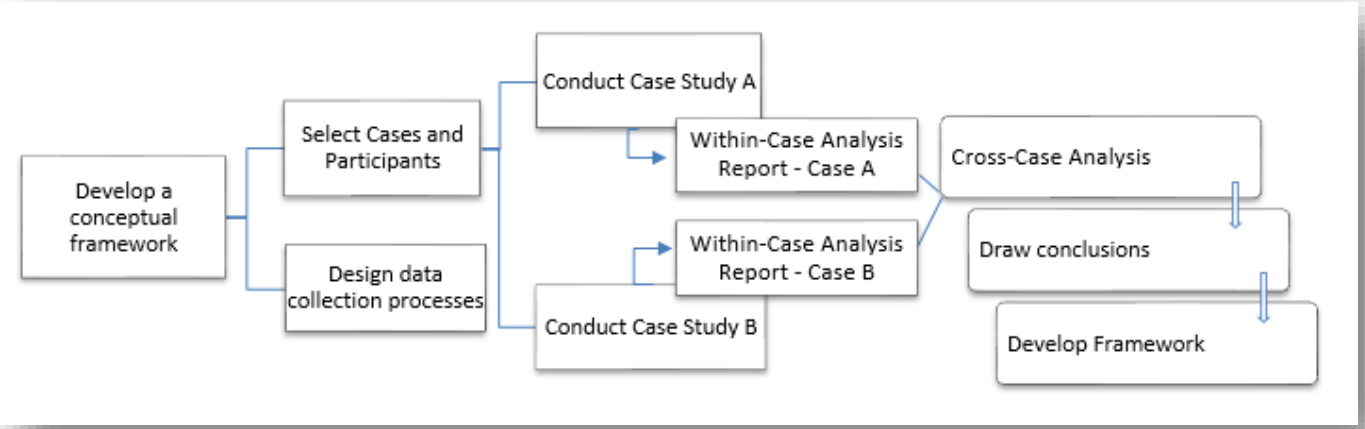


Figure 8: Multiple-case study design for this research

Source: (adapted from Yin, 2013, p. 57)

3.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of case studies

Case studies are regarded as being rich in data with an ability to describe complex aspects which allow for further analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Yin (2014), there were certain advantages to utilising a multiple-case design as compared to a single-case design. The evidence from multiple case studies were often regarded as more compelling with the study being seen as more robust. In the analysis of the multiple case studies in this research, the themes were pulled together and reintegrated to demonstrate both the essence of the individual's experience in the case, and also the variations across cases (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). The comparison between the different organisational practices provided for a deeper understanding of the experience and added to theory formulation, which was especially relevant as literature and theory on maternity transition coaching is emerging (Creswell et al., 2007).

The criticism levelled against this design was that it was time intensive and could require extensive resources, which usually went beyond the scope of a single researcher or student (Yin, 2014). The author cautioned that taking a decision to follow this approach should not be taken lightly (p.57). The researcher found the time-frame within which to source and collect the multitude of data to enable a rich, thick description of the case, as extremely gruelling for a single student. Obtaining the secondary archival data required persistence and a number of creative ways on the part of the researcher to extract the required information.

3.3.2 Case selection

3.3.2.1 Case sites

The population / case sites for the research included all organisations in SA where professional women went on maternity leave for a period of time, and then returned to the work place. The case sites were then narrowed down to two large corporate organisations - one a financial institution and the other a professional services firm, both of which had their head offices located in Gauteng. This was important as it allowed for easier access to respondents as the researcher was also based in Gauteng.

3.3.2.2 Case selection and participants

The selection method adopted for this research was purposive sampling. According to Merriam (1998), researchers who want to "discover, understand and gain insight…select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.61). As such, selection should be 'purposeful' or 'sought out' (Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposive sampling enabled the selection of fertile exemplars of the experience for this study and it suited the qualitative case study methodology (Kelly J Devers & Frankel, 1999).

The basis for the sampling was to enable the researcher to investigate the phenomena in two settings – one where the women received a specific type of workplace support during this transition to motherhood namely maternity coaching, and the other where the women were not exposed to maternity coaching. This allowed for maximum variation when describing the key themes (Wahyuni, 2012). In particular, convenience sampling was adopted (Patton, 2002) where the researcher connected with her existing network to garner support for conducting the research at the Case site B.

For Case A, seeing as maternity coaching was such a new genre of coaching in SA, a concern for the researcher was gaining access to an organisation where maternity coaching was utilised. It therefore became important for the researcher to start building a relationship that would allow her access to the required group. An initial exploratory discussion was held with the CEO (and coach) of the coaching company that was pioneering maternity transition coaching in SA, who expressed great interest in participating in this study. The women interviewed were based in the Johannesburg office, and the line manager was based in Cape Town.

Table 1 below outlines the number of respondents by role in the study and by case site. Across both cases, a total of 16 interviews were conducted. A systemic view was taken in selecting the respondents – as such multiple viewpoints were sought in each of the cases.

The largest group sampled were the women (mothers) as it was their core experience that was of most value to this research. This was followed by the line manager's viewpoint, and the organisation's

representative (HR or Business Lead) who provided context primarily around the policy and implementation strategies. Finally, the maternity transition coach was interviewed for Case A, and the Head of Coaching for Case B (who oversaw the coaching programme for the entire organisation).

Table 1: Number of respondents by role in the study, per Case Site

Role in the study	Women	Line Manager/s	Org. Rep	Coach	Remarks
Case A (professional services firm)	5*	1	1*	1*	*The Partner was interviewed as one of the women and as the organisational representative: separate interview guides were used
Case B (financial services firm)	4	2	1	1*	*The external Maternity Transition Coach was interviewed in Case A; and the Head of the company's Coaching Programme was interviewed in Case B

3.3.2.3 Criteria for respondents' selection

In alignment with purposive selection, the selection criteria were first determined which entailed a list of attributes essential to the study (Merriam, 1998). Table 2 below summarises the key selection criteria of the respondents and sources of evidence, which included the primary and secondary data.

For each of the cases, approval was initially sought from company's HR representative / Business Leader in the form of the interview, at which point sign-off was provided to participate.

In Case B, the researcher approached four of the women who were known to her that met the selection criteria – due to time schedules, three were able to participate. The fourth women interviewed was later referred by one of the respondents. The researcher approached the one line manager directly as the selection criteria was met, and the second manager was referred to the researcher through one of the women in the study. The Head of Coaching was also approached and agreed to provide input around the coaching practices in the organisation. There was no reluctance to participating in the study in Case B.

In Case A, the external maternity transition coach facilitated the connection with the respondents by first sensitising a few of the women telephonically to the research, and then provided the researcher with list of email addresses for a sample of women who had attended the coaching sessions over the past 2-3 years. The researcher sent an email to the potential respondents outlining the study and requested their participation. Four women responded shortly afterwards, and later a fifth women

joined the study. The researcher considered the "complexity of the case" (Devers & Frankel, 2000) and found that there was a potential resistance to participating in the study from the line managers in Case A. This concern was raised in the literature review by a previous author's study (Filsinger, 2012) where the line manager's viewpoint was missing (most likely due to access/agreement issues). In anticipation of this, the researcher negotiated access to this group through the women (mothers) by asking them to position the request with their line managers on the researcher's behalf. One manager in Case A agreed to participate. As the women in the study were also managers of people, where they met the criteria of the 'line manager', their viewpoint also informed the line manager's perspective in the study. One of the women interviewed in the study also represented the organisational perspective and a separate interview guide was utilised for that interview.

Table 2: Key selection criteria of the respondents and sources of evidence

Description of respondents	Key Criteria	Sources of Evidence
Professional women (mothers)	Women in leadership/ management/ specialist roles Women whose last-born child was five years or younger Women who remained with the company after maternity leave	Semi-structured interview Researcher's field notes and observations
Line Managers	Managers that had the experience managing professional women in their teams who went on maternity leave in the past 5 years	Semi-structured interview Researcher's field notes and observations
Group HR	A senior representative of the organisation who had knowledge of, and could discuss the related HR policies and practices in the org.	Semi-structured interview Archival records: Culture surveys Archival: Talent statistics Website information and annual reports Researcher's field notes and observations
Maternity Coach (Case A)	Has first-hand experience working with maternity coaching and the women in Case A.	Semi-structured interview Post-coaching feedback collected by the coach
Head of Coaching (Case B)	Has in-depth knowledge of the organisation's coaching practices	Semi-structured interview Coaching programme documentation

3.4 The research instrument

The primary source of evidence for this study was derived from semi-structured interviews with the respondents. Wahyuni (2012) referred to the merit of using qualitative (semi-structured) interviews as it allowed for the researcher to be guided using pre-determined themes (such as those which arose from the literature review). It also provided the flexibility for the respondents to delve deeper in to the discussion by prompting thought and further enquiry into the answers received.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed which assisted the researcher in covering the key discussion points relating to the research questions. Four interview guides were developed for the various roles in the study, namely the women, line managers, HR and Coach. The interview guides are provided in Appendix A.

The HR Executives and partner were interviewed to gain an understanding of the organisational policies and practices aimed at supporting the talent management and WLB of working-mothers, and to understand the coaching practices at the one company (Case B). The coach was interviewed to understand more about maternity coaching and how this acted as a support tool for the women during the maternity transition period in the other company (Case A). The line managers were interviewed to gain their perspective of managing working-mothers and their own experience during the maternity transition period. The women (working-mothers) provided an in-depth view of their own experiences of the maternity transition period, being a work-mother and managing their careers.

In addition, field notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews, and this provided a more rounded account of the interview and provided deeper context to the analysis (Bryman, 2004).

3.4.1 Testing the research instrument

The interview questions along with the entire interview process were tested prior to implementation and modifications were made where required. Yin (2014) referred to this process as the pilot-testing of the researcher's formal field procedures. The process included making contact with the potential respondent, following through with a consent letter, setting up the appointment at a suitable location, conducting the interview, testing the recording of the interview and downloading of the sound file.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

Interview requests were made directly to potential participants, by email or telephone and through the use of referrals from the researcher's networks. After positioning the research, informed consent forms were emailed to the respondents outlining the study, requesting them to acknowledge their participation in the study and authorising for the recording of the interviews (see Appendix B). An overview of the informed consent form was reiterated at the onset of each interview.

The researcher conducted 16 interviews with the participants. All of the interviews, except one were conducted face-to-face and occurred at the respondent's offices. One interview was conducted telephonically as the respondent was based in Cape Town – the use of telephone recording software allowed for the interview to be converted to a sound file for transcribing. Additional field notes which comprised of observations and further reflections, were made by the researcher during and after the interviews. A follow-up discussion occurred with the maternity coach and three of the respondents to further clarify comments from the initial interview.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The interviews with the women and line managers averaged between 60-90 minutes – it was noted that the interviews became quite a reflective space for many of the respondents.

The interview recordings were professionally transcribed and thereafter checked by the researcher for accuracy before being using in the analysis.

Secondary data comprised of archival records from the two organisations and included HR and Annual stakeholder reports, documentation about the coaching programmes, policies and information extracted from the companies' websites. Case study research allowed for the use of multiple sources of evidence which served as triangulation, assisting in strengthening the construct validity of this case (Yin, 2014).

3.6 Ethical considerations

"A good case study researcher…will strive for the highest ethical standards while doing research" (Yin, 2014, p. 76).

The informed consent form provided the respondents with the objectives of the study and the subsequent use of the findings. A recourse to complain about any ethical concerns was also noted in the form. The researcher abided by the general code of ethics that the university subscribed to for conducting research. As such, the researcher emphasised that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and that confidentiality would be honoured. The organisation's and respondent's names were anonymised through the use of code names, e.g. A-W1 which indicated Case A and Woman number 1. All data was stored on a password-protected computer, and interview recordings will be destroyed after the grading of this research report.

The researcher is an employee of one of the organisations in the study, and therefore ethical and credibility issues of being an insider researcher were reflected upon {Coghlan, 2014 #513}. In particular, the of role duality {Coghlan, 2014 #513}, pre-understanding and bias {Sikes, 2008 #514} was considered. Utilising the same interview guide for both organisations assisted with overcoming

issues around familiarity which may have limited inquiry. The researcher also had access to more detailed information and therefore took extra precaution in keeping certain confidential information secure.

3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

"Data analysis involves the drawing of inferences from raw data" - Wahyuni (2012, p. 75)

Malterud (2001) pointed out that during the data analysis, the aim was for the researcher to have a thorough knowledge of the material being worked with so that they could ascertain exactly what in the content was applicable to answering the research questions. As the researcher did not have any preconceived categories prior to the analysis, the qualitative content analysis (also referred to as inductive category development) was suitable for use as it allowed for the codes and categories to surface from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

3.7.1 Coding transcripts

The researcher followed a content analysis approach in analysing the data as recommended by Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1279):

- The coding commenced with a comprehensive reading of all data, becoming fully immersed in it until the researcher had a complete 'sense of the whole';
- This was followed by inductive coding where codes were derived by reading the data again, word-by-word and highlighting the exact words from the text which captured the key concepts;
- The labelling of the codes started to emerge which became the 'initial coding scheme';
- The codes were then combined into categories (code families) based on how they related to one another;
- The emergent categories were then joined into relevant clusters / themes.

A qualitative computer programmed called Atlas Ti assisted with storage and sorting of the transcripts and the management of the coding process. Atlas Ti also allowed for the capturing of memos and field notes which were reflective notes about what the researcher was learning from the data, concepts and their relationships.

3.7.2 Within-case analysis

The individual cases were first analysed using a within-case method, where each case was treated as a whole cases or story (Ayres et al., 2003). By analysing each case on its own, an in-depth understanding and description of the phenomenon was obtained, taking in to account the unique nature of the organisational context and its influence on the maternity transition experience.

The literature provided the researcher with certain frameworks by which to structure the flow of the case, in particular the phases of the maternity transition experience (before, during and after maternity leave). Patterns, differences and similarities emerged from the various respondent's experiences and viewpoints, which was further informed when combined with the secondary data, the objective being to provide a rich description of each case as it pertained to the research questions and research topic.

The both cases are presented in Chapter 4. In total, 2439 quotations were reviewed as part of the within-case and cross-case analysis.

3.7.3 Cross-case analysis

Themes were developed from both of the cases and further analysed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena (the professional women's maternity transition experience). The researcher started the process of discovering themes by examining how relevant codes formed a relationship with each other to create broader patterns in the data, which when combined led to a theme (Yin, 2014). An example of how one of the themes in this research was formulated is depicted in Figure 9 below.

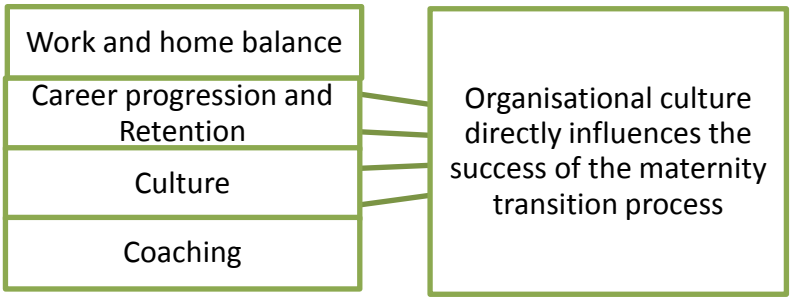


Figure 9: Formulation of a theme in this study

Thematic analysis entailed comparing the similarities and differences in the respondents' experiences and examining patterns across the two cases to address the research questions. The emergent themes were supported with examples from the data and compared to the literature.

The themes developed further supported the development of a framework in Chapter 6.

3.8 Limitations of the study

While all the women interviewed met the criteria to participate, the researcher had not foreseen that there would be a direct opposite mix in terms of first-time and second-time mothers in the cases. Case A had 4 first-time mothers and 1 second-time mother, while Case B reflected the opposite with 3

second-time mothers and only 1 first-time mother with the ages of the women differing across cases. However, having a mix of experiences across cases allowed for the differing support needs of first-time and second-time mothers to be highlighted.

In Case A, all four women who initially consented to participate where white females. And while racial diversity was not a pre-requisite for the study, the researcher sought to include a woman of another race. Sourcing another female proved challenging for a few months until the maternity coach connected the researcher with an African female who had just returned from maternity leave. Doing so proved valuable to the research as this particular woman's story brought to light the cultural context of families, and its influence on the father's role during the maternity transition period. This view also provided a more representative view in light of the fact that this is a South African study.

Not having a direct network in Case A, the researcher was reliant in many ways on the maternity coach to position requests and make introductions. While the respondents were happy to speak about their own experiences in Case A, the researcher did find it challenging to gain access to archival records such as policies and updated HR reports. It was also particularly challenging to obtain consent from a second line manager to participate in the study. Other studies of this nature also lacked the line manager viewpoint.

Time constraints were top of mind throughout the research process. The time-consuming activities involved the securing of the interviews and managing the reschedules of appointments, travelling to various sites to interview participants and following up on document retrieval requests.

The aspect which the researcher was most aware of though, was that of her own experience of being a professional working-mother. The researcher's lens for interpreting the world unavoidably entered into the process. To this end, Creswell (2013) noted that research in the interpretive paradigm was instinctively influenced by the subjective significances made by the researcher. It was therefore important for the researcher to be cognisant of any related biases, especially during the interviews. The researcher made use of field notes to assist with bracketing her thoughts and perceptions from those of the respondents'.

3.9 Validity and reliability

Validity referred to the extent to which an instrument measured what it intended to (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). The researcher considered three questions in this regard: "1) were the interviews reliably and validly constructed; 2) were the content of the documents properly analysed; 3) and do the conclusions of the case study rest upon data?" (Merriam, 1998, p. 199).

3.9.1 External validity

The strength of case study research is its ability to utilise multiple sources of evidence which provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon. Yin (2014, p. 120-121) referred to the “converging lines of inquiry” which led to triangulation, and further stated that a case study finding “is likely to be more convincing and accurate” if triangulation was evident. As such, secondary data in the form of archival information such as reports, policies, and field notes were incorporated in to the analysis of each of the cases.

Merriam (1998) posited that external validity was the extent to which the findings of a study could be applied to another. The subject of generalisability has been a point of contention amongst authors. In this regard, the researcher supported the view of both Stake (1995), who spoke of naturalistic generalisation (people drew on their tacit knowledge and personal experience, looking for patterns to explain their own experience); and Merriam (1998) who referred to reader/user generalisability (where the reader decided what applied to their own situation and what did not).

The researcher also aimed at enhancing the validity of the study through “rich, thick description – providing enough description so that readers… can determine…whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). Further, through the use of purposive sampling and utilising multiple designs, this allowed for a greater transferability to other situations.

3.9.2 Internal validity

According to Merriam (1998), internal validity looked at how the research findings matched reality. Therefore, the researcher considered this question throughout the process: “Do the findings capture what is really there?”

To enhance the internal validity, the researcher built in triangulation by using multiple sources of data, including field notes and memos to confirm the emerging findings; had her work checked by the research supervisor who commented on the case findings as they emerged; and bracketed of biases as they arose throughout the research process (Merriam, 1998).

3.9.3 Reliability

Reliability makes reference to the degree of consistency in the study, and looks to determine whether the study can be replicated (Yin, 2014). The interview guides were drafted for all the roles in the study. The inclusion of a device to record the interview ensured that the researcher had an accurate account of the conversation which was referred back to during the analysis phase. The researcher therefore did not need to rely on her memory or be influenced by preconceived views on the matter when analysing the data. The recordings were transcribed in to interview scripts, which were then uploaded

in to Atlas Ti for coding and storage. Field notes were utilised during and after the interviews, as well as during the case analysis phases of the research.

Chapter 4 will present the detailed findings of the research for both the organisations interviewed. The findings are presented by case under the chapter title: Within-Case Analysis.

4. WITHIN-CASE ANALYSIS

Each case analysis considers: the background of the organisation and the respondents' profile; organisational factors influencing women's careers; description of the coaching approach in the organisation; and the maternity transition experience of the respondents. Each case concludes by examining the implications of the analysis.

4.1 Case A

4.1.1 Background of the organisation and respondents' profile

Case A is an international professional service firm which provides tax, auditing, consulting and financial advisory services to their clients. In SA, the staff complement approximated 4000 which formed part of a global network of 220 000 professionals.

The mission of the organisation focused on helping their clients and its people excel, supported by its vision which highlighted talent, culture and diversity as enablers. The company placed a high focus on its people and dedicated an entire section of its website to talent practices and transformation. Transformation was a strategic driver in the organisation, and the responsibility for it lay directly with the CEO, who reported to the board on strategic progress. Per the company's 2014 Stakeholder Report, a target was set of 40% female ownership by 2020 (at the time of completing this study, the 2016 Annual report had not yet been published, therefore the 2014 statistics were utilised).

As part of transformation, the company's focus on women in leadership was strengthened by a specific governance board that "oversees the firm's strategies and policies relating to the advancement of women to senior levels". This board's strategic goal was to "increase the number of women at senior leadership levels within the company" (extracted from the 2014 Stakeholder Report). The board comprised of senior female leaders from across SA who supported selected events and initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining talent for long-term careers in the organisation. One of the notable initiatives supported by a joint collaboration between this board and HR, has been the Maternity Transition Coaching Programme (here after referred to as 'MTC'), which the organisation offered to its professional women in management. The primary reason for selecting this company for the case study was so that the experience of the women who participated in the MTC programme could be better understood, as compared with working-mothers who were not exposed to such an experience.

The women interviewed were in different levels of management positions - one woman was a partner, three women were senior managers and one was a middle manager. In terms of age grouping, four women were in the 25-35 year age range, and one woman was in the 36-45 range. They were all

geographically based in Gauteng and interviewed at their respective offices. The interview length ranged from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. Their average length of service with the company was 8.5 years, with the least service being 2 years and the longest noted at 19 years. All the women held post graduate qualifications.

The women took the full four months paid maternity leave, and where possible added on their annual leave to stretch it up to five and a half months. According to HR, the company's maternity leave policy was in alignment with the other organisations in the country.

The line manager interviewed was a director, based in Cape Town with 14 years of service with the company. This interview was conducted telephonically lasting an hour, and was recorded online to enable transcribing. Numerous attempts were made to secure interviews with other line managers, however this did not materialise. As the women interviewed were also managers of people, and spoke of their experiences managing other women who went on maternity leave in their teams, such references were then included under the line manager perspective. The 'organisational voice' was also represented by the partner. A separate interview guide was utilised for the HR component of the interview.

Where the respondent's information bared no relevance to the study, it was indicated with 'NA' (not applicable) in the respondent's profile table – this is outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Respondents' profile in Company A

Code name	Role in the study	Position / Level of Mngt	Gender	Age	No. of children	Ages (yrs)	Level of education	Tenure with Org.
A-HR	Org. voice – HR	Partner	Female	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
A-C1	Coach	Maternity Coach	Female	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
A-W1	Woman (mother)	Partner	Female	40	5	10; 9; 6; 3 (twins)	CA	19
A-W2	Woman (mother)	Senior Manager	Female	31	1	18 mths	CA	10
A-W3	Woman (mother)	Middle Manager	Female	35	1; pregnant with #2	2 years	Engin. Honours	5
A-W4	Woman (mother)	Senior Manager	Female	34	1; pregnant with #2	18 mths	MBA	6
A-W5	Woman (mother)	Senior Manager	Female	30	1	9 mths	CA	2
A-M1	Line manager	Director	Male	NA	2	NA	Masters	14

In addition to the interviews conducted with the respondents, published reports and articles about the company, statistics and information from annual stakeholder reports, and testimonials received from the coach were analysed. In total, seven respondents were interviewed so as to provide a systemic view of the experiences in the organisation.

4.1.2 The organisational factors influencing women's careers

4.1.2.1 Gender representation in the organisation

The statistics for the gender representation of the organisation were extracted from the company's Annual report. Females accounted for 54% of the total staff count across all roles and management levels, with 52.1% being South African women. Figure 10 indicates the total gender representation in the company's South African division. Within these numbers resided the female ownership of the company, represented through Partners and Directors which were reported at 26%, as seen in Figure 11 below (graph extracted from the company's 2014 Annual report). By June 2015, the number had

increased by another percent to 27%. Their 2016 target was 35%. At the time of the study, the achievement of this target was awaiting confirmation. The organisation confirmed that the advancement of women into senior leadership positions remained a priority for them in order to meet its 2020 target. Age diversity was also an important consideration for the company and it was noted that 60-65% of the partners were under 45 years of age, which assisted in ushering in a more flexible and dynamic culture in the organisation.

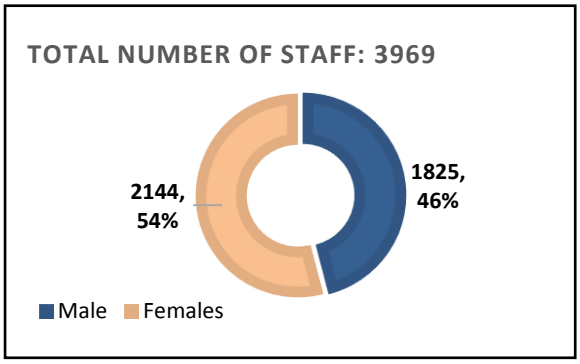


Figure 10: Gender spilt in Company A – 2014

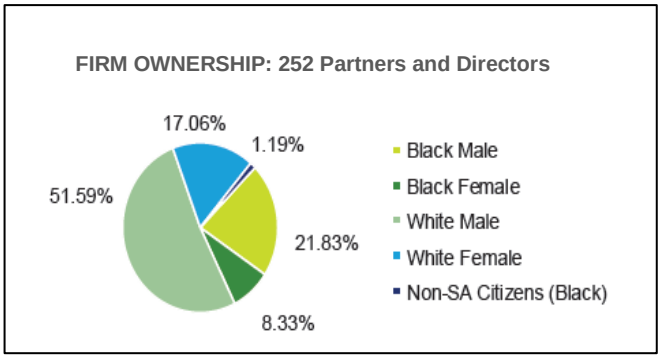


Figure 11: Firm Ownership – 2014

4.1.2.2 Culture and Talent Retention

Gender transformation was cited as important to the organisation's talent management strategy. The company has approached it in two ways: 1) the formation of the governing board which was sponsored and championed by female partners across the country; and 2) by holding Business Unit Leaders accountable as transformation was a key performance indicator.

(a) Culture

The respondents articulated the culture of the organisation as:

- *supportive and accommodating, "I don't know of many other jobs where all three of your bosses would just say 'Do what you need to do - tell us what you need… they value what I contribute and that in order to make it more feasible for myself, they are willing to adjust their expectations" A-W2;*
- *one which encouraged flexibility, "I think that is not necessarily in a policy exactly, but we practise it a lot. It is part of the culture" A-W5;*
- *underpinned by trust, "we try to foster a trusting environment where it feels safe to talk about things" A-HR.*

In addition, the organisation was actively focused on enabling female talent retention and growth.

The culture was dependent on leadership's support of it. To this end, the governing board ensured that they influenced the culture through role-modelling, holding senior leadership accountable and driving the right talent practices. The line manager's role was expressed as critical in fostering the desired culture. Accountability also lay with employees to express their needs and not always leave it to management to recommend solutions.

Given the progressive culture of the organisation, the difficulty in obtaining consent from line managers to share their experience was confusing for the researcher. It was the coach's reflection which eventually shone light on this challenge - it appeared that in alignment with the company's culture of being transparent, there may have been reluctance in speaking about the maternity transition without the woman present, even though it was explained that the intention of the interview was to understand the line manager's experience. The line manager who was willing to participate was motivated by an interest in understanding more around people development:

> *"I am enjoying my journey of both technical discovery and then also more personal and people discovery; I have sort of grown into leadership and managing people aspect. So that is one of the reasons why I am interested in this research, and contributing towards it" A-M1.*

(b) Talent retention

Retaining female talent in the organisation was a strategic priority as this was an enabler to meeting their target of having 40% female ownership in the company by 2020. It was expressed that targets and strategies were only going to be effectively met by nurturing talent from within. As such, each partner/director identified and mentored females with partnership potential –

"There is no sense in just going and employing people from outside, because you then change the culture, and the culture is one of the things why people stay here and why people come back" A-HR

The maternity coach (hereafter referred to as the 'coach'), noted research which spoke of the new generation of workers, with the talent pool being predominantly female and a higher percentage of female graduates entering the workforce each year. If organisations were serious about attracting and retaining female talent, they had to deploy different strategies to accommodate varying needs, or risk constant churn and the related costs. One such strategy has been MTC which the coach believed enabled organisations to achieve a much higher success rate of retaining their female talent, thereby increasing the pool of women available for senior leadership positions.

In addition, female Partners and Directors staying the course with the organisation was a means of role-modelling talent retention, as noted in the following comment:

"…We have the female partners that are still here, which is definitely a positive. And I mean everything in life is a slow process, and I think that women partners have to go through the process and stay on, which does demonstrate a good example to the managers and senior managers" A-W1

4.1.3 Description of the coaching approach in the organisation

Under the mandate of HR, the organisation has internal coaches who directors have access to, and a panel of external executive coaches for their executive directors. The company also utilised a blended coaching and mentoring approach. A formal performance coaching relationship was implemented where each level of employee was enabled to coach another individual at the level below them– for example, a director would coach a senior manager, who in return would be assigned to coach a manager. Thus, the practice of manager-as-coach constantly grew. In addition, new employees are encouraged to 'buddy' with an individual at a level up, to assist them with becoming accustomed to the culture of the organisation, and help them settle in.

The organisation partnered with an external company who specialised in Maternity Transition Coaching, to support their professional women through the maternity phase. As this was noted as a critical life stage for many women, the introduction of MTC not only provided a means of supporting the women through the transition, it also aimed at improving engagement with the organisation.

The coach drew on her extensive consulting and coaching experience and purchased the intellectual property from a leading MTC company in the UK to pioneer this type of coaching in SA. Company A was one of the initial companies in SA to adopt this coaching offering in 2013. As at the end of December 2016, 42 women received MTC in the organisation, of which four mothers used it again to prepare for their second babies. Of these, six women were partners/directors, nine were senior managers, and 27 were Managers.

The company structured the programme to offer one-on-one coaching to senior leadership (partners and directors) where they received up to four sessions, and group coaching for managers and senior managers who received two sessions. The structure of the coaching sessions is noted in Figures 12 and 13 below. The coach indicated that when doing group coaching sessions, additional 'one-on-one' time was factored in to speak to the women individually, "because that is valuable and I think we are doing our job properly. It is amazing the stuff they had on their mind that they didn't want to share in the group session" A-C1.

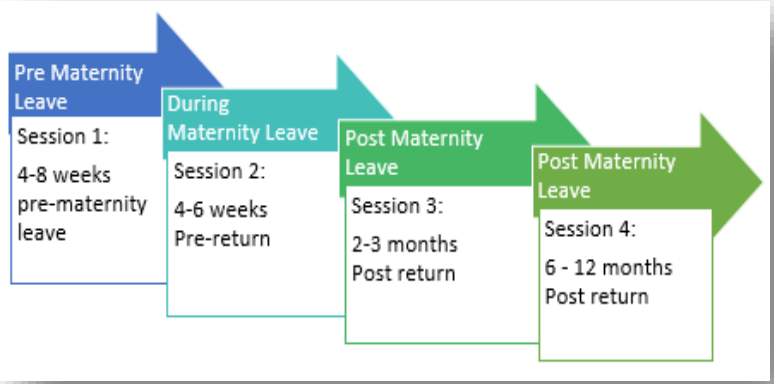


Figure 12: Structure for one-on-one coaching

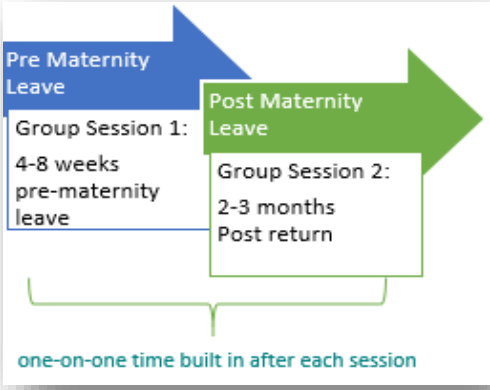


Figure 13: Structure for group coaching

The pre-maternity leave session revolved around preparation and planning, the pre-return session looked at reviewing aspects around the return to work strategies and support, the first post-maternity leave session was to assist the women re-engage with their work roles and manage the working-mother identity, and the final post-return session usually revolved around continued career focus and development of strategies to support a home and work balance.

Table 4 below indicates which MTC sessions the women attended (marked with x). Further information pertaining to their experience of coaching is covered in 4.2.4 where the maternity transition experience will be described.

Table 4: The women's attendance of the MTC sessions

Women	A-W1	A-W2	A-W3	A-W4	A-W5
Pre-MTC		x		x	x
Pre-return-MTC	x				
Post-MTC 1	x	x	x	x	x
Post-MTC 2			x		

The enrolment process entailed a member of HR or a senior business leader informing the woman of the MTC programme. A form was sent to the woman for their line manager's signature and returned to HR. After which, the coach contacted the woman to set up the session. There was no co-contracting with the organisation or line manager around specific goals as the purpose of the coaching was purely to support the women through this transitional period – this is where MTC differed from a general business coaching model. The MTC programme supported the women before, during and after their maternity leave so that they could successfully manage through an important personal transition, yet

in the context of their professional lives. In alignment with coaching principles, the content of the coaching discussion was kept strictly confidential. On an annual basis, the coach extracted key trends and themes which the organisation may be keen on addressing from a corporate level.

The process to enrol on to the programme was cited as 'easy' by four of the women, and 'challenging' for one. It is interesting to note that when it was expressed as challenging, the woman was in a client-facing project role where there was greater sensitivity cited around managing costs, as the coaching budget came from each women's department. However, as one woman indicated, once something had been approved from an organisational level, it was not in their culture for line managers not to approve it.

There was a sense of trust in the MTC process when the line manager spoke about it, as MTC was given the green light by the governing board and HR- "I just get a request to utilise it and then without thinking too much about it, it is approved". However, when asked to comment on the programme, the manager advised that he was "relatively removed in the sense that I don't actually know what the program entails or what is covered and hence how to judge its impact in any way" A-M1. While it was not a need for this line manager, providing other managers with more context and involving them in a consultative process may help sensitise them to the challenges and fears that the women in their teams are likely to face. This will enable managers to proactively engage with the women around those aspects. This would have been particularly helpful for woman A-W3, whose new line manager appeared challenged by having a team of working-mothers.

Woman A-W3 chose not to request the pre-MTC session - it was her fear of not wanting to be seen as receiving special treatment in her particular work environment which drove the decision. That particular team also comprised majority working-mothers which the male line manager appeared challenged by. The woman noted that he still held a traditionalist mind-set, wanting 7 am meetings. The team challenged him on this specific matter however they tried not to highlight other aspects which placed a focus on their mother-identity role, such as MTC. Two other women in that team opted not to attend MTC, even though they wanted to. The coach commented on this struggle:

> *"…the women more in corporate finance, I think struggle more. They are trying to figure out with the nature of the work that they do that is so client-facing and time demanding… or are there issues around the people who are actually leading them? It is looking for those kinds of threads." A-C1*

The coach recommended that line manager coaching be included as part of the maternity transition process, however Company A opted not to utilise this offering. The coach indicated that this portion would be more of a consultative approach to a) enable the line manager to think through their own

approach to the woman who was leaving or returning; and b) to support the line manager in their thinking processes. The female partner agreed with this approach. The coach subsequently attended the director-partner meetings country-wide to conduct a 30-minute engagement session around things to consider when women in their teams were preparing for, and returning from maternity leave. The sessions were well received at that level.

Skills of a maternity transition coach: Based on their individual coaching experiences, the respondents cited several skills that were important for a maternity transition coach. Topping the list was 'being a mother' themselves – this was also indicated by the coach:

> *"The UK (company) said this to me when I started, 'just make sure, because it is very necessary, for you to have people that have walked the walk'" A-C1.*

This was closely linked to being 'authentic', as the women needed to trust the coach, especially given the personal nature of the topic. Being non-judgemental, empathetic, understanding how to relate to people, practical, and having psychological acumen were also cited as valuable skills. Having the ability to manage group dynamics and draw out the essence in group conversations was another notable skill of the coach. Finally, being able to understand the industry of the client and the resultant pressures was also expressed as desirable.

The women all cited receiving great value from the coaching sessions. As one mother stated,

> *"…she (coach) just gave me great insights. I mean, almost forgetting about the maternity side, the coaching side was really useful" A-W3.*

4.1.4 The maternity transition experience

The maternity transition experience will be discussed in terms of the three main phases of the transition – before, during, and post-maternity leave. The discussion commences with preparing for maternity leave, then the during-maternity leave experience and finally the return-to-work experience, as expressed by all the respondents. The role of MTC is noted at the end of each phase.

4.1.4 1 Phase 1: Preparing for maternity leave

The topics which emerged in the period prior to going on maternity leave was understanding the worker-role-identity and the upcoming change to it, stress and anxiety, and the preparation for handing over work.

(a) Worker-role-identity

In terms of the women's life and career stages, four women were in their early career phase (aged between 25-35 years) and one women was in the mid-career phase (aged between 36-45 years). Career progression was cited as occurring fairly rapidly - three women made senior manager by age 32, and one women made partner level when she was 35 years old. Coaching and mentoring played a vital role in their career management within the organisation.

The women first spoke of their lives prior to becoming mothers – in this situation, their role was that of a working woman navigating corporate life, as a wife, and for one woman as an existing mother to older children.

As one woman stated, *""What defined my life before children? … Completely selfish – I did exactly what I wanted to do" A-W4.* In this context, starting early and ending work late was not a challenge – in fact, working long hours was the norm, as noted in the following comment: *"There is a time in your life that you need to work; you need to work to get to where you want to be, so you have to put in the hours" A-W1.*

The women agreed that establishing their careers was a priority. To this end, the partner referred to the sensitivity she felt around a possible impact to her career advancement when she fell pregnant. From the very few female partners at that stage, she observed that women focused on making partner level first, before having children. This made her sensitive about her pregnancy and influenced her decision to withhold advising the organisation that she was pregnant at the time of the partner Assessment.

Fast forward five years, and a shift in the culture was noted - the line manager advised that the woman in his team disclosed her pregnancy at the time of the partner/leadership assessment. She trusted in being fairly assessed on her capability and merit. This was a marked difference from woman A-W1's experience.

Keen on progressing her career to the next management level, another woman felt frustrated at not being assigned to a project in the last few months of her pregnancy - she felt somewhat invisible. Not being on a project impacted her revenue numbers, which had a roll-on effect on her performance appraisal and career advancement opportunities.

One of the first-time mothers was still very much attached to her worker-identity and continued working to the very last day. In retrospect, she laughed at herself for being naïve to the reality that labour could occur at any time. She went in to labour on the very evening that she stopped working.

(b) Stress and anxiety

Three women's experience around their feelings of stress and anxiety will be described – one woman did not take on the pre-MTC session, while the two women did. Comparing both sets of experiences highlighted how MTC acted as a support mechanism during this phase of the transition.

For woman A-W2, although her role was a relief in terms of handing over (none was needed due to the project having ended), it also felt punitive in that the onus was placed on her to be assigned to a project. Projects however were reluctant to sign her on in the last few months of her pregnancy, and she was quite stressed about the impact this would have on her performance targets, as noted below:

> *"I actually sold some of my work to deliver a small project, to just make my review, because we get measured on our revenue numbers. It was just... onerous on me to find work, because no one wanted to take me on to a project because I would be disappearing" A-W2*

An organisational challenge cited in this regard was that no pro-rata was given on the annual targets during the maternity leave duration.

Not being assigned to a project also played on the woman's fears about how motherhood would potentially affect her career progression. She struggled with seemingly innocent comments like, "you will feel differently when you come back", which she interpreted as being perceived as not wanting to still focus on her career:

> *"That was stressful, just having that perception around me that everybody thought well, also that you're taking yourself out of the fast track, that or you could go and form a separate category. I mean, I was still hyper competitive … you know this is a very competitive business and I was really worried that I was going to be side-lined because of this perception that now you're a mother and you don't care about work anymore" A-W3*

She had not requested a pre-maternity coaching session. Although having heard about it, she confided not knowing of other women in her area who had utilised MTC. It was a client-facing project environment and people were out at client sites the majority of the time. As such, she was not close to other women in the department to speak about such personal matters with. At the time, neither HR nor her line manager encouraged her to use the MTC programme.

Woman A-W4 was anxious about what to expect as a first-time mother, and more so what to do at home for 4 months - she described herself as having a Type-A personality (driven, go-getter, impatient and competitive). The first MTC session helped her kick-start the transition process of thinking through how she wanted to manage the upcoming changes. She discussed her expectations around work

contact and decided that she wanted to be involved to an extent. The coach considered the woman's personality and worked with her needs, resulting in her feeling empowered:

> *"I thought it would be soft and fluffy and I'm like, 'I don't need that!'. But it was really, really fantastic - just to open your eyes to understand the things that you should be considering… that you didn't think about that. It was really wonderful to talk to someone about it… She (coach) was like, 'it's up to you - you must do what works for you'" A-W4*

For Woman A-W2, her concerns revolved around 'expectations' as a first-time mother - in particular, making sense of the expectations she placed on herself and her husband, and his expectations of her in return. MTC helped her manage the anxiety around this and weaved in how she saw herself as a working-mother in the future.

> *"For me what stood out from all of those things was the expectations on creating clear understanding of what I expect, discussing with my husband what his expectations are - just in terms of what we think would happen and how it would be" A-W2*

The coach referred to this as conscious co-parenting where the women had to consciously think about how to enable the husband in getting involved. Given the type of work these women do, they were very often perfectionists and in control of all aspects. The coach noted that one of aspects covered in the pre-coaching session was around expectations and sensitising the women to potential barriers, which could be self-imposed:

> *"If we work with them before they go on maternity leave it is already an opportunity to start saying to them, when baby is born allow your husband to get involved as early as possible. If he puts the nappy on the wrong way around or upside down or inside out, don't scold him. Just encourage. Because you want somebody who is going to be able to take charge with you. If you are going to do everything yourself, you are creating the rod for your own back. You are going to be your own worst enemy" A-C1*

(c) Planning the handover

For two of the women, having their pre-coaching sessions when they were around 7 months pregnant gave them sufficient time to think about things and start preparing for the handover. It was especially important to plan well ahead when there was a client impact. One woman used the MTC to practically prepare the handover document using the coach as a thinking partner to decide on what to include and who needed to be involved.

Similarly, the line manager credited the woman in his team who went on MTC, of taking charge of the planning aspect. They then worked together on finalising the coverage for that period – as noted in the following comment:

> *"So my experience with Woman X was very smooth and painless in the sense that she almost like sat me down and said, 'okay these are the clients I am looking after, these are the key issues in that period'. And together we came up with a plan of who could cover for her while she was away" A-M1.*

Experiential learning played an important role in the preparation and handover phase as another woman's line manager suggested preparing a month before for the handover. Previous experience taught him to rather plan well in advance and therefore requested to be copied in on all work-related emails - this, combined with the woman's own handover document made for an easy exit.

The organisation had this to say about the value of the pre-maternity leave coaching session:

> *"It makes you think a bit more and it directs your attention. You know, sometimes when you go on maternity leave you are all over the show. So it helps you focus and it helps you direct your attention to the things that are important, things that you have control over and don't have control over - it just helps you direct your efforts and come up with a plan. So it is trying to bring everything together, there is definitely value in that. And it is also to build the confidence of the individual" A-HR*

The summarised role of MTC during this period

A summary of the key coaching outcomes as experienced by the women during this phase are indicated in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Key coaching outcomes from the pre-maternity leave phase

Women	A-W1	A-W2	A-W3	A-W4	A-W5
Key outcomes of the pre-MTC session	Did not have the session as MTC launched just as she went on maternity leave	Managing work interactions Preparing in advance for the handover Understanding expectations of herself and husband – conscious co-parenting Thinking about how to balance the upcoming mother-role	Did not have the session – had not requested it.	Practical preparation for the handover Thinking through how would she like to engage with work during maternity leave Discussion about aspects to consider for the next phase of her life	Helped her think through what being a first-time mother would be like Plan in advance for a nanny during maternity leave Thinking through how would she like to engage with work during maternity leave Possibilities to ease back in to work Discussion on her career post-return – felt reassured her that pregnancy was not a stumbling block - gave her the confidence she needed to negotiate her promotion upon return.

The respondents' experience during the maternity leave period will be described next.

4.1.4.2 Phase 2: During maternity leave

The topics which emerged during maternity leave included it being a time of adjustment and preparing to return to work. Adjustment at home included taking on a mother-identity role, physical considerations, and relationships. At work, the adjustment revolved around the team managing the work during this period. In preparing for returning to work, considerations included arranging childcare, breastfeeding decisions and engagement with work.

(a) Mother-role identity

This phase of the transition ushered in the mother-role identity. For the first-time mothers, this new role brought with it feelings of joy and a deeper purpose, yet it was also a time of uncertainty and feeling overwhelmed. The mothers described the initial months as stressful in terms of not knowing what to do in certain circumstances regarding caring for a baby. It was particularly interesting to listen to the more analytical-minded women talk about their transition to motherhood – they felt more challenged as there was no formula or specific process to follow which would help them understand their babies' needs. The multitude of advice was overwhelming and so the mothers had to learn to trust their instincts and do what felt right for them. The women spoke of connecting to an innate, instinctive part of themselves as a result of becoming a mother.

The pre-MTC session helped woman A-W2 start to think about this new role and prepare for it, as noted in her comment:

> *"Understanding that despite all the roles I had before, there was a new role now that needed to fit in… being a wife, and being a worker, and being a friend – those things stayed the same although they have a little less time that you can spend on it – but then understanding that you suddenly need to fit another element in, and how" A-W2*

This experience differed when compared to woman A-W3 who did not have the pre-MTC session. The mother expressed having a role-identity crisis, which made her question whether she wanted to return to work, be a stay-at-home mother, or open her own business. Her maternity leave period was riddled with this dilemma and created much stress as the time drew near for her to return to work. She thought a lot about quitting her job during this time. There was a sense of loss as the woman reflected on that period:

> *"I didn't have the before (session), it would have felt more supportive, because I spent a lot of my maternity leave worrying. I would have, if I'd actually had the first session, maybe I would have worried less" A-W3*

(b) A time of adjustment

- Physical adjustment

Physical changes such as the lack of sleep, managing breastfeeding, changes to their bodies and not having time or the mental energy to care for themselves were aspects which the women had to adjust to during this phase. For one mother, not being able to produce enough breast milk in the initial month left her feeling frustrated and somewhat lacking as a mother. Another mother expressed the sense of relief she experienced when they hired a nanny six weeks after her baby was born – up until then it

felt all-consuming taking care of a new-born baby, so much so that she had not taken a walk on her own in all of that time.

Sleep deprivation was cited by most of the mothers as their ongoing challenge. The mothers took the lead for seeing to the baby during the night. One mother confided that sleep deprivation led to her feeling resentful at the lack of night support from her husband. Logically, she knew that she had to be awake to breastfeed her baby, however felt quite alone and didn't know how to express her feelings. She entered into maternity leave without having had the pre-coaching session, which would have sensitised her to think about expectations on the home front.

- Relationships

This was also a time when relationships with one's partner/husband and family came to the fore.

In the case of women A-W5's cultural tradition, the woman's mother and mother-in-law stayed with her for the first month or so after baby was born. In as much as she appreciated their support, it also felt overwhelming to consider all viewpoints and please everyone. Amidst this, her husband was also trying to figure out his role, but started feeling excluded. The coach also referred to these sensitivities and the resultant effect on the husband during a very important time of bonding. The women were sensitised to this in coaching:

> *"So he (husband) has this general sense of exclusion. He can't breastfeed, he can't do this, and he can't do that. She is taking charge and then the moms are all around fussing, and he is more and more side-lined and it is not healthy" A-C1.*

As another woman stated,

> *"What stood out for me is to clearly define that being a mother and being a wife is still two different things – which seems very obvious but it is so easy to get it muddled up…There is still a husband who also wants attention!" A-W2.*

Most of the women credited their husbands for being supportive during this period. It emerged through the narratives that the husbands were also going through this transition and trying to determine their role in this new family situation.

One woman's husband struggled to bond with the baby and initially resented having this addition to their lives. This placed a strain on their relationship. While the woman was always clear on wanting to be a mother, the husband differed however did not want to deprive her of this experience. They eventually came to a compromise where he managed the cooking and she took care of most of the child matters. As the months progressed, her husband started bonding more with their son. Not having

had a pre-coaching session, she had to work through expectations and a change in relationship on her own.

Another mother credited her husband for being extremely involved in sharing parenting responsibilities, for example – the husband handles bedtime routine. She described her husband's personality as soft, loving and kind, and always considerate to her needs and requests. However, it was also this gentler personality which eventually became a challenge for them during this phase. In a typical "A-Type" manner, she placed herself under considerable pressure to do everything perfectly, and eventually became so frustrated. She felt that her husband could have supported her more by stopping her from doing so much. Understanding the positives and shadow sides of each one's personality was highlighted in this instance, along with being able to express one's expectations upfront.

For one mother, the birth of their last-born children (twins) marked a change of roles in the home. With five children to now take care off, the woman and her husband decided that one of them would need to play a more active role at home so as not to do an injustice to their children. With her position cemented in the company, it was decided that she would be the sole breadwinner. The husband started working for himself which allowed him greater flexibility to manage family and home responsibilities. They appeared to challenge the traditional family roles and she credited her husband for taking this on, understanding that it was not always easy to do:

> *"I mean we discussed it and that is the best that works for us… Being an Afrikaans man, it is not always easy for him because you get judged, you know you are brought up that you are a man, you need to be the head of the house and you need to provide. But you know life changes and things don't always work like we were taught when we were brought up" A-W1*

The woman's personality and world-view helped place this decision in further context. When she spoke of her life prior to marriage and children, it was unconventional in that she took overseas secondments a few times, back packed around the world and even took a downgrade in position at one time so that she could work at the overseas office for four years. It was then no surprise that a less-traditional approach to managing their home situation would be the chosen direction.

- Managing the work in the woman's absence

The line manager noted that the woman's team viewed taking on additional work in a positive light – it was an opportunity to work with new clients at an elevated level. The line manager was available to support the team whenever they needed it. The manager spoke of his own concerns during this period - he was worried about important aspects falling through the cracks in the woman's absence. As he

reflected in the interview, he recognised that no issues arose during that period and attributed it to the woman's meticulous pre-planning.

(c) Preparing for the return to work

Ensuring childcare was arranged - be it training the nanny or selecting the right crèche, and weaning baby off breastfeeding during the day was priority for the mothers in the last month prior to returning to work. The women took the lead in engaging with work in preparation for their return.

- Arranging childcare

This was a critical consideration and one which many of the women were sensitised to in the pre-MTC session. Woman A-W5 had only planned on arranging a nanny to start the week before she returned, however the coach encouraged her to arrange this at least a month prior. Upon reflection, she realised that this made sense – there was then sufficient time for the nanny to become accustomed to baby's routine and how the mother wanted things done at home. One mother enrolled her child into an intimate day-care, while the other mothers had nannies who cared for their babies at home.

- Detaching / Decision on breastfeeding

All the mothers breastfed throughout their maternity leave and introduced formula milk to their babies to supplement feeding. This would eventually assist with the weaning-off from breastfeeding once they returned to work.

- Engagement with work

Maintaining contact with work during their maternity leave was one of the considerations which the women thought through in coaching. They took the lead for positioning their requests, and did not always leave it up to their line managers to make recommendations. For the most part, it was noted that the women kept some form of contact with work, and there were underlying reasons for this. They did however indicate that their colleagues encouraged them to enjoy their maternity leave.

One mother decided to read emails from time to time, and attended the strategy meeting and year-end function. By expressing this need to her line manager, an invite was extended to her when the time came. Her underlying concern was uttered in the following comment:

> *"I was paranoid, so I came... Well, I didn't want people to forget me, I didn't want to lose touch, I didn't want to be seen differently. So I kept myself in touch" A-W3.*

Another mother decided that she would also read her emails, starting a month after she had given birth. She did not want to feel overwhelmed on her first day back, so this was her way of managing – *"So I told my boss that is what I wanted to do. I don't want to come back here and be clueless" A-W5.* She also attended the year-end function, and expressed similar thoughts to woman A-W3 in not wanting to be forgotten in the business.

The coach's reflection also noted how worried the women were about still being needed in the team, given that things were being managed in their absence.

Another woman initiated contact with work and took on some tasks to keep connected, which helped her overcome feelings of boredom at times (this linked in with her personality of wanting to be kept stimulated). She also visited the office a month before her maternity leave ended so as to introduce her baby to the team, and had a meeting with her manager to discuss the way forward for her career. She was subsequently promoted in to the senior manager role 2-3 months after returning. Having this discussion enabled her to prepare herself mentally for returning to work.

The line manager noted that the woman's role in his team was that of a "technical expert". While it was not expressly discussed with her about being contacted for work issues, she made herself available for urgent assistance. The team kept work contact to the bare minimum. It was however noted that there was an "unspoken" expectation of senior leadership having some degree of contact during times of leave, including maternity leave. Being available at a senior level corresponded with the partner's reflection, where she actually preferred having some contact with her team. As such, she invited people to her home when they needed assistance with work aspects. She was committed to ensuring that her partnership was set up for success in every possible way. This also linked in with her personality which she described as being *"overt … and wanting to be involved" A-W1.* Being responsible for a large client's account, she provided her client with the option of transferring the account to another partner, which the client declined – they were happy for her to work on the account as it suited her and understood that it would be a delayed process.

The partner commented that from experience, when women had a strict 'don't call me, don't email me' stance, their first few weeks back felt exceptionally overwhelming. They had to deal with catching up on work-happenings and cope with the separation from their baby at the same time. Figuring out a middle ground to ease back in was advisable. The coach concurred and recommended that the women engage their managers around how they could ease back in to work. The coach commented:

> *"They need to test their support system at home and they also need to start feeling like they are back in the game. It is moving from this rather protected environment where they have been protected from everything for three or four months, maybe in the last two, to feel like they*

have more of a connection starting to happen so they can be more integral when they return" A-C1

(d) The role of MTC during this phase

The partner received the pre-return MTC session and did not appear particularly stressed about this period – this can be linked back to her initial description of herself when she mentioned, *"…from a young age I was always the mother, the responsible one, looking after them. So I guess five kids is not that hectic!" A-W1.* She appreciated that the coach listened, and tapped in to who the woman was, *"I am very assertive, confident, I am older",* and pulled it together in to a very practical session. As she was already a mother to older children, it was about balancing their needs, seeing to her new-born twins and considering time with her husband as well:

"And she (coach) tried to make me come to solutions, like okay 'once a week take one child for a milkshake, other child you go take to swimming practice, and then how are you going to spend time with your husband – go and play squash together or similar… good things that are practical and not difficult to implement" A-W1

The partner reflected that for her, it more a matter of re-emphasising aspects, yet she could see how the mid-session would greatly benefit younger managers in building up their assertiveness and confidence to express their needs during this phase and as they return to work.

The coach indicated that having the pre-return conversation was quite important, however it did not occur quite so often, as the organisation reserved this session for partners/directors. To keep the support ongoing, the coach tried to call the women telephonically where possible, to connect with them prior to their return. This was done free of charge. This was the coach's reflection of this period:

"You meet with them before they leave and they are this kind of 'high powered, got everything waxed, this is not going to really change my life so much'. You eventually get to all the underlying fears in the conversation, but it is a lot of bravado. You get them three weeks or four weeks before they are coming back to work and they are kind of beside themselves and they haven't been able to talk about it really to anybody. They are desperate to have a sounding board" A-C1

This was precisely the experience of woman A-W5 who wanted to have a pre-return MTC session as she felt extremely overwhelmed during maternity leave. She was frustrated and wanted to voice her thoughts and concerns, and think through certain things. However, she did not qualify for the mid-session and recommended that the organisation reconsider offering this to all levels of management going forward.

The coach recounted a recent conversation with another woman who called her just before returning to work. The woman wanted to request a promotion which meant going for a leadership assessment, and at the same time she wanted to apply for reduced working hours. The coaching discussion helped the women to think through the scenarios and they planned the conversation in preparation for the meeting:

> *"So it was trying to get her head around … 'How are you going to do this? How do you think it will work? What is first prize for you? What if your line manager says, we have to do that, how would you counter that?' Getting her to think through the logistics of a conversation that she is having with her line manager today" A-C1.*

There was a distinct difference between the needs expressed by the first-time mothers, and those that were already mothers. The coach noted that the concern for second-time mothers arose around whether the changes would be even more disruptive than it was first time around. Quite often, the women achieved great strides in their careers and are either in, or quite close to their aspirational roles. The culture had shifted over the years in the organisation and women felt confident in going for the leadership assessments during their pregnancy, in preparation for a promotion upon their return from maternity leave. Maternity was not going to halt their ambitions or career advancement opportunities. The coach recounted the experience of an associate director who she coached that returned from having her second child, and stepped in to the promoted role,

> *"A lot of our conversation was around how she manages that responsibility. What level of flexibility; how she can ease herself into the role; how she can start working and building relationships in the latter part of her maternity leave to take on this higher responsibility. What her support system is going to have to be expanded to, to accommodate it" A-C1.*

The coach noted that while the conversation covers similar ground to first-time mothers, the aspects which they drill down further in to are different.

The challenge of having the two types of mothers in the same group coaching session was raised by a first-time mother, who shared the pre-MTC session with a second-time mother, *"our concerns were different...so for her it was (xyz) …, whereas I haven't thought about that" A-W2.* The coach was however credited for being skilful in being able to provide each person with sufficient time to cover their needs.

A summary of the key points relating to MTC, as expressed by the women during this phase are indicated in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Key points relating to coaching in the mid-phase

Women	A-W1	A-W2	A-W3	A-W4	A-W5
Key outcomes of the Pre-Return MTC session	Practical solutions around creating balance with a growing family	Did not qualify for the session	Did not qualify for the session	Did not qualify for the session. However, received a phone call from the coach - can't recall the contents of the conversation as she prefers engaging face-to-face	Did not qualify for the mid-session. However, expressed that it would have been very valuable as she needed additional support during this period

The respondent's return to work experience will be described next.

4.1.4.3 Phase 3: The return to work experience – post-maternity leave

The women voiced that the first two to three months after returning to work as being the most taxing period for them. The topics which emerged upon returning to work included taking on a working-mother identity, navigating the return-to-work period in the initial months; managing their careers, and finding a balance between work and home commitments.

(a) Working-mother identity

Four of the five women interviewed were first-time mothers. This marked a fundamental shift in identity as prior to this, their focus was purely on career advancement. It was a time of adjusting to their new role as a mother and making sense of a change in identity, along with managing their careers, workload, their own selves and relationships, and finding a balance between home and work commitments.

The women wanted to still be seen as professional and made an effort in putting forth an appearance which reflected this. They wanted to demonstrate that they were capable and passionate about their work-life. One mother even had a mini-makeover before returning to work so as to prep herself for this new working-mother identity. This period was also expressed as being "surreal" as the women felt different (internally), yet everything around them at work was the same. There was a sense of excitement about the initial return to work period – happy to be returning to an old 'normal' where the focus was not entirely on their babies.

Apart from the initial excitement, trying to find a routine which worked for their household and detaching from their babies was cited as stressful. One mother who found it exceptionally difficult,

called the nanny numerous times in the day to check up on the baby. She was reminded of utilising strategies to cope during difficult times and therefore decided to reframe it in her mind and treat her nanny like a work employee - this meant not making her feel micro managed. In doing so, she started noticing how happy her baby was when she got home and this helped her build confidence and trust in the nanny's care.

Being a working-mother brought with it the constant pull between wanting to be with one's child, and fulfilling work commitments. For one mother, the early months after returning to work was a cause of great stress as she arrived home late, by which time her baby was ready to sleep – her mother-identity felt challenged. From a work perspective, leaving work earlier than they had done before made two of the mothers question their commitment levels to the company – their worker-identities felt challenged. Reframing the combined role was a matter they made sense of in MTC.

The line manager too had to adjust to the woman's new identity – he sensitised himself to the possible changes in the woman's schedule upon her return, and was ready to adapt if she was less available to the team than before.

The coach indicated that her role was to also support the culture of shifting the traditional mind-set about working-mothers in the workplace to one where pregnancy and being a working-mother was seen as normal, and to remove the illusion of it being problematic.

(b) Navigating the return to work period

- Ease-back in period

A helpful strategy for some of the women was having an ease-back in period to the work environment. The pre-MTC session assisted the women in thinking through how they wanted to do this when the time came.

One woman had the discussion with her manager around options of easing in to work. She started reading emails before officially starting, then worked slightly fewer hours at the onset, had a reduced work portfolio and more review-time with her manager to support her. The manager sensitised the team prior to her return, and they were greatly supportive of the options proposed. Work ramped up after the first 2 months and she was operating at full speed by month three - ready to step in to the promoted role. The line manager's role was crucial in this regard as it set the tone in the team for the return experience. Incidentally, the line manager was also a working-mother who understood the stress related to returning to work.

The line manager found that easing back in worked well for him too, and noted it as a more sustainable approach when women return to work. It did however require compromise on both ends. The mother

had in fact suggested it, and together they agreed on how it could work. He appreciated the suggestion as noted in his comment: *"I like a person to suggest something that works for them…. I am slightly wary of suggesting something for fear of making somebody feel like we are imposing on them in some way" A-M1.* A blended approach worked for them – in the last month of her maternity leave, the woman started working at home for a few hours, and then the next month, started coming in to the office and logging in from home part-time. Those few hours a day or in the week supported both of their needs, *"…you know even if they are only supporting for an hour or two a day, makes a world of difference" A-M1.*

The coach noticed that women generally re-engaged quicker with their careers if they had an ease-back in to the work environment. She recounted how the UK practice encouraged a concept called "Keep in Touch" days where the women connected with work for a few hours a week. The coach encouraged the women to consider, and sensitise their line managers to the possibility even before going on maternity leave. She noted the following in this regard:

> *"I have had a couple of women in the return session saying that really worked for them. It made so much of a difference that when they stepped in on that first day back, it was not like your first day of term after a school holiday or your first day in a new job. They felt like it was like a piece of old tekkie to get back into. It was, I can do this. It is peace of mind" A-C1.*

For the second-time mother, attending technical training via phone-ins allowed her to keep up to date, and when she felt like she needed a break from home or wanted to connect with her team, she attended training on-site. Her thoughts were, "because sometimes we alienate ourselves, and then we come back and say 'well why don't they ask me to do anything?' You know it is a two-way street". Her sense was that finding ways to smoothen the transition in to and out from maternity leave helped reduce the anxiety associated with returning – for both parties. She was firm to point out though, "I think it is a choice everybody has to make for themselves" A-W1.

One of the mothers however decided not to ease back in, and preferred having only social contact with work during her maternity leave. When she did return to work however, it felt extremely stressful to catch up, "I just felt like I never caught up in that first while! Everything was falling further and further behind… because it was time-consuming" A-W2. However, to honour the experience of being a mother, she confided that she would do the same thing again.

- Gifts that women bring to work post-maternity leave

The mothers returned to work with certain attributes, which the women recognised as a result of becoming a mother.

The categories which emerged were:

- Being more appreciative and mindful about what one is doing – children had a way of making one slow down the pace in-the-moment, focus one's attention and notice things in a different way.
- Greater sense of self: the women expressed feeling more self-confident, being able to value themselves and the contributions made, and less insecure without the need to be validated externally – ultimately more grounded as a person. They also felt a connection with a deeply instinctive part of one's self, which was linked to trusting their instincts on matters.

- Enhanced Perspective:
  - Time – how one was using their time changed. The coach aptly described the women's experience in this regard as,

    "They are able to do so much more with their time because going through your maternity leave you become very time 'verskrik'. I don't know what other word to use for it. Like you are measuring how many hours…when did he go to sleep again... So their ability to pack in a lot into less time is fantastic… they get to a point where they suddenly realising how much more effective they are when they are at work" A-C1.

  - Priorities - being vigilant around value-adding activities versus attaining 'perfection' enabled the women to prioritise better making them even more effective
  - A new lens – seeing things differently and being more attuned to people's needs and how relationships are managed, "I remind them that that is so powerful, especially in a leadership role" A-C1.

(c) Support structures

The husbands were cited as being the primary support system – for two of the mothers, they confidently noted that their husbands shared the parenting and home responsibilities equally. Another woman's husband took the lead on the home front, and for the other two women, they were the primary caregivers with their husbands taking a more secondary role. For most of the women, their nannies were a considerable support. Many of the women's families also resided in the city, which meant that additional help was available when needed.

A challenge noted in some of the women's returning conversations was the relationship with their husbands. Challenges were cited around not having much time together as a couple, trying to figure out the new routine and roles in the home, and the strain experienced when the routine was disrupted

due to work pressures. For one mother, having taken on the lead for home and family responsibilities, she felt challenged when her husband was able to order his life more, yet she felt overwhelmed and quite stretched. For another woman, the father was trying to figure out his parenting role with the baby, and felt frustrated when the mother intervened – this caused a strain in their relationship.

(d) Communication

Under the banner of communication, caution was raised by the coach around "benevolent bias" and the "invisible bump syndrome".

Benevolent bias took the form of excluding the women out of kindness, instead of asking and empowering her to make the decision. This 'kindness' led to discounting the woman – decisions were made on behalf of the women based on assumptions about she wasn't prepared to do, without checking in with her.

> *" 'We are not going to ask Woman X to come to the cocktail party because she has to feed her baby'…. Let the woman make that decision, don't make it for her. Chances are maybe she won't go to the cocktail party but she would like to be treated the same way as everybody else and given the option" A-C1*

An example was shared about the loss of a talented female because her leadership team had not heeded the woman's career needs. They kept her in a role under the mistaken belief that it was to her benefit. She was kept waiting for a project which did not require extensive travelling, even though she had the support structures in place to manage this type of role. Eventually, she left and took on a position for central Africa, where she travelled quite often and achieved career satisfaction.

One mother recounted the time upon her return when her manager offered her a non-client-facing role as it was less pressurised. The manager was trying to be considerate, but because it was not communicated as such, the woman thought that she was being given an opportunity in alignment with her career goals. She later realised it was not so and opted out of the role. Better communication was needed so that the real intent was clear from the onset.

The invisible bump syndrome demonstrated the converse, where people almost disregarded that the pregnancy happened, and that there was now another little human waiting at home for attention and care. According to the coach, there was still an expectation of what the women can do based on her worker-identity – e.g. being able to travel for a few days at a stretch, and working longer hours. In this instance, unchecked expectations took on an insensitive nature. Woman A-W3's experience spoke to this aspect when her manager expected the team to attend a weekly 7am meeting, however not understanding the challenge this posed to the working-mothers in the team.

Donning her manager cap, the partner advised that in her department, women returning from leave were not assigned to work on proposals immediately. This thinking was informed by her own experience where three senior colleagues who were so keen on demonstrating that they were capable and committed, resigned because of being burnt out in the first few months, *"Loss…big loss to the firm" A-W1.* Being open in the communication and reassuring of their talent was key to ensuring that the women did not feel side-lined.

The company presently utilised MTC to support the mother through the transition period, however the respondents observed that line managers too required support. According to the coach, support for the line manager would be to understand that maternity does not have to be a problem, but an opportunity. A returning woman adds significant value to the organisation - she is coming back a different person with new perspective, and is committed which makes her want to do a good job, *"That loyalty and commitment can be strengthened but they don't know this because they've never had an engagement to allow that to happen" A-C1.* The coach recommends a consultation process to occur with the line manager so they too are educated around how to deal with this transition, and be enabled to turn it into something positive.

Line managers who were actively involved as parents in their households were cited as being more aware and understanding of returning mother's needs. For non-parents, it is then about being supportive of the practices that the company has put in place, even if one does not personally understand it. Prior to the one woman becoming a mother, she supported MTC as a line manager and encouraged her staff to attend where applicable: *"The maternity transition coaching is a great thing, I send my people on it. I don't know what they do in there, but I know it's good, so please go" A-W4.*

In contrast, another woman's line manager was extremely challenged at having a team of working-mothers. The project teams were restructured, and where the skill set and need matched, mothers of young families were reallocated together to a certain project as it required substantially less travelling to the regions. The line manager wanted to hold the morning meeting at 7am, however the team pushed back and managed to get him to agree to 8am. However, he still passed comments about the inflexibility of the team, which made the women sensitive about asking for anything 'parental' related. This was the reason woman A-W3 had not asked for the pre-MTC, and why her two colleagues also refrained.

The partner noted that support for line managers would be to keep sensitising them to the needs of pregnant women and working-mothers. Most times, line managers were not intentionally being insensitive but rather, they were unsure on how to deal with issues and so avoided it:

> *"…and avoidance is the worst thing you can do because then the women feel like 'you have written me off, am I no good anymore, do you want me?' and they get all sensitive; whereas if you are proactive, you have got a business to run, you want that employee, they are valuable, there is nothing wrong with them" A-W1.*

One mother noted that her strategy for managing expectations was to communicate as soon as she anticipated a change was coming up or there was a potential overlap in commitments, *"So almost just keeping them in the loop is the most important I think, and they are always supportive in trying to find alternative ways if things are clashing or if it isn't working out" A-W2.*

(e) Guilt

Feelings of guilt surrounded the working-mother identity and it took on different forms for the women. For the most part, women felt guilty about not being at home, and when at home they felt guilty about not being at work - *"You always feel you are at the wrong place!" A-W2.*

One mother felt somewhat torn with returning to the work which she enjoyed, but also desiring to stay home for a longer period with her child. She often questioned herself, *"why would I become a mom if I am not a mom?" A-W2.* She felt guilty for not spending enough time with her toddler and potentially missing out on important milestones: *"I don't know, somehow I am always scared that I am going to miss something important. Although I didn't miss his first steps, I missed when he started crawling unfortunately" A-W2.* This underlying desire subsequently led her to requesting a reduced working-hours portfolio which gave her back 2 hours in the day, enabling more time with her son in the afternoon.

For another woman, guilt emerged between wanting to grow her family, yet also wanting to give her new role at least 12 months focus before falling pregnant again. In this regard, her worker-identity featured more strongly,

> *"And that's placed by myself. There's no way I'm joining a job and say, 'mm, sorry I'm pregnant'. I would feel guilty to say to my manager, 'I'm taking 4 months off'. Which is why I've waited. I wouldn't be comfortable taking time off earlier…I don't think it's fair" A-W4*

For another mother, she made the choice not to go to any evening events in the first year as she knew that she would feel too guilty. She had to be firm as there was resistance at times from work, however it was clear in her mind that her children's needs took priority in this instance.

The change in relationship with one's husband also featured, and not placing him as a priority. As noted by the coach, *"For a lot of women that is another area of feeling guilty because they say it is*

not the same as before baby arrived. 'I just don't have time or the energy to sort of feel physically towards him, or we just don't talk anymore. The only thing we talk about is the baby'" A-C1.

(f) Caring for self

- Physical: Coping with a lack of sleep was cited as a common issue amongst the mothers. The lack of sleep led to decreased energy levels and at times, decreased focus. The women had to challenge their old patterns of working to understand that the sleep deficit builds up, and one could never quite catch up with it. Therefore, adding additional strain to sleep like working in to the early hours of the morning was no longer a feasible option. In between, the mothers still had to wake up for night feeds or to see to their babies if they woke up. One mother noted how she 'crashed' physically a few times, and had to be cautious going forward. The coach shed light on the impact of the return period on the women's physical well-being:

  "the pressure and the stress and the tiredness …in those first three/four months back… They say pregnancy is eighteen months – the actual nine months and then your next nine months. It is really hard. I think we can't actually underestimate how difficult it is" A-C1

  It was particularly refreshing to note the line manager's viewpoint in that he was sensitive to the sleep deprivation that mothers went through. As such, he felt that compromises may need to happen on the business end, such as reducing some of the woman's time in the work dimension, so that she coped better and moved in to a productive space much sooner:

  "I would far rather have 80% of somebody who is good and constructive, than 100% for 12 or 18 months and then they say 'well sorry, this isn't working for me, I have to go'" A-M1.

  One mother was relieved that when she stopped breastfeeding, her energy levels increased and was fortunate to have a baby who also slept through the night.

- Making the time and disciplining oneself to fit in exercise was cited as another challenge. Some mothers joked about running after their toddlers as their daily exercise, however on a more serious note, exercise was lacking. The return MTC session for one mother focused on how she would carve out time practically relating to her physical wellness, amidst an extremely demanding work-role and busy family life.
- Time for self, friends and hobbies: After their babies had gone to sleep, the mothers would either spend time relaxing with their husband's, some would log on again to complete outstanding work, and for others, having an hour of quiet time in the evenings was a way one mother coped – understanding herself, she needed for there to be some sense of organisation and preparation for

the next day. Another woman shared a common interest with her husband, namely music practice which they attended twice a month. The women had interests such as archery and running, however not much focus was given to this in the first year of giving birth.

(g) Breastfeeding

A crucial decision that the women had to make upon returning to work was whether to continue with breastfeeding, and if so, how to manage this. The women were sensitised to think about this in the coaching session. The women introduced the bottle to their babies as their maternity leave was nearing to an end, and continued breastfeeding up to two months post-maternity leave. One mother still breastfed her baby nearing two years, although mostly in the evening.

The organisation set up a lactation room at the main office building, which enabled some of the women to use their breast-pumps in private. One mother who used the facilities recommended placing a fridge in the room to store the expressed milk in (as she had to use the staff fridge). She weaned her baby on to formula milk the month after returning to work. Yet another mother decided to stop breastfeeding around the same time as it became too difficult to manage the expressing - her role entailed some travelling and client site visits. For those women whose building did not have the lactation room or were located at client sites, having to use the ladies' toilets to express felt awkward and embarrassing.

(h) Career management

Career progression and building a professional life was top of mind for the women prior to becoming mothers, and continued even during the maternity transition period. This was especially noted with women A-W4 and A-W5 who were both promoted to senior managers shortly after returning from maternity leave, and had it in their sights to advance to the next level in their careers within the next 5 years. In the midst of this, they were also planning to have their second babies. Similarly, the line manager indicated that the promotion of the woman in his team who went through MTC, was fast tracked upon her return. She took on a partner role within 3 months of returning from maternity leave with her second child. The line manager was clear that motherhood should not impact advancement opportunities. He referred to the "delicate balance" in acknowledging the effort of those team members who invested additional time and effort in attaining targets / goals, yet also not discounting the returning woman because she was on maternity leave,

> *"…we need to find ways of making sure that they (women) still have opportunities. So even if they might be spending a bit less time than their male colleagues, that they are still getting traction and pushing forward on their professional dimension" A-M1.*

The partner was an avid supporter of women taking control of their own lives and career path according to their own vision, *"If you want to become a partner or a manager or a senior manager, and that is what you want to do, you need to voice it … you need to decide what you want and if it takes you five years to get there, because you have children in between, then it is fine." A-W1*. She pointed out that women have to be their own advocates at work, and be able to confidently express their value and needs in return.

Being able to own one's decision around career progression was an aspect which one mother was able to clarify for herself through coaching: *"so I've also made peace with the fact that I can't work like I used to, so therefore it's my choice…I'm going to stay in this industry and make peace with the fact that for the next few years I probably won't be as high flying performer as I might have been previously" A-W3.*

A potential derailer to the women's career progression was noted around value-judgements and the impact of the "50-plussers" in the organisation – reference being made to people, in particular men, who questioned a women's commitment to work based on the time needed for family commitments. This influenced some women delaying motherhood until they had reached a certain level in the organisation, in order to avoid their commitment or ability to work coming in to question. The "50-plussers" were generally noted as having the stay-at-home wives who tended to all the home and family responsibilities, freeing up their husbands to focus on their careers. Woman A-W3 had this experience – although her manager also had children, he did not share the family responsibilities and therefore had an unrealistic expectation of the women in his team who were mothers. This contrasted with manager A-M1 who spoke of being quite involved in sharing parenting responsibilities, which reflected in how flexible he was with the parents in his own team. A concern which the line manager did however confide was whether the woman would be as committed when she returned to work – *"will she be able to maintain the level of involvement that she has in the past" A-M1.* He thought about this during the woman's maternity leave, but did not discuss it. The line manager could now unconditionally state that that the woman's commitment and availability to the team had increased since her return from maternity leave – *"particularly I think with her taking on various partner responsibilities – if anything (commitment) has gone up rather than down" A-M1.*

To this end, the partner encouraged her managers to purposefully communicate with the women throughout the maternity transition period. The partner also took it upon herself to encourage other Partners and Directors at their meetings to continually support the people beneath them and for them to do the same: *"Because you know it is a building block. We are a firm that want to build people to the level. So we value growing our own people" A-W1.*

(i) Intention to remain with the company

The women spoke about their intention to stay with the organisation for the next 5 years. Three women were completely committed to staying: one had achieved her career aspiration of making partner – *"for me I am a success…I am happy where I am" A-W1;* and the other two women had career advancement goals in place with their line managers.

While another mother intended on staying with the company and was planning the second baby, she still felt challenged at leaving her toddler and yearned for more time with him. She confided that she only returned to work so as to work back the 4 months' paid maternity leave. If the strain she was experiencing had not been adequately resolved, the woman would have left the organisation after the pay-back had occurred. However, as a result of the accommodating nature of her managers, she was able to cope through the difficult transition period. Those considerations positively influenced her intention to stay with the company, *"it was touch and go…and luckily we could change it into a choice that works for myself and for the partners" A-W2.*

Yet, for another mother, it was unclear as to whether she would remain for another year past the birth of her second baby (she was pregnant at the time of the study). She desired to utilise her skills towards work with a more altruistic focus and spoke of other business ideas in mind. While admiring the company's involvement with social responsibility initiatives, she wanted to incorporate more of that type of work in to her role. Her line manager was not as adaptive. The mother did not have the pre-MTC session and when comparing her maternity experience to those that did, there was a significant difference around managing the stress factors pertaining to role-identity and perceptions. She did however have the returner-MTC session which helped her to pause and refocus - she credited this session for being the reason that she was still with the company.

(j) Engagement and disengagement

The women spoke of when they felt most engaged at work, and when there was a sense of disengagement post-maternity leave. The women noted that they had moments of feeling disengaged, and this was usually when their children were ill or when they felt like they were not able to fulfil their mother-role – linked to guilt. However, those moments did not last long. For one woman however, she was feeling a prolonged sense of frustration in her work environment around the lack of decision-making and strategic involvement, and this led her to feeling genuinely disengaged at present.

The comparison of engagement and disengagement against the women's intention to stay with the organisation in the next 5 years, are indicated in Table 7 below. When the woman stated feeling disengaged, her intention to stay with the organisation was cited as uncertain.

Table 7: Comparison of engagement and disengagement against Intention to stay with the Company

Engaged	Disengaged	Intention to stay
4		Yes – long term
	1	Yes – term uncertain

The fully-engaged women all cited long-term intentions of working for the company. For them, working for a supportive organisation positively influenced their loyalty and commitment:

> *"So I love this company - it paints a good picture of being a supportive organisation. And, someone that will pay for you to go on maternity coaching and never even ask a question about it, I think that's really cool. And one that embraces flexibility. I need flexibility as a mom, you know!" A-W4.*

WLB and flexibility will be described in the next section.

(k) Work-Life Balance (WLB)

Being able to find the balance between work and home commitments was a resounding theme in the narrative, with all the respondents expressing that they ultimately strived for this. MTC played an important role in assisting the women work through work-life balance issues, create strategies and build up their support structures to enable a WLB.

The nature of the role determined the extent WLB could be achieved and it was noted that client-facing roles posed greater challenged to flexibility, than support roles.

Under the mandate of the governing body, a special portfolio looked at ways of promoting WLB – they created events where people engaged on topics related to WLB, for example different levels of management spoke about how they managed WLB. In addition, the committee raised awareness about aspects which make a women's life a bit simpler such as ordering meals to take home, and championed the opening of the lactation room and special parking for pregnant women. The challenge which the committee now faced was keeping WLB a stimulating topic so that the people did not get bored at the sound of it.

Having senior women in the organisation role-modelling the desired behaviours provided the women with examples of how they too could successful manage the working-mother role. For example, one woman credited her supportive line manager, who was a mother of three children, in this sense. As a role model to other women in the organisation, woman A-W1's advice was to be practical about what one can and cannot do, and to make peace with those aspects sooner rather than later. This would

greatly assist in alleviating feelings of guilt. Drawing on one's support system was therefore crucial to enable a more balanced life.

As a result of family being a core value for the mothers, they utilised different strategies to manage a more balanced home life, where possible. One mother was committed to giving her son her attention and not working when they were together,

> *"I think when I made the decision that I was going to be a working mom, for some reason in my mind, the bargain I made with myself, is the time that I spend with my son is absolutely his: A-W3.*

This sentiment was further supported by another mother:

> *"I am also strict with things that I do at work and it is pretty important when you get to a job at a senior level and want to have a family life; you need to be able to draw the line sometimes. And that is the difficult part of being a mother and working, is to try and have a work-life balance" A-W1*

It was observed that although the women ensured focus was given to their jobs and to their families, a third component was often missing, namely focusing on oneself. One mother referred to this as the WLB triangle where she was committed to work and dedicated to her family, yet taking care of herself was not a priority. She knew that it was vitally important though, be it through exercise or even in quiet reflection time, "…because that is how you regenerate energy" A-W1, and was committed to building up the self-discipline to carve out the time for herself.

(l) Flexibility and flexible work practices (FWP):

Being able to work flexibly was cited an enabler to managing the transition period and assisting with WLB. In terms of a FWP policy, it was referred to as a "working differently" agreement. The respondents mentioned that it obviously existed however no one recalled having read it, or could produce it for review. It had become embedded in to the culture of the organisation.

The application of FWP in the organisation was dependent on the division and the leadership of that area. Whether it is a written or unwritten policy, the organisation aimed at making it as attractive as possible for their female talent to stay, and therefore conversations around how this could be enabled were encouraged. This entailed promoting agile working so that women could be flexible in how they worked so as to integrate their new working-mother role, and continue on their career path (*it is important to note at this point that agile working is not exclusive to women or mothers – it is for the entire workforce, once again dependent on the role and function). The nature of the role was a key determinant of the extent which FWP could be utilised. It was noted as being more complex with

client-facing roles where the demand was driven by the client. One example cited was where the woman's previous client did not expect her to be on-site every day, however her new client placed a high focus on 'face-time'. This impacted on her FWP usage and she had to readjust aspects so as to manage other commitments.

The most commonly used FWP options were flexitime - being able to shift one's hours in the day, and working remotely – working from home or at another work site. When FWP was deemed as working successfully, it was usually driven by the individual and often an informal agreement with the manager and team.

A more formal option used in the company was the reduced-hours portfolio where people could opt to work 50% or 75% with pay allocated accordingly. This was structured according to the individual and department's needs - for example one woman on the 75% portfolio elected to work every day and leave 2 hours earlier than before, while another chose to work four full days and took 1 day off in the week, or three full days in and two half-days off. The coach noted that many people could not make the reduced-hours portfolio work, and it was to their disadvantage as they put in a full day's work in any case (for example, by logging in from home in the evening) but were paid less. It required discipline to manage their time and people's expectations, which is what MTC assisted the women in figuring out. If the discussion revealed that the reduced-hours option was actually not going to work for that particular woman - perhaps as a result of the type of work or client industry they serviced, or even because of the type of person the woman was, exploring how to stay on the full-time package, yet better utilising the other FWP options, was then more feasible. The coach's advice to the women was for them not to make a judgement call on their ability to handle full-time work, until after they returned. When women returned from maternity leave, they brought with them a host of gifts such a being more efficient and productive, which could then be tapped in to at this point. The key was getting through those first three months after returning from maternity leave.

The partner commented that when utilising FWP, accountability lay with the individual to ensure that one's work was completed as the company did not have a culture of micro-managing and checking up on individuals, *"…with everything in life there comes responsibility, and if you make sure your job is done and your clients are serviced, no one in the firm checks" A-W1.* Having the ability to work flexibly as she needed to in the day, further endeared her to the company. The coach supported this view and linked agile working with increased employee commitment:

> *"… we know that when a company reaches out like that and allows that degree of agility in her working, she is so committed. Her commitment and loyalty level rises when the company gives that opportunity" A-C1*

Setting boundaries was an important component of supporting a balanced home and work life. This was particularly important when FWP options were utilised, and in particular the reduced portfolio option. MTC greatly assisted the one mother with this as she elected to reduce her working hours, *"… the challenge of just making the change, because it is one thing to say you will change work hours, it is another thing to actually physically implement it, and that is something I had to learn" A-W2.* She cited the example of how she needed to make a decision as to whether a request made by someone could be urgently resolved on an exception basis, or wait for the next day. Therefore, she had to become much quicker with sizing up situations and stricter with managing the boundaries. The woman admitted that this was still a challenge to manage, however having the awareness and tools to manage it was a great help.

(m) The role of MTC during this phase

The coach indicated that optimal timing for the first of the return-MTC sessions was usually 1-3 months' post-return. Most of the women had their session between 6-8 weeks after returning. It was recommended that the women first acclimatised back into this "new normal" in order to have some experience of what she might be struggling with – this enabled the women and coach to derive the most value in their session. The coach also advised having a second return-MTC session around 12 months and even another session before 24 months, as this was also a time when many women contemplated leaving employment as a result of further family-planning and concerns about being able to balance both.

- Crisis points – The women voiced the first three months post-maternity leave as being the most taxing period for them. For one mother, the crisis time hit 6 weeks after returning to work. For another mother, the first 2 months felt extremely overwhelming in trying to catch up with work. In addition, the commute to and from work meant that she had very little time to spend with her baby and the feelings of guilt compounded her stress. Another mother was trying to set a routine at home which accommodated her husband, the nanny and herself, yet last minute meeting requests or having to go in earlier or stay later at work disrupted the routine and placed a strain on her support systems. MTC assisted the women in working through these crisis points.

A summarised view of the key coaching outcomes from the return-MTC sessions are indicated in Table 8 below. The main topics which arose post-maternity leave revolved around reassurance, understanding and managing one's anxiety, managing own view of other people's perceptions, WLB, taking control of career advancement conversations, practical solutions and coping strategies, managing boundaries and standing firm on commitments to oneself. The respondents expressed that going though MTC solidified their commitment to the company which positively influenced the retention of these professional women.

Table 8: Key coaching outcomes from the return-MTC sessions

Women	Key coaching outcome	Statement
A-W1	Care for self - being disciplined to carve out time for herself	"It was a touch base to actually find 'okay all the things you said you know, what has been realised…how did you find your time back at work?' I mean the time back at work that's fine, I mean the kids get the attention but it is the 'me' that is a left out so that is something I need to work on."
A-W2	Took the reduced working-hours option – setting boundaries and being firm on commitments made to self and family.	"It was great to then talk through it and talk through the challenge of just making the change. Because it is one thing to say you will change work hours, it is another thing to actually physically implement it, and that is something I had to learn." "The coaching would be around let's have a look at what is perhaps not in place or what can you do when you are at work. How do you shut out your own distractions in order to be able to focus and use that time effectively so that you can leave two hours earlier"
A-W3	Had two return sessions: Month 1: analytical, scientific thinking mind - felt out of depth - coaching helped her make sense of the transition, reduced anxiety, reassured her, normalised feelings, coping strategies, make people partners, recommended reading Month 2-3: Reassurance; how to manage perceptions and how to manage boundaries MTC was valuable to help her conceptualise a way forward	"Because only when I came back, and we started to develop a routine where I could go ok, this is the new normal I can cope with the new normal. And I think MTC helped me a lot with that. I was stressed out, it added so much stress not being able to conceptualise the future, not knowing how it would be … And I was all over the place as well with uncertainties as to how this was going to work and I think it helped me stop and just stop focus on the now, see how it goes and ja, but the coping thing and see how it goes. There's no need to make pre-empted decisions" "It took an awful lot of the anxiety away, it made me feel like I could do it. And it's that horrible aching anxiety and tension of not knowing … And kind of being told that it's okay, it's perfectly normal and these are some strategies of dealing with it, so that helped tremendously. And made me more confident that I could stay, I didn't know I could stay here, I didn't know if I could make this work. It made me more willing to try, and just give it a chance"
A-W4	Received most value from this session - crisis point at 6 weeks: wanted to 'do it all' without any support. Reality check with the coach, discussed practical solutions on how to rearrange things to	"It just helped me to adapt better. And it helped me fit in better, and it helped me think about things. It is great, because it managed to calm down my anxiety with having a Type A personality" "She gave such practical tips on like 'let's think about this, this is too much, this is stupid, you can't do this'. And so we thought about the clever thing to do...and I'm sure she's done this so

Women	Key coaching outcome	Statement
	manage her needs and reduce anxiety	many times, and said 'so why don't you online shop?' That's a good idea. So now I online shop through Pick 'n Pay.
A-W5	Discussion around WLB, managing her own view of people's perceptions, still taking control of her career advancement. Solidified her intention to stay with the company as she felt supported.	"These kind of sessions when you are pregnant or on maternity leave, because it boosts your confidence when you are talking to someone. You are able to talk out the things that you can't necessarily talk to your boss about or you can't necessarily talk to your husband or someone at home about – but someone independent will give you an independent opinion or advice"

4.1.5 Case A Summary

The case of Company A described the experiences of professional women in management positions as they went through the maternity transition period. The line manager's role and their experience during this transition period, the organisational perspective and insight from the external coach who provided MTC to the women were also incorporated. The findings were further expanded upon through analysing the company's reports and supporting documentation, which made for a holistic view of the maternity transition experience within Company A.

The maternity transition period looked at three distinct phases: preparing for maternity leave, during maternity leave, and the return to work period. The respondents' experiences were described in accordance with these phases.

The majority of the women who used the MTC programme were first-time mothers who expressed feelings of anxiety around what to expect in their new role as a mother, along with concerns about the future of their career progression. MTC supported the women to navigate the uncertainties of this transitional period, which ultimately led to renewed loyalty and commitment to the company for four of the five women in the study.

In preparing for maternity leave, the worker-identity still featured strongly. Women were actively planning their career advancement opportunities with some going through the rigorous leadership assessment while pregnant. However, one woman felt gradually invisible and it was noted that a challenge for women in the projects space was not being signed on to projects in the latter months of their pregnancy, yet still having to achieve the annual targets without a pro-rata for the four months when they went on maternity leave. This period was noted as being riddled with stress and anxiety, however for those women who received the pre-MTC session, they felt supported and better able to

cope. MTC further supported the women in thinking through their planning and handover strategies - directing their attention to aspects which were important to consider and plan for, and to take control of those. The women felt better equipped to open up the lines of communication with their managers and teams. In addition, the women were sensitised to consider how they wanted to engage with work during maternity leave; possibilities to ease back in and managing one's career post-return. Embracing the mother-identity was also discussed and this was cited as particularly important for one of the mothers, who felt reassured that pregnancy was not a stumbling block - it gave her the confidence she needed to negotiate her promotion upon returning.

During maternity leave, a shift in identity occurred with the women taking on the mother-role. For the woman who did not have the support and insight of the pre-MTC session, it was a period of worry where she seriously considered not returning to work. Only the partner received the pre-return MTC session, although two other women expressed that additional support during this period would have been valuable to them as it felt overwhelming at times. For all the women, this period brought with it a lack of sleep which they had to adjust to managing their energy around, along with parenting challenges. It was interesting to note that while much focus was given to the mother during this period, the father too was undergoing this transition and trying to determine his role in this new family setup. At times, he felt side-lined. The changing relationship with the husband was an important consideration during this period, as was the building up of support structures. In preparing to return to work, the women had to start planning how they would manage breastfeeding, childcare and easing back in to work.

The return to work period brought with it the combined identity of the working-mother role. The mother-identity and the worker-identity were at times a source of internal conflict for the women, which linked with managing the constant feelings of guilt. Coaching helped to ease the anxiety and work on strategies to manage the role-conflicts. The women returned with certain attributes / gifts which they were able to recognise in themselves through coaching, and tapped in to these to make them more effective as leaders and more productive as employees.

Choosing whether and how to ease back in required communication and compromise for both the women and their managers. When an ease-back in option was utilised, the women expressed being able to cope much better with the transition back to work, than when it was not done. Easing back in supported the reintegration in to the workplace, and the adjustment to work changes. In terms of communication, a caution raised in the organisation was around 'benevolent bias' and the 'invisible bump syndrome', which could either make the women feel quite disempowered and ignored, or overwhelmed at having to work in the exact same manner as before the baby was born. Effective communication was also required to uncover the 'unspoken' expectations. For managers as well as the women, being proactive in communicating needs and expectations made for a healthier work

relationship. Placing the focus once again on career progression and professional development was also a key consideration for the women.

Through MTC and the support of FWP in the organisation, commitment and loyalty to the organisation were positively influenced.

Future considerations for the organisation was encouraging support groups for working-mothers, for example where new mothers gained advice from other mothers in their specific product lines – before, during or after their maternity leave. This was also noted as a way of furthering the role-modelling in the organisation. The organisation was also urged to reconsider a pro-rata on performance targets during maternity leave so that women were not negatively impacted by their time away. The most neglected component for the women in the first 2 years after giving birth was refocusing on oneself (self-care) – this was noted as an area which the women needed continued support around.

Summarised, the benefits of MTC in the organisation allowed the women to feel supported, empowered and valued; increased their confidence and optimism; enabled them to refocus and confront challenges of anxiety, guilt, bias and perceptions; and enabled them to manage priorities and boundaries. The organisation realised significant benefits in retaining their professional and high-achieving women, and there was improved engagement between the women and their managers during this transitional stage.

4.2 Case B

4.2.1 Background of the organisation and respondents' profile

Case B is a financial services organisation regarded as one of the top four banks in SA with a total staff complement of approximately 30 000.

The organisation prides itself on its employee value proposition (EVP) which they expressed as being a promise to their staff and a differentiator to other organisations. As such, the organisation placed being people-centred as one of its core values.

One of the organisation's offerings to staff was access to coaching – external coaches for senior leadership and internal coaches for all other levels of talent. Internal coaching has played an important role in the organisation's learning space and as such, supported many of the leadership and learnership programmes. The rationale for researching this organisation was due it already having coaching established in the culture. Maternity transition coaching, however was not one of its offerings. Therefore, the experience of the women and line managers through the maternity transition period will be explored and compared against Case A in the cross-analysis section in Chapter 5.

The women interviewed were in management positions - two women were senior managers overseeing project departments, and the other two women were middle managers in the human resources field. In terms of age grouping, three women were in the 36-45 year age range, and one woman was in the 25-35 range. Their average length of service with the company was 14 years, with the least service being 7 years and the longest noted at 20 years. All the women held undergraduate qualifications, while three had post graduate degrees.

The women took the full four months paid maternity leave, and where possible added on their annual leave to stretch it to five months. There was a desire to take longer maternity leave but it could not be afforded financially. HR and the line managers expressed that the company's maternity leave policy fared well against other South African companies. HR did, however, note there was an overseas trend, especially in some European countries to offer extended maternity leave along with shared parental leave so that fathers could also stay home with the baby when the mother returned to work.

Both the line managers interviewed were Heads of Departments, and have 14 years and 23 years of tenure with the company respectively. The 'organisational voice' was represented by the Executive of Talent Management for the Group, and the HR Executive whose mandate encompassed the organisation's coaching programme.

Both the line managers and HR Executives interviewed also have children. Where their information bared no relevance to the study, it was noted with 'NA' (not applicable) in the respondent's profile table, as outlined in Table 9 below. In addition to the interviews conducted with these respondents, information available to staff, statistics from annual reports and policies obtained from the company were analysed. In total, eight respondents were interviewed to provide a systemic view of the experiences in the organisation.

Table 9: Respondents' profile in Company B

Code name	Role in the study	Position / Level of Management	Gender	Age	No. of children	Ages (yrs)	Level of education	Tenure with Org.
B-HR1	Org. voice - HR	HR Executive - Talent	Female	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
B-HR2	Org. voice - HR	HR Executive - Coaching Prog.	Female	NA	NAs	NA	NA	NA
B-W1	Woman (mother)	Middle Manager	Female	38	2	5;2	Honours	14
B-W2	Woman (mother)	Middle Manager	Female	30	1 (pregnant with #2)	2	BA; Current Honours	7
B-W3	Woman (mother)	Senior Manager	Female	43	3	17;14;3	Masters	20
B-W4	Woman (mother)	Senior Manager	Female	39	2	4; 9	Current MBA	15
B-M1	Line manager	Senior Manager	Male	NA	1	NA	NA	14
B-M2	Line manager	Senior Manager	Female	NA	2	NA	NA	23

4.2.2 The organisational factors influencing women's careers

4.2.2.1 Gender representation in the organisation

As at June 2016, females represented 62.8% of the gender split in the organisation, across all roles and management levels. This number has remained fairly consistent since 2006 when the female staff complement was noted at 62.1%. For the purpose of this study, only information pertaining to management levels were analysed (semi-skilled and temporary staff were excluded).

Females represented 21.1% at the top management level, 32.8% in Senior Management, 51.9% in Middle Management and 68.8% at Junior Management levels (as at June 2016 per the company's annual gender-split report). The organisation's gender representation across management levels over the past five years are indicated in the Figure 14 below.

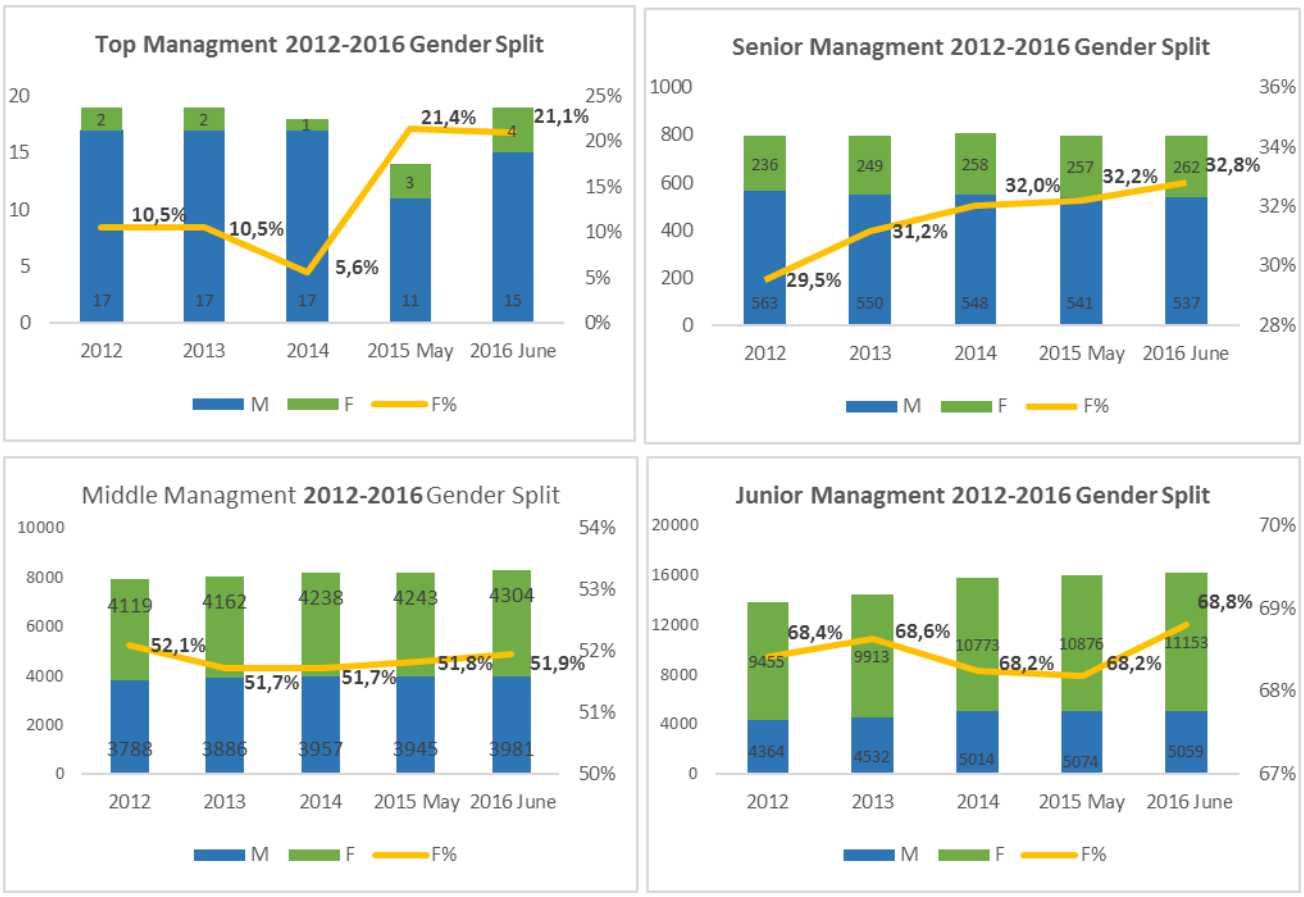


Figure 14: Gender split across management levels (graphs compiled from the company's annual gender-split report

Females in the junior management and middle management were well represented in the organisation, with annual targets being met. Female representation at senior management showed a 5% increase from 2012, and while this has remained consistent in the 32% range for the past three years, it fell short of the 2016 target of 33%. It was however positive to note that from 2015 to 2016, 5 more women joined this level of management.

Positive movement was noted in the top management category where female representation increased from 5.6% in 2014 to 21.4% in 2015 (which equated to two females). From 2015 to 2016, 1 more female joined the executive team. During the same period, four males were promoted in to top management. The target set for top management was unavailable.

This leads us to the next discussion on the culture and talent retention in the organisation.

4.2.2.2 Culture and talent retention

(a) Culture

The respondents were proud of the family-like atmosphere in their teams, which reflected across several statements. However, high levels of control also existed in the organisation, both from a people-management perspective and in its ability to adapt to market changes. The organisation was undergoing a culture shift to enable it to operate more innovatively and in a faster paced environment, which meant reducing the more controlling aspects.

The challenge cited from an organisational level was that patriarchal role-modelling existed. The executive levels were predominantly male dominated, and most women who joined these ranks did not have children. The demands of the role at the senior levels impacted on having balanced work and home life, especially when women had family responsibilities to consider. The HR Executive could identify only one woman in the top management team who had a family. While women were well represented in the junior and middle management levels, it was not the case at senior management or executive level. The following reflection noted the Executive's concern in this regard,

> *"But with women, then is it that they choose not to go into those roles, or that there are too many blockages for women going into those roles? B-HR1*

Value-judgements by means of men managing the careers of women based on their own perceptions, also influenced women's career progression in the organisation. Raising awareness about this was cited as important. The HR Executive believed that senior women role-modelling new behaviours in the organisation, having a voice at the executive level and challenging traditional mind-sets and perceptions, was a way to shift the culture.

When the respondents discussed 'control' around the people-management practices, the slow pace of gender transformation and aspects such as the detailed rules, particularly around FWP, the hesitancy to embrace these and a lack of trust in this regard, were noted as areas requiring change.

The respondents noted that the culture at the top set the tone for the role, which influenced how people balanced their lives. To this end, it was expressed that women may opt not to take on certain executive roles due to the additional time pressures and role demands that came with it, such as late nights, off-site meetings and weekend getaways. The reflection of one of the senior manager indicated that becoming an executive was no longer an aspiration as it would significantly impact on her family life.

The HR Executive noted the wave of change in the world around where, when and how work occurred was imminent – one which the organisation needed to prepare themselves for. Being able to work

more flexibly, or agile working was becoming more prevalent and included permanent contracting and working remotely or virtually. The overseas trends for working flexibly differed vastly from SA and this required a mind-set change in the organisation, which could be supported through coaching by challenging assumptions and raising one's awareness:

> *"This whole issue of more flexible ways of working, is becoming a huge thing, because people just want a different quality of life, they want to be their own bosses, and they want to move between corporates. So, we are always challenging to say you have got to look at the new world at work and what is coming our way" B-HR1*

(b) Talent retention

Gender transformation was cited as important to the organisation's talent management strategy. The company approached it from a succession planning perspective where female talent in senior leadership roles were identified for key roles. They received coaching and mentoring from the CEO or a member of the executive team to support their transition in to the role.

The company's 2015 Employment Equity Report indicated that when it came to resignations, 40.3% of senior management who left the company were females. In comparing the number of resignations to the promotions at senior management level for the same period, there was a deficit in the female category. Given the slow pace of movement in this category over the past few years, the organisation needed to be more aggressive in enabling transformation at this level, that is if it intended to meet the 2017 target of 34% females in senior management. Succession pipelines, race and gender were the key aspects that were tracked at an organisational level and each business executive was required to put forward plans on how they intended to increase senior female representation in their respective areas.

The women interviewed had an average length of service of 14 years with the organisation. In this time, they had accrued a substantial amount of organisational and industry knowledge, and a loss of this talent would lead to a loss of valuable company-specific capital. Two of the women in the study were planning to change career streams and exit the organisation in the next few years - their reasons were around finding more purposeful work which also enabled them greater flexibility. They had not discussed these intentions with their managers.

As per the HR Executive, the organisation previously ran an empowerment program for women which started in 2007 and ended a few years later. A group of nominated women across various roles were taken through a year-long journey with the aim of enhancing their personal effectiveness and enabling them to find their own voice in business. The women were coached and mentored through this process. The HR Talent Executive stated that some women in the business took offense to the

specialised women-advancement programs with comments expressed such as, "*Are you only recognising me because of the fact that I am a woman? I want to be recognised because I am the best at what I do, not because I am a woman" B-HR1.* The specialised programmes were eventually terminated; however, it was unclear whether the decision to do so was as a result of the comments expressed, budget restrictions or whether it was not a strategic priority to focus on women development at that time. Coincidentally, one of the women interviewed for this study was a graduate of the first program and cited positive feedback from that learning journey. She was promoted to a Business Head shortly afterwards.

In terms of organisational learning, there was a focus on ensuring a fair representation of women on the programs run in the company.

According to HR, the main reasons cited by women for leaving the organisation included better career prospects, opportunities for advancement, increased remuneration and personal reasons.

4.2.3 Description of the coaching approach in the organisation

As per the HR Executive, coaching was formally introduced in to the organisation around 2005/6 as a result of an executive having had a positive coaching experience – he then went on to refer his team to a coaching process, and so it grew.

The organisation utilised two coaching approaches namely, internal and external coaching by trained coaches; and line managers adopting a coaching approach with their staff. Opportunities were noted by the respondents to enhance the coaching programme to better support people as they went through transitions points in their lives. Maternity transition coaching was not offered in this organisation.

Through the years, the organisation trained a number of employees who were keen on becoming coaches so as to fulfil an internal coaching role. The main modalities of coaching evident amongst the internal coaches were Consciousness Coaching®, Co-Active® Coaching, Integral Coaching®, and more recently Business Coaching. Staff therefore had a range of coaching approaches to select from, based on their individual needs. As at 2016, there were nearly one hundred internal coaches who coached staff in addition to their actual roles, by dedicating a percentage of their time to this function. Senior managers and executives could utilise the services of external coaches, and all other levels of management and staff had access to the internal coaches. There was presently no consolidated view of the number of women who received coaching in the organisation or what their coaching needs have been.

The purpose of coaching in the organisation has been positioned to “Provide alternative ways to develop our people across all levels of the Leadership Pipeline; Support the People Development Framework and Academies”. As such coaching supported various programmes such as the Leadership Academy, Chartered Accountants Programme and the Graduate Development Programme (and as previously mentioned, the women’s empowerment programme). The focus of coaching specifically was to “enhance the overall people capacity” - both individually and with teams. Coaching further assisted individuals with navigating career transitions in to new roles (information sourced from the company’s intranet sit).

Aspects which staff utilised coaching for included increasing leadership competence, requiring support to think through work challenges or stretch goals, building of confidence, achieving a WLB, better managing stress, preparing for career transitions, and being able to identify one’s core strengths and leverage off them.

The organisation rolled out group-wide training for all line managers to build competence towards coaching their staff. However, challenges were cited a number of years later with the practice of being a leader-as-coach, and as such the training was being revisited. Managers were still however encouraged to coach their staff, which was evident from the approach that the line managers took in the study.

The non-measurement of coaching was a concern for the organisation – it was cited as being difficult to determine how coaching specifically contributed to organisational goals. More often than not, life coaching occurred without a link to specific business outcomes. The organisation therefore revisited its coaching programme so that it better supported the overall strategy. A core component of the revised coaching programme entailed a quadrilateral coaching approach. This in effect meant that the coach, coachee, line manager and HR co-contracted upfront on the purpose of the coaching engagement, with a mid-check point and post review included. This was a shift from the current practice where the coach and coachee predominantly contracted with each other, and a link to business objectives was not a requirement.

Shortly after coaching commenced in the organisation, a programme was launched which looked at assisting new mothers transition back in to the work environment after maternity leave. This took the form of group coaching where “coaches helped them (women) discuss some of the challenges they were facing, the dynamics, and to help them to transition back” B-HR1. The programme was linked to the employee well-being programme, and not strategically or to talent management. The programme ceased after two years however the HR Executive noted that there was no firm indication as to the reason for this.

The organisation identified that a challenge was enabling its people to adapt in the face of the rapid pace of external changes, which required people to manage transitions quicker. The organisational changes included restructures, realignments and mergers, which had a huge impact on the staff. The HR Executive felt that it had become even more necessary now in the organisation to support individuals through the transition, and reflected her concern around enabling this in the following comment: “How will we ground people at the unit denominator, how do we ground individuals in that transition?” B-HR2. Coaching was seen as a means to help impacted individuals navigate the restructures and to work through the change process - it was expressed that up skilling internal coaches to fulfil this role would benefit the organisation.

Similarly, a link was made with assisting individuals better manage the transitions they go through in their lives while within the organisation - such as coaching graduates entering the company to enable them to obtain an organisational fit, or retirees as they approach the next phase in their lives, or women as they prepare to take on the mother-identity role. One mother recounted her experience when her second baby was born, and reflected that having a sounding board at that stage would have been extremely helpful to make sense of her transition. As expressed by another mother, coaching creates the safe space during the transition period:

> *“I think using coaching to support return to work moms is good, I think because you have a safe space to just share your feelings, fears, expectations, frustrations. So I think that would work, that would really, really work” B-W3.*

It was discussed that through coaching, individuals could make better sense off and cope with the transitions they experienced. Further, it was indicated as a safe space to raise awareness with leaders around their own value-judgements.

The maternity transition experience will be described next.

4.2.4 The maternity transition experience

This section will be discussed in terms of the three main phases of the transition – before, during, and post-maternity leave. The discussion commences with preparing for maternity leave, then the experience during maternity leave and finally the return to work experience, as expressed by all the respondents. Understanding the maternity transition experience of the women and the line managers provided greater insight in to what this transition entailed. It also allowed for coaching opportunities to be identified, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.2.4.1 Phase 1: Preparing for maternity leave

The topics which emerged in the period prior to going on maternity leave was understanding the worker-role-identity and the upcoming change to it, feelings of stress and anxiety, and the preparation for handing over work.

(a) Worker-role-identity

The women first spoke of their lives prior to becoming mothers – in this context their role was that of a working woman navigating corporate life, as a wife, and for some as an existing mother to older children. In terms of the women's life and career stages, three women were in the mid-career phase (aged between 36-45 years) and one woman was in her early career phase (aged between 25-35 years). The women in the mid-career phase noted having a decent career progression which then consciously shifted to a slightly slower progression when they started growing their families.

All the women spoke of this period as being extremely flexible with life generally revolving around self-interests or socialising. The working day usually started very early in the morning or ended late evening, working longer hours at the office or over weekends, and being able to travel more frequently or at short notice was not a challenge for them. In fact, this was how they were known at work, even though this was not an explicit working contract requirement.

The decision to start a family in later years or once the women's careers were established had its challenges, *"…getting married at an older age was one set of things to get used to, and then a mother as well. So you knew that lots of changes were on the horizon" B-W1.* Aspects such as being set in one's routine or lifestyle made it considerably more challenging to adjust to the new change. Similarly, it was quite jarring to start the baby phase again for women who had a large age gap between their older children and the last born.

(b) Stress and anxiety

For the most part, the women spoke of this phase as being a stressful time for them, yet mixed with excitement. The context under which the transition occurred influenced the level of stress and anxiety experienced. The maternity transition was situated amongst other things that were occurring in the women's lives, which impacted on how they coped with the transition.

For one woman, the period leading up to her delivery was exceptionally difficult. Her age (40 years at the time) and health were challenging the pregnancy. In addition, she was promoted to head up the department and staff issues were particularly stressful. This, combined with her strained health made for a difficult period as noted when she said, *"I was tired, physically and emotionally, I just didn't have*

the energy to deal with all of that." She had an emergency delivery nearly a month prematurely – *"…the emotional pressure at work definitely impacted my blood pressure and so I had to deliver at 35 weeks" B-W3.* Another woman also expressed this period as being a particularly stressful time in her life, especially on the home front. She was extremely resilient though and had a belief that they would get through those difficult times, which they did. At work, she had been seconded in to another role as a stand-in for her manager. This was a steep learning curve and she felt the pressure to also deliver in this role. In alignment with her personality, she placed immense pressure on herself to complete all items entrusted to her before going on maternity leave, and incidentally went in to labour at the office.

A concern expressed by the line manager was that some women disengaged from work in the last month of pregnancy due to the impact on one's health and/or energy levels. While the manager could empathise with this, it was still an area of concern for her managing a team. Upon reflecting in the interview, the line manager came to a realisation that allowing the women to work more flexibly in the last few weeks would be a great support to them. Woman try to work to the very end before giving birth, however this placed an additional strain on them in the weeks leading up to their delivery. This was evident with two of the women in the study.

Preparing for the imminent arrival of her second baby made another mother feel anxious – in the midst of trying to find a stand-in at work, she was trying to figure out how to take care of a baby again. This was in contrast to another mother who cited the preparation period for her second baby as being a relatively stress-free time. Work held no challenges as she did not need to handover any projects at that stage. She described her first-born as a very easy baby and drew on that positive experience of becoming a mother as she prepared for the arrival of her second baby. This helped ease any feelings of anxiety. Experiential learning in this instance became a strategy to manage the maternity transition. Throughout her interview, the woman expressed a higher coping ability and a tendency to focus on the positive of the situation, and this was seen as part of her natural temperament. Upon reflecting, she commented that she actually did not know how she managed to juggle all the things she had to do – she just did. It was particularly interesting to note that some women struggled more with the transition while others did not.

Finally, the line manager drew on her personal experience of being a mother, and had a coaching discussion with the woman to start her thinking through and planning for the anticipated challenges of having a second child. One of the options that they spoke about was to consider an ease-back in period upon returning to work.

(c) Planning the handover

Preparation for the handover linked in with what people were naturally comfortable doing, and their personality preferences.

The one mother who was detail-oriented, formulated a tracking sheet with all her deliverables and status updates, which she then focused on completing. She did not want there to be any comebacks when she went on maternity leave.

The one line manager placed a high focus on relationships, and as such played a critical role in assisting the team to plan and deal with the upcoming change. He pre-empted the planning by using a coaching style of questioning and goal-setting, which in effect lessened the strain on the woman going on maternity leave. Further, support from his HR department around how the maternity leave process worked, empowered him as he then relayed the relevant information to the woman. The manager approached the preparation phase in three ways. First, he provided high-level direction to the woman as to the key aspects that he would like to see occur in the handover plan – this was his way of managing his own expectations. Next, he listened to what feedback he was receiving from the woman, which he deemed as the ““softer concerns” – she was concerned about how her performance would be rated for the year, determinants towards her bonus and increase and her role upon returning. In alignment with his nature, the manager ensured that he spent sufficient time discussing the woman’s concerns. This was a strategy he used to assist them both to deal with the upcoming change. The woman’s career progression was very important to her and she wanted to ensure that going on maternity leave would not prejudice her in any way. Understanding how her performance would be assessed and handled upon her return allowed her to mentally process the transition while she was away.

The other line manager approached this phase from a succession planning perspective. A team member was seconded who had potential to be developed and then worked with the woman during the handover period. This ensured business continuity, and provided a platform to grow skills within the team. The decision to focus on finding a stand-in stemmed from the manager’s personal experience of understanding the pressure to find one’s own stand-in during maternity leave. The line manager also experienced a level of stress during this time. The secondment of a staff member in to the woman’s position had a roll-on effect in that the line manager had to back-fill the other staff member’s position with a contract worker. Therefore, the manager had two people in new roles to coach, up skill and manage.

For one woman, the lack of support from her line manager led to her feeling stressed during the period, especially with finding a stand-in on her own.

For another woman, her line manager was on leave and they had planned on conducting a full handover upon his return. Due to the emergency delivery, this had not occurred. There was a perception that there would be sufficient time to plan the handover.

For one woman however, there was no stress related to the work handover as she had only been with her new team for a month prior to going on maternity leave. She cited looking forward to the new role upon her return and was eager to embrace it.

The experience during maternity leave will be described next.

4.2.4.2 Phase 2: During maternity leave

Being able to have the time and space to bond with one's baby was expressed as a special time by the mothers. For the most part, the stress of the weeks leading up to the maternity leave fell away. The women started adjusting to their mother-role identity, learning how to adjust to the changes in their own bodies, handling a new-born and creating a routine. Time was also spent enjoying the baby and "seeing things through their eyes", bonding as a growing family, taking him/her to baby classes, and meeting with friends and family where possible.

During this period, the line managers handled the transition from two perspectives: one was ensuring that the women's work was still carried out in the team, and at a satisfactory level of quality, and secondly it was maintaining the relationship with the women while they were on maternity leave. Both line managers expressed that being purposeful in planning for the women's return was an important consideration for them. This included consciously considering the women in their absence while key departmental changes were occurring

The topics which emerged during maternity leave included a) taking on a mother-identity role; b) a time of adjustment in terms of physical considerations, relationships and the team managing the work during this period; and c) preparing for returning to work which encompassed arranging childcare, detaching, and engaging with work.

(a) Mother-role identity

The mothers took on the role as the primary caregivers on the home front. As such, much of the responsibility to manage the home, taking care of the children's needs and the family's medical care naturally became the women's responsibility. They expressed that this certainly placed additional pressure on their time and energy, and their days were a constant balancing act.

The women's upbringing and values influenced how they identified with the mother-identity role. This was most evident with the first-time mother who wasn't quite prepared for the reality of being a mother

to a new-born, combined with being a wife. She realised that a traditionalist mind-set of what a "mother's role" entailed challenged her worker-identity. Several issues came up for her such as wanting to do everything the way she did it before (e.g. cook, clean and shop for the home). The traditional family roles were deeply ingrained as reflected in this statement,

> *"because I think it was also the way I was brought up - my mom always said a man's place is not in the kitchen. You know how old folk are, and my granny taught that as well. So even if you are working, it is a choice you are making and you have got to come home and do the cooking; let your man be because he is the head of the house! Very old school, and I think that is what stuck with me" B-W2.*

She emulated this when her baby was born and initially refused her husband's help around the house. Even though she was very close with her family, the traditional mind-set prevented her from seeking support around her concerns in trying to emotionally support her husband through his own work challenges and studies. This was a cause of much stress during this period and was an emotional reflection for her in the interview. The confidential and non-judgemental space of the interview allowed her to speak about this concern, which she confided to only having done after 2 years. The first-time mother's strategy to navigate the uncertainty of this phase was buying loads of books, researching on the internet and taking advice from people around her. When she felt really conflicted around how to care for her baby, she decided to rely on her own instinct and judgement.

The male line manager reflected that societal norms around the mother being the primary caregiver was reinforced in subtle actions and messages. He recounted one such time at a parent's evening at his child's school where the message to the children was "you must ask mom to pack healthy lunch in your case … and ask mom to get your PT kit ready"B-M1. As a single father who performed many of the duties which mothers were generally known for doing, he couldn't help but notice all the slight references made to what mothers were expected to do for their children. He thought, "I think it is a bit odd because I am saying 'hold on, I do that too' B-M1. Back in the work environment, he noted that it was generally the mother who was inclined to take time off from work to tend to an ill child, while the husband went to work. He differed in that regard.

For the second-time mothers, having a baby again was all-consuming and they had to consciously ensure that the older children were given adequate attention, for example with homework and playing together or simply talking. Meeting the differing needs, especially when there was a larger age gap between children required adapting one's routine.

(b) A time of adjustment

- Physical adjustment

The lack of sleep was expressed by the women as a common challenge for them. The lack of familial support in the city and it not being financially viable to employ a helper / nanny, resulted in one mother handling the home and baby on her own. Caring for herself was not a priority, and the lack of sleep was extremely challenging. Her struggle was noted in her reflection:

> *"… it was very stressful. It was hard, I had nobody. It was just hubby and myself and he was going back to work and I was home alone with her. It was tiring, I am not going to lie. I think what got to me the most was not being able to sleep through the night anymore. I haven't recovered from that." B-W2.*

A strategy used by a second-time mother to cope in the first month after her baby was born, was to employ a night nurse to oversee the baby and bring him through for feeding at night. She indicated that a natural instinct was for mothers to keep checking new-born babies' breathing, which meant that one never quite slept. Having a night nurse assisted the mother with this, and so she could recover better post-op and could be there for her older children too without being so exhausted.

- Relationships

This period ushered in a shift in the relationship with the husbands - conversations or activities started revolving around the baby and there was a sense of nostalgia as the women spoke about this relationship – in particular the first-time mother,

"We spent a lot of time talking and that is something I enjoy, but of late because of the baby being here we don't get to do that – and that is something I miss. I really miss that. We do talk, but it is not like it used to be. A lot revolves around our baby" B-W2.

A second-time mother indicated that the relationship aspect with her husband was a key concern for her, and having some type of support to discuss it would have helped her especially after the birth of their second child. This was noted in the following reflection:

> *"…because everything takes a toll and takes a different turn. So, it would have been nice if upfront, there was someone or somewhere, where I could have a chat about how things are interlinked and I am always thinking why is that – because it was working for five years and then all of a sudden after the second baby it wasn't working anymore – what could we have done to prevent that or make it better?" BW1.*

The women all credited their husbands for being supportive in their individual situations.

From a work perspective, both managers voiced that relationships were important for them. To this end, they reached out to the women during their maternity leave purely from a social perspective. The

one line manager made an effort to keep in touch with the woman so that she felt valued during a time when she was absent from the working world. The other line manager kept the woman informed of any major changes in the business via the team's 'what's app' chat group – which she could then choose to read. It was also a means for the team to check in with her about the baby and her well-being. The women confirmed that did not feel challenged by being in contact.

However, the manager mentioned that an expectation was that if the team really needed to know something urgent, for example where a file was kept, that the woman would assist. The line managers reflected that they had not actively discussed what the interaction would be with the women while they were on maternity leave – for example, could they discuss work matters, how would the women preferred to be contacted, would she like to be visited…? The way they approached any interactions during the maternity leave was largely based on their own assumptions and intention, which came more from a place of caring, as noted in the one line manager's comment:

> *"So I think a lot of it has got to do with relationships…I don't think I was seen as being over-bearing…It was definitely not the case, well I never got that, let me rather say that, but you never know what is going on deep inside!" B-M1.*

However, one woman's manager and new team had not sought to contact her during this period – she appeared somewhat saddened by this reflection in the interview. Yet for another woman, she specifically did not want to be contacted for work issues as her family time was cited as precious. This had not been conveyed to her manager at that time as she did not know whether one could express such wishes.

Some women also expressed the desire for adult interaction during this time, and more so with work. This was especially noted by one of the woman who placed both being a mother and having a career as extremely important to her:

> *"I clearly remember maternity leave and my husband coming home and I was like 'I need to work for somebody now. I need an adult person to talk to' because I missed that when I was on maternity leave." B-W4*

- Managing the work in the women's absence

A challenge experienced by one of the line managers was managing the women's team from a different geographic region. While the staff could manage their own work, it did take more effort on the line manager's part to check in with the team, to keep them in the loop of changes and to ensure that the quality of the work was unquestionable. Some of the administrative aspects were overlooked by the team, and this became a learning opportunity for them in her absence. The line manager's role

was to support the team through this and to provide guidance as to when to let things go. The additional value-add that the woman brought to her team was felt considerably more during her absence, and it was expressed that not every eventuality could have been planned for during the handover.

The other manager's strategy during this time was to hold regular feedback sessions with the staff member who was seconded in to the woman's role, indicating that providing ongoing feedback was critical so that the staff member had additional support to refer to in fulfilling the role, and the level of work-quality was maintained. The manager expressed earlier in the interview that "high standards are non-negotiable" (B-M2) to her, and this was evident in the focus she placed on ensuring that the seconded staff member maintained the level of quality in the team.

(c) Preparing for the return to work

Ensuring childcare was arranged – be it training the nanny or selecting the right crèche, and weaning baby off breastfeeding during the day was priority for the mothers in the last month prior to returning to work. The managers focused on engaging with the women in preparation for their return.

(d) Arranging childcare

Finding suitable childcare prior to returning to work was a major concern for the mothers. Two of the women spoke of access to the crèche at head office as being a great support and relief for them. However, the other two women were not based at head office and went through the process of learning to trust the people who took care of their children. This was an especially steep learning curve for the new mother. Lack of familial support was notably felt at this stage. Likewise, HR noted that a challenge which working-mothers experience, and in particular women preparing to return from maternity leave, was access to a conveniently located and well-priced crèche. The crèches at the company were privately run resulting in higher cost implications for staff. The HR Executive further expanded on this aspect in the following statement:

> *"It always becomes a challenge once we offer these things as we can't be all over the country with these crèches…So they have looked into the feasibility of opening more and they did say at stages, but it hasn't really panned out." B-HR1*

(e) Detaching / Decision on breastfeeding

A second-time mother decided not to continue breastfeeding and weaned her baby on to formula milk prior to returning to work – she felt that this would be the best option for her and spoke of this decision without regret. Another mother spent more time away from her baby the month prior to returning to work so that he would become accustomed with the nanny. It was also the time when she weaned

him off breast milk and on to formula milk. For the third mother, the introduction of solids into the baby's diet at 5 months enabled the eventual weaning-off from breastfeeding.

(f) Engagement with work

The line managers took the lead in engaging the women in preparation for their return to work.

During one woman's maternity leave, several changes were occurring in the division so the line manager personally went to the region where she was located – first, to meet her baby and then to also explain the upcoming changes and how it impacted her. He positioned the changes in a positive manner and gave her sufficient time to think through the changes so that when she returned, they could pick up the conversation and discuss any concerns and opportunities. In this way, the line manager felt that his role was critical in acclimatising the woman back in to work.

With the second woman in his team, the line manager used a similar approach and made contact to introduce himself as he was appointed in to the role in the woman's absence. He invited her to come in to the office with her baby, and used it as an opportunity to take her through the changes that were happening at work and discuss her upcoming performance review. Once again, he did not want things to be a surprise when she returned. He used his collaborative management style to prepare for what the woman's possible expectations were going to be upon returning to work. It also provided him with time to plan and factor those expectations into his decisions.

The other line manager revisited an earlier discussion held with the woman in her team about easing back in to work and they agreed that this would be done over a three-week period.

The stress though for one woman was the thought of returning - as a result of a restructure, she had inherited a rebellious team who were difficult at the time she went off work. Due to the stress this had caused her, the woman had actually not wanted to return. With no work contact during her maternity leave, she was also uncertain as to what environment she would be returning to.

4.2.4.3 Phase 3: The return to work experience – post-maternity leave

The women voiced that the first three to seven months after returning to work as being the most taxing period for them. It was a time of adjusting to their new role as being a working-mother and making sense of a change in identity; navigating the return-to-work period in the initial months; managing their careers, and finding a balance between work and home commitments.

(a) Working-mother identity

Three of the four women interviewed were second-time mothers, whereas one woman was a first-time mother. While the second-time mothers were already accustomed to the working-mother identity, the pressure increased with the arrival of the second and/or third child and different needs surfaced for the women. Making sense of what this change meant for the women and the line managers along with their subsequent expectations, emerged through the narrative.

One mother strongly embraced her identity as a "working-mother" expressing that being a stay-at-home mother was not desirable to her, as noted in the following comment:

> *"The mummy switch didn't quite switch on to the point of I think I will stay at home permanently. I am a working mom, I don't think I will ever be a full-time mom – I think it is easier to come to work!" B-W4*

The women became quite skilled at managing multiple commitments. The mothers of two or more children spoke of the juggling that they did to accommodate the many needs placed upon them to handle. For one mother, having children at different ages and school stages meant coordinating varying needs, as expressed in the following comment:

> *"It's tough to manage the older kids' extra murals! I rush from here, fetch them, they are changing in the car because we don't have time…And then it is getting baby home, and then my husband will fetch the kids because when I get baby home, he has got to be bathed, I have got to cook, I have got to do this and that, so really, really challenging" B-W3.*

Another mother worked for an hour from home in the early morning, and then saw to the family until her husband took the children to day-care. She then worked for a further hour before heading to the office by which time she avoided the hectic morning traffic. The work day was expressed as hectic and managing time was critical - "where do you find the time to do everything because sometimes the list just goes on and on...you don't take lunch because there is no time for lunch" B-W1. Afternoon routine involved shopping for any groceries that were needed and collecting the children before heading home. After the children were put to bed, she usually logged on to work for another hour.

For the mother who was also studying, she had to factor in time to manage work commitments, along with her own study needs and family responsibilities. Her strategy was to plan well – this became critical so that she could manage the multiple demands placed on her time, as can be seen in the following statement:

> *"So it is just servicing their different needs; play time vs work-time vs study time vs just family fun time. It is just about managing it all" B-W4.*

Preparation for the day, week and month ahead became key to managing. The women found ways to balance the mother-role and family responsibilities – for example the one mother would place her toddler on the kitchen countertop while she was preparing dinner, and allow the child to participate where possible. This allowed her to spend time with her child while still tending to the dinner.

The husbands shared home and parenting responsibilities and helped with bathing the children or homework and even cooking, though to a slightly lesser degree. While the husbands gravitated towards aspects which they felt at ease doing or which interested them more, the mothers took on holistic responsibility for the household. As one mother stated, "*so even though my husband is very flexible and supportive, you are still the main brand behind everything" B-W1.* This was further echoed by another mother, *"We try and do it 50/50. I think I do slightly more, but it is not because he is not interested, it is just stuff that he doesn't see as required" B-W3.*

For one woman though, her husband's job offered him far more flexibility than hers did, and he was therefore able to assist with taking the children to/from school, to doctor's appointments and extra-mural activities.

(b) Navigating the return to work period

- Ease-back in period

A strategy which the women considered as being helpful was having an ease-back in period to the work environment. One of the four women had this and credited her manager for being supportive in this regard. She could work for three weeks from home prior to returning to the office. This enabled her to acclimatise to the current work, catch up on important emails and changes, while also easing her children in to the new day-care routine. She felt a lot more at ease when she did formally return to the office.

Another mother voiced that having an ease-back in period would have been extremely helpful for her as she did not want to return on a full-day basis at the onset. However, having inherited a difficult team through a restructure prior to going on maternity leave, she did not propose this to her manager. Her baby stayed at the work-crèche for the full day and screamed for hours - it took six weeks to settle him in. And all this time, it was a constant worry on the mother's mind. Her stress levels were extremely high during this period and she thought about staying at home while looking for another job – her husband even urged her to do so. However, she wanted to return to work and prove to the team that she was a competent manager, and so she soldiered on.

For the first-time mother, there was no ease-back in period and the time taken to adjust to the new routine took approximately seven months after returning to work. This was notably longer than the

second-time mothers who indicated an initial adjustment period of 2-3 months. Until then, the mother struggled to cope with her feelings of worry about her child's well-being and the guilt for missing out on possible milestones*, "it was hard, I never coped, I didn't cope" B-W2*. She returned on a full-time basis and initially did not have access to flexible work arrangements due to the role she was in. Her strategy for coping during this time was to lean on her faith in God and to practice building trust in the day-mother who was caring for her baby. She also did not share her feelings with anyone at work as she did not want to be seen as someone who could not handle challenges.

The HR Executive recounted her experience where she felt particularly challenged at returning on a full-day basis, however her line manager did not want to consider a half-day option to help her ease-back in. She therefore took the risk of approaching a different manager and put forward a proposal to work on a half-day basis, with half the salary and on a contract – her baby was six months old at this stage. This was accepted and when she felt ready to increase her hours, it was an easier adjustment to make. The executive indicated that allowing women to take a "time-out" or working half-days for a certain period could assist women to manage this transitional period.

- Gifts that women bring to work post-maternity leave

The mothers returned to work with certain attributes, which the women recognised as a result of becoming a mother. Four categories emerged namely being more efficient with time, being more patient and understanding, noting an improvement in their communication styles, and gaining an appreciation for everyday life again.

Being more efficient with time and thus becoming more productive: time took on new meaning as there was a sense of urgency underlying things now. The responsibilities increased yet time remained the same, which required conscious management of it. Time taken away from core work meant an impact to them leaving work as scheduled, or having to log on later in the evening to catch up on work. Planning and prioritising were key strategies in managing time and commitments. The following statement conveyed these sentiments:

> *"I get a lot more done. I do a lot more I think, than I used to before. And I work smarter…in the sense that I can prioritise now, because that is something I never really thought of before. Yes, my work was important to me but now it is do or die because this little person is depending on me as well. So it is a lot of pressure but it's good, it keeps me busy and on my toes" B-W2.*

The HR Executive also reflected upon the time when her children were younger and she worked half-day, yet she managed to pack in a full day's work:

"I worked! I didn't mess around, I didn't go for coffees, nothing…You are highly, highly productive, you know? So my line manager at the time didn't regret it because stuff got done" B-HR1.

More patience and understanding, which positively impacted on their work and personal relationships. One mother reflected that she was a lot calmer now, while another wondered whether the increase in patience correlated with an increase in age and maturity.

The knock-on effect to an increase in patience was an improvement in communication and people-skills, which the mothers referred to as finding a "win-win" for all. The learning which occurred on the home front naturally transferred to the work environment, especially around negotiating, providing constructive feedback and motivating people – the following statement referred to this aspect:

"Because your children have their own minds and opinions of how they would like things done, and it is the same thing with people – it is people-skills – and how do you make sure that they do what you want them to do. And you are still building them and still encouraging them and still making sure that they develop the way they are supposed to" B-W3.

Finally, a deeper appreciation for everyday life was expressed by the women. They spoke of seeing things anew – differently and being able to appreciate life with a positive outlook.

(c) Support structures

- Family support

The husbands were cited as being the primary support system – for three of the mothers, their husbands shared the parenting and home responsibilities equally. In fact, one of the women noted that her husband even took the lead with managing the children's school runs and extra-mural activities. One mother was the primary caregiver with her husband taking a more secondary role. The nannies were a considerable support for two of the mothers, and they expressed their gratitude for this help. Many of the women's families did not reside in the city, which meant familial support was not readily available.

- Workplace Support
    - Support for the mothers - The women spoke of what a supportive organisation meant to them and aspects such as having flexibility and actively changing the culture of perceptions around it, providing the necessary resources/tools to enable working flexibly, access to facilities like crèches and dedicated breastfeeding rooms at work, and educating staff and clients around expectations of working-mothers emerged. One mother stated that what made an organisation

attractive to her was when she saw how they supported their staff and considered both of her roles – being a good employee and a good parent.

The business unit which one of the woman supported had not adapted to her new 'working-mother' role and still expected her to function the same as she did prior to having a baby. Whereas previously she could accommodate the 7am meetings, this was no longer possible, especially not with little children to tend to in the morning. The HR Executive further echoed the challenge of early morning and late evening meetings, when it was not feasible for mothers or parents to manage it, given their family commitments. The executive went on to state that this was one of the practices that needed to change in the organisation to make it more family-friendly.

- Non-support dressed as support emerged in the discussion – the one mother compared the difference in the support she received from her stakeholder and her line manager by citing an example. Amidst an important meeting, she was advised by the day-care mother that her child had become quite ill. While both the stakeholder and her manager told her to go immediately tend to her child, the stakeholder reassured her not to worry about the meeting. However, she felt a lack of support from her line manager when a question was raised as to who would be the stand-in for her at the meeting. The mother saw this as non-support dressed as support. In this instance, she would have appreciated her manager stepping in on her behalf, without expecting her to find a stand-in, given the time urgency of the situation. The HR Executive's also shared her experience of returning to work after their maternity leave. She reflected that having more workplace support, especially from her manager would have helped her deal with the challenges she experienced when her daughter was born with health issues. She subsequently left the previous company a few months after returning from maternity leave.
- Support for line managers: The respondents noted that the main support which line managers potentially required was around understanding the maternity transition period, and what to expect and plan for during the different phases. The one line manager specifically expressed that there was insufficient support to sensitise managers as to what to anticipate during the maternity transition period - they were expected to know what to do and say. At times, seemingly harmless questions posed by the line manager were felt as quite insensitive by the mothers, for example when a child was ill, 'What about letting the helper/nanny look after the child" B-W3.

  In this regard, the mother cited that non-parent line managers may require work-support too in order to understand the shift in the women's role:

"So I think support in the sense that if they are not parents, what is it that they can expect to be different… what is the reality… what are their expectations?" B-W3.

It was also the responsibility of the line manager to interpret the FWP policy and implement it – in this regard the managers voiced that there were grey areas in the practice of the policy, which in effect made them cautious in allowing certain options to be utilised. HR noted that some line manager's first approach was to refer staff to employee well-being for counselling / therapy, instead of considering how to leverage of FWP to assist the person better manage their lives, and coach their staff accordingly. The respondents deliberated that the onset of returning from maternity leave was the ideal opportunity for the line manager and women to re-contract around expectations, support and role demands.

The company's quarterly employee well-being report (July-September 2016) indicated that work/life balance, health and lifestyle and child/family care issues were some of the main stressors for staff. These aspects were noted as having a significant impact on work, and contributed to absenteeism. One of the report's recommendations made to the company was to consider providing parents with resources such as workshops to enable them to better understand employee life phases, parenting styles, techniques and coping strategies. This was in alignment with the one line manager's suggestion of having support groups for mothers at work where they could discuss their challenges and offer advice to each other. The employee well-being programme was also a means of workplace support if staff required counselling to cope. However, as one mother noted, coaching through different transition periods would have been a better means of workplace support than counselling.

(d) Communication

Upon returning to work, the concern that some of the women and the line managers expressed was the overwhelming feeling of having to catch up on what occurred over the past 4-6 months. It was not clearly discussed which of the changes the women would have wanted to be kept informed on prior to the them going on maternity leave, be it organisational or specifically related to the role. It was therefore usually left up to the manager's discretion to decide on what to communicate.

In this regard, the line manager observed that the women on maternity leave were not always top of mind when decisions / changes were being made in the department.

For another line manager, she felt that communication was a two-way street in that as much as she would enquire as to what her staff needs were, she expected them to take the lead in discussing their needs with her.

Two mothers took ownership of expressing their needs to their line managers upon returning from maternity leave. The one mother re-contracted around the time she would be leaving the office so as to collect her baby from the crèche - the manager was receptive to this. Another mother appreciated that her new manager candidly discussed the issues that were present in the department upon her return, and they re-contracted around each one's expectations on how to move forward.

For the other mother, having moved in to a management role, she now felt empowered to put forward her needs and requests to her manager especially when there was a potential conflict with her family-role. Even though progressing in her career was important, considering her family's needs was priority. She noted how she did this in the following comment:

> *"I had to position it, it was difficult, I didn't like having the conversation, but it needed to be done… I had to be very stern I think in terms of what I need to do as a mother, and yes you have a business to run but you need to also accommodate me at times" B-W2.*

This contrasted with another mother's experience who recently changed roles within the organisation. She felt that it was too early to communicate her needs around utilising FWP with her manager. Past experience influenced this decision - in her previous role, she had to first build trust by demonstrating her worth before making such a request and so felt that she had to do the same again. She felt challenged at having to change her routine and expressed wanting to have this discussion soon.

(e) Guilt

The topic of guilt emerged intensely for the women and several reasons were cited for experiencing this. It was observed during the interviews that the topic elicited strong emotional reactions from three of the women. They were apologetic for crying in the interview and revealed that they hadn't realised how much this had actually affected them, as they had not spoken about it previously.

Returning to work was also the time when the feelings of guilt started creeping in – guilt for leaving their baby with a stranger, for no longer breastfeeding the baby and for not having the same energy (mental or physical) to interact with their husbands as before.

The time taken away from their families and sacrifices made in favour of work also featured. One mother expressed that although she could work flexibly, it came with the 'unspoken' expectation that "she will always make a plan", and she continually tried living up to this. However, she had to sacrifice time with her family in favour of this expectation. The feeling of guilt featured quite strong as she recounted her experience:

> *"I have made such a lot of sacrifices in terms of my children, looking back; I have had the flexibility but the amount of times that I have sat working after hours, and they don't see that.*

Sorry, I am starting getting emotional (cried)…*But you realise that they expect so much and you start regretting it, because it was not them that sat working fifteen hour days where your children actually tell you 'go and sit in the kitchen' or 'go do your job, don't sit next to me'. So that is really hard" B-W1.*

One way that she is now managing the guilt is by planning in advance with her team at work so that she can take leave for important milestones, such as her son's first three days of school - *"Because I am never going to have that again … It is important to me, and that is why I did that" B-W1*.

Utilising FWP also linked to feelings of guilt for two of the mothers when they spoke about their teams. One mother felt guilty knowing that her team was still at the office working on issues when she left work, and the other mother felt disempowered to offer her team more flexibility due to the structure of their support role.

The mother of three children felt guilty that time constraints limited the opportunities she gave her children. For example, her older son wanted to attend dance classes, however the timing of it during the day was not feasible, and her toddler loved playing outside or at the park, yet was at the crèche for the full day. And while she commented that these opportunities were not critical for the well-being of her children, she would still have loved to be able to do this for them. Due to the nature of her role, she was also unable to take time off from work for more than a day at a time if her child was ill, and this was a further source of guilt for her.

Another mother spoke of having to make the difficult decision of missing out on one of her child's milestones due to being a full-time working-mother. She had to prioritise work over watching her daughter's first swimming gala and expressed feeling such guilt for not being able to be there.

Guilt on the home front also emerged as one women spoke about her career progressing while her husband's had not. She felt that she over compensated in this regard by spending many hours searching for jobs for her husband and dropping off his CVs at companies, at times without his knowledge.

Having to stop breastfeeding sooner than they would have liked to also led to feelings of guilt, and the women noted that had there been more workplace support in this regard, they probably would have continued for longer.

(f) Caring for self

Coping with a lack of sleep was cited as a common issue amongst the mothers. The lack of sleep led to decreased energy levels and at times, decreased focus. One mother mentioned that in having to fit in additional work responsibilities, time with the children and her husband, she sacrificed some of

her sleep time as seen in the following comment: *"which are you going to choose which is not going to have an impact on anyone? That is sleep… I was constantly tired, I still am" B-W1.* Even when another mother slept away from home for work, she still woke up during the night as her body had become accustomed to doing so.

Two mothers felt energised when they exercised, however cited not having the time to do this.

For the mother who had deeply-ingrained, traditional family roles, it took her two years to start placing a focus on caring for herself again. She had to challenge herself to ask for help, especially from her husband. She cited this as being difficult to do, yet she knew that she had to do it.

Learning was important to one of the mothers and she wanted her children to see her as a role model and aspire to further their education in later years. To this end, she consciously sacrificed "me" time in favour of taking care of the family and making time for studying further.

The mothers found ways to relax such as taking a walk when possible, reading a book or watching TV at night, and even organising things at night for the next day. One mother joked that this was her selfish time, *"just this hour is my time" (B-W1),* even though everyone had gone to bed.

(g) Breastfeeding

The women spoke of breastfeeding their babies as a special bonding time between mother and child. A crucial decision which the women made upon returning to work was whether to continue with breastfeeding, and how to manage this. One mother weaned her baby off breastmilk just as she returned to work, while another two women stopped two months after returning to work. One mother continued breastfeeding until her baby was 2 years old, and she did this by limiting it to morning and evening feeds. Four of the women confided that their preference would have been to breastfeed their babies for a longer period, with one woman wanting to do so for the baby's first year, if the facilities at work supported it.

The challenge cited was the lack of proper facilities to accommodate the expressing of milk at work. The women felt challenged by: the time and effort it took to manually express - there were no electric outlets to support an electronic pump in the ladies' cubicles; hygiene factors around using the toilet-cubicle to express in; feeling embarrassed at other people hearing them express; and the storage of expressed milk in the staff fridge. One mother specifically chose not to continue breastfeeding her second baby upon returning to work because of these challenges.

The head office building once housed a room in the medical suite where mothers could express in private, but it since closed. The crèche at the head office also allowed mothers to either come through

to breast feed their babies or to express milk in a private room. One mother found this very useful and used this option for two months.

The second-time mothers seemed more at ease at understanding their bodies and managing when to express as compared to when they had their first babies.

The mothers indicated that having facilities which supported this need would have enabled them to breastfeed for a longer period of time, and eased their discomfort around this issue. The HR Executive reflected that the breastfeeding room concept was valuable to explore further for the organisation.

(h) Career management

- Slower career progression

Two of the four women cited a slower career progression during the period when they started their families, as noted in the following statements:

"…6,5 years in a division was quite long but I had my children there. So it was good because it was something I knew I could just plug in and play and move on" B-W1	"I think I have come to terms with it, it is a decision you make when you are a mom – that these years won't go on forever and if it means that I put my career, not on pause but slow down the progression a bit, I am comfortable with that" B-W3

The primary reasons for slower career progression entailed women preferring to keep to their current work roles where they had built a reputation n – this made it easier to utilise FWP and to manage the multiple roles they were now fulfilling. This was a key strategy that the women appeared to be utilising to cope with the transition.

Women may even stay in a role that was no longer positively challenging them during this period as it was one less thing to have to manage in an already taxing life-period. Advancing their careers at this stage was viewed as more demanding, be it from a time or effort perspective which would impact on the women's' need for flexibility. The relationship was already established with one's line manager, therefore support was deemed as easier to obtain. The line manager supported this view as noted in the following statement:

> *"I have seen often when people or females come back from maternity leave, they prefer to stay in that specific role for a couple of years before they make a change, because there is a better understanding with that line manager, 'that this is what I need from a personal perspective', than having to start that relationship all over again with a new person that might not be as supportive. That I have definitely seen." B-M2*

The women who remained in the same role for a few years did however cite a need for additional work challenges and stimulation. In as much as they were very busy at work, boredom started creeping in. These were reflected in the following statements by three of the women:

"After my second baby, I think I just got bored, slightly bored. But yet all the activities kept you busy because you just had to carry on, there was no time to stop, you just needed to focus on getting stuff done." B-W1.	*"And I was getting bored in my role. There was not much new stuff I was learning – every year it is the same thing, my scorecard discussion is the same thing, my hands felt tied." B-W2.*	*"Two years ago it would have been 'I will definitely stay' – So I will be honest, for the first time in 15 years I am starting to think about life outside of this company." B-W4.*

The line manager too noted the conscious slowing down of career progression, however indicated that this was not a permanent state. For the woman in his team, when her child was three years old, she was ready for a change in the role and wanted increased responsibilities.

Two women echoed similar sentiments when their children turned 2 years and 2.5 years respectively. A greater sense of balance seemed to be achieved around the 2-year mark, at which time the women felt ready to refocus on their career progression. For one of these woman, building her career was still top of mind and she therefore decided to leave the company to take on a management role elsewhere – her child had just turned 2 years. In as much as she felt a strong affiliation to the company, taking on the new role provided her with additional opportunities to grow and develop her skill set. She subsequently returned to the company in a management position, and was planning on pursuing her studies further.

- Value-judgements

A potential derailer to the women's career progression was noted around value-judgements - the HR Executive referred to the challenge which female managers have expressed to her about their career progression being managed on their behalf, especially so by men. Career decisions were being made for the women, with work capability being linked to their mother-role identity - the executive referred to this as "value-judgements". This was noted in the following statement which provided an insight in to talent discussions:

> *"So when it comes to a lot of the talent discussions you find that people, and especially the men, put their lens over it, and then they think 'Shame, she won't really be suited to this career, let's rather put her in this career track because she is a mother'. Whereas as a woman you should be making that decision for herself, instead of someone else's value judgement coming into play" B-HR1.*

The line manager further noted that home roles and family experiences influenced the value-judgements, "*As a parent, it depends on your own existing family set up, in terms of who takes care of certain things in your household…I think that plays a very big role" B-M1.* The other line manager expanded on this view by expressing that the roles men fulfilled in their own homes either made them supportive of women's career progression, or maintained a more traditional mind-set based on gendered-family roles. This was noted in the following statement:

> *"I think it depends on the individual… We still have the conservative view, if I can put it that way, that children are a women's responsibility. But not all of them, I mean I have EXCO members that I work with that are extremely pro-family and putting family first. And I think it is actually something that is changing; it is definitely changing, and I think it is also changing because in most families now the man and the woman work – they have to work. But it is a shared responsibility." B-M2.*

Raising awareness around how value-judgements potentially affected women's career progression was vitally important in the organisation. The HR Executive saw it transpiring by addressing this directly with people as it occurred, and through the women who were on the executive coaching programme in the organisation, where they provided feedback to top management about women's experiences regarding career decisions.

> *"Also that particular woman who is going through coaching on this program is giving the executive that direct feedback to tell him she knows her career has been managed. And while she is lucky that she's gone through the ranks, she is aware that these are some of the conversations she has had with senior male executives over the years. And that is their own value-judgements that are at play, because you find that their own wives might not be working, they might be at home, etc – especially the more senior you get" B-HR1.*

The male line manager provided insight in to how value-judgements impacted on the concerns women have, and how their careers were potentially managed on their behalf. His perspective was that time away from actively working negatively impacted women's career progression and promotional opportunities. The following statement expresses his insight:

> *"In all honesty, I think women can be overlooked for certain positions etc., based on the fact that they… and I am going to use the word 'risk' – the risk that they could be ongoing on maternity leave…you will never worry about that for males. So, on an individual basis it is seen as wrong, from a business point of view maybe it is not wrong. I don't know." B-M1.*

Linked to this was the impact on the annual pay increases as a result of going on maternity leave. It was inferred that the women were slightly behind their colleagues' increases. This was emerged in

the line manager's discussion with one of the woman in his team who was very concerned about the performance rating she was going to receive - a 'maternity rating' was going to be applied to her annual performance appraisal, which inadvertently influenced the increase and bonus she was going to receive.

The line manager confided that there's been times when he's made decisions about the projects assigned to women – and while his intentions were to be thoughtful of the working-mother's situation, it was based purely on his perception. He went on to express that there was an element of the traditional societal roles that women and men fulfil, which came to play when work projects were assigned in the team. As the function of his team was client-facing, it required frequent travelling to client meetings, including out-of-city travel and this is when more consideration for mothers occurred. As an example, he stated,

> *"I can't send Woman X to Mpumalanga because for one, it is a very long drive and she is a female and the meeting will end there at 4.30pm. Okay, so who is going to pick up the kids, who is going to…? So I think there are a lot of assumptions sometimes that are placed, whereas the reality is I think working-mothers have taken a lot of that into consideration. So if I am going to Mpumalanga I will make a plan for someone… you don't need to worry about. They are actually non-issues" B-M1.*

The line manager went on to express that the assumption was that women had so much to care-take, that they may not be able to cope with new work projects or opportunities. Yet he admitted that he never questioned those assumptions. He did however reflect in the interview that a mind-shift change was needed in the organisation so that people's perceptions of what roles women can handle, are challenged.

Yet another woman expressed a change in her priorities since becoming a mother. While still wanting a fulfilling career, it was no longer a driving desire for her to climb the corporate ladder due to the pressures associated with being an executive. Instead, having the flexibility to balance family commitments while working was more important. In particular, not having to make trade-offs when it related to her children was a need, as noted in the following statement:

> *"So when my son is doing sports, like now I will juggle it, so I will go stay for the last half hour or the last hour. It's a compromise, whereas I want to spend the whole day… I want the freedom of that" B-W3.*

To this end, she revealed that the groundwork was underway towards her next career stream, at which point she intended leaving the organisation – this was set to happen in the next five years.

The line manager indicated that when the multiple roles which women must manage come in to constant conflict, mothers seriously consider exiting the work-role. She expressed that this was the time when support for the mother was particularly crucial for them to psychologically make sense of the transition that they're experiencing. This was further echoed by the HR Executive who cited examples of women in senior leadership positions in the organisation, who expressed a need for support to enable them to manage the transition into an executive role, while maintaining a home balance.

(i) Intention to remain with the company

Factors influencing retention included conducting purposeful work and remuneration - which included additional skills or challenges, better career prospects, enabling flexibility in the organisation's culture, and feeling empowered to make decisions in one's area of responsibility.

Two of the four women intended on staying with the organisation in the next 5 years. For one woman who recently moved in to a management role, she was keen on further developing her skill. She also felt a values-match with the company around the family-like atmosphere and teamwork in her division. For another woman who also changed roles, the strategic component increased which has allowed her operate on a higher level. This exposure and additional skill set was needed to take on a larger role in the future – she was contemplating heading up a business area.

Two women expressed an intention to leave the organisation, both women were looking to change career streams, yet for different reasons. Having been with the company for over a decade, the one woman wanted a new challenge and was studying an MBA to enable this career transition. She felt that it could not occur within the organisation and people only knew her for operating in a specific field of work, namely projects. For the other woman, she no longer felt that she was adding value in her role and there was a lack of appreciation for her efforts. She seriously questioned whether she wanted to continue working in this manner and decided to prepare the groundwork towards another career that would allow her to fulfil her purpose, and also enable the flexibility she desired.

Both women who had intentions of leaving the organisation in the next 5 years were senior managers in areas deemed as having scarce skills. To this end, the HR Executive noted that especially in these types of roles, a greater level of adaptability and flexibility was required, or the organisation ran the risk of losing professional talent. This was noted in the following comment:

> *"One of the things that would be an area of concern especially in your scarce skills environment where women do off-ramp because they see there is no other choice. And we have in the past lost a lot of good women because they just didn't see that they could be here in that kind of role with no flexibility for that period of time. But when we say we have got highly*

scarce skills roles and we need those women here, you have got try and be more adaptable and try and ensure that we retain them" B-HR1

(j) Engagement and disengagement

The women spoke of when they felt most engaged at work, and when there was a sense of disengagement after returning from maternity leave. The researcher noted that three women regarded themselves as engaged while one felt disengaged.

In terms of feeling engaged at work, the woman spoke about being involved in work that was stimulating and interesting as a primary factor. One woman felt most engaged when she could see that her efforts were making a difference, and she was being appreciated for it. For another woman, learning a new role enthused her and allowed her to play to her strengths,

"… so new stakeholders, new ways of doing things, I was responsible for something that I hadn't looked after before. So it was just interesting in setting up, putting in structure to achieve what I needed to achieve. So it played in well with what I'm good at doing" B-W4.

Feeling disengaged or being despondent occurred when the women sensed they were not adding value in their roles. For two of the women, a divisional restructure resulted in significant frustration - one woman felt disempowered to sort out the issues in her department, and another felt frustrated at the lack of cooperation and being dependent on others' inputs which impacted on her standard of delivery. Undertaking work that was no longer challenging was cited as another reason for feeling disengaged, along with taking on a number of additional tasks without it being rewarded or recognised. The misalignment between remuneration and effort was a cause for concern as one woman compared her efforts to that of her colleagues, and noted that additional expectations were placed on her, yet without the added recognition.

From a personal perspective, the women most noticed being disengaged at work when their children were ill and they could not take time off to care for them personally, as was described by one mother:

"the worst things go through my mind, and that obviously has an impact on my deliverables - I struggle to concentrate, my mind is not here and I don't give my all to what I am supposed to be doing" B-W2

Table 10 compares the engaged and disengaged women against their stated intention to remain with the company.

Table 10: Comparison of engagement and disengagement against Intention to stay with the Company

Engaged	Disengaged	Intention to stay with the org. in next 5 yrs
3		2 Yes; 1 No
	1	No

(k) Work-Life Balance

The need for balance between work and home commitments was a resounding theme in the narratives, with both the women and managers expressing that they ultimately strived for this.

Some women in senior leadership positions in the organisation already approached the central coaching department expressing a need for managing transitions in order to maintain a better work and home balance. The HR Executive recounted some of those requests:

"I am grappling with this new role, I don't know how… I have four kids at home, I have a husband, I really want to excel at this, I am ambitious enough to really go with it, but this particular role, how do I transition into it and still maintain that?' So I am definitely getting that, from a senior management perspective" B-HR2.

The sub-topics which emerged from the discussion have been grouped in to two categories: (i) Factors influencing home and work balance which incorporated work facilities, types of work roles, role models, valuing family time, and shared parenting and home-role responsibilities; and (ii) Flexibility and FWP.

(i) Factors influencing home and work balance

- Work facilities

Aspects which were cited as promoting a healthier work and home balance included having crèches and gym access at or very close to work. Some of the respondents expressed that having a gym at work would certainly have promoted a healthier lifestyle for them – it would save them time and allow them to incorporate exercise more easily in to their day. They linked this to caring for themselves, which then enabled a healthier WLB. When the respondents were asked as to what made for a supportive organisation, they all commented that enabling more on-site crèches as a recommendation.

The crèches were located at selected head office sites with other sites having closed down over the years. For the two mothers whose babies went to the crèche at head office, they found it extremely convenient and time-efficient. Being so close in case the child took ill added to their peace of mind,

and it also enabled the one mother to continue with breastfeeding for a further two months. However, while the company recently built energy efficient buildings, three respondents commented that there was a seemingly lack of focus placed on opening on-site crèches in these buildings, which would support working-mothers. The on-site crèches were independently run, and the organisation cited it as a challenge to offer it at other main campus sites across the country. As it was not subsidised by the company, staff affordability was also a consideration. With that said, it was still on the organisation's radar to conduct a feasibility study on opening more on-site crèches.

- Certain work roles did not lend themselves to a balanced home and work life

The ability to maintain a healthy work and home balance also depended on the types of roles which women worked in.

For two of the mothers, the first quarter of the year marked an extremely busy period in their work roles. This often led to working longer hours (up to 13 hours) without flexibility or an option to take a day's leave. The lack of home balance during this period led to feelings of guilt when it came to the time spent away from family.

A possible factor for the low representation of females at senior management levels in certain divisions of the organisation were noted around functional roles versus front-line roles with Profit and Loss implications. Certain types of roles did not lend itself to high degrees of flexibility, and this influenced women's decisions about entering those fields. The HR Executive recounted a discussion with the Head of Markets who expressed that the Trading desk, as an example was highly inflexible and many women chose not to enter this career stream. While the organisation had sufficient female representation in functional roles such as Risk, HR, IT and Marketing, they did however struggle to maintain their talent pipeline with Profit and Loss related roles. Generally, those roles required considerable after-hours and weekend travel to network with clients, and were known to be managed against driving-performance targets which meant even higher pressure surrounding it. The HR Executive stated, "*There is no reason a woman can't do those jobs but it does infringe on your family and personal time" B-HR1*.

Women making their own career choices may even mean that they choose not to take on roles which are known to lack flexibility and balance, and that too should be supported. The HR Executive noted that when the structure of certain roles inhibited the retention of female talent, it was then the organisation's responsibility to ensure sufficient female representation in other senior roles, which do provide for the women's needs. She further indicated that in as much as organisational leadership was shifting their thinking, a transformation of the client base was also needed. She considered the spouses of the women and questioned their level of comfort with the role demands in its present state.

To this end, she suggested sensitising clients – both internal to the company and externally about enabling a better home and work balance.

- Role models

Given that a patriarchal model presently existed in the organisation, the respondents deliberated that more women were needed in senior leadership positions, role-modelling a different way of being.

The HR Talent Executive made reference to a book she was reading by Ariana Huffington, from the Huffington Post which has shifted her thinking about women in leadership. The executive spoke thoughtfully about women standing up for their need to have a more balanced life and the male definition of success. She noted that the reason why women were not as successful in the top corporate tiers was because of success being defined by men, which women did not necessarily resonate with. She made reference to the early morning and late evening meetings, the networking that occurred in the evenings or over weekends and pushing one's self until burnout, just to live up to the patriarchal meaning of success. Women needed to redefine what success meant and role model a new way of being.

In effect, the women on the executive programme in the organisation were acting as role models for other women in the organisation, and were receiving coaching part of the programme. When considering role models for female talent, the HR Executive noted an opportunity for the mentoring of women in the organisation. This too required a culture shift as she observed that women were not always supportive of each other's success, whereas men were more receptive to mentoring fellow males around career progression.

- Valuing family time

As a result of family being a core value for the mothers, they utilised different strategies to manage a more balanced home life, where possible. The one mother opted not to utilise the FWP option of working from home in the mornings (which would have allowed her to come in later to the office), as she did not want to impact her family time. She therefore opted to maintain her routine of starting and leaving earlier. Another mother drew on her skill of planning in order to keep work commitments within the core working hours, thereby minimising the impact on family time. As these women were managers as well, they expressed that there were times when they had to work from home in the evenings; however, they ensured that it was done later at night after the children had gone to bed.

- Shared parenting and home-role responsibilities

The HR Executive reflected that the traditional mind-set was slowly shifting in SA with more men taking on shared parenting roles. The women provided examples of when their husbands handled the morning school drop-offs, and then helped with bath-time or homework while the mothers handled other home responsibilities. The gendered home-role of shopping, cleaning and cooking predominately lay with the women.

During a recent project with the company, the executive interacted with a number of men from Europe and the Netherland and noted that shared parenting and home responsibilities were the norm in their homelands. As such, the men worked as flexibly as the women.

(l) Flexibility and flexible work practices (FWP):

Being able to work flexibly and FWP surfaced as the strongest topic upon returning to work. There were advantages and disadvantages cited as to how it was understood and utilised, with a great deal relying on the line managers' interpretation of it and the culture which emerged in the specific departments.

The organisation had a clearly defined FWP policy which was easily accessible by all employees via the company's internal website. According to policy, it was designed to improve the attraction and retention of talent, reduce environmental impact through decreased travelling, reduce stress and an opportunity for employees to improve the balance between their work and personal commitments. This was stated as leading to increased engagement levels, improved productivity and job satisfaction. FWP was also indicated as being role-dependent and granted at the discretion of the line manager.

To utilise any of the options, the employee had a discussion with his/her line manager and completed an application form in order to formally apply via the HR-FWP system. At the time of the research, the organisation was transitioning over to a new HR management system which no longer catered for the online logging of requests. Whether or not the forms were still required for completion was uncertain. However, more line manager-employee engagement and conversation around FWP were being encouraged.

Flexitime (shifting the start and finish times in the day) was cited as the most commonly used option in the company. The part-time option (reducing the number of hours worked per week with pay allocated accordingly) was not used by any of the mothers, however the HR Executive voiced support towards it as she utilised this years ago when she had her babies. The most controversial option was telecommuting (working remotely from home or at another site on certain days). No one in the study made use of the other two FWP options offered in the company, namely the compressed

work-week (working the same number of hours a week in a shorter period of time) or Home-work scheme options (work permanently from a home office or mobile office).

The HR Executive noted a shift in the usage of FWP in the organisation. Whereas previously, mothers predominantly utilised it due to childcare needs, men were now using FWP just as much. However, there was still a common perception that mothers were the primary users of FWP. The HR Executive was clarifying these misconceptions through conversations with people. At last count, the HR Executive noted that approximately 2000 employees were registered on the system to utilise one of the FWP options. However, observations indicated that considerably more people were utilising it, which has made HR wonder why it was not formally logged on the system.

One mother indicated that she was using FWP even before it became formalised - it was the practice before it became a policy. However, completing a form meant that she had to formally select only one of the options but this was not always the option she wanted to use. For example, on a specific day, she wanted to use the reduced-hours option and make up the time in the week/month, and on another day work from home (telecommute). Another woman commented on the practice in her previous department where the manager had a controlling leadership style – he would not allow his staff to log their requests on the system, but preferred to be asked each time they wished to utilise a FWP option, and he would then grant permission.

The women commented that while there were a host of FWP options in the company, the lack of flexibility within the policy and the way it was over-complicated with the rules and conditions attached to it, essentially made it rigid. To counter the rigidness, informal rules emerged – for example two women spoke of the unspoken rule that 9am to 3pm as being the core business hours, and as such staff in those departments ensured that they were in the office during the core times and made up the additional time at home or by forfeiting their lunch hour. Differing practices were noted where some departments enabled the usage of FWP (telecommuting in particular) through supplying an internet modem to connect remotely, whereas others expected the staff to supply their own.

The line manager recommended reviving FWP in the organisation as she saw it as a way to retain talent. In her opinion, the organisation was behind when comparing it with what the best companies in the world were doing. She expressed that if the organisation wanted to proactively retain its talent, then a deeper understanding of embedding FWP in to the culture of the organisation was required.

This was echoed by one of the mothers who spoke from her experience of not having that flexibility prior to becoming a manager,

> *“I think the mere fact that I know what it felt like not to have it, and you know what, times are changing and everyone is looking for flexible work practices. And I think that if you can do that,*

you can keep your staff happy and retain them. Because people are leaving for those reasons: it could be flexibility, it could be for WLB which they feel they are not getting at this point B-W2.

The line manager promptly stated that people often confuse flexibility with having a work and home balance, however he pointed out that it differed,

"I mean people would ask for flexibility and then would assume that they have WLB. No, it doesn't necessarily mean that" B-M2.

As telecommuting was the most controversial of the options under FWP, it will be expanded on further.

Telecommuting - Three mothers reflected that they were a lot more focused, productive, and probably worked even more hours on those days when they were at home or at an office site closer to home. There were usually very little distractions and they saved considerable time due to avoiding traffic.

The thinking amongst people that one had to always be physically visible to the team (face-time), added to the argument against telecommuting. One mother spoke about her senior management's lack of support for this option which led to a culture of valuing face-time, as noted in the following statement:

"Very vague. It is very vague and I know that my manager's manager doesn't agree with it - whether it is a policy or not. And also you get tarnished…So you don't want to create that perception of you; that person might be working harder than anyone else, but it is not the same thing. So visibility is important in our space… we are not really direct about it" B-W3.

The line manager confided that even he did not fully understand telecommuting which was reflected in his statement,

"So, the work-from-home thing, shoo, that is probably the biggest debate on the floor. And I suppose the reality of this, when people say 'work at home', I personally as a manager, don't think we have actually sat down and fully understood what exactly that means" B-M1.

Even though he credited HR for being available to assist with training and providing support to comprehend the policy, his interpretation was that this was a grey area for all in the organisation. Consequently, along with a few of his colleagues, they decided to fully support the use of the flexitime option, however placed further conditions around the telecommuting option – it was not allowed on the day before or after a weekend or public holiday. He was transparent with his team and admitted that he "did not have a scientific explanation" for his decision. However, given that he's seen it misused, he wanted to "remove the temptation" (B-M1) from the team. Another line manager also

placed certain conditions for using the telecommuting option – the person had to have their cell phone available at all times and be connected to the network so that the manager and team could see that the person was available. However, as the one woman stated, “I could be online but I could be doing squat” B-W1. Therefore, being visible did not guarantee productivity. She did however express that having an open discussion would go a long way in fostering trust.

This view was supported by one mother who was also a line manager - she felt that it didn’t have to be that way especially if the team had mature thinking, trust was fostered, and there were clearly agreed outcomes for all. In this way, the manager and team were empowered to utilise FWP without the negative stigma.

To support a shift in thinking around telecommuting, the HR Executive and her team at head office were role-modelling behaviours by pioneering how the telecommuting practice could work. The following statement reflected this view,

> *“So we are definitely use that working in a Group HR space because we need to pioneer it and the rest of the organisation can feel it. A lot of people feel that it's empty chairs out there, but that is just the way it is. So we change our whole office space to bring that in. And that suits a lot of people because I can work around my personal life because I'm measured on my own outcomes and I can work around it” B-HR2*

Aspects which supported and those that hindered the effective use of working flexibly were discussed by the respondents.

(m) Factors which hindered / disempowered FWP

One mother referred to using FWP as “a loaded gun” in that she was expected to handle considerably more functions in her role as a result of having the benefit of flexibility, as noted in her comment:

> *“so you would almost sometimes just agree with certain things because if you disagree you might get the privilege of having flexibility taken away” B-W1*

She linked it with both guilt, “my need is not to feel like I owe the company anything more than what I have signed up for, due to the fact that I have FWP. It would be nice not to be made to feel guilty”; and control, *“when there is an unhappiness about something and you raise it, ‘but just remember you are getting this’. And I am like, but it is not about ‘this’ you know?” B-W1*.

Boundaries were blurred when another woman’s manager expected her to log on from home to assist with work, even though she was booked off ill for the week. She felt that a culture was created where this was seen as acceptable. One woman felt disempowered by her manager to offer the non-

management staff more flexibility – this led to feelings of guilt as she could see how some of the parents in her team would benefit from this. This was further echoed by another woman who felt that there was a need for equality in the FWP across the levels in the organisation, as she too felt disempowered to offer this option to her staff.

(n) Factors which supported / empowered FWP:

The most important factor was cited as the line manager's interpretation of the policy and supporting the utilisation of it. When the line manager was in support of utilising FWP, it was easier for staff to make use of it as and when they needed it. Women B-W4 had this positive experience - having known her line manager for many years and enjoying a good, trust-based working relationship, enabled her to utilise FWP the way she needed to. It was based on reciprocity - if she needed to leave early, she did so and likewise she would complete work at home if it was a necessity. She made the link to the company being a supportive organisation as it allowed her the flexibility she needed to enable a balanced family life. Another mother made the link between being regarded as talent, and therefore felt that the organisation's offering of FWP was a fair exchange for her good performance and effort. Having the resources such as being provided with an internet modem and data to enable working remotely at times was mentioned as a positive factor, especially for the positions that the professional women held which at times, required after-hours work.

A culture of flexibility was dependent on leadership's support of it, which the line manager felt that the organisation could do more work around. He was optimistic that it could be done and linked allowing greater flexibility with the building of a trust relationship.

The building of trust and measuring the outputs, rather than face-time, were expressed as enablers to working flexibly. The woman felt that having proved themselves at work, they had earned the trust of their managers and could therefore utilise FWP. The line managers similarly linked allowing greater flexibility closely with having a trusting working relationship. The role of the line manager in fostering an environment of trust emerged – the women saw it as the manager's role to promote constructive conversation in the team so that there was transparency about FWP usage, which would reduce any perception of favouritism and distrust. In addition, trust was deemed as reciprocal, and the team observed how their line managers were role-modelling the usage of FWP themselves.

Distrust was most apparent when the telecommuting option was discussed – it was attributed to a lack in transparent and candid communication around how to measure work outcomes. The respondents noted that specific discussions around measuring the work output was rarely conducted when utilising FWP options – there was no contracting as to how it would be measured therefore there was subsequently very little basis for a discussion.

One mother though remarked that her line manager was very flexible and as long as the work was completed without comebacks, the team could work in the office or at home. The team were trusted to manage their work and outputs. As such, the mother honoured this trust and consistently delivered, especially so when she was working from home.

The line manager was candid in expressing that he was not sure how to measure the work done in his space, especially when staff used the telecommuting option. There was a greater level of comfort when his staff were in the office. The other line manager felt that the perception of 'face-time' needed to shift in the organisation and as such, measuring the individual's work output and not the time spent in the office was more valuable, and had to be role modelled by the leader.

Role-modelling behaviours desired in the organisation was expressed by the line managers as needing to start at the top leadership level, as the culture of flexibility was dependent on the leadership's support of it. The respondents concurred that if line managers were better supported / guided to understand the full spectrum of FWP, they would feel more comfortable to utilise it and offer it to their staff. In addition, one mother expressed that managers were possibly afraid of how to manage the usage of FWP and would require support around having those discussions with their staff.

The HR Executive conveyed that through the culture shift that the organisation was undergoing, they were aiming to enable more agile thinking in the line managers - to empower them to think through scenarios and apply their own judgement to individual situations while considering the impact to the team. The aim was to steer line managers away from their over-reliance on referring to a formal policy before making decisions.

4.2.4.6 Case B Summary

The case of Company B described the experiences of four professional women/mothers, as they entered maternity leave, during the leave and their return to work experience. The role of two line managers and their experience of the maternity transition period was also incorporated, as was the organisational perspective, obtained through the HR representatives. The findings were further expanded upon through analysing the company's reports, policies and supporting documentation. This made for a holistic view of the maternity transition experience within Company B.

Support for female talent to navigate role-conflicts and the related stress that came with it appeared lacking in the organisation, as did female representation at senior and executive management levels. Patriarchal role-modelling existed and there was a need for more senior female leaders, particularly working-mothers role as role models for other women in the organisation.

The opportunity was that the company had an in-house coaching offering which could be leveraged to assist with transition, and that an executive coaching programme offered some senior women the opportunity to raise awareness of women's concerns at the executive level.

Consideration and support for line managers during the maternity transition period emerged as a need - this took on the form of sensitising managers to the upcoming changes and the need to discuss certain aspects, namely actively planning for the departure and return of the women, managing the handover process, considering the impact to both the women and the manager with the change in the women's role-identity, and re-engaging the women around their career progression. The line managers interviewed naturally adopted a coaching style in their interactions with their staff. The role of experiential learning during the transition period was a strategy used to cope, and informed decision-making. The line managers and the women discussed their experiences which included the context of the situation at the time of the change, how their personal attributes helped them cope, the support systems which they relied on and the strategies they used to manage the transition period. The creation of new opportunities for the women's team in terms of skills growth was a positive aspect of the transition. Gaining a deeper understanding of working flexibly was a need for managers, and an area they cited as requiring support in.

While the organisation utilised FWP, it had not been embedded in to the culture of the organisation and felt rigid. Enabling a healthy home and work balance was critical for the respondents. Within this, being able to work flexibly was a strong need. A theme of linking flexibility to a trust relationship emerged, and there was a need to strengthen trust through enabling open conversations and measuring outputs, and not face-time. This was especially the case when the telecommuting option (working remotely) was raised.

Career progression was important for the women, and more so engaging in work that was challenging, purposeful and which allowed them the flexibility to also fulfil their mother-identity roles. It was interesting to note that the women around 40 years of age were planning second career stream, which would most likely allow them greater flexibility for the different stages of their children's lives.

The interviews became a reflective space for the respondents with each person thanking the researcher for the confidential space to share their experience. They found that speaking about the subject and their experience made them think about the maternity experience and the challenges of the women – something which one did not usually makes the time for. The interview space was likened to the valuable space of coaching, as it created the safe space for sharing.

5. CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Chapter 5 comprises the cross-case analysis and examines the themes which emerged from the two within-case analyses in Chapter 4, and is positioned in relation to the literature that was presented in Chapter 2.

The themes therefore aim at answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period?

RQ2: What is the role of the line manager during the transition period?

RQ3: How does organisational culture influence the professional working-mother?

RQ4: How does maternity transition coaching act as a support mechanism?

5.1 Theme 1: Maternity transition is a process over time which requires support at specific touch-point

5.1.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The maternity transition period extended beyond the actual maternity leave - it started months before during the pregnancy phase, and extended up to 2 years after returning to work. Anderson et al. (2011) agreed with Bridges and Mitchell (2000) in that transitions go beyond an event (point in time) – it must be regarded as a process that occurs over time. The maternity transition period can best be described in accordance with the phases in Bridges transition model namely endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridges, 2003).

In the study, while the actual change (event) occurred with the birth of the baby, the transition to motherhood already started occurring in the months leading up to the birth, and further intensified going in to maternity leave. In Case A, the change in role-identity was a key consideration for the first-time mothers as they were highly attached to their worker-identities. Considering Bridges (2001) advice, it was important for the women to understand what was ending (e.g. the pure worker-identity), before they could embrace what was to come (e.g. the working-mother identity). This contrasted with the experience of the one women in Case A who had not received the pre-MTC session, and where there was a lack of support from the line manager. Her narrative expressed additional strain during this period, including the subtle exclusion from projects in the last trimester of the pregnancy. This was comparable to the experience of some of the women in Millward (2006) study. Similarly, the first-time mother in Case B had not expressed her challenges and concerns to anyone for nearly two years, and this eventually impacted on her health. To this end, Bridges and Bridges (2017) asserts that omitting the phase of exploring what's 'ending', could result in the transition taking much longer.

In Case A, the arrival of the woman's second baby appeared to spur on the need to be involved in more altruistic work and she seriously considered alternate options during her maternity leave. This phase can be likened to the 'neutral' zone where there is a sense of uncertainty, and where a new identity is being crafted (Bridges & Bridges, 2017). Upon returning to work, she had a MTC session and this helped her make sense of her thoughts and emotions on the matter. In Case B, where there was a large age gap between the woman's two older children and the last-born, a revaluation of life and work purpose occurred, prompting the woman to consider her options external to the organisation. As noted by Bussell (2008), the 'danger period' of losing valuable female talent was therefore not immediately post-maternity leave, but rather later, and could even be after the second or third child.

The second-time mother/s in both cases did not appear challenged during their maternity leave. However, their challenge emerged in the first few months after returning to work.

The first-time mothers expressed the greatest challenge during the maternity leave period. It was a time of adjustment to the mother-role, both physically and in terms of changing relationships with one's partner.

Across cases, the first few months back from maternity leave were the most stressful. However, moving beyond that, there was an active focus on career management in Case A. This could be seen with two of the women who were promoted in to senior roles within 6 months of returning to work, and with the line manager who did the same for the woman in his team. This period could be likened to the 'new beginnings' phase where the woman's new identity, that of the professional working-mother, is embraced with a renewed focus on one's career (Bridges, 2003). Proactive career management of returning mothers was less evident in Case B; however, the women were seeking their own opportunities for growth and development.

It is therefore noted that when guidance and support were received at critical points, this assisted with relieving anxiety and enhanced the women's resilience and focus. Therefore, workplace support must be continuous, and can take different forms such as coaching, mentoring, support groups and WLB initiatives. The transition period did not merely end with the women returning to work after maternity leave, but rather it was an evolving one (Bussell, 2008; Richards, 2013).

5.1.2 Conclusion

This study extends the existing literature around the maternity transition period. In particular, it serves to demonstrate that the maternity transition occurs over a period of time. The implication for organisations, and managers in particular is to be purposeful in engaging and supporting the women at specific touch-points throughout the maternity transition period - which included the pregnancy

phase, during maternity leave, the immediate months after returning from maternity leave and further down the line. When purposeful support and engagement was present, this led to a greater intention to remain with the company and refocus on one's career. Workplace support should also consider the differing needs of first-time and second-time mothers as their transition and coping resources differ. Further, the role of MTC as a support tool was a key support mechanism during the maternity transition period, although sessions around the 24-month mark were yet to occur with the study group.

5.2 Theme 2 – Understanding 'Self' is critical to the maternity transition process

5.2.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

Personal characteristics (individual and demographic), and psychological resources influence how people perceive a transitional period (Anderson et al., 2011). The psychological resources component bears the most relevance to this theme's discussion and includes: ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, commitment and values, as well as spirituality and resilience (Anderson et al., 2011). Understanding the level at which people think and operate, can assist coaches to design appropriate interventions (Anderson et al., 2011). To depict how the "Self" played out in this study, exemplars across the two cases were selected (based on the women's narratives only).

- Ego development - the frame of reference which people use to approach the transition (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976):

  A-W1 typified what the literature refers to as autonomous ego development (Anderson et al., 2011) referring to individuals who are better able to handle ambiguity. In her narrative, A-W1 spoke of the unconventional life that she led, growing up as the 'mother' to her siblings, and then opting to take a downgrade in position so that she could travel and work abroad – she was confident in her abilities, quite comfortable in handling her own destiny and a champion for women's rights in the organisation. In her personal life, once again an unconventional approach was taken where she was the sole bread winner and her husband handled home matters for their five children.

  A-W4 could fall within the conscientious ego development in that her narrative spoke of a high achiever in terms of valuing skills and competence. She had an impressive career progression, starting with topping her board exams, and now at 30 years, made senior manager.

- Outlook - included aspects such optimism (Seligman, 2002, 2011) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1995)

  B-W4's narrative displayed these characteristics in that she approached situations with an optimistic outlook and showed little sign of strain, even though she was pursuing a MBA degree,

managing a department through a challenging time, parenting two small children and still managing to run a household. While also crediting her husband for being a supportive partner, she commented that her strategy was to plan, set goals and then gets on with things.

- Spirituality and resilience (Anderson et al., 2011)

This was best typified by B-W2 who experienced immense family turmoil during her pregnancy – her husband left his job to take care of his ailing mother, who subsequently passed away. The woman bore most the financial responsibilities, and still emotionally supported her husband through his struggles. She had firm belief in her faith and knew that they would get through those difficult times, which they did.

- Commitment and values (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990)

Woman A-W2's narrative spoke of her value system of family, in particular being a mother. It was, for a time a source of internal conflict for her as she also valued achievement and work. The family value emerged most strong and this influenced her decision to request a reduced working-hours portfolio so that she could spend a few more hours with her baby each day. This value also helped her stay strong to her commitment to leave the office by a certain time, and not work over the weekend so that her family received her undivided attention. Her statement aptly summed up her reflection, ""why would I become a mom if I am not a mom?"

In addition to the components of the 'Self' framework, the women also returned to work with certain gifts. Table 11 below summarises those gifts. These gifts add to the women's concept of self and an increased awareness of this can be explored during coaching to determine how to leverage off them.

Table 11: Summarised Gifts of the return-to-work mother

Description	Case A	Case B
Being more appreciative and mindful about what one is doing; gaining an appreciation for everyday life again	√	√
Greater sense of self and more self-confident	√	
Noted an improvement in their communication styles		√
Enhanced Perspective: Time (more efficient with time)	√	√
Enhanced Perspective: Priorities – vigilant about value-adding activities	√	
Enhanced Perspective: A new lens – new way of seeing relationships; more patient and understanding	√	√

5.2.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports existing theory on the relevance of understanding the "Self" when working with people in transitions. It also extends the research by considering the unique gifts working-mothers bring back to the workplace. This is important to consider as these gifts make for a more productive, focused, influential, relational and efficient employee. Tapping in to these qualities in coaching can assist the women in raising one's confidence and stance.

5.3 Theme 3 - A change in role-identity can result in guilt

5.3.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The combining of the mother-identity and the worker-identity were at times a source of internal conflict for the women. This led to the constant managing of feelings of guilt. Across both cases A and B, the women interviewed experienced feelings of guilt relating to their working-mother identity. Based on the coding conducted in Atlas.ti, both cases reflected an equal number of 20 quotations relating to guilt which indicated that guilt was a natural occurrence during the maternity transition. The primary reasons underpinning the guilt experienced are reflected in Figure 15 below.

The quotations related to guilt reflected links to increased stress levels and concerns around self-perceptions. In this regard, Case B reflected stress levels 1.5 times higher than Case A, and similarly issues around self-perceptions were noted 2.5 times higher in Case B than in Case A. It could be inferred that while guilt was common across both cases, the women in Case A were better primed to manage it because of MTC.

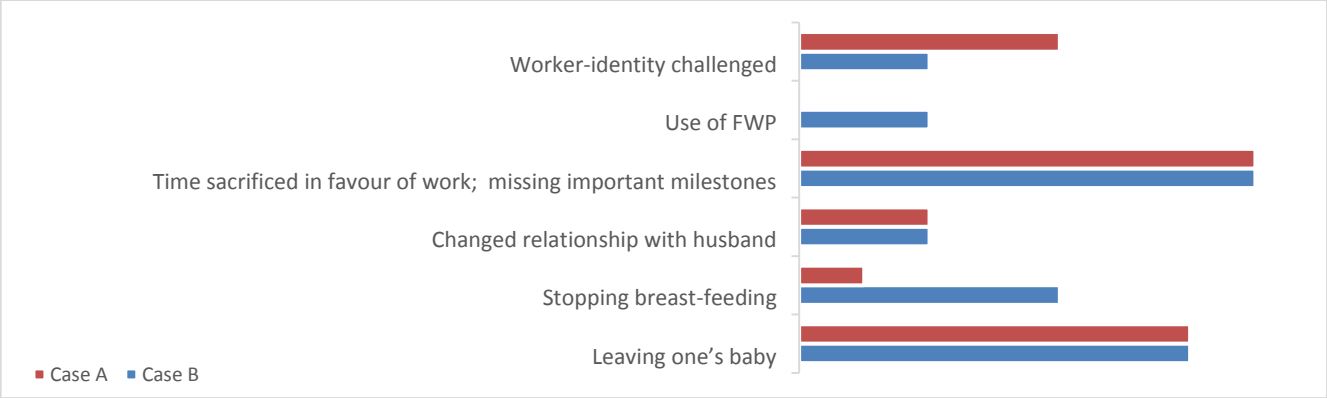


Figure 15: Primary reasons relating to Guilt across cases

For the women in Case A, having the support and safe space of the coaching sessions assisted them with making sense of the guilt they felt in a shorter space of time, and they cultivated strategies to manage it quicker than the women in Case B. This was noted where both women A-W4 and B-W2 wanted to take care of all matters relating to their baby's care and meeting the household needs

without support, and it resulted in a crisis point for them. Likewise, literature provides a cautionary note around the impact of continuous levels of role-conflict in working-mothers leading to burnout, exhaustion, compromised psychological well-being and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment (Gilbert et al., 1981; Grady & McCarthy, 2008). Whereas it took two years for woman B-W2 to speak about her needs and seek support (which incidentally only occurred as a result of her taking ill due to the self-imposed pressure), woman A-W4 was supported through MTC two months after returning from maternity leave. She worked through the emotional aspects, relationship challenges with her husband and the thinking behind her behaviour, coupled with practical strategies such as online shopping. Having strategies in place to help her manage the guilt aspects then allowed the woman to take on a promoted role in to senior management a month later. This aligns with Brockbank (2006) view of the benefit of reflective dialogue.

Guilt emerged quite intensely for one mother in Case B, and this linked to sacrifices she made in favour of her worker-identity and at the expense of time with her family, “I have lost time with my children and I have literally made a pact to say that ‘I will focus on that’” B-W1. As a result, she placed herself on a slower career path until such time that her children are older. This was similar to another woman in Case A who was working long hours and the lengthy travelling distance meant that she arrived home when it was nearing her baby’s bedtime. She opted to take the reduced working-hours option and this strategy allowed her to capture back 2 hours of daylight time with her baby. Coaching assisted her with managing her boundaries once the decision was made. Another woman in Case A decided not to attend evening work functions or trips away in the first year as she was breastfeeding and felt that her children needed her presence more. She mentally prepared herself and then her team as she knew that the guilt of leaving her babies would not serve her well. In this regard, Stelter (2009) encourages the ability to reflect in order to strengthen one’s self-identity.

Having to stop breastfeeding sooner than desired and a lack of work facilities to support lactation was a source of guilt for the mothers in Case B. The results of the study aligned with recent research conducted by Dinour and Szaro (2017). However, guilt featured to a much lesser extent in Case A as the company supported women’s need to breast feed by including a lactation room in the main office building.

Guilt relating to the use of FWP appeared more so in Case B where leaving work earlier than they had done before made two of the mothers question their commitment levels to the company and their teams – their worker-identities felt challenged. This finding is comparable to the study by Fursman and Zodgekar (2009) where a link was made between working flexibly and feeling guilty. Particularly for the women in Case A, there was a need to ‘prove’ to themselves that their worker-identity was still intact, and this resulted in working longer hours even if it was at home at night. One mother even delaying having a second child for a further 12 months so as to give her full attention to her new role.

This could be attributed to the fact the four of the five women interviewed were first-time mothers, therefore the transition from the worker-identity to a working-mother resulted in a greater shift than in Case B where only one woman was a first-time mother.

The coach noted that while it was absolutely normal for the women to feel guilty for all these reasons - *"I am being a bad mother and I am being a bad employee and I am definitely being a terribly bad wife" A-C1,* it did not serve them to stay in that space. Therefore, her role was to help the women with making sense of the guilt they felt, shift their thinking to a space of reframing it in their minds and creating helpful strategies to manage those aspects, comparable with coaching strategies noted by Elaine Cox, Bachkirova, and Clutterbuck (2014) and Rogers (2012). Coaching therefore strengthened the women's resources to cope in Case A by helping the women to confront challenges of anxiety and guilt, and perceptions of oneself. Similarly, the women in the Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010) study, shifted their focus from the feelings of guilt to the more positive aspects of their experience, and crafted a more accurate sense of what balance meant in each other lives.

5.3.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports existing theory on working-mother's guilt and extends the literature by positioning maternity coaching as a means to assist with internal conflict, and adds to the limited literature around the link between using FWP and feeling guilty. The interviews were likened to the safe space of coaching, with many of the respondents responding emotionally to this topic. The researcher supports the view of Pearlin and Schooler (1978, p. 239) who concluded that "it is not the tearing away from old roles that matters to well-being, but what is discovered in the context of the new roles". Through support and coaching, the working-mother can make sense of the changed identity and start crafting strategies to support the shift.

5.4 Theme 4 – Professional working-mothers desire WLB

5.4.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The respondents across both cases expressed that they ultimately desired a WLB, and having a satisfying career. Linked to WLB, the women expressed factors such as being able to work flexibly, managing time and commitments, balancing multiple role, feeling empowered / disempowered to make decisions, value-judgements, managing work boundaries, and focusing on caring for themselves.

The largest enabler of WLB is the ability to work flexibly and warrants its own discussion, as reflected in Theme 5.

In Case A, the “50-plussers” were seen as contributing to the lack of WLB similar to Case B where value-judgements influenced how women’s careers were being managed with work capability being linked to their mother-role identity. This is comparable to the findings of Drew and Murtagh (2005). However, a shift in the dynamics of the workforce was occurring in Case A with a newer generation of directors being ushered in and more shared parenting responsibilities due to dual-income households. This resulted in a need for even more balance for parents, and not just mothers (Glynn et al., 2002).

This required empowering line managers to make decisions that would support a better work and home balance. Similar to Allen (2001), it emerged through the narratives that line managers who were considerate of the women’s desire to integrate work and family commitments, actively sought ways to assist with the transition. For example, when looking at the ease-back in period, woman B-W1’s line manager recommended an ease-back-in period, as did woman A-W5’s line manager and A-M1 with the woman in his team in Case A. A successful maternity transition relied on practices which supported the re integration of the women back in to work, and one where they could envision a fruitful future for themselves in the organisation and as a working-mother. The consequence of feeling constrained by rigid policies could result in women responding then to the pull of the family (Hewlett & Luce, 2005), therefore organisations would do well to reconsider their historic rules and policies so as to attract, retain and fully utilise talent offerings (Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Gursoy et al., 2008).

Caring for oneself was another important occurrence in the narratives relating to WLB. This linked to a lack of sleep, exercising, pursuing hobbies, or setting aside reflection / “me” time. The experiences of the women were fairly consistent across cases with both groups of women citing the first year as one characterised by a lack of sleep, lower energy levels and fatigue. Sleep deprivation continued in some cases until the child was two years – entering the toddler phase. It was also now when the mother considered having their next child, which meant that this could go on for at least 4-5 years (as it did with one woman in Case B). One mother in Case A and two in Case B indicated that a lack of energy due to reduced sleep was still affecting them in the 12-24 month period after returning to work. A lack of sleep was further compounded when the women worked again at night, and saw to night-time feeds lessening the available sleep time. Wanting to manage it all led to one women in Case B becoming quite ill. This is comparable to the recommendations made by Bosch (2014) for organisations to particularly consider a nursing mother’s fatigue. It takes conscious effort for the women to refocus on themselves, something which one of the woman in Case A worked on in her MTC session.

Consciously setting boundaries was a strategy used by some of the women to aid WLB and reduce the related stress and guilt. One woman in Case A worked on this through the MTC session as she had selected a reduced working-hours portfolio. Two women across the cases shared the same

philosophy of not working over the weekends as they dedicated that time to family – it was a core value for them. For one mother in Case A, coaching helped her think through the practical ways she was going to carve out time for every family member – now the challenge was being disciplined to do the same for herself. Another woman in case B employed a night nurse for the first month after her baby was born, which was a great source of support. Yet another woman in Case B knew herself well enough to understand that her lack of energy was attributed to the lack of exercise, however felt challenged to put forward this request in her new role.

The women in Case A who received MTC were better equipped to deal with issues as they arose, and more confident in putting forward their requests to the organisation. Through coaching, the women could link their needs back to their value system, and create strategies to enable increased WLB. Likewise, McIntosh (2003) posited that coaching played a vital role in supporting individuals to restore a work and life balance. Underpinning his research was an exploration of the individual's values so that the factors causing balance or imbalance could be revealed.

5.4.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports and extends the existing literature around WLB and the maternity transition period. It highlights the need for more consideration towards the women's mental and physical energy states in the first year after returning to work, and advances that a higher degree of support is required at critical transition points. Organisations (and the representative managers) should be open to options and experimentation - knowing that what may work for one person may be a bit different for the next one. Coaching can support the women in developing strategies to increase their support systems and create the disciplines to focus on themselves as well.

5.5 Theme 5 - A culture of flexibility is core to a successful maternity transition

5.5.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

Across both cases, being able to work flexibly was noted as an important enabler to a successful maternity transition as it assisted with WLB. The organisational culture either supported or hampered working flexibly, with it often being expressed in the behaviours and attitudes of the women's immediate line manager (Clutterbuck, 2003; Drew & Murtagh, 2005; Glynn et al., 2002).

In reviewing the number of relevant quotations under the desire to work flexibly, there was a marked difference between cases, with Case B noting this aspect three times more than Case A as indicated in Figure 16.

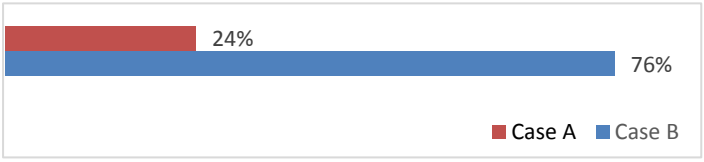


Figure 16: Comparison in the occurrence of quotations relating to wanting to work flexibly across cases

In Case A, working flexibly had been embedded in to the culture of the organisation and managers were encouraged to find workable solutions to enable the retention of their female talent. However, in Case B, while the women could access FWP, the concept of working flexibly was still dependent on the line manager's interpretation and approval of it, with practices differing from one department to another. 'Face-time' was a predominant measure of productivity, and working remotely / from home was often frowned upon if there was not a 'legitimate' reason provided. This view is supported by Lewis et al. (2007) and Clutterbuck (2003) in that the actual outcomes / what people achieve should be the focus. The rules attached to the policy felt rigid to the respondents in Case B and informal practices emerged to counter the perceived rigidness of the policy. Overall, the culture spoke to one of high control in this regard (Cameron & Quinn, 2005).

The coach saw agile working as a means to supporting WLB, and noted that it should be on the strategic agenda of every business, and not only on women's agendas,

> *"I think an organisation should be feeling compelled right now if they are wanting to move more into the 21st century…that they recognise that there is a trend, and this old thinking around counting peoples' hours…the sooner you can get your head around that and change, then the better. Because you are going to lose very good people - male or female, whether they are single, married, kids or no kids" A-C1*

Similarly, Glynn et al. (2002) makes the case for flexible working, not only for mothers but for parents given the rise in dual-income households and shared parenting responsibilities.

Case A successfully managed this shift as it was noted that working flexibly had become embedded in to their culture. Embedding flexibility in to the organisation's culture was a need expressed by the respondents in Case B and timing appeared optimal as the organisation was presently undergoing a culture shift to make it more agile. Table 12 below indicates the options which required approval from line managers when using FWP. In Case A, line manager approval was not required to utilise flexitime or remote working options, however it was a requirement in Case B. Across both cases, line manager approval was required to utilise the reduced working-hours option as this had a financial implication to the employee's remuneration, and HR needed to facilitate the administration of it.

Table 12: FWP options requiring line manager approval across cases

Requires approval from line manager to utilise…	Case A	Case B
Flexitime / Remote working options	X	√
Reduced working-hours option (e.g. 50% or 75%)	√	√

In Case A, no FWP policy could be produced when requested by the researcher, and the respondents also could not recall having seen it. Instead conversation and compromise were encouraged. This differed to Case B which had a comprehensive policy around utilising FWP, however it had become rigid and almost countered the very intentions of why it was introduced. To counter the rigidness, informal rules and practices emerged.

The enablers to working flexibly were noted as trust and integrity, strengthened through robust communication around performance outcomes. In Case B, it emerged that there was a need to strengthen the trust relationships around the perceptions of utilising FWP, particularly where working remotely was brought up. In contrast, Case A spoke about enabling open conversations to discuss performance requirements and measuring outputs, so that the reliance on 'face-time' as a measure of productivity was reduced or eliminated. This finding corresponds with research by Lewis et al. (2007) and Clutterbuck (2003). Therefore, it was noted that trust and communication were two sides of the same coin. This aligned with the findings from research conducted by Doherty and Manfredi (2006) where managers expressed distrust towards staffs' potential abuse of FWP, however underlying issues of management styles and communication were actually unearthed. Therefore for FWP to be deemed a success, it requires a partnership relationship between the manager and employee where trust and a sense of autonomy is fostered (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

5.5.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports and extends the literature around working flexibly, by drawing the link between enabling an environment of trust through communication, in particular around measuring performance outcomes. The implication for organisations is that it requires a mind-set change to move away from face-time being a measure of productivity. Engaging managers in a coaching relationship could support with the challenging of assumptions around this issue, and encourage new behaviours to support working flexibly.

5.6 Theme 6 - Professional working-mothers desire career satisfaction

5.6.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The women interviewed across both cases were noted as being 'adaptive' in that they actively worked on navigating motherhood and a satisfying career (Hakim, 2002). Figure 17 below depicts the aspects

relating to career satisfaction across cases. In Case A, four of the five women were keen on remaining within the organisation.

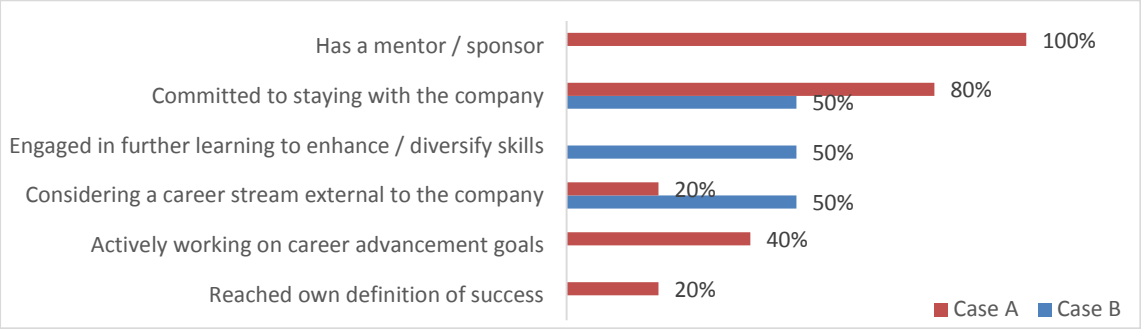


Figure 17: Percentage of women indicating aspects relating to career satisfaction

Two of the mothers in Case A confided that during their maternity leave, they were actively exploring opening mother/toddler franchises. At first glance, this could be linked with the home-centred category (Hakim, 2002), however analysis of their narratives revealed that having a purposeful and fulfilling career was still important to them – they did however need to make sense of the adjustment and desired more time and flexibility upon returning to work period. MTC helped them think through coping strategies upon returning to work which enabled them to re-engage with their careers. Two other women were actively working on their career advancement goals in the company and utilised MTC as a sounding board for this. The example of Case A also brought to light how the women were empowered to take the lead in managing their career needs. Through workplace support such as having a mentor / sponsor, and going through the maternity coaching process, the women increased their confidence and optimism about seeing a fulfilling way forward for their careers in the organisation. This finding confirmed the research outcomes of Meister and Willyerd (2010). The following statement depicted the perspective of one of the woman around workplace support being about mutual exchange:

> *"…MTC is a benefit to me and I think I would be silly not to use it, because this company is obviously saying, that they are interested in me and my transition to back work. It's not just helping you...Its helping the company as well - they're paying for it because it helps them in a long run, and for me transition back to work. Not about me being a happy mommy, to retain me. This is a service they provide – it's for their benefit and mine" A-W4*

This contrasted with Case B, where there was little indication of robust career development plans in the period following maternity leave. One mother in Case B stayed in her role for 6 years while she had both her children. Once she felt ready, she took on another role in the company which allowed her to further develop her skill set. Women are likely to stay in the same role for a period of time as it offered them a level of comfort. Yet with guidance, women can still actively consider their career

progression. This occurred with one of the women in Case A who expressed that she would remain in her newly appointed role for up to 5 years, in which time she planned on having a second baby. However, she was actively planning her career goals for this period, and had her sights set on a senior leadership role. MTC assisted her think through her wants, which she then positioned to her line so that they were aware of her aspirations.

Case B highlight that women will find ways of improving their skill set to enhance their career aspirations. This was noted when one mother actively sought to transition in to a management position, when her child was 2 years and left the organisation for a period to take on role which provided her this opportunity, before returning. Active career management and helping the women define new / challenging / different career paths for themselves appeared lacking, especially for the women who were with the company for a lengthy period of time. To this end, two of the women undertook post graduate studies (on their own account) to enable a career transition externally. This aligns with the protean careers where continuous learning and development is valued (Cabrera, 2009b; Hall, 1976, 1996)/.

This is critical with the rise of the changing workforce's needs and to enable talent retention. Case B required a more focused strategy around managing their talent. Given that the organisation offered internal coaching, there is an opportunity for coaching to aid women in determining their career goals and to become confident in managing it. Even senior female leaders have approached the coaching division in Case B seeking support to manage career transitions and maintain a better WLB. This view aligned with O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) and Bussell (2008) who posited that an organisational understanding of the women's career development phases and the use of support strategies such as coaching and mentoring, would lead to talent retention.

Another interesting observation was the shift in career aspiration for a few of the women. The woman in Case A realised that she wanted to utilise her skill set towards more altruistic work where she could contribute back to society, similar to Hall (1996); Hall and Mirvis (1996). Her age range borders the early and mid-career phase however her desire is more characteristic of authenticity which is usually reflected in the later career stage (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), and would prefer to do this through the company. Whereas in Case B, two women also intended on leaving the organisation indicating a shift in their career aspirations and studied further to enable them to reinvent their careers. They felt that the new work would connect to a deeper purpose, and provide them with increased flexibility and autonomy. Incidentally, their skills were regarded as being one of the scarce skills needed in the organisation. This is comparable with the authenticity characteristics of the late-career phase (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), and studies by Cooke et al. (2010), and Bussell (2008) who indicated the reinvention transition perspective. It is interesting to note that the woman in which indicates a possible shift in the career model. This is an area for further research and understanding.

5.6.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports and extends the existing literature around women's career needs, particularly during the maternity transition period. Where the women received MTC combined with guidance and workplace support from their line managers in Case A, a refocus on career progression was noted. This highlights that the 'professional brakes' need not be applied (Bussell, 2008) but that organisations and the representative managers should be purposeful in their engagement with the women throughout the maternity transition period. The study also confirmed that women's career decisions are more complex than one career model can account for, and this is something that a maternity coach would need to take in to account.

5.7 Theme 7 – Communication is critical to the maternity transition process

5.7.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

Having an environment where open communication was fostered was regarded as crucial to a successful maternity transition across both cases. Different communication strategies were either utilised or seen as lacking between the organisation, line managers and the women. This is similar to the findings of Doherty and Manfredi (2006). The need for communication appeared across a number of aspects in the study such as enabling effective career conversations, enabling flexible working, tapping in to the gifts of the working-mother, negotiating an ease-back in period and un-surfacing unconscious biases and psychological contracts. This view aligns with Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) who ascertained that certain communicative interactions revealed shared values and common commitments to organisational goals, and unearthing these enabled people to create and sustain productive relationships in organisations.

The organisation has a vital role to play in supporting communication efforts. This includes ensuring that managers and the women are fully aware of the practical and procedural aspects of maternity leave, and how to go about accessing and utilising support mechanisms (Seignot & Clutterbuck, 2016). Case A was noted as having done this well, however there were pockets in the business where more support was required – e.g. in the client-facing roles where a matrix structure left one woman feeling quite isolated during the transition period. The suggestion from the women was to have a working-mothers support group where women could interact with each other. The line manager in Case B credited his HR team for the procedural support they provided him in this regard, which empowered him in his discussions with the woman. He did however indicate that more support for line managers was needed around understanding the maternity transition period and what the line manager's role would be throughout. This recommendation aligned with the findings of Glynn et al. (2002) and further supported by Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016).

In preparing for maternity leave, communicating and planning in advance eased the stress often associated with the last few weeks of this period. The women across both cases took the primary lead in preparing their handover documents / work. The stress levels around this was considerably less in Case A than in Case B. In Case A, MTC sensitised the women to preparing for this 2 months in advance of their expected due date. This also gave the women's manager and team sufficient time to consider how key accounts were going to be handled, and to plan for a stand-in. The women in Case B had a less structured approach to the handover, with the one woman expressing concern about having to find her own stand-in and another woman not being able to handover to her manager as a result of an emergency delivery. The women in Case A were also sensitised to think about, and communicate to their line managers and teams the extent to which they wanted to be contacted during maternity leave. This assisted with reducing assumptions. This differed to the women in Case B who did not have these types of discussion, and there were 'unspoken' expectations from both the women and line managers. This aligned with findings from Guest and Conway (2002). The lack of communication between the one woman and her manager and team in Case B left her worrying about the state of things at work during a time of restructure. She expressed not wanting to return to work and did not feel confident enough to enquire in return.

In Case A, the coach's role in this regard was empowering the women to have these crucial conversations with their line managers, "It is almost putting quite a lot of the power into the hands of the women: A-C1. It takes conscious effort to create the openness to have conversations around return to work expectations. Often, the women took charge of this, and this is also where MTC supported them, "It is to avoid that wall of silence…for her to give the right messages about her return" A-C1. The women in Case A expressed a greater sense of confidence in their ability to effectively communicate their needs with their line managers. MTC helped the women not only raise their self-awareness, but also to reframe their thinking patterns, to become less apologetic and more solutions-focused on issues that arose. Once the women were able to identify those expectations, they could communicate it. Communication was particularly important in discussing the women's career aspirations both before maternity leave, and upon returning. Case A demonstrated this aspect well, mostly as a result of the agenda being driven by the women and supported by the managers. This finding was supported by Filsinger (2012), Parke and Bingham (2012) and Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016).

5.7.2 Conclusion of theme

This study extends the existing literature around the maternity transition period, in particular the importance of communication across different levels in the organisation. HR, line managers and the women themselves all have a role to play in ensuring effective communication occurs to enable a successful maternity transition. Support is required for both the line manager and the women in this

regard. The implication for organisations is to reconsider how communication occurs in relation to the maternity transition period, and to determine key points of improvement and engagement. Ultimately, the purpose of enabling effective communication during this period is to ensure a better level of engagement between the woman and her manager, to plan and prepare for the handover in advance, to reintegrate the woman back in to the role and to proactively engage the woman about their career aspirations and plan for the next milestone.

5.8 Theme 8 – The nature of psychological contracts influences the maternity transition

5.8.1 Manifestation of theme in the data

The relevance of the psychological contract in the study (Guest & Conway, 2002; Millward, 2006) emerged in different ways both in the pre-maternity leave phase and upon returning to work. In particular, there was heightened awareness around the performance expectations from line managers and the women themselves, and the women's concern about being perceived as either able / unable to fulfil them (Millward, 2006). The nature of psychological contracts emerged as a theme where the women and the organisation (often reflected through the line manager) both had unspoken expectations of each other.

If looked at from the subtheme of "Perceived reasonable obligations to continue fulfilling performance expectations during pregnancy" (Millward, 2006), the women across both cases actively worked to the very end of their pregnancies – almost as if they were proving something to themselves. In Case B, the one mother's underlying motivation for working to the very last day of her pregnancy came from an expectation that she did not want to be contacted during her maternity leave for unresolved work matters – however this was not communicated to her manager. In contrast, the women in Case A wanted to keep in touch with work so that they were 'not forgotten', with one mother even requesting to do some work in between to keep her mind stimulated. Only one woman in Case A felt excluded from work projects in her final months of pregnancy and this was a source of frustration for her as she felt that she could still actively contribute. Not being assigned to a project impacted her annual performance targets. Further, without having received the pre-MTC session, she went through her maternity leave period feeling somewhat jaded about her future career prospects. Similarly, the coach spoke about an example of a women that she had coached who also experienced exclusion and how this linked to the way she was being perceived:

> *"…the stressor is also around how they are perceived by others. So we see a change happening in how the woman is perceived before she goes on maternity leave. This lady yesterday was giving me the example that even before she went on leave she started being excluded from things. She said… 'it is interesting, I have a very understanding boss'"A-C1.*

The second subtheme of ‘Perceived unreasonable obligations to prove that one can continue to fulfil performance expectations on return to work’ (Millward, 2006) was clearly evident in Case B where there was a sub-culture of being expected to be ever available – e.g. in the one woman’s department where it was seen as acceptable to contact employees who were on leave or off ill to make work requests, as they had laptops and remote access to the work servers. It was also noted in Case A that there was an ‘unspoken’ expectation that senior leadership would avail themselves during periods of personal leave, however this was not expressed for other levels of management. In Case A, the line manager spoke of his concern about the possibility of the women’s performance changing upon returning to work, however he had not voiced this concern to her. Upon her return, he did however coach her around aspects that were required to enable her to step in to the promoted role, and reflected that he was quite pleased that if anything, her commitment levels had increased. To this end, Guest and Conway (2002) posit that effective communication is the key to managing the psychological contract, which results in increased fairness and trust.

The women that went through MTC were given the opportunity to think through if/how they wanted to be contacted during their maternity leave and then took the lead in engaging their managers about their preference. Empowering women in this way allowed them to feel more in control of their maternity leave and clarified for the line manager the boundaries, if any.

The psychological contract (Millward, 2006) was also felt when the women no longer worked the way she previously did before having her baby, for example starting very early or working until late evening at the office, or being able to travel at short notice for a few days at a stretch. This could be seen in Case A when the one woman’s line manager expected his team (of working-mothers) to be available for 7am meetings. The line manager’s perspective in this regard is highlighted by Guest and Conway (2002). The other was when the women expressed a desire to change their working hours, be it taking on a reduced working portfolio or renegotiating flexibility. In Case B, the changed psychological contract emerged for the HR Executive (B-HR1) when her line manager was not willing to accommodate her request for working half-day upon returning from maternity leave. While on the surface of things, it may appear that a request for reduced working hours is a transactional contract, the underlying reasons for rejecting the request carried more relevance as it spoke to the line manager’s concern of not having access to the employee as before. She then approached a different manager and received buy-in. This example was comparable to the findings of Meglich et al. (2016) where the needs of the manager and the part-time worker were both accommodated and a win-win situation was encouraged.

5.8.2 Conclusion of theme

The finding supports existing theory on the importance of communication within psychological contracts. The finding also expands on theory in the context that even seemingly contractual aspects, such as reducing working-hours, comes with unspoken aspects such as perceptions about changed commitment and availability, and from the women's perspective being able to place the boundaries needed to support decisions taken. It requires raised awareness to understand underlying perceptions, and communication in order to express one's needs / expectations so that the other party is better positioned to meet those needs. This is a space that coaching is able to assist with, as seen when MTC was used.

5.9 Theme 9 – The line manager's role is critical to a successful maternity transition

5.9.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

While literature exists around the manager's experience of implementing WLB policies (Maxwell, 2005), research appears lacking in direct relation to the line manager's experience of managing working-mothers, especially through the maternity transition period.

The role of the line manager was expressed as critical in fostering the desired culture, as noted by the coach in the following comment, and further supported by Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010):

> *"I think a line manager can have a strong influence … because everything duplicates in leadership, in that if the leader is seemingly and apparently positively disposed in word and deed, it cascades" A-C1*

While many of the key roles performed by the managers are not exclusive to the maternity period, it does highlight the roles which support and add value to the transition process. Table 13 below outlines these roles with support from literature:

Table 13: Managerial roles which support the maternity transition process

Description	Authors
Enabling communication	Goleman (2000) Guest and Conway (2002)
Enabling an environment of trust	Doherty and Manfredi (2006); Goleman et al. (2002) Doherty and Manfredi (2006);
Empowering employees, including decision-making	Kanter (1977) as cited in Honold (1997) G. McCarthy and Milner (2013)
Empowering flexibility and work-life balance	Glynn et al. (2002) Maxwell (2005) Doherty and Manfredi (2006) Lewis et al. (2007) A. McCarthy et al. (2010) Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2010)
Enabling a family-supportive culture in the organisation	Allen (2001) Bosch (2014)
Fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion	Hunt, Layton, and Prince (2015) Seignot and Clutterbuck (2016)
Continuous career development discussions, focus on performance outcomes	Hamlin et al. (2006)
Providing guidance on organisational policies and practices	Maxwell (2005)
Role-modelling the desired behaviours in the organisation	Allen (2001)
Displaying coaching skills – holding relational conversations	Grant and Hartley (2013) Hamlin et al. (2006)
Offering tangible support (during the handover period)	Literature lacking
Allowing for an ease-back in period	Literature lacking

Managers needed to be sensitised to the maternity transition experience and its impact on the women, team and business. Across both cases, the line managers indicated that they were not specifically briefed / sensitised on how to manage the maternity transition period, and therefore followed what they thought was best in that situation. The line manager's comment from Case B expressed the need for guidance around understanding the transitional aspect of the change:

"I think we need to get more information around understanding some of the potential challenges that individuals coming back from maternity leave could face, because I will be honest, I have never thought about it. You know you see the person back in their chair and you just assume they are going to carry on as per normal. The reality is their lives have changed. Work may not have changed, but their lives have changed" B-M1

Based on the collective narratives across the two cases, the line manager's role during the transition period was noted as important in the following ways:

- Pre-maternity leave: supporting an ease-out by providing maternity-leave related information including how performance would be measured / rewarded, preparing the team for their role during the maternity leave, guiding the preparation of the handover and assisting with locating a stand-in, agreeing to what communication would occur during maternity leave and how often, and enabling the increased use of FWP to support the ease-out where needed.
- During maternity leave: being purposeful in keeping in contact, honouring commitments made, showing an interest in the woman's well-being and that of her baby, and connecting with the woman before her return to discuss an ease-back in to work.
- Support the return to work period: enable an ease-back in period and be considerate of the initial adjustment period which may require increased flexibility / support in particular around lactation needs and fatigue, work-travel / overnight trips and managing team dynamics.
- Continued career focus – actively discuss career goals and stretch assignments.

Across both cases, the line managers interviewed were actively involved as parents, and therefore could relate to much of the challenges raised by the women. Therefore drawing on past personal / family experiences informed some of the approaches taken by the line managers during the maternity transition period (McCarthy et al., 2010). In Case B, the one line manager's personal experience of not being supported by her own manager when she was pregnant, guided her decision-making around making it a more positive experience in her team. Similarly, in Case A, the line manager's flexible approach with his team stemmed from sharing parenting responsibilities on the home front, as did woman A-W5's line manager whose experience of being a mother proved to be a helpful guide during her transition period. This contrasted with woman A-W3's line manager who did not share the family responsibilities and displayed less tolerance towards working-mothers' needs in his team. The topic of support received from non-parent managers were raised by the respondents across both cases – in Case A, the culture of the organisation encouraged the support of Group-driven initiatives, even if people personally could not relate to them.

- Empowering employees featured prominently in the narratives (Kanter, 1977; Spreitzer, 1995). While the managers in Case B drove the planning and sought to initiate communication with the women during maternity leave, the women in Case A were empowered through coaching to take the lead in communicating their needs with their managers and teams. The role that the line managers played in Case A was to actively consider / support the suggestions put forward by the women, and they also empowered the women in the face of the business – e.g. in Case A where the manager accelerated the woman's partnership to facilitate decision-making with the team and external clients. Empowerment also featured in terms of how the line managers used their own judgement to make decisions regarding the women, without having to rely on policy. Case A had less of a reliance on policies such as FWP, as compared with Case B where the one line manager confided about the uncertainty around using the telecommuting option, and as such placed certain conditions to prevent the possible misuse of it in his team, similar to the findings by Doherty and Manfredi (2006). Further, two of the women in Case B referred to feeling disempowered as managers themselves, to offer their own staff FWP to enable a better WLB. This is comparable to the findings of Glynn et al. (2002) around the positive roll-on effect to staff when managers were empowered by the organisation to make certain decision relating to flexibility.
- Communication was therefore critical (Goleman, 2000). In Case A, the partner encouraged the managers reporting to her to be proactive in terms of communication and to steer away from avoiding-tactics. Given that coaching skills are regarded as a vital communication competency for managers to have (Goleman, 2000), it warrants investment and support to ensure that line managers acquire and effectively utilise this skill. Leaders require time and support to develop workplace coaching skills (Grant & Hartley, 2013) especially when it does not come naturally. Consulting with the line manager and role-modelling coaching behaviours supports and empowers the manager in their role. Where line managers were more supportive, the women expressed the transition period as easier to cope with and this linked to a positive organisational perception. Similarly, Allen (2001) indicated that the supervisor / line manager played a vital role in supporting family-friendly benefit policies in order to reduce employees' work-family conflict.

5.9.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports and further extends the existing literature around the line manager's role during the maternity transition period, which goes beyond supporting WLB. In particular, it adds new knowledge around supporting the line manager by providing them with knowledge, consultation and coaching role in supporting an ease-back in period, and key activities that the line manager can fulfil across the maternity transition period. The finding also highlights the importance of empowering employees and adds to the knowledge that coaching can support these efforts.

5.10 Theme 10 – Organisational support includes access to facilities and mechanisms to support the working-mother's return to the workplace

5.10.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The mothers considered a number of aspects in preparation for returning to work from maternity leave. Under the banner of organisational support, the need for facilities and certain mechanisms to support the return-to-work mother were highlighted.

- Crèches: Two women in Case B felt particularly challenged by the lack of crèches at / close to the workplace, while the other two women cited great appreciation for having the crèche at head office where they were based. This eliminated much of the anxiety related to finding suitable childcare option. Access to affordable, safe and convenient childcare such as an on-site crèche topped the list of aspects that the respondents in Case B felt would support them in enabling greater balance and peace of mind. In contrast, Case A did not offer crèche facilities at any of its offices sites, however this was not raised as a concern by the respondents. Most of the women in Case A did however have access to family support in the same city, whereas in Case B, all of the women's families resided outside of the city. The aspect around organisations supporting childcare needs and the related employee benefits are raised by Bosch (2014).
- A lactation room was available for the women in Case A which enabled them to continue breastfeeding. However, the women in Case B noted breastfeeding as a challenge due to the lack of workplace facilities. Having to stop breastfeeding was not a choice that the women took easily to, however the work setup (a lack of a private room with a fridge) was not adequate to continue with it. To this end, companies can play a role in supporting women's desire to continue breastfeeding by including a lactation policy / breastfeeding program in their EVP. Sensitising the workforce, and managers will remove the 'shame' or embarrassment associated with lactation at work (Gatrell, 2013).
- Enabling an ease-out and ease-back in period were expressed as mechanisms which supported the transition. In Case B, the line manager reflected that allowing women greater flexibility in the last few weeks of pregnancy, such as working from home would be a great support to them. This would be one such example of easing out. The women echoed these sentiments. Allowing for an ease-back in period occurred with one woman in Case B, and two women in Case A. The line manager in Case A also negotiated this with the woman in his team, and cited support towards it. Easing back in allows the woman to flexibly reintegrate back to work, while easing out of the home routine that she was accustomed to for a few months (McGregor, 2015).

5.10.2 Conclusion of theme

While organisational support for working-mothers is most often linked with using FWP, less focus perhaps is given to other support aspects. This study extends the literature around the need for specific support mechanisms in South African organisations to support a better work-life integration for working mothers.

5.11 Theme 11: Organisational culture directly influences the success of the maternity transition process

5.11.1 Manifestation in the data with comparison to the literature

The analysis across both cases revealed two key areas which are directly influenced by organisational culture, as indicated in Figure 18. A successful maternity transition relied on practices which supported the re integration of the women back in to work, and one where they could envision a fruitful future for themselves in the organisation and as a working-mother.



Figure 18: Key areas influenced by organisational culture

Gender transformation, encompassing diversity and talent management, was cited as being important for both organisations.

In Case A, the organisation's support for nurturing its female talent was evident by the focus it placed on enabling a culture conducive to working-mothers. A shift in culture is supported through leadership role-modelling behaviours (Glynn et al., 2002), as culture and leadership are intimately linked (Schein, 2010). A rise in working-mothers taking up senior leadership positions, and role-modelling working flexibly while meeting organisational commitments paved the way for other woman in the organisation to see a future for themselves in leadership, without feeling that motherhood meant that the career brakes were being applied. The partner who was interviewed was an exemplar of this. Only one woman's manager in the study had not made this shift – the woman was reluctant to use MTC as the sub-culture in her department did not promote a family-friendly environment.

By contrast, Case B appeared in its infancy stages around gender transformation with little focus being placed on supporting female talent navigate role-conflicts and the related stress that came with it. Female representation at senior and executive management levels were under-target and active career management appeared lacking. With patriarchal role-modelling apparent, value-judgements have potentially impacted on women's career progression. While there were a few senior females represented at the senior management levels, there was a need for more women with families, role-modelling a different way of being in the organisation. This would potentially make executive roles more appealing to women. In Case A, directors and partners were encouraged to communicate purposefully with the women in their teams at certain touch-points throughout the maternity transition period, and to role model this behaviour for others in leadership positions. In contrast, Case B had not yet considered doing this and it was reflective in the reduced focus on career reengagement goals post-maternity leave.

It was also important for the organisations to review their structures and culture to determine aspects would undermine formal WLB policies, which ultimately leaves those who utilise them feeling undervalued and marginalised (Lewis et al., 2007). In Case A, flexibility was noted as an enabler to a successful maternity transition experience. In order to manage the conflicting demands of family and work life in the 21st Century, agile working was required. For this, a shift in the culture was needed, which the organisation has noted as occurring with the increase of dual-income households and shared parenting responsibilities. The enablers to working flexibly were noted as trust and integrity, supported through robust communication around performance outcomes. And to support a balanced home and work life, the setting of boundaries and keeping to those commitments was a critical factor. The women managed to work on boundary management and communication in the MTC sessions. Within WLB, being able to work flexibly emerged as the strongest topic upon returning to work for the women in Case B. The respondents spoke of the family-like culture, yet also with high control (Cameron & Quinn, 2005). The organisation had comprehensive policies in place to support the retention of talent and the achievement of better work and home balance, such as FWP. However, a strong theme that emerged was that a culture of flexibility was dependent on leadership's support of it, and there was a need to remove the perceptions of rigidness that presently surrounded it. To this end, embedding flexibility in to the organisation's culture was a need expressed by the respondents. In Case B, working-mothers in senior leadership positions role-modelling how to navigate the working-mother role was an expressed need by the women, as it was seen as a way to shift the culture. This is similar to the findings of Hennekam (2016).

In addition, special facilities such as designated parking for pregnant women and a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers supported a family-friendly culture in Case A. The governing board made up

of senior female leaders, also organised events such as the WLB talks to raise awareness and promote enablers to talent retention in the organisation. They also sponsored the MTC programme.

5.11.3 Conclusion of theme

The study supports and extends the existing literature on the influence of culture on WLB and gender transformation. The study further highlighted the need for support facilities and mechanisms which leads to a higher perceived organisational value.

5.12 Theme 12 – Maternity transition coaching aids in the retention of professional women

5.12.1 Manifestation of theme in the data

Only Case A received MTC. The narratives revealed that through coaching, the women felt supported and could re-engage with their careers, leading to their retention with the company. This is comparable with the findings of Bussell (2008) and Filsinger (2012)

The coach reflected that from the 42 women who went through the MTC programme in the organisation, only two women had left the organisation. This meant that 95% of women who went through MTC remained with the organisation. One of the women who left negotiated a consulting role to consult back in on a freelance basis, similar to a protean career (Cabrera, 2009b). One other woman posed an immediate flight risk post-maternity leave – this was due to the woman's preference of being a stay-at-home mother as it linked in with her value system, similar to the 'home-centred' group put forward by Hakim (2002)

In the return-MTC session, the coach noted that they also looked to the next 12 months to get the women thinking about what they wanted to achieve or focus on. This positively influenced the women's mind-set about seeing a future for themselves in the organisation.

MTC was particularly helpful for the women to be able to voice their concerns, and to figure out strategies to cope with it. As a result, it was easier for two of the mothers to plan how they were going to have another baby and still keep on track with their career goals. When the one mother spoke of her plans to have a second baby within this period, staying in her current role offered her both the "comfort" of her role, yet it was still challenging enough to keep her fulfilled for at least another 3-4 years. Coaching assisted her with thinking through the next phase, and she was actively engaging her manager around this. The same occurred for the other mother who, having returned from maternity leave, approached her line manager to discuss the promotion she was ear-marked for. Her coaching session helped her work through her own view about other people's perceptions, and to actively think about creating a home and work balance as she took control of her career advancement.

Having this support solidified her intention to stay with the company post-maternity leave, as noted in her comment:

> *"So for me – and I think this company has excelled in that – and I feel comfortable being back to work because of this maternity session and pre-maternity session I had with Coach. If it wasn't for that I don't know where and how I would be now. Maybe at this point in time I would be thinking 'maybe I should leave'" A-W5.*

It is however important to indicate that in as much as MTC supports the women's re engagement with their careers, organisational factors drastically influence the final outcome. For one woman in Case A, she felt a prolonged sense of frustration due to the lack of decision-making and strategic involvement, and this led her to feeling genuinely disengaged. The women subsequently indicated that her intention to stay with the organisation was presently uncertain. To this end, Bussell (2008) cautions that maternity coaching would only offer temporary relief in instances where the organisational culture is not supportive of the women's needs.

5.12.2 Conclusion of theme

This study supports existing literature around talent retention, and provides empirical evidence that coaching can aid with the retention of professional working-mothers. Coaching assisted by allowing the women to see a way forward for themselves in their careers, even though they may be slowing down the pace momentarily. The finding further highlights the importance of organisational culture, and its impact on talent retention.

5.13 Cross-case analysis conclusion

The cross-case analysis of the two cases were discussed under the following themes and positioned within the context of the literature as described in Chapter 2. The themes concluded:

- Theme 1: Maternity transition is a process over time which requires support at specific touch-points.
- Theme 2: Understanding 'Self' is critical to the maternity transition process
- Theme 3: A change in role-identity can result in guilt.
- Theme 4: Professional working-mothers desire WLB
- Theme 5: A culture of flexibility is core to a successful maternity transition
- Theme 6: Professional working-mothers desire career satisfaction
- Theme 7: Communication is critical to the maternity transition process
- Theme 8: The nature of psychological contracts influences the maternity transition
- Theme 9: The line manager's role is critical to a successful maternity transition

- Theme 10: Organisational support includes access to facilities and mechanisms to support the working-mother's return to the workplace
- Theme 11: Organisational culture directly influences the success of the maternity transition process
- Theme 12: Maternity transition coaching aids in the retention of professional women

These themes were explored in order to answer the research questions.

In the next chapter, the four questions will be answered, the report concluded, implications presented and recommendations made.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

In this chapter, the four research questions will be answered after which a proposed model for maternity transition coaching is presented. This is followed by implications and recommendations of this research; and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Conclusion

The research questions that will now be answered are:

- Research Question 1: What is the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period?
- Research Question 2: What is the line manager's role in managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period?
- Research Question 3: How does organisational culture influence working mothers?
- Research Question 4: How does maternity coaching act as a support mechanism?

6.1.1 What is the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period?

The maternity transition period is a time of adjustment, questioning and re-evaluation which has an impact on the working-mother's role, relationships, routines and assumptions.

In the study, the transition occurred over a period of time, starting in the months leading up to the maternity leave and continued for up to 2 years afterwards. This is important to note as people often consider the return of the woman from maternity leave as the end point, however the transition is not a point in time, but a process over time (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011; Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). The implication for the mothers is that they would require distinct strategies to deal with the different transition points.

Whilst some experiences were the same for all mothers, the needs differed between the first-time and second-time mothers. Becoming a mother (in particular, for the first-time mothers) meant taking on a new identity, and with it came the uncertainty of what this identity, and the upcoming combined role of being a working-mother, would mean in their lives. The first-time mothers require notably more support during the maternity leave period. The maternity leave period and the first few months back to work after maternity leave, can be likened to the 'Neutral Zone' which Bridges and Bridges (2017) posit is at the core of the transition. This is a time when critical re-patterning and psychological realignments are occurring for the woman as they are making sense of what their new roles will be and are actively trying to craft a new identity. If considered from this perspective, it is then understandable that increased levels of support are required. The four first-time mothers in Case A

did not qualify for the mid-MTC session, yet cited that this would have been extremely helpful. For the first-time mother in Case B, the impact of not having sufficient support at the onset of the change in identity, resulted in a prolonged state of stress. This is something for organisations to consider in future – how to purposively support women during their maternity leave and in the first few months upon returning to work.

The need for support during the transition period, the utilisation of effective strategies and a reframing in one's mind is required to help women navigate this period. A change in role identity brought with it feelings of guilt, both on the work and home fronts. Guilt is a natural occurrence for working-mothers. To do this, having a deeper understanding of themselves as individuals - in particular the psychological resources which influence how aspects are perceived, and the context / situation in which the transition is occurring influences how the woman copes with the transition and manages the aspects of the guilt.

Caring for oneself appears to be less of a priority in the first year of the baby's birth, with a few of the mothers expressing that they had little 'me' time.

The case studies revealed that professional women desire both work-life balance and career satisfaction. To enable a successful integration of both these aspects, being able to work flexibly and feeling empowered to make decisions and be able to act in accordance, is paramount. Across the transitional phases, working-mothers make crucial decisions regarding their personal and professional lives – choices which impact themselves, their families and work. Providing women with resources to make sense of the myriad of emotions and experiences they are going through, assists the women to make better, more informed decisions.

Women required a safe space to make sense of the myriad of emotions and experiences they were going through, to be able to sort through these, draw on their values when needed, and then plan a way forward. As a result, woman are more focused and purposeful in their interactions and communication.

Summarised, the transition to a working-mother brings with it a change in identity, role-conflict and guilt. Support is therefore critical to a successful transition requires focused effort and support to strengthen coping resources. Through support such as coaching, the working-mother can make sense of the changed identity and start crafting strategies to support the shift. A successful transition was deemed to have occurred when the women felt that they could manage their feelings of guilt, were able to craft strategies to increase / utilise support structures, when they felt reengaged and could refocus on their careers - with a renewed understanding of their purpose.

6.1.2 What is the line manager's role in managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period?

The manager's support during the maternity transition period is paramount. Line managers have specific roles to play in the pre-maternity leave phase, during maternity leave and post maternity leave phase, as were detailed in Theme 9. In this regard, the manager is required to consider aspects relating to maternity leave planning, the impact and opportunity for the team, keeping the relationship intact with the woman, preparing for the woman's return to work and considering ongoing career management.

The manager, in many ways represents the organisation and has a direct influence over the perceived organisational support, as they are seen as the enablers to a family-supportive culture in the organisation. Managers discern and practically implement the organisation's policies, for example flexible work practices, and the way this is done determines the resultant culture. Managers ultimately influence the environment for a work-life balance.

The managers, like the women, have unspoken expectations of each other and it requires the development of a trusting relationship to un-surface these expectations. This requires an environment where open and transparent communication is encouraged. The line manager's role in fostering an environment of open communication is also a key determinant in the effective use of flexible work practices. To this end, managers have an important role in creating an environment which fosters the improvement of employee empowerment.

The line managers interviewed naturally adopted a coaching style with the woman in their teams, and appeared quite thoughtful of both the women's and the business's needs. Drawing on the latest research in the field of managerial coaching, Grant (2016) refers to evolving nature of coaching which now considers both the enhancement of performance and the well-being of the individual. However, the woman raised concerns that managers did not always adopt coaching behaviours. Therefore, line managers also require support in the form of education, consultation and coaching. They are often expected to instinctively know what to do, however the narratives revealed that this was not always the case. The approach which line managers took and the areas they opted to focus their support towards, were often informed by their own experiences and assumptions. By supporting the manager at key transitional points, empowers the manager to have the conversations with the woman, instead of avoiding it.

Linking back to the interviews, the managers found the confidential and non-judgmental space helpful to reflect on both the women's and their own challenges. This space can be likened to coaching, which the manager would find beneficial during this process.

The findings also revealed that line managers play a critical role in supporting the woman's career reengagement and progression post maternity leave. Therefore, line managers must guard themselves against the thinking that the women are no longer committed or on the same career path as before, as these concerns could unintentionally be projected on to the women. Proactively engaging women throughout the transition period around their career goals is a means to retaining key talent.

6.1.3 How does organisational culture influence working mothers?

The organisational culture was found to influence access to support facilities and mechanisms, work-life balance, talent management and the extent to which managerial coaching was adopted in the organisation. By providing programmes which support working-mothers and the maternity transition period, a shift can be created in the traditional thinking about mothers in the workplace.

The culture of being regarded as a family-friendly organisation includes providing working-mothers with access to certain facilities such as lactation amenities and creches. The need for a breastfeeding / lactation policy is important to include in the employee value proposition as it demonstrates the care for the working-mother's role as a mother, in addition to being an employee. Both the organisations studied could benefit further from exploring alternate options to supporting the childcare needs of working parents. A major concern for mothers upon returning to work is arranging childcare for their babies. In the absence of a nanny / helper or familial support, finding a suitable creche that is located close to work or home is a necessity. Some organisations in South Africa, for example are arranging bulk discounts at reputable creches in instances where opening an onsite creche is not feasible.

The culture also speaks to supportive mechanisms such as allowing for an ease-back in period. Such organisational compromises may result in speeding up the time taken to full productivity. Not allowing for this may mean an extended period of trying to cope, which could eventually lead to the woman becoming disengaged or leaving the organisation. The researcher also puts forward that enabling an 'ease-out' period in the final few weeks of pregnancy, such as increased work-from-home days, would enhance the perceived organisational support. This period is extremely tiring and uncomfortable for the women, and many try to work to the very end of the pregnancy so as to extend their maternity leave.

Organisational Culture is the enabler to a successful maternity transition. When there is an inhospitable organisational culture, barriers to women's career progression occur along with increased work-family conflict, which affects the women's attitude and engagement levels. Under the banner of work-life balance, being able to work flexibly is critical for working-mothers. The culture of flexibility is determined and role modelled by the leadership's support of it.

Talent management also requires a culture which is supportive of transformation in the form of gender diversity & inclusion, family-friendly policies & practices and career management. Commitment to gender diversity required accountability by senior leaders, sponsorship of high-potential women, an investment in focused leadership programmes aimed at enhancing female talent and transparent tracking of gender metrics.

In summary, the extent to which managerial coaching is supported, encouraged and practiced in the organisation is dependent on the culture. Managers require coaching skills training and opportunities be coached themselves.

6.1.4 How does maternity transition coaching act as a support mechanism?

MTC supported working-mothers to understand the impact of the maternity transition on their role, relationships, routines and assumptions. The women felt supported in taking charge by strengthening their coping resources.

The women needed a safe space to make sense of, and sort through the myriad of emotions and experiences they were going through, draw on their values when needed, and then plan a way forward. From a practical perspective, MTC assisted the women to think through planning strategies, enabling communication and fostering effective dialogue. And on a psychological level, MTC assisted with the challenging of assumptions and biases, reframing of guilt and making sense of conflicting emotions. The women felt supported in internalising the change in identity and created strategies to manage role-conflict. Further, the women were better able to manage of boundaries by connecting it to the one's value system, which served as an anchor (for example, when the women selected the reduced-working hours options).

Therefore, MTC allowed the women to feel supported, empowered and valued; increased their confidence and optimism; enabled them to refocus and confront challenges of anxiety, guilt, bias and perceptions; and enabled them to manage priorities and boundaries.

The organisation realised significant benefits in retaining their professional and high-achieving women, and there was improved engagement between the women and their managers during this transitional stage. Women felt empowered to put forward their requests in a way that honoured their needs, whilst also considering the business's requirements.

Ultimately, MTC aided with the retention of key female talent in the organisation.

6.1.5 A Maternity Transition Coaching Model

The proposed model, as indicated in Figure 19 outlines the process as well as a framework for conducting a maternity coaching programme in an organisation. A discussion of the key components follows the diagram.

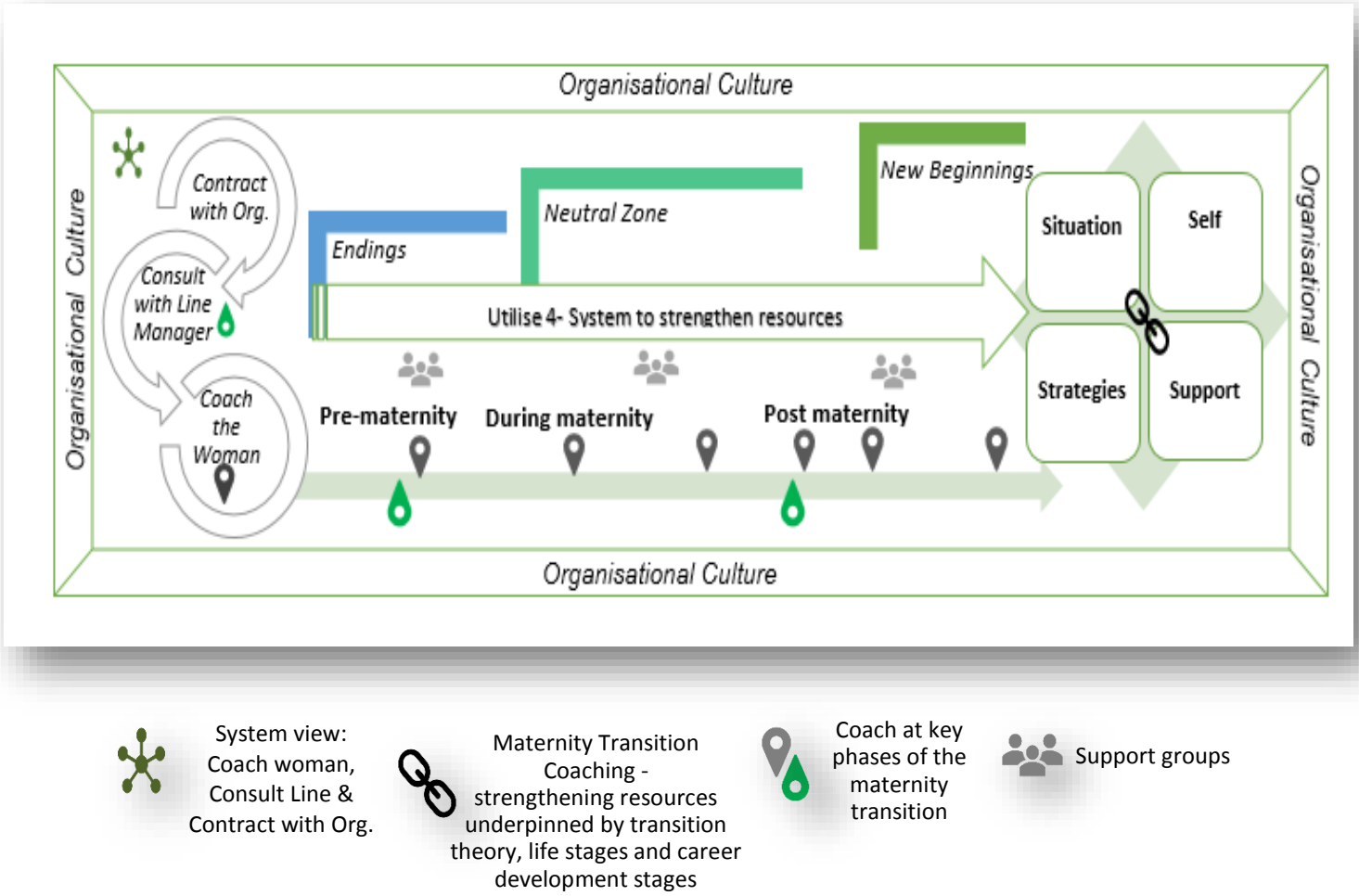


Figure 19: Maternity Transition Coaching Model

The proposed coaching model is informed by the research findings and literature, and further builds on the structure provided by the maternity coach.

Organisational Culture is an enabler to the MTC Programme and encompasses, family-friendly policies & practices, work-life integration, diversity & inclusion, talent management and career management (which is inclusive of performance management). Organisational culture surrounds the model to indicate the importance of culture on the maternity transition.

In alignment with business coaching principles (Stout-Rostron, 2009), the start of the coaching process entails contracting with the organisation. The contracting will also determine what themes will be fed back to HR and how often.

Two consultation / coaching sessions have been proposed with the line manager. The first is set to occur approximately 2 months before the woman is expected to go on maternity leave, and the second in the month that the woman returns from maternity leave. These sessions serve to sensitise the manager to the maternity transition, improve communication and understanding about what to expect and prepare for. It is also a safe place for the manager to work through their own assumptions and unconscious biases, which may in advertently impact a successful transition. The coach will also role model coaching behaviours to embed this practice with the manager. The line manager is also encouraged to purposefully check in with the woman at the specific touch-points throughout the transition period.

Six MTC sessions are proposed for the women. The first being pre-maternity leave - around the 7-month mark so that there is sufficient time to plan and prepare for the handover and a stand-in. This session occurs in parallel with the line manager's session so that there is alignment in objectives. The second session occurs during maternity leave – approximately a month after giving birth as this was expressed as one of the more difficult times of adjustment. The third session occurs a few weeks before the woman is due to return to work – it is to get her thinking about how she will reengage with work, options for easing back in and to test her support structure at home in her absence. Session four occurs approximately 6-8 weeks after returning from maternity leave – this was expressed as another crisis point for woman. The session provides the woman with both practical and psychological support. Once again, the session with the line manage runs in parallel. Managers are encouraged to proactively engage with the woman, and keep in mind that she may still want the same career goals as before, albeit her support needs are different at this specific point in the transition. Session 5 occurs around the 9-month mark after returning from maternity leave, and the emphasis moves more towards refocusing on goals and career aspirations. Finally, session 6 occurs around 18 - 24 months. Quite often, women are planning their second babies, and combined with a demanding career, issues around balance and being able to manage come to the fore even stronger than before. It is recommended that the coaching sessions are supported with the use of a personality-preference assessment, such as the Enneagram or Discovery Insights as these will assist the woman with deeper self-insight and awareness throughout the coaching journey.

When group coaching sessions are conducted, it is recommended that additional one-on-one time is factored in so that the coach and woman can discuss any particularly sensitive issues. And as far as possible, it is recommended that first-time mothers and second-time mothers are grouped separately, as they have differing needs or points of focus.

Finally, there is a need for working-mothers support groups, which the woman can link in to at any time during the maternity transition period. These groups not only serve as a support network, it also

starts fostering professional networking and role modelling – an aspect which professional women need more access to.

Core to the model is an understanding of transition theory and application. As such, the 4-S System for managing transitions (Anderson et al., 2011) is recommended to be utilised throughout the programme. By cycling through each of the S's, the woman can determine which S (Situation, Self, Support or Strategies) requires strengthening, and a specific plan can be created in the coaching session to enable more balance. Anderson et al. (2011) stresses the point of being creative in figuring out strategies as even the smallest of actions can assist. The 4-S System can also be used to support the line manager in their coaching / consultation sessions.

The three phases of Bridge's transition model (Bridges & Bridges, 2017) are also indicated in the framework and it to shows the overlap between the phases in the theory, and the three maternity phases – pre, during and post. The 'endings' phase continues through pregnancy and into maternity leave, before baby is born. The arrival of the baby marks the start of the 'neutral' zone, which continues throughout the maternity leave period and in to the initial few months of returning to work. Once the woman has adjusted to her new role as a working-mother, the 'new beginning phase starts'. Having an understanding of the nuances of these phases makes for a more robust coaching session.

6.1.6 Key skills of a Maternity Transition Coach

It is also important to consider the skills and competencies of the maternity transition coach. The skills and experience of a maternity transition coach, as recommended by the researcher are outlined in Figure 20. The recommendations were directly informed by the research and related literature.

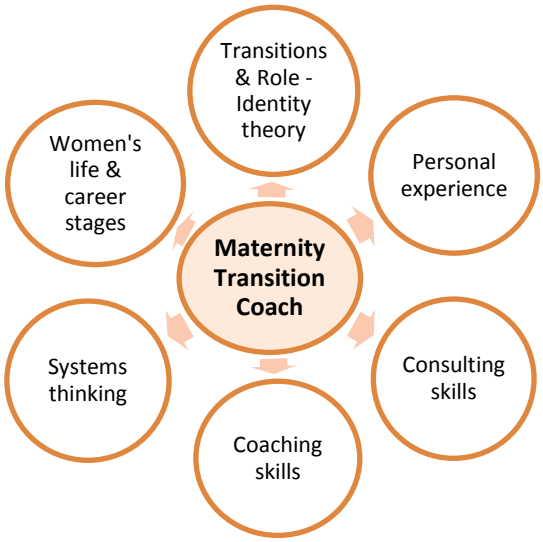


Figure 20: Proposed skills for a maternity transition coach

6.2 Implications and recommendations

This section provides implications and recommendations for the HR and Leadership of the organisation, line managers, coaches and the working-mother.

6.2.1 Organisation

As the research was set within an organisational context, Human Resource functions such as Organisational Development, HR Generalist functions, Coaching and Talent Management may find the descriptive nature of the case studies and the themes useful to consider. Further, it may support in informing gender diversity and talent management practices, both for existing working-mothers in the organisation and for those women who may be considering employment with the company. The employee value proposition is always an important consideration for attracting and retaining talent. It has to be acknowledged that utilising an external coaching company to provide MTC does mean an additional cost to the company (as does any external executive coaching), however this has to be weighed up against the costs of losing valuable female talent who take with them industry knowledge, expertise and potentially even client-loyalty.

The research may also be useful to internal coaching programmes who have yet to consider the opportunity in transition coaching, by utilising transition theory as a base to include in their HR strategies. Transition theory has a multitude of applications – for example, helping graduates transition in to the workplace, soon-to-be retirees transition out of the organisation and even for employees transitioning in to management roles at all levels.

As a starting point, HR is encouraged to determine the current maternity experiences / perceptions of women and their managers around maternity support. Following this, a clearly defined process which covers how to handle each phase of the maternity transition effectively, and which is aligned to their development and retention strategies, can be formulated.

Future considerations for organisations are to understand how its policies are practically implemented or perceived and aligned to strategy. This creates the opportunity for organisations to revisit its application and re-educate the workforce around the support policies. To this end, it is critical that HR managers are adequately prepared to support maternity consistently across the business, and more importantly know how to support the woman and line managers.

Organisations are also urged to critically evaluate how the performance targets are measured during maternity leave, so that women are not negatively impacted by their time away. Support groups for working mothers could be established; for example, where new mothers gain advice from other

mothers – before, during or after their maternity leave. This can also be a way of furthering the role modelling in the organisation, and allowing for access to networks of professional women.

6.2.2 Coaches

A deeper understanding of working with transitions, in particular maternity transitions in the work context, is recommended The report further adds to body of coaching knowledge by providing an understanding of MTC and how it is presently being used in South Africa and the benefits being realised as a result.

6.2.3 Line Managers

Managers would benefit by being educated about maternity transition, and what their role is across the different phases; for example, supporting the woman in the preparation for handover, arranging a stand-in, keeping connected with the woman during maternity leave, and preparing for the reintegration to work. A further benefit would result in managers becoming more self-aware of their own biases and assumptions. Managers are encouraged to consider the support they may need as managers. Managers would benefit by building confidence in having career conversations with the women, and not see maternity as it being the end of career advancement.

6.2.4 Working-mothers

Through MTC women gain would build confidence in their communication abilities, particularly with their line managers. They should gain a deeper understanding of their strengths, values and beliefs and understand how these impact on their behaviour. As such, they can develop better coping strategies to assists with increasing their work focus and effectiveness. Through increased self-awareness, they are ultimately able to tap in to their gifts of being a mother, and appreciate themselves and their value to the organisation.

The most neglected component for the women in the first 1-2 years after giving birth is re-focusing on oneself (self-care) – this was noted as an area which the women needed continued support around, and required potentially different wellness strategies.

6.3 Contribution to Research

The research indicates that the transition period is longer than many anticipate. The very fact that it is a transition indicates two things: a) it is a process over time and as such there are related implications, and b) it is a transition; therefore, a consideration for transition theory needs to feature in the framework of this genre of coaching.

The research serves to highlight the support which Maternity Transition Coaching can offer to professional working-mothers, their line managers and the organisation. In particular, it serves to demonstrate how MTC supported one group of women in a South African company, and highlights the experience of women who did not receive this type of support during their maternity transition.

When MTC was utilised, the link was made between the benefits of increased support at critical transitional points, with the retention of female talent. MTC facilitated a quicker re-integration in to one's career, and women were able to return to full, if not increased, productivity sooner than those who did not receive MTC. This was noted in the purposeful and planned career advancement of the women in Case A.

MTC further enhanced communication between employees and managers, with a focus on common performance outcomes. This enabled a trust relationship, and companies could therefore use flexible work practices, without the need for rigid rules and controlling behaviour.

The study also highlights the different support needs of line managers during the transition period, and provides a structure for managers and HR to consider in supporting the women. Line managers too require coaching / consultation during the transition period. When managers are coached, they start role modelling coaching behaviours with their teams, and so empowerment increases. Ultimately, it is the line manager who influences the organisational culture.

The study further highlights the need for additional support for first-time mothers during maternity leave, something which is not actively occurring for all levels of management, even in the case where MTC is offered.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

Recommendations for further research include:

- Explore formulating a definition of 'maternity transition coaching' within the context of business coaching. This will serve to strengthen its construct and position MTC as a strategic necessity for talent retention and the talent-attraction strategy.
- Conduct a study utilising the proposed framework for MTC, in particular the 4-S model to determine its efficacy. Track the study throughout the key coaching points in a longitudinal study.
- As none of the respondents received MTC beyond the 12-month mark, a longitudinal study covering the full spectrum of the MTC programme would be beneficial.
- Explore the maternity transition experience of mothers who left the organisation, and/or have opted for a different career model such as part-time working, consulting or entrepreneurial

ventures. Within this context, it is necessary to understand how MTC may need to be adapted to meet the needs of women outside of the corporate world.

All the women in this research were married and cited their husbands as a core support structure. It would therefore be beneficial to explore the maternity transition experience of single mothers, and the role of coaching in strengthening support strategies.

In the same light, the maternity transition experience of same-sex couples and/or adoptive parents and/or mothers / parents with special needs children could be explored. This is to understand their challenges within an organisational and societal perspective, and once again the role to determine whether MTC can support their transition to parenthood.

- The needs of working fathers in the corporate world and how coaching can support dual working parents in organisations would be another area for research.
- Noted in the study was the changing nature of the workforce with the rise of the millennial generation. South Africa appears to be a number of years behind the global band for millennials, which ultimately influences the strategies which organisations may deploy to attract, retain and support their talent. Therefore, a useful study would be to explore the maternity transition experience of millennial working-mothers, their careers and the implications for coaching.
- Cultural influences on maternity coaching would be another area for research – only 1 professional women in the study was an African female and her narrative reflected the role of the extended family during the transition process.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Guides

Professional Women

Interview Guide: Professional “Mothers”

Guideline to questions to allow the participant to share her life experience openly:

Name	
Age	
Marital Status	
No. of children	
Age of child	
#. of years employed with co.	
Position/title	
Education	
Duration of maternity leave	

Tell me a bit about yourself … your family, your interests … who is (participant’s name)?

I’d like to start by recalling your life prior to becoming a mother …

What was that like … what was a typical day/week for you?

Tell me about your career progression then.

Explore the women’s experience of becoming a mother …

What has becoming a mother meant to you?

What has brought you most joy since becoming a mother?

What does your support structure look like?

What has been your biggest cause of stress since becoming a mother?

Family-wise ii. Work-wise

Tell me about a bit more about how you manage running a young family and managing work commitments…

On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your current stress levels? (1 being minimal – 10 being over the top) . Tell me more about that …

How do you manage these aspects?

Take you back to the maternity leave period: Can you recall how you felt in the weeks leading up to your maternity leave? Work-wise, had anything changed?

–MTC – how did you go about enrolling for it? How was it brought to your attention?

How many sessions did you attend?

What can you recall as being valuable from the first session?

How did you plan for your handover for the time you were on maternity leave?

How did your line manager engage you around your commitments?

What was the engagement with you during Maternity leave? Would you have liked it to be any different … explain further.

Your second session? Explore …

What was the experience like when you returned to work? Work, team, manager …

At what point did you have the third session? What was most valuable for you from that session?

I'd like you to think about the first 6-12 months after you had returned to work (so baby was x months old then), what were the key challenges that you?

And as baby grew into a toddler, say upto 24 months (2 years)?

What were some of your key needs/challenges during that time? How did you manage to resolve those?

What does a supportive organisation mean to you?

What policies/practices does <Company> have in place to support return-to-work mothers?

Talking about work-life balance policies, what do you understand by these?

To what extent are you able to take up the use of these policies?

What have been some of the key challenges?

What is important for you now from a work perspective? What brings you satisfaction at work? What do you see career-wise for yourself in the future?

Over these past years since becoming a mom, what were your intentions of staying with <Company>? At what stage/s, did you question this … explore.

What does an engaged employee mean to you? Presently, how engaged are you on a daily basis at work? 1-10 scale . When do you feel most disengage?

What was your line manager's role in supporting you during this time?

How did you engage your manager around work and family commitments?

What support do you think line managers need when dealing with team members who are going through this life changing transition?

From an organisational perspective, If you could change/recommend anything to change at the moment, to support return to work mothers, what would that be?

MTC - How, if any did partaking in the Maternity Coaching Programme shift your way of thinking / being?

MTC: How did partaking in the programme support your transition to motherhood?

MTC: What, in your opinion could be done differently in the programme to better the experience for the women?

Line manager

Interview Guide: Questions for the line manager

Tell me a bit about yourself … who is (X)? (prompt for personal interests, family and role)

As a line manager, how many times did you experience having women in your team go on maternity leave?

Think specifically about the last time that you had a team member directly reporting to you that went on maternity leave. Let's explore your experience in managing a female staff member who went on maternity leave.

How was the planning for the handover handled? And how did you engage her around key commitments/deliverables?

What is the rest of the team's perceptions / feelings about this? How were they engaged?

What was the return to work experience like? How did you engage each other around commitments and expectations?

What, if anything, changed?

And in terms of their working abilities / performance upon returning?

Overall, what if any, has been a cause of stress/concern for you? How do you resolve it?

As a Head of business unit, how do you guide your managers when dealing with women in their own teams who are planning to go on maternity leave / returning?

*Do you think there's a difference in the way that women managers and men managers relate/ deal with working-mothers in their teams? Tell me more…

How are managers prepared to plan and handle this maternity transition in their team?

What type of coaching do you provide your team members? Explore…

What challenges do you think working-mothers experience?

When do you think these women are more likely to exit an organisation?

What policies/practices does Nedbank have in place to support return-to-work mothers?

What is your understanding of the work-life balance policies at Nedbank?

What training did you receive in this regard?

What are your thoughts on WLB policies?

How often do you personally utilise WLB initiatives?

How do staff in your team go about accessing it?

What, if anything would you do differently with a future staff member who may go on maternity leave?

What are your thoughts on the level of commitment that staff display when they make use of work-life balance initiatives?

*(For the line managers of women who have been coached) What is your take on the maternity coaching programme? What value, if any have you found as a result?

How have you been involved in the programme?

What would you like to see enhanced?

What support do you think line managers need in order to better support them (with regards to managing working-mothers)?

Group HR / Talent

Interview Guide: Group HR / Talent

Name	
#. of years employed with co.	
Position/title	

What is the talent management strategy for women at the company? How are key talent retained?

Tell me a bit about the career advancement opportunities for women in the organisation, especially after becoming mothers?

How are senior managers being held accountable for growing the female leadership pipeline?

How does the organisation support women going through maternity transition?

When do you think women are most likely to exit an organisation? Or stop progressing to senior appointments?

What are the company's WLB policies?

How do you think it is practically being utilised? How is it measured?

How do you think companies can better support women through the maternity transition period?

Additional questions to ask the organisation where MTC is occurring…

What is your take on the maternity coaching programme that is on offer in your organisation? What value has the organisation seen as a result?

How is it assessed?

Who gets to participate (explore the selection criteria)?

How do they get to participate? Any foreseeable barriers to taking up the offer?

What is the line manager's involvement during the maternity transition? How are they prepared to handle this maternity transition in their team?

What challenges have been observed?

Maternity Coach

Tell me about your experience being involved as a maternity coach?

In your opinion, how is this similar or different to that of a business or executive coach?

What are some of the key challenges that return to work mothers' experience?

What are their biggest stressors?

What type of support do you think these women need in their work and family life? Explore how coaching supported them.

From your discussions with the women coached, what were their intentions off staying with the organisation in the next 24 months?

What is your experience of the line manager's role in supporting these women?

How do you think they are faring at present? What support do you think line managers require?

What would you like to see happen differently for these women?

How does maternity coaching influence retention?

How does the culture at org.X support / influence working mothers?

Tell me about the maternity coaching programme that you offer? Explore the structure of the programme. Then the themes and challenges that emerge in coaching conversations.

How would you like to see the maternity coaching programme be further enhanced?

What else would you like to share about your experience as a maternity coach?

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Form

The Graduate School of Business Administration

2 St David's Place, Parktown,
Johannesburg, 2193,
South Africa
PO Box 98, WITS, 2050
Website: www.wbs.ac.za

Wits Business School
Sculpting global leaders

MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT – BUSINESS AND EXECUTIVE COACHING (MMBEC)

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Supporting the professional women's transition to motherhood through maternity coaching: a South African perspective

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction

Hello, my name is Aneshrie Yasar. I am conducting research for the purpose of completing my Masters in Management in Business and Executive Coaching at Wits Business School.

I am conducting research to explore the experiences of women in leadership/management once they enter motherhood and return to the workplace. In particular, I will be exploring their perceptions on work-life balance and support. I am conducting a qualitative case study with 16 participants across two organisations to establish the following:

1. How does organisational culture influence working-mothers?

2. What is the line manager's role in managing working-mothers during the maternity transition period?

3. What is the professional women's experience of the maternity transition period?

4. How does maternity coaching act as a support mechanism? (where applicable)

Your participation

I am kindly requesting your permission to allow me to conduct an interview with you. If you agree, I will ask you to participate in one interview for approximately 1 hour. I would also like your permission to tape record the interview, so that I can accurately record what is said.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. If you choose not take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time by advising me that you no longer wish to continue. If you decide this, please be assured that there will also be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced in ANY way.

Confidentiality

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that my research is conducted properly, including my academic supervisor/s. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.)

All study records will be destroyed after the completion and marking of my thesis. I will refer to you by a code number or pseudonym (another name) in the thesis and any further publication.

Risks/discomforts

At the present time, I do not foresee any risks in your participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

Benefits

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to us in understanding experiences of women in leadership/management once they enter motherhood and return to the workplace.

If you would like to receive feedback on the study, I can send you the results of the study when it is completed sometime after February 2017.

Who to contact if you have been harmed or have any concerns

This research has been approved by the Wits Business School. If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact the Research Office Manager at the Wits Business School, Mmabatho Leeuw. Mmabatho.leeuw@wits.ac.za

If you have concerns or questions about the research you may call my academic research supervisor, Lynda Gouveia on 083 3261756.

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in research on the professional women's experience after motherhood. I understand that I am 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 not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to 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 the tape-recording of my participation in the study.

…….. Date:……..

Signature of participant

APPENDIX C: An example of one of the email requests made for participating in the research

From: Yasar, A. (Aneshrie) Sent: 10 November 2015 05:27 PM

To: <details kept anonymous>

Subject: Masters study - Maternity Coaching

Dear X

I have undertaken a Masters in Management in the field of Business and Executive Coaching with Wits Business School. A requirement to complete the Masters degree is the submission of a research dissertation.

My particular interest is in understanding the leaking pipeline, and how coaching can play more pivotal role in this regard. As such, my research aims to determine whether offering professional women specific workplace support once becoming mothers (such as maternity coaching) will aid women in re-engaging with their careers, ultimately allowing organisations to retain their female talent.

Maternity transition coaching is emerging in some organisations as a means to support professional 'mothers' in the workplace. However, there has been no academic study to date in South Africa which has looked at Maternity Coaching. I am therefore extremely excited that you agreed to participate in the study as a pioneering Maternity Coach in South Africa.

Next is to engage with the leaders of Company X, in particular Group HR / Talent and Transformation to obtain their consent in also participating in the study. Thank you for offering to position my request with Company X on my behalf.

I have chosen a case study approach where I will be looking at two organisations – one where maternity coaching is offered, and where it is not.

The table below outlines the proposed profile and logistics for the study. I foresee the majority of the interviews taking place at Company X in Jhb, starting December 2015 and continuing into early February 2016. The interviews will take approx. an hour long each. Follow-up (telephonic) discussions may proceed to clarify any aspects that arose from the interview.

Description of respondent	Key Criteria	Number of respondents	Logistics and proposed evidence
Professional women (mothers)	-Women in leadership/ management/ specialist roles -Women who have become mothers within the last 3 years (including adoptive mothers)	4-5	-1 interview per women Held at the <company> office in Jhb
Line Managers	Managers who had exposure/experience to women in the team who had a baby during their tenure (within the past 3 years)	1-2	-1 interview per manager Held at the <company> office in Jhb
Talent & Transformation (Group HR)	Head of Group HR / Talent to discuss the related HR policies and the maternity coaching programme from a 'purchaser' perspective.	1	-1 interview - held at the <company> office in Jhb - Archival: Culture and Staff surveys - Archival: Staff attrition information for a specified period - Any post-coaching feedback collected by the company
Maternity Coach	Has first-hand experience working with maternity coaching	1	-1 interview with the Coach (CPT / JHB) -Observation of an actual maternity coaching session (if possible) - Any post-coaching feedback collected by the coach - Documents: The Maternity Coaching Programme proposal

In line with good academic practice, the organisation's and the respondent's details will remain anonymous in the study's findings. I will also be able to tailor a separate report for yourself and <Company X> once the dissertation has been concluded in 2017.

Kind regards

Aneshrie Yasar

APPENDIX D: Number of quotations by Code Family, per case

Code families	# Quotations: Case A	# Quotations: Case B
Breastfeeding	9	19
Care for self	22	4
Career progression and Retention	68	98
Coaching	170	66
Communication	10	12
Culture	9	17
Decisions	19	42
During maternity leave	32	23
Empowerment and Disempowerment	12	31
Engagement	6	14
FWP and Flexibility	45	144
Gifts women bring post motherhood	18	25
Guilt	20	20
Line manager's role and concerns	67	140
Organisational policies, practices and facilities	22	73
Perceptions	10	25
Post maternity leave	89	58
Pre motherhood experience	12	16
Preparing for maternity leave	17	17
Relationships	31	44
Role model	19	11
Roles that women fulfil	24	55
Second-time mothers	25	14
Self	45	65
Situation	24	29
Strategies	45	51
Stress levels	20	30
Support	68	99
Time	15	19
Values	9	26
Women's concerns and needs	32	52
Work and home balance	8	10