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The effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity beyond junior executive level for South African women

Dhanesheri Govender

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 Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

Women have historically borne the responsibilities of family and home life. With the advent of the need for dual earner families, many women have used the opportunity inherent in the closing gender gap in access to education, to obtain better paying jobs. Despite this change, women are still expected to bear their historical role of family responsibilities. Whilst many organisations have introduced work-life balance strategies in an effort to assist female employees balance these roles, the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level is doubtful.

The data pertaining to this research problem was collected from 15 junior executive women from 15 different organisations through a semi-structured, open-ended interview questionnaire. The key findings are that South African organisations do not offer as many work-life balance strategies as the literature would lead one to anticipate. When they do offer these strategies, they are thought to have a negative impact on the ability of women junior executives to progress to more senior positions within the organisation.

The continued discrimination of women on the basis that they have families and want to be involved with those families has to end in order for gender equality at senior executive levels to become a reality. Women need to take an active role in changing cultural norms by engaging with their spouses to share family responsibility and by shaping future generations to do the same. In addition female senior executives also have a part to play in mentoring female junior executives to attain their desired career aspirations, instead of playing the part of honorary males.

The most important change however lies with organisations. They need to be more conscious of their reasons for offering these strategies and need to make these strategies a cultural norm, which may require a cultural shift within the organisation. This change may include encouraging their male employees to use work-life balance strategies. Finally, organisations have to monitor the

effectiveness of these strategies in meeting the desired goals, like they would do for any other strategy that is believed to be of importance to the organisation.

DECLARATION

I, Dhanesheri Govender, 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 Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Dhanesheri Govender

Signed at Parktown, Johannesburg on the 31st day of March 2014

DEDICATION

THIS RESEARCH IS DEDICATED TO THE MANY WOMEN WHO HAVE STRUGGLED WITH BALANCING THEIR ROLES AS MOTHERS AND THEIR DRIVE TO ATTAIN CAREER SUCCESS AND PERSERVERE REGARDLESS.

IT IS ALSO DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER, YURISHA….MAY YOU HAVE GREATER SUCCESS THAN ME IN ATTAINING THAT BALANCE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking all the wonderfully dynamic women who have contributed to this research by offering their time and trusting me with their honest thoughts and opinions of the subject matter.

I would also like to acknowledge the patience of my husband, Rajend and my children Yurisha and Shaylan, for their unwavering love, support and patience, which has been ill-rewarded with my inattention to their needs over the duration of this research. A special thanks to my husband for stepping in to ensure that we were fed, when I was unable to make us meals because of the commitment required to completing this research. I would also like to thank Rachel, my helper, for going above and beyond the call of duty, by working long hours and weekends in order to ensure that the needs of my children were met, when I could not attend to them.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Louise Whitaker for her guidance and support, as well as Professor Terri Carmichael for her constructive input and Mrs Jennifer Croll for her assistance with Endnote. Without the three of you, this would not have been a possibility.

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to assess the effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity beyond junior executive level for South African women. This information could potentially contribute to organisations understanding and thus managing perceptions and bias experienced by South African female junior executives with specific regard to their potential career progression. The understanding and subsequent management of these perceptions and or biases could prove prudent for organisations in attracting and retaining female talent.

1.2 Context of the study

Women have historically and traditionally borne the responsibilities of family and home life. Women were not expected to concern themselves with matters outside the home as that was considered the domain of men. However with the rise of the industrial economy, the traditional role of women came to be overthrown (SAHO 2000). As such, the 1960's saw a rapid growth in female labour market participation in South Africa (van Klaveren 2009).

Despite this change in the role of women in society, women are still expected to fulfil their historical roles associated with caring for the family. Franzway (2001) suggests that professional women are simultaneously expected to be fully committed to their work like their male counterparts as well as give priority to their family and that the latter has become a largely inescapable greedy institution for women. This leads to a conflict which Blair-Loy (2003, p. 9) refers to as "competing loyalties".

In light of these conflicting demands and in order to retain female talent, many forward thinking organisations have created policies and practices that facilitate work-life balance (Kehl 2012). According to Guest (2002, p. 263) work-life balance is defined as "sufficient time to meet commitments at both home and

work". Work-life balance may also be defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimal role conflict Clark (2000, p. 751). Work-life balance strategies are thus policies employed by organisations in order to assist employees achieve work- life balance, with a specific view to retaining them.

Despite the introduction of various strategies in order to retain female talent and in order to assist women in balancing the conflicting roles they play, very few women have progressed beyond junior executive level. In fact, the 2012 – 2013 Annual Report by the Commission for Employment Equity indicates that gender diversity is more likely to be achieved at senior management level and not executive level (CEE 2013).

It is with this in mind that the question around the effectiveness of these work-life balance strategies is raised, with specific regard to female junior executives in South Africa, in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 *Main problem*

Identify the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations to female junior executives, establish their perceptions and reasons therefore with respect to the impact and/or the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender diversity at senior executive levels.

1.3.2 *Sub-problems*

The first sub-problem is to identify the work-life balance strategies used by South African organisations in assisting female employees at junior executive level better manage the demands of their various roles and/or responsibilities.

The second sub-problem is to establish the perceptions of South African female junior executives with respect to the effectiveness of work-life balance

strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels and the reasons for these perceptions.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study fills a gap in that it will assist South African organisations in understanding the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of their work-life balance strategies in meeting the needs of female junior executives. This will enable organisations to better manage the expectations of their female junior executives through understanding their perceptions of the impact and/or the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels. Comer and Soliman (1996), as cited in Kossek (2005) allude to the fact that organisations implement work-life balance strategies as a form of workforce diversity, without effectively monitoring them.

The study will hopefully provide guidance to South African organisations in order to proactively understand the need for understanding the effectiveness of work-life balance strategies, in specific relation to female junior executives and with specific regard to their career progression to more senior executive levels. In addition, Carter (2011) found that it may also benefit business in retaining female talent that is likely to provide the extent of gender diversity that is required to improve the profitability of organisations. It is also likely to benefit female junior executives by dispelling perceptions that may ultimately contribute to them exiting the female talent pool that is required for gender diversity.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

This study focussed on South African female junior executives, based in Gauteng, that have responsibilities outside of the work environment. These responsibilities may include, inter alia, a spouse, children, community responsibilities, caring for an elder, personal healthcare and activities related to personal values. In addition, because this study was limited to 15 women across 15 different organisations that offer work-life balance strategies, it was not representative of the impact of work-life balance strategies on the general

employee populace of alternative positions or gender within the organisations or of the South African workforce in junior executive roles.

1.6 Definition of terms

Gender gap – refers to the measurable difference in a specific aspect based solely on gender, e.g. the difference in the number of male and female farmers in the Karoo would be described as the gender gap in farming in the Karoo. The World Economic Forum ("WEF") defines gender gap as the measure of the gap in access to resources and opportunities in individual countries rather than the actual levels of the available resources and opportunities in those countries, based on gender (WEF 2012). For the purposes of this report, the term gender gap refers to the difference in various determinants such as income levels, age, levels of education, geography and occupation types, based on gender.

Junior executive – refers to individuals at senior management level that are predominantly responsible for operational delivery as opposed to formulating strategy. They are at the early stages of informing strategy development and thus have little to limited input to organisational strategy formation, but have significant input in achieving strategy.

Work-life balance – the ability to balance work and non-work (life) roles and responsibilities and the extent to which work and life supports that balance. According to Guest (2002, p. 263) the definition of work-life balance is "sufficient time to meet commitments at both home and work". Work-life balance may also be defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimal role conflict Clark (2000, p. 751). For the purposes of this report work-life balance is the ability of an employee to meet their obligations relating to their work and non-work roles with minimal conflict between the two.

Work-life balance strategies – refers to policies employed by organisations in order to assist employees achieve work-life balance, with a specific goal or set of goals in mind e.g. talent retention. These are also referred to as family friendly policies that have organisationally defined outcomes, which may include, inter alia, increased productivity, employer commitment, employee

retention and profits. For the purposes of this report, it refers to policies employed by organisations in order to assist employees achieve work-life balance.

1.7 Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding the study:

- The proposed sample of respondents had the information required to support the purpose of this study;
- The information provided by the sample population is a reflection of the individuals experience and/or perceptions or that of others that they are familiar with as it relates to the topic; and
- If the respondents did not want to disclose certain information and/or experiences and/or perceptions, they would have informed the interviewer

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The 2011 SABPP Women's report indicates that 87% of women in South Africa are literate and have increased opportunities to attend school and possibly attain some form of tertiary education. It also indicates that the number of women working in South Africa increased by 1.3% from 2010 to 2011. In addition, the report states that in South Africa in 2011, 4.4% of leadership positions are occupied by women, whilst 5.3% of chairpersons were women. South African women demonstrate far greater success in directorships and executive management positions where they hold 15.8% and 21.6% representivity respectively (SABPP 2011).

SABPP's findings are confirmed by the leadership census carried out by the Businesswomen's Association of South Africa ("BWA") in 2012. According to Dormehl (2012), the BWA South African Women in Leadership census 2012, women make up 52% of South Africa's population but constitute only 43.9% of South Africa's workforce. Furthermore, BWA also established that women constitute only 21.4% of executive managers, 17.1% of directors, 9.1% of CEO's and 5.5% of chairpersons in the country, thus remaining a minority. This significant progress in female labour force participation, albeit slow, is also supported by the 2012 World Development Report (The World Bank 2012).

The SABPP, BWA and 2012 World Development reports are further borne out by the 2012 – 2013 Annual Report by the Commission for Employment Equity. The report suggests that gender diversity is more likely to be achieved at senior management level or junior executive level, not above or below (CEE 2013), as is indicated in figure 1 below:

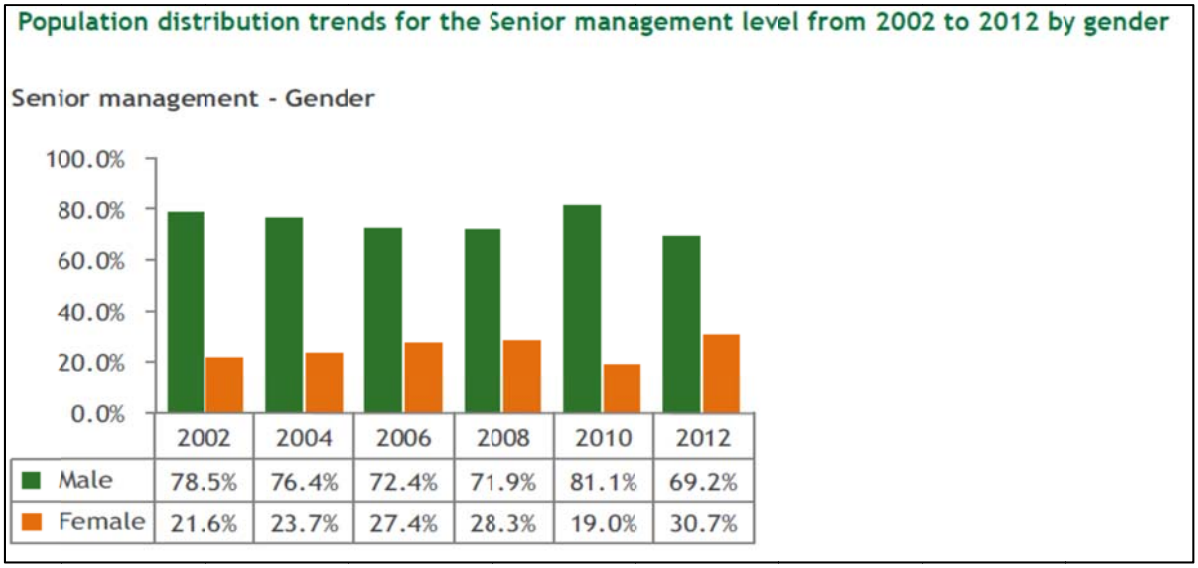

Figure 1: The distribution of gender across senior management positions in South Africa for the period 2002 to 2012 (CEE 2013).

The report also states that whilst it is encouraging that women constitute 45,2% of the workforce, only 19.8% and 30.7% of women are in top management and senior management positions respectively. This is less encouraging when one considers the fact that women constitute 42.2% and 42.8% of South African workforce that is professionally qualified and technically skilled respectively.

The progress of women in the workplace is however marred by their visibility and involvement in leadership positions as well as the disparity in earnings relative to their male counterparts. The Wage Indicator Foundation (2011), through their online questionnaire, collated 510,000 responses over the period 2006 to 2010 relating to various factors such as individuals' levels of education, extent of experience, and their impact on gender gap. The results of their research are as follows:

- The gender gap is wider in developing countries. The gender gap at 29% in Africa is better than the gender gap of South America, Central and North America and Asia at 33%, 34% and 40% respectively. Europe has the lowest gender gap with an average of less than 20%;

- The gender gap varies with occupations. Historically male dominated occupations exhibited a greater gender gap. Historically female

dominated occupations exhibited smaller gender gaps or gender gaps in favour of women;

- There is a positive correlation between age and the gender gap i.e. as a women's age increase, so too does the gender gap; and
- The gender gap widens with levels of education and on average an educated women earns 30% below what their male counterparts do.

Similar to the Wage Indicator Foundation, the Global Gender Gap Index WEF (2012) measured the gap between men and women across four categories, namely economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment. Their findings are presented in figure 2 below:

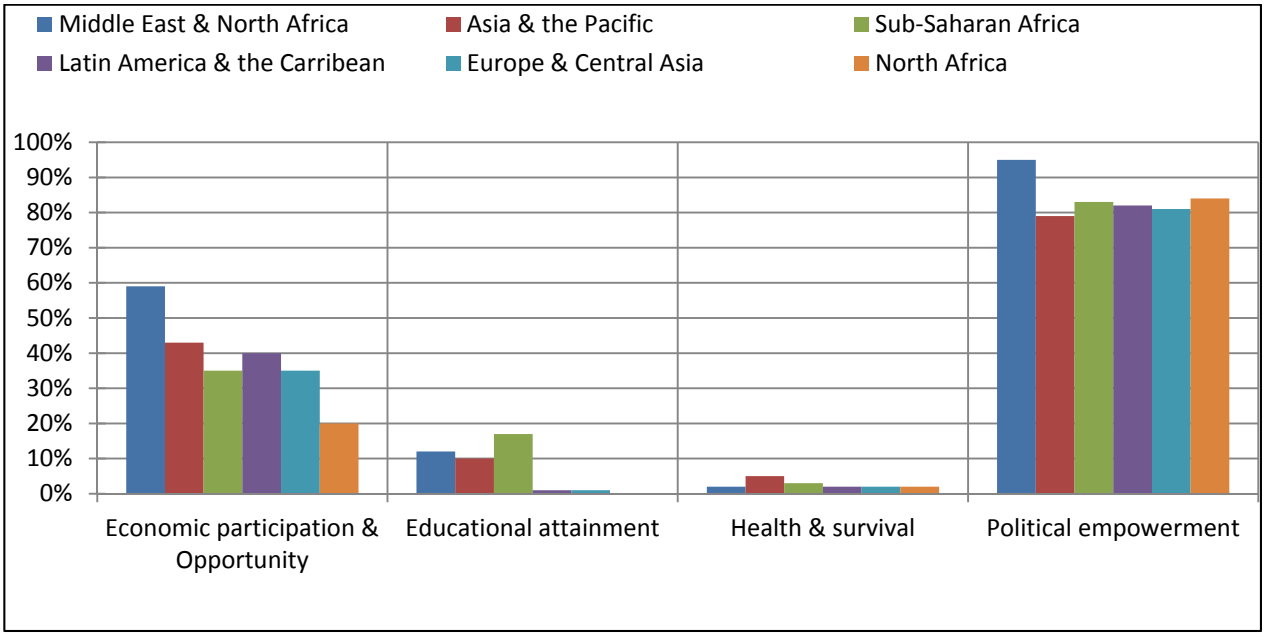

Figure 2: The gender gap per geographical area across the four categories researched by the World Economic Fund. (WEF 2012).

It is encouraging that the research conducted by the WEF found that, in terms of aggregate rankings, South Africa ranked 16 out of 135 countries and that the gender gap relating to health and education outcomes has closed quite considerably over the six years analysed. It is however disconcerting that the

gender gap in economic participation and political participation found by WEF echoes the findings made by the Wage Indicator Foundation.

Based on this information, this section sets out a literature review on the key themes of relevance to the study. This section begins with defining the research topic by understanding the existing gender gaps in the form of statistics relating to women in the workplace in relation to their positional and financial progress in the workplace relative to their male counterparts of equal educational stature. This is followed by an exploration of literature relating to the roles and responsibilities that female employees have to fulfil, thus illustrating the need for work-life balance strategies in assisting employees, specifically female employees, balance their various roles with a view to retaining them. This is followed by a subsection relating to the types of work-life balance strategies that organisations offer their employees. Literature relating to the second research problem is then considered and deals with the need for gender diversity in the workplace. Finally, this section unpacks the effectiveness of these work-life balance strategies and its consequent impact on promoting gender equalities.

2.2 Definition of topic or background discussion

It is clear from section 2.1 above that gender gaps exist when positional, financial, educational and political status of men and women are considered. Whilst, to a large degree, the gender gap in educational status has been closed, business has a role to play in closing the gender gap with regard to positional and financial status. It is therefore difficult for organisations to continue to ignore the fact that women constitute 50% of the potential skilled workforce. In addition, forward thinking organisations have experienced the benefits of having women hold executive positions within the organisation.

In this regard, many organisations have been forced to acknowledge that societal constructs of gender roles hold negative implications for career progression where women are concerned, largely attributable to the work-life conflict experienced by women. In attempting to address these work-life conflicts, organisations have introduced work-life balance strategies in an

attempt to retain female talent as well as to assist women to better balance their work and life demands. It is however unclear as to how these work-life balance strategies impact on the careers of the women it seeks to empower. The purpose of this study is to understand this in the South African context.

2.3 Work-life balance strategies that organisations offer

The first sub-problem is to identify the work-life balance strategies used by South African organisations in assisting female employees at junior executive level better manage the demands of their various roles and/or responsibilities.

In order to answer this question, it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities that create demands for women in their work and non-work lives thus creating a need for work-life balance strategies and the types of work-life balance strategies that organisations offer their employees in order to assist their employees achieve work-life balance.

2.3.1 *Roles/responsibilities of the female and it's evolution in the South African workplace*

Women across the world were historically subjected to several kinds of discriminatory behaviour, attitudes and policies (SABPP 2011). As early as 1977, gender consciousness was evidenced in South Africa. One such instance of gender consciousness was when women made a submission to the Wiehahn Commission, wherein the discrimination faced by women in the workplace and in society in general was highlighted. The submission made reference to, inter alia, inequality in marriage, maternity leave arrangements and domestic duties, which stems from the historically subservient position of women originating in the family and perpetuated through education and training (Berger 1992).

Since 1977, labour legislation in South Africa such as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 as well as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 have come a long way in assisting women find their place in the workplace. In addition, the South African government introduced a number of initiatives and policies to support women since 1994. South African women have also been

exposed to better educational opportunities which have contributed to the dramatic change in the role of women in the workplace (SABPP 2011). In fact this opportunity for education is a global trend to such a degree, that in some parts of the world, more women than men pursue this educational opportunity (The World Bank 2012). Yet another encouraging fact is that 33% of South African parliamentarians are women compared with the global average of 19.3%.

Despite these strides in the generally right direction, women have not shed the yoke of responsibility around family life and the resulting responsibilities. Franzway (2001) aptly describes both work and family as greedy institutions which demand loyalty and full commitment from those who work for them. Selmi and Cahn (2006) agree that the workplace is unwilling to adapt to the challenges of working parents and thus their non-work roles and responsibilities. In addition, Franzway (2001) further suggests that women serving both these institutions are often faced with the conflicting demands imposed by these institutions, which proves to be disruptive to their careers and family lives, better termed as competing devotions (Blair-Loy 2003). Selmi et al. (2006) also discuss the possibility that if more men were to be actively involved in familial responsibilities, it is unlikely that they will be penalized for it with respect to their career progression and this in turn would reduce the potential impact their spouses may face career-wise.

Furthermore, Franzway (2001, p. 3) asserts that professional women are simultaneously expected to be fully committed to their work like their male counterparts as well as give priority to their family and that the latter has become a “largely inescapable greedy institution for women”. She further suggests that in South African society, there is a separation of roles between private and public spheres and that it is a social expectation that women commit to the private sphere. In consideration of this and the fact that public institutions are embedded in society, “men actively exclude women from high status positions and that such exclusion is in turn justified by reference to women’s higher emotional investment in the family” Franzway (2001, p. 2).

Women still bear the responsibility of having and raising children and this according to Gatrell (2007) places them on the “mommy track”, where prospects of career progression are constrained. The “mommy track” is a phenomenon described by Blair-Loy (2003) as a pathway requiring experience, qualifications, and work ethic while lacking career advancement possibilities. Gatrell’s assertions are further backed by the SABPP report with specific regard to the limitations that family responsibility, including child-bearing and child-rearing place on a woman’s career. In fact, the SABPP report on South African women indicates that whilst there is positive trend in the involvement of women in previously male dominated careers, and whilst women in South Africa have the capability, educational competence and confidence to assume leadership roles, the extent of their success is significant only in lower executive management levels.

In addition, the research conducted by SABPP indicates that this is as a result of the fact that women in the workplace still devote themselves to the family and care-giving responsibilities, thus spending more than twice the amount of time on unpaid work than their male counterparts do. This is further borne out by the online research conducted by the Wage Indicator Foundation which indicates that women carry the bulk of the household burden, resulting in a longer working day than male workers (Wage Indicator Foundation 2011).

From the literature reviewed and referred to above, it is clear that the historical societal and personal roles and expectations of women have evolved significantly. Globally, women have a variety of opportunities available to them which allows them to progress, in some facets of life, to the extent of their male counterparts, as indicated by the WEF. The introduction of women in the workplace has to a large degree progressed to current levels due to economic need. However, women still bear the brunt of family responsibilities, which is a limiting factor to their career path and progression and thus requires interventions such as work-life balance strategies in order to assist employees in striking a satisfactory work-life balance. This is a thought that is supported by Selmi et al. (2006), who claim that despite the fact that women have made significant inroads in entering the labour force, the work-family dilemma has

remained largely unchanged and suggests that the status quo is likely to pervade unless change happens in the workplace, at home and in society.

2.3.2 *Types of work-life balance strategies that organisations offer*

According to Friedman, Christensen, and DeGroot (1998), as the composition of working families continues to change and as women have made inroads into the formal workplace, employers have developed practices that allow employees to find greater balance between work and home lives. Guest (2002) adds to the theory around the relevance of work-life balance strategies and states that they are necessary, due to the perceived excessive demands of work coupled with negative impact that work-life imbalance has on well-being and effective functioning. He further suggests that by focussing on work-life issues, individuals and employers alike are forced to consider the boundary between work and non-work responsibilities and to determine their tolerance for how close to the boundary they wish to work. Burchielli, Bartram and Thanacoody (2008) add to the need for work-life balance mechanisms by citing the trends in work-change impacted by technological advances that substitutes the concept of a traditional work day with longer working hours and work intensification. (Kossek, 2005) (Kossek, 2005) (Kossek, 2005)

- Attracting outstanding, talented individuals in an increasingly competitive global market;
- Challenging business practices in an increasingly technological environment;
- Offering their employees, men and women alike, the time they need to balance work, family and other roles that may be important to them, thus customising the work environment for as many employees as possible; and
- Building the employer's position as an employer of choice.

However, according to Connell (2005), work-life balance strategies mainly serve to support women's domestic commitments.

Harrington and James (2005) list the following to be the most common practices that are effected through changes in human resource policies:

- Extension of employee services – onsite child care, employee health and fitness centres and concierge services;
- Employee benefits – paid parental leave, resource and referral programs, adoption benefits and domestic partner benefits;
- Job restructuring initiatives – greater use of alternative work schedules and loosening of requirements around part-time positions; and
- Increased initiatives aimed at human resource and organisational development – diversity programmes, women's initiatives, leadership development and cultural change efforts.

In line with Harrington et al. (2005), Gatrell (2007) focusses solely on part-time work (fractional employment) insofar as it is viable as a strategy offered to female employees, for the achievement of work-life balance, after they have had children. Kossek and Friede (2006) discuss strategic alternatives that Harrington et al. (2005) broadly classified as job restructuring initiatives as well

as offer examples of additional strategies. Accordingly Kossek et al. (2006) suggest that work-life initiatives include:

- Strategies that allow for the flexibility of working time which are designed to allow employees to have more control over hours worked and when they are worked. These strategies include:
    - Flexitime – allows for employees to work full time by varying the start and end times that they work;
    - Compressed work week – allows for employees to work extra hours on some days in order to work shorter days the rest of the week or to have a whole day off at another time;
    - Job sharing – two employees share one full-time job;
    - Compensatory time – employees working long hours get time off in order to recoup; and
    - Leaves of absence – allowing employees leaves of absence, after which they can return to their jobs or a similar job. This would include time taken off to further their studies, do military services or other life pursuits.
- Strategies that allow employees to choose to work outside the office, all or some of the time, whilst making use of technology to maintain contact with co-workers and clients alike;
- Support with care responsibility strategies assist employees in providing care for others (children or elders), or for oneself and household. These include:
    - Child/elder care – provides employees with access to employer-provided care for children or elders either at their worksite or in communities;

- Child/elder care provider referral service – provides employees with a service, which they can call to get assistance with finding regular child/elder care providers;

- Financial support for dependent care – provides employees with financial assistance in the form of flexible spending that uses pre-tax earnings to help pay for care, direct subsidies or discounts; and

- Emergency/sick child/elder care – providing access to employees for care for children or elders in unexpected situations.

- Strategies that offer informational or social support by providing employees with emotional support relating to non-work or balance challenges. These include:

    - Support hotlines – employees can call a designated hotline number to receive support relating to work-life issues; and

    - Support groups – employees can join a support/networking group for informational and psychological support.

Whilst the strategies listed and discussed above are not meant to be exhaustive, it is fairly comprehensive and provides the necessary insight for the purposes of the research being undertaken.

2.3.3 ***Research Question 1***

- What work-life balance strategies do South African organisations offer their employees;

- To what degree are the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations focussed on their female employees; and

- What are the reasons behind organisations offering their employees these policies?

2.4 The impact and/or effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity at senior executive levels

The second sub-problem is to establish the perceptions of South African female junior executives with respect to the impact and/or effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels and the reasons for these perceptions. In exploring this, there is a need to understand the existing gender gaps, why gender diversity at senior executive level is important and finally how work-life balance strategies impact on gender diversity at senior executive level.

2.4.1 *Importance of gender diversity at senior executive level*

In 2004, Catalyst, in their Bottom Line report, indicated that:

- Women earn more than 50% of all Bachelor and Masters degrees in the United States of America ("USA") and nearly 50% of all Doctorate and Law degrees;
- Women also represent an ever-increasing presence in USA's labour force and in the management ranks in Fortune 500 companies; and
- Women make and/or influence purchasing decisions, which is an indication of their growing economic power.

Catalyst further asserts that these factors contribute to the business case for recruiting, developing and advancing women within organisations in order to better financial and overall organisation performance.

In addition, Carter (2011) in the Catalyst's bottom line report for the period 2004 – 2008 indicates that American organisations that have a sustained high representation of Women Board Directors ("WBD") on their Board significantly outperform those that have a sustained low representation of female Directors on their Board as shown in figure 3 below:

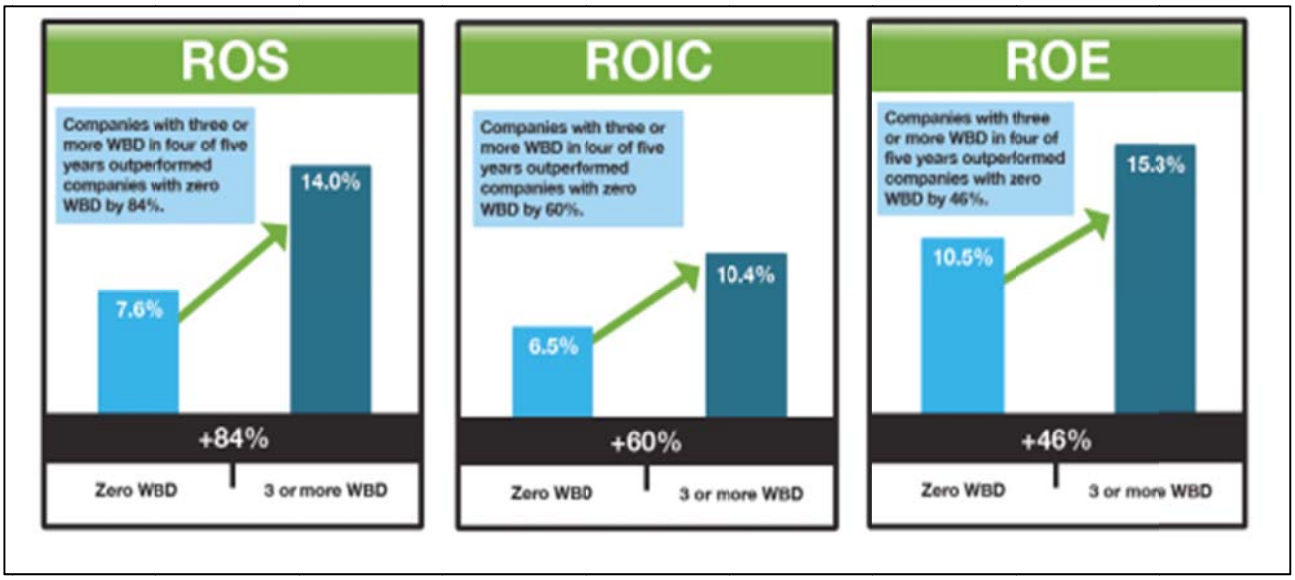

Figure 3: The correlation of gender diversity and organisation performance of Fortune 500 companies for the period 2004-2008. (Carter 2011)

In addition, a study conducted by Adler (2001), wherein it is reported that a 19 year study of 215 fortune 500 firms indicates a strong correlation between promoting women into the executive suite and high profitability. This fact is further supported by the Gender Gap Index which indicates a strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its national competitiveness, income and development (WEF 2012).

The fact that South African women are so poorly represented in executive levels within organisations and that, similar to their American counterparts, their careers are likely to fall victim to competing devotions along the path to senior executive positions, creates a potential gap in South African organisations with regard to gender diversity at senior executive levels.

This coupled with the fact that American studies show a positive correlation between gender diversity in executive levels and organisational performance and that the WEF's research indicates an inverse relationship between gender gap and competitiveness, income and development creates an impetus for South African organisations to understand the needs of their female junior

executives in order to ensure that female talent is retained to create an optimal level of gender diversity for improved organisational and perhaps national performance.

It is in this regard that this study is relevant for the South African market, as organisations can only manage what they are aware of. It is thus important that an organisation's understanding of the perceptions that female junior executives hold relating to the impact and/or effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity beyond junior executive level becomes imperative in order to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of female talent to assist in running more effective and profitable South African organisations and a more robust national economy.

2.4.2 *The impact of work-life balance strategies on promoting gender equality in the workplace*

The World Development Report of 2012 found, through their research, that women are more likely to work in jobs that offer flexible working arrangements or work-life balance strategies, so that they can combine work and family care responsibilities and in so-doing trap themselves in low paying jobs and low productivity business activities. This finding suggests that women are less likely to experience career progression, should they choose to exercise work-life balance strategies offered by the employer. Gatrell (2007), in her study of women using fractional working arrangements, after becoming mothers, as a means to attain a degree of work-life balance concluded that fractional working brought with it serious negative consequences for career progression, both immediately and in the long term.

Gatrell' s study also highlighted that women who returned to work fractionally after maternity leave were not only denied opportunities for development but were demoted even though their responsibilities were the same as before they went on maternity leave. Their experiences were contrary to their understanding that a fractional work arrangement is conducive to work-life balance and are regarded as a privilege because it combines part time work with career progression. The question that begs is "why is it that when women exercise

employer offered work-life balance strategies, do their careers stagnate and in some instances suffer?" One possibility is that, despite changes to societal norms and the increased access to education, as well as the progress of women to more senior levels within the work-place, many women still remain torn between their commitment to work and family.

In her attempts to understand the possible reasons behind the impact of work-life balance strategies on the careers of women in senior positions, Blair-Loy (2003) studied these competing devotions, by interviewing 81 accomplished American women who have attained senior positions with organisations. Blair-Loy concluded three very important issues relating to work-life balance strategies:

- She argues that employees are evaluated against the perceptions of the employer created constructs of what is a committed employee and as such women who opt to work part-time or that want to use available work-life balance strategies are viewed as being less committed than those who don't;
- Plausible alternatives to the typical male dominated work ideal have not been identified, or, if identified have not been institutionalised; and
- That an additional reason why work-life balance strategies have not been adopted by employers is that they threaten "the route of power of the traditionally male executive with a home-making wife".Blair-Loy (2003, p. 200)

Blair-Loy's findings are confirmed in a study by Peters (2004), which indicated large numbers of capable Australian women leaving their employer as a result of feeling marginalised with respect to selective job opportunities and being passed up for promotion, both of which the organisations defended under the veil of non-work roles. In addition, Burchielli et al. (2008) are of the view that even though Australian employers have understood and embraced the need for work-life balance initiatives and have introduced work-life balance strategies, as advocated by government, there is much question around how much employers are actually doing to support the achievement of work-life balance. This

suggests that employers are introducing work-life balance strategies, without necessarily committing to their workability. In fact their research reflects that their respondents (female senior managers) rejected the concept of work-life balance and that they were able to function in their work roles as a result of substantial support from various sources.

Managing Director of Manpower South Africa, Lyndy van den Barselaar, in an online Bizcommunity article, Lion's Wing (2013) supports the idea that work-life balance strategies are outdated and, when used by women, pose a barrier to the advancement of women in the workplace. Van den Barselaar also supports the notion that women require the right kind of support in their personal lives in order for their careers to progress, in conjunction with being provided with equal opportunities to their male counterparts. Burchielli et al. (2008) go one step further and suggest that work-life balance strategies do not result in balance and creates other challenges that include employees managing both domains at great personal expense or creates greater conflict between work and non-work responsibilities that are not alleviated by their greater level of autonomy at executive level or their access to resources.

According to Blair-Loy (2003), these are the factors that contribute to women ultimately choosing career or family and if they choose the latter, they exit the business world, thus causing organisations to lose talented women. Goff, Mount and Jamison (1990) suggest the alternative that if women cannot cope with the demands of work and non-work responsibilities, they resort to having fewer or no children. Connell (2005) however suggests that work-life balance strategies have a place in redefining social norms for the common good, where men are not the sole beneficiaries of freedom, where children are not short changed and where respect for women is not veiled as a mechanism for confining women to their domestic role.

Friedman et al. (1998) surmise that there are three guiding principles that make work-life balance strategies that work, which are central to line management. These, they believe, require line managers to clarify what is important, clearly inform their employees about business priorities and they encourage their employees to identify where work falls in the spectrum of their overall priorities.

In this regard, Thompson, Beauvais, and Lyness (1999) found that perceptions of a supportive organisational culture were strongly correlated with the use of work-life balance strategies. This is turn correlates to higher commitment, lower staff turnover and work-life conflict. Allen (2001) agrees that implementation of work-life balance strategies alone are not sufficient for organisations to assist their employees attain work-life balance, but that the organisational culture and environment needs to be supportive, specifically at the line management level.

2.4.3 Research Question 2

- In the context that gender diversity in senior executive roles is important to organisations, coupled with the dual facts that women still assume bulk of the responsibilities of family life and the existing gender gap, how effective are work-life balance strategies, offered by South African organisations, in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level for South African women?;
- To what extent are they used by South African female junior executives?; and
- What are the factors that contribute to usage, or lack thereof, of these policies?

2.5 Conclusion of Literature Review

Klaus Schwab, The Executive Chairman of the WEF, states "*The key for the future of any country and any institution is the capability to develop, retain and attract the best talent. Women make up one half of the world's human capital. Empowering and educating girls and women and leveraging their talent and leadership fully in the global economy, politics and society are thus fundamental elements of succeeding and prospering in an ever more competitive world. In particular, with talent shortages projected to become more severe in much of the developed and developing world, maximizing access to female talent is a strategic imperative for business.*" WEF (2012, p. v).

Mr Schwab succinctly expresses that maximising female talent is a strategic imperative for business. However, women will continue to fail to make inroads to this end if there is no change to support that endeavour in the workplace, society and their personal lives. This is unless work-life balance strategies are not only placed on the agenda but can be measured and linked to tangible results. Although many organisations have woken up to this reality and have introduced a host of work-life balance strategies that are incredibly diverse and cater for most non-work eventualities, they have failed to implement and monitor their effectiveness in achieving the desired goal. To this end, it would appear that capable, talented women are discriminated against in the workplace for wanting a life outside of work.

In addition, women are often penalised with regard to the careers, when such strategies are accessed and ultimately are faced with choice of work or life or both, with the price tag of stunted career progress. Even in instances where they sacrifice non-work roles and responsibilities, they are still faced with gender gaps with respect to financial and positional status, which are exacerbated at higher levels of education and experience. In essence, it is important that organisations continually monitor usage of work-life balance strategies and how it impacts on the ability of talented women to progress to senior executive levels. Organisations also need to make a conscious effort in driving societal change insofar as encouraging their male employees to use these strategies, and in so doing, assist in changing the balance of non-work demands between genders.

2.5.1 Research Question 1:

- What work-life balance strategies do South African organisations offer their employees;
- To what degree are the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations focussed on their female employees; and
- What are the reasons behind organisations offering their employees these policies?

2.5.2 Research Question 2:

- In the context that gender diversity in senior executive roles is important to organisations, coupled with the dual facts that women still assume bulk of the responsibilities of family life and the existing gender gap, how effective are work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level for South African women;

- To what extent are they used by South African female junior executives; and

- What are the factors that contribute to usage, or lack thereof, of these policies?

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides insight into the research methodology used to answer the research questions relevant to this study. This section also explains how data was gathered and analysed in order to answer the research questions. The section below sets out the research method used as well as the literature relating to the research method chosen. This is followed by a brief description of the research design and instrument as well as how data was collected and analysed and concludes with a discussion of the validity and reliability of the study.

3.1 Research methodology /paradigm

This study used qualitative methodology to gather and analyse data in order to answer the research questions.

Qualitative data is usually verbal in nature and is a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions, which preserve chronological flow and enables the researcher to see which events lead to which consequences. This further enables the researcher to derive explanations that transcends initial conceptions (Miles and Huberman 1994).

This method is suited to the research topic, as the respondents have the knowledge and experience required to answer the research questions. Furthermore this method is apt for the research topic as data collection for the research topic requires a methodology which allows respondents to describe their experiences and activities. It is also appropriate in that it is semi-structured as this enabled the collection of necessary data, as asserted by Creswell (2003). This in turn enables the data collection process to evolve as it progresses as suggested by (Walker 1985).

Data collection took the form of one hour interviews with each respondent. Each respondent was able to express their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes to the questions posed in their own words. It is assumed that the respondents

were truthful and felt comfortable enough with the subject matter to be candid. The researcher made every effort to encourage such frankness through reassuring them with the promise of confidentiality.

3.2 Research Design

The design of this research took the form of semi structured interviews which was guided by a series of open ended questions that seeks to elicit information pertaining to the research questions. As suggested by Creswell (2003), the information obtained through the interviews formed the basis of a simple interpretive study. This method was used as it is the most efficient means of collecting information that is factual in nature, yet linked to perceptions and also provides insight of emotional value.

As asserted by Walker (1985), the advantage of this method was that it was of interest to the respondents as they were familiar with the subject matter and were able to provide the answers to the research questions posed by the researcher. Furthermore they were impacted positively or negatively by the work-life balance strategies, directly or indirectly and were able to contribute to the body of knowledge around the issue in context of the South African work environment. In addition, the advantage of this method was that the process of data collection was flexible and allowed the researcher to explore points of interest as they arose. The possible disadvantages of this method are the impact of the researcher on the interview process, maintaining confidentiality of the respondent's identities and any organisational specific information that was discussed during the interview and issues around interpretation of interview questions by the respondents.

3.3 Population and sample

3.3.1 Population

The population for this research topic is working women who hold junior executive positions in South African organisations that offer work-life balance

strategies, or have knowledge of work-life balance strategies from previous organisations they were employed by. This research focussed on 15 South African women from 15 different organisations, who currently hold junior executive positions within the organisations they serve. These female junior executives included in the population have multiple roles. These roles may include, *inter alia*, a spouse, children, community responsibilities, caring for an elder, personal healthcare and activities related to personal values. These women may or may not necessarily utilise the work-life balance strategies offered by their employers.

3.3.2 Sample and sampling method

The sampling method used for the research is a purposive convenience sample, utilising 15 female junior executives identified from 15 different organisations through networking events, including developmental programmes and other professional initiatives attended. These 15 junior executive women were interviewed through a semi structured interview process, which was arranged telephonically. This sample is appropriate because it represents a diverse view of work-life balance strategies offered by a variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as well as across diverse industries. The sample also provided diversity with regard to their responses to the research questions. Potential respondents that were not able to meet their commitment with regard to the interview process were replaced by an alternative respondent that met the criteria described in paragraph 3.3.1.

The potential respondents, who were identified, approached and agreed to assist in this research on a voluntary basis are listed in table 1 below:

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Respondent	Position held	Organisation
1	Senior Manager	Accounting and Audit firm 1
2	COO: Line of Banking	Bank 1
3	Associate Director	Accounting and Audit firm 2
4	Senior Manager	Insurance company 1
5	Head of Training	Insurance company 2
6	Portfolio Manager	Bank 2
7	Head: Fund Provider Relations	Financial Services Company 1
8	Brand Campaign Manager	Alcoholic Beverage Company
9	Manager: Wealth Management	Bank 3
10	Cost and Management Accountant	Financial Services Company 2
11	Senior Marketing Manager	Insurance Company 3
12	Group Consolidation Manager	Chemical company
13	Executive: SAP Core Banking	Bank 4
14	Senior Manager	Provincial Hospital
15	Senior Manager	Accounting and Audit firm 3

3.4 The research instrument

The research instrument is a semi-structured, open-ended interview questionnaire, attached hereto as Appendix A. The interview questionnaire takes into consideration the content of the literature review and the conclusions derived therefrom. According to Creswell (2003), this creates an opportunity for respondents to share information in a familiar and comfortable manner.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

The interviews were pre-arranged and were, as far as possible, conducted in person. Alternatively interviews were conducted telephonically. Interviews were held at the respondent's office, unless otherwise preferred by the respondent, at a time that was convenient for the respondent. Whilst it is preferable that interviews were held at the respondent's place of work, as this would have presented an opportunity to observe the environment, the respondent's level of comfort and convenience was considered. Interviews were recorded and notes were taken. Observations relating to workplace atmosphere, body language, gestures and other non-verbal cues were also documented and clarified with respondent to the extent that they were comfortable to discuss these.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data collected was analysed using the three sub-linked processes of data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The data reduction process entailed transcribing the recorded interviews. The transcribed interviews were then summarised for analytical purposes. Key terms and themes were identified utilising pre-assigned colour coding across all the interviews, as recommended by Neuendorf (2002). Neuendorf's method did not only assist in extracting themes, but also served to highlight inconsistencies and contradictions within the data. Data display entailed the analysis, interpretation and identification of trends, through the use of text-based matrices. Finally, the conclusions made by the researcher were verified by re-

contacting a few of the respondents, and accessing alternative information sources.

3.7 Limitations of the study

This study involved scheduling significant time with junior executive women. This posed a challenge with regard to cancellations and/or rescheduling, due to their work commitments. As mentioned earlier, if a respondent was not able to honour their agreed to appointment, an alternative time or respondent was identified and interviewed instead. The extent of industrial representivity of the respondents was limited by the researcher's access to respondents who met the criteria, as detailed in section 3.3.2 above, and potentially limited the use of the findings to industries that are represented by the respondents.

3.8 Validity and reliability

3.8.1 External validity

Neuendorf (2002) suggests that external validity relates to generalizability of learnings to groups other than the population research. However, as qualitative research is not intended to be generalisable, more relevant to this research will be the Guba and Lincoln's definition of external validity. External validity speaks to rigour, which according to Guba and Lincoln (1981) is synonymous with trustworthiness in qualitative research.

According to Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers (2002), without rigour, research becomes worthless fiction and loses its utility. They further suggest that there are five pillars to achieve external validity for research that is qualitative in nature. In line with these five pillars, the researcher ensured methodological coherence by maintaining flexibility and adapting the various steps in the research project to ensure that the process was congruent to the research questions.

In addition, the sample was deemed appropriate for the research as the respondents were from varying industries or within different practices within the same industry, was demographically representative and best represents and/or have knowledge relating to the research questions. The researcher also endeavoured to collect and analyse data concurrently thus cross referencing what is known to what needs to be known. The outcomes of the data analysis have been checked and rechecked to ensure that conclusions are not stretched and that they are truly represented in the data.

3.8.2 Internal validity

As internal validity speaks to uniformity with regard to the data collection process, and the chosen research instrument allows for flexibility with regard to how the interview develops, internal validity may pose a challenge. As such, the researcher ensured that the semi-structured interview questions were used consistently throughout the interviews, whilst maintaining the opportunity to explore lines of thought as they developed. In addition, the researcher provided the results of the analysis to the respondents to confirm internal validity. Furthermore, as the 15 respondents are from 15 different organisations, internal validity could be achieved by cross-referencing responses of respondents in the same or similar industries.

3.8.3 Reliability

According to Neuendorf (2002), reliability refers to the precision of the research instrument. Precision of the research instrument relates to the consistency in the results obtained when the same tool is used in repeated trials. This implies that the research tool had to be rigorous enough to be deemed trustworthy. As such, the research tool was tested on several trial respondents from one company and was refined so as obtain relevant and appropriate responses from respondents. This ensured the reliability of the interview questions and thus the results.

4 CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out and describes the results obtained from the interviews held with the respondents. It begins with the demographic profile of the respondents and a comparison of the anticipated respondents to the actual respondents, specifically with regard to industry. This is followed by the results obtained relative to each research question.

4.2 Demographic profile of respondents

All of the respondents interviewed were female, as was intended. Each of the 15 respondents represented a different company, as was discussed in the research methodology chapter. Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 below indicate the diversity of the respondents with respect to race, age, educational level and industry diversity respectively.

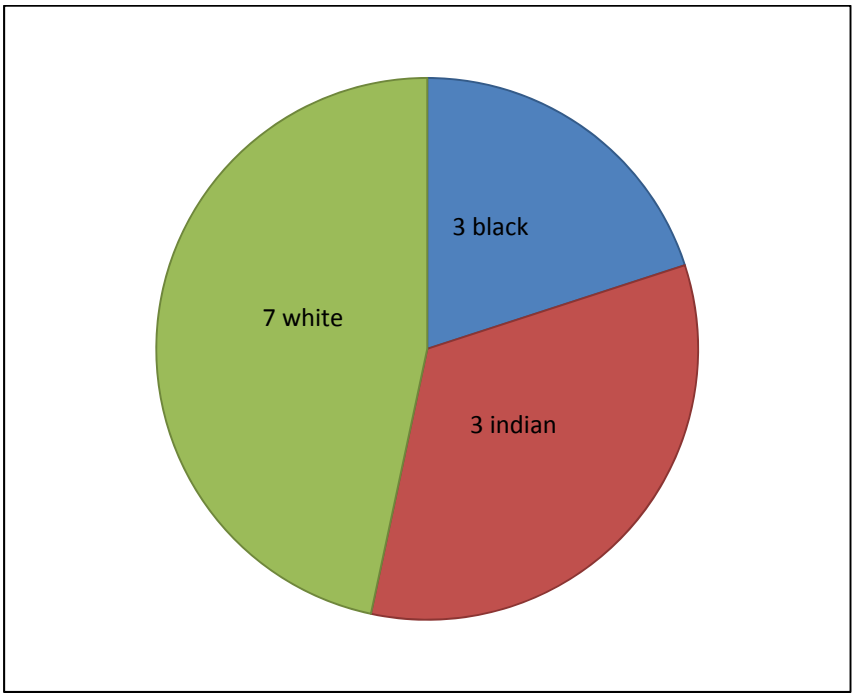

Figure 4: Respondent demographic by race – indicates the number of respondents per race group

There was no expectation with regard to respondent demographic by race, as race was not considered as a factor to career progression in the literature review.

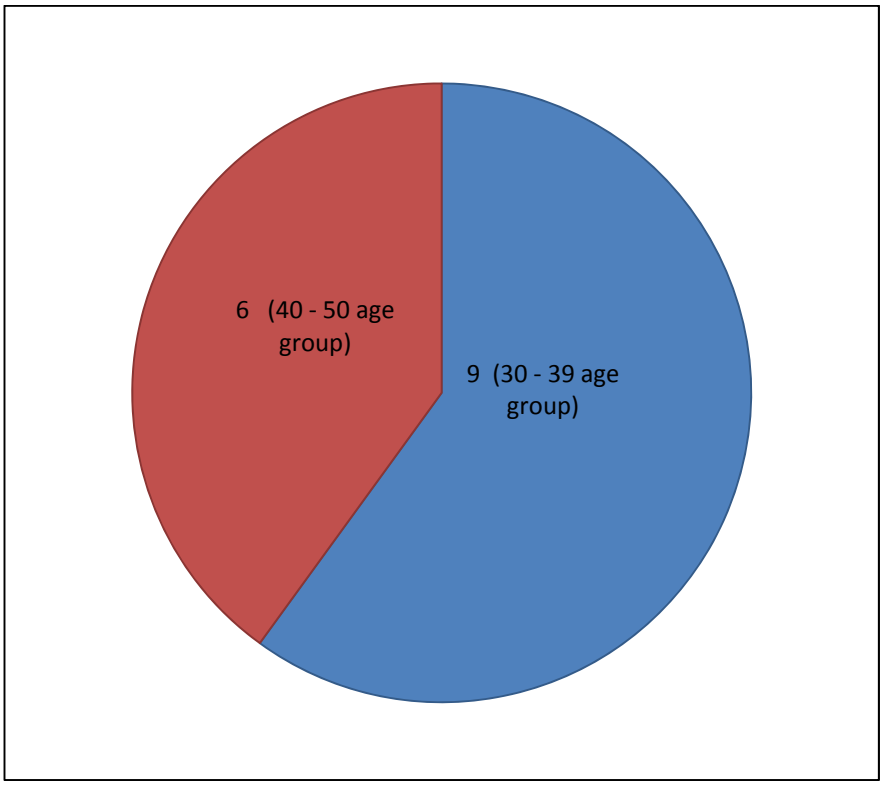

Figure 5: Respondent demographic by age group – indicates the number of respondents per age group

The researcher had no expectation with regard to respondent demographic by age, as age was not considered as a factor to career progression in the literature review. 60% of respondents were aged between 30 and 39, whilst 40% of the respondents were between the ages of 40 and 50.

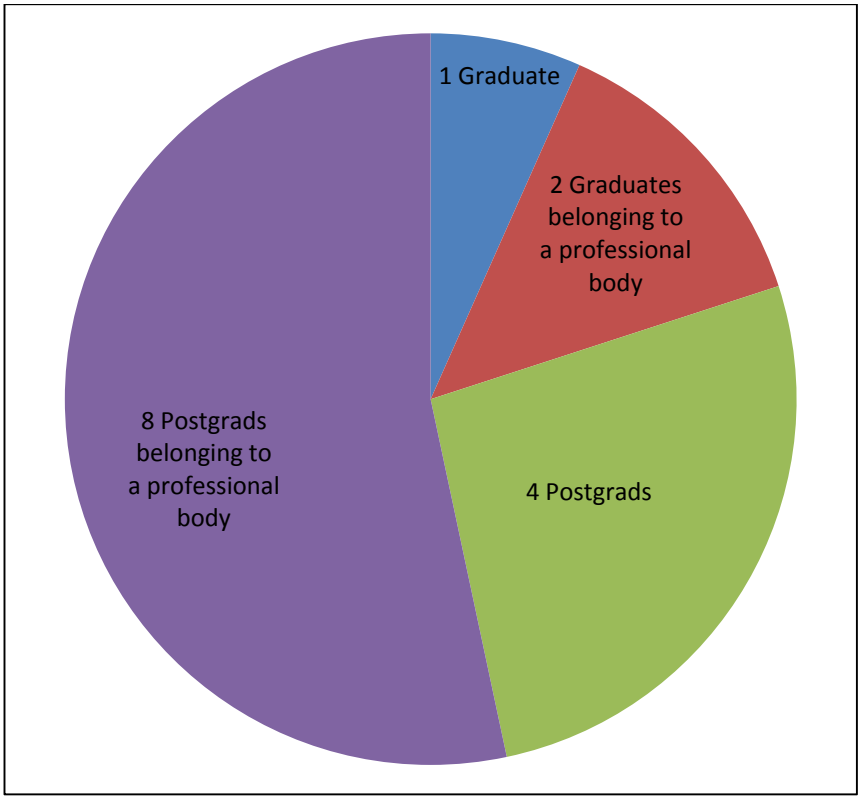

Figure 6: Respondent demographic by educational level – indicates the number of respondents per educational level and affiliation with a professional body

The researcher anticipated that the respondents would be well educated with a minimum of a single degree. As indicated by the figure 6, majority (8) of the respondents had postgraduate qualifications and belonged to relevant professional bodies. Of the remaining respondents, 4 were postgraduates. 2 respondents were graduates and were affiliated to a relevant professional body, leaving a mere 1 respondent as a graduate.

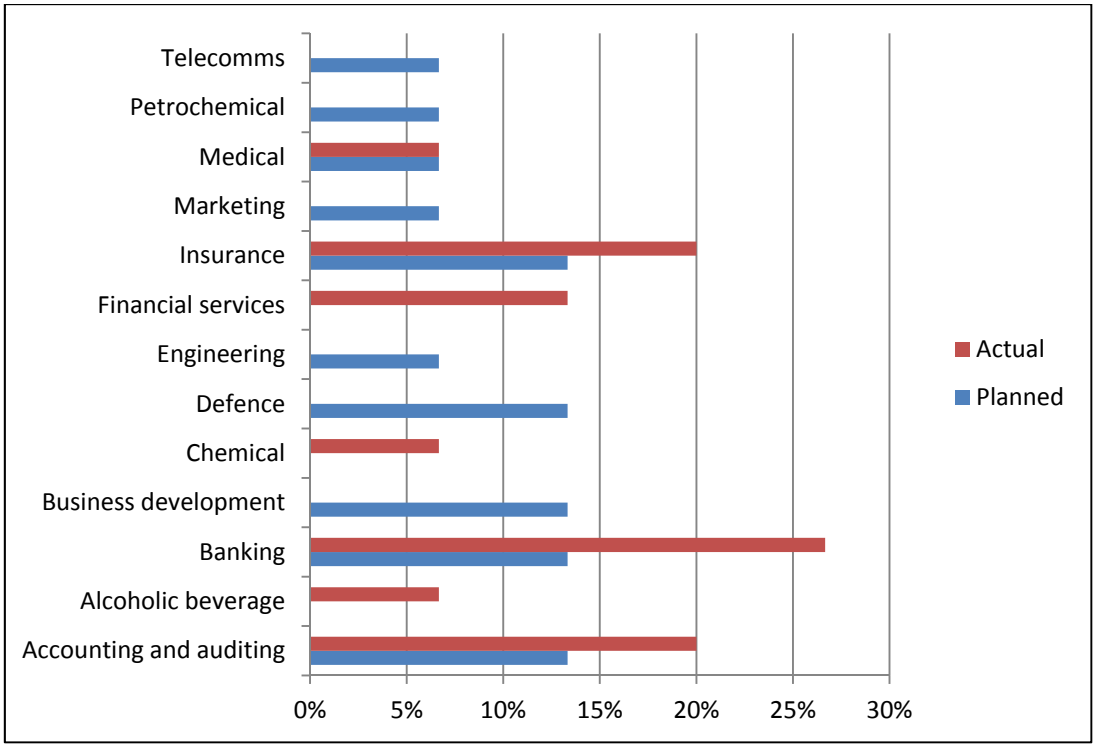

Figure 7: Respondent demographic by industry – comparison of planned vs. actual industries that the respondents represent

The planned pool of respondents embodied greater industry diversity and were representative of ten industries. The actual respondents are from industries that are less diverse and work across seven different industries. This variance is as a result of the planned respondents not being able to make their appointments at the scheduled interview times, due to work commitments.

4.3 Results - Research Question 1

Research question 1 relates to the types of work-life balance strategies used by South African organisations in assisting female employees at junior executive level better manage the demands of their various roles and/or responsibilities. This research question is broken down into the following three sub questions, which are discussed below.

4.3.1 *Work-life strategies South African organisations offer their employees*

	Number of respondents strategy is offered to	Number of respondents that believe that this strategy is most likely to confer benefit to one's career progression	Number of respondents that believe that this strategy is least likely to confer benefit to one's career progression
Flexitime	11	7	3
Reduced work hours	5	1	5
Flexiplace	9	1	4
Combination of flexitime and flexiplace	2	3	3
Crèche	2	1	4
Employee well-being programmes	4	5	5

	Number of respondents strategy is offered to	Number of respondents that believe that this strategy is most likely to confer benefit to one's career progression	Number of respondents that believe that this strategy is least likely to confer benefit to one's career progression
Women's forums	1	5	5
Other strategies offered	Adhoc flexibility, in the case of emergencies		
Strategies that respondents believe organisations should offer	General flexibility which can be tailored to an individual's needs Chauffeur services to assist with fetching kids from school in the middle of a school day		
Strategies that respondents believe organisations should offer	Job sharing Compressed work week A lack of strategies		

Table 2: Matrix of work-life balance strategies offered by the organisations that the respondents work for

6 of the 15 respondents reported that the work-life balance strategies offered by the organisations that they work for were not formalised offerings and had to be negotiated with the organisation or with their line manager, whilst 5 of the respondents were offered work-life balance strategies formally. One respondent claimed that even though the organisation she worked for offered formal work-life balance strategies, the organisation constantly tweaked the policies to suit organisational goals. She felt that this disregarded her needs and thus negated any possible benefit that could be derived from the strategies on offer. The remaining 3 respondents stated that their organisations offered only specific types of formalised work-life balance strategies. In this regard, the strategies specifically mentioned were reduced work hours, employee wellness and the women's forum.

4.3.2 *Degree to which work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations focussed on their female employees*

In all instances but two, the work–life balance strategies offered by organisations, if offered, are offered to all employees, male and female alike. One respondent indicated that the organisation that she works for specifically proactively offers their work-life balance strategies to expectant mothers in order to pre-empt the possible use of the strategies on offer once they become mothers, thus anticipating the need for flexibility and creating an opportunity to promote the use thereof. Another respondent mentioned that her employer offered a work-life balance strategy specifically focussed on women and their career development, but does not believe that it adds the value that it is meant to. She believes this because this strategy has not made a tangible difference to the number of women progressing beyond junior executive level.

4.3.3 *The reasons that organisations offer their employees work-life balance strategies*

Category	Reason for offering work-life balance strategies
Genuine	• To assist employees with creating balance in their lives; • Crèche is offered in order to help save employees time, so they have a smoother transition in and out of their work role; • Offered to employees as a retention strategy, proactively offered to expectant mothers; • Employee wellness programmes are offered to support employees regarding their various challenges, be it work related or not; • To assist staff to have the extent of work-life balance they require, without neglecting their work and the needs of clients; • To encourage work-life balance; and • Encourage work-life balance on the understanding that deliverables will be met and that quite often people need to work beyond the specified work hours.
Disingenuous	• To enable staff to manage their work and non-work commitments by choosing between financial reward and time for non-work commitments; • The offering was enforced in South Africa as it is part of the Global company policy; • It's offered as a farce to try and fool staff into believing that they can have balance, but in practice, it is impossible to get the balance that is perceived or communicated; • Work-life balance strategies are offered with the intention to score brownie points with the public; • Offering work-life balance strategies at line manager discretion does not create a sense of security and in order to retain the benefit, work has to come first, which defeats the purpose of offering work-life balance strategies; • The crèche makes employees available for meetings that they would not ordinarily be able to because they would have to drop off or pick up kids; • Special arrangement made with employee in order to retain them due to their strategic value of employee, which leads to resentment by colleagues; • Employee wellness programmes are offered to employees to ensure that they are healthy, mentally and physically, and can meet their work

Category	Reason for offering work-life balance strategies
	obligations and to assist with stress or depression to allow for optimal output from the employee; • Women forums are introduced as a tool to develop and promote women to higher career levels, but does not really seem to work; and • An industry norm that would cost them their ability to attract and retain talent if they did not offer these strategies.

Table 3: Perceived reasons that South African organisations offer work-life balance strategies

4.3.4 *Conclusion – Research Question 1*

South African organisations seem to offer a considerable number of varied work-life balance strategies with the two most commonly offered strategies being flexitime and flexiplace. Across the fifteen respondents, there were only two strategies from two different organisations that were specifically geared to women. However, in one instance, the respondent was of the opinion that the strategy was ineffective and did not add value to career progression where women are concerned.

The respondents also believe that flexitime is likely to confer the greatest benefit for the progression of women's careers, whilst the three equally unfavourable strategies were thought to be reduced work hours, employee well-being programmes and women's forums. In addition, only seven of the 15 respondents believe that the strategies offered were offered to sincerely assist employees manage their work and non-work roles. According to the respondents, the reasons as to why organisations offer work-life balance strategies are varied.

The work-life balance strategies, when offered, seem to have an industry bias. For example, the respondents from the banking sector and accounting & audit industries seem to have access to these strategies as a norm, which are more often than not formalised. The insurance industry seems to offer non-formalised

strategies that are negotiated on an individual basis and leave its employees feeling exposed with regards to their ability to become dependent on these policies.

4.4 Results - Research Question 2

Research question 2 relates to the perceptions of South African female junior executives with respect to the impact and/or effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels and the reasons for these perceptions. This research question is broken down into three sub questions, two of which have been combined in order to present the results. These sub questions are discussed in the paragraphs below.

4.4.1 *The extent to which work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations are used by female junior executives and the factors that contribute to usage, or lack thereof, of work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations*

The extent to which these work-life balance strategies were used varied from one respondent to the next. Figure 2 below illustrates respondent usage of the work-life balance strategies offered by the organisations that they work for:

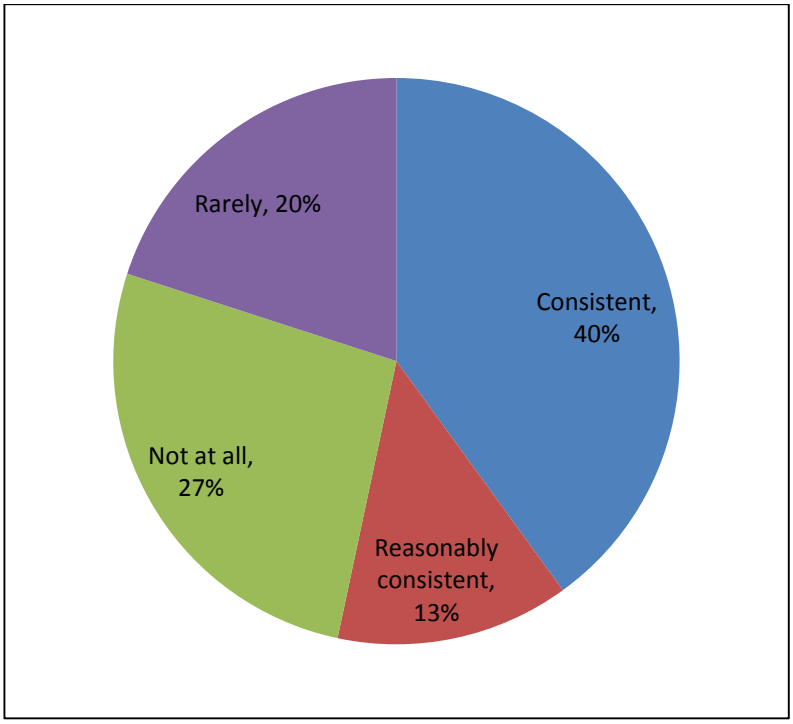

Figure 8: Extent to which the respondents use the work-life balance strategies offered by the organisations they work for

Only 6 respondents use the work-life balance strategies offered by their employers consistently whilst a mere 2 respondents use them reasonably consistently i.e. between 40 and 60% of the time. The remaining respondents either do not use these work-life balance strategies offered at all (4), or rarely (3). Of the 8 respondents that use these strategies consistently and reasonably consistently, the predominant reasons for using them are generally to facilitate the needs of their kids and to be involved with their families or to assist with scheduling such as to save on travel time or to be able to get home at a decent hour.

The respondents that use these strategies rarely do so in the case of emergencies or when non-work demands require extra attention than normal. The respondents that choose not to use these strategies have made a conscious decision not to use them for several reasons. These reasons for non-usage include:

- Career orientation – the choice of career over family;
- The organisation does not offer work-life balance strategies;

- The use of work-life strategies risks or hinders career progression; and
- Work–life balance strategies are of no real benefit or value.

4.4.2 *The effectiveness of work-life balance strategies, offered by South African organisations, in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level for South African women*

Three of the respondents do not believe that work-life balance strategies offer any value to women in the workplace. One respondent said "*I do not believe that work-life balance strategies necessarily eliminate the stress of the many roles and responsibilities of a working mother. It merely postpones it and you work harder to make everything balance. I almost alter the day by starting the day earlier, thereby achieving more than I would if I worked traditional hours*".

Another respondent stated "*I think that in general work-life balance strategies put in place by the employer confer the notion that a woman can't manage her personal life and her workload concurrently. Therefore measures are put in place to enable her cope. It is the same notion which hinders career progression as someone who is seen as struggling is unlikely to be promoted. All these strategies confer the notion that if you are out of sight, you are quite simply out of mind, making your hard work and what you have already achieved in your career meaningless*".

The third respondent believes that these strategies do work, but the context in which they are applied makes them unworkable. She said "*I do not think that these strategies don't work. My experience is that they allowed me to have time during the day with my family, but the people that are meant to implement and live with them don't and as a result, it ends up creating a situation where it does not work. Also organisations that offer these strategies need to monitor how these strategies are working like they do for other strategies. The sad part is that even though these strategies should work for the most part, they choke your career, but only because of how people see you when you use these*

strategies. If the organisation were to make these the norm, they would be less likely to have such a negative impact on the careers of women".

One respondent believes that there is no such thing as work-life balance. She explained that it becomes about what one is passionate about and where you choose to set the boundaries for yourself, knowing what they are and how and when to apply them. She also mentioned that certain occurrences might be a natural consequence of those choices, but then, at least, it as a matter of the choices you exercised as opposed to being at the mercy of the organisation.

Eight respondents feel that the use of work-life balance strategies by women will ultimately have a negative impact on their career progression. Their perceptions are largely based on their own experiences of using these strategies, their experience and knowledge of family and friends that use these strategies or the verbalised thoughts of managers and decision-makers within their organisations. Only one respondent believes that the impact of work-life balance strategies on career progression for women is entirely dependent on the thoughts and attitudes of line management towards work-life balance strategies.

There were two respondents who are of the opinion that the impact of work-life balance strategies is likely to be positive on the ability of a woman to progress in her career. One of the respondents believes that this is more likely to happen in the public sector and is probably less likely to happen in the private sector. The second respondent calls for more practical work-life balance strategies such as chauffeur services that would encourage women to keep their focus on their work, instead of breaking their concentration by interrupting their day in order to do school runs. In addition, the second respondent also believes that only flexitime and flexiplace are likely to impact positively.

4.4.3 ***Conclusion – Research Question 2***

Whilst most of the respondents utilise work-life balance strategies to varied extents, only four of them use these strategies consistently or on a daily basis. The reasons for the extent of utilisation of work-life balance strategies are

varied but predominantly relates to balancing work and non-work roles. The overall predominant feeling regarding the impact the use of these strategies have on career progression of women beyond junior executive level is negative and will cause careers to stagnate at junior executive level. Any career progression beyond junior executive level is attributable to either limited use of these strategies or not at all.

4.5 Summary of the results

South African organisations have a considerable number of varied work-life balance strategies, when they are offered, with the two most commonly offered strategies being flexitime and flexiplace. Across the fifteen respondents, there were only two strategies from two different organisations that were specifically geared to women. However, in one instance, the respondent was of the opinion that the strategy was ineffective and did not add value to career progression where women are concerned.

The respondents also believe that flexitime is likely to confer the greatest benefit for the progression of women's careers, whilst the three equally unfavourable strategies were thought to be reduced work hours, employee well-being programmes and women's forums. In addition, less than 50% (7) of respondents believe that the strategies were offered to sincerely assist employees manage their work and non-work roles. The reasons, as offered by the respondents, as to why organisations offer work-life balance strategies are varied.

The work-life balance strategies, when offered, appear to have an industry bias. For example, the respondents from the banking sector and accounting & audit industries seem to have access to these strategies as a norm, which are more often than not formalised. The insurance industry seems to offer non-formalised strategies that are negotiated on an individual basis and leave its employees feeling exposed with regards to their ability to become dependent on these policies.

Whilst most of the respondents utilise work-life balance strategies to varied extents, only four of them use these strategies consistently or on a daily basis. The reasons for the extent of utilisation of work-life balance strategies are varied but predominantly relates to balancing work and non-work roles. The overall predominant feeling regarding the impact the use of these strategies have on career progression of women beyond junior executive level is negative and is believed to cause careers to stagnate at junior executive level. They further believe that any career progression beyond junior executive level is attributable to either limited use of these strategies or not at all.

5 CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This chapter deals with understanding and explaining the results of the research. The results are discussed with reference to the literature reviewed in chapter 2.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with understanding the demographics of the respondents and more specifically how and why it differs from what was planned. The results relating to the research questions are then discussed with a view to understanding them relative to the literature review. This chapter sets out to highlight the similarities and differences between the results obtained and what was expected based on the literature review.

5.2 Demographic profile of respondents

Racially, the respondents were composed of 3 black, 5 indian and 7 white women. Whilst the race demographic was not a consideration prior to conducting the research, it has since piqued the researcher's interest, with regard to the impact of race on career progression for women of different races, given the political history of South Africa. Respondent age was also not a consideration prior to conducting the research.

The researcher did not have specific expectations with regards to respondent age prior to conducting the research. The respondents interviewed were split into the 30 to 39 year category and the 40 to 50 year category in the ratio of 3: 2. It is quite refreshing to find such a large percentage of women attaining junior executive level at an earlier age and indicates promise for women climbing the corporate ladder. However, the converse relating to the potential stagnation in those same positions is indicated by the fact that 6 of the 15 respondents are in the 40 to 50 year age group.

Having said this, this finding is fairly consistent with the findings of the Wage Indicator Foundation. The Wage Indicator Foundation (2011) noted that as

women's age increase, so too does the gender gap. This suggests that women are likely to stagnate at the level they are at when they in their late thirties.

Based on the findings of the SABPP, BWA, the 2012 World Development Report and the Global Gender Gap Index 2012, the researcher anticipated that the respondents would be well educated. As indicated by the figure 6, 12 of the respondents are postgraduates, with 4 of them belonging to relevant professional bodies. The remaining 3 were graduates, of which 2 of the respondents were graduates and were affiliated to a relevant professional body, leaving a mere 1 as a graduate. As was anticipated, the respondents were all well-educated.

The distribution across industries for the intended sample was diverse and represented 10 different industries. The actual sample is far less diverse with 12 of 15 respondents belonging to 4 of 7 industries. The reason for this was due to the anticipated challenge of scheduling time in the diaries of women that already experience challenges with balancing multiple roles. Even when scheduling was planned outside of working hours, work commitments interfered with their ability to be interviewed. The sample was then adjusted to incorporate women who were sample appropriate and were able to accommodate the interview.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 1

Research question 1 is to identify the work-life balance strategies used by South African organisation in assisting female employees at junior executive level to better manage the demands of their various roles and/or responsibilities.

The respondents identified 7 strategies that are offered by the 15 South African organisations that they work for. These are:

- Flexitime;
- Flexiplace;
- A combination of flexitime and flexiplace;

- Reduced work hours;
- Crèche;
- Employee wellness programmes;
- Women's forums; and
- Adhoc flexibility, e.g. In the case of emergencies.

This is in stark contrast to the comprehensive list of work-life balance strategies offered by Harrington et al. (2005), Kossek et al. (2005) and Gatrell (2007). It is rather disappointing to think that there are work-life balance strategies that South African organisations have not even begun to consider and that could well have positive implications for the career progression of female junior executives. In particular, one respondent specifically articulated that "*South African organisations are not very progressive when it comes to benefits, including flexibility. They often like to believe that they are progressive and flexible, but in reality few actually are*".

The researcher expected to find that South African organisations would be on par with their international counterparts and to the degree that they are part of Global companies, they are. However, if they are an indigenous South African company, this is unsatisfactorily not so. In addition, approximately 50% of South African organisations have no formal policies and arrangements have to be negotiated on an individual basis. There seems to be little to no benefit in these instances as respondents feel that in order to make these adhoc arrangements work, they cannot say no to work even when they have a clashing non-work responsibility. In this regard, one respondent specifically mentioned "*These negotiated arrangements are moot. I will not use an arrangement that is not formalised because they are done on the basis that work comes first, which defeats the purpose of offering balance. In fact, there is no real balance and no real offer of balance".*

Another respondent suggested that "*Negotiated arrangements create a great insecurity for those needing balance. I cannot use these arranged strategies for fear that I cannot become dependent on these strategies and if I do not have a fixed type of arrangement, it does not help in terms of scheduling*". From the

literature review, it is clear that employer offered work-life balance strategies have become necessary for a variety of reasons:

- The continual change in the composition of working families, employers have developed practices that allow employees to find greater balance between work and home lives (Friedman et al. 1998);
- The perceived excessive demands of work coupled with the negative impact that work-life imbalance has on well-being and effective functioning (Guest 2002);
- Connell (2005) suggests that work-life balance strategies mainly serve to support women's domestic commitments;
- Work-life balance strategies are introduced to optimise work-life balance for employees with a view to retaining superior staff, attracting talented individuals, challenging business practices in an increasingly technological environment, customising the work environment for as many employees as possible and building the employer's position as employer of choice (Kossek 2005); and
- The trends in work-change impacted by technological advances that substitutes the concept of a traditional work day with longer work hours and work intensification (Burchielli et al. 2008).

The results that are consistent with the literature are limited. In fact, there are only two instances, where work-life strategies offered are specifically geared to females, and only one that is offered to support women's domestic commitments as asserted by Connell (2005). These strategies are:

- Proactively approaching expectant mothers to genuinely offer support and assistance in balancing work and non-work roles; and
- Women's forum.

However, one respondent advised that in the organisation she works for, "*The women's forum is not an effective mechanism for achieving its goal, which is to promote the career progression of women to leadership positions*".

In addition, very few respondents believe that the strategies offered by South African organisations are well-intentioned and are in the best interest of the people that need to use them and are offered in the spirit of assisting employees. In fact three respondents went as far as to say that they do not believe that these strategies work, citing different reasons for this belief. More than 50% of respondents view their company's reasons for offering work-life balance strategies is less than honourable and are perceived as negative. One respondent mentioned that "*The work-life balance strategies on offer almost works as a grading system, which employers categorise their workers into promotable and non-promotable*".

In 33% of the organisations, strategies offered to employees were done on an individually negotiated basis. In these instances, two respondents indicated that it was not optimal as it attracts resentment from co-workers and that the commitment it takes to make it work is not worth having the special dispensation. Seven of the 15 respondents believed that the flexitime policy is the most effective strategy in promoting gender diversity beyond junior executive level, provided that the employer allowed the worker to make up for lost productivity after working hours, at home. This is subject to it being implemented and driven effectively by the organisation.

The respondents also mentioned additional strategies that have not been offered by their employer but are perceived by them as being beneficial to their career advancement. These are compressed work week, chauffeur services and general flexibility tailored per individual, if they are properly managed. Many of the respondents felt that the fact that there is line manager discretion leads to inconsistencies in the practice of such policies within the organisation, whether the policies were formalised or not.

In conclusion, the results of the research show that South African organisations do not offer the extent of work-life balance strategies that are prevalent in the literature, and in some cases there are no formalised offerings. The reasons for these organisations offering these strategies are largely seen as being a

mechanism to placate their employees and lead them to believe that the company cares, or is necessitated by the industry in which the organisation operates or the organisation is part of a larger Global entity that offers these strategies.

5.4 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 is to establish the perceptions of South African female junior executives with respect to the effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels and the reasons for these perceptions. The literature review around this research question presented a school of thought around work-life balance, supported by Franzway (2001) and Selmi et al. (2006) and suggests that organisations are unwilling to adapt to the challenges of working parents and the resultant non-work roles and responsibilities. Furthermore Gatrell (2007) in agreement with Blair-Loy (2003) suggests that the fact that women still bear the responsibility of having and raising children places them on a pathway that requires experience, qualifications and work ethic whilst lacking in career advancement opportunities.

This largely correlates to the results of the research as eight of the respondents used the work-life strategies offered due to their non-work responsibilities, specifically geared towards their maternal roles. One respondent stated that she has made a conscious decision to pursue her career and has chosen not to have children. The reason offered by her for not having children is "*The organisation I work for is demanding and judging from the extent of commitment it takes to have children, my career and family life would not be compatible*". Another respondent sees little opportunity to start a family given the demands of her job saying "*Having to work long hours creates difficulties in nurturing my new marriage and makes the prospect of having children in the near future seem almost impossible. Work creates little to no room for anything-else*". Yet, another respondent resigned from her job and chose to pursue alternative means of making a living, which requires no formal qualifications at all. These findings are consistent with the notions that are suggested by Goff et al. (1990) and Blair-Loy (2003) that if women are faced with a choice between work and

family, they will choose to either not have children or have fewer children or will exit the business world respectively.

In addition, all but one of the respondents believed that the use of work-life balance strategies would negatively impact on one's ability to progress to more senior roles within the organisation. The reasons for their perceptions included:

- The use of these policies reduces prevalence or visibility in the workplace;
- The women that do succeed to senior executive levels tend to have little or no non-work roles and are 110% committed to their work roles; and
- Perceived as not being able to manage their personal life, which reduces chances of being promoted.

One respondent actually commented that the use of work-life balance strategies offered by her employer did not alleviate or eliminate her needing to do what she needed to. She claimed that "*It merely postpones or shifts what I have to do to a different part of the day, and I often feel like I need to work extra hard to earn the acknowledgement of my line manager, despite the fact that i worked the exact number of hours, if not more than my colleagues*". These findings are consistent with the views expressed by Burchielli et al. (2008) and Lyndy van den Barselaar, in an online Bizcommunity article (Lion's Wing 2013).

When respondents were asked how organisations can change these perceptions, their responses included:

- Employer commitment to make these strategies work, They should not just offer them;
- Be more proactive in offering these strategies and formalising them;
- Line management commitment to making the strategies more workable, in line with organisational goals as opposed to manager perceived constructs. It was suggested by two respondents that line management commitment to the strategies should be made a KPI;
- These strategies needs to become embedded in the organisational culture;

- Open and honest communication with what one can expect if these strategies are used. Understandably, these will be different depending on the individual's role. In this regard, one respondent mentioned that "*Organisations should be open to the extent that they discuss the likely impact the use of these strategies may have on one's career, so as to allow women to make an informed decision with regards to their use of the strategies as opposed to creating false hope where career progression is concerned*";
- Become more output/ deliverable focussed as opposed to time focussed;
- There needs to be a culture change, not just within organisations but in society as a whole; and
- Actively encourage employees to pursue balance in their lives by holding personal time sacrosanct. In this regard, one respondent mentioned "*Because I make use of these strategies does not mean that I should be available when I am on leave or on holiday, yet it creates the expectation that I should be because of the "special allowance" of working a full day at different times from my colleagues".*

These responses are all borne out by the literature review and more specifically the thoughts of Friedman et al. (1998), Thompson et al. (1999) and Allen (2001) on the subject of how work-life balance strategies impacts on promoting gender equality.

In conclusion, the results obtained from the research are consistent with those explained in the literature review with regard to the impact of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender equality in the workplace. The respondents have definite ideas on how South African organisations can change the perceptions held by junior executive women and this is congruent to the views expressed in the literature review.

5.5 Conclusion

In summary, South African organisations offer very few of the work-life balance strategies that are examined in the literature review, if they offer any at all. This is in direct contrast to what one might be lead to believe when the literature is considered. Half of South African organisations that offer these strategies do so on an informal basis, which creates further doubt regarding their usability and has practical implications for the user. In addition, the reasons for South African organisations offering these strategies are perceived by the respondents as being, for the most part, disingenuous.

In addition, these policies are predominantly seen as having a negative impact on the career progression of South African women, holding junior executive positions, specifically when these women want to have families and be involved in them. This is consistent with the findings of the literature review. The ideas, which are fairly consistent with the literature reviewed, offered by the respondents on how organisations can change this include:

- Women needing to take an active role in changing cultural norms by encouraging their spouses to become actively involved in raising a family;
- Women executives need to use their success to mentor female junior executives and drive gender diversity beyond junior executive level; and
- Organisations have the most important role to play by driving the cultural change that is required in order to drive gender equality at senior executive roles.

The thoughts of the respondents differ from the literature in relation to the importance of the role that line management plays in effectively implementing work-life balance strategies as well as the need for the organisation to monitor the effectiveness of these strategies relative to the organisation's intentions for using them. These remain important considerations for any organisation intent on attracting and retaining female talent.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the conclusions of the study in context of the study. This is followed by recommendations to the various stakeholders identified, based on the outcome of the research. The chapter rounds up with suggestions for future research.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

The context of the study is that women have historically borne the responsibilities of home life. However, as time has evolved, there is little room for single earner families which has created the need for women to work. In light of this, women have taken advantage of opportunities to obtain tertiary qualifications and venture into the corporate world. Despite these endeavours, women still remain predominantly responsible for roles associated with caring for the family. This is evidenced by literature that highlights the fact that despite the introduction of various strategies to retain female talent and in order to assist females in balancing their various roles, very few women have progressed beyond junior executive level.

In light of this, the question around the effectiveness of the strategies, whatever they may be, offered by South African organisations in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive levels is raised. The research revealed that, South African organisations offer very few of the work-life balance strategies discussed in the literature review, if they offer any at all. 50% of South African organisations that offer these strategies do so on an informal basis, which creates further doubt regarding their usability and has practical implications for the user. In addition, the reasons for South African organisations offering these

strategies are perceived by the respondents as being, for the most part, duplicitous.

In addition, these policies are predominantly seen as having a negative impact on the career progression of South African women, holding junior executive positions. This together, with the ideas offered by the respondents on how organisations can change this, is consistent with the findings of the literature review.

6.3 Recommendations

The stakeholders identified in this research topic are South African organisations and female junior executives working for these organisations.

Recommendations to South African organisations include:

- Benchmark to other organisations with regard to what they can do to promote gender equality beyond junior executive level. The benchmarking exercise can be done on an industry basis as well as on best international practice;
- Those organisations that do offer work-life balance strategies need to take stock of their reasons for offering them and actively work to communicate these reasons, not just verbally, but with their actions;
- South African organisations should work to manage the perceptions of the individuals that work for the organisation, irrespective of whether or not they use these strategies;
- Offering these strategies are not enough. The cultural change that goes along with it needs to be actively driven and rewarded. Line management need to be incentivised on it;
- Organisational storytelling that highlights the instances where the use of these strategies result in a women being promoted beyond junior executive level, and more importantly how these strategies were used in successfully contributing to gender equality; and
- These strategies, if offered, needs to be practiced consistently across various departments of the business and if this is not the case, a

forthright, honest explanation as to why this is, should be communicated to all employees of the organisation.

Recommendations to female junior executives include the following:

- Effecting cultural change needs to be driven from home, by educating spouses and negotiating joint responsibility or even splitting non-work responsibilities;
- Draw power from the fact that the next generation may be moulded by your hand, so you can effect the extent of cultural change that is required to make gender diversity a reality at senior executive levels; and
- Be honest with yourself and be clear about what it is you want. Your choices determine the path you walk. Ultimately balance may require a choice between forgoing some of your aspirations or shifting the cultural norms.

Women in senior executive positions, who have and are actively involved in non-work roles, have a part to play in mentoring female junior executives to attain greater career success.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

It might be a worthy consideration to study the impact that race may have on the career progression of women beyond junior executive levels. That is, are some women more likely to progress beyond junior executive levels than others, based on their race and the political history of South Africa and perhaps even the cultural norms associated with race?

It might also be interesting to repeat the study with narrower age definitions, coupled with the race demographic to assess if race contributes to women attaining certain management levels at earlier ages. In other words are certain races of women likely to attain success at junior executive level at an earlier

age than others. This once again brings in the cultural norms that are specific to each race.

Perhaps a more relevant alternative is to conduct this study from an organisational point of view to understand their view of the work-life balance strategies they offer and their reasons for why these are offered. This may also present a perfect opportunity to bring to their attention that work-life balance strategies, like all other strategies, need to be monitored in order to meet the desired goal. This could be achieved by asking if these strategies are monitored for effectiveness, and if so, how. It could also be taken a step further by asking organisations how they think these strategies could be made more workable in order to obtain the desired outcomes. This research could inform the types of cultural change drivers that are within the control of organisations to implement and could well be the start of conveying greater success for work-life balance strategies.

Perhaps research can also be done using a specific industry focus, as an industry bias was picked up during this research, like in the Accounting and Auditing industry or the Banking industry.

Another interesting research option could be to examine the types of initiatives that organisations could implement to make the cultural changes that would be necessary for strategic goals of work-life balance policies to be met. This could be done based on case studies of companies where work-life balance strategies have been a success.

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APPENDIX A

Interview questions

1. Describe your educational background and your rise to your current role.
2. How does your current role fit into the organisational structure?
3. What are your career aspirations?
4. Describe your non-work roles and responsibilities.
5. How do you currently balance these roles?
6. What are the trade-offs?
7. What work-life balance strategies does your employer offer?
8. What are the reasons for your employer offering such strategies?
9. To what extent do you use these strategies?
10. What are the factors that contribute to your use of these strategies, if you do use them?
11. How do you think your use of these work-life balance strategies will impact on your career progression?
12. What informs your thoughts around the impact that work-life balance strategies will have on your career progression?
13. What do you think organisations can do to promote the use of work-life balance strategies by female junior executives?
14. What do you think organisations can do to dispel the views or perceptions that female junior executives hold in relation to work-life balance strategies and their impact on their careers?
15. What work-balance strategies do you think work best and why?

16. What work-balance strategies do you think do not confer any benefit to you or your career and why?

17. Anything-else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

Research problem: Identify the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations to female employees at junior executive level, establish the perceptions of these employees and their reasons therefore with respect to the impact and/or effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels.					
Sub-problem	**Literature Review**	**Hypotheses or Propositions or Research questions**	**Source of data**	**Type of data**	**Analysis**
Identify the work-life balance strategies used by South African organisations in assisting female employees at junior executive level better manage the demands of their various roles and/or responsibilities.	Friedman, Christensen and DeGroot (1998) Guest (2002) Kossek (2005) Kossek and Friede (2006)	What work-life balance strategies do South African organisations offer their employees, to what degree are the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations focussed on their female employees and what are the reasons behind organisations offering their employees these policies?	Respondents answer to semi-structured interview questionnaire, and possibly strategy or policy documents, where available.	Qualitative data	Data reduction Data display Conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman 1984) (Morse, et al. 2002)

Research problem: Identify the work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations to female employees at junior executive level, establish the perceptions of these employees and their reasons therefore with respect to the impact and/or effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels.					
Sub-problem	**Literature Review**	**Hypotheses or Propositions or Research questions**	**Source of data**	**Type of data**	**Analysis**
Establish the perceptions of South African female junior executives with respect to the impact and/or effectiveness of work-life balance strategies in promoting gender diversity at more senior executive levels and the reasons for these perceptions.	The World Development Report (2012) Gatrell (2007) Blair-Loy (2003) Catalyst (2004)	In the context that gender diversity in senior executive roles is important to organisations, coupled with the dual facts that women still assume bulk of the responsibilities of family life and the existing gender gap, how effective are work-life balance strategies offered by South African organisations in promoting gender equality beyond junior executive level for South African women, to what extent are they used by South African female junior executives, and what are the factors that contribute to usage, or lack thereof, of these policies?	Full interview data, press and/or scholarly articles.	Qualitative data	Data reduction Data display Conclusion drawing/verification (Miles and Huberman 1984) (Morse, et al. 2002)

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