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Perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an IT organisation

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Perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an IT organisation

A research proposal submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This research report aimed to identify those barriers that are perceived to be impeding the advancement of the black career woman at one IT organisation in South Africa. These barriers have been identified as restricting the benefits of tools such as diversity that will never be fully realised at workplaces if these barriers remain unresolved. Black career women in South Africa are a unique group to study as they come from a very disadvantaged background where society expectations and perspectives did not make it any easier. It is only now after apartheid that they are steadily being absorbed into the mainstream of the economy. However, apartheid remnants are not making the process any easier.

The study identified a plethora of barriers faced by black career women at Microsoft which they easily lumped together as the 'glass ceiling'. Most black career women at Microsoft have accepted the fact that nothing was going to change and were performing at that bare minimum level to keep their jobs. Causes of the barriers were also identified and this led to recommendations and conclusions made in the last chapter of this study. A themed content analysis was conducted on the responses using qualitative methodology. A balanced perspective was given by the respondents, and themes drawn. The findings and themes drawn from respondents led to a list of 7 pragmatic conclusions and 4 recommendations. The research findings included the fact that black career women did not view their barriers unilaterally as identified in literature; that the glass ceiling was the most challenging barrier to their career, as well as the most laden with other barriers that they may not fully explain, followed by lack of mentors and then organisational structural factor; and that goals and visions of young black women needed to be aligned with those of Microsoft in order for barriers to be overcome.

The key message from this research study is that top management need to consider alienating barriers that affect black career women in their organisation from those affecting all other employees in order to be able to deal with them more effectively.

DECLARATION

I, Letlhogonolo Meko, 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 at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

Letlhogonolo Meko

Signed at ……

On the …….. day of …… 20…..

DEDICATION

To my late parents for paving the path of education and the rest of my family for their patience, love, courage and support during this very demanding period. You were truly my inspiration and were ultimately responsible for my success in completing this project.

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First and foremost, I am grateful to God for giving me grace, health, strength, wisdom and perseverance to start, sustain and finish this research study.

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Special recognition goes out to my supervisor, Conrad Viedge for his guidance in finalising the research. He has put in many hours of listening and assistance, for which I respect him.

Finally, I would like to thank the following individuals, without whom this research study would not have been successful,

1. All the participants who took the time to complete the questionnaires. The data collected made it possible to obtain results and complete my research study,
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

Organisations are increasingly adopting policies to increase diversity in management (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), and introduce equitable policies and procedures fair to all employees, but the goal seems elusive to some sections of employees, the black women that is. The purpose of this research is to investigate and identify perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an Information Technology (IT) organisation in South Africa. The study defines barriers, that is, negative factors to career advancement as they are perceived by black women. It is intended that the results will enable organisations to develop policies and programmes that will enable black women to circumvent such barriers and realise their true potential in their workplaces.

1.2 Context of the study

There are more women in business today who hold senior executive positions and sit on corporate boards, and with the introduction of various forms of legislation protecting women's rights, for example, pay protection, maternity leave and employment rights, the future looks promising for senior women executives (Heffernan, 2002). In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act has spearheaded the drive for employment equity and affirmative action within organisations, including the employment and progression of women.

Part of the transformation agenda for South Africa after the 1994 elections, was the transformation of all organisations to make them representative of all South African citizens (Denton & Vloeberghs, 2003; Leonard & Grobler, 2006). The rationale for introducing the Employment Equity Act *55* of 1998 was to enforce transformation on the basis that organisations would not empower sufficient numbers of black employees of their own free will (Leonard & Grobler, 2006). Although there is evidence of transformation of the work force, the implementation of the Employment Equity Act is often reduced to a question of legal compliance (Leonard & Grobler, 2006). A consequence of the scepticism and cynicism of business leaders is that the attitudes and experiences of employees affected by the implementation of these transformational laws are often not taken into consideration.

The ability to fully utilise the potential of black women in the workplace is paramount to the economic effectiveness and profitability of businesses, and to the up-liftment of society as a whole. Imbalances caused through non-exposure to education, development, training and mentorship have created a vacuum in terms of skills for black women and this, coupled with the discriminatory practices inherent in South African society, has ensured a non-equitable playing field for black women and, at times, men in the business environment.

Even in organisations whose policies support both black women and men (historically disadvantaged individuals), prevailing historical attitudes and job pressures undermine them. Historically disadvantaged individuals' lives have been expanded, but the attitudes of many corporate cultures weigh down and constrain what black women feel is achievable.

This research study investigated and identified the main perceived barriers to the advancement of black women in an IT organisation in South Africa. Generally it is believed that the clear barrier, especially for black women in particular, and women in general, is stereotyping. Gender stereotyping, male chauvinism, work life balance, as well as organisational structure and culture are among the top barriers that some scholars have identified as inhibiting advancement of black women in work places (Afza & Newaz, 2008). These authors state that the glass ceiling and its effect is another problem that emphasise the difficulties and obstacles which women face in order to progress in the organisational hierarchy and not only in management roles, but throughout other levels and categories of occupations as well.

For the black women and men to some extent, the issue of subtexts, nuances or undertones in the working environments is also paramount. Marleen Potgieter, Managing Director at Equity Works, in her contribution to a panel discussion on the topic **"**Universities, employment and transformation: Are universities growing black talent in South Africa" pointed out the issue of organisational nuances and said, for example, "what makes white people get faster promotions in organisations than black people?" She went on further to say, "there is something in the manner that the organisation does or does not do that creates barriers for black people and prevents them from career advancement". Informal grooming that happens around lunch and dinner tables, excludes the very people who need that input, often because they are unable to read the undertones that important career decisions can take place at these lunch hour gatherings,

(http://www.inyathelo.org.za/universities-employment-and-transformation-are-universities-growing-black-talent-in-south-africa.html).

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 *Main problem*

The main research problem is to identify the perceived barriers to black women career advancement in an IT company in South Africa.

1.3.2 *Sub-problems*

Sub-problem 1

To identify barriers to career advancement faced by black women in an Information Technology company in South Africa as perceived by various stakeholders.

Sub-problem 2

To identify whether black women face different perceived career advancement barriers to those encountered by black men within an Information Technology company in South Africa.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study will contribute and provide guidance of both theoretical and practical value to career progression of black women in IT organisations in South Africa, human resource development (HRD) practitioners, and other corporations that desire to attract, develop and retain black professional women in corporate South Africa. Findings in this study are intended to contribute to the body of knowledge on career advancement within the context of a developing economy. While feminist scholars have expanded the literature to include experiences by women, theories on career development and race are still lacking. Phelps and Constantine (2001, p.173) hold that for as long as African Americans have experienced discrimination and institutional racism in the workplace, little systematic research has been

conducted to help fully understand their complexities. Over a decade later, the finding of those authors is still remarkably accurate.

This study seeks to understand the perceived barriers that impact the career advancement of black women in an IT organisation and how the intersection of race and gender creates a unique social position for black women in the white patriarchal structure of corporate South Africa. In an increasingly global economy, developing and leveraging the talents of every worker is a business imperative. Those who do not maximize the benefits of diversity within their organisations jeopardize corporate productivity, profitability and competitiveness in the global marketplace (Wentling, 2001). The author points out further that because so few studies have focused on the unique career development experiences of black professional women, many Human Resources Development (HRD) practitioners and corporations lack the knowledge they need to develop and facilitate appropriate career development strategies for these people. This study contributes to literature by uncovering barriers to career advancement for black women in an IT organisation and provides recommendations on ways to deal with these perceived barriers.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

In this study, IT organisation excludes telecommunications or information and telecommunication organisations. The nature of the study is such that it is focused on one organisation. The methodology employed in this study only focuses on non-managerial and managerial employees of the IT organisation whose service period with the organisation is more than one year.

1.6 Definition of terms

Blacks: is a generic term which means:- Black Africans, Coloureds and Indians in South Africa, who are citizens of the Republic of South Africa by birth or descent or who became citizens of the Republic of South Africa by naturalization before 27 April 1994 or on or after 27 April 1994 and who would have been entitled to acquire citizenship by naturalisation prior

to that date, (Act 46 of 2013, Government Gazette Number 37271 of 27 January 2014), *(http://www.dti.gov.za/news2014/Act46of2013BEE .pdf)*

Career Advancement: as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time (Oxford English Dictionary 1989).

Sexual Harassment: is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature to such an extent that it alters the conditions of the person's employment and creates an abusive working environment, (http://definitions.uslegal.com/s/sexual-harassment/).

Information Technology Organisation: A South African organisation concerned with and focused on the manufacture and supply of information technology equipment, systems, software and services in the Information and Communications Technology industry *(http://www. ita.org.za/)*.

Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998: The purpose of the Act is to achieve equity in the workplace, by:-
a) promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and
b) implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups, to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce

Glass Ceiling: situation in which progress, especially promotion, appears to be possible but restrictions or discrimination create a barrier that prevents it *(http://www.thefreedictionary.com/glass+ceiling)*

Racial Harassment: Deliberate or repeated unsolicited verbal gestures of a racial nature which are unwelcome (US Merit Systems Protection Board 1988]

Male chauvinism: activity indicative of belief in the superiority of men over women (Princeton's WordNet).

Organisational structure: Explicit and implicit institutional rules and policies designed to provide a structure where various work roles and responsibilities are delegated, controlled and coordinated. Organisational structure also determines how information flows from level to level within the company. In a centralized structure, decisions flow from the top down. In a decentralized structure, the decisions are made at various different levels (*http://www.investopedia.com/ terms/o/organisational-structure.asp).*

Subtexts: messages which are not stated directly but can be inferred, the underlying or implicit meaning (http://ww .thefreedictionary.com/subtexts). Subtexts have special use in drama, more than any other art form, people do not say what they mean. Subtext is all the meanings that are not stated, but lie beneath, it can be found beneath words, gestures, behaviours, actions, and images.

Work life balance: is a concept that supports the efforts of employees to split their time and energy between work and the other important aspects of their lives.

Family-work conflict: Recognizes the role of family demands and how these demands affect work performance. Personal demographics, such as having children, predict family-work conflict.

Work-family conflict: A form of inter-role conflict in which family and work demands are incompatible in some way. Organisational stressors predict work-family conflict. The conflict therefore, originates in the organisation or work itself.

1.7 Assumptions

The assumptions made by the researcher are that,

a) Participants understand what the perceived barriers are and answer to the interview questions truthfully and honestly.

b) The researcher is a black woman and participants may tell her what she wants to hear.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The Employment Equity Act, Number 55 of 1998 in South Africa has served as the catalyst for change towards embracing diversity within South African organisations. The Employment Equity Act, Number 55 (1998) recognizes that as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory societal practices, there have been disparities in employment opportunities among the race groups.

Historically, women the world over often found themselves subject to several kinds of discriminatory behaviour, attitudes, and policies. Whether this was intended or not, discrimination still hampered their full integration into the work environment. South Africa shared in this phenomenon. Although numerous policies and campaigns have been implemented to ensure equal and fair access for women to opportunities at workplace, access to quality jobs is still limited (Department of Labour, date). Even though there is no clear-cut evidence that women are then more likely to end up in an informal work environment, there is evidence suggesting that women are over-represented in lower tiers of informal employment (Kucera & Xenogiani, 2010).

2.2 Background discussion

2.2.1 Introduction

Even though gender equality issues have formed part of legislative and social discourse in South Africa for at least the past 10 years, and even longer internationally, it is clear that society has yet to achieve parity in terms of adequate female representation in organisational management structures. Former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, while commending the work of the Commission on Gender Equality, commented that 'society still lags far behind in terms of actual implementation, particularly in mainstreaming gender issues' (Freeman, 2003).

A number of researchers have hypothesised on the reasons why women are under-represented in organisations in general, despite factors such as legislation and a societal drive for the promotion of equal opportunity and the acceptance of difference (Lewis-Enright, K Crafford, & Crous, 2009). Although they are no longer required to resign from work on account of marriage and pregnancy, women are generally expected to fulfil homemaker roles; a situation which makes it difficult to maintain a career (MacDonald, 2004).

2.2.2 Career Advancement

According to researchers, career success can be categorized into extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are external rewards which are mostly concerned with observable, measurable and verifiable attainments such as pay, promotion and occupational status (Nicholson, 2000). The scholar explained that the objectives of an extrinsic career have long been recognized as the hallmark of career in many different societies, and, on the other hand, subjective career success refers to intrinsic rewards which are defined by the individual, such as career satisfaction.

Zhao and Zhou (2008) indicated that regardless of the position and demographic factors i.e. age, gender, race or others, any employee will look forward for career advancement throughout their career path. A career is a pattern of work experience spanning the course of a person's life and in most situations is usually perceived as a series of stages reflecting the movement of one phase to another, (Carmeli, Shalom & Weisberg, 2007). According to the authors, every employee has the aim of career advancement regardless of their position or demographic factors such as age, gender and race. They explained that the new entrants may be looking for upward mobility in their chosen career, whereas the seniors will aim at achieving advancement in their career due to their seniority. Hence, in order to achieve career advancement, ingratiation is one of the mechanisms that can be employed by the employees (Zin, Ngah, Ismail, Tajuddin, Abdullah & Salleh, 2010).

2.2.3 Achieving Career Advancement

According to Dyke and Murphy (2006), the meanings of career success can be categorised into four factors, namely, balance, relationships, recognition and material success.

Hennequin (2007) established three factors within the career success construct, namely, material career success, psychological career success and social career success. Zin, *et al.,* (2010) posit that, in establishing these constructs of success, employees try by all means to formulate social support through relationships with their supervisors and leaders. Zin *et al.,* (2010) argue that career success is no more about one's personal efforts to know those around but rather that the intuition to want to be known must come from those one endeavours to know. The authors explained that this recognition is a product of acting as a dedicated, enthusiastic staff member who is willing to learn and be taught, and employing ingratiatory behaviours. Personal values may be regarded as milestones that one may use to evaluate one's advancement in a career (Stokes, 2010). (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood (2003). found that staff members who are proactive, flexible, have expertise in a field and engaged in influence tactics were usually successful. The scholars explained that besides, flexibility and openness are also required in the work environment

2.2.4 Racial Issues

The influence of race/ ethnicity on the perception and experience of career-related barriers has been examined in several studies with different samples of racial-ethnic minority workers since the significant influence of race/ ethnicity in the career development process have become apparent over the years (Tidwell, 1992). During an investigation of racial-ethnic differences in career choice, Lopez and Ann-Yi (2006) found that racial-ethnic minority students perceived and experienced significantly greater career barriers than comparatives of the majority of students. Luzzo, McWhirter, and Hawley, (2001), in addition, mentioned that not only do racial-ethnic groups perceive and experience more career-related barriers, but they also report a lower perceived coping efficacy for dealing with these barriers. In recent years, researchers have begun to investigate college and university students' acknowledgement of barriers in particular (Swanson & Tokar, 1991b), as it became apparent that the awareness of the perception and experience of career-related barriers among young people were increasing at a fast rate in our contemporary society. Nowadays, students are starting to realise the impact and consequences that their current decisions will have on their future career path (Stead, Els & Fouad, 2004).

2.3 Common barriers to career advancement

Table 2.1: Summary of barriers as reviewed from literature

Author	Glass Ceiling	Organisational Structure Factor	Stereotypes & prejudice	Sexual Harassment	Racial & Ethnic Harassment	Work Family balance	Lack of Org. Savvy	Unsupportive Work Environment	Qualifications & Performance	Lack of Mentors
Phillips (1997)	*									
Imhoff (1997)	*									
Adair (1999)	*									*
Wright (1999)	*									*
Thompson	*				*					*
Henning (1997)		*			*					
Blum (1981)		*							*	
Catalyst (1990)			*						*	
Baskerville			*	*					*	*
Tucker (1991)			*	*						*
Morrison				*			*	*	*	
Cameli (2003)						*			*	
Greenhaus						*			*	
Collins (2002)						*				

Author	Glass Ceiling	Organisational Structure Factor	Stereotypes & prejudice	Sexual Harassment	Racial & Ethnic Harassment	Work Family balance	Lack of Org. Savvy	Unsupportive Work Environment	Qualifications & Performance	Lack of Mentors
Shaw (2002)						*				
Wentling (1992)							*			
Camevale (1994)								*		
Stone (1994)								*		
Smart (1991)									*	
Dwyer (1991)									*	
Weber (1991)									*	
Fiske (1984)									*	
Taylor (1984)									*	
Blackburn (1981)										*
Chapman (1981)										*
Caneron (1989)										*
Fitt (1989)										*
Newton (1989)										*

2.4 Perceived career advancement barriers mostly faced black women in South Africa

2.4.1 The glass ceiling hypothesis

The glass ceiling is a term which symbolises a variety of barriers faced by women, minorities and disadvantaged groups as they seek to improve their employment status (Adair, 1999). Various studies investigating barriers experienced by women at workplaces have been conducted in South Africa. Hewlett (2002) investigated the problems that female managers experienced in the workplace and the so-called 'glass ceiling' that seemed to succeed in keeping women out of the top ranks of management. His findings concluded that even in organisations whose policies support women, prevailing attitudes and unrelenting job pressures undermine them. Abrahams (1997) researched the challenges for women in management and found that structural factors, i.e. the way the organisation sets up its policies and procedures, were some of the internal barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace. Other studies have had, as focus, the barriers experienced by women in different industry sectors. For example, Parsadh (2001) explored gender inequality in education management using a case study of four women educators' experiences in applying for promotion to principal posts in schools. Govender (1997) investigated obstacles to career advancement encountered by women in a road transport division. Parsadh's findings concurred with Govender (1997)'s findings and singled out lack of mentors, lack of role models, role conflict, male attitudes towards working women, lack of day care facilities, lack of part-time employment, insufficient maternity benefits and re-entry into the market-place, as some of the greatest obstacles.

Elsewhere, many studies confirmed the glass ceiling hypothesis and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during decisions made on their career path (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997), and also invisible barriers, which continued to prevent women, minorities and disadvantaged groups from moving up to higher positions in organisations (Adair, 1999; Baxter & Wright, 2000; Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Lyness and Thompson (2000) were curious about whether female and male executives followed similar routes in climbing the corporate ladder. In fact they found that women,

minorities and disadvantaged groups face greater barriers and they need different strategies to succeed than do men, especially white men. In collating these studies, Steyn (2011) found that in order to be a successful executive, women, minorities and disadvantaged groups have to overcome isolation, sex-stereotyping and performance pressures. The author found that the results of the studies indicated above are also true within the South African corporate environment, where most black people were disadvantaged by the previous political situation where the apartheid system of government was practiced that marginalised non-white people.

Cotter, Heemsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001) noted that the glass ceiling exists when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy. The authors examined and defined four specific criteria that must be met to conclude that a glass ceiling exists in a workplace. They argued that should any one of these criteria be present in the workplace then the glass ceiling can be thought to be in existence:

i) A gender or racial difference or preference in appointment that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee.

ii) A gender or racial difference or preference in appointment that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome.

iii) A gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels.

iv) A gender or racial inequality that increases over the course of a career.

The researcher concludes that the more the prevalence of any one or a combination of these criteria, the more difficult it is for women to attain career success at the workplace.

2.4.2 Stereotypes and Prejudice

According to Loden and Rosener (1991, p.58), a stereotype is a fixed and distorted generalisation made about all members of a particular group. Prejudice can be defined as the tendency to have prior negative judgment towards people who are different from some reference group in terms of sex, ethnic background or racial characteristics such as skin colour, (Morrison, 1992). Henderson (1994, p.133) defines prejudice as a conclusion

drawn without adequate knowledge or evidence. The existence and the functions of stereotyping have been researched and documented by many individuals (Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Devine, 1989; Fernandez, 1993; Morrison, 1992; Wilder, 1986).

A study conducted by Catalyst (1990) revealed that stereotyping, preconceptions, and exclusion were some of the most serious career hurdles for African American male and female managers. The 1990 Catalyst survey of Chief Executive Officers of Fortune 500/ Service 500 companies found that stereotypes regarding women in business included: viewing them as less committed to their careers than men; not tough enough; disinclined to work long or unusual hours; too emotional; not aggressive enough (or, conversely, too aggressive); lacking quantitative skills; not wishing to relocate; and having difficulty making decisions.

One of the most ubiquitous stereotypes is that the combination of a successful career and a happy family is more difficult to attain for females than for males (Bowdler & Clune, 2000). These findings coincide with the findings provided by the Executive Leadership Council's study (Baskerville & Tucker, 1991) in which 50 top African American executives of large American corporations were surveyed. The survey revealed that many barriers that have hindered the advancement of female managers are very similar to the restrictions imposed on African American executives. It also revealed that these restrictions included discrimination against colour and race, harassment at the work place along various lines that included patronising prejudice. Similarly, Morrison (1992) surveyed 196 managers from 16 organisations, including IT corporations and found that the biggest barrier for non-traditional (women and minorities) managers is prejudice. In her study she observed that, while Affirmative Action legislation provided access to opportunities, it did little to address the underlying assumptions and stereotypes that plagued African employees especially black women and created barriers to advancement that persist today.

2.4.3 Work –family conflict

Women view motherhood as their central life interest (Wallis & Price, 2007; Franks, Schurink & Fourie, 2006), and this priority could lead to greater conflict between work and family demands. Quality time spent with children and family, structure and planning, coping with guilt, support structures, and self-reliance could balance mothers' dual roles

(McLellan & Uys, 2009). Naidoo and Jano (2002), however, found that women may experience work and home as complimentary rather than conflicting. Whitehead and Kotze (2003) held that if a woman is to balance her multiple life-roles, she needs to be physically and mentally healthy. Balance is a life process with a cyclical nature, and is a useful tool for achieving personal growth, they concluded.

Freeman (2003) argued that married black women reported significantly higher family-work conflict than unmarried women in South Africa. Working, married women however, tend to view paid work as more important than their household work, and reported that their working had a positive impact on their families (Patel, Govender, Paruk & Ramgoon, 2006). These women furthermore show a significant tendency to continue academic and professional development and embark on second careers once they return to work from maternity leave (Geber, 2000). In conclusion, Freeman (2003) noted that both family-work conflict and work-family conflict need to be reconciled to maintain life balance and personal empowerment.

2.4.3.1 Role balance definitions

Carmeli (2003) defined the work-family conflict as a mutually incompatible discord between roles, that is, participation in the work role is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2002) suggested that work-family balance is constructed of both inputs and outputs. According to them, inputs are the actual time, energy and involvement put into each role, and utputs are the satisfaction with each role. Marks and MacDermid (1996) used the terminology of positive role balance and negative role balance. Positive role balance is described as, “achieving satisfying experiences in all domains of life, (Kirchmeyer, 2000). Negative role balance, on the other hand, describes a disengagement from and dissatisfaction with both roles. Thus, the work-family balance can be defined overall as “the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in and equally satisfied with his or her work role and family role, (Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2002).

2.4.3.2 Spill over definition

The work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) expanded on a role-based definition by stating that conflict arises when the demands of one role impacts on the expectations of the other role and spills over into the experience of the other role. The authors explained that the exposure to stress in the one domain leads to tension, fatigue and irritability which affect the person's ability to operate effectively in the other domain. They also proposed a bidirectional conflict. One of their findings noted that work-family conflict (WFC) is the impact of the work role on the family; while Family-work conflict (FWC) is the intrusion of the family role on the work domain. This has also been termed work-to-family spill over and family-to-work spill over respectively in other studies (Freeman, 2003).

2.4.3.3 Positive impacts: definition of work family facilitation

Wayne, Musisca and Fleeson (2002) expanded on this idea by defining a concept called work-family facilitation. They described this as occurring when participation in one role enhances the participation or functioning in another role. Though that is the case, they posited that it is apparent that the processes around how this occurs have not been thoroughly researched. However, Stephens, Franks and Atienza (1997) gave some suggestions that the activities in one role are rewarding and therefore enhance the individual's mood in the other role. Similarly, skills and attitudes acquired in one role can be applied positively in the other role (Crouter, 1984).

The conflict between work and family responsibilities continues to be a barrier, forcing some working women to quit their jobs and limiting the contributions of many talented women who stay (Morrison, 1992; Stoner & Hartman, 1990).

A study conducted by Heatley (1992) in which 75 female managers were surveyed, found that "home-career conflicts" have less impact on their career advancement or are less detrimental than barriers such as differences in salaries, exclusion, and isolation. Steyn (2011) noted that career barriers, especially racial and ethnic ones, allow black men and women to be treated differently to their other counterparts.

2.4.3.4 Wage differentials and the class position

Harlan and Berheide (1994), in their study based in the USA, found that wage differentials by gender and race are due to channelling women and minorities into less complex jobs, as well as underpaying females and significantly minority jobs relative to their compensable characteristics. The scholars also found that class position of low-paying jobs in the capitalist labour market is a structural barrier to job advancement. Such demographics do not seem to be the case in South Africa: Tokarczyk (2008) noted that class-based economic power relationships in South Africa are closely associated with the sexual and racial division of labour. This, the author explained, is based on the fact that, because of their previous disadvantaged past and lack of education, black people, mostly black women, in South Africa are paid far less than their male counterparts.

2.4.4 Lack of Organisational Political Savvy

Lack of organisational political savvy is another barrier affecting black men and women and minorities at work. Wentling (1992) studied 30 African men and women in middle-level management positions and found that, in many instances, African women and men have difficulty conforming to company norms, fitting in, adapting to the organisational culture, knowing who to approach for support, or determining the organisation's informal power structure. She also found that black men and women have difficulty perceiving the organisational political environment due to lack of accessibility of information. These findings are applied to women in management (Morrison, 1992). According to Morrison, black people do not seem to pay enough attention to organisational politics and often fail to advance. Furthermore, they have difficulty perceiving the organisation's political environment accurately (Wentling, 1992).

2.4.5 Unsupportive Work Environment

Morrison (1992) found that women and mainly black women are often treated differently from their white colleagues. For example, they may be excluded from luncheons, social events, and even informal gatherings within the office. In addition, they may not have access to the information they need in order to make informed decisions (Wentling,

1992). African women and men and mostly black women are constantly under scrutiny; therefore, they must consistently demonstrate competence on the job, for they are under enormous pressure to do outstanding work continuously (Wentling, 1992). The author noted that created a serious problem in that, if they need help, they cannot admit it and ask for help for fear of being marked as incompetent. Because of the pressure to be consistently outstanding and the need to avoid serious mistakes, their not asking for help can result in detrimental consequences (Morrison, 1992; Wentling, 1992).

Another factor that contributes to an unsupportive work environment for black women is a lack of role models and mentors, especially for those moving above middle management positions (Steyn, 2011). The author argued that most people want to surround themselves with others like themselves. Even though people from different backgrounds may be just as competent as those who look, talk, and behave the same, often managers tend to hire and promote people like themselves (Carnevale & Stone, 1994). White men are usually not devoted to assisting and supporting someone with a different perspective or values and may find it difficult to associate with such an individual (Morrison, 1992). This tendency adversely affects black women who are more likely to be different from the decision makers who are making recommendations that affect their career advancement (Hanover, 1993).

2.4.6 Organisational structure

In a recent study done by Kirai and Mukulu (2012) in Kenya, the authors found that organization structures are perceived as barriers to women career progression in Kenyan civil service, and are consistent with the previous research carried out in other parts of the world (Kottke & Agars, 2005; Schein, 2007) The results of research revealed significant difference across the management levels which showed that the majority of the respondents - 56 percent of women stated that they faced discrimination due to their gender in promotion. The respondents also stated that male hierarchies are more likely to promote men into managerial positions than women.

There is a strong indication that the glass ceiling (an unofficially acknowledged barrier to advancement affecting women) does exist in South Africa (Tokarczyk, 2008). Limited support structures and networking opportunities hinder women career advancement (Rowe & Crafford, 2003). A low salary average, and corporate culture and structure

continue to pose a barrier to the advancement of female employees in the form of out-dated company policies regarding programmes such as part-time and flexi-time work options, job-sharing, and telecommuting (McCammond, 2008).

2.4.7 Organisation structural factors

The notion that the structure of institutions can work to limit opportunities is not a new one (Kanter, 1977, Henning & Jardin, 1981). Blum, Fields, and Goodman (1994) found that some structures are designed to support certain business models that suit the strategies being followed by top management. The authors explained that for example, a decentralised structure may require that a general manager or chief information officer travels across the world regularly instilling strategic intent and discipline in various business subsidiaries. Such structures, they posited, do not favour black women as they prefer working closer to home and their families (Blum, *et al.,* 1994). Structural factors account for almost half of the variance in the percentage of black men and women managers in IT organisations (Blum, *et al.,* 1994). Blum & Smith, (1988) noted that these globalization trends in IT seem to have a negative effect on women's chances of being hired, retained and advanced in positions that require travel and long hours. They argued that this is because women are perceived to be family-oriented and unwilling to travel or work late. In addition, they noted that the IT profession requires employees to constantly update their skills, which may translate into long hours. Lack of role models and mentors and the existing proportion of black women in the top ranks are examples of structural factors (Blum, *et al.,* 1994).

2.4.8 Racial Harassment

Racial harassment can happen at workplaces in as much as other forms of harassment, and is against the law, using the same legal analysis applied to sexual harassment **(**www.workplacefairness.org/raceharassment). According to the website, racial harassment is unwelcome behaviour that happens to an individual because of their race, such as verbal or physical conduct of a racial nature. It is explained on the website that conduct based upon colour or national origin is analysed under the law similar to race harassment, and may also violate the law. Racial harassment in the workplace can be against the law when the conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive that it creates an

intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment or interferes with the individual's work performance. It is noted on the site that many different kinds of conduct that are of a racial nature may be considered racial harassment, if the behaviour is unwelcome and if it is severe or pervasive. However, courts have resisted adopting what they consider a workplace "code of conduct" or list of behaviour that is automatically considered to be racial harassment. As a result, if the conduct is not unwelcome or not severe or pervasive, courts will not necessarily consider each type of conduct listed below to be racial harassment.

Some examples of conduct that may be racial harassment:

Verbal or written conduct: Comments about clothing, personal behaviour, or employee's body; racial or race-based jokes; telling rumours about an employee's personal life; threatening an employee; organized hate activity directed at employees.

Physical conduct: Rape or assault; impeding or blocking an employee's movement; inappropriate touching of an employee's body or clothing;

Nonverbal conduct: Derogatory gestures or facial expressions of a racial nature; following or stalking an employee.

Visual displays: Posters, drawings, pictures, screensavers or e-mails of a racial nature; epithets scrawled on the employer's property; or other items understood to have racial significance.

2.4.8.1 Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment covers a wide spectrum from generalized sexist remarks and behaviours to coercive sexual advances (Conley, 1994). The term sexual harassment was not coined until the 1970s (Farley, 1978), but formal organizational responses have since diffused rapidly (Dobbin & Kelly 2007; Schultz 2003). Black (1990, p. 1375) defined sexual harassment as a type of employment discrimination, which includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature prohibited by law.

Roscigno (2011) asserted that sexual harassment policies are put in place to protect workers, but general organizational practice is often misaligned with formal policies or grievance procedures, calling into question fundamental assumptions many sociologists make regarding organizational constraint and agency. McLaughlin, Uggen & Blackstone (2012) posited that theory and research on gender stratification often make the implicit assumption that problems such as sexual harassment, sex discrimination, and workplace bullying will recede if and when women attain greater power at work. The authors explained that even though that is the case, power in the form of supervisory authority also provokes backlash from clients, subordinates, and fellow supervisors. The authors noted that this paradox of power represents a challenge and an opportunity for existing frameworks.

The researcher concludes that the foregoing points out to the fact that perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in organisations go beyond sexual harassment. This is not to say sexual harassment is by any means the least form of the perceived barriers.

2.4.8.2 Ethnic Harassment

Ethnic harassment is a term that refers to an individual who is bothering, threatening, or treating another individual unfairly on the basis of race, colour, and ancestry (http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/guides/racial-harassment.shtml. Ethnic harassment encompasses both hostile comments about a target individual's ethnic group and exclusion of the target from work-related or social interactions because of the individual's ethnicity (Schneider, Kimberly, Hitlan & Radhakrishnan, 2000). Other factors that may result in ethnic harassment include where an individual was born, where an individual lived before he/ she moved to his/her current location, an individual's religious beliefs, ethnic background, citizenship, or even his/her language.

Schneider, *et al.* (2000) asserted that as organizations and institutions become more ethnically diverse, racial or ethnic harassment may become more frequent and may result in multiple negative outcomes. He proposed that ethnic harassment in the workplace is a stressor composed of two factors: slurs or derogatory comments about a

target's ethnic group and exclusion of the target from work-related or social interactions as a result of his or her ethnicity. The psychological stress caused by ethnic harassment may be severe for employees, and organisations may sacrifice productivity if employee complaints concerning ethnic harassment are not taken seriously (Harrick & Sullivan, 1995).

2.4.9 Qualifications and Performance Questioned

There is a tendency to question the qualifications of employees who have satisfied an organisation's Affirmative Action goal (Cose, 1991; Elfin, & Burke, 1993; Gates, 1993; Gleckman, Smart, Dwyer, Segal, & Weber, 1991; Summers, 1991). The authors argued that often managers may have different expectations of performance for employees, based upon their race or sex. For example, when a white person, especially a man fails there is a tendency to blame it on a temporary setback, lack of effort, or bad luck (Cose, 1991), but when a black person, especially a black woman, fails, there is a tendency to blame it on a more personal factor such as lack of ability or competence. Expectations that white men will succeed at tasks are stronger than expectations for the success of black persons, especially black women (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Often, Affirmative Action is used to explain the success of black people in South Africa and their abilities on the job are discounted (Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay, 1981). The notion that there is an expectation of lower productivity from black people in South Africa, especially black women, is an assumption so pervasive that it sometimes affects their perceptions of themselves (Morrison, 1992).

2.4.10 Lack of Mentors

Mentors have been defined as higher ranking, influential, senior organisational members with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support to a protégé (Collins, 1983; Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979). The authors noted that since most high ranking, influential, senior organisational members with advanced experience are white males, they are in the most likely position to be mentors. White male mentors may not even consider black people, especially women as candidates for protégé roles because they may be more comfortable in developing a

professional and personal relationship with another white person (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2008).

A number of studies have found that a key element in the selection process is the degree to which the mentor identifies with the protégé and perceives the protégé as a younger version of them (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Bowers, 1984; Lunding, Clements, & Perkins, 1978). To achieve appropriately matched dyads in a workplace environment mentorship programmes, there is a need to establish clear mentorship purpose and goals, solidify the dyad relationship, advocate for and guide the protégé, integrate the protégé into the career tenets and mobilize organisational resources for mentoring support (Allen, Eb & Lentz, 2006). Work done by these authors reveal that having protégés and/or mentors provide input in the matching process results in better match outcomes.

The selection process may, therefore, be biased by the tendency of white male mentors to choose other white persons over black people protégés, Allen, *et al.,* (2006) explained. White male mentors may be reluctant to sponsor a black protégé because they perceive them as being a greater risk than their white counterparts (Fitt & Newton, 1989). Given that black people are numerically rare in top-level management positions in IT organisations, they may be seen as a bigger risk for sponsorship by a mentor (Fitt & Newton, 1989).

Fitt and Newton (1989) assert that lack of mentors, role models and robust and informed matching processes are barriers for many black women. Mentors are extremely important to black people who were disadvantaged by the previous system, especially since they need the guidance, encouragement, and advocacy that mentors can provide to overcome such obstacles as isolation, lack of credibility, and lack of political savvy (Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992; Morrison, 1992).

The significance of obtaining dyad input during the matching process has been noted by many researchers (Chao, 2009). Allen, *et al.,* (2006) found that when mentors provide input during the matching process, mentors demonstrated stronger commitment to the relationship, and had a greater understanding of the mentoring programme. The authors found that one strategy to elicit input into a matching process is to match the dyad using criteria—in this way, the potential for compatibility increases.

Another strategy that encourages input of both mentor and protégé is a variation on speed dating (Berk, 2010). The author recommended using this concept with a novel application—speed mentoring—where several mentors and protégés meet briefly to form first impressions and then request to be matched to a specific person. When be formed (Stokes, 2010) . The author posits that this approach may be more useful with a large number of people.

Coleman, Power, Williams, Carpentieri & Schulkin (2005) noted that mentors can facilitate protégé integration into the culture of an organisation by helping protégés learn to network and establish professional contacts. These scholars identified networking as extremely important for getting to know professional contacts in the clinical area.

Parise and Forret (2008) studied the relationship between voluntary participation, mentor input to the matching process and training, and the benefits (or costs) perceived by mentors and concluded that voluntary participation was positively related to rewarding experiences.

Without the kind of career guidance often provided by mentors or a systematic career planning programme, and without a natural dyad between the mentor and the protégés, it is easy for black women to choose certain job assignments for the wrong reasons (Stokes, 2010). The scholar adds that the lack of mentoring for black women makes them particularly vulnerable to poor career decisions. Not having a mentor who is trustworthy and knowledgeable about career mobility is a factor that further contributes to the problem of unwise career decisions (Morrison, 1992).

2.4.11 The social dimension

This dimension refers to the social interaction that individuals engage in with other individuals (i.e. colleagues, supervisors), groups (i.e. communities of practice, work units, occupational groups) and institutional bodies (i.e. trade unions, professional bodies) (Kirpal, 2004). The author explains that within the social dimension, the self is seen from an “individual relational orientation” and a “collective identity orientation.” The social interaction that both women and men have with their supervisors and peers influences the development of social identification within an organisation (Witt, Patti, & Farmer, 2002). One problem that is evident in organisations is the lack of female mentors and role

models (April, Dreyer, & Blass, 2007). Many executive women are not willing to help and promote younger women in their careers (April, Dreyer, & Blass, 2007). This is directly attributed to the "queen bee syndrome," (Staines, Tavris, & Hayagrante, 1973) where executive women are sometimes reluctant to help other women advance in their careers and instead surround themselves with men. Mentoring is regarded as an important tool for employee development (Noe, 2010), and would thus enhance a woman's work identity.

2.4.12 Diversity

Microsoft has long subscribed to the principle of diversity within its organisations throughout the globe. The nature of business in Microsoft International (in reference to Microsoft global) is such that talent is moved around easily to meet strict deadlines negotiated with customers. By so doing the business benefits from the advantages of diversity that include the following:

Increased adaptability: - Organizations employing a diverse workforce can supply a greater variety of solutions to problems in service, sourcing, and allocation of resources. Employees from diverse backgrounds bring individual talents and experiences in suggesting ideas that are flexible in adapting to fluctuating markets and customer demands

Broader service range: - A diverse collection of skills and experiences (e.g. languages, cultural understanding) allows a company to provide service to customers on a global basis

Variety of viewpoints: - A diverse workforce that feels comfortable communicating varying points of view provides a larger pool of ideas and experiences. The organization can draw from that pool to meet business strategy needs and the needs of customers more effectively

More effective execution: - Companies that encourage diversity in the workplace inspire all of their employees to perform to their highest ability. Company-wide, or in the case of Microsoft International, global-wise strategies can then be executed; resulting in higher productivity, profit, and return on investment.

Another issue that became apparent in the interviews is that there was hesitation whether personal goals and ambitions were aligned strategically with the organisational goals and values. For example, Microsoft is sometimes a project-based organisation which executed its duties within very strict deadlines and deliverables. This value would be at conflict with a career woman who may be putting her family values first. Respondents whose goals and values were at variance with the values of Microsoft would find it difficult to navigate the corporate ladder.

Four respondents acceded to have changed their goals and values in order to match those of Microsoft as they had fallen in love with the organisation. It came out in the interviews that they expected their relationship with the organisation to grow as a result of this alignment. Respondent 17 expressed that one of the factors at work that makes it easier for him to deal with barriers ahead of his own career advancement was the dedication and the extra mile he goes to when duty called. “Clearly these are dictates of this organisation and if one disregards these one is bound to be frustrated,” he added.

Asked what she thinks would happen if there is a misalignment between self-values and organisational values, R15 expressed that this leads to lower productivity and an increase in absenteeism at work. Mistrust between line manager and the subordinate sets in and productivity suffers further, “the cycle does not end until a deliberate effort is made to arrest the situation,” she concluded.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Research Methodology is the critical section of research work; it explains the procedures, methods and techniques that the researcher used for the collection of data. It is also here that the researcher analyses the reliability and breadth of the data collection techniques and thus builds the platform from which the researcher later judges the overall soundness of the conclusions the researcher reached at the end of the study. It is also the systematic way to solve a problem. It is the science of studying how research is to be carried out. It is the approach taken to acquire the information (McNabb, 2010). Essentially, research methodology outlines the type of research, the rationale for choosing the methodology for the research, elaborates on the research philosophy and strategy, defines and describes the target population, sampling, research instrument, administration and collection of the research data, data analysis, validity and reliability, limitations, bias and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Methodology

Qualitative research is characterised by the quest for understanding in an in-depth inquiry (Henning, 2004). In qualitative studies the variables are not controlled, because of the need for the subjects to express themselves freely, and to allow for the capture of the representation of the data. Qualitative studies seek to explain, by using evidence from the data and from literature what the phenomenon or phenomena being studied are about (Henning, 2004). All the data gathered are documented and analysed qualitatively by looking for integrated primary themes. Henning further states that there are three main categories of data collection or gathering methods in qualitative research, namely, observation of the subjects in the relevant setting, archival and document studies and interviewing of the respondents in an open-ended manner.

For this study, the qualitative research method was adopted because the aim was to understand the perceived barriers to career advancement of black women working in an IT organisation and whether the perceived barriers are different to those encountered by

black men working in an IT organisation. This investigation warrants semi-structured questions to probe and extract the necessary details from the subjects.

3.2 Research Design

Research design is the critical process that transforms an idea, interest, or question from 'just a thought' into a meaningful and purposeful investigation of social or physical process (Gatrell, Bierly & Jensen, 2005). The selection of research components in this study was done by keeping in mind the objectives of the research. Most research objectives can be achieved by using one of the three types of research designs, namely, exploratory, descriptive and explanatory or casual research (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2000).

The method of data gathering used in this research study was the use of semi-structured questions conducted in the form of interviews by the researcher, face to face with the respondents. According to Henning (2004), "the main aim of interview data is to bring to our attention what individuals think, feel and do and what they have to say about it, giving us their subjective reality in a formatted discussion which is guided and managed by the interviewer and later integrated into the research report." Henning (2004) distinguishes between two types of interviews, namely, the discursive constructionist interview and conventional standardised interview. Discursive interviews are non-standardised and the interviewer yields control to the interviewee. On the other hand, in a standardised interview, the interviewer should guide the interview, but should not ask leading questions, should prevent contamination of the data and should not force the speaker/interviewee into a confessional mode.

3.2.1 Item of analysis

The research study focused on Microsoft South Africa as the as the chosen unit of analysis in the IT industry. Microsoft is a global leader in information technology and its status as a global leader positions it to be faced with a number of challenges that includes diversity and career advancement of various groups of employees in various geographical areas in which it operates. The organisation was founded on the strong axis that technology creates opportunities for people and organisations to express and achieve their dreams by putting a personal computer on every desk and in every home.

Microsoft describes itself as a “devices and services” company. It specialises in software, services, devices and solutions that help people and businesses realise their full potential. Globally Microsoft has 100 912 full time employees and 1 623 interns. Microsoft is also involved in joint ventures with other IT organisations. Microsoft South Africa (hereafter referred to as Microsoft) was established in 1975, and employs 272 full time employees and 16 interns.

3.2.2 Population

The population for this research comprised skilled and qualified employees of Microsoft South Africa working in the various functional areas of this organisation. However, for the purposes of this research, only nine functional areas were focused on in terms of drawing the sample for the research. These nine functional areas comprise the bulk of the black women in Microsoft. The sample comprised 1 black women and five black men, all skilled and qualified employees ranging from a minimum of a few months in the organisation to more than eleven years of service with the organisation.

The sample was drawn from the following functional areas;

1. Business Services & Administration - Business Services and Administration professionals provide support to key decision makers.

2. Customer Service & Support - Service and support professionals are the face of Microsoft, improving the customer experience across products and services. Each day, they connect people with technology—from families at home to systems administrators in the world’s largest corporations.

3. Finance - Microsoft’s growth and success relies on superb financial management and on mapping finances to product and business strategies.

4. Hardware Engineering - Hardware Engineering is responsible for customer needs for entertainment, mobility, productivity, comfort, and value in Microsoft product lines.

5. Information Technology – Is responsible for delivering innovative, reliable, and scalable technology and service solutions. Quality is also critical and the teams provide

feedback on products before they are released to help ensure they meet the highest standards of excellence.

6. Legal & Corporate Affairs – The professionals perform at the leading edge of new technology law, ethics, and policy. Their job is to protect and strengthen the company's assets and intellectual property.

7. Marketing - Marketing presents Microsoft products and services to the world. The Marketing professionals are responsible for the evaluation of market opportunities, represent customer and partner preferences and priorities, define value propositions, and produce integrated marketing programmes.

8. Operations - Operations controls product manufacturing, licensing, and packaging, as well as the supply chain that moves products to market. The professionals work closely with technical, sales, and marketing professionals to coordinate product launches, transactions, and vendor relations.

9. Research - Collaborates with colleges and universities worldwide, Research advances computer science and software engineering by conducting both basic and applied research. In addition to inventing remarkable computing technologies, the professionals enhance user experiences and reduce software development and maintenance costs.

Table 3.1 below lists respondents according to the functional areas.

Table 3.1: List of research respondents according to functional areas

Participants	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	W8	W9	W 10	W 11	W 12	W 13	W 14	Black men				
															M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Functional Area	Business Service & Administration	Customer Service & Support	Finance	Hardware Engineering	Information Technology	Legal & Corporate Affairs	Marketing	Operations	Research	Business Service & Administration	Customer Service & Support	Finance	Hardware Engineering	Information Technology	Legal & Corporate Affairs	Marketing	Operations	Research	Business Service & Administration
Date Interviewed	26. 02. 15	26. 02. 15	26. 02. 15	02. 03. 15	02. 03. 15	04. 03. 15	04. 03. 15	06. 03. 15	23. 02. 15	04. 03. 15	27. 02. 15	24. 02. 15	24. 02. 15	05. 03. 15	05. 03. 15	07. 03. 15	06. 03. 15	04. 03. 15	26. 02. 15

W1 – Woman Number One (1) Interviewed to **W14** – Woman Number Fourteen (14) Interviewed

M1 - Man Number One (1) Interviewed to **M5** - Man Number Five (5) Interviewed

3.2.3 Sample and sampling method

The sample for this research study comprise 14 career women with proven potential to advance in their careers as evidenced by talent management statistics kept by Microsoft Human Resource department, (to be denoted by **W1 -** Woman Number One (1) Interviewed, **W2** - Woman Number Two (2) Interviewed, **W3**, and so on to **W14**) and 5 black men (men denoted by **M1 to M5**) currently working for Microsoft South Africa in the various indicated nine functional areas or divisions (as shown in table 3.1 above) and who are skilled and qualified and have worked for Microsoft South Africa for at least three or more years.

The sampling method employed for this study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is used in exploratory research, where it selects cases or key informants with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman, 2006). Purposive sampling is appropriate to select unique cases (or individuals) that are especially informative, and may be used to select members of a specialised population. This type of sampling may also be relevant to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation to gain a deeper understanding of a subject (Neuman, 2006). The participants in a purposive sampling might include persons likely to be knowledgeable, influential or otherwise key to understanding the situation (Robson, 2007).

3.3 The research instrument – Semi-Structured Questions

The research instrument adopted for this research study is a semi-structured questionnaire used to interview the respondents. The semi-structured questionnaire schedule was provided to the respondents at least one week before the actual interviews. This allowed respondents sufficient time to prepare their answers or responses for the interview and seek clarifications on questions that they might have not understood. The propositions that were drawn from the literature review formed the basis for the semi-structured interview schedules/questionnaire. The interview schedule was divided into two sections to address the two sub-problems identified in this research. The first section addressed the identification of the perceived barriers to career advancement for black women employed in an IT organisation. The second section recorded responses to questions that sought to determine whether black women face different perceived career advancement barriers to those encountered by black men within an Information Technology company in South Africa.

3.3.1 Procedure for data collection

There are two types of data, namely primary and secondary data. According to Saunders, *et. al.,* (2003), primary data is generated from a research process and has implications on the methods and techniques of data collection. Secondary data is the product of a previous primary data collection process. Saunders, *et. al.,* (2003) noted that secondary data can further be divided into 'raw' and 'compiled'. Raw data is the first stage after a survey and is yet to be processed and 'compiled' secondary data is that which has received some degree of selection or summarizing.

3.3.2 Pilot testing

A pilot interview was initially carried out in order to determine the alignment of the questions to the sub problems identified in this research. Pilot testing was also done in order to determine the average time spent on each interview session. The time span was determined with the aim of it to be feasible and enticing enough not to overburden or inconvenience the interviewee as well as not to induce respondent fatigue.

It was considered important to pilot test the semi-structured questionnaire to ensure that the questions were understood by the respondents and there were no problems with the wording or measurement. Pilot testing involved the use of six interviewees to test the appropriateness of the questions and their general comprehension.

All the interviewees were sent an email requesting their voluntary participation in the research study at least a week before interviews commenced. The email indicated that the respondents were free to withdraw their participation at any time they so wished. The interviews were conducted through semi-structured questions administered through face to face interviews with the employees of Microsoft that comprised the sample. The researcher conducted all the interviews personally and recorded them, using a recording device.

3.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The type of analysis applied in this study is qualitative content analysis, where the researcher divided an A4 page in half and wrote down what the participants said. The researcher recorded what the participants said during the interviews. After the interviews the researcher elaborated on what she remembered about each interviewee. The recorded tapes were not to be transcribed but kept for reference purposes only.

The researcher analysed and presented the data using descriptive and inferential statistics. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) define descriptive statistics as a set of statistics that describe a body of data. Data analysis is a process of turning data into information (Lancaster, 2005). The researcher organised the data into the processes of distillation, classification and communication. Distillation involves sieving potentially large amounts of data into forms that are more readily managed and absorbed, and also discarding data that is not appropriate in the context of the research project. Classification involves grouping data into categories that allow the researcher to quickly see what factors are involved and potentially what the data means. Identification is concerned with establishing causes and/or relationships between factors.

The sample demographics were obtained using analysis of the frequencies of respondents in each of the demographic categories of years of service, gender, race, job level and employment status.

3.5 Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study is the risk of social desirability bias. This occurs when research participants express viewpoints that they think the interviewer wants to hear, rather than what they truly believe. Another limitation of this study is the small sample size. While the sample size is not large, it represents all skilled and qualified black men and women in a South African IT organisation.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Validity is defined as a measure of truth or falsity of the data obtained through using the research instrument. It can be classified as internal and external validity of the measuring instrument (Burns & Grove, 2001). Reliability is the degree of consistency with which the instrument measures an attribute (Polit & Hungler, 1999). It further refers to the extent to which an independent administration of the same instrument yields the same results under comparable conditions (De Vos, 1998).

3.6.1 External validity

This refers to generalisability of the research to the external world (Stacey & Griffin, 2005).) In the current research, one cannot generalise in this instance, as the external validity is quite limited because the sample was purposive, drawing only from skilled and qualified men and women employed by Microsoft South Africa. One

cannot therefore generalise because this sample was not randomly chosen. However the findings of the research might still be informative for organisations in the IT industry in South Africa.

3.6.2 Internal validity

Internal validity of research is concerned with the interpretation of observations, whether or not the researcher is calling what is measured by the right name (Perakyla, 2006). Creswell (2003, p. 30) refers to validity as the strength of qualitative research used to determine whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of an account. According to Henning (2004), “to validate is to check for bias, for neglect, for lack of precision, to question all procedures and decisions critically, to theorise, looking for and addressing theoretical questions that arise throughout the process and to discuss and share research actions with peers as critical in-process reviewers”. Internal validity means that there are no errors internal to the design of the research (Neuman, 2006).

3.6.3 Reliability

Kirk and Miller (1986), as cited by Perakyla (2006), defined reliability as the degree to which the findings are independent of accidental circumstances of the research. In ethnographic research, the reliability of research results entails whether or not (or under what conditions) the researcher would expect to obtain the same finding if he or she tried again in the same way. Accordingly, the quality of recordings and transcripts has important implications for the reliability of conversational analytic research (interviews).

To ensure reliability in this study, the researcher conducted all the interviews personally while special attention was given to the technical quality of recordings as this is a key aspect of reliability (Perakyla, 2006).

4.0 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Redundant data and analysis tautology are identified by scholars as one of the main pitfalls into which student researchers fall (Priem & Butler, 2001). This chapter presents the results and identifies themes emanating from the in-depth semi - structured interview process. The purpose of the data presentation and analysis presented in this chapter is to meet the objectives of the research questions as identified in chapter 1. The researcher sought to identify the perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in Microsoft South Africa, in Johannesburg. Findings and discussions arising from the research are presented herein.

4.2 Demographic profile of interview respondents

Table 4.1: Schedule of interviews

Interviews intended	**Semi-structured questionnaires interviews conducted**		**Response rate**
24	19		79%
Category of respondents	**Target sample**	**Actual Sample**	**Abbreviation**
Top management	**4**	**2**	Top
Middle management	**6**	**4**	Mid
Junior management	**4**	**3**	Jun
Non-managerial staff	**10**	**10**	Non
Total	**24**	**19**	

Table 4.1 above shows that 19 interviews were carried out and completed. A total of 24 interviews were initially targeted for this research, but eventually 19 interviews were conducted, yielding a response rate of 79 percent. This is an acceptable response rate considering that most respondents had busy schedules leaving them with little time to accept interview appointments. The working sample of 19 and a

response rate of 79 percent is therefore considered to be adequate for the analysis of the results to follow.

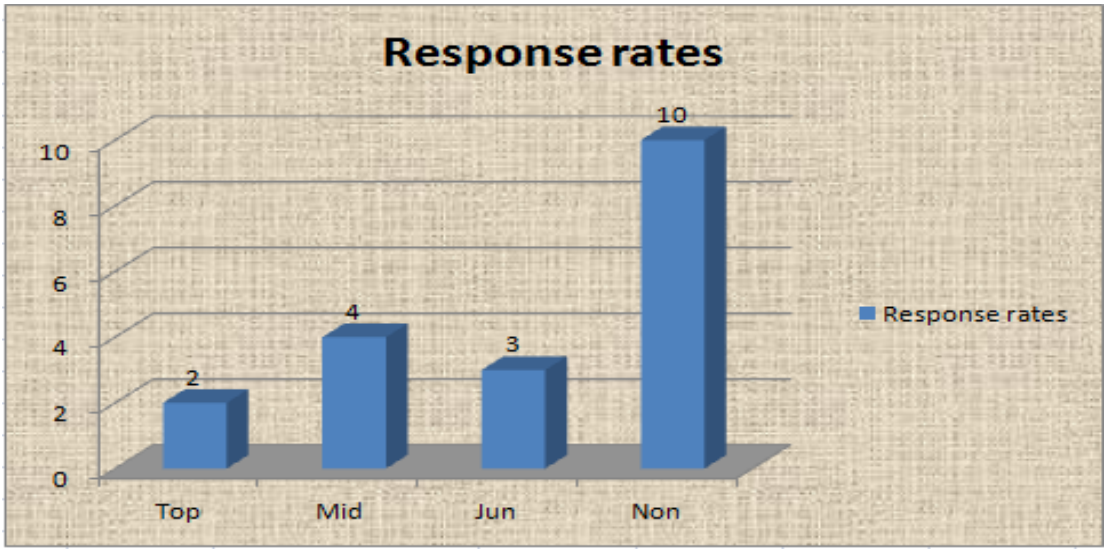


Figure 4.1: Interview response rates per category

Responses from black respondents in top management were lowest at 11 percent of the total respondents whilst middle managers were at 21 percent. Junior management were at 16 percent and non-managers had a response rate of 53 percent, which was the highest. The low response rate for top management could be attributed to their busy schedules whereas non-managers are usually loyal and will grab any opportunity to air their views, general resentments and complaints.

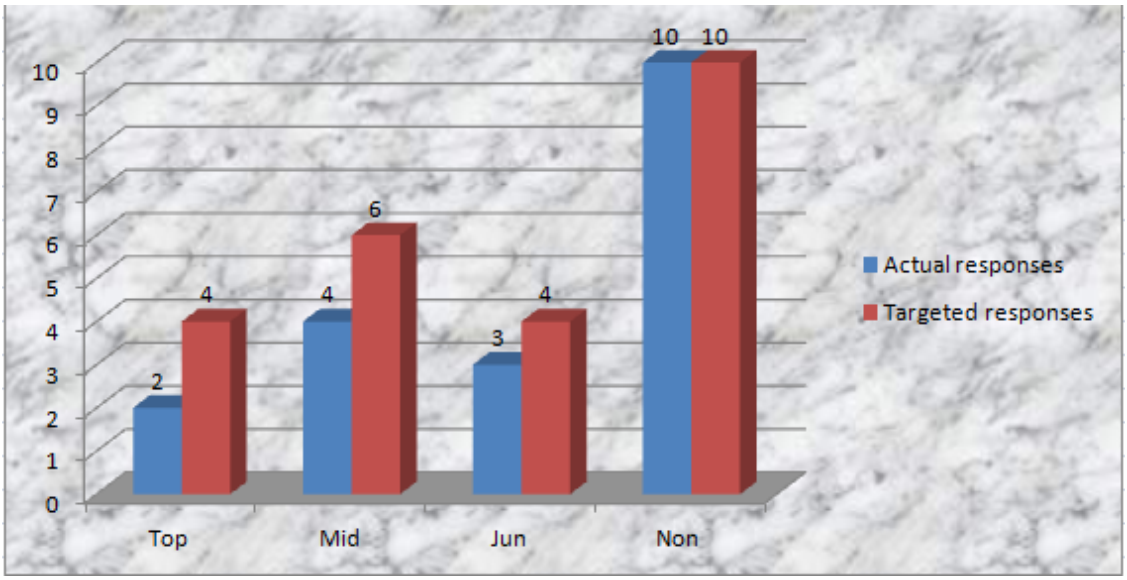


Figure 4.2: Interview response rates – actual vs target

Figure 4.2 above pivots the information in Table 4.1 and compares the response rate of each category in terms of actual versus targeted. Non managerial stratum had 100

percent response rate while top management at 50 percent had the least response rate. This could be due to diary constraints on the part of top management.

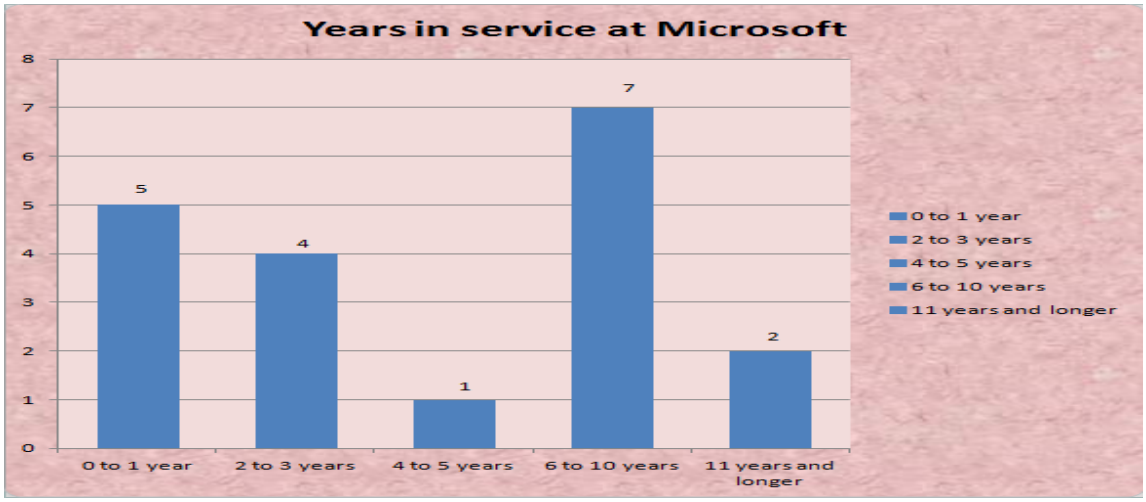


Figure 4.3: Years in service

Figure 4.3 above depicts data presented by question 1 of Section A of the instrument. From the graph it is noted that most of the interviewees have spent 10 years (37 per cent) at Microsoft. Combined, 89 per cent of the interviewees are in the 0 to 10 years category but if this distribution is compared to Figure 4.2 above, one notices that a lot of these experienced respondents are still in the non-managerial category (which has 53 per cent in Figure 4.1 above). This means that a lot of these very experienced black women are still non-managerial.

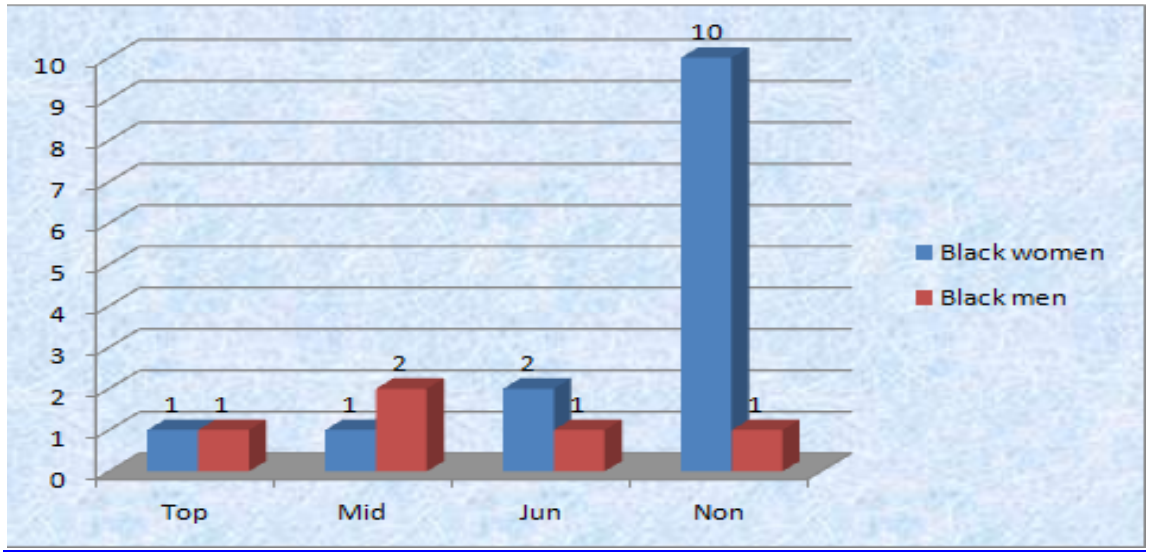


Figure 4.4: Gender distribution across categories

Figure 4.4 is in respect of questions 2 and 3 on Section A of the research instrument. The graph shows the total numbers of interviewees in their gender; 14 black women and five black men, as well as their profession category. Drawing an imaginary trend

line from non-managerial staff to top management, it is noted that fewer women make it to the top, the number petering away on each category. This depiction is better understood when read in conjunction with Table 4.2. below.

The inclusion of question 4 in the questionnaire was meant to provide a guide into the originality and therefore credibility of some of these responses. Respondents are sometimes accused of rushing through their responses especially when faced with topics they have been asked to respond to or discussed before (Meade & Craig, 2012). The bulk of the respondents of this research are either getting involved for the first time (see below pie chart, 37 per cent) or this is their second time (32 per cent). Figure 4.5 below therefore shows the distribution of the responses in this regard.

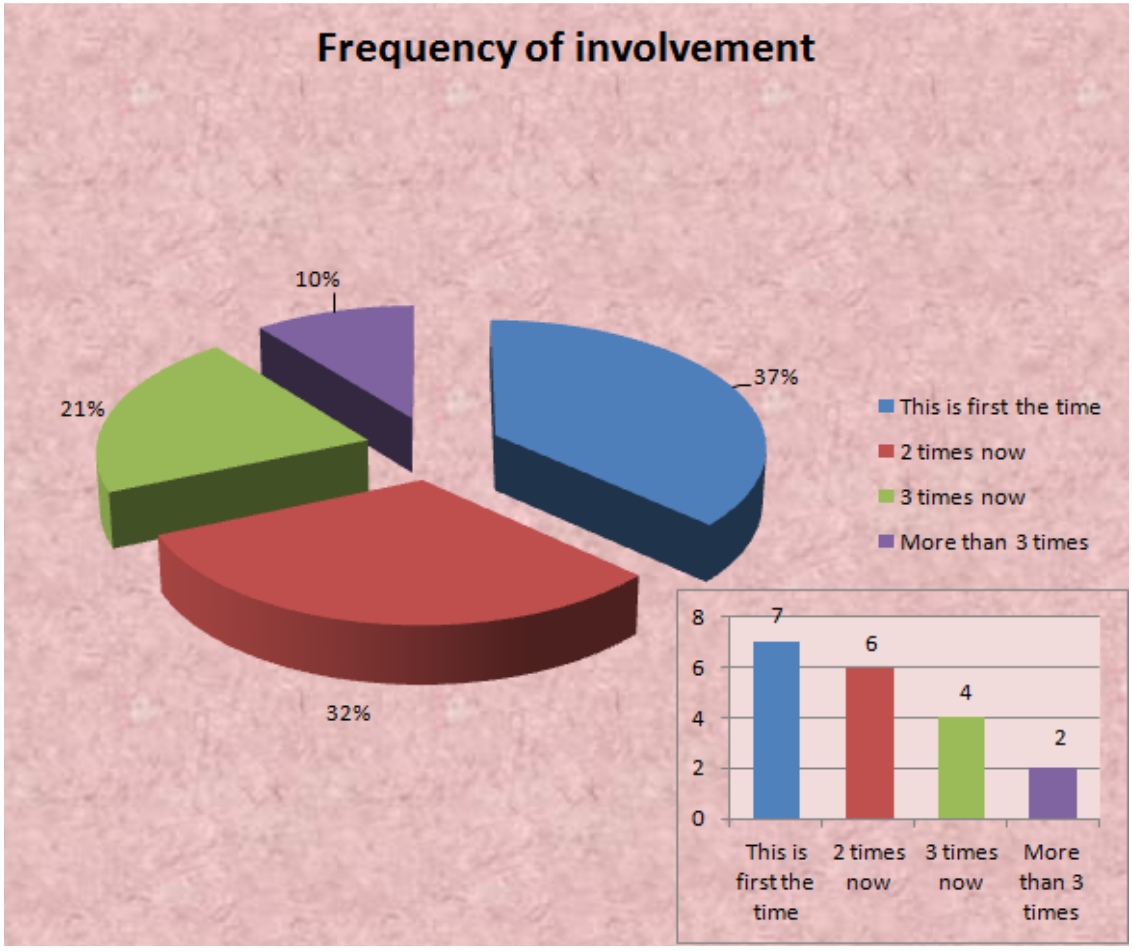


Figure 4.5: Frequency of involvement in the same topic

Table 4.2: Cross reference of responses vs. ten black women career barriers

	Barrier	Response rate		R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14
1	Glass Ceiling	13		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
2	Organisational Structure Factor	11		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
3	Stereotypes & prejudice	7		✔	✔	✔			✔	✔			✔		✔		
4	Sexual Harassment	6				✔	✔			✔					✔	✔	✔
5	Racial & Ethnic Harassment	8			✔	✔		✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	
6	Work-Family balance	9		✔		✔			✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔
7	Lack of Organisational savvy	6			✔					✔	✔	✔	✔				✔
8	Unsupportive Work Environment	5		✔			✔	✔			✔				✔		
9	Qualifications and Performance Questioned	9		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔			✔			✔	✔	✔
10	Lack of Mentors	12		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔

Key: R = Respondent

The results depicted in Table 4.2 above revealed that Glass ceiling, Organisational structure factor, Lack of mentors, Qualifications and Performance Questioned, Racial and Ethnic harassment and finally Work-Family balance were the leading five barriers as perceived by the sample. This evidence is consistent with the study findings by Hewlett (2002), Freeman (2003) and to a certain extent Abrahams' (1997) findings as well. The researcher states *to a certain extent* with regards to Abrahams (1997) as his findings were grouped together under *lack of policies that support black women, prevailing attitudes and unrelenting job pressures* that some scholars argue reflect organisational structure factors. The pie chart below condenses the total responses per barrier in Table 4.2 into percentage terms.

4.3 Unsupportive work environment

Leadership effort to deal with barriers facing black women amounts to either supportive or unsupportive work environment. Effort to deal with these barriers is mounting. At 5%, this barrier represents the lowest barrier faced by black women at Microsoft. Leadership have been commended to be playing an active role is eradicating these barriers but their efforts are being hampered by external factors such as the ICT Charter that is yet to be fully implemented. Although this is the sentiment coming out of the interviews that included men interviewed, most black women pointed out that the willingness of leadership top deal with these barriers should not be doubted at all. Leadership must reflect the intention to deal with the barriers so that the whole organisation follows. It is believed that any amount of perceived unwillingness to deal with the barrier on the part of leadership does not reflect the organisation in a good stead.

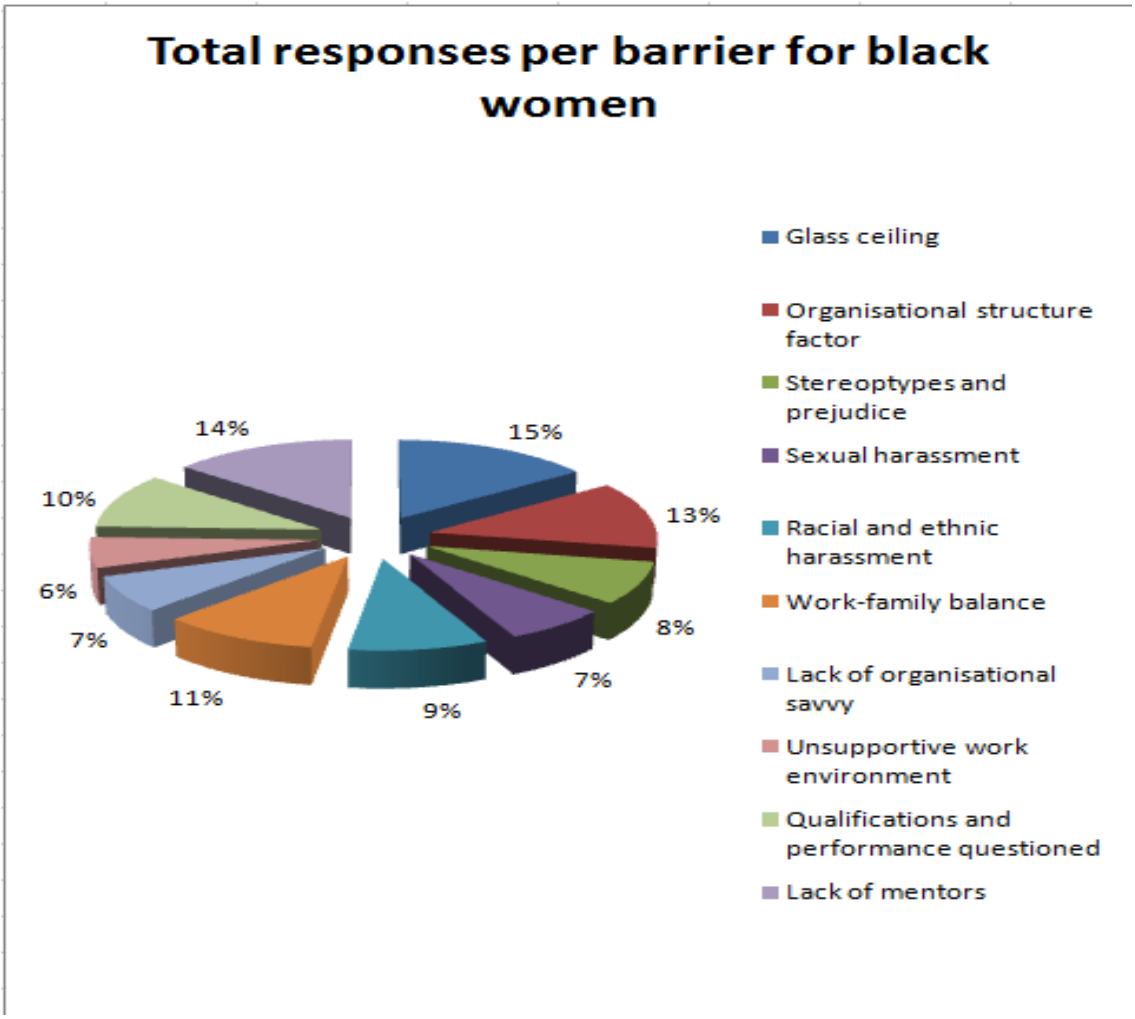


Figure 4.6: Total responses per barrier for black women

4.4 Mining for consistency in findings

Below the researcher presents a summary of the main points raised by each black career woman respondent. These results will be presented in a summary later in the chapter, and discussed in theme groupings as well later. As other scholars, for example, Abrahams (1997), Govender (1997) and Parsadh (2001) grouped a number of factors as contributing to a few major barriers, it was necessary for the researcher to understand what each respondent meant by each of the five leading barriers to career advancement as perceived by women in Microsoft so as to alienate major barriers from others as identified by literature and compare them to empirical findings. This was also necessary for the researcher to discover consistency in meaning of terms used in the research questionnaire and therefore improve or disprove reliability and credibility of findings of the research. No effort was made by the researcher to assist respondents understand the reference of the terms. Below is collation of the findings as responded to by the sample.

Respondent R1: Respondent 1 perceived **glass ceiling** as the most significant barrier to her career progress. This respondent believes that no matter what set of skills a female employee possesses, there was always a glass ceiling that prevented them from reaching top managerial positions. She believes that the **organisational structure** was set in such a way that it becomes the glass ceiling that prevented female promotions at Microsoft. In her opinion, this stems from stereotyping women no matter how much potential women have. According to her the situation is not made any better as most women do not hold **exceptional qualifications** that enabled them to be outstanding. Although that is the case, she believes that this is because the women themselves find no reason to advance their qualifications when most factors act as barriers to their career advancement anyway and top management is still not fully willing deal with the barriers, and thereby creating an **unsupportive working environment.**

Respondent R2: What matters most to respondent R2 is to see the **glass ceiling** removed deliberately by top management. To her it is the duty of top management to ensure that equitable distribution of opportunities is guaranteed in the organisation and that advancement is assured purely on merit. She underscores the fact that the will and intent to change the status quo is sometimes viewed as favouritism towards the women, and therefore resented by the male population at large in an organisation like Microsoft. She has viewed leadership response to most issues raised by black women as lip service. She is not convinced that the **organisational structure factor** is geared to promoting eradication of these barriers as most often as not women are made to go through a hierarchy of men in leadership, employees who have never experienced what these black career women have or are experiencing. It is therefore not surprising that “most responses one receives is based on **stereotyping**” them.

Respondent R3: It is **racial and ethnic harassment** that she strongly feels hinders career advancement for women. She has had personal experiences being mentored by one male mentor as she scaled her heights up the corporate ladder. The experience left her believing that the black woman was being victimised because of her colour, where she came from and what she stood for in the organisation. She translated this to a

glass ceiling for this employee. In her culture family is very important and there is need to strike that **work-family balance** but at Microsoft this is a challenge. It is made worse by the fact that every employee is expected to chart their own career path which means meeting organisational goals which in her opinion conflict with her own family cultural goals.

Respondent R4: This employee believes that little will change if there no deliberate effort and resource allocation to deal with the **glass ceiling**, **lack of mentorship** and **organisational structure factor** and **unsupportive work environment**. The latter came out strongly as a hindrance to black women's career advancement, according to her. Microsoft is an organisation that is mostly project based and bound by deadlines. The environment does not accept the fact that women needed to be recognised as housewives who need to be given an opportunity to take families into their work-family balance. Striking this balance was a challenge at Microsoft for R4.

Respondent R5: Of the ten barriers explained in literature, **lack of mentors** to guide women to navigate their career path, was obtrusively the most challenging one to respondent 5. She notes that in order for a black woman to make it in a predominantly male dominated workplace like IT environment, she sometimes has to act like one, and that included talking, and in some instances dressing. The protégé and the mentor must be in a natural state of willingness to participate into growing the other. They must find common ground where they click. It is noted by Parsadh (2001) and Govender (1997) that lack of mentors played a huge role in hampering career advancement. In this study 13 respondents decried lack of mentors in black women career advancement, consistent with the findings pointed above. Another sentiment expressed by R5 is the fact that there is little advertising of cutting edge courses that employees are encouraged to partake in order to advance their **qualifications,** making it difficult for black women to search and choose their courses that they may believe enhances their career advancement**.**

Respondent R6: Respondent R6 observes that she needs to strike a **balance between work and family** and her family always comes first. Although she does not blame anyone for putting her family first ahead of her career, she

concedes that work-family balance is a huge impediment to her career advancement in the IT industry and there is little she can do about it; she has resigned herself to that fact and it is her personal choice. This introspective belief is consistent with the conclusion by Wallis and Price (2007) and Franks, Schurink, and Fourie (2006) that women view motherhood as their central life interest and this priority could lead to greater conflict between work and family demands. Because a black woman is in most cases a wearer of at least two caps, at work and home, R6 believes **stereotyping** of any black career woman is easy for her peers at work and that affects her confidence.

Respondent R7: It is apparent in respondent R7 that no matter how strong a black career female tries to advance herself, the unsupportive work environment, especially in the IT industry plays a major part in hindering her progress. In her opinion it is even harder for a black career woman to aspire for a greater position due to **sexual harassment** that she encounters in one way or another. Further, she explains, the fact that women in general are **stereotyped** to be less capable than men does not help the situation, thereby prejudicing women further. It is only nowadays that views and perceptions over career black women are changing, but a lot still needs to be addressed.

Respondent R8: Respondent R8 believes that the IT industry is changing and changing very fast. Due to the globalisation of the market place, a black career woman must be prepared to move from one geographical area to another. She must always be prepared to understand the dynamics of the organisation she is working for and in that regard respondent R8 believes perceived barriers to career advancement by black women are indeed very few; **racial and ethnic harassment, work-family balance and lack of "working dyads, or mentorship programmes**" that contribute positively to developing a black career woman are notables in this instance. In her opinion, if leadership do not deal with these, then "we are faced with an **unsupportive work environment** leading to our frustrations at work."

Respondent R9: This respondent points out the findings by Fitt and Newton (1989); that white male mentors may be reluctant to sponsor a black protégé because they perceive them as being a greater risk to their available time than their white counterparts due to their cultural demands,

questions regarding **qualifications and performance** and **lack of early career guidance or mentorship.** She draws this conviction from the fact that black women are numerically rare in top-level management positions in IT organisations, they may be seen as a bigger risk for sponsorship by a mentor. The demographics of the sample surveyed in this study reflected the concerns raised by this respondent, i.e. only one black woman was found in the top management category.

The respondent pointed out that barriers black women face lead up to a invisible glass ceiling that she has to deal with at work. She explained that executive management in all IT companies in South Africa are aware of what needs to be done in order to advance the black woman in their work places. In this regard she mentioned - Information and Communication Technology Charter (the ICT Charter) that is published as a sector Code of Good Practice in terms of Section 9 of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003. Among its noble causes are:

- Achieve a target of 50% black people in senior management positions with 30% black women being a percentage of the former;
- Achieve a target of 65% black people in other management positions with 30% black women being a percentage of the former;
- Commit to a target of 60% black people in the governing body with black women comprising 50% of the former.

Probed further as to why, despite these intentions and existence of the 2012 Charter, there still seems to be challenges in advancing the black women, R9 explained that the largest hurdle the charter has come up against was there is no oversight mechanism and no forum that would allow companies to get together to achieve its aims. These sentiments were also echoed by two men who were interviewed.

Respondent R10: According to respondent 10, **organisational structure factor, racial and ethnic harassment, work-family balance,** and **lack of mentors** are critical barriers to her career aspirations. She is a firm proponent of the theory of matching process as being key to the development of a black woman. Significant in the development of a black woman is recognition from her mentor which is responsible for highlighting her true ability. The matching process is extremely important as it provides

trust, confidence, encouragement and guidance that a black woman coming from a previously disadvantaged situation requires, she explains. This is consistent with the findings of Jeruchim and Shapiro (1992) who, based on the interviews with 106 protégés and mentors, both men and women, found that the quality of the matching process relationship emerges from a trusting relationship

Respondent R11: For this respondent, **glass ceiling** comes out as the most insurmountable barrier that black women in the IT industry face. By definition, she defines the glass ceiling concept as all challenges or impediments in one's career way that one cannot explain their purpose, how they came about or why they are there in one's way. According to her, this is the case for most black women in the IT industry and Microsoft was no exception. Probed further, she explains that opportunities just pass black women by, or are channelled towards a certain class of individuals without any explanation even though they may have identified them as well. Seniority at work did not play a part in promotion as long as a black woman was up against another non-black woman. This observation was collaborated by respondent 12.

Respondent R12: This respondent explains that apart from the inexplicable **glass ceiling, qualifications and performance questioned** is a factor that causes a black woman to suffer career stagnation in the IT industry. She explains that this industry is quite a fast moving industry which requires that professionals keep up-skilling themselves in order to be recognised for higher responsibilities. Work-life balance and flexibility in terms of the environment in which she works is an incredibly important factor to her. She is looking at defined **mentorship** on her career journey, which to her, if not there, becomes a barrier to career progression.

Respondent R13: A significant factor affecting the respondent is the **organisational structure factor**. She strongly feels that policies, processes and procedures in IT promote her male counterparties more than female. She reveals that heads of department in IT have predominantly been males and for that to change would take a long time. Females quickly get frustrated and disenchanted leading to a situation where they are labelled 'lack of ambition' according to her, and therefore suffer natural attrition. R13 explains that very few black women were willing to fight

the status quo as most of them were secondary bread-winners in their homes, resigning the responsibility to their male partners which then come out as men being 'ambitious' and having a 'go-getter attitude.'

Respondent R14: R14 firmly believes that most modern career black women are not willing to stand and let opportunities pass by. She argues that the gap in ambition between a black career woman and her male counterpart is narrowing due to societal evolution. According to R14, lack of **organisational savvy** is a real barrier to many a black woman career advancement. This observation is congruent with Wentling's (1992) conclusion that African women (and men) have difficulty conforming to company norms, fitting in, adapting to the organisational culture, knowing who to navigate their way for support through the informal structures of the organisation. Morrison (1992) also noted that black women (and men) do not seem to understand the political structures of the organisation. In responding to this finding, R14 believes that this is because the power corridors in the IT industry shift so fast and shift towards while male counterparties in most cases who have also been **mentored** by white senior counterparties. This perpetuates the trend and is perceived as blocking the black woman's understanding of politics in the organisation. In support of R14, R8 added that it was not uncommon to hear of cases of **sexual harassment** and the victimisation of these women at work. In most of these cases such women then preferred to just do the minimal to keep their jobs going, and lose all the ambition and drive to attain greater positions. They become disenchanted and lose interest in attaining better **qualifications** leading to their **performance being questioned** and then is seen as a lack of ambition.

In order to note any difference in barriers faced by black men at Microsoft, 5 black men were interviewed as well. Racial and ethnic harassment, qualifications and performance questioned as well as lack of mentors came out as the strongest and common barriers that black men struggle up against. All the black men interviewed expressed concern over organisational structural hindrance to their ascending to power, 4 had serious issues with the way their white male counterparties treated them racially. Remarks to do with their colour usually were interjected jestingly in discussions with their white counterparties. Three of the black men expressed that their qualifications were always questioned even though their experience showed that they know how to do their jobs

well. This was especially true when it came to performance review discussions and personal development plans.

Although the researcher noted some similarities in the kind of barriers black men faced to those faced by black women, it is the nature and degree of severity that differed, for example, while black women have the glass ceiling as the most notorious of the barriers, black men had racial and ethnic harassment as their biggest challenge. Below in Table 4.3 the researcher summaries the themes coming out the interviews in the context of the literature.

Table 4.3: Thematic conclusions from the findings in literature perspective

Respondent	Thematic conclusions from the findings and literature
Respondent 1	• The need to deal with the glass ceiling at Microsoft is paramount to breaking down barriers • Colleagues and peers of different colour need to start viewing me as an equal and able contributor • On our part, black women need to continue up-skilling themselves despite the glass ceiling ➢ The main theme is that the black career women can only do so much but they require those around them to change their perception over them. This finding is collaborated by what Morrison (1992) concluded. She concluded that while Affirmative Action legislation provided access to opportunities, it did little to address the underlying assumptions and stereotypes that plagued African employees especially black women and created barriers to advancement that persist today.
Respondent 2	• Top management must make deliberate efforts to remove the glass ceiling • Male counterparties to start viewing efforts that Microsoft is doing to pull down the ceiling not as favouritism over women, but correcting the traditional imbalances • The removal of the glass ceiling entails the removal of many other barriers that make up the glass ceiling ➢ The main theme is that the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges, organisational structural factors being one of the main one. This finding collaborates work done by Abrahams (1997). The author researched the challenges for women in management and found that structural, i.e. the way the organisations sets up its policies and procedures, were some of the internal barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace.
Respondent 3	• Policies and procedures to deal with racial and ethnic harassment exist at Microsoft, but are not fully practised • Deliberate efforts to deal with racial harassment must be seen to be effective • In my view every employee needs to be aware of consequences of racial and ethnic harassment • Given the diversity concept and globalisation of the world market, where I was born, where I lived before I moved to my current location, my religious beliefs, ethnic background, citizenship, or even my language does not matter – traumatic consequences are severe ➢ The main theme is that the black career women face sexual harassment that contributes to diminishing her self-confidence as an able contributor, irrespective of her position on the corporate ladder. This contributes to what Uggen & Blackstone (2012) concluded. These authors posited that theory and research on gender stratification often make the implicit assumption that problems such as sexual harassment, sex discrimination, and workplace bullying will recede if and when women attain greater power at work, however this was not the case; they argue.

Respondent 4	• Top management must make deliberate efforts to remove the glass ceiling (this entails allocating resources to deal with this) • Work-family balance is a challenge to attain at Microsoft due to the demands of the projects • I feel the business needs to accept and support the work-family facilitation concept and its benefits • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • Certain groups in Microsoft have their luncheons and meetings together without inviting others • For me it is not difficult to assume or suspect wage differentials within the same bracket ➢ The main theme is that the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges. These sentiments correspond to what Abrahams (1997) found in his research (refer Respondent 1 above).
Respondent 5	• Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance • I feel comfortable if a dyad is formed naturally and not coerced • Therefore discovering of common interests and goals upon which to relate is key ➢ The main theme is that the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges, and lack of mentorship was one of the main ones. Without mentorship it was virtually impossible for black young women to attain their goals. This conclusion was congruent to what various authors noted in their studies. Mentors are extremely important to black people who were disadvantaged by the previous system, especially since they need the guidance, encouragement, and advocacy that mentors can provide to overcome such obstacles as isolation, lack of credibility, and lack of political savvy (Jeruchim & Shapiro, 1992; Morrison, 1992).
Respondent 6	• The work-family facilitation concept is not supported • Top management must make deliberate efforts to remove the glass ceiling (this entails allocating resources to deal with this) • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • The existence of a penchant to stereotype black women makes it difficult for me to be identified as my own person ➢ The main theme: Lack of work-family balance support leads to an unsupportive environment. This however was not congruent with literature. Patel, Govender, Paruk and Ramgoon, (2006) argue that working, married women, however, tend to view paid work as more important than their household work, and reported that their working had a positive impact on their families. Geber (2000) assert that these women furthermore show a significant tendency to continue academic and professional development and embark on second careers once they return to work from maternity leave.

Respondent 7	• The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • Sexual harassment makes it difficult to reach my ambitions • The existence of a penchant to stereotype black women makes it difficult for me to be identified as my own person ➢ The main theme: the black career women face sexual harassment that contributes to diminishing her self-confidence as an able contributor. (refer to respondent 3 above).
Respondent 8	• The way the Microsoft organisational structure is set up does not promote a black woman advancement • Given the diversity concept and globalisation of the world market, where I was born, where I lived before I moved to my current location, my religious beliefs, ethnic background, citizenship, or even my language does not matter – traumatic consequences' are severe • The work-family facilitation concept is not supported • Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance ➢ Two main themes: Lack of work-family balance support leads to an unsupportive environment; this finding is consistent with Morrison (1992) and Wentling (1992) who concluded that women and mainly black women are often treated differently from their white colleagues. For example, they may be excluded from luncheons, social events, and even informal gatherings within the office. In addition, they may not have access to the information they need in order to make informed decisions; and mentorship programme and matching process challenges do not support a black woman career advancement. Evidence from studies concluded by Wentling and Palma-Rivas (2008) point to the fact white male mentors may not even consider black people, especially women as candidates for protégé roles because they may be more comfortable in developing a professional and personal relationship with another white person.
Respondent 9	• Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • The need to deal with the glass ceiling at Microsoft is paramount to breaking down barriers ➢ The main theme: the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges (refer to respondent 2 above).
Respondent 10	• The way the Microsoft organisational structure is set up does not promote a black woman advancement • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance • I feel comfortable if a dyad is formed naturally and not coerced ➢ The main theme: Mentorship programme and matching process challenges do not support a black woman career advancement (refer to respondent 8 above).

Respondent 11	• Top management must make deliberate efforts to remove the glass ceiling (this entails allocating resources to deal with this) • The way the Microsoft organisational structure is set up does not promote a black woman advancement ➢ The main theme: the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges. This is consistent with conclusions drawn by Cotter, Heemsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001) who noted that the glass ceiling exists when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy. Literature notes that when mentors provide input during the matching process, mentors demonstrated stronger commitment to the relationship, and had a greater understanding of the mentoring programme (Allen et al., 2006), Chao, 2009). But when white males may not consider black women as natural candidates in the dyadic mentorships then the above process suffers, a finding noted by Wentling and Palma-Rivas (2008). In the selection process, key is the degree to which the mentor identifies with the protégé and perceives the protégé as a younger version of them (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Bowers, 1984; Lunding, Clements, & Perkins, 1978. This study found this element lacking for reasons noted by Cho (2009) and Allen et al., (2006) above.
Respondent 12	• Top management must make deliberate efforts to remove the glass ceiling (this entails allocating resources to deal with this) • I feel qualifications are necessary for career advancement at Microsoft, at least • Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance • The work-family facilitation concept is not supported • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times ➢ The main theme: the black career women face a glass ceiling that is made up of a plethora of challenges. This conclusion is captured in the definition of this barrier by Adair (1999), who defined the glass ceiling as a term which symbolises a variety of barriers faced by women, minorities and disadvantaged groups as they seek to improve their employment status. Hewlett (2002) investigated the problems that female managers experienced in the workplace and the so-called 'glass ceiling' that seem to succeed in keeping women out of the top ranks of management. His findings concluded that the even in organisations whose policies support women, prevailing attitudes and unrelenting job pressures undermine them, thereby registering similar findings to Adair.

Respondent 13	• The way the Microsoft organisational structure is set up does not promote a black woman advancement • The environment becomes rather unsupportive at times • I feel comfortable if a dyad is formed naturally and not coerced • Mentorship, forming of effective dyads and matching processes are necessary in order for a black career woman to advance ➢ The main theme: Mentorship programme and matching process challenges do not support a black woman career advancement; natural dyads need to be encouraged. Allen, Eb & Lentz (2006) concluded that in order to achieve appropriately matched and natural dyads in a workplace environment mentorship programmes, there is need to establish clear mentorship purpose and goals, solidify the dyad relationship, advocate for and guide the protégé, integrate the protégé into the career tenets and mobilize organisational resources for mentoring support. This view was consistent with what the researcher noted in this current study. It was also noted that having protégés and/or mentors provide input in the matching process results in better match outcomes. This was echoed by various respondents in the current study.
Respondent 14	• Black women need to understand the networks and the DNA of an organisation, Microsoft is no exception • Informal networking in Microsoft is very important • It is not about 'who you know' but 'who know you' • Understand the politics of the organisation you are in, and respect those politics. According to Morrison (1992), black people do not seem to pay enough attention to organisational politics and often fail to advance. Furthermore, they have difficulty perceiving the organisation's political environment accurately (Wentling, 1992). These conclusions are consistent with the results of this current study in this respect.

4.5 Analysis of results pertaining to the perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in Microsoft

Theme 1: The Glass Ceiling: Thirteen out of fourteen black women (representing 93 per cent of possible responses (14 respondents)) highlighted the glass ceiling as the most important barrier to their career advancement at Microsoft. There is a general consensus from the black female respondents that the glass ceiling is a summation of all their challenges at Microsoft. This sentiment is consistent with findings of Adair (1999) who concluded that the term 'glass ceiling' symbolises a variety of barriers. Many studies confirmed the glass ceiling barrier and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during decisions made on their career path (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). In some studies the glass ceiling was termed the invisible barriers which continued to prevent women, minorities and disadvantaged groups from moving up to higher positions in organisations (Adair, 1999; Baxter & Wright, 2000; Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

When the black career woman at Microsoft could not precisely identify the barrier that is hindering her progression to higher position, the term 'glass ceiling' came up. This is consistent with findings by Lyness and Thompson (2000) who noted that barriers black women face climbing up the corporate ladder were greater than those men face. According to Cotter, Heemsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001), the glass ceiling is compounded when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy. In other studies this is pointed out as a specific barrier which could be due to sexual, ethnic or racial harassment, or it could be due to work-life imbalance experienced by a black women causing this discrimination (refer Table 4.3). If is a barrier that means a number of barriers to various respondents, and consequently authors refer to it differently. The research also found that the glass ceiling barrier was the most common or mentioned barrier by most respondents.

As figure 4.6 shows, thirteen respondents mentioned the glass ceiling as the heaviest barrier in their career. Responses ranged from "For some reason I am unable to get the promotion I need even though my supervisor is happy with my performance," to "my supervisor and me discuss everything but clearly there may be something I am doing wrong that my supervisor is afraid of telling me" (Table 4.4). Three respondents mentioned that their inability to scale up their career ladder was due to the fact that they were black female. Table 4.2 captures shows that the glass ceiling is the most challenging, followed by the lack of mentors factor. Its severity and applicability in Microsoft is shown in Table 4.4.

Theme 2: Organisation structure factor: With 11 respondents out of fourteen (representing 79 per cent of the possible responses), this barrier is the third a significant challenge to black career women. The researcher observed an overlap in the responses given between this barrier and the glass ceiling. However it is important to note that specific respondents noted this barrier as a challenge. Kirai & Mukulu (2012) in their study in Kenya, found that organization structures are perceived as barriers to women career progression in Kenyan civil service. Their results were consistent with research carried out in other parts of the world (Kottke & Agars, 2005; Schein, 2007). In the responses most black women pointed that male hierarchies are more likely to promote men for managerial positions than women.

According to the respondents, Microsoft has an organisational structure with a number of levels that make it difficult for one to achieve their goal as it tends to be bureaucratic. This was compounded by the fact that most of the occupants of senior positions were white male, making it a challenge for black women to navigate their way up either for guidance purposes or promotion. This view was contrasted with those obtained from two of the black men interviewed and the conclusion was that this needed further research between the two groups of black employees. However this remained a barrier most common to black women although black men seemed to have found ways around this barrier by being organisationally savvy and forming informal networks in the organisation.

Theme 3: Stereotypes and prejudice: At 7 respondents out of fourteen respondents, this barrier remained a considerable factor against the black career women in their career advancement. Respondents noted that there was a tendency for white employees to view all black women as the same in the way they would view their job responsibilities. As a result the respondents felt that their performances were not judged with respect and according to merit. Morrison (1992) defined prejudice as the tendency to have prior negative judgment towards people who are different from some reference group in terms of sex, ethnic background or racial characteristics such as skin colour. What black women are experiencing at Microsoft is consistent with this definition. Henderson (1994) refers to prejudice as a conclusion drawn without adequate knowledge. The majority of those who mentioned this theme as a barrier also expressed the fact that most of the conclusions upon them were being drawn without adequate knowledge about them, what they can do or what causes them to be truly engaged as black women at work.

Theme 4: Sexual harassment: At 43 per cent (6 respondents out of fourteen respondents) this barrier did not come out as strongly as the other discussed above, however, respondents

were concerned that it was still a barrier that they perceived as a hindrance. Of concern was the protracted ramifications of the emotional disturbance that black women undergo should that happen to them, they explained. Most respondents viewed this barrier as a type of employment discrimination, which includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature prohibited by law, consistent with the definition given by Black (1990). The respondents argued that most forms of sexual harassment went unchallenged at their workplace, but still left lingering scars on their victims. The situation was made worse where the victim and the perpetrator would cross paths where the perpetrator was in a position of a recommender to the victim's career advancement.

Theme 5: Racial and ethnic harassment: 8 respondents – representing 57 percent - noted that their career advancement was hampered by their colour and creed. They made this conclusion given the remarks they have experienced, the fact that in meetings discussions would sometimes be conducted in Afrikaans in their presence and they were still expected to contribute even though it was clear that they did not understand the language. Even though there was no apparent hostility expressed in their presence, this practice could be attributed to hostility about targeting an individual's ethnic group and exclusion of the target from work-related or social interactions because of the individual's ethnicity as noted by Schneider, Kimberly, Hitlan & Radhakrishnan (2000). Respondents felt that this was a deliberate behaviour aimed at hampering their advancement at work. Although black men would experience the same prejudice, most black women expressed the fact that they would resign and withdraw from the discussion while most black men argued that they would remind participants of their presence and the need to participate in the discussion too.

Theme 6: Work-family balance: At 64 per cent of the possible responses recorded (that is, 9 respondents out of fourteen respondents), this barrier was of a strong concern to most black women. In discussing this barrier, it became apparent to the researcher that most black women viewed motherhood as their central life interest, consistent with findings by Wallis & Price (2007), and Franks, Schurink & Fourie,(2006), a view most respondents were not prepared to compromise upon. This inevitably could lead to greater conflict between work and family demands as noted by the researcher. As the black career woman advanced, the responses expressed the fact that family took precedence to career aspirations. Most young black women responded that at this time in their lives their careers came first. In conclusion the researcher noted that the importance of this barrier is different for various black women, depending on their stages in life. Ultimately it became a weighty barrier when the black woman is a mother and has a family of her own.

Them 7: Lack of organisational savvy: 6 out of fourteen respondents agreed that this was a barrier in their careers. This represented 43 per cent of the responses. Wentling (1992) concluded that African women had difficulty conforming to company norms, fitting in, adapting to the organisational culture, knowing who to approach for support, or determining the organisation's informal power structure. According to Morrison (1992), black people do not seem to pay enough attention to organisational politics and often fail to advance. Freeman (2003) concluded that it was still a challenge for black people to understand the workings of most organisational politics. Responses noted in this research seemed to collaborate this view as most of them believed it was not up to being organisational political savvy for them to progress but their performance should speak for itself.

Theme 8: Unsupportive work environment: Only 5 respondents out of fourteen believed that the work environment was still unsupportive. This means that 36 per cent agree that leadership has therefore done a great deal to try and lessen the effects of this barrier, although according to the 5 respondents, a lot still need to be done upon the other barriers. They noted that the power and the will to eradicate these barriers lie with top management. In a study concluded by Wentling (1992), African women and men and mostly black women are constantly under scrutiny; therefore, they must consistently demonstrate competency on the job, for they are under enormous pressure to do outstanding work continuously. This is a challenge that creates an unsupportive work environment. Morrison (1992) noted that white men are usually not devoted to assisting someone with different values and may find it difficult to associate with such an individual. This tendency adversely affects black women who are more likely to be different from the decision makers who are making recommendations that affect their career advancement (Hanover, 1993). These behavioural aspects contributed to making an unsupportive environment for the black women and undermined efforts by leadership that they shown in dealing with these barriers at the organisation.

Theme 9: Qualifications and performance questioned: 9 of the respondents expressed the view that their qualifications and performance were constantly being questioned or looked upon suspiciously. This had the effect of diminishing their self-confidence and ultimately further affecting their performance in a brutal cycle. These 9 respondents represented 64 per cent of the total responses that are saying this barrier is affecting their career advancement immensely. What is pertaining to Microsoft is consistent with findings from a number of studies concluded in South Africa; that there is a tendency to question the qualifications of employees who have satisfied an organisation's Affirmative Action goal (Cose, 1991; Elfin, & Burke, 1993; Gates, 1993; Gleckman, Smart, Dwyer, Segal, and Weber, 1991; Summers, 1991). Consistent

questioning of performance and qualifications had an effect of creating a self-pity or self-blame syndrome that affected many respondents' performance.

Theme 10: Lack of mentors: Twelve respondents representing 86 per cent of the responses expressed that their careers were stagnating due to lack of mentors. This was the second most challenging barrier - after the glass ceiling - to black women. It was not only mentorship programmes that were needed, but there was need for these programmes to be based on natural matching process where the mentee had a greater say in picking her mentor, leading to natural dyads. This finding was consistent with outcomes in studies done by various authors (Blackburn, Chapman, & Cameron, 1981; Bowers, 1984; Lunding, Clements, & Perkins, 1978). Empirical evidence drawn from literature reveal that lack of mentors, role models and robust and informed matching processes are barriers for many black women (Fitt and Newton, 1989), and explanations given by the respondents at Microsoft were not any different.

Summary

The above findings were noted from interviews the researcher had with the fourteen black women interviewees. The five men interviewed as pointed above argued that organisational structure factor, racial and ethnic harassment, qualifications and performance questioned as well as lack of mentors were the strongest and common barriers that they struggle up against.

It is concluded that the black men still faced the same kind of barriers but in varying degrees to the black women. Barriers profound to women were far more numerous and more difficult for them to surmount as opposed to those faced by the black men. Further, the black men seemed to have developed means and ways to deal with barriers facing them as opposed to the black women. This fact is given credence when one notes that the government and the IT industry have recognised that without outside assistance a black career woman's aspirations towards career advancement in her organisation would falter, hence the advent of various policies and the ICT Charter to alleviate her plight.

4.5.1 Career advancement within Microsoft and how it works

R10 and R11 in particular explained that the situation obtaining on the ground was different from what is intended by the organisation especially when it comes to black career woman progression. Structures, policies and write-ups display organisational intent, but implementation is still lagging. Structures and policies made available within the organisation to employees include one-on-one conversations with employees that take place twice a year

on a formal level, where the individual maps out the steps required to move to the next level and their progress is tracked.

The employee career development framework allows individuals to map out how they would like to progress within the company, as well as to create their own opportunities. The individual is largely responsible for their own growth, while the manager provides support and Microsoft provides resources, such as mentoring and training. Opportunities for promotion are available throughout the year. It is precisely this set-up that R3, R5, R6, R7, R9, R10, R11 and R14 argue that the organisation make it difficult for newly recruited black female employees to navigate their way up. Leaving the responsibility for career charting to new recruits, especially black women who may be coming from schools that did not have career guidance programmes is a challenge, they explain.

Most respondents felt that advancement in general must be done in two ways; first as new employees come in, the organisation must consider 'holding their hand' and assist by providing guidance as the very fact that IT has so many opportunities in itself could be overwhelming to a new employee. After the first year at the organisation an employee can be left on their own, but not so for black females as their challenges are uniquely different from those faced by their male counterparts.

4.5.2 What do you perceive as barriers to career advancement for black women/ men in Microsoft

First, for black women nearly all of the respondents argued that a traditional glass ceiling exists at Microsoft. This explains why there are hardly any black female career persons on the executive team of seven individuals for the year ending 2014 (Annual Financial statements, 2014). Asked to explain what they meant by glass ceiling for black women, most of the respondents pointed out that black career women do not feel that they have enough support to mentor them up the corporate ladder. Even if they do there was a general perceived belief that the kind of support and knowledge offered to a black career woman fell short of that offered to their male counterparts.

Admittedly what contributes to this scale of difference is the fact that the female mentees general demands as opposed to her male counterpart are naturally different, for example, a woman would perhaps request meetings times more convenient to her due to her wanting to collect her child from the nursery, while the male counterpart would be willing to abide by the mentor's time. Further, the female counterpart would perhaps lag behind on her mentorship programme during her maternity leave while the man may finish more quickly.

Even though Naidoo and Jano (2002) found that women may experience work and home as complimentary rather than conflicting, Whitehead and Kotze (2003) hold that for this to happen, i.e. that a woman is to balance her multiple life-roles, she needs to be physically and mentally healthy. Not all women have that quality.

Most respondents believed that the legacy of apartheid still affects the way corporates are run in South Africa. The country comes from a troubled past that discriminated against black people. It was even harder for the women than the men as the woman's place was in the house as opposed to workplace. It would appear that this scenario has not fully been erased in black men's mentality to allow and to view their female counterparts as equal. The remnants are still visible in the way other black men treat their female counterparts even at workplaces. Organisational structures have not fully accepted the equality that now obtains between the black career woman and her male counterpart.

For black men at Microsoft, racial and ethnic harassment, qualifications and performance questioned as well as lack of mentors were their most challenging impeding to their quest for greater positions in the organisation. t would appear then that in conclusion the barriers black men face are fewer than those their female counterparts face. While the black man has to deal with apartheid's remnants at work, at home he may be equally free from these prejudices while the female counterpart has to deal with these prejudices both at work and at home in a socially expected manner.

4.5.3 Enablers of career advancement for black women

R13 believes that one strong factor that needs to change in order for the black female counterpart to enjoy normal career advancement was the organisational structure factor. The respondent is so passionate about this issue that she believes the resources committed by Microsoft would do little to change if the situation if the organisational structure remains as is. Blum, Fields, and Goodman (1994), found that some structures are designed to support certain business models that suit the strategies being followed by top management. According to these authors, structural factors account for almost half of the variance in the percentage of black men and women managers in IT organisations.

Internalised mental institutions firmly rooted in other employees' minds also need to change. The belief that a man is perhaps superior than a woman in the workplaces no longer holds true. Merit is ubiquitous and not reserved for one group of people. Respondents 4, 6, 9 and 11 are strongly convinced that training and workshops must be regularly carried out in order to educate employees about the equality in performance that both men and women reflect.

Respondents 10 and 12 believe that the organisation needs to engage a lot more female role models to execute these trainings and workshops.

Respondents 1 and 8 believe that it would assist if every man adopts a black female role model he would follow and share her unique success stories on a monthly basis to the rest of his immediate team. Respondents 3, 6 and 7 argue that a mental revolution needs to take place in the societies of both black and white compatriots. Cultural values, gendered social roles and expectations in not only South African but African societies require a paradigm shift for these barriers to become enablers. This view was confirmed by Ragins and Kram (2007) who found in their study of Middle East societies that the spill-over effect of societal expectations and cultural gender stereotypes into the organisational realm, results in widely experienced attitudinal and structural organisational barriers to career advancement for indigenous women.

Respondents 9 and 8 believe that the ICT Charter is the ideal tool for enabling eradication of barriers to career advancement for women. The challenge with this document, as noted above, is that it still lacks an overseeing mechanism to ensure that the IT industry follows what it stands for.

In conclusion, the researcher argues that what lacks for the enablers to work is the political and strong organisational will to collaborate and effect their policies and agreements.

4.5.4 What have been done by the successful black women and men

All respondents agreed that education and continuous upskilling of one's academic credentials were critical in the IT field. Whether that would enable a female career woman to navigate the corporate ladder was something else. During the interviews of three respondents, it became apparent that education had played a central role in their career advancement. Only one respondent provided a firm outlier response in which she stated that no matter what a black career woman does to upskill her educational credentials, it was impossible for her to enjoy career advancement in her time at Microsoft. She pointed out the ICT Charter and called it a 'stagnated document.'

Respondents in the managerial categories agreed that education, being organisational political-savvy, dedication to one's duties and exceeding one's employer's expectations were paramount to one's advancement at Microsoft. All these factors led 'to one being there at the right time' and therefore being 'lucky,' quipped R13. The respondent added that it seemed for

one to excel in Microsoft, external experience is paramount. This is because, she explained, most of those who have made it to senior positions came from outside the organisation.

Forming natural dyads with a mentor one naturally clicks with was also noted as key to advancing in this organisation. Natural dyads have been noted as guiding careers to the advantage of the mentee in this organisation. Respondents were adamant that top management need to find a workable way that will match-make dyads in a natural manner as such dyads tend to withstand the test of time and challenges. Such dyads are also built on trust and openness, qualities key for their survival. The complexity of black women's careers in the IT sector can be best understood using a relational approach that highlights the intersectionality between gender, socio-cultural realities and organisational boundaries, and this intersectionality can best be understood in natural dyads, not coerced dyads (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

4.5.5 Barriers to career advancement

Perceived barriers to career advancement need to be understood in the context of the perceiver. This research identifies the respondents – the black career woman – as the perceiver of these barriers. What is important to understand is that the perception by the respondents as recorded in this research is attributed to how and why the black career women perceives these barriers the way they do as opposed to how they are perceived by their black male counterparties. In an effort to understand these perceptions, the attribution theory assists in this regard. Attribution theory by Heider (2013) deals with how the social perceiver uses information to arrive at causal explanations for events. It examines what information is gathered and how it is combined to form a causal judgment" (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). The type of attribution that is key in understanding these perceptions is the personal perception, which embodies the fact that due to the manifold observational data available and the various causes (e.g., beliefs, desires, emotions, traits), understanding these perceptions may not be that easy. With the help of such concepts as intentionality and the inference of wishes, purposes, sentiments, and other mental states, Heider argued, perceivers bring order and meaning to the massive stream of behavioural data they observe, attributing those positive connotations of success to themselves, and not so for failures and negative connotations.

In this study this order referred to above by Heider reflects as barriers as perceived by the black female respondents. In instances where they fail to succeed, it seemed respondents found external factors not within themselves impeding on them to succeed. This is evidenced in responses given, very few attribute their failure to scale up the career ladder to themselves. Similarly the black male employees are faced by the same massive stream of behavioural data

but their perception and order in success of failure to succeed at work reflect in a similar manner, although the black men seems to have found ways of dealing with some of these barriers. Motives played an important role in Heider's study: "motives, intentions, sentiments, the core processes which manifest themselves in overt behaviour". According to the attribution theory, in understanding the barriers as perceived by the black career woman, it is vital then to note that motives, intentions and sentiments shape how they process what is happening around them which ends us making them.

a. ***Within the organisation's control***

Most respondents agreed that the glass ceiling, mentorship programmes, matching process, harassment and organisational structural changes were factors that the organisational had all the latitude to deal with. Dealing with these barriers would be mean that other barriers such as unsupportive work environment would fall away. Respondents were in agreement that implementation was still a challenge when dealing with these barriers and there was very little they could do. However, what was clear in their responses was that if the motives, intentions, sentiments are bent to complimenting a success, then it is internal effort by the respondent and if it is to point out reasons for failure, it is usually the barriers outside their control.

b. ***Within one's control***

Respondents were in agreement that qualifications and upskilling initiatives and, to a large extent, balancing work and life were barriers that an individual may overcome. There are however other barriers that respondents felt could be jointly dealt with by both organisation and employees and these included organisational savvy, to a certain extent, harassment of all forms, and stereotyping and prejudice. Also what came through the responses was that success up the career advancement was largely due to one's efforts, their ability to balance work-life, upskill themselves and attain greater qualifications. These barriers were perceived to be controllable, further reflecting the findings of the attribution theory.

4.5.6 The existence of the glass ceiling for a black women vs men

13 respondents indicated that for a black woman in an IT environment, there is always that belief that no matter what they do, they were not likely to excel in their career advancement. Most black women interviewed felt that even though they have equal duties like their peers in this organisation, their contribution was not likely to be valued just as well as their male counterparties. Three respondents felt that historical remnants to do with the way black women were treated in this country still remain in the corridors of power in this organisation. However

all the respondents interviewed concede that top management had made concerted efforts in order to 'level the work field' for all employees. Policies and procedures that afford every employee equal opportunity have been put place.

R4 however noted that little will change if the current effort in terms of resources remain at the level top management have expended. She felt there was need to engage all stakeholders concerned even outside the organisation for the glass ceiling to be broken. The challenge to this was, she added, other employees, especially male counterparts, felt the glass ceiling was imaginary while all the black women interviewed and those that she works with express that it is real. R1 equipped that the glass ceiling was on almost every level of management one aspires to reach. It was almost impossible for a black woman to progress up without meeting one form of inexplicable resistance or another.

R2 was happy that top management have shown efforts to deal with the glass ceiling. The ICT Charter of 2012, though signed off and was in place, lacked 'real teeth to bite,' according to respondent 4 as there was no managerial or political will to enforce the tenets of this noble idea. Respondent 11 was in agreement with Adair (1999)'s definition of glass ceiling: that is a term which symbolises a variety of barriers faced by women, minorities and disadvantaged groups as they seek to improve their employment status. To R2, the glass ceiling represented all barriers that black women met up with in their quest for excellence at work. Most respondents agreed that there was almost a deliberate attitude to undermine efforts made by women in their performance.

Hewlett (2002) investigated the problems that female managers experienced in the workplace and the glass ceiling that seem to succeed in keeping women out of the top ranks of management. His findings concluded that even in organisations whose policies support women, prevailing attitudes and unrelenting job pressures undermine them. Using a case study of four women educators' experiences in applying for promotion to principal posts in schools, Parsadh (2001) concluded that the glass ceiling was real and that more needed to be done to change the perception of top management who think otherwise. This is consistent with the sentiments expressed by most respondents.

Phillips and Imhoff (1997) confirmed the glass ceiling hypothesis and indicated that women in their early lives experienced a number of barriers during decisions made on their career path. Eight respondents expressed that when they joined the IT industry, it was indeed challenging to navigate their way up, ending up taking their job just as a job to get by. This scenario was not unique to Microsoft only, but to the whole IT industry. There seems to be an invisible barrier that prevented them from advancing in their careers. This correlated to the findings in a

number of studies carried elsewhere (Adair, 1999; Baxter & Wright, 2000). In a latitudinal study, Steyn (2011) found that in order to be a successful executive, women have to overcome isolation, sex-stereotyping and performance pressures, which all add up to the existence of the glass ceiling. This finding was congruent with Cotter, Heemsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001)'s findings which expressed that the glass ceiling exists when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy.

Almost all respondents argued that indeed there exists a glass ceiling for a black career man, however the severity and effect of its ceiling was much less than that for women. Further, respondents believed that barriers that make up this ceiling were, to a large extent, within the back man's control and thus surmountable. Of special mention was the racial and ethnic harassment that black men said they sometimes suffered at this organisation, lack of mentorship and the practice of questioning their performance alongside qualifications.

It would therefore seem, from the current study conducted, that the thirteen respondents would strongly agree with the findings in the above studies. One male respondent is an outlier who feels the existence of a glass ceiling was indeed imaginary, that so much has been done by both the government and the IT industry to try and level the playing field for the black woman to such an extent that it felt like favouritism and tilting the field towards black women at the expense of the black man.

It can be concluded that no matter how other employees may think about the glass ceiling, its existence and effects are real and the black career woman is feeling it at Microsoft. Efforts that have been done by top management so far attest to the acknowledgement that the glass ceiling is real and needs to be dealt with.

4.5.7 The extent and effect of stereotyping and prejudice at the workplace

Stereotyping and prejudice is a particularly thorny issue that top management at Microsoft has been battling with for a very long time. This barrier to advancement flies in the face of the principle of diversity that the organisation is embracing, given the company's global characteristic. Seven respondents interviewed felt that stereotyping was a challenging barrier that set black women up for failure before they even embark on any particular task. They felt that it was almost pointless to give one's best when they knew that the stereotype glass was difficult to break. According to R1, stereotyping was negative as it disregarded the black career woman's qualifications, experience and ability. R6 pointed out that even though she was not a housewife as she was still young and needed to attain her goals and vision in life before she settles down, society and even peers at work viewed her differently and almost with an attitude

that it was almost impossible to perform her duties diligently. She explained that when job questions that had something to do with housewifery were asked, for example, work-life balance, she was expected to know as she is a woman.

R7 explained that 'everyone expected a woman to perform less than a woman.' She explained there was a whole world of difference from the fact that 'everyone expected a man to perform more than a woman.' A black career woman was not viewed in her own right or like any other employee at work. What black career women were looking for was to be on an equal footing with any other employee and their performance to be judged on merit. This was almost impossible due to the effect of stereotyping. According to Loden and Rosener (1991), a stereotype is a fixed and distorted generalisation made about all members of a particular group. This distortion, according to the seven respondents, is getting in the way of black women advancement at work. Their confidence is diminished while their ego is hurt.

Prejudice can be defined as the tendency to have prior negative judgment towards people who are different from some reference group in terms of sex, ethnic background or racial characteristics, such as skin colour (Morrison, 1992). This attitude stems from their white counterparts at work. The attitude is prevalent in meetings where the black woman feels the need to contribute. Sometimes language of communication is deliberately switched to a different language that the black woman does not understand. It is a practice at times for black women at this organisation to receive emails in a language that is common to the white populace of the organisation, and unfamiliar to black.

R8 was not particularly pleased with the fact that everyone seems to be aware of what is good for a black career woman. Advice given tends to become almost orders given, and this extends beyond work. Efforts created to advance a black career woman are not followed to fruition. Using his vast experience in the industry, R8 cited the ICT Charter and various other policies that they have created as executives in the IT industry as a whole which have not been advanced to implementation stages. The respondent is so passionate about the subject that he has taken it upon himself to ensure that the black woman experiences positive change at Microsoft.

In 1990, Catalyst conducted a study of Chief Executive Officers of Fortune 500/ Service 500 companies and found that stereotypes regarding women in business included viewing them as less committed to their careers than men; not tough enough; disinclined to work long or unusual hours; too emotional; not aggressive enough (or, conversely, too aggressive); lacking quantitative skills; not wishing to relocate; and having difficulty making decisions. These findings are congruent with what the seven respondents variously mentioned about

stereotyping black women at work places. R1 mentioned that whenever there is a discussion of who to promote and if it is a woman, there are always questions like working hours, relocation, toughness and not aggressive enough that are put across by male counterparts before the black female candidate is even given a chance to respond, let alone know about the promotion.

4.6 Other issues at play

During the interviews, respondents provided a number of additional discussion points particularly relevant to the South African IT Industry and Microsoft in particular, that they believe affect the advancement of a black career woman in the IT industry. One of the points was that the benefits of diversity were being affected by these barriers to career advancement. Richard (2000) argues, using a resource-based framework, that by examining the relationships among cultural (racial) diversity, business strategy, and firm performance, value-add can be realised. Findings demonstrate that cultural diversity does in fact add value and, within the proper context, contributes to firm competitive advantage. In reaching this conclusion, a number of benefits following from diversity were noted. These benefits have been explained in chapter 3.

4.7 Respect for leadership in the face of these adverse conditions

Despite the perceived barriers noted in the discussions above, respondents were adamant that leadership was engaged enough to try and make it easier for the black career woman to navigate the corporate ladder. They believed their efforts were tied within the confinements of the ICT Charter as they understandably did not want to be seen as the only organisation implementing the Charter while all others were waiting upon the setting up of the overseeing forum and Council.

In their localised space, leadership had set up structures to assist the advancement of the black woman but employees were yet to change their mind set. The respondents noted the “open door policy” prevailing at Microsoft that anyone aggrieved by either a fellow employee or policies in place would go and discuss the issue with leadership. They accede that much that needed to be done in order to change was required from the employees themselves as Microsoft subscribes to the notion that each employee is responsible for their own career path.

Respondents 3, 9, 10, 14 and two black men particularly mentioned the existence of support systems and structures within Microsoft that were set up to handle a black career woman’s

issues to do with career advancement. The specific support systems mentioned were the internal Human Resource team and the mentorship programmes based on a matching process. The challenge was that the matching process results in what one may term 'coerced' dyads.

Respondent 14 indicated that it was difficult though to engage with the allocated mentor as sometimes they did not understand each other's demands. If the mentor treated her with respect and dignity and took her personal needs into account, it would make such a difference to how she felt about how the organisation cares for her growth within its rank and structure. Respondent 10 expressed her frustration regarding a specific factor at work that makes her feel disconnected to the organisation in such a way that she is never on the lookout for how the business can do better. The factor turned out to be the fact that the allocated mentor was never engaged in the mentorship, but that he would wait for the periodic sign-offs to request for a rushed through update of how she was doing. "A badly run mentorship update process is a complete and utter downer for my enthusiasm levels within the organisation. I feel like it's a tick box exercise, then the integrity of the process cannot be trusted and won't be taken seriously and the whole process suffers."

4.8 Conclusion

The main research problem of this research was to identify the perceived barriers to black women career advancement in an IT company in South Africa. Emanating from this research were the two following sub problems. In response to the sub-problems, these are the barriers that have been identified from the research:

Sub-problem 1

To identify barriers to career advancement faced by black women in an Information Technology company in South Africa, as perceived by various stakeholders.

With the assistance of literature, the research has identified 10 perceived barriers that are hindering career advancement of black career woman. The barriers were then tested in the context of Microsoft and their applicability ascertained. Out of a sample of fourteen female respondents, the barriers were found to be applicable, albeit in various degrees of severity. This is not unique to Microsoft. Studies done before by various authors have varying conclusions with regard to the degree of applicability and severity of these barriers (see Chapter 2). Longitudinal work done by Steyn (2011) in collating various studies shows variability in the degree of application. The black woman's situation in the organisation studied

is made worse in the sense that Microsoft, although in the right path, has not had sufficient support from external necessary parties that are tasked with changing the industry status quo, and these parties include the relevant government ministry and the ICT Charter Council who are yet to complete the task that give the charter its necessary powers.

The research showed that black career women referred to a number of challenges to their career advancement as glass ceiling. Even though that was the case, they were barriers that could be recognised as stand-alone barriers mainly due to their significance and severity in career advancement hampering. The severity of the barriers was noted to be different (refer Table 4.4 below). The perceived severity of each barrier depended on a number of factors, among them the stage at which the black woman is in her career, family responsibility and societal expectation. For example, the research found that where the female respondent was still young from college, work-family balance would not carry as much severity as for example organisational structure factor, or sexual harassment. It is also noted in the research that these levels of severity changed as the black woman progressed through her career.

Sub-problem 2

To identify whether black women face different perceived career advancement barriers to those encountered by black men within an Information Technology company in South Africa.

Responses given by the five men interviewed showed that barriers that black women face are the same as those black men face, the only difference being the quantum and the severity of each barrier. What black career women considered as barriers were not necessarily what their male counterparties regarded as such. Black women were more concerned about the glass ceiling (thirteen out of fourteen respondents), followed by lack of mentors (twelve out of fourteen respondents) with organisational structure factor posing another severe barriers (eleven out of fourteen respondents). Black men, although agreeing to a certain extent the effect of these barriers, had racial and ethnic harassment, qualifications and performance questioned as well as lack of mentors as their main barriers.

The severity and therefore order of ranking also differed. According to the findings of this research, black men at Microsoft had fewer barriers than their female counterparties. Of concern to them most was racial and ethnic harassment. This fact is attributed to the way they perceive their barriers, how they face them and ways they have developed to deal with them. For example, black men have showed a deliberate reliance on informal network to deal with the barriers they are facing at Microsoft. This has helped them manage challenges such as lack of organisational political savvy, turning the challenge into an enabler. The same cannot

be said for black women as circumstances surrounding their barriers are very different from men's, for example, it may be impossible for a family black woman to stay until late at work socialising with other employees or men in the organisation's pub.

In conclusion, although both groups of black people face barriers to their career advancement in Microsoft, black women face more barriers than their male counterparts and these barriers seem a lot more difficult to surmount than those of their male counterparts. It is not uncommon therefore for the back career woman to either change jobs, resign, or just let it be. Policies, structures and initiatives put in place by both Microsoft and the industry to assist in overcoming these barriers are moving at a slow pace, while the industry is losing experienced people who could have made a difference, or experienced people who have lost all ambition and are resigned to remain in their current jobs for more than ten years, stagnating their careers (see Figure 4.3). Responses provided by the black women at Microsoft were ranked in terms of severity and applicability of the ten barriers as shown in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4: Severity and applicability ranking of the barriers

	Barrier	Determinant factor (mentions in interview)	Severity ranking	Applicability ranking	Significant respondents comments
1	**Glass ceiling**	13	1	1	• All my challenges to career advancement boil down to a glass ceiling that I cannot explain. • I feel I cannot progress career-wise simply because I am a black woman • My needs are not adequately catered for, for example, I require a mentor I can relate to, one who understand me and one I do understand as well. For me a female mentor is better • For some reason I am unable to get the promotion I need even though my supervisor is happy with my performance • My supervisor and me discuss everything but clearly there may be something I am doing wrong that my supervisor is afraid of telling me
2	**Lack of Mentors**	12	2	2	• The way the mentorship process is created determines the nature of dyads that can be formed • Coerced mentorships pay lip service to the reason for mentorships • Natural matching process creates strong and interactive mentorship process or dyads
3	**Organisational Structure Factor**	11	3	4	• Legacy remnants remain poised, threatening black woman career advancement at Microsoft • The structure promotes our male counterparties, their interaction and informal networking • The structure contributes to what I term the glass ceiling • My progression is hampered by the structure of this organisation
4	**Qualifications and Performance Questioned**	9	4	6	• My effort as a black career woman to upskill and develop myself is hampered by the presence of the glass ceiling • I feel there is no need to upskill myself due to the presence of the glass ceiling • The system is set in such a way that a black career woman finally resigns everything to fate
5	**Work-Family balance**	9	4	5	• Societal expectation and values get in the way of my work responsibilities • It is difficult to at Microsoft to say black career women are assisted in balancing work-family issues • This barrier contributes to the work environment being unsupportive

6	**Racial & Ethnic Harassment**	8	6	10	• I don't experience this much, but when it happens I am seriously affected • My background and where I come from should not affect the way I am viewed by other • Slur comments affect my work, even if they are not directed at me but other my female peers • Diversity suffers
7	**Stereotypes & prejudice**	7	7	3	• I am my own unique person in my own right • I suffer emotionally when I am stereotyped • My productivity and innovative juices are seriously affected by stereotyping • I need to be recognised by my own merit, not by my peer's being
8	**Sexual Harassment**	7	7	7	• Here and there I experience it and it depresses me • I had no mode of defence and didn't know what to do as it happened to me in the early days of my career. I guess the 'freshman' black women may still be experiencing it • It is hard for a black career woman to aspire to greater positions when acts of sexual harassment happen
9	**Lack of Organisational savvy**	6	9	8	• It seems we women are unable to become immersed in organisational politics • Sounds to me like embracing organisation politics • My performance, qualifications and ability should speak for me
10	**Unsupportive Work Environment**	5	10	9	• I experience this when I am turned down on a particularly important task I would need to do for my family • When I come up with an initiative and I am not seconded I feel unsupported and tend to draw back into my shell • We must be recognised as women and our needs are special, and different. That is not favouritism, we are different

5 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher draws out conclusions from themes drawn and practical recommendations from the research concluded in light of the limitations faced. In the preceding chapter a theoretical analysis was carried out, highlighting a number of themes drawn from the interviews conducted.

This closing chapter of the report summarises the conclusions to the findings and interpretations from the literature. Practical recommendations are provided and it concludes with suggestions which could facilitate further research. The research aimed to identify perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an IT organisation, taking Microsoft as a unit of analysis.

Nineteen respondents, fourteen women and five men whose tenor in the IT industry was from just a few months to open ended were interviewed and asked to highlight those barriers they perceived as impeding the progress of black women in their career advancement. The male perspective on the issue was critical as it gave a balanced view to the research. Their interview responses were recorded in section 4.3 followed by theme conclusions in Table 4.3 above.

5.2 Conclusions of the study

In setting out to identify the barriers to black woman career advancement at Microsoft, the researcher noted a number of findings. Various dimensions to the findings were analysed in Chapter 4 according to each respondent's understanding of the subject matter, showing exactly where the challenge for the organisation lies. The findings indicate that where black women feel neglected by top management, their resultant performance suffers. The findings further show that black women have expectations that are quite different from their male counterparts. Their barriers too were unique to those faced by the black career man.

With regard to sub-problem 1 – to identify barriers to career advancement faced by black women in an Information Technology company in South Africa as perceived by various stakeholders – the following main conclusions are made:

- Black career women do not view their barriers unilaterally as identified in literature. A practical perspective to the matter is that they lump barriers together to become what

they term the 'glass ceiling.' Literature identifies the glass ceiling as one of the ten barriers to career advancement, but practically this is not true. This empirical research has provided a different perspective at least as far as the organisation studied is concerned. A glass ceiling, according to the majority of the sample, is made up of a plethora of barriers whose nuances are too numerous to pin point and discuss in a research of this nature and scope.

- Where the effect of the barrier becomes great, the respondents tended to alienate that barrier from the plethora and identified it separately. This was the case with sexual harassment, racial and ethnic harassment, lack of mentors, organisational structure factor and qualifications and performance questioned.
- Top management will and readiness to resolve these barriers is hampered by external efforts that the ICT Charter Council has provided. There is little movement towards implementation that it was not easy for the researcher to identify with certainty whether the organisation's efforts to resolve issues were indeed hampered by the ICT Charter issues or that they had found a scapegoat in this issue. Nevertheless, structures, policies and codes to assist the black career woman to surmount these barriers were in place at the organisations, lending credence to the fact that top management were serious about the issue.
- It also became apparent that organisations goals and visions, translated into policies and procedures that employees live by at Microsoft were not in congruence with goals and visions of young black career women at Microsoft. For example while these expected the organisation to be fully decided in their career and goal orientation and decision-making, Microsoft subscribes to employees charting their own career path. This made it difficult for the young black woman to navigate her way through the new 'family', understand the organisational politics and suck herself in the organisation network.

With regard to sub-problem 2 – To determine or identify whether black women face different perceived career advancement barriers to those encountered by black men within an Information Technology company in South Africa – the following conclusions are made:

- Black women barriers are uniquely different from a black man's barriers to career advancement. This is because of different roles the two occupy in society, yesterday, now and tomorrow. Societal expectations have a bearing on the way these two individuals live their lives both at work and at home and as such, shape their barriers differently.
- In order for Microsoft to reap as much benefit as it may from these uniquely different individuals, their difference must be embraced by top management and celebrated.

Their uniqueness is a source of diversity that comes with the benefits described elsewhere in this research.

- Black men were able to navigate their way up their careers much easier and faster due to their place in society and societal expectations. Most black men interviewed acknowledged this finding and concurred that black women's issues deserve top management intervention more than their issues. What they found quite challenging to deal with at Microsoft was racial and ethnic harassment that sometimes comes out in a subtle way in conversations.

5.3 Recommendations

It is the duty of top management to ensure that no group of their employees is marginalised. With the above observations made, the researcher draws out the relevant recommendations:

- That top management set up structures that deliberately create natural dyads that will handle the issue of mentorship right from entry level up to such a time they think the black female employee is now able to navigate their way alone. Such dyads should not end at this level, but should continue informally should the black female feel it must. Such a relation may mature into a career guidance relationship, can be used by top management to identify future leaders and thus stay close to them until they are appointed in senior positions.
- Organisational structure factor is an issue management needs to resolve. Legacy issues were invoked during interviews. It is recommended that management considers an organisational structure that is flatter so that employees perceive each other almost as colleagues, rather than a top management up there and an employee down there. Such structures have manager-employee authority and nuances that new black women felt threatened by.
- It is further recommended that top management emphasizes the notion of appropriate qualifications and merit in order for one to be promoted. Black women feel that because of the existence of the glass ceiling, qualifications and performance were factors that would do little to change the direction, speed and recognition of their career advancement. Therefore top management needs to be seen to be tackling these issues head on.
- Perhaps waiting for the full implementation of the ICT Charter is not the most correct way to go about promoting black women in their career advancement. Top management needs to do something about their own employees and do that fast. Starting to implement the Charter is small ways is recommended. The advantage is that this will prevent 'shock' to the organisation when implementation of the Charter

becomes a must for the industry. Waiting for the overseer council or industry forum to be formed might be too late for a disgruntled black career woman.

5.4 Suggestions for further research

Various studies that make for a comparative reading looking at barriers to women career advancement have been concluded in other industries. These studies constitute an interesting reading. One of them is the qualitative study by Rowe and Crafford (2003) who explored the barriers to career advancement for professional women in the investment banking industry in South Africa. Almost similar but fewer barriers emerged which the authors termed structure of society, embodiment, male domination, support structures and networking.

The reader is also pointed towards a meta-analysis study done in the USA in 2011 at Northwestern University where the scholars looked at the assertion that stereotype was one of the major barriers to women progression into leadership. The uniqueness of this study stems from its use of these three research paradigms, which provide independent tests of leader stereotypes. Most of the data came from the United States, with some from Canada, Europe and East Asia. The study found that even today leadership continues to be viewed as culturally masculine. Thus, women suffer from two primary forms of prejudice. Women are viewed as less qualified or natural in most leadership roles, and secondly, when women adopt culturally masculine behaviours often required by these roles, they may be viewed as inappropriate or presumptuous (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell and Ristikari, 2011).

Further interesting reading is made by a research concluded by Tlaiss and Kauser (2010) where the authors examined Lebanese female managers' perceptions of their organizations in relation to women's career progression using a quantitative methodology. The results were somewhat different, revealing that female managers perceive their career progression to be affected by organizational culture, practices, and networks, while mentoring and tokenism were shown to be less critical.

In a study in the Kenyan civil service done by Kirai and Mukulu (2012), using data obtained through a descriptive survey involving 324 women in middle and senior management in selected government ministries, it was found that the fundamental barriers were firmly rooted in the recruitment and selection stages, creating a bottle-neck for women who endeavour to join the civil service. Those that made it through faced other barriers such as absence of sound human resource policies and lack of mentors as well as networking practices.

5.5 Conclusion

The research has looked at barriers faced by women at one organisation. It is suggested that should this be an industry-wide research in future, the reader is able to note how certain barriers are unique to certain companies, and how they are dealing with them. Some barriers are better handled as a 'bucket of issues' rather than separately. Further, the researcher recommends that the reader also looks at research done in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – five major emerging economies) region as these countries may have economic demographics that are more or less similar to South Africa. Such articles assist in understanding the prevalence, effect and resolution of these issues in other countries and how they have dealt with them. Work done by authors such as Stephen Covey (2003,) and Paula avis-Laack (2012) makes interesting reading in this regard.

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APPENDIX A

Request email to respondents

Dear Ms/ Mr._____,

I am an MBA student at Wits Business School and am currently completing my research report in order to fulfil all requirements for the Masters degree. My research topic is entitled: “Perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an IT organisation”, and I kindly request your utmost assistance in affording me an opportunity to meet with you. It is my intention to relate research recently conducted locally and aboard to a South African corporate context.

The expected meeting I would like to have with you will last for approximately an hour. The meeting will take the form of an interview in which I would like to discuss the barriers that black women encounter in their career advancement in your organisation. I intend to record the discussion which will be guided by a set of prepared questions I have.

I will gladly provide you with a copy of my findings upon completion of my research and will also ensure that your name and details will be kept confidential in the research report.

I thank you in advance and I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours faithfully,

Lethlogonolo Meko
Tel: 082 593 0885
E-mail: lmeko@outlook.com

APPENDIX B

Interview guide

Date:.....

Perceived barriers to career advancement of black women in an IT organisation

Section A: Biographical Information

(Please tick appropriate box for interviewee)

1. Your years of service at Microsoft?

0 to 1 year 1

2 to 3 years 2

4 to 5 years 3

6 to 10 years 4

11 years and longer 5

2. What is your gender?

Male 1

Female ☐ 2

3. What is your job level as per the organisation's title matrix?

Top Management ☐ 1

Middle Management ☐ 2

Junior Management ☐ 3

Non Managerial Staff ☐ 4

4. How many times in your career have you been requested to complete questionnaires on barriers to black career women advancement?

This is the first time ☐. 2 times now ☐. 3 times now ☐. More than 3 times ☐.

Include any comments: .....

.....

Section B: Questions

1. Why did you choose Information Technology as your career path?
2. Tell me about your career journey and experiences so far at Microsoft
3. Tell me about career advancement within our organisation and how it works?

   And what do you think about advancement opportunities in general?
4. What do you perceive as barriers to career advancement for the black women/ men in Microsoft?
5. In your view, what are the enablers to career advancement for black women in general in this organisation? Are they any different to those found in other IT organisations you have worked in, if applicable?
6. For those black women /men who have been successful in this organisation, what do you think helped them to succeed?
7. And of those you feel are capable but are not advancing, what would you say are the hindrances? Let us discuss the glass ceiling.

8. Of the factors you have indicated as barriers to your career advancement, what would you perceive to be under? - a) the organisation's control, and b) your own control

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9. Stereotype and prejudice is a serious concern raised in a number of studies in literature. Can we discuss that in relation to Microsoft?

10. In your opinion would you say the barriers to career advancement faced by black women are any different to those faced by black men in Microsoft? Which ones?

Please note: Question 11 was not included in the questionnaire sent to respondents a week before for the need of impromptu definitions. This was asked in the interviews.

11. With me here are some of the perceived barriers to black career women that have been identified in studies done across the globe. I will call them out one by one and if you feel it is a barrier applicable in Microsoft please indicate. You may want to start by briefly describing what you understand by that term:

a) Glass ceiling
b) Organisational structure factor
c) Stereotypes and prejudice
d) Sexual harassment
e) Racial and ethnic harassment
f) Work—family balance
g) Lack of organisational savvy
h) Unsupportive work environment
i) Qualifications and performance questioned
j) Lack of mentors

12. Now that we have had an opportunity to discuss the barriers, can we discuss stereotyping and prejudice as it applies to black women, a particularly sensitive barrier in the face of diversity in Microsoft?

13. Is there anything that you feel we have not discussed that is related to this topic? If so please feel free to add on.

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Thank you for participating!