



A RESEARCH THESIS

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The Characteristics & Career Development
Of Women Executives in South Africa

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1. Introduction

One of the most consistent demographic trends over the last fifty years has been the increasing number of women in the workforce. In the UK in the 1950s women represented less than a third of the work force; in 1997 women represented approximately half, occupying a significant and growing proportion of entry and mid-level management positions (White, Cox & Cooper, 1997). However, although women are flooding the managerial pipeline they have been blocked in their attempts to gain access to higher occupational positions.

In 1993 only 1% of top managers in the UK were women (Coe, 1993) despite the widespread introduction of equal opportunities policies. A more recent study undertaken by Singh & Vinnicombe (2002) monitored the representation of women on boards of the FTSE 100 companies since 1999. In 2002 only fifteen women held executive board level positions, which although slim is an improvement from 2000 when there were only ten. However, in 2002 this still represented less than three per cent of the total figure. This figure corresponds with an American study, which found that women held less than 5% of executive positions (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998).

In South Africa a 2004 study conducted by the Women's Business Association (www.bwasa.co.za) found that whilst women made up 52% of the adult population in South Africa, they made up only 41% of the working South African population. In South Africa women constituted only 14.7% of all executive managers and only 7.1% of all directors.

Venter (1997) in a study on equal opportunities for female managers found that discrimination did exist against women in South African organisations. Venter established that within a group of equally qualified individuals it was the men who were employed at a faster rate than the women, implying discrimination against women in terms of equal opportunity. Although women were a little closer to representation at the junior and middle management levels Venter (1997) commented that it would "take years to deface the backlog at all management levels" and that there was a "serious lack of women at the top".

This is despite the fact that many companies are trying harder than ever to help women climb to the top. "Diversity programs" (which are aimed at promoting other minorities as well as women) are "as common as diversity on the board is rare" (The Economist, 2005). Formerly no-nonsense all male clubs such as IBM, BP and GE are now on high profile drives to recruit women to senior management positions. Such companies no longer see the promotion of women as a moral or an equal opportunity issue. Instead these companies have learnt that mixed groups are better at solving problems. Research by Catalyst, an American Research organisation (The Economist, 2005) found a strong correlation between the numbers of women in senior executive positions and the financial performance among Fortune 500 companies between 1996 and 2000. As Booyesen (1999) suggests, 'Clearly there is strength in diversity and if effectively managed a diverse workforce and diverse management team can deliver much more than a homogenous group. An inherent source of innovation is well-managed cultural diversity'.

As a result, women's involvement in the work place is increasingly regarded as a business imperative and one that all employers should encourage. Chorn (1995) notes that, "traditionally, organisations have been dominated by the so-called "masculine values" which have emphasized competition, independence and discipline. Although these have contributed much of the past success in organisations, they appear to be falling short of the requirements in the emergent competitive environment". Booyesen (1999) adds that, "the feminine values of supporting collaborative behaviour, open communication, sharing of information, exploratory decision-making and an open approach to learning are more aligned to developing the integrated, cross-functional capabilities of the modern organisation".

Within this context it has become increasingly important for employers to understand, given the small percentage of women who have made it to senior management positions, what are the characteristics of these women, what are the barriers to success that they have negotiated (and continue to negotiate) and what can organisations do to ensure their continued commitment and career elevation. As Van Rooyen (1981) asserts, "The career development of women is accepted as being more a more complex issue than career development in men, due to the

interrelationships between attitudes, role expectations, behaviours and sanctions incorporated into the socialization process”.

This area is now the subject of this study and is developed considering the wide breadth of literature that exists on this topic. The literature emanates predominantly from the United Kingdom and the United States and is supplemented by South African research that provides localized findings and views.

The remainder of this introduction is organized into a statement of the problem that is followed by a brief purpose statement. The delimitations and significance of the study are also discussed followed by a section highlighting the assumptions underpinning the proposed study.

Section 2 is a literature review that details the main variables discussed by other academics and offers a supporting argument for the adoption of a research methodology that accommodates storytelling from a women’s perspective.

Section 3 contains the research methodology and research plan.

Section 4 provides an overview of the sample group and contains a brief introduction to each of the co-researchers.

Section 5 offers an individual analysis of each of the co-researchers transcripts (that have been validated by the co-researcher).

Section 6 provides a final narrative that includes a comparison of the co-researcher’s analysis contrasted with the literature review. This section includes a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

Annexures contain thematic guidelines and suggested questions, a consistency matrix and conclude with the full transcripts of each co-researcher.

1.1 *The Research Problem*

What are the characteristics of women who have climbed the corporate ladder and how have they achieved their success? The research will aim to describe the characteristics, attitudes, career strategies and leadership styles of successful female executives. The research will provide insight into the personal experiences of successful female executives, identifying barriers en route to the top and the ways in which successful female executives have successfully negotiated these barriers.

The research intends to take a life span development perspective to give a broad and comprehensive picture of successful women. The research will address issues such as childhood, education, personality & motivation (attitudes for success), work history, barriers to success, strategies for overcoming sexism, leadership capabilities and effectiveness.

The research aims to identify the voices of women and to break the silences that exist around women's experiences in the work place (Marshall, 1995). The aim is to find women's voices and allow them to create their own meanings outside of the dominant male paradigm of executive culture (Olsson & Walker, 2004). For this reason a phenomenological approach, that aims to offer a personal portrait of a successful female executive, has been selected.

1.2 *The Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of the study is to enhance women's understandings of their own careers and how they may interrelate with other aspects of life. Greater understanding may help women to formulate better coping strategies that will enhance the advancement of their careers. For women to advance it is critical that they understand the barriers women face and the choices women make.

Second, it is important that females find role models with whom they can identify and who act as a break through inspiration for younger female executives. Singh & Vinnicombe (2002) found that a lack of female role models was an impediment to success and The Economist (2005) writes 'there are too few women in the top jobs to show how it is done'. This study therefore aims to provide women with role models upon which they may choose to model their future careers.

Third, and just as important, is the need to provide men with greater understanding of their female colleagues' position in the dominant male executive culture. Research has highlighted a disparity between a woman's perceived barriers to success and those of the CEO (Ragins *et al* 1998; Singh & Vinnicombe, 2002). This has implications for a company's progress towards equality in the work place and the retention and promotion of female talent in an organisation. Companies need to take greater care in understanding the position of women at work in order to promote enhanced working conditions. As The Economist (2005) notes, 'Change doesn't just happen. It needs specific intervention within companies, intervention that is led from the top'. The journal quotes Steven Price, HR Director of a Canadian multi-national as saying, 'It's been a long journey ... to strike the right tone at the top ...and break down the perception that working long hours and wearing air miles like a "battle medal" are ways to get ahead in the company' whereas at the time of publication three out of its four main business divisions were headed by women.

1.3 *Delimitations, Limitations and Significance*

1.3.1 Delimitations

The study is limited to a sample of six successful female executives drawn from diverse areas of business.

1.3.2 Limitations

The research findings will not be statistically generalisable given the size of the sample base.

No attempts will be made to understand the psychological forces behind the experiences of the individual. The focus will be on the behaviours manifested.

1.3.3 Significance

This study attempts to extend the work conducted by authors in the literature review

and may lead to enhanced understanding of some of the suggested research themes.

1.4 Assumptions

- i. This researcher assumes a commonality among the experiences of the co-researchers (interviewees) that is able to be explored (Leedy, 1997).
- ii. This researcher assumes that the co-researcher consciously understands the phenomenon and that the co-researcher is able to describe the phenomenon.
- iii. Open-ended questions are effective in exposing the meanings constructed by human beings (Creswell, 2003). This researcher assumes that with due process sufficient data will be collected, so that the results can be analysed for a meaningful understanding of the co-researcher's experience of the phenomenon.
- iv. By disciplining her approach, this researcher assumes that she can effectively approach a state of epoche (through bracketing and assumptions), such that reliable and sustainable application of the phenomenological methodology is applied.
- v. This researcher makes explicit her bias so as to minimize spurious effects
- vi. This researcher assumes that the research questions will evolve during a continuous research process (Creswell, 2003).

2. Literature Review

The literature review will touch briefly on the characteristics of successful women, both intrinsic and extrinsic, as defined by Keown & Keown (1982). The literature review will then explore the attitudes that successful female executives display in their careers, together with the career strategies that they employ. Barriers to success are also considered, and where relevant, strategies to overcome these barriers are mentioned. Finally the literature review discusses the contentious issue of female leadership and raises questions for the research process.

2.1 Characteristics

As Keown & Keown (1982) suggest, characteristics can be categorized into intrinsic or ascribed factors and extrinsic or achieved factors. Intrinsic factors are therefore those characteristics over which an individual has no control, such as parents, race or position in the family, whereas extrinsic factors are those characteristics over which the individual presumably has some control, such as education, marital status and having children.

2.1.1 Intrinsic Factors

i. Siblings

Keown & Keown (1982) interviewed twenty-one top-level female executives and found that of the survey's sample 58% were an only child or had only one other sibling, whilst 62% were the only or the oldest child. These findings challenged the hypothesis proposed by Hennig & Jardim (1977) that being the only or oldest child was a critical factor for success. Hennig & Jardim had found that in their 1997 survey all of the women interviewed were either first-born or only children.

However, White *et al* (1997) have noted the predominance of first born or only children among successful women (54%). Firstborn children are unlikely to initially share their parents with other siblings and therefore receive more attention, providing a secure environment in which to foster independent

exploration. Mussen, Conger & Kagan (1979) suggest that firstborn children are usually pushed harder to achieve and given responsibility for younger siblings at an earlier age.

In addition White *et al* (1997) in their survey of forty-eight successful women found that the majority of later born successful women (68%) had older brothers with whom they competed. The authors suggest that girls with older brothers are often more ambitious and aggressive than girls with sisters. Many will imitate and identify with an older brother, who is perceived as stronger and more competent. As a result these women may acquire what are thought of as traditionally masculine traits, such as achievement orientation. Therefore it may be that the sex of the older sibling is a significant variable in bringing about achievement striving in women.

ii. Parent child relationship

White *et al* (1997) also found that a large proportion of women reported a problematic relationship with their parents, with several women experiencing a lack of bonding with their mothers. Gilligan (1982) hypothesized that a separate sense of identity was likely to cause a high need for achievement and that early experiences of independence generated a strong sense of competence and self-confidence in women. Van Rooyen (1981) asserts that, "Women who function more independently can be expected to have a stronger need to succeed than their dependent counterparts who may experience a need to avoid failure". An additional factor may be the absence of excessive mother love, considered to increase tolerance to problem solving and in coping with stress later in life (Kagan & Moss, 1962).

In White *et al's* (1997) study the majority of successful women identified with one parent as being more influential. Successful women who identified strongly with their fathers engaged in activities normally reserved for sons, resulting in a loosening of the sex role stereotypes (Hennig & Jardim, 1978). A smaller number of women felt that their mothers had been most influential in their development. Their mothers described as strong characters with driving energy who provided powerful female role models.

2.1.2 Extrinsic Factors

i. Education

Keown & Keown (1982) found that two thirds of women in the survey sample had college degrees and that over 48% had advanced degrees. This showed that education is still an important, although not critical factor in the career of a successful female executive. This is supported by Cox & Cooper (1988) who found that a high level of education is not a prerequisite for outstanding career success in females. However education does certainly help. White *et al* (1997) found that over 50% of their female sample group had degrees, compared with only 6% of females in general.

ii. Marriage

Whilst anecdotal evidence often suggests that the majority of women in senior management are single, 77% of senior female managers surveyed by Sheriden (2002) were married or in genuinely long term relationships. It is therefore fair to suggest that marital status does not preclude access to senior positions for women. Similarly White *et al* (1997) found that 58% of the successful women were married and with the exception of two cases, all the partners of successful women were described as supportive of their careers pursuits. All married women believed that a supportive partner acted as a secure base on which they had built their careers. However as an anecdote, Keown & Keown's study (1982) found that in a follow up to their original survey 50% of married women were likely to become divorced.

iii. Children

Coe (1993) cited a study conducted by the Institute of Management in the UK (1992) that reported 42% of women saying that having children had negatively affected their careers, compared to only 16% of men. Taking a break to care for children appeared to be particularly damaging, of the 29% of women who had taken a career break to care for children, 39% returned to work at a lower management grade.

Moreover, the recent flattening of organisations, as layers of management have been stripped out, has meant that promotions are now far steeper

steps than they used to be. In this context women who need to take time off in their careers to care for children (although more and more are withdrawing to care for elderly parents) find it particularly hard to regain a foothold on the ladder. In this regard a woman's absence from the workplace "negatively reinforces companies' long held belief that they should invest less in women's careers because they are unlikely to stay the course" (The Economist, 2005).

A recent survey on executive females conducted by Sheriden (2002) noted that of the 47 respondents, 35 of them reported having children, suggesting that in this instance career success was not limited by family responsibilities or employment disruption. White *et al* (1997) found that successful women who did have children were particularly good at compartmentalizing their lives and delegated child rearing responsibilities to a grandmother, nanny or father, suggesting that for these women having children was not as important as commitment to a career goal.

2.2 Attitudes for Success

2.2.1 Work / Life Balance

Widrich (1992) asserts that despite the increase in women's labor force participation, there has been little change in the division of family labor "Women continue to perform the majority of housework and child care tasks. Women thus enter the workplace, while at the same time maintaining their family responsibilities. As a result, women may experience much greater and more family demands than men and therefore encounter far more difficulty in fulfilling both work and family obligations".

Gutek, Repetti & Silver (1988) support this view arguing that, "Working women, even those in male dominated jobs, have a hard time abdicating their 'wifely' supportive role and continue to feel obligated to their husbands and their careers, despite the fact that they are constrained by time and other responsibilities". Therefore the inter-dependence of work and family should have greater implications for women than for men. In addition,

women are more likely than men to bring work influences into the family and personal needs into the work situation (Burke, 1986).

Marshall (1984) suggested that for women, work does not take priority over all areas of their life. However Dawson & Kleiner (1992) found that successful women approached their careers with absolute commitment. This commitment required setting priorities, work was always at the top of their list, but time with the family, and time for themselves, was constantly being juggled in an attempt to reach a balance. Whilst most men made a serious commitment early on in their lives to have a career, with an understanding wife who accepted the career as a central role, women in general tended to exhibit feelings of guilt or felt that they were looked at differently when they did the same. Successful women were able to acknowledge the importance of work and free themselves from feelings of guilt. Similarly White *et al* (1997) found that work took a central role in the lives of the survey sample. Very few women said that family took priority over their careers.

When discussing work / life balance Widrich (1992) warns of an “underlying assumption ... that the effect of work on the family is negative”. Barling (1990) also notes that this assumption is not fully supported by research findings and consequently it is important not to assume that the impact of work variables on the family is negative. Indeed, Garden (1987) suggests that until the possibility of the positive manifestations of work is built into research designs, the notion of a negative impact will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Widrich (1992) claims that “past research has emphasized the impact of people’s work on their family, with the effect of family life on the work setting being overlooked” suggesting that, “although it is commonly assumed that families must adjust to conditions of work, conditions of work could adjust to family circumstances”. For example, Salkever (1982) found that mothers’ work performance was influenced negatively by their children’s health.

From an organisational perspective this is interesting. As Krause (2003) comments, “further studies into work-family conflict and how it may or may not differ between employment situations may provide valuable input to employers who are interested in helping their employees balance work and

family demands". Krause cites interventions such as flexible work arrangements, on-site day care, time management courses, stress management courses, part time work or working from home as being valuable in this regard. Similarly Venter (1997) suggests that "if organisations want to retain female employees and especially female managers they need to change their corporate environment ... and start to assess the benefit of flexible hours and special training programs, thereby adjusting the corporate environment to fully accommodate equality and affirmative action".

However, Allen (2001) warns that organisations that are considering implementing family-friendly policies need to provide an authentic environment that supports these policies. Otherwise these policies may not have the intended effect.

2.2.2 Personal Qualities

In 1992, Dawson & Kleiner (1992) found that women filled only 2% of senior management positions in American Companies. What special qualities do these two per cent of women have that have helped them make it to the executive level? White *et al* (1997) defines attitudes as the personality and motivational traits of successful female executives.

Successful women are women who have an above belief in their own abilities (Keown & Keown, 1982 and Dawson & Kleiner, 1992). Successful female executives believe that they can excel, be the best at their jobs and advance further in the field. They also rated themselves as above average in ambition, self-knowledge, intellectual ability and assertiveness. They also considered themselves above average in their desire for money, power and their physical attractiveness. Interestingly Keown & Keown (1982) found that the sample survey did not consider themselves below average in any of the fore mentioned traits. This indicates that successful women have a good self-concept of themselves that drives their self-efficacy and locus of control (self efficacy and locus of control are defined below).

White *et al* (1997) define self-efficacy as, "... the conviction that one can successfully execute the required behaviour to produce desired outcomes". Because of the barriers to success that women experience, such as discrimination and lack of support systems, White *et al* (1997) speculate that women who enter the managerial domain have a high self-efficacy. Successful women, when asked how they had achieved their success, felt that determination and perseverance had been the main factors.

Rotter defines locus of control (1996) as the disposition to perceive the rewards that one receives in life as consequences of one's own behaviour. White *et al* (1997) found that successful women had a very strong locus of control and demonstrated a significantly stronger belief in their ability to control the direction of their career than a group of middle managers or secretaries. Female executives attributed their success to hard work, tenacity and a willingness to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented to them.

High levels of self confidence, self efficacy and a strong locus of control enable women to reject the glass ceiling described by Ragins *et al* (1998) as "... an invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organisational bias", claiming that over 92% of executive women in America reported its existence. In 1995 the American government's Glass Ceiling Commission found that the barrier was "continuing to deny untold numbers of qualified people the opportunity to compete for and hold executive level positions in the private sector" (The Economist, 2005).

However, Olsson & Walker (2004) found that a significant number of successful women surveyed rejected the operation of a glass ceiling in their own career experience, implying that such barriers were partly to do with a mind-set that impaired effective action. One interviewee is quoted as saying, "I'm never going to have one [a glass ceiling], because I'm going to jolly well find a way round it, through it, I'll destroy it". Similarly DiDio (1998) found that women saw the glass ceiling as just another obstacle that needed to be overcome. Successful female executives are self-empowered and self-determined: they do not wait to be told what they can and cannot do and instead seize the initiative.

Those women who are unable to display this fighting attitude have what Van Rooyen (1981) describes as 'internal barriers' to success. She says that, 'barriers internal to women themselves are often overlooked when analyzing factors affecting female career development. The reluctance of women generally to aspire to policy-making positions also contributes towards a climate of male reluctance to promote women who, individually, may wish to advance to high level jobs'. This means that some women co-conspire to hinder their own careers by internalizing male paradigms and limiting their own potential.

2.3 Career Strategies

2.3.1 Performance is the Bottom Line

Ragins *et al* (1998) note that superior performance is expected of all male executives, but suggest that it may be particularly important for women. In a large scale nationwide (US) survey of 461 female executives the authors found that consistently exceeding performance expectations was ranked as the top strategy used by successful female executives. An overwhelming 99% of these women reported that they needed to over perform in order to overcome negative assumptions in a predominantly male business environment. Female executives reported that they were frequently viewed as not credible and that they had to prove their credibility in each new work situation. They achieved credibility by working harder than their male peers, and out performing even the star performers.

In a similar study Olsson & Walker (2004) asked women to describe an incident in which gender had affected their careers. Despite these women insisting that gender had not affected their career progression they nevertheless conceded that women had to work harder than men to get the same recognition. Recurrent themes of career progression involved "not only achieving, but over achieving", earning credibility through over performing and over delivering.

2.3.2 The Importance of Stretch Goals

The seeking out of highly visible assignments was also identified as a contributing factor to the successful careers of women (Ragins *et al*, 1998). Keown & Keown (1982) concur by suggesting that successful female executives risked taking on the challenging, high profile jobs (what they term “stretch assignments”) that provided professional growth and learning opportunities and served as a grooming exercise for career tracks leading to executive positions. In addition high profile assignments provided access to the important decision makers and influential executives in the company.

However, women must explicitly signal their willingness to take on unusual or challenging assignments, otherwise managers may assume that they are not interested. This point is illustrated by a CEO in Ragins *et al*’s (1998) study who is quoted as saying, “There’s been an assumption on the part of men that opportunities everywhere are open to them, whereas there might be a perception that a woman might not want to move, because of personal interests of one kind or another ... Managers are reluctant to talk about these things today, for whatever reason ... I think it’s more incumbent on a women to come forward and say how free she is to do things”.

2.3.3 Mentoring

Individuals with mentors received more promotions, enjoyed more career mobility, and advanced at a faster rate than those lacking mentors (Dreher & Ash, 1990). Ragins *et al* (1998) found of the 461 female executives surveyed, 420 reported having a mentor sometime in the course of their careers, with 373 regarding their mentor as either critical or fairly important in their career advancement. In follow up interviews with 20 female executives, all of them identified at least one senior male who was instrumental in their development and advancement. Male mentors were regarded as being more influential in organisations, providing greater access to power, whereas female mentors were better able to empathize with the barriers faced by women in organisations.

A critical function of mentors is that they build self-confidence and professional identity in the individual being mentored. These functions are particularly pertinent to women who often feel that they lack support and report feeling isolated, depleted in their self-esteem and self-confidence. White *et al* (1997) found that mentoring had been influential in the careers of successful women, but that none of the women had been involved in formal mentoring schemes.

Olsson & Walker (2004) also identified male mentors as critical to giving women their career breaks. However they suggest that male mentors need to be established and nurtured by women because women need to overcome greater barriers to getting a mentor than men. For Olsson & Walker (2004) a key barrier involved the mentor's reluctance to assume a mentoring role for fear that the relationship would be misconstrued as romantic in nature. Women who had secured high profile mentors had done so by managing their image and the perception of others.

2.3.4 Barriers to Success & Subsequent Coping Strategies

Wilson's survey (1995) found that the marginalization of women in management cannot be attributed to either their competencies or management styles, suggesting that the barriers to success may be largely attitudinal or cultural. Coe (1993) found that remaining barriers to success for career women were male attitudes towards women. Single and divorced women in particular were likely to rate male attitudes as a problem more than their married counterparts.

Olsson (2000) collected and studied a total of 96 female executive's stories and found that there were three key attitudinal barriers that women faced i) invisibility ii) sexuality and iii) being stereotyped.

- Invisibility

All women managers spoke of having to overcome the "monster of invisibility" that attempts to conceal the abilities and contributions of women in management. Examples included male managers being paid more for

doing the same job as a female counterpart, the “feminization” and subsequent undervaluing of organisations with female management teams and a restructuring process in which middle male managers were preferred over senior female managers as the new team leaders of the future. For those women who faced this overtly male, patriarchal system, the advice of the successful women interviewed was to seek another position at an alternative company as soon as possible. In other words, do not attempt to take on this prevailing culture by yourself.

- Sexuality

Women encounter forms of sexual harassment in the work place. In particular, sexuality can be deemed as the reason for women’s success, undermining the management ability of women by assuming that a woman can only accomplish something by using her sexuality. This takes a woman’s accomplishments away through rumor and innuendo. As a result women are forced to deny their sexuality in the work place by dressing in an unfeminine manner in an attempt to de-sex themselves. Again the overwhelming advice from successful female executives faced with this type of dominant male culture was to find a position in an alternative organisation with a more supporting culture.

- Stereotypes

Women are often stereotyped as being born to serve, that they cannot be aggressive and that they should not express an independent view. Others see women managers who reject this stereotype as troublesome, unreasonable and unnecessarily aggressive. Indeed Sinclair (1998) found that unsuccessful women were women who were considered too abrasive and too aggressive, who were attempting to be “too like men” or “too different”. Women must therefore walk a fine line between accepting the dominant male culture of organisations but at the same time refrain from acting like a man.

Ragins *et al* (1998) suggest that successful female managers overcome sexual stereotypes by developing a professional style that male managers

are comfortable with. They found that successful female executives were those who were able to adapt to a predominantly male culture and environment. In doing so they were able to deal with the phenomenon often referred to as the male managerial model, in which models for successful managers include only masculine styles and characteristics. The paradox is that if women's managerial styles were regarded as too feminine they risked being viewed as ineffective managers. However, if they adopted overtly masculine styles they were criticized for not being feminine enough. One successful female executive pointed out that, "... the guys can yell at each other all the time, shake hands and walk out the door, and it's perfectly comfortable for them – but on the rare occasion that I raise my voice, it's not accepted in the same way". Female managers are therefore forced to develop a style of management that is not too masculine and not too feminine. This formidable challenge is not one faced by their male counterparts.

Dawson & Kleiner (1997) suggest that successful women have become skillful at handling discriminatory situations based on stereotypical perceptions of women, "... the goal is not to humiliate or make an enemy of the offender but to act in a way which will advance one's status in the eyes of observers around". In particular the authors note that successful women made use of humour in defusing otherwise confrontational situations.

- Old Men's Network

Coe (1993) asked women managers whether they had encountered any barriers in their careers. The existence of "a men's club network" ranked as the number one barrier with 43% of women believing that the men's network had acted as obstacle at some stage in their careers. Olsson & Walker (2004) call this the "Locker Room Culture" and suggest that women are excluded from informal male interactions and relationships. In their survey women executives mention decisions made in washroom breaks as well as informal social contexts that have left them missing out of important conversations where decisions are informally made.

Some women pointed to the emergence of a female network and how it was important to have other women on your side because of this operating network. For some women, being a part of an external female network was a new and developing experience of unity, driven by their competitiveness in a male-dominated world. These networks also help to counter male 'clubbiness' and offer counter opportunities for women to succeed.

Widrich & Ortlepp (1994) found that, contrary to expectations, supervisors and coworkers could play a greater role than non-work related sources of support (spouses or partners) in reducing occupational stress. Therefore 'the most effective sources of support would be those directly influencing work stress, for example supervisor and co-worker support'. This statement underlines the importance of women establishing a network in their organisations. It suggests that women who feel isolated in organisations are likely to experience greater degrees of stress than those women who have the opportunity to build strong networks.

2.4 *Issues of Female Leadership*

An on-going debate has taken place in management literature over the past two decades as to whether female and male managers use different leadership styles. Through the 1990s a growing body of research concluded there were no gender differences in leadership styles. Well known management researchers, Powell (1990; 1993) and Bass (1981) supported this view. However both these researchers began to question their findings following the publication of the Harvard Business Review article, "Ways Women Lead" (Rosenar, 1990). Rosenar and more recent studies by Bass have suggested that there are gender differences between men and women the findings, although statistically significant are small.

Researchers who advocate a difference between male and female leadership styles point to the difference between transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is based on contingent reward leadership, i.e. the leader establishes work standards, communicates these standards to employees and points to the rewards of succeeding and the punishment of failing (Burke & Collins 2001). Transformational leaders develop positive relationships with their

employees, and in doing so strengthen employee and organisational performance. Managers who display transformational leadership encourage employees to focus on the interests of the group, and to look beyond their own needs. Burke & Collins (2001) suggest managers achieve this by

- Serving as role models
- Intellectually stimulating employees
- Inspiring and motivating employees
- Meeting the emotional needs of employees

The preliminary findings of the research indicate that women are more likely to engage in transformational leadership styles than are men (Burke & Collins, 2001; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996). Similarly Booyesen (1999) in a study of South African managers found that “male managers focus on performance, competition and winning, domination, control and directive leadership. It emphasizes leadership as a number of social transactions, conducted in an unemotional, rational and objective manner. The culture of South African female managers emphasizes collaboration, participation, intuition, empathy, empowerment, self-disclosure and subtle forms of control. Emphasizing follower-leader relationships, it is interactional and transformational”.

In this sense women bring an alternative perspective to the working environment, no longer advocating the command-and-control style of management long associated with men. This implies that women are succeeding because of, not in spite of, certain characteristics generally considered to be inappropriate in leaders (Tropila & Kleiner, 1994).

Other researchers dismiss the difference in the leadership style debate as inconsequential (Fierman 1990). As Stanford, Oates & Flores (1995) suggest, “It does not make any difference *how* you lead as long as your leadership style is an effective one”. Regine & Lowe (2003) propose a further proposition, arguing that in terms of defining a women’s career success, it does not matter how you lead as long as your leadership style is a *recognized* one. After all, everyone is unconsciously biased and there is strong evidence that men are biased against promoting women inside their own companies (The Economist, 2005).

Badaracco (2001) writes, "It is not the heroic types but the quiet leaders who achieve extraordinary results". And yet it is the heroic leaders whose faces dominate the covers of leading business magazines.

For Regine & Lowe (2003) executive culture has traditionally offered definitions of successful masculine identity linked to a heroic archetype of leadership. Both myths and stories reflect the "cultural and political realities of an organisation's life," (Olsson 2000). Olsson speaks of the "myth of meritocracy" which takes the masculine paradigm for granted. The heroes of corporate culture embody selective male characteristics. This reflects to the issue of visibility discussed previously under barriers to success.

Regine & Lowe (2003) suggest that as a result of the dominant male paradigm, female leaders find that their talents and intentions as leaders are unseen and misunderstood, and their achievements attributed more often to luck than skill. When former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell passed a particularly difficult and complex bill in parliament she wondered why her colleagues and the press were attributing her success to a watering down of the bill (which was a false claim). She says, "They couldn't see the leadership because it took place in meetings and discussions. I hadn't made the sounds and noises or declarations that they recognize as leadership. There was a total disconnect between my manner of dealing with this very difficult piece of legislation and the success that I had," Campbell attributes this to the fact that there "is virtually no overlap between the qualities ascribed to femininity and those to leadership".

Bem (1994) argues that research results increasingly indicate that androgynous, as compared to gender-typed individuals have a broader repertoire of behaviours appropriate to a variety of situations, and a wider range of competencies. Bem comments that, 'handling present-day life roles, particularly at an executive level, requires flexibility in personal functioning, hence requiring the combination of the best of masculine and feminine, and demands transcending rigid gender role stereotyping'.

However Fletcher (2002) describes a deeply ingrained cultural and societal prejudice that equates feminine behaviour with being female and being female with being powerless. As a result female leaders are often assumed incompetent until

they prove themselves otherwise. Even then their success can be diluted by speculation of luck. Men on the other hand are presumed competent until proven otherwise and are hailed as responsible for the success of entire companies (Regin and Lewin, 2003).

Boucher (1997) illustrates what this means for women's leadership and how lack of a female archetype of leadership can be a significant barrier to women taking up authority when in senior positions. She found that women fought against the male construction of leadership, in order to lead in ways that felt authentic and meaningful. Women rejected distance, objectivity and unconditional confidence. Yet the cost of resisting the male archetype was self-doubt, not in their competence but in how they talked about being leaders and identifying themselves as leaders in the organisation. Bennis (1997) suggests 'society must dispel the myth that the only way for women managers to survive is to act like men, because the irony is that male leaders have been trying to shed the same macho characters traits that women have been encouraged to imitate ... what needs to change is not women's character traits but corporate cultures, because most of them have been playing chauvinist games for too long'.

How then have successful female executives overcome these issues of leadership? How have they managed to strike a balance between the female (absent) and the male (present) leadership paradigms? These issues of leadership call for the authentic voice of women to be heard, unbound by the political constraints of operating in a male environment.

2.5 *Towards a Research Methodology*

The above literature review demonstrates the wide breadth of research concerning successful female executives. A characteristic of the research has been a focus on quantitative review, involving questionnaires sent to a relatively large sample of successful women. Questionnaires however impose an already structured perception of the world based on male centered notions (White *et al*, 1997).

In addition, quantitative research often produces writing that is distanced and impersonal. The writing offers a rational, linear and logical world that is at odds with

the daily experience of many women in the work place. These conventions limit the kinds of truth that can be told.

The quantitative approach does not explain why there is an absence of women in the upper echelons of management, which as the literature review suggests, is less to do with women's capabilities and more to do with deeply engrained social and gender prejudices that inhibit a woman's performance.

This explains why other researchers have balanced a quantitative approach with anecdotal evidence gathered from interviews with the sample. The anecdotal evidence offers glimpses into the world of work and the experiences of successful women but does not adequately unveil their stories, from their perspective. If the purpose of the study is to enhance women's understandings of their own careers and how they might interrelate with other aspects of life, then the research must be conducted using a methodology that allows these stories to be told.

Marshall (1985) advocates "breaking through silences" by finding research methodologies and forms of communication that express female voices, allowing them to articulate their own meanings. For Marshall the realist position of research, which claims that as academics we tell the truth about the world, is no longer tenable. Marshall writes, "All theorizing is interpretation influenced by history, social context and the characteristics of the sense-maker (amongst other things) and cannot produce universal or general claims to authoritative knowledge". Marshall also suggests that we cannot speak authentically for other people's experiences, although she recognizes that more collaborative methodologies help us move towards some version of this.

Marshall suggests that it is appropriate to begin writing from a perspective or set of experiences in the world in contrast to writing about. Trotman (1994) agrees with this approach and writes "over-theorizing gender makes it possible to detach oneself from the issue. When gender is talked and written about in neatly sanitized, de-personalized and censored language, it becomes something that other people have to deal with".

Marshall (2000) adopted a qualitative approach that told the stories of twelve senior female managers who had paused to review their careers. Marshall uncovered

deeply personal experiences of women that are often not talked about in traditional gender literature. For example, Marshall found that many women experienced significantly higher levels of tiredness and stress than their male counterparts due to the difficult of managing themselves and their image in male-dominated environments – pointing to a significant amount of effort directed at avoiding the minefield of negative stereotypes. Many of these women felt that their sense of self and integrity were threatened as a consequence. This was revealed only through adopting a research approach that allowed the women to tell their own stories and to make sense of their own experiences.

This researcher therefore aims to use an appropriate form of research that aims to tell the stories of successful female executives from their perspective, providing a personal reflection on their work place experiences. However as Marshall (1995) notes, it is important to appreciate that “the meanings of such data are often contentious and that the stories could be interpreted from different view points and value systems”.

2.6 Research Themes

If one accepts that the research methodology must accommodate story telling from a women’s perspective then it is more appropriate for the research to be structured around open-ended research questions rather than research propositions (which would be difficult to evaluate). This approach is suitable to a phenomenological methodology. Research propositions concerning the extrinsic and intrinsic factors discussed earlier would in large part be meaningless as statements about marriage; and position in the family vis-à-vis siblings will be established by the composition of the sample. Instead research questions reflect the thematic guidelines. Please refer to annexure A for a detailed list of open-ended interview questions.

Research Question 1

What are the characteristics of successful female executives?

Research Question 2

What are the key personal qualities displayed by successful, including their approach to work / life balance and their levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and locus of control?

Research Question 3

What career strategies do successful female executives employ? How have they negotiated themselves past potential barriers to success?

Research Question 4

What is the leadership style used by success female executives? Is this style a recognized one?

3. Research Methodology

Previous sections established and framed the research problem and sub problems. As discussed earlier, a characteristic of the research has been a focus on quantitative review balanced by anecdotal qualitative evidence. Having found this approach to be limited, this researcher intends to adopt a form of research and communication that expresses women's voices and allows them to create and articulate their own meanings. This is suited to the phenomenological method of inquiry, which focuses on the experiences of co-researchers (interviewees) to understand the central phenomenon of successful female executives in the paradigm of male culture, and any subsequent coping strategies.

This section provides background information on phenomenology as a research methodology and frames its suitability given the purpose of the research. The way in which the method will inform the types of questions asked (annexure a), the process of data collection, data analysis and the formation of the final written narrative are discussed.

As the approach is fundamentally interpretive, a passage is included that documents the role of this researcher, clearly stating my biases, values and personal interest about the research and its processes.

The limitations of the study are further described in a passage on data collection procedures.

The procedure for sampling and recording information is presented, together with a description of the sample.

* * *

Phenomenological research uses the analysis of significant statement, generation of meaning units and the development of an "essence" description (Creswell, 2003). For this reason a sub-section that describes how the data will be analysed, together with the process of interpretation is also included.

Rigour is an important aspect of all qualitative research that requires consideration of the concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability. A sub-section focuses on how the data will be validated, together with a description of an approach that aims to maximize the reliability and generalisability of the findings. These findings will, in the final stage of the research report, be contrasted to the literature.

The section is concluded with a sub-section summarizing the research process.

3.1 Research Strategy

Phenomenology is a research methodology aimed at improving the understanding of ourselves and our world by means of a careful description of experience. The aim of phenomenology is to “produce a description of a phenomenon of everyday experience, in order to understand its essential structure” (Priest, 2002). It “is the study of conscious phenomena: that is, an analysis of the way in which things or experiences show themselves” (Sanders, 1982). Specifically, eidetic phenomenology aims to present the form and nature of reality as described through an individual’s experience of it.

In order to arrive at the essential structure of reality the phenomenological methodology is based on four fundamental processes: intentionality, phenomenological reduction; description; and essence (Baker, 1992).

- i. Intentionality. This is the process whereby the mind consciously focuses its thoughts to an object (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996). The task of a phenomenologist is to differentiate between the set of common sense beliefs about the nature and existence of things in the everyday world and the conscious ideas objects.
- ii. Eidetic Reduction / Epoche / Bracketing. This is the process by which the researcher must put her own attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and prejudices into “brackets”, suspending her own judgment in order to maintain an open mind, investigating the phenomenon from a fresh viewpoint and to see the experience for itself (Patton 1990). A further strategy required is ‘imaginative variation’ (Giorgi 1985). This involves asking questions about

the phenomenon in order to remove unnecessary features and to test limits. In doing so a researcher observes all possible meanings of the data. This process therefore requires the researcher to listen actively and understand first, before attempting to analyse the data.

- iii. Description: only after the process of eidetic reduction can the phenomenon of interest be described.
- iv. Essence: where the essential structure of the phenomenon is uncovered through the above processes of eidetic reduction and description, processes that should continue throughout the entire research process in order to achieve the purest form of description.

These processes are achieved by means of the following generic approach (Priest, 2002). Firstly, the researcher must intensely probe the phenomenon utilizing open-ended questions during the interview. Whilst the process of bracketing requires a researcher to suspend their own attitudes towards the phenomenon, nevertheless the interview must remain focused on the research problem. Secondly, the researcher must engage deeply with the transcribed data, in order to come intuitively to understand the attitudes and beliefs of the co-researcher whilst preserving the spontaneity of the subjects' experiences. A draft written account is provided to the co-researcher for validation. Thirdly, a second written description is drafted that integrates the data from all the interviews. Finally, a written narrative is produced that includes a comparison of the findings with that of the literature review.

3.2 *The Role of the Researcher*

This researcher is a full time student of Wits Business School. She is a woman who is separated from her husband and has a young child. She has ambitions to become a successful female executive and has noted a general lack of audible female voices that speak openly about the challenges facing female executives in organisations today. She regrets the absence of compelling, authentic female role models.

In considering the research problem, this researcher has tried to assess and explain her behaviour in order to be fully aware of any bias that may require "bracketing"

during the phenomenological process. The expressed intention is to provide open-ended questions along thematic guidelines (annex A) and to listen actively to the co-researcher's perspectives. The questions will be selectively used in order to maintain the focus of the dialogue and encourage momentum.

By increasing awareness of her own biases this researcher will be able to provide an objective account of her experience, so that subjectivity may not act as a barrier to uncovering the essence of the phenomenon.

3.3 *Data Collection*

3.3.1 Research Population and Sample

The population consists of successful female executives working in the corporate sector. This excludes female entrepreneurs and women working in the public sector (government or non-governmental organisations). The population represents only those women working in the corporate, masculine world. For this reason the sample will include only those women who work for companies that are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.

The term "executive" implies success at a particular level in the corporation. As these titles differ from organisation to organisation as well as job position to job position, it is not possible to outline objective criteria of "success" or "executive" such as salary, size of budget, number of staff or the level achieved in the occupational hierarchy. Therefore the definition of success will be left deliberately open so as not to limit the population arbitrarily. Success can however, be peer defined. A career can be seen to be successful and a female can appear to have reached an executive level if so deemed by her peers or members of the corporation.

Aspects of the study are concerned with how women have successfully negotiated barriers that have appeared during the course of their career path. For this reason the population excludes those women who may have been appointed to executive positions due to political considerations. However, given the peculiar nature of

South Africa's social history, "career path" is defined as encompassing the past ten years of South African freedom.

The relative absence of women in leadership positions is identified in the literature as an inhibitor to women establishing successful careers. In addition, the relative absence of successful female executives who have children means that those women who want to combine a successful career with motherhood have even fewer role models. For this reason it is suggested that the sample of six women include those who have chosen not to have a family as well as those who have chosen to have a family.

Whilst the study includes only those women who are organisationally employed, aspects of the research findings may apply to those women who are self employed. Examining type of employment, work-family conflict and well being of women workers in South Africa, Krause (2003) found that there were no significant differences between a self-employed and organisationally employed group of women when it came to work-family conflict, life satisfaction and family involvement. Indeed, contrary to expectations, self-employed and organisationally employed women did not display significant differences in their degree of work flexibility. This finding does not support the commonly held belief that self-employment brings with it a great degree of flexibility and autonomy (Loscocco, 1997; Mannheim and Schriffirin, 1984; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk & Beutell, 1996). Therefore aspects of the researching findings that cover work-family conflict will be applicable to self-employed South African women.

3.3.2 Data Type

The primary data collection was in-depth personal interviews, which may be supplemented by limited use of observational data. This researcher used a list of pre-selected questions (annexure a) to focus the interview and ensure in-depth probing of the subject matter. The questions were purposefully open-ended. The intention was to let the co-researcher direct, where relevant, the course of the interview.

The advantages of in-depth interviews are (Creswell, 2003):

- Participants provide a rich context within which the data can be analysed.
- In cases where the central phenomenon cannot be adequately understood by means of observation, the input of the co-researcher is required.
- The researcher is able to execute a measure of control over the line of questioning.

The disadvantages of in-depth interviews are (Creswell, 2003):

- Data is filtered by the co-researcher before communication to the researcher.
- Information is provided at a formal place, rather than at the natural field setting.
- The researcher's presence is likely to bias responses.
- People are not equally articulate and responsive.

3.3.3 Data Collection Protocol

With the permission of the co-researcher, the primary method of data collection was voice recording. This researcher was also able to take limited notes throughout the session. Note taking served as a back up in the event of equipment malfunction, but was also a useful tool in recording observations and key understandings revealed in the interview process. Voice records were transcribed into text documents and then posted electronically to the co-researcher for validation.

Due to the personal and timely nature of the interview process the co-researcher sought to establish introductions to the sample group via personal contacts and introductions. In all instances the co-researchers were approached via telephone. During these electronic conversations the nature of the research was described as too was the role of the co-researcher and the process of validation. These introductions were followed up by a formal written request complete with a summary of the research proposal (no more than 2 pages). Co-researchers then suggested a suitable time and location for an interview to be held.

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis phase involves processing the data into meaning units and finally, the construction of an essence description (Creswell, 2003).

The generic steps are (Creswell, 2003):

- Organize and prepare the data for analysis. This involves transcribing the data recordings and logging the data together with any written notes in a filing system.
- Gaining a general sense of the information, by becoming deeply familiar with the data content, this will involve reading the notes and the transcripts several times over.
- Start detailed analysis with a coding process, the process of coding, patterning and memo writing (Miles & Huberman, 1994) will be utilized.
- Use the coding to generate a description of the context, the people, the setting as well as present categories or themes for analysis.
- Use displays (context charts, checklist matrices, conceptually clustered matrices, thematic conceptual matrices and cognitive maps) to develop the themes and descriptions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
- Interpret the data, what is the essence of the phenomenon?

3.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the selection of the first sample. The purpose of the pilot study was to enhance the skills of this researcher as interviewer, ensure that the correct questions had been identified and that the questions were adequately focused on the research problem. After the interview, the interviewee gave her view on the techniques and interview skills of this researcher together with any interesting comments on the data generated. Because this was a practice interview this researcher selected a female executive with whom she was reasonably familiar.

The transcript of the interview was presented to the pilot co-researcher for validation. The co-researcher was comfortable that the transcript was an accurate reflection of her experiences and requested no changes. After validation the data was then reflected upon and co-analysed by this researcher and the supervising professor. Both parties agreed that the data adequately addressed the research problem. However, it was decided that subsequent interviews should spend less

time dwelling on the co-researcher's formative years and dedicate more time to the co-researcher's experience of the workplace as these discussions provided the richer data.

In addition the pilot study underlined the importance of accessing 'successful' women in the work place. It was clear that the more senior the co-researcher's professional position the greater likelihood that the co-researcher would have been exposed to possible barriers to success (e.g. the glass ceiling, the men's network). Women in middle management positions may not have experienced feelings of isolation that come from being a lone woman in a senior management position, nor may they have yet risen high enough in the organisation to encounter barriers to their success. The pilot study interview was conducted with an individual representing middle management. Although the work experience of the individual was limited the pilot study provided useful preparation for interviewing more senior women.

The transcript and analysis of the pilot study is not included in the research report.

3.6 Sequencing the Interviews

An interview cycle starts with the interview and culminates in the co-researcher's validation. This researcher intended to structure the complete start and finish of one cycle before attempting another although this was not always possible. The co-researcher was able to complete the transcript and post it to the co-researcher before beginning an additional interview, but the process of receiving validation from the co-researcher took some time.

The benefit of completing each transcript before beginning another interview was that the lessons from one cycle were carried over to the next, facilitating a more skillful approach to subsequent interviews. As the interviews progressed this researcher gained in confidence, interview skill and was able to focus the co-researcher on the main themes of the research. In addition, this researcher was able to identify emergent themes that were appropriate for further probing in subsequent interviews.

3.7 Validating the Accuracy of the Findings

Considering rigour is an important aspect of all qualitative research. “There is a need to determine whether the study is believable, accurate, and right, and whether it is useful to people beyond those who participated in it” (Priest, 2002). Klein & Meyers (1999) offer seven fundamental principles through which the validity and accuracy of “interpretative research” can be assessed. The authors define interpretative research as “a knowledge of reality that is gained only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents, tools, and other artifacts” which quite clearly includes the phenomenological approach to research. In addition the seven principles offer guidance for the conduct and reporting of interpretative research so that evaluation is not independent of the guidelines for conduct. These methods were adopted in both the conduct and validation phases of the research.

i. The Fundamental Principle of the Interpretative Circle

This is principle upon which the following six principles expand. The idea of the interpretative circle suggests that we come to understand the complex whole through preconceptions about the meaning of the individual parts and their interrelationships. Parts can be the researchers’ and the co-researchers’ preliminary understandings whereas the whole consists of the shared meanings that emerge from the interactions between them. This fundamental principle emerged during the course of the interviews. Co-researchers were probed with questions and where answers were vague or not fully formed researcher and co-researcher explored the response until a shared meaning was arrived at. This process continued into the validation phase of the research in which drafts were presented to the co-researchers for sign off, providing the co-researcher with an opportunity to explore the emerging view and to qualify individual parts so as to influence the complex whole.

ii. The Principle of Contextualization

This principle requires that the subject matter be placed in its social and historical context so that the reader can see how the current situation under investigation emerges. However, interpretive researchers are often seeking to understand a “moving target” in the sense that people, situations and

organisations are dynamic and not static. Several of the co-researchers involved in this study have already changed jobs and moved on with their careers.

An interpretive researcher must therefore recognize people as the producers, and not just the products, of history. In this respect the co-researchers are portrayed as actors and not merely as passive respondents to a situation. This researcher was sensitive to the co-researcher's background, her relationship with senior management and peers and the ways in which the co-researcher may have actively influenced her surroundings.

iii. The Principle of Interaction Between the Researcher and the Subjects

In interpretative research facts are produced as part of the social interaction between researcher and co-researcher. In this sense informal contacts and interviews, requests for validation and conversations with between researcher and co-researcher will affect the co-researchers view of their own experience and how they present that experience to the researcher. In this sense the co-researcher is an interpreter and analyst, as is the researcher. This researcher attempted to remain aware of this dynamic and bring into consciousness the interactions between researcher and co-researcher.

For example, because the co-researchers were given the subject matter of the research, several of them assumed the focus of the study was sexism in the workplace. This researcher had to work at presenting a more rounded view of the study that would not unduly influence the focus of the interview process. In one interview the co-researcher apologized for not having encountered sexism in the workplace and commented that she was not being very helpful. In this instance this researcher momentarily halted the interview process to explain the broader focus of the research and to minimize the affect of the co-researchers own interpretation of what was 'worthy' data.

The scope of the interviews were discussed with each co-researcher in an almost identical manner and where possible this researcher read from a script. Each co-researcher was sent a short two-page synopsis of the research together with a summary email. At the beginning of the interview process this researcher introduced herself in a similar manner, opened with the same preliminary comments and sought to move through a list of similar questions.

However, given the open-ended nature of the interview process the content of the discussion was influenced by the co-researcher who emphasised different aspect of the research.

iv. The Principle of Abstraction and Generalization

The two previous principles dealt with the specifics of a unique situation under study. This principle guides the attempt to relate particulars to ideas and concepts that relate to general situations. Such generalisations should be carefully related to field study details so that the reader can follow how general insights were arrived at. With this in mind an individual analysis of each interviewee was done with this researcher careful to quote extensively from the co-researcher's transcript. In making generalisations this researcher cross analysed the co-researchers responses. However that this researcher did not just look for generalisations but also for differences amongst the co-researchers.

v. The Principle of Dialogical Reasoning

This principle requires the researcher to confront her own prejudices. The preconceptions of the researcher have been informed by the literature review. This researcher has endeavored to remain open to the possibility that her research findings do not support propositions forwarded in the literature review. Propositions may need to be modified or abandoned. The suspension of prejudices was therefore necessary to eliminate bias from the research findings. This was achieved by continuing to maintain self-awareness during all stages of the validation, analysis and generalization phases of the research.

As a precautionary measure this researcher chose not to show the literature review to the co-researchers, less this influence their opinions and responses. Transcripts and analysis were presented to the co-researchers for validation in isolation. The researcher did not wish the co-researchers to be prejudices by the experiences of the other co-researchers. By omitting the literature review from the validation phase it is hoped that the co-researcher will have corrected any inclusion of this researcher's own prejudices that may have been informed by the literature review.

vi. The Principle of Multiple Interpretations

This requires the researcher to examine the influences that context has upon the interpretation of the study by seeking out multiple viewpoints and establishing the reason for them. However, as this study focuses on understanding the singular viewpoint of the co-researcher this principle does not apply to this particular research study.

vii. The Principle of Suspicion

The above principles are more concerned with the interpretation of meanings than with the realization of “false preconceptions”. This type of research goes beyond interpreting the data and encourages the researcher to move beyond “the words of the actors” and to “read the social world” beyond. Reading of the ‘social world’ can only come about through familiarity with the data and the voice of the co-researcher. When this researcher has moved into reading the ‘social world beyond’ she makes it clear that these are her interpretations rather than those of the co-researcher.

Klein & Meyers (1999) note that the above seven principles are interdependent, suggesting that the principles cannot be used “a la carte”. In addition Priest (2002) suggests that the research adopt the following concepts of validity, reliability and generalisability. These concepts compliment the seven principles outlined by Klein & Meyers (1999) and were also adopted by this researcher.

i. Validity: methods of increasing validity of the interpretations included:

- acknowledging when the researcher was making subjective judgments.
- ensuring that the researcher engaged with the data for an extensive period of time, in this case over an intensive period of five months.
- primary validation through verification with the co-researcher. The co-researcher was asked to validate the transcript of the interview as well as the individual analysis.
- where possible, verbatim extracts were used from the co-researcher’s account, thereby minimizing the use of low inference descriptors.
- peer debriefing, on going analysis and findings were regularly presented to the research supervisor for peer review.

ii. Reliability: strategies to increase the reliability of the procedures and data generated included:

- maintaining an audit trail (on going memos and note taking).
 - disclosing the personal subjectivity of the researcher.
 - deeply engaging with the material and allowing for iteration between data and interpretation.
 - ensuring that interpretations within the data were backed up with the use of verbatim illustration.
 - ensuring technical accuracy in the transcribing of data and the note taking, which was reassured by the validation phase.
- iii. Generalisability: refers to the extent to which findings of the research will be relevant to other situations. Findings in qualitative research are generally considered to be weak in generalisability as participants are selected specifically to fulfill the needs of a study. However the study provides detailed information regarding the participants, selections methods, context and data in order for subsequent researchers to decide how far and to whom the findings maybe generalised.

4. The Sample

Six successful female executives were chosen for the sample. This was done by mining personal contacts who were able to offer personal introductions to potential co-researchers. This was necessitated by the time commitment and personal nature of the interviews. Potential co-researchers who were approached via a formal written request did not respond. This researcher previously knew D and F. In all other interviews, this researcher met the co-researchers for the first time.

The research sample of six women provided this researcher with a rich source of data that was sufficient to cross analyse the findings and draw comparisons with the literature reviews.

Given the personal nature of the interviews this researcher is committed to ensuring that the identities of the co-researchers remain confidential. For this reason only brief career outlines of the six co-researchers and their profiles have been provided. The letters 'A' 'B' and so on identifies the co-researchers. The names of the companies the co-researchers have worked and are working for, together with any other individuals that they name during the course of the interview have also been omitted and replaced with a generic reference.

A Currently Chief Executive Officer of a division within a large South African bank this successful female executive is one of seven divisional heads that reports directly to the group's CEO. Her career began at a large consulting company where she remained for seven years, working her way up to the position of senior consultant involved in utilities, mining, rail transport and government industries. Thereafter she was recruited to join her current employer as team leader on the strategic projects review committee. Rapid promotion led her to become Project Manager of a major merger and acquisition, a position that she held for just six months before being appointed CEO of her division. A is married and has a young child.

- B began her career as a technician working for two large construction companies in South Africa. B went on to do her MBA in South Africa before being approached by a leading South African investment bank to join their team. She has been working in the bank for the past five years and has been involved in some of their more high profile projects. Her experience makes her one of the more experienced members of the team, although a flat working structure prohibits hierarchical promotions. B is unmarried with no children.
- C Her career began as a trainee engineer at a consumer products company in South Africa, before graduating to a process engineer at Lever Ponds. She then did an MBA in South Africa after which she re-launched her career as consultant for one of the big four consulting agencies. As a senior consultant she worked on projects for a large retailer, an insurance company and a cellular operator. She was then headhunted to join a dotcom division of one of South Africa's leading banks. Today she works as head of product and service development at another leading South African bank. C is married and has a young child.
- D Currently a senior consultant working as part of the Ministerial Committee to manage and develop a new GET curriculum for South Africa D is also chairperson of several high profile government interventions. She has returned as Executive Chair of a large publishing company where she held the position of CEO for over five years, increasing the company's market share from 10% to 33% during her tenure. She began her working life as a teacher working in some of South Africa's most challenging school environments. D is married with no children.
- E A graduate in International Business E began her career in the United States, working for companies that specialized in analyzing business and economic opportunities in countries

around the world. Her work led her to South Africa where she joined a large consultancy company working on international business opportunities. She was then recruited by a telecoms company as a Business Development executive and has since gone on to become General Manager of business development for this large and fast growing organisation. E is divorced and has one child.

F

F began her career as a receptionist for a large hotel group. She enjoyed rapid promotion and quickly asserted herself as responsible and hard working. She was elevated to part of the management team and thereafter joined an independent airline where she worked her way up through the ranks, becoming a senior member of the management team. A continuing commitment to education and self-investment saw her complete numerous management courses, culminating in her obtaining an MBA. She was then headhunted to become HR manager at one of South Africa's leading corporations. She is currently head of HR (South Africa) for a global electronics company. F is divorced and has two children.

5. Individual Analysis of the Transcripts

This section offers an independent analysis of each of the co-researcher's transcripts. This is in keeping with the phenomenological approach which aims to "produce a description ... of everyday experience" (Priest, 2002). Specifically, eidetic phenomenology aims to present the nature of the reality through an individual's experience of it (Sanders, 1982), drawing generalisations from specific field study details (Klein & Meyers, 1999). The intention of the research is to "break through women's silences" (Marshall, 1985) and to write from the perspective of the co-researcher (Marshall, 1985, 1995, 2000; Trotman, 1994). This requires that each woman tell her story. In presenting each individual voice the researcher provides a personal reflection of the work place and one that it is hoped will be relevant to the reader. Due to the open-ended nature of the interviews each interviewee was free to respond to the research questions with varying degrees of emphasis. For this reason, the interviews do not adhere to a structure that is common to them all.

Cross generalizations and comparisons with the literature review are provided in Section 6.

5.1 A

Background

A is the oldest of three children. Her sister is eighteen months younger than her and her brother is four and a half years younger. Her parents are South African by birth. The family emigrated to Israel in the late 60s to do the "Zionist thing". The family returned to South Africa when A was five years old. Her parents divorced when she was seven. Her father moved to Johannesburg and her mother and children stayed in Cape Town.

Early Independence

A saw her father "maybe once a couple of weeks for an afternoon and when he moved to Jo'burg ... even less, once every three to six months". The absence of

the father created a distance that led to A to “hero-worship” her father “... quite a bit. I really identified with him back then, with the image that I had of him in my mind’. The absence of the father and the breakdown of the marriage may have led A to form a separate sense of identity from her parents early on in life. She goes on to comment, “of course growing up without my father has obviously influenced me in a number of ways, but it is hard to pinpoint exactly how. I think it’s fair to say that I would probably be quite a different person had my mother and father stayed together ... for example, I’ve always struggled with trust and intimate relationships and I think the divorce is a possible explanation. My mother also suffered from depression during our childhood. She was and can be quite reticent in terms of expressing affection and she’s not very open about her feelings”. This absence of excessively motherly love and a problematic relationship with the father possibly contributed towards a strong sense of independence in A.

Seizing Opportunity

A is adept at taking advantage of the opportunities that come her way. Her career path has not been pre-ordained or consciously planned. Her style is to seize the opportunities that come her way, as illustrated by the following story.

A has worked at consultancy A for seven years and is contemplating her next career move.

“I had a fairly good career path going at consultancy A, following the standard career path from analyst, consultant, manager but whilst I really enjoyed the problem solving aspect of the work I wasn’t that motivated to be a partner. As you become more senior the work becomes more about admin, people management and selling. So I was vaguely thinking that perhaps I should move on to a new challenge and was even considering doing an MBA. It was around this time that I bumped into an ex colleague whilst having dinner in a restaurant. X and I had gotten on well at consultancy A and he was now working at Bank A. He mentioned that he needed some help in the strategic projects area and he was like, ‘yeah come and work with me’, so I did”.

Describing her opportunism A states, “My approach has been that I don’t really mind the content of my work, as long as I’m interested and challenged and there are

people who inspire me. So if doors open, as long as they're interesting and challenging then I'll do it'.

This ability to take opportunities as they come is a key characteristic of A. She explains that because, "I've not landed up in a career of my choosing my attitude has always been that if you are open to it, doors will open. But by open I don't mean being fatalistic and not doing anything. There's the story about the guy at the top of the building, and there's been a flood, and he believes in God. And this helicopter comes past and the pilot says, 'Come on board' and the guys like 'no, no God will save me' and then an airplane comes by and the same thing happens. And he dies and he goes to heaven and up to God and he says to God, 'you know God I have prayed for you my whole life why didn't you come and save me?' and God says, 'what do you mean, I sent a helicopter, and then a plane!'"

Total Commitment

Commitment is something that A admires. It is a quality that both her mother and father have displayed throughout their lives. She describes both her mother and father as "very committed". The work place is where A demonstrates her absolute commitment. She says, "I ended up working for consultancy A for seven years and I really enjoyed my time as a consultant. I worked long hours, typically 14-hour days and full days on Saturdays and Sundays. Looking back now I don't know if I could do that again, but at the time I was young and enthusiastic and that's just what you did".

When discussing her new role as a mother vis-à-vis the workplace she comments on her ability to set her working hours from 8.30pm to 5.00pm as "... difficult to enforce because obviously I want to be available to my colleagues and I feel like I'm not doing my job properly. Funnily enough I don't feel guilty about not seeing my baby enough, but I think that's because I grew up with a full time working mother. The only guilt that I have is that I feel like I am shortchanging my job. I still take too much work home and I worry about work. I still feel like I'm only doing a third of the job that I should be doing. But I've always felt like that, before I felt like I was doing half the job I needed to be doing and now with the baby it's a third. So there's always a gap, it's just the size of the gap that's increased". In this regard A acknowledges the importance of work and is able to free herself of feelings of guilt.

Work / Life Balance

A describes her “biggest challenge at work today” as “trying to maintain a semblance of work / life balance, which has become more important because I’ve recently had a baby. Part of the reason for initially leaving consultancy A was that I realized that I was working crazy hours and that my life was a bit out of kilter. Since the baby I’ve had to become even more disciplined about the hours that I keep. I generally arrive at work at 8h30am and leave work at 5pm and then I’ll dial into work after my baby is asleep.

“My husband also works full time, he’s a lecturer at Wits in molecular biology and genetics and so he’s got a more flexible schedule than I do. We have discussed that if one of us were to give up our jobs, it would be him. At the moment though we have a really good nanny and it seems to be working at okay. I still work weekends a little, but I have supportive in-laws who live in Pretoria. We’ll visit them and I’ll dump the baby with the doting grandparents and then go off and do some work. They’re happy and I’m happy, it’s good”.

It is interesting to note that A’s after hour’s work goes unseen and leads to comments by colleagues such as “when I leave at 5pm [people are] like ‘half day?’” Although this is delivered as a light hearted comment that A does not take seriously it does however underline the continuing importance of maintaining a physical presence in the organisation, a lack of which may ultimately penalize women who work late from home. However, on balance A describes her colleagues as having been “enormously respectful of my boundaries ... on the whole it’s been a very positive experience”.

Mentorship

A has benefited from informal mentors who have provided a safe environment in which she has been able to learn and develop her skills. She says “these aren’t relationships that I have gone out of my way to cultivate. They are just people that I really get along with. I don’t really like the whole networking thing, going out to meet people just for the sake of potentially using them down the line. I’m just not a

political player like that. If I strike up a friendship with somebody and they also happen to support me in my career, well that's wonderful and it's a bonus".

A's emphasis is on establishing a personal rapport with others that is based fundamentally on liking one another. A's dislike of formal networking, i.e. attending "company functions and socializing just for the sake of your career" is counter-balanced by an intuitive ability to informally network with her peers, establishing relationships and then using these relationships to support her in the workplace.

The most influential of her mentors is X a former consultancy colleague who ended up offering her a job in the bank. She describes him as "really wonderful to work for, in the sense that he has given me great opportunities but has also protected me. He's one of those guys where, if a project that I did went really well, he would give me the credit but if it went badly, then he would take the blame for me. I mean obviously we would have a private chat about what had happened but publicly he would take the responsibility if things went badly. The trust he placed in me, it gave me enormous exposure into the bank and enormous opportunities. He is very successful within the bank and very well respected. He gave me a lot of credibility. He's still someone that I go too for advice".

Her other mentor is Y whom she met at Bank A. She describes him as being "an enormous help and support to me. Although he is technically a peer of mine, he heads up investments for Bank A and he has a very good understanding of the organisation. He's very creative and has a strong financial background, which as you know is my weakest area. So he offers me support on the financials, but he's also got very good insight when it comes to people, so if I'm struggling with a people issue I'll call him and we'll bounce some ideas off one another". When asked whether these relationships could ever or had ever been misconstrued as romantic in nature A said "no", suggesting that she has been successful in managing her own image and the perception of others.

Willingness to Learn

A says "It's funny but I've never had a job that I was qualified to do. I did Clinical Psychology and English at University and then I ended up at a management consultant company where everyone had Business Science, MBA or Engineering

degrees. And then I joined Bank A with no banking experience, no financial experience and no IT experience, (and as you know, banking is all about IT). But in a way it's really worked in my favor. Unlike people who may come in a little arrogant and say, 'well I've got my MBA and I know everything' I have always been very aware that I have had to learn. I don't know whether this is a female thing, but I've never been scared to ask for help. If I'm unsure of something, or if I feel a little in over my head, I go and I make sure I ask for help. It doesn't bother me as I've always recognized that I'm on a steep learning curve". In the above statement A demonstrates a strong humility towards her work and a willingness to learn. In addition she identifies this as a "female thing" implying that men are less likely to demonstrate humility and are subsequently less willing to learn. ▼

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Perceptions of Confidence

A states that "I've always felt that I've been promoted far beyond my level of competence, and that I've never actually been found out. I think I get more than enough credit for what I do. I think that that's a female thing because men somehow seem to have more confidence. And I've realized that other women feel the same way. I mean I have to acknowledge that I do actually know something. If I look back over certain projects that I've done I cannot argue that I was responsible for them and that they were delivered successfully, so I must have got something right. I have to take credit for that myself. For instance Bank B was a very high profile project that I managed. It was a massive integration of two banks, it was an extremely complex project, very stressful and it went very well so even if all I did was put the right team together, identify the right people and identify the issues well then, fine".

A was not asked to categorize her confidence levels as above or below average and yet the above statement implies that her confidence may not be on a par with that of her male peers. The statement also suggests that it does not matter how you lead as long as your leadership style is a recognized one and that women face a degree of invisibility in the workplace that attempts to conceal the abilities and contributions of women in management.

A is alluding to soft skills, or silent skills that are not typically recognized by an organisation. Organisations traditionally recognize qualitative technical skills of

which hard evidence can be provided. Indeed, when A describes how she has overcome instances of sexism it is through demonstrating technical skill (below), and yet it is her quantitative skills that deliver value to the organisation although she appears to search for reasons to support and explain her success.

Overcoming Sexism using Technical Skill

It has been suggested that successful women have become skillful at handling discriminatory situations based on stereotypical perceptions of women and that they do so in a manner that is not overtly aggressive. A has overcome sexism by demonstrating her technical, qualitative skills.

An illustration of overcoming sexism at consultancy A

“In terms of stereotypes I’ve had one or two instances of sexism when I was a consultant and I had to deal with middle aged Afrikaans men. You’d go into a meeting and they would call me ‘poppie’ and I have had meetings where people talk past me to the male in the room. I’ve always seen it as a challenge. Occasionally I’ve walked in and been invisible and I try and see whether I can get visible. Not by doing anything really aggressive but just by commenting now and then, making my presence felt and then eventually they notice. For example, eight or ten years ago I had a meeting in Bloemfontein with a railway manager. I went with a male colleague of mine who was fresh on the project. I had mapped the process for the railway so I knew more about how trucks were coupled and decoupled and so on. Every time there was a technical point the railway manager would look to my colleague but I would land up answering”.

Role Models

A lack of female role models is often cited as an impediment to the success of female executives. However, when asked about role models A gave examples of distant female role models, such as Maria Ramos, Irene Charnley and Wendy Lucas Bull and other “very senior prominent women who serve as role models ... Thabo Mbeki[’s] current deputy president is a woman”.

This researcher felt that A was struggling to name role models. She says, “I must admit that I haven’t looked for a gender role model in particular” implying that a lack of female role models is not something that she is aware of. Rather she talks more easily of observing “with interest other women with children and the choices they’ve made. I’ve got some friends who’ve stopped work completely, others who have gone back to work with greatly reduced hours and people like me who have gone back full time and how we’ve coped with that”. This suggests that the value of role models for A is those women that are close to her and whom experience similar challenges rather than distant public figures that are harder to identify with on a personal level.

Transformational Leadership Style

A adopts a transformational leadership style in the workplace. She sees this transformational style as key to her success in the workplace. As she says, “I’ve ... done well because of the teams that I have led. If you’ve seen those four quadrants – driver / analytical / expressive and amiable, well I’m a driver but also amiable. I know that when I want to get something done I go on a mission to get it done. In this sense I can be extremely focused. I like to get to the core of an issue and deal with it. I cannot take waffle and I like to get rid of all the crap. But I also want people to like me. I’m very aware that if you don’t take people with you, if you don’t have respect for the people you are working with ... hopefully I can model my leadership style on the same treatment that I have received, giving people the credit for a job well done and building a good team around me”. She attributes this leadership style as being directly linked to her personality. She says, “I’m about taking people with me, wanting people to be happy and I suppose wanting people to like me. It’s also probably a bit of a female thing, the ability to ask for help and the valuing of connections between people. Or possibly it’s a people / person thing but it’s disproportionately represented by women”.

As noted in the literature review, transformational leadership is about encouraging employees to focus on the interests of the group and to look beyond their own needs. A demonstrates this quality when she recounts the following experience.

“I remember at consultancy A there was one project in particular ... which was quite a critical project for me. I was on it for three years and I made manager during the

course of the project. When I first started on the project I was put in charge of training. We had almost 5,000 people to train and the two content specialists, who were more senior to me, had to report directly to me. This was quite an awkward situation, because I had been put in above them and although I didn't know what they felt, I knew how I would feel if I was in their position. So at the beginning of the project I sat down with both of them individually and I said, 'we've all been placed in this situation, what you guys need to do is tell me what I need to do to support you. I've got these skills, you've got these skills, and this is how we will work together as a team'. So in the beginning they actually told me what to do and then after a while I formed my own role and successfully led the team. It was one of the things I am most proud of because a year and a half later the one woman came to me and commended my leadership style. She'd wanted to acknowledge the role that I had played because she was unhappy when I had first started and she had complained to one or two other people about me, but subsequently she thought that I had done a good job".

It is interesting that in this instance A's transformational leadership style was recognized and acknowledged by a colleague but only after a significant amount of time (a year and a half) and presumably once A's style had produced results. It maybe that transformational leadership is a less instantly recognizable leadership style than the dominant hero leadership archetype.

Self Capping

A introduced the term "self capping" into the conversation. The phrase summarizes a theme not covered in the literature review and describes the challenges of combining motherhood and career. "The only challenge that I can honestly say that career women face is if they decide to have children. That's a massive choice and one I completely underestimated. It just completely changes your life. Firstly it takes you out for five months (luckily for me that had no impact because Bank A was so supportive) and secondly, when you come back you'll never come back in the same way, never. Unless you reverse roles and your husband is the primary care taker, which is one way of doing it. But I have become quite a traditionalist in my old age and I think there's a genetic thing between mother and child, I'd like to pretend it's not there but it is. My experience is that motherhood puts a self-imposed cap on women's careers. Like right now if I got the most sexy opportunity offered to me, like

a new job, which was way above what I was doing now and involved me being away and traveling or working long hours then I would say no. What has become important for me is security for my child and I. You know I had 800 people working for me and luckily now I have only 200 because I gave an area I was responsible for away. I would happily go back to three people reporting to me in a more junior job, if I could keep a salary that would support us, and the same level of interest and challenge. I've got no ambitions to continue up the career ladder for the sake of it".

It seems that in this regard A is not status driven or power driven and that that she has imposed a cap on her career, she is happily comfortable where she is. This is an interesting challenge for organisations wishing to promote women in the organisation. Are there ways in which the organisation can encourage women to continue to rise through their ranks and avoid this self-capping, which is presumably driven primarily by the desire for balance, for the need to avoid long hours and traveling a lot?

5.2 B

Background

"I come from a family of five siblings, four girls and a boy. I grew up in province A where my parents own a farm. My Dad takes care of the running of the farm and my Mum is a housewife. I'm the second eldest in my family. My brothers and sisters are all fairly close in age, the five of us were born over a ten year period".

Early Independence

B explains that "for most of our lives my sisters and I didn't live with our parents. We had to go to school some distance from our home. Schools at that time were largely segregated and there were no schools within the area, the nearest school was quite some distance away. So my parents set up a place for us in a granny flat that was located off of my grandparents' house. We lived there as a little sub unit, we had our own helper who took care of us and we looked after ourselves. We would visit our parents on weekends or our parents would visit us. Because we were effectively living by ourselves this experience made us quite independent. I

mean, we had to take care of ourselves and I think it made us stronger and more independent as women”.

This early independence from her family and a separate sense of identity supports the view that women who function independently are more likely to exhibit a strong sense of competence and self-confidence that supports a stronger need to succeed.

Early Influences

B does not identify one parent as being more influential than the other. She says, “I got different but equal kinds of support from my parents. I wouldn’t say that one was more influential in my life than the other. I’ve always seen them as a very tight unit and the two of them complement one another. My Dad is very quiet but very, very concerned with doing the right thing. He is very focused on being fair, on having integrity, on being kind to people. My Mum is a little more extroverted and a little more social, but she also has a lot of fairness to her. My grandmother was also quite a strong character, very traditional”.

Overcoming Challenges

B describes her biggest challenge at work as working in “a highly pressured environment in which there is always a lot of tension between the bank and the client in terms of risk transfer. The client is trying to push a lot of the risk on to us and we are working hard to reduce our own levels of risk. Then there’s also a tension between our division and the bank’s credit committee. Then we work within teams and everyone with the team has different views. It’s important that all of those views are expressed because everyone has to sign off on the deal. The team’s performance is our individual performance so success or failure reflects on all of us at the end of the day. So you find a lot of tension and conflicting agendas.

“Because these deals are made over a protracted period of time the tension is constant. For me that’s a real challenge, I find it very difficult, because I’m not a confrontational person and I don’t always enjoy being in this space and yet I find myself in it almost every day. I am always on the defensive. It’s like, if you were a cricketer, well I’m defending the wicket all the time and on all sides. Once in a while

I might be able to hit a six but most of the time it's defense, defense, defense and it's not that you have any space to maneuver on any side. It's constant. Of course I am exaggerating a little but I am in that space all the time, and for me personally, it's a challenge. I work to overcome it by dealing incrementally with every single issue that comes my way. So if I've got an issue I work on removing it as quickly as possible and packing it away into a little box. Then I'm ready to deal with the next one that comes my way".

It is unclear whether this challenge is a gender-related challenge, in the sense that B describes herself as "not confrontational" and in doing so implies that the working environment is confrontational. However, this researcher speculates that part of the siege mentality displayed by B, the image of the lone cricketer on the pitch, could be exacerbated by her position as the only female in a heavily male orientated working culture such as banking.

A transformational leadership culture

B describes her leadership style only briefly, instead focusing on the leadership culture of the banking division in which she works. Of her personal leadership style she says, "My style is to have a structure and to follow it through. I'm not sure I'm very good at delegating completely. I mean I think I do but my nature is to always get involved". Comparing her leadership style to that of her male colleagues she says, "I haven't really noticed any significant differences in my leadership style to that of my male colleagues. I think that's because we're a cohesive team with great rapport. There is a great sense of comradeship amongst the team, although we are not personal friends outside of work, but we are great friends at work.

"At bank A you are encouraged to focus on building on your expertise. That's why there is a very flat structure. There are project teams but the team leaders are constantly revolving. You could be the team leader on one project but not on another. It's a very fluid process. You will find people here that are very advanced in their careers but who you work along side with. There is really no hierarchy. Our core business is banking, not managing other people. There's really no reason for me to manage somebody else. ... you are rewarded for sticking to where your passion lies. You are encouraged to be focused. When people become managers

they become distanced from their core skills set. For instance I hardly ever see my boss. We hardly ever interact”.

Yet despite the lack of difference in leadership style between her and her male colleagues B does acknowledge key differences in the workplace in terms of the qualities that women bring to a work environment. She says, “If anything women bring an almost complementary angle to situations that enhance our performance as a team. I think women are more sensitive which can be useful in negotiations. A woman’s perspective on how things are is different, a woman’s approach is different and I think you need that balance in a discussion. I have seen it used in practice, and I think it’s valuable.

“I’m suggesting that men have a more ... not aggressive style, but rather that women have a softer conversational style, a different language and an approach that fosters a softer conversation, and a softer conversation makes negotiating more sensible. It’s not less aggressive it’s just more sensible. I think the word I’m probably looking for is calmer. Women can help create a calm atmosphere. If you have ten men in a room they can become a little bit brash, uttering four letter words and competing amongst themselves. But if there’s a woman present I think things are softened a notch, and I think that’s good in any discussion.

“A critical work/ life philosophy for me is to bring fairness and balance to a debate. I think that’s very important. For example, if you are negotiating with suppliers/ b-contractors, it’s not sustainable to make such a large profit that the guy goes under. You have to be fair. It’s easy to negotiate and make a super profit but then you are just killing the long-term relationship. I think it’s important for long-term relationships to be fair and to always recognize that. And I’m not sure that in the business world that that voice is always there.

“I also think, and this is maybe a woman’s perspective, that I see things differently too. If there are issues to do with a client for example, I will often spot them before my male colleagues do. In difficult negotiations you need to be in tune with something else, and I think that identifying that something else perhaps has to do with being a woman. I would say that I am in tune with another space, as opposed to maybe a male colleague who wouldn’t hear what the person was saying”.

B appears to be endorsing the view that women bring alternative qualities to the working environment, implying that women are succeeding because of, not in spite of, certain characteristics. However, when asked whether her male colleagues recognized the female perspective that she brought to the negotiations she is hesitant. "I'm not sure whether men recognize women in this respect. I'd like to think they did, but I'm not so sure", which suggest that her talents and intentions as a valuable member of the team maybe unseen or misunderstood.

Perceptions of Confidence

When asked to comment on her confidence levels B commented that, "you now I'm not a financial person, I'm a technical person who has become a banker. So I think that relative to my peers I'm not as confident as them or rather I'm not super-confident. I'm not sure how I come across to others, but my style is fairly quiet. I only say things when I have something positive to say, my confidence is not out there ... because it's not congruent to who I am, and perhaps other women are the same. When you compare us to our male counterparts, you know we don't come across as confident because it's just not in our nature. What I'm referring too are different expressions of confidence, as opposed to different confidence levels. I guess you see a lot of men who aren't that vocal but who are quietly confident. And then you get a lot of vocal men who are actually the opposite, who are very loud but who have a lack of self-confidence. In many ways I would say that women in their unassuming way are actually as individuals, much more confident than their loud, gregarious male colleagues, except maybe they are not perceived as so. But as long as you deliver, as long as you are focused, what does it matter?"

B describes the men around her as super-confident. In relation to this super-confidence she views herself as "not as confident" and "not sure how I come across". An element of self-doubt, not in terms of her confidence as a woman but about how she talks about herself as a leader begins to creep in to the voice of B. However, she does then rationalize this self-doubt by suggesting that men and women have different "expressions of confidence" rather than different levels of confidence. And yet the lingering question at the end of her thoughts "... as long as you are focused, what does it matter?" needs to be answered. Does it matter that woman and men have different expressions of confidence? Perhaps it does, acting

as a significant barrier to women taking up positions of authority when in senior positions.

Role Models

A lack of female role models is often cited as an impediment to the success of female executives. When asked whether B agreed with this statement she responded by suggesting that, "there are very few female role models for us to look too. You know there are women in the distance like Madelaine Albright for instance. There are very few women in banking, full stop. That filters down to all levels. But even if there were, your interactions with other women would be very limited. I'm in a team and I just interact with people in my immediate environment. So unless the head of the team was a woman, well ... it would be meaningless. But I don't really look to professional role models, because this is just one part of my life, they're unable to give me a bigger perspective. I look rather to certain people who I find good qualities in, and I like the way they lead their lives. It's their approach to life, their life attitudes that are interesting and inspiring to me".

B looks to those individuals in her life to whom she is personally close as a source of inspiration. She suggests that formal and distant role models in the form of publicly successful women, such as Madelaine Albright, are not valuable to her. Interestingly this follows through to the work place where she comments that for a woman to provide a role model to her it would have to be someone with whom she comes into close contact with, "unless the head was a woman, well ... it would be meaningless". This suggests that for B to enjoy the benefits of other female role models there would need to be many more of them in the banking environment, as opposed to one or two women in the senior echelons of management and with whom she would have no day-to-day contact.

Sexism

B has chosen to work in typically male dominated industries. Of these career choices and her experiences in these male dominated environment she says, "I studied quantity surveying at college, the reason I chose it was because I really enjoyed numbers and I thought it might make for an interesting career.

"Engineering was a very male dominated industry. I would often work on sites where you were dealing with blue-collar workers as well as the typical white-collar workers. During that time I don't think I encountered one negative experience that related to me as a woman. You would expect it but to be honest I never experienced it. There were very few women in the industry. There was only one other female technical person". However in a loose reference to the men's network she says, "I do think that there were several cultural events that excluded me as a woman. I'm referring to social events that tended to be very male dominated, which is understandable, but they didn't appeal to me. I'm talking about heavy drinking sessions, that sort of thing, which I didn't want to go too because it's not my thing. But I don't know if that's necessarily a gender thing, that maybe just a 'me' thing".

In relation to her current position in banking she says, "There are no other women within the team. We did have another female in our team until quite recently but she has moved elsewhere. I don't see the lack of women as a problem. I mean, why should it be? We're all operating on a project, we're all working towards the same goals, so why should there be an issue?

"There are no issues about me being a woman within my team at work. It only becomes an issue when we interview other women. I'm always asked to attend those interviews because it's important for women outside to feel comfortable. I think it can be intimidating for women to approach a team if it's all male. We are cognizant of that fact and I sit in on the interviews so that I can answer their questions".

B suggests that " ... it really isn't about gender, it's about people, it's all about trusting relationships with people, and when you have that, that's all that matters. I mean it's got nothing to do with ... you know that's just a life philosophy whether it's with your family, your friends or your blue collar workers or whatever, you know it's all about respect and trust and I think that if that's the approach one adopts I don't think one should encounter problems".

Life / Work Balance

"It's always been important for me to have a life outside of work, in that sense work / life balance has always been an issue in my career. It's very important to me that I

have a personality outside of work. Work is really just one part of my life. There are lots of other things that I really love doing. I don't have a husband or child but when you're married with children I would imagine that the work / life balance becomes even more of an issue. It's not where I am in my life right now but as a woman I'm not sure how you would balance your career with family life. Women typically want to give their best in everything and that's probably what I would continue to try to do, but I would imagine that one would suffer. But then again, I wouldn't have a problem being a housewife, that's a fine choice. I'm sure many women would prefer to be housewives, given the choice".

5.3 C

Background

C is the second of three daughters. She was born in a small town on the edge of the Platt-lands in South Africa. Her father was a math's & science teacher who loved teaching. He became a headmaster and then an inspector of education. Her mother was a housewife, although she is described as "an incredibly busy person" and one who can "just never sit down".

Early Identification with the Father

C identifies more with her father than mother. She says, "I think I almost always identified more with my father growing up. I would help my father clean the pool, sort the compost, or mow the lawn. I definitely spent a lot more time doing the 'guy' things with him. My father is also a very rational and clear thinker. I inherited that from him. My father and I used to play chess together in the evenings. He wouldn't do that with either of my other sisters and I certainly wouldn't do something like that with my mother ...". As a result she comments that, "I've always been more of a guy's girl than a girl's girl. I don't think of myself as a particularly feminine female ..." which suggests that C is able to blend elements of the masculine and feminine resulting in a greater degree of androgyny.

A High Achiever

C has been a high achiever since childhood. She learnt to read & write at a young age. She excelled in sports and was very strong academically. She says, "I enjoyed school and I participated in everything. I worked for the school newspaper, I was part of the debating society, I swam, ran, played hockey and did whatever had to be done. With hindsight I was quite lucky. It kind of came quite easy. My parents encouraged me to get involved and experience it all. I think that perhaps their whole attitude of 'if you can do it, you should do it, and we're not all going to jump up and down and applaud when you do', was a way of them trying to prevent me from becoming too big headed or too much of a brat because things did come quite naturally and easy to me".

This high standard of achievement has carried through to her working life where she describes herself as a doer, someone who gets things done, "I'm one of those people that cannot relax if there's a list of things that need to be done ... I do drive myself hard to get things done. I think you will find that almost everybody in a senior position is capable of doing significantly more work in a given period of time. It's not about working longer hours. It's about saying that if you sit here for 10 hours and I sit here for 10 hours, then I can just crank through more stuff. I think that just allows you to move ahead".

Attitudes for Success

C displays the signature attitudes for successful female executives outlined in the literature review. In the context of describing her frustration of working as an engineer where one is implementing the decisions of accountants and marketers she says, "I knew that I could do what they were doing but that they could never do what I did", a statement that reveals a high level of confidence and self-belief. She also describes herself as having "a very strong internal locus of control. I don't need a lot of external approval about what I'm doing which is why I don't mind being brave about making a tough call. And perhaps because I've demonstrated that, it allows me to get into these senior positions. I'm not scared of a challenge and I never have been".

In her first working position C describes herself as being more inclined than others to "push the system and rock the boat" an attitude that gets her noticed. This is a woman who is not frightened to challenge the status quo. This attitude is

summarized by a story she tells about a particular challenge she faced at her current employee that she joined as Head of Product Development, “Shortly after arriving I discovered that the business’s strategy was flawed. I had been here about two months when I looked at the numbers and I knew that they did not stack up. I had the conversation with CEO Y who did not handle the criticism at all well. He basically told me that I should focus on my job and leave the business to him so I went over his head to his superior. I warned him that he wasn’t going to make his budgets and targets and he wouldn’t listen to me, so I went over his head to the next person. I kept on going until I spoke to the CEO for the entire African group. I said to him, ‘look you’re my last shot, I’m telling you that this business is pouring money down the drain and you can do whatever you want to do with the information, but at least I have tried’. He chose to ignore everything I had to say.

“Then [late last year] the guy who had been head of Africa was shunted to Hong Kong and a new chap came in. I got on the phone to him and said ‘look - I can sit here and say nothing or I can say that clearly you have moved out one or two people because budget targets haven’t been met, but the problem is still sitting in this business and you have to fix it because otherwise you are going nowhere’. By this time I was six months pregnant so I was probably behaving a little rash!

“He flew down to have a chat with me and I put some budget slides together. I explained that to him that I wasn’t going behind Y’s back as all of the slides I was presenting to him I had also presented to Y with whom I had argued with until I was blue in the face. After that I heard nothing from this new guy. I thought that I had burnt my bridges with pretty much everyone. Then about a week later I got a phone call to say that he and a whole posse were flying in tomorrow. He said, ‘we’re going to ask Y to leave and we would like you to take over as the CEO’”.

This story highlights C’s determination, perseverance and tenacity. It also demonstrates that the co-researcher is able to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented to her. Rather than accepting the status quo she challenges them, adopting a mindset in which barriers are overcome. C has the mindset to take charge of her own destiny. In the context of discussing sexism in the workplace C comments, “... because I haven’t looked for difficulty it hasn’t been difficult. I have had female colleagues who have, I felt, navel gazed a little bit too much and I’ve felt that if you just get on with the job then everything would fall into place, but if you

spend too much time focusing on the obstacles ... sometimes people are looking for an excuse of their own lack of progress when they have the ability to change the situation themselves”.

Seizing the initiative is emphasized throughout C’s career history. When describing her promotion to CEO at Bank A she says, “I never went out there and said, ‘I want to do that’. I have just always thought that whatever you give me to do I will do it properly. I’ve never sat down and said that I want to be the CEO. My approach is rather, ‘okay well here’s something that needs to be done, nobody is doing it, there is a gap, let me fill it”.

Further, C has worked hard and has displayed a total commitment to work. When referring to her years as a consultant C claims that “the consultancy worked you to the bone. 7am–7pm was a good day. It was more like 7am-9pm and that was five days a week. And then I probably put in another 6 or 7 hours on either a Saturday or a Sunday, and you do that week in and week out. My husband (we were married a few years ago) was incredibly patient as I was just nowhere. I was completely buried in my work for a good two years”.

Mentors

C is able to identify several key figures that influenced her career. An early career break at a consumer products company she credits to a senior engineer who identified her potential and from whom she learnt “an enormous amount”. She says, “I was lucky that he took a fancy to me. He’d obviously been looking out for someone with the potential to do the job and he’d probably seen and liked something that I had done. Today this would never happen. The job would have to be advertised and candidates interviewed, but at that time he just came up to me and said, ‘If you want it, the job’s yours’. It was a great opportunity because I was only a year and a half out of University. I was completely in at the deep end ... it was a huge learning curve”.

Then later in her career C moved to the dotcom division of Bank A where she was “incredibly lucky to work with then CEO X. He was a fantastic people person and a much better at delegating than I will ever be. X is brilliant at giving credit to where it’s due. He really empowers the people who work for him. And I learnt that from

him. So whilst I'm not a very good at delegating when I do delegate it's in an empowered way. When I give you a piece of work I'm not going to interfere, it's yours. If you make a mistake I will publicly support you even though I will sit down privately with you and suggest doing something differently". She describes X and herself as making "a great team, we had great complimentary skills. X is a financial whiz kid who has got a PHD in Finance and he's also fantastic at managing people".

Over Performance

"I think women unconsciously end up doing more work than men. I think we feel we have to do more. Most of us don't know how to say no. Our male colleagues are much, much better at drawing the boundaries. They don't feel guilty about going off to play soccer with their mates at 6pm. We hit 6pm and we think we'd love to make it to yoga but you know, we haven't finished the report and six months later you haven't been to yoga once. I see that in my female colleagues all the time. But I don't know how much of that is the nature of who we are, as opposed to a business that won't recognize us unless we do that. I've worked in environments where everything I've done has always been recognized and I don't think other people have been given promotions with less work, but I think as women we tend to over work.

"I think that maybe to be a successful woman in the work place you have to know that you can do the job. Women in senior management positions are A-type personalities. They will be able to do it all and then they'll figure out how to make that balance work for themselves. But then I don't think you would think so hard about being a female in a senior business position if there were more of us".

Being yourself

A continuing theme throughout the interview was the emphasis C placed on being true to herself. She has observed other women struggle to balance their female selves in male-centric environments. She asserts that a woman should "... be true to herself". She warns women not to "try and adopt a style or an attitude that you believe is required in order to make you successful if it is incongruent with whom you are, because I have watched female colleagues become unstuck. I have watched them become quite hard because they have felt that that's what they

needed to do and you end up losing yourself. If the job is not going to allow you to be true to your personality then find another job, because it's not worth the contortions that you put yourself through. The women that were around in chemical engineering were not role models that I would have chosen for myself. They were quite extreme, trying to be men in a men's world. They felt they had to be hard in order to succeed in that sort of environment and for me it's more important to be true to myself rather than try and put on a persona that matches my environment".

C successfully walks the tightrope between being seen as neither overtly masculine nor overtly feminine. C manages to maintain her authenticity at work and does so in a conscious manner, wary of the experiences of other women who have 'lost themselves' at work. The suggestion that it is not worth "the contortions that you put yourself through" suggests that women should rather leave non-supportive workplaces and move to environments that recognize their talents.

Luck

As a result of the dominant male paradigm female leaders often find that their talent and intention as leaders are unseen and misunderstood, and their achievements attributed more often to luck than skill. It appears that to some extent C has internalized this paradigm. She describes herself as "lucky" no less than six times during the course of the interview. She says that, "I'm lucky that I've always been quite capable ...". When referring to a mentor who gave her the first career break she says, "I'm lucky that he took a fancy to me". She describes herself as "incredibly lucky to work with X" and "lucky" to have got the CEO job at Bank A because "it could have been any one of ten people". She was "lucky" that during wage negotiations her 'bosses have not taken advantage' of her willingness to have them set her salary. Finally, C asks her husband "isn't it unfair that I should have so much luck?" Her husband responds by asking her to think about her "luck" and remarks that throughout her career she has demonstrated that she is capable and has also been adept at maintaining her professional relationships.

Explaining her away her success as "lucky" is at odds with her high levels of confidence, locus of control and self-efficacy. C is assigning her success to luck. Men on the other hand present themselves as responsible for the success of entire companies.

Leadership Style

C exhibits transformational leadership traits. She says, "I once read an article in the HBR ages ago and they talked about the sixth dimension of leadership, the bit about humility. I think that it is such an important thing. I don't think you can consciously choose to be humble, you can't, but I think you can consciously choose to say, 'I am not larger than life'. I don't stand in front of people and exclaim, 'follow me!' I'm very pragmatic, I have my feet on the ground and I think I am trustworthy. I cannot lie, I cannot hide something and I cannot be dishonest. I think that comes across. You need to know that your people trust you implicitly and visa versa".

When asked whether there is a notable difference between men and women in the workplace she says "I do think that women have a lot less ego, which I think encourages you to empower other people. It allows women to be more human. When you have a large ego you sometimes put up a façade that you have to be the 'manager'. I am quite casual in my work relationships. I don't put a lot of formality in to it, I like to be approachable and I think that that is more of a female style than a male style.

"It's the small things that make such a difference in a person's work life. A colleague will point out to me that some people have been working really hard trying to fix up some transactions or something. I will then ask her to go and find five little boxes of 'nutties' put them on their desk and write something funny about 'transactions driving you nutty'. A male colleague would never think of that. I used that approach a lot at Bank A although it got quite difficult when the team climbed to 160 people. But I would write little notes and leave them on people's computer. I became famous for my little post-it notes. It's such a small thing, it doesn't take long and it makes such a difference. I didn't realize what a difference it made until one of my colleagues showed me this envelope where she had stored all my messages and I was quite taken aback. And then somebody else said 'oh yeah, I've kept mine too'. When the crunch comes and it always does, those people will go the extra mile for you because you have shown that you are noticing and supportive".

Modeling herself on X whom she admired for his ability for "giving credit where it's due" C comments that "I think I have tried to do as much as the public supporting as

possible. I think that's very important to people. I have a junior colleague who will write a memo and it might be a terrible memo. They will send it to me and I will change 90% of it but I will still send it out under their name. Then they will come to me and say 'Well you wrote more of it than I did' and I just challenge them to get it right next time. What then comes back is a 1,000 times better because they are so keen to prove that they can do it. At the end of the day you will get so much more out of people if you treat them that way.

"I think without meaning to be I'm quite good with people. There are people who are brilliant with people and other people who are terrible with people, and I think I'm somewhere in between. I also lead by example. I will never ask somebody to do something without also being willing to do it myself and without having at least taken the time to understand what it is I'm asking of them. I look at my colleagues who kind of go, 'ohh, this person hasn't done this probably' and I think well you know, you didn't even know what it was you were asking them to do, so how can you then be upset when what comes back isn't what you wanted".

Sexism & Sexual Harassment

C asserts that she has not "experienced profound sexism in the work place in the sense that I have been restricted from moving up a level because I was female". At Bank A she says that she never felt, "any sense of any glass ceiling. When I left my colleagues sat me down and said, 'Why are you leaving? You could be one of the top managers in the bank one day'". However at [Bank B] she comments that it "is a very colonial, white male dominated environment ... most of their senior managers round the world are British expats, most of whom are men. I don't have a sense that there would be a limit to my career path, but I do have a sense of discomfort that a lot of rugby and bar talk is actually business talk and that I would find quite hard to break into.

"That's the hardest part of an organisation - when too much of business is done in airport lounges – which is probably a reflection of the fact that senior executives seem to spend a third of their life on planes. So there are lots of opportunities for people over a drink or in an airport lounge to talk about business. And I think that if your business is more confined to a traditional working environment it's much to be excluded from the real business decisions".

These comments confirm the existence of a men's network. It is these informal social contexts that have left some women out of important conversations where decisions are informally made.

When asked whether a woman's network exists to balance the male network C replied that she had " ... experienced something of a female network in Bank A, but it was never a formal arrangement. If I knew of something that was happening in someone else's area, that I thought she wouldn't be aware of, then I would pick up the phone and have a chat. So it was very subtle. There was nothing explicit about it, it was never 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back'. We didn't go for drinks together, we didn't go out and have lunch, it was more based on the fact that I can relate to you, we're the same age, we've spoken about the same things and if we weren't so busy we could probably be friends, and so I'll keep an eye out for you". She comments that, "... it can be lonely if you don't have other female colleagues who you can relate to, even if they're sitting in another department three buildings removed, just a sense that there are other people in the same position as you can be quite comforting" which confirms that women in the workplace can and do feel isolated in the male corporate environment because of their gender. As she says herself, "I don't think you would think so hard about being a female in a senior business position if there were more of us". This comment suggests that it is not necessarily the absence of female role models in an organisation, but the absence of women at senior positions in general, that lead to feelings of isolation and dislocation and that were there more women, role models or not, women would consider less their position as women in the workplace.

C recommends that the best way to cut through the men's network is to " ... be direct as possible. I have also always found that the best way to deal with corporate politics is to be as direct as possible. You just cut right through it. Don't play the political game. It's amazing we always talk about women as being capable of gossip but men do it in the work / political context way better than women ever will ... it's a strength of the lack of ego that women have can allow you to be much more direct because you are less worried about how you're going to look".

C has also experienced sexual harassment in the work place. "The first time it happened to me I didn't realize it was happening. This guy leaned over and kissed

me and I was like, 'hang on a moment, what is happening here?' I was completely horrified. It was an unfortunate and disillusioning experience but I think it is part of growing up. I dealt with it by just brushing it aside and got completely business-like about it. Then of course that night I lay awake and just couldn't believe it. From then on I tried not to be in the same room as this guy. When I did end up in a room with him and he tried it again I was like, 'you are so way out of line, if you ever come near me again I will do whatever I have to do' and that was it, and he just stood there stammering".

C advises women that "... if you are aware and self-aware you can very quickly pick up on whether you are giving someone the wrong impression, whether it's intentional or not. When I say giving the wrong impression I mean that you are inadvertently signaling to a guy that he could get away with it or that you might invite it. I just learnt to put out the signals way before that train comes down anywhere near the track".

Work / Life Balance

The interview with C was dominated by her struggle with work / life balance issues following the recent birth of her first child. Work / life balance influenced the way C currently felt about her working environment, her future career possibilities and her struggle with the competing demands of work and family life. C is currently erring towards "self capping" her career although as the cross-analysis suggests, this phrase belies the organisational context and culture that motivate women to cap their careers, thereby challenging the notion of "self" capping.

When she was six months pregnant C was asked to take over as CEO of an ailing banking division. In considering the offer C "sat down and thought about it. I thought that this business needs somebody who is going to roll up their sleeves and throw all their energy into it. The job required a huge amount of commitment for the next 2 years and I just couldn't do that. I had made a conscious decision to have a kid and I absolutely wanted to be able to work from 8am-5pm, I want to be able to go home and spend two hours with my son. As much as everyone tried to convince me that I could work 8 or 9 hours a day and that they would be happy with that, that they didn't want more, I knew that the business needed more than that. And I think a lot of women instinctively know that they are going to be short changing

somebody if they try and do that job and try and do the family thing. It's hard enough to get the balance right anyway, so why not put a cap on what job you can reasonably expect to do yourself ... "

C feels a strong desire to be spending time with her child, "I think I underestimated just how much love you can feel for a little human as a mother. Someone who is just so dependent on you, it's awe inspiring" although she adds that "I had no idea to what extent I would start questioning my own identity, because for so long I have defined myself by what I do. And it's the classic question, 'hello, how are you and what do you do?' and to now consider taking a lesser job with no career path and just kind of trust in 5 years time that something will pan out – I am giving up a huge chunk of what my life was about. Now I am defining myself as a mother and you get no recognition for that role unless you are a mother yourself. Single females will never appreciate the trade off that you've made and I don't think that men will ever appreciate the trade off – the choice between what you could do and what you are doing. The biggest challenge that we have is trying not to do it all, everyone says, 'you wanted women's lib and you can have it, you can have it all!' But nobody is saying, '... we will pick up the different piece of the equation to try and make this possible'".

C is feeling isolated and unsupported in her current working environment. She comments that "when I've talked to the company about my hours they've all been bending over backwards saying to me 'don't worry, absolutely you must go home at 5pm'. I'm still breastfeeding at the moment because my son has all sorts of allergies and so I'm trying to express at work. I've found that people pay complete lip service to the idea that they are actually sensitive to your commitments outside of work. You know 5pm will come and go and nobody will say 'you had better go home', and I'm trying to desperately get myself out the door and I will have to say 'excuse me, actually I need to go'. What I'm finding here is that I've got to apologise for leaving at 5pm. The fact that I am going to go home and after my son is asleep put in two more hours at work is completely unseen".

Whilst the company may have supportive policies for working mothers the company culture expects C to continue at work as though life were unchanged. The issue for C is the difference between active and passive support. "I have employed women in part time work. When I worked at Bank A I had two developers, wonderful women

who had children. Nobody in the history of Bank A had ever allowed a part time contract. And I questioned why. 'For heavens sake I can pay each of them 50% of what I would have paid them before, and I will probably get more work out of them'. And it did really work but only because I supported it. I would be in a meeting and I would say to one of them, 'go home, it's 1pm'. And so I gave them the mandate to feel comfortable for working a half day as opposed to feeling apologetic".

At the time of the interview C was considering leaving her position because she felt that "here the world rests on my shoulders". She attributes part of the problem to the fact that she "used to be the person who would turn the lights off at work" whereas now she is going home at 5pm. When considering taking a new job at Bank C she says, "I'm going in as a working mother. I've said up front that I won't be in the office before 8.30am and I won't be in the office after 4.30pm. Perhaps it's easier to establish your boundaries when people see you from day one as a working mother".

C suggests more job sharing to support working mothers in the work place in "a way that everybody wins ... if you are job sharing (which presupposes that you have found somebody whose work style is completely congruent with yours, and who is very happy about sharing the job) then you can get the whole job done, you don't feel that stuff is piling up and you are getting to see your family". A company that advocated job sharing would attract "[the] women out there who would quite like to work at the level that they've worked at but not in the quantum of time that they've worked at".

Job sharing would alleviate the pressure of taking on a job where "... they [the company] say to you '8 hours is okay', but they still want the 12 hours out of you ... and you suffer. I mean I'm intensely uncomfortable about leaving work unfinished and it's one of the things I have had to deal with, as the job gets bigger. If you are trying to do that on an 8 hour day and something urgent comes up you just can't let the wheels fall off, you have to stay and then there's all the compromise that comes with that". In the mind of C job sharing would allow women to continue to build their careers, stay in jobs that intellectually stimulated them and allow them to slow-track their career progression for a few years rather than step off the ladder. This is the choice between "what you could do and what you are doing". Otherwise women are forced to make a "trade off" in which they take "a lesser job with no career path and just kind of trust that in 5 years time something will pan out".

Fortunately C describes her husband as “very supportive of” her career. She says, “He has never been threatened by me. I’ve almost always earned more than he has and it’s never been an issue. He’s immensely supportive of me. When I was offered the CEO position he offered to find a way to spend more time at home. So it really has been about supporting one another. When I was coming back to work after maternity leave my husband was like, ‘if you don’t want to come back to work, then just tell me now before I leave [work] to set up my own [business]’. And you know we’ve decided that for the next two years he’ll do his own thing and I’m going to effectively be the bread winner and when we have another kid it will probably about turn”. However, C does admit to feeling the pressure to maintain a wifely presence in the home. “I find that I’ve always done more housework than him”. Although she explains this away by saying “I don’t like living in a messy environment and yet he is happy too”.

5.4 D

Background

D is the eldest of six siblings. Her father worked in manufacturing and when she was very little “our family moved to city A and I remained behind in city B. I lived with my grandmother until I was about 11 and then I moved back in with my parents. My grandmother and I lived alone together. At the time my family left I had two sisters. My parents then had three other children in city A. I only joined them when I was 11 and by that time all my siblings had been born”.

A powerful female role model

D describes her “formative years” as being “heavily influenced by my grandmother”. She describes her grandmother as “an extremely strong woman. She was left a widow with 5 children at the age of 32. My father was the eldest and he was only 12. So she had to bring up all her children on her own. She was Mauritian and so she hadn’t had much of an education, but she was very literate and she read a lot, but she wasn’t a professional with a career. So she did catering and things like that

to bring up her children ... so my grandmother was had quite a tough life but she was extremely strong and she brought me up.

"My grandmother had very strong opinions about various things. My grandmother was very rebellious and very outspoken for her time. She was once arrested because she smacked someone at a till in an OK Bazaar, because the person told her to go to the back of the queue to let a white person in front of her. So she slapped this woman and was arrested and she just laughed. She was very audacious". D's grandmother provided her with a powerful female role model.

Early Independence

Living with her grandmother and away from her family was an experience that made D "feel very independent from my parents. I would go and spend school holidays with my family ... but I was quite alienated from them. I saw them as relatives. I didn't really grow up with them and so we are very different now. We are very close but I can see that they are very different. I learnt to be very self-sufficient and take control of situations, whereas my siblings are more dependent types. They need to be close to people and they need people to help them make decisions and give them advice.

"My siblings grew up with each other in a more child-centered environment whereas I grew up in an adult-centered environment. There were hardly any children around me, except my friends at school. My siblings did more child-like things. They all swam and rode bicycles and played in the streets. When I grew up I read and played with older children. I learnt to swim and ride a bike in my late 20s! My grandmother just didn't think those things were important and so I didn't think they were either. I also learnt to read and write very young, because two of my aunts and uncles were studying teaching. They would visit us for long vacations and they would sit and do stuff with me, they taught me to read and write when I was very young".

This early independence from her family and a separate sense of identity supports the view that women who function independently are more likely to exhibit a strong sense of competence and self confidence that supports a stronger need to succeed.

Personal Qualities

D displays the key qualities of successful women, i.e. self-efficacy, self-confidence and a strong internal locus of control. These attributes were instilled during childhood by a father that “strongly influenced” her young view of the world. She says, “My father bought me up to believe that I’m equal to anyone, in any circumstance. My father didn’t instill it in me in a theoretical way it was more by example. He always challenged the norm. We grew up during apartheid where we weren’t allowed on certain beaches, we weren’t allowed to go to certain public swimming pools and my father had no compunction about driving us to these various places and instructing his children to go and do whatever they wanted to do, wherever they wanted to do it in parks, on beaches and in swimming pools ... we would go off and play and then the policemen would come and my father would argue with the policemen in front of us. He would say ‘how can you do this to these poor innocent children?’ and he would embarrass people in front of us. We saw this and I guess I picked some of it up from him.

“My father also instructed me not to stand up in school when the national anthem was sung. He let me know that he would be very upset with me if I did. So I would not stand up and not sing the anthem and if the teacher asked me what I was doing then I would say that I refuse to do this because it’s an apartheid country.

“Because of these experiences I have never felt that anyone has a right to inflict sexism or racism on me. I think it’s quite a subtle difference between someone just standing up against it but for me it was internalized. So even if someone tries it on me I ignore it. It just washes over me. I ignore it and I stand up for who I am. I think because of that people recognize my strength of character and don’t actually practice that much sexism or racism on me”. This rejection of obstacles that may lie in her path (e.g. the sexism and racism of others) is a key characteristic found amongst successful women.

Hard Work

A re-occurring theme in the interview with D was the importance that she placed on being able to work hard. When explaining her career success she says, “I think

initially my success was more to do with hard work and an understanding of the market in the real context, not the apartheid version of it". Again she says, "I was able to work quite hard and put in long hours. The cultural environment and my ethnic background had taught me a strong work ethic that just wasn't present in city C or in the company that I joined. To be quite honest I think my success can be attributed to the fact that I just put in more hours than people normally did. But for me it was a perfectly natural thing to do".

When describing her leadership qualities she claims to "work hard myself, so when I'm in a position of authority I don't just use the authority to get other people to do the work. I've always pushed performance which has been linked to my work ethic approach and my ability to do hard work. My legacy and my influence in the company have been to instill a culture of earning your respect and earning your value. I would also never ask anyone to do anything that I wouldn't be prepared to do myself".

The emphasis on hard work and of working long hours displays a strong commitment to her career. Interestingly, despite D equating hard work with long hours she comments that "I've never admired somebody who's at the office till 8pm or 9pm because I'm not sure whether the person sitting next to them who left at 5pm actually did more qualitative work – but unfortunately the way the corporate world works at the moment is that people do tend to value that kind of visible contribution. The more visible you are the more people believe that you are adding value, although I've never been one to believe that.

"It should be about the impact that you have rather than the hours that you put in, and there are people – I think women in particular who can do a lot more in less time and manage multiple projects. My female colleagues and I have done that over the years and I know there are males who work who tend to want to work in a more directed and defined way and get it done and then do the next thing. I think maybe this ability to multi-task is another important attribute. Women should be given more opportunities to work in that way.

"I think it is very hard for men to let go of the corporate framework that they are working within. But I think now, slowly, with the new age influence on corporations and individuals, maybe it is starting to change and there is a little more integration

between men and women at work, which allows for more flexi-time and the ability to work from home’.

Integration & Diversity

D displayed throughout her childhood and working life the ability to integrate herself with people from a variety of different backgrounds, religion and race. She also appreciates diversity and values the differences between people. These two attributes have enabled her to excel in her career and to offer value to her company in a time of social upheaval and political change.

D’s ability to integrate herself across cultural groups may be the result of an upbringing that saw “the entire community ... in our home, there were six of us children but there were always other children playing and eating with us. My father was never very well of but what ever he had he shared with everybody”. In addition, “my grandmother was half Catholic and half Muslim. I went to a Catholic school whilst I lived with my grandmother. I was crazily in love with the Nuns and wanted to be one”. Later D went to “a very snobbish school, a private Muslim school. It wasn’t expensive but it was a bit snobbish and a lot of the children used to hang around together based on their class and their wealth whereas I made friends across religion and across class”.

Later after graduating as a teacher D started “teaching in a township school for black girls”. This was quite a feat given that “it was very difficult to teach in communities outside of your own community in SA at the time, but I just didn’t want to teach in an Indian school under the apartheid government”. The school, “had students from all over, it wasn’t a wealthy school because it was a missionary school”. When she moved to city C she applied for a position in a “so-called colored school. When I went for the interview the Head Principal said that I looked like a gentle soul, he didn’t think I would fit into the school so he wouldn’t give me the job. He said it was full of ‘coloured’ gangsters and wild youth and he thought I’d be completely over-run by all these teenagers. I was very disappointed and then about two weeks later he phoned me and said ‘nobody wants this job – are you still interested?’ And I said, ‘of course I am’. And I started teaching and the children were terrible but I managed to win them over and we had a great time while I taught them”.

This exposure to the diversity of South Africa proved valuable to publishing company A whom she joined as a trainee language editor. D says, “the country was starting to think about transformation at the time and a lot of the books that were developed were for markets in South Africa, as well as Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. No one in the entire building, which was the head office, had had exposure of working in African schools or had really engaged with black people. I was able to add value to their products because I’d only taught in schools that weren’t white. And so I had insight into what was needed. I made the books more beautiful for the children. I understood where the students were coming from, their language issues and that sort of thing. And a lot of what I produced was extremely successful”.

D’s ability to assimilate herself into different contexts contributed not only the quality of her work but also to her ability to “get on” with management who were, at the time of joining the company, all white middle aged men. She describes how she would “always go to the company pub. I was only one of the few women and the only black person who would go there. At the time I didn’t even drink alcohol. But I would go to socialize with people. So I guess they thought, ‘well she’s actually integrated with us’. You know the thing about integration is that after a while the race and sex barriers diminish and disappear, and I think eventually people in senior positions just saw me as ‘she’s one of us’ and when people feel comfortable they feel they can share things with you. That’s why the boy’s network works because men feel safe with one another. So I think that first they saw me as one of them and then they saw that my talents could maybe take the company somewhere, and then it wasn’t an issue that I was a bit different”.

She describes this integration as managing “to make my seniors feel comfortable. I think some women can appear to be extremely aggressive and highly competitive, but I don’t push agendas just for the sake of pushing agendas. I don’t appear to be an activist – I’m an activist in the things that I do rather than the things I say. So I went out of my way perhaps to make board members and the MD and CEO at the time feel comfortable and not threatened, I didn’t push the feminist agenda, but made it clear that I would be treated equally and fairly. And I think that also contributed to my successes”.

Once in a senior position within the organisation D recognized “deliberate steps need to be taken” in order for “integration to occur”. She says, “I have observed that not enough integration has occurred within companies in South Africa, and particularly in this company that I worked for. It’s better now than it was in 1988 when I joined but you still find that people at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy such as the warehouse packers are not white and that most managers and certainly most senior managers are white. And even though people may not feel like they are racist or sexist, the statistics make one wonder about that kind of thing. One of the things I have tried to do since becoming part of senior management was to encourage integration ... because [real] transformation takes quite a long time, so unless you take very deliberate steps it will take quite long to change”. Upon becoming CEO D’s deliberate steps included putting a stop to (or democratizing the use of) company golf days, private boxes at sporting events and the company pub which was set up only for a few people to enjoy, as well as more formal steps such as specific recruitment strategies.

On a broader note D speculates that on the whole women may be more natural integrators than men. She says, “I’m not sure whether it’s a female thing but I think men tend to go home and forget the office. But women tend to integrate work and private life. That’s why I deliberately negotiated a [recent] position where I have the opportunity to be flexible. If I want to do home things I do it and then I will work till 12am. And if I go away to Mozambique and work for ten days in a row I can come back and I don’t go into the office for a week. That flexibility between home and work is very important to me. And I don’t think men need that type of thing as much as women do”. She suggests that this is because “women integrate their intellect and their emotions more than men do. They have observed their mothers integrate work and home life. Women have always had to do that integrating and balancing. And they have to find time for themselves, which is a huge challenge, because women tend to prioritize work or family before themselves. I think if organisations can reach a point where they allow flexibility for women then they would be better at retaining good women”.

Opportunity & Change

D is a change orientated individual. She says, “I love change. I actually seek it out in my personal life and my professional life. I get bored very easily”. She views her

ability to seek out change as a key variable in her career success, “because I’m always looking around me for new challenges and new things to do to and I’ve brought quite a few visionary steps into the company’s history over the years. I was willing to take risks. I’ve worked with colleagues who have also done very well, who have many of my qualities, but sometimes just won’t take those extra risks, or don’t have the foresight to predict what might be coming in 3 to 5 years time. I have managed to do that on numerous occasions in my career. Being able to read the current circumstances and predict what might be happening in the future. And there are several instances I can quote in the company where I did that and which really led to amazing gains for the company”.

An example of how change creates opportunities for her career is demonstrated by the following story, “In 2001 I was sitting at work one evening and I decided that I was bored. I’d done so much in the past 10 years that it was time to do something different. Maybe it was a woman thing. I thought that if I’m 70 years old and lying there ready to die and I look back what would be the things that I had achieved in my life that were important? It was quite a shock and a revelation to me. I wrote my resignation that evening and a week later sold my house behind my husband’s back and decided that it was time for new things.

“I gave the company six months notice but I wasn’t staying. A few weeks after I had resigned I sat next to the Minister of Education at a fund raising breakfast. He asked me whether I’d like to come to work for him on the national curricula. I was quite open to new challenges and maybe that’s why it came along. It was one of the most fantastic experiences that I ever had. I earned 15% of what I had earned as CEO but the reward that I got was immense, and that’s the kind of thing that I think women would do, more than men”.

This ability to experiment with change and to embrace new challenges distinguishes D’s career. Indeed, her departure from publishing company A allowed her to name her own terms when they attempted to woo her back. At first unwilling to return D was eventually persuaded to return when, “they asked me a very important question, and maybe there’s something here about how corporations and men can learn to deal with women. They asked me ‘well what do you want? What will make you come back?’ Before they were making me all these promises but they had

never thought of asking me what I wanted. Suddenly the tables were turned and I thought about it and I thought, 'I do know what would make me go back'".

A change agent

D's egalitarian and inclusive nature, combined with her instinct to embrace change, saw her adopt the role of a change agent during the course of her career. She says, "I am an activist in the things that I do, not in the things that I say". Upon promotion to the board of directors at publishing company A there were "things like golf days and a pub in the company that was visited mainly by white men. The pub used to be opened by the CEO and the MD at the time. The CEO would gather his forces about him and pour drinks on the other side of the bar. Because of the kind of person I am I wasn't offended by this. I just found it ridiculous. Then there used to be these golf days where big suppliers used to invite you for these free golf days and the guys would fly off here, there and everywhere – but I stopped all of that.

"The first thing I did when I became CEO was to shut down the bar and I said 'no free drinks' because 'this seems to be restricted only to certain people, if you want to socialize go do it on your own account and not the company's'. I also stopped the golf day. The company used to have a private box at Newlands for rugby and cricket. I eventually gave the box back to Newlands.

"I did meet resistance. People were very upset about the golf days and the Newlands box. The first thing I did was democratize the box and put together a lucky draw, and lots of warehouse people and lower levels staff, who were more in numbers, began winning these lucky draws and going to these boxes at Newlands. And then eventually when the new CEO took over he and I decided that actually we should just close it all off".

Mentorship

D has benefited from two informal mentors during the course of her career, one who assisted her in a subtle way, lending her exposure and supporting her growth and the other who aggressively championed and accelerated her promotion through the company.

The first was “the sales and marketing director and he was what you would call a progressive Afrikaner. Some of what he tried to do was very inappropriate because it was artificial, like he would try to make ‘happy families’ with African people but it didn’t always work out. I could see that he was genuine and he and I got on very well for the short time he was there. I think he probably told the MD at the time to watch out because this woman was maybe quite good. He also gave me opportunities to address large numbers of staff. For example whilst I was a publisher he would invite me to give product presentations and things which hadn’t been done before, so he gave me a lot of exposure to people within the organisation.

“And then there was a woman Y from UK who was the head of publishing company B that owned a 50% stake in our company. She was an extremely progressively left labor person from the UK and she actually refused to come to South Africa until 1994, so she managed the board remotely. I went to England in 1992 and from the first time we met each other we liked one another instantly. In 1994 after the election she came to South Africa for her first board meeting. She insisted that I was put on the board, she said, ‘that woman knows what she’s talking about, I’ve met her, she’s proven herself in the company, there are no females on this board, and you are going to appoint her’. There was resistance from other people at the time, not the MD, but the Finance Director who subsequently left the company. He and I clashed, but always very politely.

“But there was more aggressive resistance from the new Sales & Marketing Director who was a white male and who was very competent ... and had been in a senior position for about a year or two longer than me. The MD felt very uncomfortable, they thought that it was unfair. They felt the Sales & Marketing Director’s nose would be out of joint and it would be risky. But Y insisted. She came three times that year. The first time that she came she said, ‘we have to get a female on to this board and we have to get a black person on to this board’ and she sowed the seeds. The second time she came she said it’s got to be me, and these are the reasons why and so on. But it was happening behind closed doors and although people argued about it I wasn’t there to witness it, I just heard about it.

“Then she came and spoke directly to me. It was interesting because the MD didn’t come to speak to me, she said, ‘we’d like to put you on the board, we’d like to make

you a director, it's a little bit unusual because you've been in this position for a very short time but it is an important position, you will be the Publishing Director of this company'. The company was fairly small at the time so it was one of the four or five most senior positions. I asked for an hour to think about it. I then went back to her and refused explaining that, 'these men are going to be terribly upset, especially because the Sales & Marketing Director and I have to work together'. So she was like, 'well that's ridiculous, you're a woman and you should take the opportunity and take the challenge'. And I told her that I wasn't fearful of the challenge, I was extremely grateful and flattered that people had thought of me but there's also appropriate behaviour and people have to serve their terms and things like that.

She came back a few months later and by then the MD had started talking to me. And eventually I was appointed a Director. And I had terrible times with the Sales & Marketing Director and the Finance Director. There was one incident when the three Directors went away and had a drink up one day, and all three of them had terrible accidents that night. One got locked up, one broke his hip and the other one resigned. And it was specifically because I had been made a Director of the Board.

"They were venomous. I think it was to do with the fact that I wasn't there for that long and it was a leg up. It would be a very easy thing for me to say to you now, because it would really support all sorts of feminist agendas, that they were resentful and the boy's club and so on, but I think that they were just terribly upset that I did it so quickly ... and there were fights. There was one meeting when the Sales & Marketing Director just said, 'this is crap, I don't have to work with you, you're ignorant and what do you know?' And I just said 'I don't have to hear this, you must judge me on the work that I'm doing' and eventually it eased up. This particular guy had built up resentment over the years but in the end I won his respect because I went on to change the company's fortunes, from a company that had 10% market share to one that had 30%. I really was the architect of that, so had they had any thoughts in their mind that I was a black woman and getting a leg up, that was dispelled soon after that".

This is a compelling story that demonstrates how those individuals with mentors can enjoy increased career mobility and advance at a faster rate than those lacking mentors. It also shows the tenacity that women need to have in order to break through glass ceilings and overcome obstacles.

Given such a hostile working environment why didn't D just leave during this difficult period and find work elsewhere? Possibly because she, "enjoyed the work tremendously. I had also become divorced at the time and I guess my career was by then very important to me. I also knew that I was good and I knew that I had my team behind me".

Overcoming Obstacles

D was able to overcome the issues of race, gender and sometimes overtly aggressive behaviour displayed by some senior management toward her. She was able to do so by not taking people's views and actions personally. She says, "from my side I was open hearted and very open minded, and I was slightly embarrassed that I had got a leg up so quickly. I just felt embarrassed that they felt disempowered and unappreciated by the company. So I was very careful in my dealings with them. I approached them very sensitively".

In another incident an employee whom she challenged over abusing company privileges wrote her a letter that personally attacked her and her race and sex. He did so in the context of her impending departure from the company only to find that she was offered the position of CEO in a bid to keep her to stay on, which she accepted. She says, 'the next day I was back in my office. And then this guy came up to my office and he was shaking like a leaf. He shut my office door and he said, 'I just wanted to tell you that I am so sorry that I wrote that letter, it was actually one of the worst things I could ever have done in my life and it was so insulting to you'. And I said, 'I'm here, I'm here to stay, and we've always had to work together so I've never taken any of it personally'".

D talks of "rising above situations" and "not taking things personally". This strength is one that allows her as a woman not to become overtly aggressive or highly competitive. She does have internal barriers. Incredibly, despite the difficult times documented above she says that, "to be quite honest I haven't experienced much [racism or sexism]. The company has always been quite a supportive environment. But I have seen sexism and racism from time to time in more subtle ways. I'm thinking of one occasion where I was very young in the job and new to management. The company had to hire a publishing manager and they brought

someone in who wasn't very bright and wasn't very good but he was an elderly Afrikaner and probably needed a job. And I thought to myself, 'well, this is very odd, it's 1991 and change is about to occur and this is the type of person that the company brings in'. But I didn't appear hard done by because I'd only been in the management job for about a year or two, but the guy was ... fired and then I got his job".

Transformational Leadership

D's direct observations on her leadership style are limited but her style does appear to be transformational. She says, "Based on my observations and my experiences over the years I have observed that male managers tend to be more lonely, isolated and paternalistic. The female managers around me, including myself have generally tended to take people with us, but these are generalizations. I know one female colleague who is in a very senior position who is very paternalistic, but I think on balance women are more likely to take people with them".

She describes herself as a "fairly egalitarian manager. I might be the leader but I work with people and I also manage to get people to do what needs to be done. So I won a lot of respect from people and I think the company saw this and realized there's something here and so I got quite good promotions". In addition, "I've also displayed the ability to spot talent. I have the ability to recognize and nurture the potential in good and competent people". She also sees herself as "brave and bold. I'm not afraid of new challenges".

Indirect observations via the accounts of her working life at [publishing company A] reveal a strong leader whose equal and inclusive attitude towards her colleagues has enabled her to build strong teams. This team support has lent her the strength to deal with some tough circumstances, providing her with a network to counteract the loneliness that comes with breaking through those invisible barriers.

Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling

For D the glass ceiling is not "men saying that we don't want to let other women in - I think it comes from them viewing you, in terms of really senior positions, from a particular framework and you're coming from a different framework and that's where

the ceiling is". She explains that women "have a different linguistic database in their heads which imposes limits on their careers.

"For example, I had a colleague working with me. She is a very ubuntu, facilitative and unassertive type of person. Extremely bright, articulate but she's also very facilitative and team orientated. I put her in a management position and she would do presentations to senior management and other business units. Her language would be 'we did this or the teachers came up with this suggestion ...' She would use a whole particular set of her vocabulary and just didn't twig that there was another vocabulary going on. I was able to put on the lens of the Anglo-Saxon male because I'd really fraternized with them for years. I was able to put their lens on my eyes and look at her and say 'she looks wishy-washy and she looks like someone who will never make it into senior management because she just can't be trusted to make decisions. She looks like someone who will never be able to manage poor performance and fire people'. Yet I have known her since I was 18 and she's a very strong person. I took her aside and I said to her 'I have to tell you this is how you come across. And I know, you're very bright and you're very strong, but you've got to try and integrate some of the other corporate jargon into the way you articulate and express yourself'.

"That's the glass ceiling, it's saying 'she's done a lot, she's a valuable person but she's never going to really cut it in the boardroom, she's going to use all this jargon with outside shareholders and they're going to panic that she's some kind of mother earth'. I think the glass ceiling comes from this kind of thing. And when you reach that point, both parties need to integrate the way they are thinking about it. The women have to say 'is there something more I have to do, is there a different way of expressing that I need to get across' and men need to say, 'this woman has achieved a huge amount, naturally she should move into senior management, what is it that we are not seeing, what's worrying us?' But I don't think this conversation happens – it sounds more like it would happen in a psychologist's room or something ... board level positions aren't given very easily.

"I think boards are also custodians of an almost secretive type of behaviour. Board meetings always have this aura of mystery about them and it could be that a particular way of behaving is perpetuating itself. Because if I look at the women that

have got onto boards, they are usually quite strong willed, powerful, independent fighters, in other words they are more like the men.

“People take longer to recognize women’s strengths and skills and so maybe it takes longer for them to be promoted into more senior positions. I have observed that men tend to climb the ladder more quickly. I think women tend to operate in a more egalitarian and collegial way than men and so they don’t necessarily take credit early on for things that they have achieved. In fact women often wouldn’t even recognize that they should be taking the credit for something, because they would feel it was a team effort. Whereas men, even those men that do work in a team, they are quite up front about claiming the credit for themselves.

“I think that women are just more in touch with people around them and themselves, generally, and I’ve worked with a lot of men and women in varying positions in relation to myself. Generally I find that men don’t really want to go to places, which make them uncomfortable. I think women integrate their intellect and their emotions more than men do and because of that they are more sensitive. Women don’t take the credit, not because they’re shy and withdrawn but because they just feel there has been a team effort behind it’.

D suggests that women’s skills take longer to be recognized, in part because women do not recognize that they should be “taking the credit for something”. The onus is then on a woman to claim the credit for her, ensuring that their leadership style is a recognized one.

Work Life Balance

D is married with no children. She says, “... during my first marriage I was very young and I didn’t feel that I wanted to have children. And as it turns out my first husband couldn’t have children, but it didn’t really bother me at all. And then after that, the next phase was that I was very busy with my career so I didn’t give it much thought. And then I married again in 1994 and after a couple of years I did feel that I wanted to have children. I think it was because I had done a lot in my career and I was in a fairly good relationship. I did get pregnant a few times and had miscarriages, but I was never really devastated or depressed about that. As a

human being I felt fulfilled. I love children. And then I guess the kind of profession I was in, that involved doing things for children”.

5.5 E

Background

E comes from a family of seven children and describes herself as having “three mothers and one father”. Her father had seven children from three different women, not an unusual event in her culture “where children belong to the clan of the father”. Consequently her father raised all the children with the mothers playing only a secondary role. She says, “my mother was 16 when she had my older sister and about 18 when she had me. She couldn’t take care of us and she was still young enough to get married. So my father took care of us kids and my mother was free to go and get married which she did. She went on to have five children with her husband. So I have half-siblings on my father’s and my mother’s side, but I am closest to the children on my father’s side as we were all raised together by my father and my step-mother. It sounds complicated but actually it was quite simple for us as my father was the constant. I only vaguely remember life with my mother. The only mother I’ve known consistently is my step-mother”.

A Strong Father Figure

The absence of E’s mother suggests that as a child she was heavily influenced by her father. She describes him as, “very strict, very professional and very moral”. This is someone who “believes in a very high level of integrity and who has a spotless work ethic. He was very hard working, he had seven kids and his wife (my step-mother) never really worked”. Her father appears to be the main driver of E’s will to succeed. She said, “My father really believed in educating his daughters. He stressed the education of his girl children more than he did his sons because he felt that his sons would find their way even if they weren’t very clever. But if you’re not very clever and you’re a girl you have very few choices in life. From his own experience, I don’t know, he didn’t want us to ever be the victims of men. He always felt that as long as we could provide for ourselves we could always provide for our children. He always felt that men walk away and that women rarely do”.

An Early Work Ethic

E received a very strict upbringing where the emphasis was on working hard, striving to achieve your best and taking responsibility for one's self, "I remember getting whipped for coming tenth in class out of 30 something students. It was my first time in a new school and a new country and I still got whopped, so [my father] had very high expectations of us. I was never super bright but I just worked hard. There were subjects that I was good at but some that I wasn't. But I did work very hard and I think that was recognized. As long as he felt that you had done your very best he was quite satisfied.

"My stepmother was also very strict. She came from a traditional culture and she saw her girl children as assistants. We did a lot of the work in the house. My sister and I used to clean the soiled baby cloth nappies that were left stewing and waiting for us when we came back from school and we also had to meet high expectations from our father. He would hand us a pile of books that we would have to read in a certain amount of time. I read Great Expectations and Shakespeare before I was nine. I also had homework and childhood and ironing to do for the household. It was extremely hard. I remember in London how miserable it was in winter. It was cold, wet and damp in those old two-up two-down houses that stank of moist wallpaper. But I had a strong sister and we made time to play and even though we got in trouble we made friends on the street and there was joy because we had each other. It was hard at that time to ever think of life as anything different so we accepted it".

E's father also directed her career path, disallowing soft subjects like drama and art and encouraging hard subjects such as math and economics. She claims that "if I were in another family I guess I would be a down and out actress but I was never allowed to pursue my interests".

Growing up in England as one of a few black children in her London neighborhood E experienced overt racism that toughened her up. "[We] went to the local comprehensive ... I learnt an awful lot about protecting myself, there was a lot of bullying and racism in England in the 1960s. My parents didn't really know how to deal with racism because they had never really experienced it growing up in [home

country]. They always felt like we had to grin and bear it because we were guests in a foreign country and we were a minority. But somehow my sister and I didn't think we should take it because there would be big guys beating us up on our way to school and on our way back from school. They would physically beat us up and we were small".

The absence of her mother and a problematic relationship with the stepmother suggests that E experienced a lack of bonding with a mother figure. Moreover, the emotional distance of the father possibly created an early sense of independence in the mind of E and is at the root of her high need for achievement.

Personal Qualities

"As a consequence of my background I set very high expectations of myself and I set very high expectations for my daughter. However I have become better at moderating those expectations. For example, I think my daughter will be quite artistic but I want her to be able to have a balance and for me to be able to accept that balance. It's easier for me to do it for my daughter. It's harder for me in my own life. I think I have a very hard time moderating my behaviour. I work hard. I don't know how not to work hard. I don't know how to be laid back. I don't know how to do just enough at work to get by. I have to excel or nothing. I mean I just don't feel adequate if I don't put in my very best effort. I think success, my success, I think is down to hard work and I think that's the foundation. I work hard. I believe in giving it my all".

This statement reveals an individual who is 100% committed to excelling in the work place. She is driven to over-perform and to go beyond doing "just enough work to get by", confirming a key career strategy of successful women. The emphasis E places on hard work is visible through out the rest of this analysis and is clearly grounded in her childhood experiences.

E also displays self-confidence and an internal locus of control that has enabled her to take advantage of the opportunities that come her way underpinned by a sense that she will and can get the job done. E demonstrates these qualities in the following account, "the project I was working on was indigenized and I applied for the job as financial manager and I got it. That was really very cheeky of me because

you know, me and finance! But I passed two audits, set up the systems and trained a real accountant to come in. For the first nine months I was earning dollars and then after that they wanted me to become a fully local person. But I thought, 'If I want to go local let me do something where I'm not worried about getting caught as being a fake'. So I trained someone up for the project and then I got a job for consultancy A which was again business development orientated but across Africa".

Mentor / Role Models

E cites her female boss as both a role model and a mentor. She describes herself as lucky to have a very strong woman as her immediate supervisor. E identifies with her as a role model because "she is also the breadwinner of her family. She has three young children. The youngest is four. She's older than I am and her husband contributes to the family in other ways other than financially. So she sees herself in a lot of ways as a single mother because a lot of weight is put upon her". This sense of shared context is what allows E to see her boss as a role model. The boss also acts as a mentor but interestingly in a more diluted sense than the mentor's identified by the other interviewees. E experiences more of a peer-to-peer relationship with her mentor and their relationship hints of an informal support network with the two women leaning on each other for support at various times. E's mentor is explained as follows:

"She's accommodating as much as she can be towards my own position now as a single mother. But she's also extremely demanding because she has strict KPIs that are attached to mine. If I am not productive I impact her ability to be productive. So we have a dependent relationship. I will travel for her if she really needs to have time for her kids, if I can do the job. We're willing to do that for each other. But it's a personal agreement it's not necessarily a formal thing. It's a personal thing.

"I try not to abuse it and I only use it when absolutely necessary. Like I have to go on vacation this weekend because I am going through a divorce and I only have my daughter for half the holiday. And we're going through an extremely busy time at work. My boss can't go on holiday [because I am going] but she knows she can go another time and she has access to her kids at all times so I'm going. And it will be difficult for me and it is difficult for me because of my background. It's very difficult for me to leave things hanging. I hate to hand over to others. But that's what I've got

to do because I have to be with my child for the next two weeks. So I'm lucky that I have my boss because it would be very different with a guy who has a wife at home who is taking care of all the family commitments. He has only to do his work. So I am lucky".

E's mentor counteracts the lack of support and isolation that she might feel if she was working in an all male environment in which the guy "has a wife at home who is taking care of all the family commitments". Moreover, the combined roles of mentor and role model provide E with a sense of professional identity "she is also the breadwinner of her family" that builds self-confidence.

A Women's Network

When asked to comment further on the possibility of a women's network in the work place she says, "I don't have time to belong to a formal organisation, I really don't, but I have seen it expressed in more subtle ways in my place of work. I mean we have a kind of a sisterhood and we get together for coffee once in a while but it's not consistent but it is a light support system. We're all in different departments, we're all at different levels, there's very little in depth interaction. We all work hard and as soon as the bell rings we're all off trying to do the shopping, getting home to our kids and just trying to have a life".

E suggests that women's ability to network with one another in the place of work is limited by time pressures and the demands made upon them by their dual roles. This explains why E is oblivious to a men's network, if there is one, at her place of work. She says, "My work is not South African focused and so networking that I have to do has to be out in Africa, so I don't get much value out of a company golfing day. And besides I don't manage work / life balance very well so if I have spare time I do try and spend it with my daughter or with myself because I work from 8am-8pm everyday. If I see my daughter before she goes to bed I'm lucky, and if I can drop her off in the morning for school it's a joy. To spend four hours on a golf day talking to people that I know will not enhance my career or my life I don't have time for it".

Transformational Leadership Style

E emphasizes working with people when she describes her leadership style, suggesting that she follows a transformational style of leadership. She says, "I work very well with people. I can't do what I do without my team. If my team doesn't trust me and doesn't have respect for me I know that I will get shoddy results. I give people that I work with enough latitude to feel that their contribution is appreciated and valued but also that they are professionals like I am. I have got a very empowering management style. I work with professionals and I believe that the more responsibility you give people the more ownership they take over their area and the better the product, so I don't believe in a fully hands on approach.

"At the end of the day I know I'm responsible for the outcome so I need to be involved, but I do try to give people responsibility because I like my own independence. I like to make own judgments and to take responsibility for what I do. My attitude is that I am no better than the people who I work with I just happen to be the head of a particular project. If you give respect you get respect back. And I think I've got a few skills that help in my job as well, academically I think I've got the right background, but I'm also methodical and I do pay quite a bit of attention to detail even though I'm not controlling at all.

"I went to a convent school and I went to boarding school and I don't want to be in a strict environment at my work. We spend so much time at work that I believe in bringing people in. Even if it's a silly question I will bring people in. I ask people "what do you people think?" My boss may present me with a question or a really puzzling opportunity and I really want to get people's feedback. Even if I may know the answer it's amazing what you can get from people when you get them around the table. These people aren't under any pressure, it's not a deliverable, or rather it's not their deliverable it is my deliverable. And after all I work with professionals who have been employed because they bring something to the table and if you don't use them, what's the point?"

E identifies her leadership style as distinctly feminine when she says, "I think there is a difference between men and women's leadership styles. I've worked with men and women and I've really enjoyed working with the women. I've worked with extremely strong women and not so strong women so I'm not saying that all women are great managers. But I've found that women are driven in a very different way. They believe in really working with people as opposed to having people work for

them. I think that makes all the difference. I like to feel that people work with me as opposed to working for me. They don't call me boss and we have an equal relationship.

"I think women are a lot more sensitive and will try and make sure that everybody feels comfortable. It's hard work but it yields results. I also feel that men who may or may not be skilled at what they do, it's easier for them to exude confidence and intimidate people around them. And I don't think women would normally do that, I haven't had that experience with women.

"I've also found that men aren't such great communicators. For me, I like to know exactly what is required in a job. That usually necessitates an in depth discussion which could bring out areas where I feel that I could actually add value. Those areas may not be apparent if I'm just given a two-liner that says, 'would appreciate document on this subject'. It's far better to talk and ask what do we really want, what's the objective? In this respect I've felt that communication has always been better between a woman supervisor and me. I've felt that it's always been easier to say 'this is how we can enhance the process' as opposed to saying 'here's the report'. The openness of discussion can really benefit the final product.

"When you have difficulties one must never have a problem for asking to help and getting support from other people around it. Men are terrible at that. You find them in a little corner just stuck on one thing, whereas women are in a corner chatting over coffee, resolving an issue and getting buy in at the same time. I find some men do work independently and are also alone, whereas they could have had feedback and interaction and workshops and all sorts of things, you know over coffee or a quick break.

"I do find that men don't tend to bring other people on board and they like to take credit for the deliverable. I've had men at my work place ask me what my opinion is on a certain project that I am working on and then they regurgitate what I have said and send it to the CEO and claim it as their opinion. The CEO will call me and he will say, 'This project that you are working on, so-and-so says that we should be doing this ...' and then you feel like a stupid idiot saying 'that was my idea' so you have to overcome that. One shouldn't be afraid of saying 'actually that was my idea and in fact I can enhance it by doing something more'. So you have to have balls

especially when there are people that you are working with who see work as a competition. And that's when you have to roll up your sleeves and say, 'this is what I am able to do'. But it's rare, if I have to do it then I do it but you know it's the game".

E's leadership style works for her in a team-centric environment that encourages collaboration and participation. However, when individuals seek to take advantage of her openness E is forced to be more combative which is where the masculine takes over she says, "you have to have balls". She talks of her boss being in "an extremely elevated position and there are people who will try and cut her down, but she is strong and she has had to come out strongly, come out fighting, which is more energy that anyone wants to expend ... but a woman comes back extremely harsh because she too". This last comment suggests that women in senior positions can experience significantly higher levels of tiredness and stress than their male counterparts due to their gender.

A Career Strategy

E comments that, "a lot of women are very good at certain things but feel inhibited in some way or another. They feel that it is not their place to show how good they are because they don't want to show another woman up or even worse put a man down. I think if you are yourself and if you do have good things that you can showcase then you shouldn't hesitate. It's a way of getting ahead without having to fight for it. It's just about demonstrating what you can do'. She suggests that women should be 'confident enough to know that you can do the job as well as anyone else, and other people are just as stupid as you are and that you are here to learn. You can only learn if you are willing to accept your weaknesses and see opportunities for growth via those weaknesses'.

Overcoming Racism

Interestingly, E experiences, in a South African context, an anti-African sentiment that is less to do with racism and more to do with xenophobia. She comments that she has "experienced from my black colleagues quite a lot of animosity. It's sort of a lack of understanding of who I am and maybe less interest in what I bring to the table. I was once accosted by a senior person within my first year or two at the [telecoms company]. I was told quite rudely that the white South Africans who were

running the company felt that they could fool the black South Africans by putting a black face, like me, in a senior position. She told me that I did not meet the empowerment criteria and never would and that I should also feel some kind of guilt because I did nothing towards the alleviation of apartheid. I did not take part in the struggle, they did, and it's unfair that I should come and be the person to reap the rewards. And even though I had felt some of this tension nobody had ever actually come to me. In fact this particular person felt that she had had some bad experiences where people had been very arrogant about their access to education and their exposure to the world. I came back with 'look I have made a commitment to South Africa. I have chosen to be in South Africa. I have married a South African and my child is South African. I could live anywhere in the world if I wanted too but I have chosen to live here'.

"But those kinds of attitudes have never impeded my career. I would never let it. I've always been the odd person out in schools, or work or wherever and I think you could dwell on being the odd person out and take any negativity that comes your way personally but you will never get above a certain level. So I take it. People say that I give in too easily or I take a lot of crap but that's fine because I know that I have got my eye on the bigger picture and if I want to achieve there are some things that I will want to make a compromise on. So if someone is personally upset with me I don't let it impact my big picture. I deal with it and I move on. There are some things that get me down but you know if you can't deal with it, you might as well give up now".

This attitude towards racism is similar to the attitude that women need to adopt in order to overcome the glass ceiling and that is the refusal to recognize obstacles as barriers to success. Xenophobic attitudes have never impeded her career because "she would never let it".

Women & Diversity

E advocates the appointment of more women in her place of work. Currently the telecoms company employs as low as an eighth of women in senior positions. She suggests that the company could do with more women but also "more international representation. We have two francophone countries [in which we are doing business] and I'm the only person at headquarters that can speak French and I'm

not fluent. We may at some point have a business in an Arab speaking country but we have nobody who understands Arabia or speaks Arabic. Or we may need someone who can speak Portuguese for Mozambique or Angola and so on. So we need to become, especially at the senior level, an international company. We need to look at having more women or rather more international women or people on board so we can absolutely be more diversified and add value to our operations at the right level”.

The value of women in the workplace, for E, is in adding diversity to the company so that it becomes strengthened by a variety of different skills sets. She evaluates that “women add value but I don’t think they’re any better than men because at the end of the day business is worried about its financial success”. However, she does advocate that ‘special efforts and targets should be made to force change in the organisation’ suggesting that the promotion and retention of women in the organisation be a pro-active activity rather than one of muted support.

Work / Life Balance

E judges that she does not balance her life very well. “I have a lot of external help that you can only get on the continent. I have a fantastic Nanny whom I’ve known since way before I got married and she’s a part of my family. She has been my daughter’s Nanny since my daughter was five weeks old so they have a very firm bond between them. Although she is literate she’s unfortunately not that well educated so she’s unable to help my daughter with her homework. So now I have employed an au pair who is college educated and who can drive. She picks up my daughter from school because I am unable too and she does homework with my daughter and they also practice music together. But I have a lot of out goings in terms of employing these two people”.

E is able to outsource her child-rearing responsibilities to a support network that provides for her daughter which allows E to her work. Unusually this commitment to work appears to have been accelerated and not diluted by the birth of her daughter. When her daughter was four months old E began work with her current employee. She claims to have “started traveling a lot for my job when my daughter was only five months old. I was still breastfeeding. I went to Burundi, Cameroon, Rwanda and Ivory Coast. But joining the telecoms company was a real shift in gear for me.

Usually women will downsize when they have a baby but I ended upsizing. Mainly because my husband was an artist and didn't have great earning power and influenced by my background, you know I don't take responsibility lightly. I would have loved to have sat and enjoyed my child's infancy but I actually felt very anxious about making ends meet. I always felt it was up to me to make those ends meet with very little assistance from my husband. I knew that if I wasn't great at my job I would always be mediocre and I didn't want to ever be in a position where I didn't have a job. I knew that everything that my child needed depended on me. At the end of the day to be perfectly honest I knew that at some point I would probably divorce my husband and I had to make sure that I had laid a foundation for myself and my child that would be sustainable, so yes, I was very driven". The burden of being a single mother who is the breadwinner for her child drives E to work hard at her job and to overcome the feelings of guilt that some women feel when they prioritize their career over family, she strongly asserts that "my role as a working mother is for me unquestionable".

5.6 F

Background

F was raised in a small village in and is the last of eight children, although unfortunately three of her brothers and one of her sisters passed away. She grew up in a family of four children. Her father was a businessman in the village. He owned a general dealer stores. Her mother was a domestic housekeeper who lived with her employees. As a consequence F's mother was absent for her early childhood year. However, as soon as her parents had accumulated enough money to put their children through school her mother returned to the village and worked with her father in the local store.

Influences

F "can't really say whether I identified with one of my parents more than the other' although she does suggest that she experienced feelings of independence early on in her life. Firstly, her mother was away for much of her early years providing an absence of excessively motherly love and her father is described as a distant

character 'because culturally of course ... you tend to give the male a lot of space and respect'. In addition, F was raised as an only child, staying 'at home whilst my elder sisters studied or were away at boarding school'. Both parents died before F had reached her 19th birthday, possibly fuelling her sense of independence and internal drive.

F recalls her mother being a very strict character, a perfectionist. She is described as the type of person who "wanted things to be done the right way or not at all. She was a disciplinarian but I am so grateful that she brought us up the way she did, because we managed ... to keep that discipline going". Indeed, self-discipline is a re-occurring theme in the life of F and is further documented below.

Personal Qualities

F does not overtly list her personal qualities but it is clear from the accounts she tells of herself at work that she has high levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and a high locus of control identified in the literature review as the key qualities of successful women. Throughout her work history she has displayed the ability to seize the initiative and create opportunities (see below). She has displayed the ability to overcome obstacles but refusing to accept them as barriers to her success. Given that F is black she has had to work hard to overcome a double set of prejudices and she has done so by outperforming her peers. For example, the story of her encounter with a racist lecturer (told in more detail below) reveals her fighting spirit and her strategy of overcoming her critics by always performing better than expected. At the end of three-month course she received a gold credit matched only by one other woman. This approach reveals a woman who does not look for barriers but rather when she encounters them seeks to overcome them.

Seizing & Creating Opportunity

F has proven herself adept at making the most of the opportunities that come her way. She describes herself as "having angels around me, angels that have given me opportunities and when I've been given those opportunities I've really embraced them". She has done so by working hard and ensuring that at every turn she works hard. She says of the time that she was sent on a training course by the hotel group

that she worked for, “I worked really hard on that training program. I went back to the hotel and implemented the system and it all worked out very well”.

F has not only made the best of the opportunities that were handed to her but she has also created her own opportunities by “identifying gaps where I can add some value. If there is a gap to fill, then fill it. It will put a lot of pressure on you, a lot of stress on you, but look upon it as an opportunity and say, “someone is not fulfilling this role for a reason”. This view supports the findings of DiDio (1998) who found that successful women are self-empowered and self-determined, they do not wait to be told what they can and can’t do and instead seize the initiative. An example of how F makes the most of opportunities handed to her, as well as creates her own opportunities through self-determination is portrayed in the following story.

F is working for an airline company that is struggling with its new launched private jet service.

“The jet had made about three trips when the MD stepped into my office almost shaking. He was basically about to be fired. The preliminary flights had been really unsuccessful. He put a report onto my desk and said ‘read this and come into my office in one hours’ time with a recommendation’. I read the report and when I stepped into his office he said ‘the next trip is in four weeks time and I am going to be flying the airplane (because he was also a pilot) and you are going to be flying with me as the cabin crew, so go and get yourself a license’.

“I went back to my desk and I was pretty upset. The MD had been really aggressive with me, but still, I phoned around and organized training for myself in emergency aviation medicine, swimming training, fire training and so on. I got the license, told the MD and he was over the moon. I also did some investigating. Having done marketing & sales I had formed some good relationships with some high level individuals (government ministers and so on) through PR work. I interviewed them as customers and found out what their likes and dislikes were. I then went to the MD and said, ‘this is the situation. Am I empowered to make decisions around certain issues or not? If you want this venture to be a success you have to empower me’ and so he did. I fired the caterer for instance. Someone had contracted a Swiss caterer that just weren’t equipped to serve our customers. They would serve gourmet food whereas our customers wanted pap and meat. I even interviewed the

President's chef to find out what his favorite foods were, so that we could serve it to him on a journey. Anyway the next flight was a real success. The President even went so far as to ask for me to be present every time he flew on our jet. That was very flattering but I made it clear to the company that cabin crewing wasn't my job but that I would do cabin attendance if the President was flying. I did it for PR purposes for the airline".

F is very conscious of pursuing opportunity and maximizing her exposure to the business. She comments that "I've always done things that have widened my scope. For me it is essential to broaden your knowledge so that you can contribute to other divisions or businesses within the group. For example, last night [a colleague] called me. She 's going on leave and she asked me to cover for her in Nigeria, Morocco and Egypt whilst she's away. At first I said I needed to think about it and that I would get back to her. I bought myself some time to apply my mind to it. I thought, 'Maybe this is an opportunity to understand the issues in different countries in Africa'. It ties in nicely with a conversation that I was having with my boss the other day ... [she] wants me to be willing to take over HR for Africa ... so the request that came in yesterday fits into my game plan. Although the whole thing will put more pressure on me because it means no social life and it means my kids are going to suffer". A former boss once described her as, "... a slave driver. My staff knew I was a slave driver. My HR meetings would start at 2.00pm on a Friday and sometimes they would carry on till late at night. And then I would say, 'we need to close the week and we need to prepare for next week, so let's do it'".

Mentoring

F benefited from an informal relationship with a mentor who was critical in promoting her advancement in the company. A story that encapsulates her relationship with her key mentor, the confidence he gave her and the career breaks the relationship lent her is presented below.

"When I started working for the airline there was a guy called Z who joined soon after me. Z was my boss but he was based in Jo'burg. Somehow he recognized something in me. He was very old and he saw me as something of a daughter but in those days this was a very delicate relationship. It was unheard to have a black face working at the kind of level I was in the airline industry. But he really had a heart. He

was an honest person. He would sit down and open up and tell you if he wasn't happy with your performance. He would always try and make you see the other side of the argument, rather than be subjective and look at your own side.

"Z presented me with some great opportunities. I remember one time when we were due to give a tourism presentation to some foreign business leaders. He asked me to put the presentation together for him. I had to go out and research and prepare the presentation. The first day we were hosting the Americans, the second day we would talk to the Europeans and then the third and fourth days were reserved for the Asians. We worked on the presentation together and went back and forth on various revisions. After it was done he invited me to help him with the presentation. He did the first and the second presentations and then after that he wrote a note to me and said, 'I have a very important call. If I'm not back you must run with the presentation'. I felt like I was going to throw up. Of course he didn't come back and so I had to stand up to do the presentation. That was the worst. I will never forget it. I was so scared. I thought my voice wouldn't come out but of course once you start the presentation your mind is diverted and you forget about the nerves. Then before I knew it I saw A. He was standing right at the back of the room and he was holding up both his thumbs, as a way of congratulating me.

"This was a great experience because Z had obviously planned for me to do the presentations, but he had planned it without exposing me. Some managers expose you. They put you on the spot when you're not ready. He didn't do that. From that day my confidence really excelled. After that I flew overseas and I did a lot of presentation and exhibition work for the airline, which allowed me to win a lot of respect within the company.

"Early on Z drove me to succeed and I really didn't want to let him down. I didn't want to disappoint him. This was a man who against all the odds recognized me as a female and as a black female. In a way he risked his profession by taking me under his wing and I was like 'I can't disappoint him'. Every night before I went to bed I would close my eyes and think of something to do with work and then I'd be like 'no, I can't leave it for tomorrow', so I would jump out of bed and I would do whatever needed to be done because I could not bear to disappoint him".

Echoing the sentiments of the other interviewees it appears that the key to a successful mentor relationship is someone who does not expose you to the company at large, providing a safe space in which an individual can build their confidence and skills. F reflects on this element of a successful mentoring relationship when she observes of herself, "I try hard in my current position to recognize people with potential and with the correct attitude and to give them opportunity in a safe environment. It can really kill people's confidence if you expose them too early".

Self-Awareness

F appears to have made a conscious effort to be aware of her abilities and qualities in the context of a working environment and to strategically plan her career. She says of her first job break, "I started off running the reservation office in town and within two years time I was asked to take over the marketing & sales of the area. That's when I started to think 'okay I need to get a three year diploma in marketing'. I didn't tell the company what I was doing. I just went off and did it. I studied part time again". Upon receiving an early promotion she says, "at the time I asked myself, 'what is it that I have? Because I've been given an opportunity without the skills-set to back it up'". When considering a three-year degree in administration she says "it was always a very conscious decision for me to be able to profile myself and take advantage of my opportunities. I looked at my life and I thought, 'I have been recognized even though I don't have anything behind me' but I also thought 'this luck will not be with you forever' and so I considered what I could do to raise my competitive advantage. I was always looking out for what I could do differently from other people so that I could get recognized".

This ability consciously to assess her position in the company and to work towards maximizing her offering is a key attribute of F. It is her motivation for pursuing part time education and continuous reinvestment in her career.

Learning / Education

F's career path is characterized by a continuous commitment to education with a view to improving her skills. F has been in and out of part-time education for most of her working life. She has pursued education not at the behest of her employer but

driven by her own initiative and by her own admission that, “you can never know everything. Even if you have to steal with your eyes – then learn”.

F successfully completed her matric in 1976, “which was a difficult time in South Africa’s history. The Soweto Uprisings made school life quite unstable so it was quite an achievement to even get my matric”. Thereafter she took a couple of short-term courses whilst working as a receptionist in a hotel group. She says of the time, “the [hotel group] trained me a little but I wanted something more formal something that I could actually say was a skill of mine. So I registered for a one-year course in marketing. I did that part time. I used to hop onto a taxi from town x into Jo’burg every Saturday morning and then I would hop back. I could have done it via correspondence but I really wanted to benefit from the interactive elements of learning. The learning part of the course takes part in the classroom where you are challenging each other’s point of view, when reading a book on your own that’s your only point of view. I used to think to myself ‘I have got one day off a week and I’m going to use it’. I used to work six days a week so on Sundays I would be back in the office but every Saturday without fail I came to Jo’burg to do the course. My husband and my in-laws (who we were staying with) were very supportive. I wouldn’t have survived without them”.

After moving to the airline company and running the reservation office she was asked to take over the marketing & sales. “That’s when I started to think, ‘okay I need to get a three year diploma in marketing’. I didn’t tell the company what I was doing. I just went off and did it. I studied part time again. The company only learnt about what I was up to when there was this marketing conference on in Jo’burg and I wanted the company to sponsor a free flight so that I could attend it. I went to the MD and told them I was studying and that there was this interesting conference on and could I go? The MD responded by saying ‘wow, we were not aware of this’. Immediately he organized the airline to book me a ticket and they paid for my three days in Jo’burg. I think they were really impressed that I had taken the initiative to invest in myself”.

This commitment to part time education went on throughout her time at the airline. She says, “I had applied for and won a scholarship at [a leading business school in America] and I went on a leadership development program there for six weeks. I remember flying back from America and thinking that I had so much to learn. You

know in a comfortable work environment you can easily become big headed and you can think, 'I am getting all this recognition and I am great'. But in the classroom nobody knows who you are or what you've achieved and they just treat you relative to how you behave in the classroom.

"The leadership course fired me up to do my MBA part time. The company sponsored me. Every Tuesday and Thursday night I would go off to my classes. I completed my MBA and was then selected for a scholarship in another senior management program with a college in the UK so I went over to the UK and I did a three-month senior management program".

This pursuit of education is a career strategy that is directly linked to her commitment to over-performance, doing not just that is required to get the job done but doing more in order to get noticed and to prove one's worth against a backdrop of societal and organisational culture that may dictate otherwise.

Her drive to succeed despite the odds is driven by F's fear of failure, she says, "Failure is a nightmare for me. For instance, I've really struggled with the fact that my marriage failed and that that is somehow a reflection on me. I probably should have dealt with my marriage differently in hindsight in order to invest in that marriage but I definitely have the 'am I going to fail?' complex. Recognition for me is also important. I'm not saying recognition in terms of people saying 'wow' but it's about self-recognition, for me to say 'well done girl, despite the odds you made it' that's enough for me".

Over-performance

F has used over-performance as a means of over coming sexism and racism in the workplace. The following story demonstrates her belief that in order to break through barriers and assert her value she consistently exceeds performance expectations.

F is on a company sponsored training course in Johannesburg.

"In the South Africa of the 1980s it was unusual to have a black face working in the airline business. I remember one awful time when I was sent by the airline onto a

course that was based in Jo'burg. It was a three-month course and those three months this one white lecturer could not or would not look me in the eye. If I had to ask a question he would pretend he hadn't heard until my colleague would ask the question on my behalf. Then he would respond but he would respond to my colleague rather than to me.

"From our office there were three of us enrolled on this course. One of them was a white woman, one of them was colored and there was me. After the first week on this course the colored woman and I wanted to go home because the environment was absolutely unbearable. We were made to feel like we were nothing, absolutely nothing. I remember one night we stayed up crying until about 2am. And then one day we made a decision to say, "No, we are better than this. We are going to be above this and we're staying". We aggressively adopted a strategy to say, "I have left my family. I am in Jo'burg. I can't go back and be a quitter. Rather than spend the whole time crying we are going to study". At the end of the three months we both got gold. No one else on the course got gold. Our lecturer had to shake our hands and that was the first time that he looked me in the eye".

F says she is "always are of having to prove my worth. For instance, in the beginning of my career I used to spend quite a lot of time preparing for meetings and presentations. My fear was always, 'what is someone asks this question?' and I found that fear put a lot of stress on me. I created a database at home where I used to store all my information. I definitely worked harder as a woman. You have too. You are conscious about what the men are thinking about you. If you're a woman, if you're a black woman, you have to work harder to show that you are not a token. It's a real challenge. On Monday morning we will come in here and the guys will be fooling around before a meeting and they won't be prepared, whereas I will be working on Sunday afternoon making sure that I am very well prepared".

Leadership Style

F displays a leadership style that can be described as transformative. The emphasis is on working with people, teamwork and encouraging others to excel. She describes her leadership style as "generally ... participative. I like engaging people. I like coming up with ideas. I think I'm creative but I need to involve people to say 'this is what I'm thinking, what do you think' and start breaking it down until it is in pieces

and in doing that people add value to the idea. I also work with people. I embrace change and I'm open-minded but I'm not a walk over and when called upon I can be firm. I've also always worked within a team environment. I am also able to challenge issues without challenging the person".

However, F identified that, 'there are situations when you need to make a decision. You can't call meeting after meeting. So for project work I will engage people but if there's an executive decision that needs to be taken that I will take it, it's my call and I make that decision. I then inform people that maybe affected by that decision or may be influenced by that decision.

"For example, I have recently worked on a sexual harassment case that has involved a very senior manager. It has been a very sensitive issue in the company. Until a decision was made I kept the matter to myself. This individual resigned (an outcome that I had pushed for) and I knew that that would really shake things up. I immediately informed the stakeholders in Europe about what was happening. I had to be strategic in terms of the stakeholders that I engaged with. I needed people to support my position in case others turned against me. At the same time I knew that the resignation would become hot gossip in the company. So I called in my HR team and I said to them "this is the situation, this is what you need to know, this is the decision, these were the challenges, these are the messages that are coming from other divisions" and I asked them to manage it whilst they were sitting in the smoking room. I asked them not to be part of the speculation. I also didn't want them to be taken by surprise.

"So I think my strength is really working with people and giving people the bigger picture. I don't make demands of people, I try and give them the context in which they are working so that they are able to contribute. I don't want to limit people's potential nor do I want to deny the company or myself the opportunity to benefit from an employee's potential".

An example of her leadership style is demonstrated by the following account.

F is the divisional manager of [airline company]. Political change is upon South Africa and the company is trying to implement 'quick win's for black people in areas such as cabin attendance and ground crew.

"The challenge was managing people's expectations. A lot of the black employees felt that I was going to be on their side and hand out favors to them, whereas the white employees felt vulnerable and threatened by change. So I had to be very sensitive.

"One day I told my boss that I was going to have a race meeting because I was tired of this really terrible vibe in the office. I told him I was going to have two meetings, one with the blacks and one with the whites because I wanted to tell the truth – I didn't think I could be completely direct if I had blacks and whites in a mixed group. Besides we were trying to build a team across racial divides and to have everyone in the same room together would not have been helpful. I called in the black employees and I said, 'the truth must be told today'. I said, 'Guys - what are you doing? Don't think that you have arrived because of the color of your skin. You have got to work hard. You've got to show people that you can make it. If you don't take this responsibility you are going to ruin this opportunity for yourself and for others. Don't think about it as your own future - think about it as the future of the country. I'm not here to hand out jobs to people who aren't qualified. I'm sorry, that's not my agenda. But I will try as hard as I can to make sure that the environment is conducive for you to excel so you are not going to be set up for failure. I will be there for you, but you've got to work for it yourself. The reality is that this is South Africa. You can leave this airline and join another company but these are the issues that we have to deal with so be mature enough to develop a strategy to deal with it in a non confrontational manner'. Then I walked out and I went into the second meeting with the other group. I felt very relieved after these meetings.

"Some people were very angry with me and the way I came across but after a few days I was getting feedback from people that actually said "you were right". They still weren't happy with me but over time it got a lot better. I was managing about a third of the airline at that time, with about 800 people reporting to me. I dealt a lot with these kinds of issues. I was forever trying to facilitate between people and them work as a team".

F asserts that being successful in a leadership position is "really about being who you are, and being a woman, bringing the element of being a woman to the work place. I find that as women we get challenged all the time and we tend to want to

become men. Because men have created the culture - we feel we have to fit in. So we have to try and be heard and sometimes being heard means being taken seriously, and there are times when you have to really be assertive and you have to push your way. But as many times as possible you should try and relate to people as humans, don't be confrontational because you don't want to bruise their ego, but you have your facts, and your facts must be right in order to be taken seriously".

F demonstrates that she has successfully managed to balance a women's managerial style with a male managerial style by fusing quantitative elements traditionally equated with being feminine "bring that soft element to work" with more qualitative elements traditionally equated with being masculine, such as knowing your facts (demonstrating technical skill) and by being decisive when the situation calls for it. This blending of the feminine and the masculine is characterized by the following comment, "I believe in a company that uses its heart and its head, you have to go back to the head all the time but it's the how you are at work that's important".

In terms of a leadership style that works, she advises women "not to be confrontational because you don't want to bruise their ego" this researcher presumes she is talking about the male ego. Perhaps she does so by "challenging the issue and not the person", an insight that provides a useful approach to other women hoping to achieve her level of success. In addition, she maintains that women must retain their authenticity in the workplace.

Challenging Sexism

F recounts an incident of sexual harassment at her present company. As the recently appointed head of HR, F felt it was incumbent upon her to pursue this matter with vigour and to challenge the boy's club that she felt was operating at the company. Her account is as follows.

"We are fortunate at this company now as the country's CEO is a female and the Financial Director is female. When I started here there was an issue of a sexual harassment case that had been pending for many months. When I arrived I looked at the case and started calling the people that had lodged their grievances and I was like amazed at the attitude taken by the company. I had to sit down with the

CEO and the FD and I said, 'I'm sorry guys. You cannot expect this to disappear. It is here with us and if we don't fight it and create a positive environment for women to work in then we are allowing these harassment issues to actually pass us by'. I just refused to be a part of it. I insisted that we follow the process. The feeling that I had was that there was a boy's club at the company. I suggested that an independent arbitrator come in and assess the facts and the case is now at the CCMA. The man who allegedly committed the sexual harassment was like 'you know what, it's been done before. The last person just got a letter'. So sometimes you've just got to really shake things up for people to take issues seriously. It makes you unpopular in the short term but if you are consistent in applying your principles then it makes you popular. I am a disciplinarian and I did get that from my mother. If I want to be respected I need to treat people fairly and be consistent in how people are treated". This sense of egalitarianism, of leveling the playing field so that each person has an opportunity to excel is a key characteristic of F and is possibly born out of her own discriminatory history as a young black women growing up in apartheid South Africa. Her account demonstrates how company's need to overtly tackle issues of racism and sexism and how tolerating either leads to comments from senior managers such as "well you know what, it's been done before. The last person just got a letter".

Work / Life Balance

"I made sure that I have a good support system at home. When I was traveling overseas a lot my husband was not there, but I had a good neighbor who was a second mother for my kids and I had a good housekeeper. I invested in them because I knew without them I would not survive. I would be traveling and having sleepless nights worrying about my kids but they were brilliantly taken care of by these two women. When we moved to Jo'burg I had to create a structure that would facilitate my work. I have friends that I rely on and that have since become part of my family. But I also have my helper who has been with me forever, and without her I would not survive. For me to be able to be productive I need to make sure that my kids are taken care of because then the company can have 100% of me'.

6. Cross-analysis

This section cross analyses the experiences of the sample group and makes comparisons with the literature review. Given the size of the sample and the nature by which the co-researchers were selected, caution is exercised in applying generalisations from the sample to the population. Instead generalisations are made about the sample group whilst maintaining a focus on the specifics of individual context and story. To this extent the research is as preoccupied with exploring the differences amongst the sample group as it is with identifying the similarities.

* * *

As an introductory comment it is worth noting that prior to the research it was clear that each woman had previously reflected on her role as a woman in the world of work. Whilst some questions inevitably challenged the co-researcher's perspective and gave rise to an emergent discussion between researcher and co-researcher, more often than not each interviewee demonstrated a thorough understanding and self conscious awareness of her gender and the challenges it has, or has not, imposed on their career. As C says, "If there were more of us [women] we wouldn't think so much about it". This serves to underline the importance of understanding a woman's challenge in the workplace and to recognize what it is that women think so much about.

6.1 Characteristics

What are the characteristics of successful female executives?

6.1.1 Early Independence

With the exception of C the interviewees reported an unusual relationship with their parents that in some instances could be considered to be problematic (White *et al*, 1997). These unusual family histories may have precipitated an early separate sense of identity in the interviewees, causing a high need for achievement and generating a strong sense of independence (Gilligan, 1982). B and D were both separated from their

parents for extended periods of time and both suggested that their situations encouraged early independence. A grew up with a distant father figure and a mother who was reticent in terms of expressing affection (Kagan & Moss, 1962). Both E and F reported childhoods separated from their mothers. E's mother was continuously absent for her childhood whereas F's mother returned to the home only after having earned the money to send her children to school. C, who was the only individual to have experienced a normal childhood, i.e. growing up with both parents continuously present reported the strongest identification with the father out of all the interviewees suggesting a loosening of the sex role stereotypes (Hennig & Jardim, 1978).

6.2 Qualities

What are the key personal qualities displayed by successful, including their approach to work / life balance and their levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and locus of control?

6.2.1 Work Life Balance

Three of the six interviewees are married, one is divorced, one is in the process of becoming divorced and the last is unmarried. The married women described their partners as supportive of their careers (White *et al*, 1992). A and C both earn more than their partners and A suggested that, "if one of us were to give up our jobs, it would be him". C's status as the breadwinner of the family is less certain. She suggested that once her husband's business was up and running, she would downsize her work commitments and spend more time with the children. Both of these women are new mothers with children under the age of one. It is no surprise then that of all the interviewees A and C spoke the most about the challenges of work / life balance. The other married woman, D, is on her second marriage and has no children. Her relationship with her second husband appears equitable as they both work.

The other divorcees, E and F have children that are older than A and C's. Both women take on the responsibility of being the breadwinners for their children. Both women mentioned the sacrifices that they have made in order

to be successful in their careers. E said that, “if I see my daughter before she goes to bed I’m lucky” and F acknowledged that a potential promotion means that “my kids are going to suffer”. E and F are particularly good at compartmentalizing their lives and delegating childrearing responsibilities (White *et al*, 1997) using nannies, au pairs and a network of friends to support them. Delegating has allowed them to put their careers first. When E’s baby was born she took on a demanding role that required her to travel frequently, as too did F who noticed that “there were lots of women at the lower levels but fewer women in management positions [where] there was a lot of traveling required ...”. F managed her time so that she could travel and push herself up the career ladder.

Comments made by E and F suggested that the compartmentalization and dedication to career comes at a price, i.e. time with their children and possibly, the success of their marriages. They have made the choices around work / life balance that A and C, who have younger children, are now struggling with. C debated her new role as a mother and the visible commitment that is required for her present job. For C the issue is not one of freeing herself from the feelings of guilt that come from having a child (Dawson & Kleiner, 1992) but rather of fulfilling her desire to be with her child. “I think I underestimated just how much love you can feel for a little human as a mother, someone who is just so dependent on you”. The desire to be with her children is what drove C to seek alternative employment. Contemplating a new position she commented that, “I’ve said up front that I won’t be in the office before 8.30am and I won’t be in the office after 4.30pm ... perhaps it’s easier to establish your boundaries when people see you from day one as a working mother”.

Establishing boundaries is what A had to do after her return to work from maternity leave. A now arrives to work at 8.30am and leaves at 5.30pm. A appears more comfortable with her role as a working mother than C. Whilst A admits she underestimated the emotional pull of having children and the affect it would have on her career (leading her to ‘self cap’) she nevertheless places the emphasis on her career (White *et al*, 1997; Dawson & Kleiner, 1992). She said that she doesn’t “feel guilt about not seeing my baby enough ... but I feel like I am shortchanging my job”.

A and C feel that they need to put in visible working hours at the office. Both women leave the office at around 5.30pm but put in extra hours in the evening when their children are asleep. However, because this work is unseen co-workers do not appreciate it equally. A's colleagues make jest when they ask her "half day?" as she leaves the office at 5.30pm and C is often made to feel uncomfortable for checking out at this time, "what I'm finding is that I've got to apologise for leaving at 5pm. I will have to say 'excuse me, I actually need to go'". These comments points to corporate cultures that only partially endorse flexible working hours, supporting Allen's (2001) warning that "organisations ... need to provide an authentic environment that supports these policies otherwise [they] may not have the intended effect".

Whether single, married or divorced - all the women recognised the challenge of balancing the demands of work with family and time for themselves. In discussing work / life balance A described it as the biggest challenge facing her at work, particularly now that she has a baby. B commented that, "women typically want to give their best in everything" and that when combining work with motherhood she "would imagine that one would suffer". C commented that, "a lot of women instinctively know that they are going to be short changing somebody if they try to do a demanding job and try to do the family thing. It's hard enough to get the balance right anyway, so why not put a cap on the job you can reasonable expect to do yourself?" D speculated that women find it harder to balance work and life roles because they are, on the whole, natural integrators. She said, "I think men tend to go home and forget the office. But women tend to integrate work and private life. Flexibility between home and work is very important to me. And I don't think men need that type of thing as much as women do". She puts this down to women "integrating their intellect and their emotions more than men do. They have observed their mothers integrate work and home life. Women have always had to do that integrating and balancing. And they have to find time for themselves, which is a huge challenge, because women tend to prioritize work or family before themselves".

E suggested that the struggle to maintain a work / life balance may be one reason why women do not form official networking systems amongst themselves, such as men do with company golf days. She said, “we all work hard and as soon as the bell rings we’re all off trying to do the shipping, getting home to our kids and just trying to have a life ... I don’t get much value out of a company golfing day ... and besides ... if I have spare time I do try and spend it with my daughter”. Likewise C in describing her relationship with her colleagues commented that, “if we weren’t so busy we could probably be friends”.

These comments suggest that the inter-dependence of work and family does have great implications for women. A, C, E and F suggested that they experienced much greater family demands than the men in their lives and therefore “encountered far more difficulty in fulfilling both work and family obligations” (Widrich, 1992).

The underlying assumption that “the effect of work on the family is negative” (Widrich, 1992) was reflected in the views of the sample. F suggested her children would suffer if she took on an additional work role and A would refuse a promotion (involving additional hours or traveling) on the grounds that “there’s a genetic thing between mother and child”. C suggested that women trying to combine a high-powered job with the demands of a family life would suffer. She also commented that “the only reason I am back at work is because I found an [excellent] nanny” and that her son is “probably getting care than he would even from me”. Despite not having children B imagined that women who combine work and family would suffer.

E is the only woman with a child who made a comment on work / life balance and did not draw a negative correlation between work and family. Whilst she lamented the loss of time spent with her daughter she was unapologetic in her dedication to her career, believing that she was providing the best life for her daughter, “I knew that everything that my child needed depended on me ... so I was [and am] very driven”. She described her role as a working mother as beyond question. As Dawson & Kleiner (1992) suggested, it is doubtful whether men, who mostly make a serious commitment early on in

their lives to have a career, experience such negative feelings about the trade-off between work and family life.

Finally, both C and D support Venter's (1997) view that organisations wishing to retain female employees and particularly female managers must change their corporate environment. For C this involves not just paying, as she puts it, "lip service" to flexible working hours but a corporate culture that actively supports working parents. Otherwise, she says, the company tells you "8 hours is okay, but they still want the 12 hours out of you ... and you suffer ... everyone says, 'you can have it all' but nobody is saying 'we will pick up the different pieces of the equation to try and make this possible'". C advocates job sharing in order for women in senior positions to maintain their seniority and stay on a career trajectory whilst balancing their work / life commitments. D suggested that "if organisations can reach a point where they can allow flexibility for women then they would be better at retaining women. But I think it is very hard for the men to let go of the corporate framework that they are working within". After all the dominant organisational culture is a male one that caters for men who "tend to want to work in a more directed and defined way ... get [the task] done and then do the next thing" whereas "women can do a lot more in less time and manage multiple projects". D is suggesting that what needs to change is not women's character traits or working practices but rather the corporate cultures (Bennis, 1997).

In summary, work / life balance dominated the conversations of many of the women. In particular A and C, who recently returned to work as new mothers, underestimated the impact that having a child would have on their careers and their willingness to work visible long hours. Both of the women discussed self-capping their careers, i.e. they did not wish to move any further up the career ladder. To varying degrees the motivation for self-capping was attributed to time with family and a corporate culture geared towards recognizing traditional working practices. The other women with children, E and F managed their work / life balance in favor of work and had reconciled themselves to spending less time with their families. Both women went out of their way to travel, to prove their availability for high profile positions and to build home support systems. The two women without

children spent less time discussing work / life balance but nevertheless supported a different style of working that was not commonly catered for in the conventional organisations.

All the women suggested that organisations should adopt more flexible working practices and recognize that most women may have a different way of working from most men. This involved taking active steps to support women. Finally, three of the six women presented work / life balance as an explanation for the lack of a formal, regular female network to rival that of the 'old men's club'. The women in this study appear simply too busy to spend Saturday's on the golf course or to attend after work functions.

6.2.2 Personal Qualities

The interviewees displayed very similar personal qualities upon which their careers have been founded. All the women demonstrated a strong sense of self-efficacy, self-control and self-confidence, (Ragins *et al*, 1998; White *et al*, 1997; Rotter, 1996, Keown & Keown, 1982; Dawson & Kleiner, 1992). The co-researchers generally attributed their success to hard work, tenacity and critically a willingness to take advantage of opportunities that were presented to them. Interviewee A demonstrated how she created opportunities through working hard and being open to new experiences. Likewise C created the opportunity to become CEO (an offer which she declined) through her dogged pursuit of what she felt to be right. She says, "I've never sat down and said that I want to be the CEO. My approach is rather, 'okay well here's something that needs to be done, nobody is doing it, there is a gap, let me fill it'".

D never said no to any opportunity that arose and had the internal resolve to overcome significant organisational bias. This is a similar approach to E who after the birth of her young child took on a working role with increased commitments and traveled frequently, indicating her willingness to take on challenging assignments (Keown & Keown, 1982; Ragins *et al*, 1998).

F consciously worked harder than others in order to overcome both racial and sexual barriers that would otherwise have impeded her career and to

seek out opportunities in which she might shine, “I’ve got a lot of my opportunities from identifying gaps where I can add some value. If there is a gap then fill it. It will put a lot of pressure on you, a lot of stress on you, but take it as an opportunity to say ‘some one is not here for a reason’. I’ve always done things that have widened my scope”.

B was less vocal in celebrating her personal qualities, instead focusing on the broader company culture. However, given her position as the only female within the division of a large South African bank it would be fair to suggest that she has had to demonstrate self-confidence and self-efficacy in order to maintain her senior position.

Self-efficacy and self-confidence have allowed these women to overcome potential barriers to career success and to claim their careers as their own. If there is a men’s network operating at A’s place of work she is “just completely obviously to it” and has “never been interested in company functions and socializing for the sake of your career”. This is a no-nonsense, self-possessed approach to work that suggests A is all about putting her head down, working hard and letting the results speak for itself. B suggested that the work place “... really isn’t about gender, it’s about people” which suggests that it is performance that counts. C asserted that “... because I haven’t looked for difficulty it hasn’t been difficult” whereas other women have “navel gazed a little bit too much”. She feels that “if other people just [got] on with the job then everything would fall into place”. For C barriers are present only in the eye of the beholder and that getting on with the job in with the best career strategy of all.

This refusal to see barriers as obstacles is argued in a more forceful fashion by D who said “I have never felt that anyone has the right to inflict sexism and racism on me”, so if “someone tries I just ignore it ... I stand up for who I am”. E concurred that racism and sexism would never affect her career because she “would never let it” demonstrating absolute control over her destiny. Likewise F never let potential barriers affect her career she rather elected to out-perform her detractors and to overcome obstacles by continuing to prove her worth.

In this regard each of the interviewees advocate performance as the bottom line. However, whether these women support the view that women have to achieve credibility by working harder than their male peers is questionable (Ragins *et al*, 1998). Only F claimed her commitment to outperforming others as a conscious career strategy, “I definitely worked harder as a woman. You have too. You are conscious about what the men are thinking about you. If you’re a woman, if you’re a black woman, you have to work harder to show that you are not a token. I’m always aware of having to prove my worth”.

C conceded that women “unconsciously end up doing more work than men”. She thinks that as women “we feel we have to do more. Most of us don’t know how to say no”. But she questioned, “how much of that is the nature of who we are as opposed to a business that won’t recognize us unless we do that”. C’s question is revealing not because she can answer it, but because she felt the need to ask it. Do women feel that they have to work harder than men in order to achieve the same level of success? Certainly one of the women in the sample did, but the rest of the group would probably suggest otherwise. Indeed A even goes so far as saying that she is rewarded in her career and “gets more than enough credit for what I do”.

Whilst self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-control have formed the foundation of these women’s careers and a principle explanation for why they have been able to adopt positive mind-sets that allow them to see racism, sexism and other barriers as obstacles that need to be overcome (DiDio, 1998), the research does not suggest that these qualities guarantee a successful career. It would be interesting to explore the possibility that unsuccessful women have similar qualities but have become undone by insurmountable obstacles in their path.

Another quality that reappears throughout the interviews but which is only briefly covered in the literature review is a woman’s capacity for “exploratory decision-making ... and an open approach to learning” (Booyesen, 1999). The ability to learn and to be open to learning is a key characteristic of A who perceived it as a “female thing”. She said, “I’ve never been scared to ask for help. If I’m unsure of something, or if I feel a little in over my head, I go and I make sure I ask for help. It doesn’t bother me as I’ve always recognized that

I'm on a steep learning curve". She views her willingness to learn as a key factor contributing to her success. Similarly C talked about humility and the lack of ego that women have compared to men. This is why C "doesn't mind being wrong and I don't mind making mistakes ... whereas I think my male colleagues are sometimes 100% confident or nothing". If part of the learning process is the willingness to make mistakes and learn from them, then an unwillingness to make mistakes or be wrong inhibits learning. E concurs with this view when she said, "you can only learn if you are willing to accept your weaknesses and see opportunities for growth via those weaknesses". For E learning comes from engaging others no matter how silly the question. She said, "it's amazing what you can get from people when you get them around the table". Whereas men "don't tend to bring other people on board" which prevents learning through interaction.

The most ardent advocate was F. "My attitude has always been that you can never know everything. Even if you have to steal with your eyes – then learn. Throughout my whole time at the airline I had been educating myself by studying part time. I had applied for and won a scholarship at [a leading business school in America] and I went on a leadership development program there for six weeks. I remember flying back from America and thinking that I had so much to learn. You know in a comfortable work environment you can easily become big headed and think 'I am getting all this recognition and I am great'". Like A, C, D and E interviewee F sees her humility and acceptance of what she does not know as a key factor in her career success.

These successful female executives have all demonstrated high levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-control. However they have also all adopted positive mindsets that have dismissed potential barriers to success as just another set of obstacles that need to be overcome. These women have also demonstrated a degree of humility in regard to their own skills and knowledge, thereby enabling themselves to be lifelong learners. They do not presume to know everything and are dedicated to continuously evolving their skills set.

6.3 Career Strategies

What career strategies do successful female executives employ? How have they negotiated themselves past potential barriers to success?

6.3.1 Performance, Stretch Goals & Mentoring

The literature review highlighted three career strategies for successful women - performance as the bottom line, the importance of stretch goals and being mentored by a senior figure in the organisation. Of these three, mentoring appeared to be the most effective employed by the sample group. However, all of the women advocated the importance of performance as the bottom line (Ragins *et al*, 1998) suggesting that there was no getting around delivering results, working hard and meeting expectations. Only one of the women claimed to work harder than her male peers in order to achieve equal recognition.

Five of the six women demonstrated their ability to take on high profile jobs (Keown & Keown, 1982; Ragins *et al*, 1998). Interviewee A project managed her bank's merger with a competitor; C demonstrated her commitment by drawing senior management's attention to a critical business issue; and D, E and F signalled their availability for stretch assignments by travelling and taking on high profile assignments.

Mentoring was cited in the literature review as being critical in providing women and men with greater career mobility and opportunity for promotion (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Ragins *et al*, 1998; Olsson & Walker, 2004). White *et al* (1997) found that, whilst mentoring had been influential in the careers of successful women, none of the women had been involved in formal mentoring schemes.

Five of the six women in the sample group were able to identify mentors who had been influential in giving them career breaks and in providing them with a safe environment in which they could explore their skills. However, none of those mentors was provided as part of an official program. Interviewee A

commented that “these aren’t relationships that I have gone out of my way to cultivate” although she impressed her mentors (whether consciously or not) with her intellectual abilities and technical skill. For A, the benefit in mentors was in “giving me great opportunities but also protecting me”. Her mentor was able to take the public blame for when one of her projects went well and give public credit to a project that went well. This allowed her to take on high profile projects and to grow her skills in an environment that was considered safe. C gave a similar description of her mentor as someone who really empowers the people who work for him. From him she learnt that if you make a mistake “I will publicly support you even though I will sit down privately with you and suggest doing something differently”.

D has benefited from someone who was not so much a mentor but more of a career champion who insisted she be placed on the board of directors. Her female mentor insisted that the board required female representation and identified D as the woman in the organisation who would fill the role.

E enjoys an almost peer-to-peer relationship with her female mentor. Whilst E leaves no doubt that her female boss is performance driven she said that, “we have a dependent relationship. I will travel for her if she really needs to have time for her kids, if I can do the job. We’re willing to do that for each other. But it’s a personal agreement; it’s not necessarily a formal thing. I’m lucky that I have my boss because it would be very different with a guy who has a wife at home who is taking care of all the family commitments. He has only to do his work. So I am lucky”. In this instance E’s mentor acts as a support and inspiration to her role as a single working mother.

F’s mentor was a white Afrikaans male, she a black African woman working together during apartheid South Africa. She said that it was “a very delicate relationship. It was unheard of to have a black face working at the kind of level I was in the airline industry. But he really had a heart [and] presented me with some great opportunities”.

With the exception of interviewee B all the women spoke at length about their unofficial mentors and the advantages they had received in their careers from these relationships. Performance as the bottom line appeared

as an entry- level strategy, the minimum that women should expect to deliver in the workplace. The importance of seeking out stretch goals was demonstrated by five of the six women in the sample group.

6.3.2 Barriers to Success & Subsequent Coping Strategies

- Invisibility, Sexuality & Stereotyping

Wilson (1995) found that the marginalization of women could not be explained by either their competences or management style. Coe (1993) identified that the remaining barriers to success were male attitudes towards women. Olsson (2000) found that women faced three attitudinal barriers in the workplace I) invisibility ii) sexuality and iii) stereotyping. In the sample group two of the women spoke about the invisibility that they had experienced. For A the experience did not effect her, as it was her client, not her employer, who did not recognize her contribution. For a time interviewee F was ignored by one of her trainers who resolutely refused to look her in the eye. Rather than take on her trainer she excelled beyond expectations and in doing so achieved his recognition.

The sample group was adept at developing a professional style that male managers were comfortable with (Ragins *et al*, 1998) whilst not denying the essence of being a woman in the workplace (Olsson, 2000). Further discussion on sexuality and stereotyping is presented under point 6.4 issues of feminine leadership.

- The Old Men's Network

The existence of the old men's network ranked as the number one barrier to a woman's career (Coe, 1993). Olsson & Walker (2004) called this the "Locker Room Culture" and suggested that women are excluded from informal male interactions and relationships. In this sample group only one woman described an overtly men's club, but does not identify it as an obstacle to her own success because she found a way to get around it. The other interviewees are more cautious in describing a men's network.

In discussing discrimination in the workplace, A commented that “while the old bank may have had elements of the old boy’s club network I haven’t experienced it here. Mind you, it could very well be happening around me, but I’m just completely oblivious to it. I’ve never been interested in company functions and socializing for the sake of your career”. B admitted that there were “several cultural events that excluded me as a woman. I’m referring to social events that tended to be very male dominated, which is understandable, but they didn’t appeal to me. I’m talking about heavy drinking sessions, that sort of thing, which I didn’t want to go too because it’s not my thing. But I don’t know if that’s necessarily a gender thing, that may be just a ‘me’ thing”. However B did not suggest that her reluctance to join in these heavy drinking sessions affected the progress of her career.

In her previous job C said that she did not get any sense of any glass ceiling that may have existed as the result of a men’s network. However, in her current position she commented that the culture “is very colonial, white male dominated environment ... most of the senior managers are British expats, most of whom are men. I don’t have a sense that there would be a limit to my career path, but I do have a sense of discomfort that a lot of rugby and bar talk is actually business talk and that I would find quite hard to break into. That’s the hardest part of an organisation - when too much of business is done in airport lounges – which is probably a reflection of the fact that senior executives seem to spend a third of their life on planes. So there are lots of opportunities for people over a drink or in an airport lounge to talk about business. And I think that if your business is more confined to a traditional working environment it’s much easier to be excluded from the real business decisions”.

C’s coping strategy was to “... be direct as possible. I have also always found that the best way to deal with corporate politics is to ... cut right through it. Don’t play the political game. It’s amazing we always talk about women as being capable of gossip but men do it in the work / political context way better than women ever will ... it’s a strength of the lack of ego that women have can allow you to be much more direct because you are less worried about how you’re going to look”.

C confirmed the existence of a male network but did not get a “sense that it would limit my career path,” although she did admit to a sense of discomfort that she would find some business talk hard to break into. It is interesting that of all the women interviewed, C appeared to be the least happy in her position, due to a conflict between work / life balance and an organisational culture that was at odds with her own. After the interview C left her job to take up a position elsewhere. Whilst C did not recognise the men’s network as limiting her career path it did make her feel uncomfortable about her position, particularly given her a dual role as a working mother, which makes it difficult for her to travel and earn the “badge of honour” (The Economist, 2005). This may well have been a contributing factor to her decision to leave.

Of all the interviewees D described the most obvious male network. She said, “When I first made it to the board there used to be things like golf days and a pub in the company that was visited mainly by white men. The pub used to be opened by the CEO and the MD at the time. The CEO would gather his forces about him and pour drinks on the other side of the bar. Then there used to be these golf days where big suppliers used to invite you for these free golf days and the guys would fly off here, there and everywhere”. Rather than see this as an obstacle in her path D just found it ridiculous and did not take it personally. Instead “I was only one of the few women and the only black person who would go there. At the time I didn’t even drink alcohol. But I would go to socialize with people. So I guess they thought, ‘well she’s actually integrated with us’ ... people in senior positions just saw me as ‘one of us’ and when people feel comfortable they feel they can share things with you. That’s why the boy’s network works because men feel safe with one another. So I think that first they saw me as one of them”. This account is equal to the experience of a Muslim woman who made it to the board of Abbey, a FSTE 100 company. She neither drinks alcohol nor supports a rugby team but that she did make a point in her career of participating in industry-wide events where the opportunities for exclusion were less, (The Economist 2005).

D was able to overcome the barrier of a men's network by not "navel gazing" (interviewee C) and instead aimed to ensure that she was perceived as "one of us". She went out of her way to "make my seniors feel comfortable and not threatened. I didn't push the feminist agenda". As Dawson & Kleiner (1997) suggested, successful women handle discriminatory situations in a manner that is not overtly aggressive, "the goal is not to humiliate or make an enemy of the offender but to act in a way which will advance one's status in the eyes of observers around". However, once D was appointed as CEO she wasted no time in taking deliberate steps to shut down the pub, put an end to golf days and democratize the use of the company's private sports boxes. When asked how she coped with the derision with which senior management reacted to her changes she repeatedly talked about "the team" and "her team" who were behind her during this difficult time – suggesting that the support of her coworkers, if not senior management, was very effective in reducing work stress (Widrich & Ortlepp, 1994).

F has also been elevated into a position in which she can make changes in the company and contribute towards building a more level playing field. After starting work with her present employee (a respected Fortune 500 company) she had "the feeling that ... there was a boy's club at the company". Previous sexual harassment cases had been treated lightly by the company with previously alleged perpetrators receiving a letter of warning, which amounts to a very light slap on the wrist. At the time of the interview F was working towards breaking a company culture that wanted sexual harassment to just disappear. Instead her attitude was "it is here with us and if we don't fight it and create a positive environment for women to work in then we are allowing these harassment issues to actually pass us by". The case is now at the CCMA. In this regard promoting women to senior management positions can be a force for change as women, because of their different experiences in the work place, are more likely to challenge the status quo than men.

Given the enduring presence of a male network in many organisations why have women not organised themselves into female networks that counter-act the barrier of the male network? The traditionally view is that competition between women makes them less reluctant to form networks and support one another. However, a less obvious reason is offered up by E who claimed

that as a single working mother “I don’t have time to belong to a network, I really don’t. I don’t manage work / life balance very well so if I have spare time I do try and spend it with my daughter or with myself. To spend four hours on a golf day ... well I just don’t have time for it”. When asked specifically about a formal female network, she said “we all work and so as soon as the bell rings we’re all off trying to do the shopping, getting home to our kids and just trying to have a life”. Work / life balance and the challenge of being a single working mother puts E’s time under pressure. She does not have the time for golf days or after working drinking sessions. However she did identify a subtle sisterhood between herself and other woman at work. “We get together for coffee once in a while ... it’s not consistent but it is a light support system”.

C offered a similar explanation, “I have experienced something of a female network but it was never a formal arrangement. If I knew of something that was happening in someone else’s area, that I thought she wouldn’t be aware of, then I would pick up the phone and have a chat. So it was very subtle ... it was ... based on the fact that I can relate to you, we’re the same age, we’ve spoken about the same things and if we weren’t so busy we could probably be friends, and so I’ll keep an eye out for you ... it can be lonely if you don’t have other female colleagues who you can relate to, even if they’re sitting in another department three buildings removed, just a sense that there are other people in the same position as you can be quite comforting”. Again the emphasis is on women who struggle to balance their lives and who do not necessarily enjoy the same home support as their male counterparts (Dawson & Kleiner, 1992).

In summary, the presence of a male network is not as visible as it once was, given the legislated workplace of today, but its presence is nevertheless still felt. Between them the women in the group mention golfing days, drinking sessions, decisions made in the business class lounges of airports and in the most extreme instance, a chummy male acceptance of sexual harassment in the workplace. Yet despite these descriptions the sample group was reluctant to suggest that a male network could disadvantage their careers. Their reluctance can be explained by their positive attitudes that see the male network as just another obstacle to overcome, or alternatively

recognising its existence is just too de-motivating for those who believe that hard work, tenacity and performance will be equally rewarded, regardless of gender.

What is clear is that once the women in the sample group broke through into senior management they became agents of change. Both D and F have made it their priority to tackle instances of sexual harassment and inequality in the workplace. These women have experienced prejudice in the workplace, experiences that appear to drive their sense of fair play. E for example wants to be judged on merit and D has been very hurt by suggestions that her career success is due to the fact that she is black or female. Could it be that this sense of fair play, combined with busy schedules, makes women reluctant to counter-balance a male network with a female network? D and F both commented that they wish to be recognized only for the work that they do, not because of their sex, the color of their skin or whom they may happen to know in an organisation.

6.4 Issues of Female Leadership

What is the leadership style used by success female executives? Is this style a recognized one?

Each of the women in these interviews presented a leadership style that is best described as transformational (Burke & Collins, 2001; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996). As Booysen (1991) found in a study of South African managers, "the culture of South African female managers emphasizes collaboration, participation, intuition, empathy, empowerment, self-disclosure and subtle forms of control." A attributes her success to the teams that she has led and whilst she is focused and does not, as she puts it, "take waffle" she is also very aware that success is about taking people with you. Although she described this leadership style as "a bit of a female thing", she does not depict it as exclusive to women. A models her style on male mentors whom have displayed a similar leadership style. She said, "hopefully I can model my leadership style on the same treatment that I have received, giving people the credit for a job well done and building a good team around me". Similarly B presented a transformational style of leadership but accredited this style to the

broader divisional culture where “team leaders are constantly revolving ... it’s a very fluid process”. Given this scenario B would not regard transformational leadership as the exclusive domain of women.

C, like A, models her leadership style on a male mentor whom she admired for “giving credit where it’s due” and “really empowering the people who work for him”. As a result, “when I give you a piece of work I’m not going to interfere, it’s yours. If you make a mistake I will publicly support you even though I will sit down privately with you and suggest doing something differently”. However, despite C identifying with the leadership style of one of her male colleagues, she did suggest that in general “women have a lot less ego [than men], which I think encourages you to empower other people”, allowing “women to be more human”. So again a transformational leadership style is disproportionately, but not exclusively represented by women.

D described herself as a “fairly egalitarian manager. I might be the leader but I work with people and I also manage to get people to do what needs to be done”. She has “the ability to recognize and nurture the potential in good and competent people”. Based on her observations and experiences over the years she said, “male managers tend to be more lonely, isolated and paternalistic. The female managers around me, including myself have generally tended to take people with us” although she admits that these are “generalisations”.

E categorized her leadership style as “empowering” and said she could not do “what I do without my team”. Her attitude is “I am no better than the people I work with I just happen to be the head of a particular project”. Her style is to engage people on projects, consulting widely with her colleagues, getting as much input as possible. Likewise F’s leadership style is about people, teamwork and encouraging others to excel. She described her leadership style as generally, “participative. I like engaging people. I like coming up with ideas. I think I’m creative I need to involve people and ask them ‘what do you think?’”

Contrary to A, B, C and D, interviewee E categorized her qualities as distinctly female, “I’m not saying that all women are great managers. But I’ve found that [women] believe in really working with people as opposed to having people work for them”. She has found that “men aren’t such great communicators. When you have

difficulties one must never have a problem asking for help and ... men are terrible at that. You find them in a little corner just stuck on one thing, whereas women are in a corner chatting over coffee, resolving an issue and getting buy in at the same time. I find that men do work independently ...” She suggests this is because men “like to take credit for the deliverable”. She has experienced men stealing her ideas. When this has happened she has been forced to abandon her collaborative approach and, as she puts it, “have the balls” to claim the credit. However she does not suggest that “women are better than men, if you get the results you get the results”.

The experiences of these women suggest that they are succeeding because of, not in spite of, certain characteristics generally considered to be feminine (Tropila & Kliner, 1994). In addition the interviewees suggest that women are more likely than men to engage in transformational leadership (Burke & Collins, 2001). However, these women combine traditionally female characteristics with traditionally male characteristics. This observation lends credence to the view of Bem (1994) who suggested that it is the androgynous individual who is able to exhibit a broader repertoire. These behaviours are appropriate to a variety of situations and are most suited to the emergent modern organisation. For instance, C claimed to be “brave about making a tough call” and “not scared of a challenge”, likewise D described herself as “brave and bold. I’m not afraid of new challenges”. E said she had “the balls” to challenge her colleagues “especially when there are people that you are working with who see you as competition” and F recognized that despite a collaborative approach she never errs from making a difficult decision and taking responsibility for herself as leader, “I’m not a walk over and when called upon I can be firm”.

The cost to those women who exhibit only feminine characteristics is illustrated by D, who described the situation of a female colleague who she regarded as coming across as too feminine. “She used a whole particular of set of her vocabulary and just didn’t twig that there was another vocabulary going on. I was able to put on the lens of the Anglo-Saxon male because I’d really fraternized with them for years. I was able to put their lens on my eyes and look at her and say ‘she looks wishy-washy and she looks like someone who will never make it into senior management because she just can’t be trusted to make decisions. She looks like someone who will never be able to manage poor performance and fire people’. Yet I have known her since I was 18 and she’s a very strong person. That’s the glass ceiling, it’s

saying 'she's done a lot, she's a valuable person but she's never going to really cut it in the boardroom, she's going to use all this jargon with outside shareholders and they're going to panic that she's some kind of mother earth'. D suggests it is the responsibility of women, as much as it is men's, to manage perceptions and to ask, "is there a different way of expressing myself as a woman"?

The women in the sample are able to successfully combine male and female qualities. The research does not propose "all men to be like all men and all women to be like all women" and recognizes instead "differences amongst women, as well as differences between men and women" (Bem, 1994).

Despite the women's leadership abilities it is worth asking whether organisational culture conspires to keep these women's talents unrecognized (Regine & Lowe, 2003) even though they may well be effective (Fierman, 1990)? Interviewee A suggested that her transformational leadership style was recognized by one of her co-workers but only after a project had been up and running for 18 months. This suggests that a collaborative form of leadership not as easily recognized as the transactional model. However, A does not imply that her employees have been slow to recognize her talents.

B, despite holding a firm belief that she brings a "complementary angle to situations", is unsure whether this is recognized by her male colleagues, "I would like to think it is, but I don't know". E has to fight to have her contributions recognized when colleagues undermine her; and F is acutely aware that unless she outperforms her colleagues her contributions are not equally recognized. D alluded to her contributions not being recognized early on in her job because of organisational bias that saw white Afrikaans men obtaining promotions that could well have been hers. C gently described a male network that could bias any future promotion.

The above suggests that women need to be particularly adept at ensuring that the results of their work are recognized. This quality comes naturally to only one of them. Of all the women D is the most forthright in selling herself and taking credit for her successes. In describing her talent for spotting trends she said "I have managed to do that on numerous occasions in my career. Being able to read the current circumstances and predict what might be happening in the future. And there are

several instances I can quote in the company where I did that and which really led to amazing gains for the company". She also claimed to have "changed the company's fortunes, from a company that had 10% market share to one that had 30%'. In this sense D described herself as responsible for the success of a company, an archetype that is typically reserved for men (Regine & Lower, 2003). D suggested that women's skills take longer to be recognized in part because women do not themselves recognize that they should be taking the credit for something.

The other women in the sample showed a reluctance to take credit for their successes. Interviewee A had to persuade herself that "I do actually know something. If I look back over certain projects that I've done I cannot argue that I was responsible for them ... so I must have got something right. I have to take credit for that myself". She explains this uncertainty in her abilities by the fact that "men somehow seem to have more confidence". Likewise B suggested that women "don't come across as super-confident because it's just not in our nature". For C the male ego dictated that men appear "100% confident or nothing. For them it's either all out there or they're not going to contribute". She also suggested that men exhibit a leadership style that is about follow me! C, despite her self-confidence and intellectual achievements attributed her success to 'luck' rather than skill (Regine & Lowe, 2003). E was prepared to claim credit for an idea only when she really had too and did not like doing it. She noticed that, "a lot of women are very good at certain things but feel inhibited in some way or another. They feel that it is not their place to show how good they are because they don't want to show another woman up or even worse put a man down. I think if you are yourself and if you do have good things that you can showcase then you shouldn't hesitate. It's a way of getting ahead without having to fight for it. It's just about demonstrating what you can do".

Boucher (1997) illustrated how women fought against the male construction of leadership in order to lead in ways that felt authentic and meaningful - rejecting distance, objectivity and unconditional confidence. This is true of the sample group as each woman dispels the myth that the only way for women managers to survive is to act like men (Bennis, 1997). C felt strongly that for a woman to succeed she must "be true to herself. I have watched [women] become quite hard because they have felt that that's what they needed to do and you end up losing yourself. If the job is not going to allow you to be true to your personality, then find another job because it's not worth the contortions you put yourself through".

F concurred that being a successful leader is “really about being who you are, and being a woman, bringing the element of being a woman to the work place. I find that as women we get challenged all the time and we tend to want to become men. Because men have created the culture - we feel we have to fit in. So we have to try and be heard and sometimes being heard means being taken seriously, and there are times when you have to really be assertive and you have to push your way. But as many times as possible you should try and relate to people as humans, don’t be confrontational because you don’t want to bruise their ego, but you have your facts, and your facts must be right in order to be taken seriously”.

Nevertheless remaining true to them selves did appear to undermine the confidence of some of the co-interviewees and led to elements of self-doubt. C, B and E compared their transformational leadership style to that of the transactional model. C commented, “I think male colleagues are sometimes 100% confident or nothing”. She did not think that this was a particularly positive characteristic and implied that women with less ego are more likely to empower their co-workers. B said, “relative to my [male] peers I’m not as confident as them, or rather I’m not super-confident ... my confidence is not out there. When you compare us to our male counterparts, you know we don’t come across as confident because it’s just not in our nature ... [but] in many ways women in their unassuming way are actually as individuals much more confident than their loud, gregarious male colleagues, except maybe they are not perceived as so”. E said, “men may or may not be skilled at what they do, [but] it’s easier for them to exude confidence and intimidate people around them. And I don’t think women would normally do that. I haven’t had that experience with women”.

Interviewee A offered the most candid example of how she has struggled to recognize her own worth in the organisation. “I’ve always felt that I’ve been promoted far beyond my level of competence, and that I’ve never actually been found out. I think that that’s a female thing because men somehow seem to have more confidence. And I’ve realized that other women feel the same way”. The cost of resisting the male model of leadership for these women was self-doubt, not in their competence but how they talk about themselves in the organisation (Boucher, 1997).

In summary each of the women in the sample group presented a transformational leadership style, embracing collaboration and a people-centered approach. However only one of the women stated categorically that transformational leadership was the domain of women, to the exclusion of men. The other interviewees suggested that generally women, more than men, were inclined to adopt a transformational leadership style. A transformational style should not be interpreted as 'soft' management as many of the women described their ability to make tough decisions when the job called for it and in doing so were able to successfully integrate both masculine and feminine traits.

The cost of adopting a transformational style was, for some, self-doubt in terms of how they viewed themselves in the organisation. The collaborative approach can lead women to question their contribution as leaders and discourage them from taking the credit for a job well done. By not claiming the recognition for a job well done, women are disadvantaging their long-term careers. Finally, the sample group encouraged other women to be true to themselves and not to betray their identity as a woman in the work place.

6.5 Other

Singh & Vinnicombe (2002) and The Economist (2005) suggested that the lack of female role models was an impediment to the success of women. Indeed the phenomenological approach of this study presents the experiences of successful female executives so that others may learn from them.

When A was asked whether she thought that the lack of female role models could be an impediment to her career she gave what appeared to be a lip-service answer. "In South Africa I think we have a number of very senior prominent women who serve as role models. Thabo Mbeki has clearly appointed women to provincial executive positions and his current deputy president is a woman. In the business world there are women like Maria Ramos, Irene Charnley and Wendy Lucas Bull who I suppose are women role models". This researcher felt that this was a token rather than the inspirational response suggested by Singh & Vinnicombe. Passion re-enters the voice of A when she said, "what I do now is observe with interest other women with children and the choices they've made. I've got some friends who've stopped work completely, others who have gone back to work with much-reduced

hours and people like me who have gone back full time and how we've coped with that".

B gives a similarly token response citing a number of distant models such as the US former Secretary of State Madelaine Albright. In terms of immediate role models says "there are very few female role models for us to look too. There are very few women in banking, full stop. That filters down to all levels. But even if there were, your interactions with other women would be very limited. I just interact with people in my immediate environment. So unless the head of our division was a woman, well ... it would be meaningless". This suggests that for B, as for A, role models need to be personal in order to have relevance.

E supports this statement. She is the only woman in the sample who has a woman as her direct boss and she is the only woman to describe her boss as both a role model and a mentor. She describes herself as lucky to have a very strong woman as her immediate supervisor. E identified with her as a role model because she is also the breadwinner of her family. This sense of shared experience is what allows E to see her boss as a role model. The boss also acts as a mentor but shares more of a peer-to-peer relationship with her mentor, with the two women leaning on each other for support.

HR directors who are considering appointing females in the senior positions, with a view to providing role models to other women, should know that, according to some in this sample group, such women do not achieve impact across the organisation. The challenge is to champion the appointment of women right the way through the management spectrum enabling women at all levels of the organisation the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of a close, meaningful relationship with female role models.

7. Conclusion

The aim of the study is to reveal the characteristics, attitudes, career strategies and leadership styles of successful female executives in South Africa. Mostly the sample group and their experiences have supported the findings presented in the literature review. However, this researcher hopes that by using the phenomenological approach the research study has provided women with a greater understanding of their own careers and for others, greater insight into the position that female executives occupy in the dominant male executive culture.

This researcher hopes that the cross-analysis showed the differences as well as the similarities of the women in the sample group. In the section headed work / life balance each woman demonstrated subtle differences in their approach to this issue. If work / life balance were a scale with work positioned on the left and life on the right then interviewee E sits to the far left of the scale. For E hard work is an unqualified priority whereas the other women, whether they are married or not, have children or are childless, sit within the middle of the spectrum and struggle to find more of a balance.

The open nature of the interview process allowed the women to pursue areas of interest that were relevant to them. All of the interviewees steered the conversation toward work / life balance and spent a lot of time discussing the trade-offs that had to be made between work and life. With the exception of B and E the women recognized they were working in cultures that had been created by men and in to which women had to fit themselves. The women supported the introduction of flexible working hours, job sharing and being measured by results, not the number of hours one spent at the office. Interestingly E and C did not view crèches at work as desirable. They commented having their children nearby would only the guilt they felt at not being with them. E would rather her company provide onsite facilities that would allow her to be more efficient with her time – facilities like household shopping, a gym and a dry cleaners.

The women in the sample group were less able or less inclined to accept the rigid boundaries set up between work and home. In one instance the penalty of an organisation that failed to adapt to the needs of their female staff was to lose a key

talent. Subsequent to the interview C left her employer only nine months after being offered, but turning down the position of CEO. A key motivation for C was to find an employer that respected her boundaries and which supported flexible hours. C's experience echoes the findings presented by Olsson (2000), which advised female managers to leave organisations that failed to adequately support them. Female managers cannot change an organisational culture by themselves. It is not for them to battle against the prejudices held by their colleagues and to prove their worth. Instead change needs to be actively led from the top.

C's experience exposes the difference between those employers whose policies accommodate working mothers and those employers that actively support working mothers. Similarly F's experiences expose the difference between those employers who are publicly against sexual harassment (whilst privately turning a blind eye) and those employers who walk the talk and take senior managers to the CCMA (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration of South Africa). Leaders of an organisation should not lament the lack of senior female managers as some kind of social phenomenon for which they abdicate responsibility. Instead leaders must accept their responsibility as agents of change. They must actively promote the retention and elevation of senior female managers in the organisation. Some readers may unfavorably interpret active promotion as positive discrimination. It is worth reminding those readers that the motivation for the retention and elevation of women is not a moral imperative but rather one of competitive edge (The Economist, 2005). Leaders owe it to their shareholders, not to women.

Given the wide breadth of literature concerning the lack of women in senior positions curiously little asks women to describe what kind of organisation they would like to work for. The majority of literature concentrates on how the qualities that women need to possess in order to successfully navigate their way through male dominant organisations. Indeed, this researcher is guilty of the same oversight. It took interviewee D to point out that organisations rarely ask, "What do you want? What will make you come back to work?" The company for which she was CEO was trying to woo her back and made her a lot of promises, none of which were enticing enough. However, when she was asked, "what do you want?" the tables were turned around. She was forced how she wanted to work. In this instance asking a woman what she wanted led to a more open and meaningful

conversation between employee and employer. The result was a unconventional solution that benefited by both parties.

Despite their different approaches to work / life balance all the women demonstrated high levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy, a strong locus of control and a positive mindset that enabled them to overcome obstacles. These qualities are presented as the entry-level ticket for women who want to succeed at work. In this regard women can be viewed as no different to men. These qualities are surely the gender-neutral hallmarks of successful people. However, what makes these women exceptional is the literature's inference that these qualities are more common in men. Women, by virtue of their social conditioning are less likely to be independent, to be driven to succeed. The research shows that childhood experiences do influence a woman's qualities. With this in mind it is interesting that five out of the six women had unusual family backgrounds. Only C had a normal childhood, in that she lived at the family home with her mother and father. However, given the size and representation of the sample it is unfeasible to draw any wider conclusions from this data.

An ability to continuously learn stood out as a key quality of the women. This came across in the interviews as distinctly feminine. The Interviewees suggested that women have a lack of ego and don't mind being wrong. Women ask questions and involve others whereas men sit in the corner. Men are 100% confident or nothing whereas women are not afraid to be unsure of something. Learning comes from engaging others and listening to what team members have to contribute. These sentiments support Booyesen's (1999) assertion that "collaborative behaviour, open communication, sharing of information, exploratory decision-making and an open approach to learning" are feminine values more aligned to developing the integrated capabilities of the modern organisation. However, these feminine values are not exclusive to women. Some men exhibit these feminine values. However, the women in the sample group suggest that women are more likely to be open and collaborative. As a result women are more willing to learn than men who value "competition, independence and discipline" (Chorn, 1995).

The women in the sample have employed career strategies that reflect the findings of the literature review. The sample group advocated performance as the bottom line and pursued stretch goals. All of the women worked hard. Only one of them

suggested that she had to work harder than her male peers in order to gain the same amount of recognition.

What marked out the majority of these women's career strategies was the credit they gave to their unofficial mentors in influencing their careers. The women agreed that their mentors had allowed them to develop their skills in a safe environment. Their mentors took responsibility for when things went badly and shared the credit for when things went well. D's mentor went out of her way to ensure that D succeeded in the organisation. D's mentor aggressively campaigned for D's appointment to the board. Without such support it is questionable whether D would have become CEO of the company or if she had, whether she would have done it so quickly. This story demonstrates the power of mentors and the role that they can play in a woman's career.

Issues of sexuality, invisibility and stereotyping were paid little due by the sample group. For the two women who had experienced invisibility, it did not affect their career path and was quickly overcome. Only one woman had experienced direct sexual harassment. She overcame this by confronting the offender and made it clear that such behavior was not going to be tolerated. In this regard the force of these women's characters appears to deter any overt sexual discrimination, as D said, "I have never felt that anyone has a right to inflict sexism or racism on me. I think because of that people recognize my strength of characters and don't practice that much sexism or racism on me". The women in the sample group who had experienced discrimination managed to rise above it and not take it personally. D experienced open hostility from senior management when she was appointed to the board of directors. Rather than be vindictive or personally wounded by the experiences she continued to behave in a professional manner that, at the end of the day, won around her critics. The same is true of E who experienced the xenophobic attitudes of a female co-worker. E did not let her attitudes personally and the two women now enjoy a warm relationship as the co-workers attitudes have thawed. This ability to de-personalize discrimination and to rise above it reveals the women's self-confidence and emotional maturity.

Strength of character should not to be wrongly associated with being aggressive or abrasive (Sinclair, 1998). The women walk a fine line between accepting the dominant male culture of organisations but refrain from acting like men. The women

in the sample group dispel the myth that the only way for women managers to succeed is to 'act like men' (Bennis, 1997). The sample group warned of the pitfalls of women abandoning their femininity and becoming too aggressive or too manly and so doing, losing their authenticity. The balance is a delicate one. The stories of the women provide insight into how the balance may be struck. For example, interview E talked about not wanting to put a man down but sticking up for herself when the time called for it. F advised that there are times when "you have to be really assertive and you have to push your way through [but] don't be confrontational because you don't want to bruise ... [a man's] ego". D went out of her way to make the men in organisation feel comfortable and not threatened and didn't push the feminist agenda. But she was forceful in the actions that she took, rather than the things that she said. Getting this delicate balance right is a challenge not faced by men. It is worth asking to what extent other talent women may have got this wrong and as a result have been hampered in their careers.

Interviewee A expressly denied the existence of a men's network (Coe, 1993) at the bank where she worked whereas D described working in an organisation that had a rampant men's network. In between these two extremes the other women described elements of a male network. None of the women suggested that the male network had any direct effect on their careers. Referring to the male network C said, "I don't have a sense that [it] would limit my career path, but I do have a sense of discomfort that a lot of bar talk is actually business talk and that I would find that quite hard to break into". This comment seems contradictory. It appears that a male network could affect C's career as a lot of informal conversation between men is actually business talk, despite C's own assertion that it would not. The comment is an example of the sample group's general reluctance to recognize the possible negative effects of the male network on their careers. This may be because there are no negative effects or it may be that these positive minded women do not want to acknowledge that they could be, or are, unfairly discriminated against.

Having experienced degrees of discrimination, either in the form of a men's network, or through gender stereotyping, the women in the sample group value fairness. They want to have earned their positions. They do not want to be regarded as token women. Perhaps it is for this reason that the women were reluctant to form networks that could work against fair play. This proposition is forwarded by D. Alternatively E suggested that a professional women are simply too busy to

accommodate a formal network into their schedules. She argued that the competing work / life commitments make it impossible for her to participate in any additional work functions. However, she suggested that for a man “who has a wife at home who is taking care of all the family commitments” the situation is different.

However women do form networks. Many of the women described informal networks between women at work that was facilitated by their cooperative leadership style. Women together tended to solve problems whilst sipping a cup of coffee whereas men tended to work in isolation. These networks were subtle but they did provide a light support system that most women feel they emotionally benefited from. In this regard the men’s network may be prevalent not because it intentionally excludes women but because it compensates for men’s own isolation in the workplace and offers a degree of comradeship.

All of the women exhibited a style of leadership that is best described as transformational (Burke & Collins, 2001; Bass, Avolio & Atwater, 1996). However, with the exception of E this style was not presented as a ‘feminine’ style that excluded men. A, B, C, D and F described men whom they admired and who also adopted a transformational leadership style. It could be that transformational leadership combines the best of male and feminine qualities. These women were tough when they need to be. Successfully integrating collaborative qualities with independent decision-making and accountability.

Confusion existed around how much of a woman’s leadership style can be attributed to either personality or gender. Yet it was generally accepted that women were more likely than men to adopt a transformational style of leadership. No judgments were made on which style was better. The women were at pains to point out that what matters is finding a leadership style that works for you. It’s performance that counts.

Nevertheless, four of the women in the sample group were uncertain as to whether their leadership style was equally recognized, not only by others but also by themselves. Interviewee A struggled to qualify her worth and B and C were unsure whether they were as confident as their male colleagues who always appeared to be super-confident in their views. The collaborative, investigative approach of transformational leadership appeared to undermine the value the women placed on

their own contribution and made them reluctant to take the credit for a job well done. D was the only woman who boldly took the credit for her successes. In this matter her voice stood out against the silence of the other women. She said, 'I ... changed the company's fortunes ... I increased market share from 10% to 30%'. As a female I read her words and blush at her audacity. Is this embarrassment caused by a social prejudice within myself that expects a woman to demure? I am sure I would accept, without issue, a similar claim expressed by a man. And yet if women don't accept the credit for a job well done then no one else will do it for them. Although this instinct does not come naturally to most of the women in the sample group, women must ensure that the results of their work are credited to them.

Finally, the research offers insight into what some of these women considered to be meaningful role models and what this means for organisations who have too few women in senior, middle and junior management roles. Female role models became significant influences when women were able to form close personal relationships with other women. The observations of the sample group suggest that a distant senior figure, such as a female CEO, would not be relevant to a woman in middle management who would have no day-to-day dealings with the CEO. Role models were meaningful only when they were relevant. The challenge then is to appoint women throughout the management spectrum and provide women with the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of a close (and therefore meaningful) relationship on which they can model their careers.

* * *

The research has presented the reader with a group of extraordinarily tough and ambitious women who have achieved senior positions despite encountering some compelling obstacles. In sharing their stories the women have given the reader insight into the particular challenges that women face in the workplace. These women do not present themselves as any better than men, for them performance is the bottom line. What is clear is that these women have managed to combine the best of masculine and feminine qualities. They are collaborative and people centered but unafraid to make difficult decisions and take responsibility when the time calls for it.

Despite similarities each woman presents herself as an individual who has forged a successful career based on her own personal style and her own measure of work / life balance. Through the course of this study each woman has provided the reader with an intimate portrait of her challenges, sacrifices and views on what it means to be a successful woman in today's organisation.

8. Suggestions For Further Research

This study has focused on the characteristics and key career strategies of successful women. The study has not compared these characteristics and career strategies to that of men. The findings beg the question whether women are that different to men in the workplace. For instance, would men dwell on the work / life balance issue as much as the women had? Traditional views of gender would suggest not, given that typically men have enjoyed the support of a woman in the home. However, are there circumstances changing as more women try to combine successful professional and personal lives, how does this impact men in the workplace. It would be interesting to compare the characteristics and career strategies of six successful men with the six successful women presented in this research.

The research also focused on describing successful female executives. In the cross-analysis this researcher noted that it would be interesting to explore the stories of six unsuccessful female executives, women who had similar entry-level qualities to the women in this sample group, such as self-confidence, self-efficacy and a strong locus of control, but who had not been able to overcome challenges and obstacles in their careers. What would be the differences in these two sample groups? Do the unsuccessful women work in organizations that do not recognise their abilities or are there distinguishing qualities between the two groups?

Finally, the research suggests that organizations have been remiss in asking women what they want in terms of work / life balance. What kind of organizations would they most like to work for? How would they organize their work? What would encourage those successful women who have left work for personal reasons (such as caring for family) to come back? Or, what could organizations offer existing female executives in order to keep them on at work? This is a question that appears not to have been adequately asked in the existing literature.

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Annexure A: Interview Skills, Thematic Guideline and Suggested Questions

Prompts for Probing Issues in the Interview (Steeneveldt, 2004)

Interview Skills

- Establish rapport
- Be subordinate
- Keep the discussion going
- Ask open ended questions; avoid questions with yes / no answers
- Avoid jargon and abstractions
- Avoid double negatives and loaded expressions
- Know when not to interrupt and to let silences work for you
- Be non-judgmental
- Focus and pace the interview

Keywords

- Behaviour: what did you do?
- Behaviour: how did you respond?
- Behaviour: What is your instinctive response?
- Feelings: how did you feel?
- Feelings: how did you express these feelings?
- Feelings: why did you feel that way?
- Feelings: what frustrates you?
- Feelings: why do you feel frustrated?
- Behaviour: when feeling frustrated how did you react?
- Feelings: what is the source of job satisfaction?
- Behaviour: how do you achieve satisfaction?
- Emotions
- Context
- Situation
- Explore
- Understand
- Leadership qualities
- Leadership styles & career coping strategies

General open-ended questions relating to research questions:

- Question 1 Please tell me about your family history. Who were the influential people in your life? What are the key events that have shaped you?
- Question 2 Please tell me about the history of your career, how have you arrived at your position of leadership? What would you describe as your key strengths? What key factors have contributed toward your success?
- Question 3 What challenges have you had to overcome in the work place?
- Question 4 How would you describe your leadership style? Is your leadership style a recognized one?

Suggested (prompt) questions**Characteristics: Intrinsic Factors**

- Do you have brothers and sisters?
- If so, how many?
- Where are you positioned in the family hierarchy?
- Did you have a good relationship with your mother and father?
- Who was your primary carer growing up?
- Did you find you identified with one parent more than the other?
- If so, which one, and why?

Characteristics: Extrinsic Factors

- Have you got a college degree?
- What in, where from?
- Are you married?
- If not, do you have a defacto partner?

- Does your husband work full time?
- Has your husband / partner been supportive of your career?
- Has being married / having a partner benefited your career?
- Do you have children, if so, how many?
- If so, who are their primary carers?
- How do you maintain a work / life balance?

Attitudes for Success:

- How much of your career do you think was luck?
- To what extent have you constructed your own destiny?
- How do you regard your own abilities to that of your peers?
- How do you respond to opportunities?
- What would you say are the key attitudes for success among women?
 - explore
- How have you achieved your success?
- How committed are you to your career?
- Where does your career come on your list of priorities?
 - When did you make a commitment to your career
- Are you familiar with the term “the glass ceiling”?
- What does this term mean to you?
- How have you approached the glass ceiling?

Career Strategies

- What are the key career strategies that you have employed throughout your career?
 - explore
- Do you think that women have to work harder than men to get noticed?
- If so, why?
- What kind of projects / jobs have contributed towards your career and got you noticed?
- What strategies did you employ to get this kind of job / project?
- Why were they important?
- Did you ever have a “mentor” throughout your career history, or has one or two people been important in directing your career?

- Who were these people, how did you benefit from the relationship?

Barriers to Success

- What barriers to success have you encountered during the course of your career?
 - explore
- Have you encountered the notion of “invisibility” (explain) how have you managed this?
- Have you encountered discrimination in the work place, how have you managed this?
- Have you experience sexual discrimination in the work place, how have you managed to over come this?
- What do you think of the old men’s network as a barrier to success? What does this mean for ambitious females in the work place?
- Have you experienced an emerging female network?

Issues of Leadership

- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What makes a successful leader?
- Do you think women’s leadership differs from that as men?
- Have you experienced difficulties in having your leadership style “noticed”?
- Are you ever criticized for appearing too masculine or too feminine?
- If so, how have you struck a balance?
- What do you think it takes to succeed in a “man’s world”?

Annexure B: Consistency Matrix

Portraits of Female Executives					
Research Theme			Literature Review	Source of Data	Method of Analysis
What are the characteristics of successful women?	Intrinsic – Siblings	First born Or older sibling (brother)	White et al (1997) Hennig & Jardim (1977) Keown & Keown (1982) Mussen, Conger & Kagan (1979)	Open ended interview	Coding, patterning, memo-ing, co-researcher validation of individual interviews. Integration of themes across interviews. Eidetic Reduction to uncover the essence of phenomenon
	Intrinsic – parent / child relationships Extrinsic - Education	Over identification with the mother or father Strong sense of self identity from early years College education	White et al (1997) Gilligan (1982) Kagan & Moss (1962) Hennig & Jardim (1978) Van Rooyen (1981) White et al (1997) Keown & Keown (1982) Cox & Cooper (1988)		
	Extrinsic – Marriage	Not a prohibitive factor	Sheriden (2002) White et al (1997) Keown & Keown (1982)		

Portraits of Female Executives					
Research Theme			Literature Review	Source of Data	Method of Analysis
	Extrinsic – Children	Not a prohibitive factor	Coe (1993) Economist (2005) Sheriden (2002) White et al (1997)		
Work Life Balance	Women experience greater inter-dependence between work and home life than men		Widrich (1992) Gutek, Repetti & Silver (1988) Burke (1986)		
	Successful women must prioritize work life over family life		Marshall (1984) Dawson & Kleiner (1992) White et al (1997)		
	Organisations must adapt to allow greater flexibility for women		Barling (1990) Garden (1997) Widrich (1992) Salkever (1982) Krause (2003) Venter (1997) Allen (2001)		
Attitudes for Success	High levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self control	Above average self belief, self efficacy & self control	Keown & Keown (1982) Dawson & Kleiner (1992) White et al (1997) Rotter (1996) Ragins et al (1998)		
Career Strategies	Performance is the bottom line	Women have to work harder than men in order to be successful	Ragins et al (1998) Olsson & Walker (2004)		
	The importance of stretch goals	Go for the high profile, risky jobs	Ragins et al (1998) Keown & Keown (1982)		

Portraits of Female Executives					
Research Theme			Literature Review	Source of Data	Method of Analysis
	Mentoring	Successful women have mentors	Dreher & Ash (199) Ragins et al (1998) White et al (1997) Olsson & Walker (2004)		
Barriers to Success & Coping Strategies	Invisibility	Tend to leave the organisation	Olsson 2000	Open ended interview	Coding, patterning, memo-ing, co-researcher validation of individual interviews. Integration of themes across interviews. Eidetic Reduction to uncover the essence of phenomenon
	Sexuality	Tend to leave the organisation	Olsson 2000		
	Stereotypes	Tend to leave the organisation / find unique ways of breaking down stereotypes	Olsson 2000 Sinclair 1998 Ragins et al (1998) Dawson & Kleiner (1997)		
	Old Men's Network	Excludes women from informal decision making. A network of females is emerging.	Coe (1993) Olsson & Walker (2004) Economist (2005) Widrich & Orllepp (1994)		

Portraits of Female Executives					
Research Theme			Literature Review	Source of Data	Method of Analysis
Leadership Issues	Finding a recognized female style in the dominant male culture	Women must develop a leadership style that is effective (for women) as well as recognized (i.e. visible)	Powel (1990;1993) Bass (1981) Rosenar (1990) Boucher (1997) Regine & Lowe (2003) Olsson (2000) Badaracco (2001) Burke & Collins (2001) Bass, Avolio & Atwater (1996) Booysen (1999) Tropila & Kleiner (1994) Fieman (1990) Stanford, Oates & Flores (1995) Economist (2005) Badaracco (2001) Bern (1994) Fletcher (2002) Boucher (1997) Bennis (1997)		

Annexure C: Transcripts of the Individual Interviewees

Individual A

I am the oldest of three children. My sister is eighteen months younger than me and my baby brother is four and a half years younger. My parents are South African by birth but they emigrated to Israel in the late 60s to build the land and do the 'Zionist thing'. As a result, my siblings and I were all born in Jerusalem. But we didn't stay there long. We returned to South Africa when I was five years old, in 1976. My mother's father had passed away and whilst the plan was always to return to Israel, well it didn't work out that way. My parents got divorced about two years later, when I was about seven. My father, who was originally from Pretoria eventually returned to Jo'burg and my mother and the three of us, we stayed in Cape Town.

Although my father was the absent parent, I think I ended up hero worshipping him quite a bit. I didn't see him often, maybe once a couple of weeks for an afternoon, and when he moved to Jo'burg we saw him even less, once every three to six months. I really identified with him back then, with the image that I had of him in my mind. Of course, now I am an adult I view my father differently but as a child it was different. Of course I was closer to my mother because she was present for the every day course of my life.

I would say my mother is quite an anxious person although she is very committed to whatever she sets her mind too. She started studying at the age of around 45 and completed her masters cum laude. She has since published several journal articles and has presented at international conference circuit. She is extremely disciplined about what she does. I admire that because I think she has quite low self esteem and I think it was hard for her, bringing the three of us children up alone. She probably suffered from depression during our childhood. She was and can be quite reticent in terms of expressing affection and she's not very open about her feelings.

My Dad is also an equally committed character. He's also intelligent, he has a good sense of humor and he's also insecure. But he's what I would call a 'good man'. If somebody has been unfair or unjust he goes beyond the call of duty to correct the injustice. Sometimes his good intentions land him in trouble. He can make

commitments that are difficult to follow through or that lead him into situations that he knows are probably wrong. In that sense, I think he can also be a little weak. Sometimes it takes a stronger person to make a hard decision about what one can and can't do.

Of course growing up without my father has obviously influenced me in a number of ways, but it is hard to pinpoint exactly how. I think it's fair to say that I would probably be quite a different person had my mother and father stayed together, I mean, I'm sure something would have changed about me. For example, I've always struggled with trust and intimate relationships and I think the divorce is a possible explanation.

I don't think either of them has influenced me more than the other. From both my parents I received a very strong sense of justice and fairness, of doing the right thing. They also instilled in me a Jewish identity that stresses the importance of community and of family.

Their fairness carried through to the way they treated the three of us children. I think we were all pretty much treated the same, although my brother was spoiled by my grandmother and I was also very jealous of my sister growing up. She was an outstanding ballet dancer and she used to get a lot of public recognition for her talent. Whereas I was quite a shy, introverted child who loved to read. I would spend most afternoons buried in my books. When I was about nine or ten years old I won a couple of poetry competitions so I got some positive reinforcement and I think that's what really shaped my future path – that and my fascination with understanding how people worked, what they were thinking, I was fascinated by that.

When I was eight I wanted to be a 'brain surgeon' but over the years I refined it a bit and settled on being a psychologist. Psychology and writing were my two interests so I signed up for a BA with English and Psychology majors at the University of Cape Town. I followed up my BA with an Honors in Clinical Psychology. I then hit something of a cross roads, I was debating whether I should continue with a Masters in Clinical Psychology or pursue a career as a journalist. I was tending towards doing a Masters, but knew that I was probably too young for a Masters, the course usually requires a mature candidate with some practical work experience..

It was my final year at University and the blue chip companies were visiting campus, doing what is known as the 'milk round'. A friend of mine persuaded me to tag along, on the premise that it was good to practice one's interview skills. I wasn't all that interested, but I was looking for a reason to avoid finishing my thesis, so I went along. I had a few interviews with Unilever and the like, and then I found myself sitting outside the [consultancy A] stand. I had no interviews lined up and I was taking a break. Then this guy from [consultancy A] stepped out and said "my last interview has just been cancelled, does anyone want to come in for a chat?" And that's how my career at [consultancy A] began. It was actually a bit of a joke. I mean, I didn't really know who [consultancy A] were, other than the fact that a few of my friends worked there.

I ended up working for [consultancy A] for seven years and I really enjoyed my time as a consultant. I worked long hours, fourteen hour days and full days on Saturdays and Sundays. Looking back now I don't know if I could do that again, but at the time I was young and enthusiastic and that's just what you did. I had a fairly good career path going, following the standard career path from analyst, consultant, manager , but whilst I really enjoyed the problem solving nature of the work I wasn't that motivated to be a partner. As you become more senior the work becomes more about admin, people management and selling. So I was vaguely thinking that perhaps I should move on to a new challenge and was even considering doing an MBA.

It was around this time that I bumped into an ex [consultancy A] colleague whilst having dinner in a restaurant. X and I had gotten on well at [consultancy A] and he was now working at [bank A]. He mentioned that he needed some help in the strategic projects area and he was like, "yeah come and work with me", so I did. The strategic projects area at [bank A] was a great introduction to the world of banking. Essentially we would assess whether business cases for [BANK A] were any good or not. That required working across many different aspects of the business. I did that for a few years, reviewing business cases, and also working on some projects. Eventually, I joined core banking as the Chief Operating Officer – which was my first move from project work to real line work - and then about three years ago I got promoted again to CEO.

It's funny but I've never had a job that I was qualified to do. I did Clinical Psychology and English at University and then I ended up at a management consultant company where everyone had Business Science, MBA and Engineering degrees. And then I joined [BANK A] with no banking experience, no financial experience and no IT experience, (and as you know, banking is all about IT). But in a way it's really worked in my favor. Unlike people who may come in a little arrogant and say, "well I've got my MBA and I know everything" I have always been very aware that I have had to learn. I don't know whether this is a female thing, but I've never been scared to ask for help. If I'm unsure of something, or if I feel a little in over my head, I go and I make sure I ask for help. It doesn't bother me as I've always recognized that I'm on a steep learning curve.

Because I've not landed up in a career of my choosing my attitude has always been that if you are open to it, doors will open. But by open I don't mean being fatalistic and not doing anything. There's the story about the guy at the top of the building, and there's been a flood, and he believes in God. And this helicopter comes past and the pilot says "come on board" and the guys like "no, no God will save me" and then an airplane comes by and the same thing happens. And he dies and he goes to heaven and up to God and he says to God, "you know God I have prayed for you my whole life why didn't you come and save me?" and God says, "what do you mean, I sent a helicopter, and then a plane ..."! My approach has been that I don't really mind the content of my work, as long as I'm interested and challenged and there are people who inspire me. So if doors open, as long as they're interesting and challenging then I'll do it.

I would attribute my success to being in the right place at the right time and having some really great people who have supported me and who I have learnt from. X at [Bank A] has been really wonderful to work for, in the sense that he has given me great opportunities but has also protected me. He's one of those guys where, if a project that I did went really well, he would give me the credit but if it went badly, then he would take the 'blame' for me. I mean obviously we would have a private chat about what had happened but publicly he would take the responsibility if things went badly. The trust he placed in me, it gave me enormous exposure into [Bank A] and enormous opportunities. He is very successful within [Bank A] and very well respected. He gave me a lot of credibility. He's still someone that I go too for advice.

Although I don't work directly for him anymore he's someone that I will have regular lunches with, about once every two months, and we have a catch up.

My other mentor is a guy called [Y] at [Bank A], he's also been an enormous help and support to me. Although he is technically a peer of mine, he heads up investments for [Bank A], he has a very good understanding of the organisation, and he's very creative and has a strong financial background, which as you know is my weakest area. So he offers me support on the financials, but he's also got very good insight when it comes to people, so if I'm struggling with a people issue I'll call [Y] and we'll bounce some ideas off one another. And then there is [Z], who is the CEO of [bank A]. He has also given me wonderful opportunities and has been very supportive. I haven't encountered any barriers to success at [Bank A] at all. In fact [Z] almost favors women, his theory is that women are better than men except they have to go off for five months to have a baby.

These aren't relationships that I have gone out of my way to cultivate. They are just people that I really get along with. X and I worked together at [consultancy A] and we'd always got on well. When I first met him he was this very bolshie guy who everyone was scared of. He was very technically orientated and when I first met him I was this change management, soft and fluffy bunny hugger I remember we had one argument in which I stood my ground and then I mentioned the word "DASD" which is a technical term – that that took him back a bit. After that I think he respected me a little and we ended up having a good working relationship. I met [colleague Y] here at [bank A] and we just liked one another. It wasn't anything that I worked on. I don't really like the whole networking thing, going out to meet people just for the sake of potentially using them down the line. I'm just not a political player like that. If I strike up a friendship with somebody and they also happen to support me in my career, well that's wonderful and it's a bonus.

I've also done well because of the teams that I have led. If you've seen those four quadrants – driver / analytical / expressive and amiable, well I'm a driver but also amiable. I know that when I want to get something done I go on a mission to get it done. In this sense I can be extremely focused. I like to get to the core of an issue and deal with it. I cannot take waffle and I like to get rid of all the crap. But I also want people to like me. I'm very aware that if you don't take people with you, if you don't have respect for the people you are working with ... hopefully I can model my

leadership style on the same treatment that I have received, giving people the credit for a job well done and building a good team around me.

I remember at [consultancy A] there was one project in particular, which was quite a critical project for me. I was on it for three years and I made manager during the course of the project. When I first started on the project I was put in charge of training. We had almost 5,000 people to train and the two content specialists, who were more senior to me, had to report directly to me. This was quite an awkward situation, because I had been put in above them and although I didn't know what they felt, I knew how I would feel if I was in their position. So at the beginning of the project I sat down with both of them individually and I said, "we've all been placed in this situation, what you guys need to do is tell me what I need to do to support you. I've got these skills, you've got these skills, and this is how we will work together as a team". So in the beginning they actually told me what to do and then after a while I formed my own role and successfully led the team. It was one of the things I am most proud of because a year and a half later the one woman came to me and commended my leadership style. She'd wanted to acknowledge the role that I had played because she was unhappy when I had first started and she had complained to one or two other people about me, but subsequently she thought that I had done a good job.

I think this leadership style is directly linked to my personality. I'm about taking people with me, wanting people to be happy and I suppose wanting people to like me. It's also probably a bit of a female thing, the ability to ask for help and the valuing of connections between people. Or possibly it's a people / person thing but it's disproportionately represented by women. I think my style is also linked to a bit of a Cinderella complex, you know "here's [me] dressing up in her suit and here's her suitcase and she's off to work in a bank now". I've always felt that I've been promoted far beyond my level of competence, and that I've never actually been found out. I think I get more than enough credit for what I do. I think that that's a female thing because men somehow seem to have more confidence. And I've realized that other women feel the same way. I mean, I have to acknowledge that I do actually know something. If I look back over certain projects that I've done I cannot argue that I was responsible for them and that they were delivered successfully, so I must have got something right. I have to take credit for that myself. For instance, [bank B] was a very high profile project that I managed. It was

a massive integration of two banks, it was an extremely complex project, very stressful and it went very well so even if all I did was put the right team together, identify the right people and identify the issues well then, fine.

My biggest challenge at work today is trying to maintain a semblance of work / life balance, which has become more important because I've recently had a baby. Part of the reason for initially leaving [consultancy A] was that I realized that I was working crazy hours and that my life was a bit out of kilter. When I joined [BANK A] my hours did reduce a little, but now I'm back from maternity leave, I've had to become even more disciplined about the hours that I keep. I generally arrive at work at 8h30am and leave work at 5pm and then I'll dial into work after my baby is asleep. It's difficult to enforce because obviously I want to be available to my colleagues and I feel like I'm not doing my job properly. Funnily enough I don't feel guilty about not seeing my baby enough, but I think that's because I grew up with a full time working mother. The only guilt that I have is that I feel like I am shortchanging my job. But since coming back from maternity leave people have been enormously respectful of my boundaries. Who knows, people maybe saying things behind my back and obviously there are jokes when I leave at 5pm, like "half day?" or whatever but on the whole it's been a very positive experience.

My husband also works full time, he's a lecturer at [University A] in molecular biology and genetics and so he's got a more flexible schedule than I do. We have discussed that if one of us were to give up our jobs, it would be him. At the moment though we have a really good nanny and it seems to be working at okay. I still work weekends a little, but I have supportive in-laws who live in Pretoria. We'll visit them and I'll dump the baby with the doting grandparents and then go off and do some work. They're happy and I'm happy, it's good.

At [bank A] the representation of women at a senior level is not that great. Of the seven managers who report directly to the CEO only one of them is a woman. But at the next level down there is probably about 30% to 40% female representation. My core team is about 70% women for which I take some flak. But my personal experience is that whether you are a woman or a man, it makes very little difference. I've never experienced discrimination either within [consultancy A] or here at [bank A]. Whilst the old [bank A] may have had elements of the "old boy's club" network I haven't experienced it here. The bank was taken over by [bank C]

which possesses a very young, very entrepreneurial culture that is very results driven. Mind you, it could very well be happening around me, but I'm just completely oblivious to it. I've never been interested in company functions and socializing for the sake of your career. Neither do we have a women's network at [bank A]. There have been sporadic attempts to cultivate a formal network but it's never really taken off. I'm much more of the mind to unofficially mentor people who are good for the job, which in my case, are mostly female.

The only challenge that I can honestly say that career women face is if they decide to have children. That's a massive choice and one I completely underestimated. It just completely changes your life. Firstly it takes you out for five months (luckily for me that had no impact because [bank A] was so supportive) and secondly, when you come back you'll never come back in the same way, never. Unless you reverse roles and your husband is the primary care taker, which is one way of doing it. But I have become quite a traditionalist in my old age and I think there's a genetic thing between mother and child, I'd like to pretend it's not there but it is. My experience is that motherhood puts a self-imposed cap on women's careers. Like right now if I got the most sexy opportunity offered to me, like a new job, which was way above what I was doing now and involved me being away and traveling or working long hours then I would say no.

What has become important for me is security for my child and me. You know I had 800 people working for me and luckily now I have only 200 because I gave an area I was responsible away. I would happily go back to three people reporting to me and a more junior job if I could keep a salary that would support us, and same level of interest and challenge. I've got no ambitions to continue up the career ladder for the sake of it.

In terms of stereotypes I've had one or two instances of sexism when I was a consultant and I had to deal with middle aged Afrikaans men. You'd go into a meeting and they would call me "poppie" and I have had meetings where people talk past me to the male in the room. But I've also had meetings where they started out talking past me but end up talking to me, which is quite nice. I've always seen it as a challenge. Occasionally I've walked in and been invisible and I try and see whether I can get visible. Not by doing anything really aggressive but just by commenting now and then, making my presence felt, and then eventually they

notice. For example, eight or ten years ago I had a meeting in Bloemfontein with a railway manager. I went with a male colleague of mine who was fresh on the project, whereas I had mapped the process for the railway so I knew more about how trucks were coupled and decoupled and so on. Every time there was a technical point the railway manager would look to my colleague but I would land up answering. And another time, when I left a meeting, this guy said, “goodbye, Mr [my surname] which I thought was a significant Freudian slip. But it was never a really serious problem for me because I have never experienced stereotyping within my organisation. In consulting it was almost like a standing joke, we’d roll our eyes about the ‘stupid client’.

In South Africa I think we have a number of very senior prominent women who serve as role models. Thabo Mbeki has clearly appointed women to provincial executive positions and his current deputy president is a woman. In the business world there are women like Maria Ramos, Irene Charnley and Wendy Lucas Bull who I suppose are women role models. But I must admit that I haven’t looked for a gender role model in particular. What I do now is observe with interest other women with children and the choices they’ve made. I’ve got some friends who’ve stopped work completely, others who have gone back to work with much-reduced hours and people like me who have gone back full time and how we’ve coped with that. At the moment I’m comfortable with my position. I still take too much work home and I worry about work. I still feel like I’m only doing a third of the job that I should be doing. But I’ve always felt like that, before I felt like I was doing half the job I needed to be doing and now with the baby it’s a third. So there’s always a gap, it’s just the size of the gap that’s increased. But overall it’s working for me. I mean I like being challenged by my job and I know that I could not be a 24-hour mother ever.

Individual B

My name is X, I’m 33 years old and I come from a family of five siblings, four girls and a boy. I grew up in Zulu land where my parents own a farm. My Dad takes care of the running of the farm and my Mum is a housewife, she’s always been a housewife. I’m the second eldest in my family. My brothers and sisters are all fairly close in age, the five of us were born over a ten year period. My siblings and I have all taken fairly different routes. My brother had cerebral palsy throughout his life so he doesn’t work, of course. My elder sister is a nurse and at the moment she’s in

LA, she's always traveled abroad, nurses are completely undervalued in South Africa, actually in most places. My third sister works in biotechnology in South Africa and my other sister works [name of company].

For most of our lives we didn't live with our parents. We had to go to school some distance from our home. Schools at that time were largely segregated and there were no Indian schools within the area, the nearest Indian school was quite some distance away. So my parents set up a place for us in a granny flat, which was located off of my grandparents' house. We lived there as a little sub unit, we had our own helper who took care of us and we looked after ourselves. We would visit our parents on weekends or our parents would visit us. Because we were effectively living by ourselves this experience made us quite independent. I mean, we had to take care of ourselves, and I think it made us stronger and more independent as women.

Although I didn't live with my parents they were still very present in my life. I'm not sure that you need to physically around people for them to influence who you are. Sometimes space is a good thing, it can actually better a relationship. I got different, but equal, kinds of support from my parents. I wouldn't say that one was more influential in my life than the other. I've always seen them as a very tight unit and the two of them complement one another. My Dad is very quiet but very, very concerned with doing the right thing. He is very focused on being fair, on having integrity, on being kind to people. My Mum is a little more extroverted and a little more social, but she also has a lot of fairness to her. My grandmother was also quite a strong character, very traditional. She and my grandfather were both retired when we lived near to them. They had this wonderful life together actually, living together, spending all their time together and reading – it was wonderful.

As a young girl I would read a lot to the point that I think my mother would want me to spend more time in the sun and I just wouldn't want too. I think I was more extroverted as a child than I am now. I had quite a range of interests, but perhaps I read more than I played sport. But I was fairly well balanced. I can't say I enjoyed school, I mean school was fine, but you know, it was school.

I studied quantity surveying at college, the reason I chose it was because I really enjoyed numbers and I thought it might make for an interesting career. Whilst I was

studying I won a bursary from [company Y] and so whilst I studied I was also working. I actually started working quite early. I worked for [company Y] in Durban for a while but then I decided that I would rather work in Johannesburg. I transferred with company Y up to Jo'burg but I didn't last with them much longer than six months. The company was going through a merger and I found it was a difficult environment in which to work. So I decided to leave them and I joined [company X] and spent about 2 years with them.

Engineering is a very male dominated industry. I would often work on construction sites where you were dealing with blue-collar workers as well as the typical white-collar workers. The culture is very technical and the main challenges in my work were mainly related to delivery. I would be in charge of looking after the technical and financial areas of the project. That would involve managing the revenue, checking the performance of the guys who were doing the work as well as negotiating with sub contractors.

During that time I don't think I encountered one negative experience that related to me as a woman. You would expect it but to be honest I never experienced it. There were very few women in the industry. There was only one other female quantity surveyor that I knew of and I don't think I every met a female civil engineer. Although I do think that there were several cultural events that excluded me as a woman. I'm referring to social events, which tended to be very male dominated, which is understandable, but they didn't appeal to me. I'm talking about heavy drinking sessions, that sort of thing, which I didn't want to go too because it's not my thing. But I don't know if that's necessarily a gender thing, that maybe just a 'me' thing.

After the two years at the company I just didn't feel stimulated in my job anymore, I felt like I had learnt what I needed too and that I needed to do something else. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do so I resigned from my job and signed up to do an MBA full time at [college]. You have to be passionate about what you do. That's why I had to change careers so I could be excited about my work. Performance is really important to me. If I undertake to do something it's important that I finish it, it's important that the quality is good.

It was towards the end of my MBA that I began to think, 'well what am I going to do next?' I really wasn't sure where I wanted to go. Banking was not an area that I contemplated, partly because on the MBA you are exposed to very few finance areas. I was thinking that consulting sounded interesting and I was also interested in doing some NGO work, in terms of scope. And then somehow I found myself here at [bank], which was about three and a half years ago. [Bank] had offered me a position in a particular division or in the 'Class of ...' program where essentially you spend some time moving around the bank, experiencing different divisions and deciding where you may like to place yourself. I wasn't sure about my focus so I joined the 'Class of ...' program. I spent about five months in and out of various departments before I finally dedicated myself to a particular division. I discovered that this is really where my passion lies.

At [bank] you are encouraged to focus on building on your expertise. That's why our division has a very flat structure. There are project teams but the team leaders are constantly revolving. You could be the team leader on one project but not on another. It's a very fluid process. You will find people here that are very advanced in their careers but who you work along side with. There is really no hierarchy. Our core business is banking, not managing other people. There's really no reason for me to manage somebody else. For example, when I first joined here one of my colleagues was a former marketing director. He was 65 years old and this was really a retirement job for him. Whereas for me, you know, it was my first job after the MBA. But there was no talk of who was the most senior. In [bank] you are rewarded for sticking to where your passion lies, you are encouraged to be focused. When people become managers they become distanced from their core skills set. For instance, I hardly ever see my boss we hardly ever interact. Of course he's very incisive, very strategic and he can be very direct. I think he's maybe a little bit kinder to women. I think he can be a little bit blunt with guys and maybe a little more sensitive to women.

There are no other women within our division. We did have another female in our team until quite recently but she has moved elsewhere. I don't see the lack of women as a problem. I mean, why should it be? We're all operating on a project, we're all working towards the same goals, so why should there be an issue? If anything women bring an almost complementary angle to situations that enhance our performance as a team. I think women are more sensitive which can be useful

in negotiations. A woman's perspective on how things are is different, a woman's approach is different and I think you need that balance in a discussion. I have seen it used in practice, and I think it's valuable.

I'm suggesting that men have a more ... not aggressive style, but rather that women have a softer conversational style, a different language and an approach that fosters a softer conversation, and a softer conversation makes negotiating more sensible. It's not less aggressive; it's just more sensible. I think the word I'm probably looking for is 'calmer'. Women can help create a calm atmosphere. If you have ten men in a room they can become a little bit brash, uttering four letter words and competing amongst themselves. But if there's a woman present I think things are softened a notch, and I think that's good in any discussion. But I'm not sure whether men recognize of women in this respect. I'd like to think they did, but I'm not so sure.

A lot of my career success is a result of my ability to bring fairness and balance to a debate. I think that's very important. For example, if you are negotiating with sub-contractors, it's not sustainable to make such a large profit that the guy goes under. You have to be fair. It's easy to negotiate and make a super profit but then you are just killing the long-term relationship. I think it's important for long-term relationships to be fair and to always recognize that. And I'm not sure that in the business world that that voice is always there.

I also, and this is maybe a woman's perspective, but I think I see things differently too. If there are issues to do with a client for example, I will often spot them before my male colleagues do. In difficult negotiations you need to be in tune with something else, and I think that identifying that something else perhaps has to do with being a woman. I would say that I am in tune with another space, as opposed to maybe a male colleague who wouldn't hear what the person was saying. I will pick up on the body language, as an example but then I'm a really good listener. It's a role that I play in my life in general, with my friends and even with my male colleagues. People tend to open up to me more than they do with other people. So perhaps it's just a personal thing and not a gender thing.

You know I'm not a financial person I'm a technical person who has become a banker. So I think that relative to my peers I'm not as confident as them or rather I'm

not super-confident. I'm not sure how I come across to others, but my style is fairly quiet. I only say things when I have something positive to say, my confidence is not 'out there'. I don't need to be 'out there' because it's not congruent to who I am, and perhaps other women are the same. When you compare us to our male counterparts, you know we don't come across as confident because it's just not in our nature. What I'm referring too are different expressions of confidence, as opposed to different confidence levels. I guess you see a lot of men who aren't that vocal but who are quietly confident. And then you get a lot of vocal men who are actually the opposite, who are very loud but who have a lack of self-confidence. In many ways I would say that women in their unassuming way are actually as individuals, much more confident than their loud, gregarious male colleagues, except maybe they are not perceived as so. But as long as your deliver, as long as you are focused, what does it matter?

I think my personal leadership style is quite high level, but also quite detailed, I tend to get involved in all levels of the spectrum. My style is to have a structure and to follow it through. I'm not sure I'm very good at delegating completely; I mean I think I do but my nature is to always get involved. I would also struggle to delegate to a person that I haven't worked with before, particularly if it's a new person, then I would delegate to them but I would ensure that I monitor them quite closely. But I haven't really noticed any significant differences in my leadership style to that of my male colleagues. I think that's because we're a cohesive team with great rapport. There is a great sense of comradeship amongst the team, although we are not personal friends outside of work, but we are great friends at work. Recently we have moved to an open plan office and certainly some people in my team were a little bit skeptical because we are used to working in our own offices, but it has built up a social element.

The biggest challenge for me at work is that the work creates is a highly pressured environment in which there is always a lot of tension between the bank and the client in terms of risk transfer. The client is trying to push a lot of the risk on to us and we are working hard to reduce our own levels of risk. Then there's also a tension between our division and the bank's credit committee, as to what projects the bank will and won't accept. Then we work within teams and everyone with the team has different views. It's important that all of those views are expressed, as everyone has to sign off on the deal. The team's performance is our individual

performance so success or failure reflects on all of us at the end of the day. So you find a lot of tension and conflicting agendas.

Because these deals are made over a protracted period of time the tension is constant. For me that's a real challenge, I find it very difficult, because I'm not a confrontational person and I don't always enjoy being in this space, and yet I find myself in it almost every day. I am always on the defensive. It's like, if you were a cricketer, well I'm defending the wicket all the time and on all sides. Once in a while I might be able to hit a six but most of the time it's defense, defense, defense and it's not that you have any space to maneuver on any side it's constant. Of course I am exaggerating a little, but I am in that space all the time, and for me personally, it's a challenge. I work to overcome it by dealing incrementally with every single issue that comes my way. So if I've got an issue I work on removing it as quickly as possible and packing it away into a little box. Then I'm ready to deal with the next one that comes my way.

We're very fortunate within our division, there are not any power politics being played. I think it's because we are all set up to aim for a common goal, so it's really all about trust and respect, and if you can get that atmosphere right then nothing can really disrupt it. I'm really passionate about my work right now. I really enjoy the work that I do, largely because it has got a strong social element to it. It's very stimulating. But I don't know if I will be passionate about it forever. If I no longer am, then I will switch to another job. In that sense I don't really have a career path. I mean I'm not driven to be the Head of the division.

It's always been important for me to have a life outside of work, in that sense work / life balance has always been an issue in my career. It's very important to me that I have a personality outside of work. Work is really just one part of my life. There are lots of other things that I really love doing. I don't have a husband or child but when you're married with children I would imagine that the work / life balance becomes even more of an issue. It's not where I am in my life right now but as a woman I'm not sure how you would balance your career with family life. Women typically want to give their best in everything and that's probably what I would continue to try to do, but I would imagine that one would suffer. But then again, I wouldn't have a problem being a housewife, that's a fine choice. I'm sure many women would prefer to be housewives, given the choice.

There are very few female role models for us to look too. You know there are women in the distance, like Madeleine Albright for instance. There are very few women in banking, full stop. That filters down to all levels. But even if there were, your interactions with other women would be very limited. I just interact with people in my immediate environment. So unless the head of our division was a woman, well ... it would be meaningless. But I don't really look to professional role models, because this is just one part of my life, they're unable to give me a bigger perspective. I look rather to certain people who I find good qualities in, and I like the way they lead their lives. It's their approach to life, their life attitudes that are interesting and inspiring to me.

But really, there are no issues about me being a woman within my team at work. It only becomes an issue when we interview other women. I'm always asked to attend those interviews because it's important for women outside to feel comfortable. I think it can be intimidating for women to approach a team if it's all male. We are cognizant of that fact and I sit in on the interviews so that I can answer their questions. But you know for me, it really isn't about gender, it's about people, it's all about trusting relationships with people, and when you have that, that's all that matters. I mean it's got nothing to do with ... you know that's just a life philosophy whether it's with your family, your friends or your blue collar workers or whatever, you know it's all about respect and trust and I think that if that's the approach one adopts I don't think one should encounter problems.

Individual C

Background

I'm the second of three daughters. I was born in a small town on the edge of the Platt-lands in South Africa, quite close to a place called [town A]. My father was a teacher and when I was about four or five he was transferred to [town B] where we lived until I was about 14, and then we were transferred back to [town A] which was another tiny little small town environment. My father was a math's & science teacher who loved teaching. He became a headmaster until he became an inspector of education. He took the promotion because he was expecting to send three kids to university. But the irony is that my elder sister got a bursary to study, I got a full

scholarship and my younger sister did nursing for which there were no university fees.

I think I almost always identified more with my father growing up. I would help my father clean the pool, sort the compost, or mow the lawn. I definitely spent a lot more time doing the 'guy' things with him. My father is also a very rational and clear thinker. I inherited that from him. My father and I used to play chess together in the evenings. He wouldn't do that with either of my other sisters and I certainly wouldn't do something like that with my mother, and yet people who know us say I'm incredibly like my mother. I have a lot of her mannerisms. She talks a lot, I talk a lot, and we sound quite similar.

My mother was a housewife for most of my childhood. She did all sorts of bits & pieces. I think if I'm like my mother it's because she's always been incredibly busy person, and she can never just sit down. She'll watch TV, knit and read all at the same time. So even though she dropped out of the formal workforce when we were born she was always involved in things like the local hospice, the cancer association and care for the aged. Whilst we were at high school she worked as a lab assistant because it was an 8am-2pm and she could be around when we were at home, but her primary role was being a mother.

Influences

When I think about the influence that my parents had on me, one hasn't really influenced me more than the other. Both my parents gave me the sense that if I had the ability to do something, then I should do it. So if you could get an 'A', then not getting an 'A' was laziness. Getting an 'A' didn't deserve a huge amount of applause because it was a god given ability and you should just get an 'A'. It was a very matter of fact approach to life.

I had a godfather who was a very close friend of my father's at University. He went into the commercial world and ended up as a finance director at [a car company]. He was very successful and worked for the [car company] all around the world. He was quite a close godfather and immensely encouraging. I think my father was a little bit of a chauvinist as he always suggested that I look at careers that could support the life of a working mother. He'd suggest that I should be an accountant

because, “you can always keep people’s books part time when you’ve had children” or “why not become a pharmacist so you can locum part time?” But my godfather was more like “do what you want to do and deal with the rest of the stuff when it happens down the line”.

The School Years

You know when the report card says that “[name] is a lively and interested student” that means she’s a complete disruption to the class. I think I must have been a bit of a brat in primary school. My older sister is only 17 months older than me. When she was learning to read & write I was able to keep up with her. By the time I started school I was able to read & write and I think I must have been a bit of a handful. When the teacher was trying to get everyone to go “A, B, C” I was like “yeah, yeah, yeah”

I’m lucky that I’ve always been quite capable from a sporting perspective as well, so I played first team tennis, first team hockey and first team swimming. I was quite strong academically and I came first in my class probably all the way up until standard 9, and I also was quite sporty, which was good because I was never a nerd.

I enjoyed school and I participated in everything. I worked for the school newspaper, I was part of the debating society, I swam, ran, played hockey and did whatever had to be done. With hindsight I was quite lucky. It kind of came quite easy. My parents encouraged me to get involved and experience it all. I think that perhaps their whole attitude of “if you can do it, you should do it, and we’re not all going to jump up and down and applaud when you do”, was a way of them trying to prevent me from becoming too big headed or too much of a brat because things did come quite naturally and easy to me.

Senior school was a co-ed primary school and I had a wide circle of friends there. I mean I was a happy kid at school. I didn’t really have any kind of issues. I was Deputy Head girl at primary school, and then Head Girl at the end of my matric year. But I think by the time I was in matric I was bored of school and ready to move on.

University

I did chemical engineering as my undergraduate degree, and even now when people ask me why I did it, I think it's because I had no first hand exposure to business. My aunts and uncles are mostly teachers, doctors and nurses and there is one engineer. I didn't have examples of people who worked in business to choose from. At school we went through a career planning seminar and chemical engineering appeared interesting to me. I knew I didn't want to be an accountant. I knew I didn't want to be a pharmacist. I quite wanted to be an astronaut but then that wasn't going to work in a South African context.

I went to University in [city A] which was quite interesting because in South Africa you either went to one of two universities. There are two reasons why I did. Firstly I had won a full scholarship at [a consumer product company] and its Head Office is in [city A]. At the time there had been quite a lot of political activity in Cape Town and [consumer product company] were keen for me to go to [city A] because of less disruption to my studies and also because the Chemical Engineering department in [city A] was highly thought of. From my personal perspective, half of my class was going to [city B] and so I thought that I'd rather go somewhere that was a little more anonymous.

My course was a four-year degree. I did my usual thing, throwing myself in at deep end and getting involved in all sorts of committees. I got half way through my second year and realized that this degree actually needed to be worked at. The course was 8am-5pm with a Monday to Friday timetable, and what with the extra curricula activities, I had no social life. That's when I stopped doing a whole bunch of extra mural stuff and rather thought that I was going to get this degree and have a little bit of fun in the mean time.

I still think that during the course of the degree and the time I spent working as an Engineer I used far more grey matter than I have ever used since. And the irony is that as an Engineer you get paid a fraction of what you get paid in the financial services. Employers definitely value people skills and financial skills outside of a technical environment more.

Early Work

After graduating I worked for [consumer product company] in [city A]. I worked in the [city A] factory for about a year and a half and I was actually quite unhappy. I don't know how much of it was because everybody's first year of working is quite an adjustment or whether it was the situation that I found myself in. I reported to a colored chap who was probably about fifty at the time. He was a very competent guy but had quite a bad stutter, he was a little bit shorter than me and the fact that he was colored and a senior manager at [the consumer product company] meant that he had fought his way through the whole apartheid system in South Africa. And then I breeze in, I've had it easy all my life and I've come to do my job as engineer. I do come across as very extrovert, I'm quite a good public speaker (although the reality is that I'm actually quite introverted and I need a whole bunch of more space to myself than people realize) and I just don't think he knew how to deal with me, I was just too much for him.

Firstly, I was a female and he had a daughter my age and for him that didn't really fit with me in the work place. And he had a stutter whilst I was quite eloquent. And I was just 'go, go, go' and he was just very slowly paced. We were a smallish team. There were about three or four other junior engineers. Two of them were black guys who had the same qualifications and the same experience that I had, but I think they were just less inclined to push the system or rock the boat. And then there was another chap who had been working for about three or four years but was just kind of quieter.

I was unhappy because I didn't feel like I was being pushed or challenged. I was bored of the work that I was doing and this colored guy just wasn't able to give me any sense of where I was going. So I was very fortunate when another senior engineer on the factory side approached me to run a pilot plant in [city C]. In [city C] they were looking at launching micro detergents and they had committed R400 million to building this micro detergent factory, although they hadn't quite figured out how they were going to do it. So a little two ton pilot had been built and he said to me, "I need a chemical engineer to go and run the test plant, do the formulation trials for the next six months, figure it all out and then become part of the big team".

And I was lucky that he took a fancy to me. He'd obviously been looking out for someone with the potential to do the job and he'd probably seen and liked something that I had done. Today this would never happen. The job would have to

be advertised and candidates interviewed, but at that time he just came up to me and said, "If you want it, the job's yours". I did think about whether I would take it or not. I had a boyfriend in [city A] and I had family and friends nearby. So for me it was definitely stepping out of my comfort zone. But in hindsight it was a great opportunity because I was only a year and a half out of University.

I got in my car and drove to [city C] where I found this brand new pilot plant. I had to interview and recruit two black operators to come work with me. I had to find a lab analyst to work with me. I had a little budget. Until then I'd just had my pocket money and my salary to deal with. I was completely in at the deep end and there were days when I thought, "I have no idea what I'm doing here". It was a huge learning curve but it was an opportunity to be the master of one's own destiny at a young age. And then I ended up doing formulation trials for [country A] factory and the [city A] factory and joined the team that was involved in running the 20-ton factory to which my formulations were applied.

Work / Travel

Once the project was a success I decided to go and do what every South African does, which was to do the work / travel thing. [The consumer product company] offered me a job in Germany but I decided that I really wanted to do the gap year thing and not confine myself to working 8am-5pm. So I went after some pub work in England. I had this romantic notion that the pub would be better and more fun than actually getting back into an engineering job, but after three months I realized that it was quite hard work and everybody treats you like an idiot when you are behind the bar in a pub and that it's really badly paid. So I got a job working for [pharmaceutical company A] where I stayed for about eight months, before traveling around the world for six months.

After that I returned to the UK and got a job working for [pharmaceutical company B] which was actually great. The company had unbundled and they moved all their chemical engineers into a little subsidiary where we provided pure engineering services. And Jesus - my grey matter stretched there. I remember doing some triple faced equations that I had purposefully avoided in my exams but now I dealing with them in real life. [Pharmaceutical company B] offered me an opportunity on their

management trainee program but by that time I had become quite disillusioned with engineering.

From my perspective what happens in a factory is that the accountants decide what the budget is for the year, they decide how much money the company is going to make and what the cost are going to be. That's usually informed by the marketing and sales plan, which determines what, and how much the company will sell. Then they come to you as the engineer and tell you what you will make and how much money you have got to make it. So you have two sides of the triangle pegged and the third is just about making it happen. I found it quite frustrating not to be involved in any of the input decisions. You are always at the receiving end of somebody else's decisions and as a chemical engineer I was pigeon holed as the factory person. At the time I shared a flat with three girls who were either chartered accountants or who had done an accounting degree. I knew that I could do what they were doing but that they could never do what I did. But I was never allowed to cross those boundaries.

That's when I decided to do an MBA because it was a great way of forcing people to look at you differently. I had no idea what I wanted to do but I thought that it would give me a lot more options. I came back to South Africa to do my MBA because basically it was a lot cheaper than the international MBAs where you had to have \$100,000 in your bank account! I met my husband whilst I did my MBA here in South Africa, so it wasn't all bad.

Post MBA

Straight after my MBA I joined [a consulting company]. I had had offers to become an investment analyst but having come from a technical and numerical I didn't really want to go straight into another. Rather I thought that some general business would be interesting. I'm glad I did it as I had a great time, even though they work you to the bone. 7am–7pm was a good day. It was more like 7am-9pm and that was five days a week. And then I probably put in another 6 or 7 hours on either a Saturday or a Sunday, and you do that week in and week out. My husband (we were married a few years ago) was incredibly patient as I was just nowhere. I was completely buried in my work for a good two years.

In my heart I knew I wasn't a consultant. I find it really hard to sit and watch. I'm not a good advice giver. I'm much better at rolling up my sleeves and mucking in and making it happen. And for me there's something a little bit phony about the consultancy world, in that consultants will give the best intellectual solution to the problem because that's what it's about. But in reality the best intellectual solution to the problem is often not the most practical solution given the people that you have on the ground. Because I had more work experience than the average consultant I had a more realistic view of what clients were or weren't going to be able to do.

Then I was approached to go into [bank A] for interviews because they were looking for people to help set up an e-commerce start up. I thought, "well I have nothing to loose and it sounds like quite a fun thing to do". I joined [bank A's] dot com start up that ended up being a business which was a combination of a reward program and an internet banking initiative, so I kind of got into it financial services by default really. The business now has close to 300 000 customers is very successful and has exceeded expectations. The reward program now has a float of R210 million and is the biggest e-commerce business in South Africa.

When I joined the team I was hired to do CRM. After about two weeks [X] who was the CEO asked me to fill in as project manager until we found somebody. Well we never did find a project manager and so I project managed the business up till the launch. After the launch I was probably best described as the Chief Operating Officer. I effectively ran the business on a day-to-day basis.

[X] and I made a great team, we had great complimentary skills. [X] is a financial whiz kid who has got a PHD in Finance and he's also fantastic in managing relationships, I get impatient with company politics, but he was great at all that kind of stuff. The business grew from 60 employees to close to 120 people and then about a year after launch [X] was promoted upward into [bank A]. I took over from him as CEO and when I left there were probably about 160 people employed full time.

I really enjoyed this period of work but my husband was transferred to [city B]. I told the bank that I was moving and they offered to find some other work for me. At first I tried to commute from [city B to city C] but when you are a line manager it's impossible. I was on a plane every Monday morning and coming back every

Thursday evening. It was also a little bit too much like being a consultant again. I also found myself in a group strategy position which whilst enormously interesting and challenging I think is something I would like to do 10 years from now.

Current Work & Challenges

Then [bank B] approached me with a job in one of their business divisions. It was a very hard decision to make as I was moving to a competitor. When I started work in [bank B] the CEO was [Y] and I was brought on board to do new product development. I was quite happy to step away from the CEO role and I had no issues about working for anyone else. But still my time here has been quite turbulent.

After arriving I discovered that the business's strategy was flawed. I had been here about two months when I looked at the numbers and I knew that they did not stack up. I had the conversation with [Y] who did not handle the criticism at all well and who basically told me that I should focus on my job, which was product development, and leave the business to him. I went over his head to his superior. I warned him that he wasn't going to make his budgets and targets and he wouldn't listen to me, so I went over his head to the next person. I kept on going until I spoke to the CEO of [bank B] for the entire Africa group. I said to him, "look you're my last shot, I'm telling you that this business is pouring money down the drain and you can do whatever you want to do with the information, but at least I have tried". He chose to ignore everything I had to say.

Then in June last year they fired the guy who was head of banking for [bank B]. There was a kind of a hiatus where the business sat in limbo for 4 or 5 months. [Y] was still the CEO and it was a very uncomfortable place to be. But I stuck my neck out once again when the guy who had been head of Africa was shunted to Hong Kong and a new chap came in. I got on the phone to him and said "look - I can sit here and say nothing or I can say that clearly you have moved out one or two people because budget targets haven't been met, but the problem is still sitting in this business and you have to fix it because otherwise you are going nowhere". By this time I was six months pregnant so I was probably behaving a little rash!

He flew down to have a chat with me and I put some budget slides together. I explained that to him that I wasn't going behind [Y]'s back as all of the slides I had present to him I had also presented to [Y] with whom I had argued until I was blue in the face. After that I heard nothing from this new guy. I thought that I had burnt my bridges with pretty much everyone.

Then about a week later I got a phone call to say that he and a whole posse were flying in tomorrow. He said, "we're going to ask [Y] to leave and we would like you to take over as the CEO". I sat down and thought about it. I thought that this business needs somebody who is going to roll up their sleeves and throw all their energy into it. The job required a huge amount of commitment for the next 2 years and I just couldn't do that. I had made a conscious decision to have a kid and I absolutely wanted to be able to work from 8am-5pm. As much as everyone tried to convince me that I could work 8 or 9 hours a day and that they would be happy with that, that they didn't want more, I knew that the business needed more than that. And I think a lot of women instinctively know that they are going to be short changing somebody if they try and do that job and try and do the family thing. It's hard enough to get the balance right anyway, so why not put a cap on what job you can reasonably expect to do yourself ...

So I turned the job down. And they appointed [Z] as the new CEO and it's slowly starting to turn - but I'm at a career cross roads right now. I have had a couple of job offers whilst I was on maternity leave and I'm starting to become a little bit tired of the corporate game where you are very responsible and very accountable but you don't necessarily have the autonomy to make all the decisions that you can. I've been approached by another bank to set up a reward program for them as they're trying to do a whole re-branding exercise. And I must say I'm kind of leaning towards that at the moment because it's a discreet piece of work. Right now I'm feeling like the whole world rests on my shoulders and I want to be able to go home at 5pm and spend 2 hours with my son before he goes to sleep.

A working mother

When I've talked to the company about my hours they've all been bending over backwards saying to me "don't worry, absolutely you must go home at 5pm". I'm still breast-feeding at the moment because my son has all sorts of allergies and so I'm

trying to express at work. I've found that people pay complete lip service to the idea that they are actually sensitive to your commitments outside of work. You know 5pm will come and go and nobody will say "you had better go home", and I'm trying to desperately get myself out the door and I will have to say "excuse me, actually I need to go".

I have employed women in part time work. When I worked at [bank A] I had two developers, wonderful women who had children. Nobody in the history of [bank A] had ever allowed a part time contract. And I questioned why. "For heavens sake I can pay each of them 50% of what I would have paid them before, and I will probably get more work out of them". And it did really work but only because I supported it. I would be in a meeting and I would say to one of them, "go home, it's 1pm". And so I gave them the mandate to feel comfortable for working a half-day as opposed to feeling apologetic. And what I'm finding here is that I've got to apologize for leaving at 5pm. The fact that I am going to go home and after my son is asleep put in two more hours at work is completely unseen.

On the plus side I think I under estimated just how much love you can feel for a little human as a mother. Someone who is just so dependent on you, it's just awe inspiring. So that compensates for the flip side of it - in that I had no idea to what extent I would start questioning my own identity, because for so long I have defined myself by what I do. And it's the classic question, "hello, how are you and what do you do?" and to now take a lesser job with no career path and just kind of trust in 5 years time that something will pan out – I am giving up a huge chunk of what my life was about. Now I am defining myself as a mother and you get no recognition for that role unless you are a mother yourself. Single females will never appreciate the trade off that you've made and I don't think that men will ever appreciate the trade off – the choice between what you could do and what you are doing. The biggest challenge that we have is trying not to do it all, everyone says, "you wanted women's lib and you can have it, you can have it all!" But nobody is saying, "We will pick up the different piece of the equation to try and make this possible".

Career Crossroads

I think I'm going to have one more child. I'll probably have a two-year gap between my son and another child. Which is why the job with [bank C] is appealing. I could

set up the reward program and then hand it over to someone else to run. [Bank C] recognizes that they have a lot of good people, but that they also have a lot of clones, people who have been with the organisation for 20 or more years and so they desperately need a bit of fresh blood. They're on a recruitment drive to identify people who they think will challenge the organisation. I was honest with them and said "look I'd like another child in two years time", and they were like "that's fine as it will work out very well with handing over to someone else. Then take six months or a year off or whatever works for you and then we'll decide the next place where we can put you". That for me is appealing.

Another advantage of working for [bank C] is that I'm going in as a working mother. I've said up front that I won't be in the office before 8.30am and I won't be in the office after 4.30pm. I will also work from home whenever I can. Perhaps it's easier to establish your boundaries when people see you from day one as a working mother, as opposed to you being the person who used to put the lights out at night and now suddenly you're not.

Husband / Wife Balance

My husband worked for a bank until he retired about two weeks ago. He has been in banks all his life and he ended up as media and IT analyst for about five years. We have both worked very long hours although I find that I've always done more of the housework than him. I end up doing more of the work at home because I don't like living in a messy environment and yet he is happy too. But I'm learning to try and let go of some things. Generally it's a success and we just try and muddle along.

He's been very supportive of me and that's why I'm less worried by what happens in the home. He's never been threatened by me. I've almost always earned more than he has and it's never been an issue. He's immensely supportive of me. When I was offered the CEO position he offered to find a way to spend more time at home. So it really has been about supporting one another. When I was coming back to work after maternity leave my husband was like, "if you don't want to come back to work, then just tell me now before I leave to set up my own thing". And you know we've decided that for the next two years he'll do his own thing and I'm going to effectively

be the bread winner and when we have another kid it will probably about turn around.

He's going to set up a boutique research service. It's got quite an interesting business model. My husband has watched me and he sees that there are actually quite a lot of women out there who would quite like to work at the level that they've worked at but not in the quantum of time that they've worked at. Very few companies are willing to give you a half job. He is proposing to find all these disenfranchised women who are married with children and ask them "what companies would you like to cover? You pick the two or three as opposed to the ten that you would be forced to cover if you worked in an asset management broking house and you can also work from home. My only requirement is that when your company reports its results, you will get a report in by 7am the next morning even if you have to stay up all night'. In addition he's going to offer them a proper share in the broking business that the reports generate. So it will be interesting to see how that works.

Personal Attributes

I have an almost Calvinistic sense of conscience. If I'm going to do something I've always got to do it to the best of my ability. I wouldn't say that I'm a perfectionist in the sense of, I won't read a document a hundred times over, I will sometimes send out documents with typos, but as long as the thought process is there, then I can get lazy about the presentation. But I like to do everything as well as I can possibly can.

I'm also not a procrastinator in the sense that I can sit and read a book rather than doing what needs to be done. I'm one of those people that cannot relax if there's a list of things that need to be done. The classic procrastinator won't actually do anything whereas I do drive myself hard to get things done. I think you will find that almost everybody in a senior position is capable of doing significantly more work in a given period of time. It's not about working longer hours. It's about saying that if you sit here for 10 hours and I sit here for 10 hours, then I can just crank through more stuff. I think that just allows you to move ahead.

I'm not scared of a challenge. I never have been. I think I have a very strong internal locus of control. I don't need a lot of external approval about what I'm doing which is why I don't mind being brave about making a tough call. And perhaps because I've demonstrated that, it allows me to get into these senior positions.

I think without meaning to be I'm quite good with people. There are people who are brilliant with people and other people who are terrible with people, and I think I'm somewhere in between. I also lead by example. I will never ask somebody to do something without also being willing to do it myself and without having at least taken the time to understand what it is I'm asking of them. I look at my colleagues who kind of go, "ohh, this person hasn't done this probably" and I think well you know, you didn't even know what it was you were asking them to do, so how can you then be upset when what comes back isn't what you wanted.

Mentors

I've had fantastic mentors and people to learn from. The guy who identified me at [consumer product company] - I learnt an enormous amount from him. He really took the time to spend with me. And when I was at [bank A] I was incredibly lucky to work with [X]. He's a fantastic people person and a much better delegator than I will ever be. I'm a little bit of a control freak, which comes from wanting the job to be done properly. [X] is brilliant at giving credit to where it's due. He really empowers the people who work for him. And I learnt that from him. So whilst I'm not a very good delegator when I do delegate it's in an empowered way. When I give you a piece of work I'm not going to interfere, it's yours. If you make a mistake I will publicly support you even though I will sit down privately with you and suggest doing something differently.

Making Opportunities

I remember saying to my husband that I feel like I'm such a fortunate person. I have god given abilities to do things and these opportunities land in my lap. I mean when I was thinking about the phone calls that I got when I was on maternity leave, I didn't put my CV out there, I didn't start asking. I said to my husband "isn't it unfair that I should have so much luck?" And he told me to think about it. Each one of those phone calls came from people that I had worked with and so I must have

demonstrated that I'm capable and I have also kept my relationships going with them.

But I do think that I have been lucky. It could have been any one of ten people who joined the business at [bank A] who took over from [X] because I was there with a bunch of people who were hand picked. Some of them were more experienced or better qualified than I was. I never went out there and said, "I want to do that"; I have just always thought that whatever you give me to do I will do properly.

I mean maybe an example is the salary discussion, which is always a thorny issue for people. It's an example where people think you have to be very demanding and aggressive and women are notoriously bad at it. The conversations I've had with my various bosses along the way is "you and I both know what I'm worth to the business. You have my 100% commitment and support to do the best job that I can and therefore I'm going to trust you to give me what I'm worth". And it's always worked with me. Again I've always been lucky that my bosses have not taken advantage. I know other colleagues who have gone in saying "this is the number that I want" and it's backfired. I've never sat down and said that I want to be the CEO. My approach is rather, "okay well here's something that needs to be done, nobody is doing it, there is a gap, let me fill it".

Leadership Style

I think I have tried to do as much as the public supporting as possible. I think that's very important to people. I have a junior colleague who will write a memo and it might be a terrible memo. They will send it to me and I will change 90% of it but I will still send it out under their name. Then they will come to me and say "well you wrote more of it than I did" and I just challenge them to get it right next time. What then comes back is a 1,000 times better because they are so keen to prove that they can do it. At the end of the day you will get so much more out of people if you treat them that way.

I once read an article in the HBR ages ago and they talked about the sixth dimension of leadership, the bit about humility. I think that it is such an important thing. I don't think you can consciously choose to be humble, you can't, but I think you can consciously choose to say "I am not larger than life" I don't stand in front of

people and exclaim “follow me!” I’m very pragmatic, I have my feet on the ground and I think I am trustworthy. I cannot lie, I cannot hide something and I cannot be dishonest. I think that comes across. You need to know that your people trust you implicitly and visa versa.

Femininity in Business

I’ve always been more of a guy’s girl than a girl’s girl. I don’t think of myself as a particularly feminine female, but I do think that women have a lot less ego, which I think encourages you to empower other people. It allows women to be more human. When you have a large ego you sometimes put up a façade that you have to be the “manager”. I am quite casual in my work relationships. I don’t put a lot of formality in to it, I like to be approachable and I think that that is more of a female style than a male style.

It’s the small things that make such a difference in a person’s work life. A colleague will point out to me that some people have been working really hard trying to fix up some transactions or something. I will then ask her to go and find five little boxes of ‘nutties’ put them on their desk and write something funny about “transactions driving you nutty”. A male colleague would never think of that. I used that approach a lot at [bank A] although it got quite difficult when the team climbed to 160 people. But I would write little notes and leave them on people’s computer. I became famous for my little post-it notes. It’s such a small thing, it doesn’t take long and it makes such a difference. I didn’t realize what a difference it made until one of my colleagues showed me this envelope where she had stored all my messages and I was quite taken aback. And then somebody else said “oh yeah, I’ve got mine too” and I don’t think men will do that.

Having said that I’ve seen one male colleague, a guy who is CEO of a bank, he will ring you on your birthday. It doesn’t matter who you are in the organisation, he will phone you to wish you a happy birthday and it’s those little things that go such a long way towards building goodwill. When the crunch comes and it always does, those people will go the extra mile for you because you have shown that you are noticing and supportive.

Over performance

I think women unconsciously end up doing more work than men. I think we feel we have to do more. Most of us don't know how to say no. Our male colleagues are much, much better at drawing the boundaries. They don't feel guilty about going off to play soccer with their mates at 6pm. We hit 6pm and we think we'd love to make it to yoga but you know, we haven't finished the report and six months later you haven't been to yoga once. I see that in my female colleagues all the time. But I don't know how much of that is the nature of who we are as opposed to a business that won't recognize us unless we do that. I've worked in environments where everything I've done has always been recognized and I don't think other people have been given promotions with less work, but I think as women we tend to over work.

I think that maybe to be a successful woman in the work place you have to know that you can do the job. Women in senior management positions are A-type personalities. They will be able to do it all and then they'll figure out how to make that balance work for themselves. But then I don't think you would think so hard about being a female in a senior business position if there were more of us.

Expressions of confidence

I have a very healthy self-esteem in that I don't mind being wrong and I don't mind making mistakes. Therefore I will go into a situation and put forward my suggestions even if I'm not confident that it is the best solution, but I'm in those situations I'm always happy if someone else has got something better to say. Where I think my male colleagues are sometimes 100% confident or nothing. For them it's either all out there or they're not going to contribute. Which I find quite interesting, maybe it's to do with the ego thing again.

Role Models

The women that were around in chemical engineering were not role models that I would have chosen for myself. They were quite extreme, trying to be men in a men's world. They felt they had to be hard in order to succeed in that sort of environment and for me it's more important to be true to myself rather than try and put on a persona that matches my environment.

Sexism & Sexual Harassment

I wouldn't say that I have experienced profound sexism in the work place in the sense that I have been restricted from moving up a level because I was female. Also because I haven't looked for difficulty it hasn't been difficult. I have had female colleagues who have, I felt, navel gazed a little bit too much and I've felt that if you just get on with the job then everything would fall into place, but if you spend too much time focusing on the obstacles ... I've been pulled into groups with people who have said "you know we have a bunch of issues in the work place". Sometimes people are looking for an excuse for their own lack of progress when they have the ability to change the situation themselves.

Sexual harassment I have experienced in the work place. The first time it happened to me I didn't realize it was happening. This guy leaned over and kissed me and I was like, "hang on a moment, what is happening here?" I was completely horrified. It was an unfortunate and disillusioning experience but I think it is part of growing up. I dealt with it by just brushing it aside and got completely business-like about it. Then of course that night I lay awake and just couldn't believe it. From then on I tried not to be in the same room as this guy. When I did end up in a room with him and he tried it again I was like, "you are so way out of line, if you ever come near me again I will do whatever I have to do" and that was it, and he just stood there stammering.

I think if you are aware and self-aware you can very quickly pick up on whether you are giving someone the wrong impression, whether it's intentional or not. When I say giving the wrong impression I mean that you are inadvertently signaling to a guy that he could get away with it or that you might invite it. I just learnt to put out the signals way before that train comes down anywhere near the track.

The Glass Ceiling

From a [bank A] perspective I never felt any sense of any glass ceiling. When I left my colleagues sat me down and said, "Why are you leaving? You could be one of the top managers in the bank one day". Whereas the bank I'm at now is a very colonial, white male dominated environment. They have their high street bank in the UK and most of their senior managers round the world are British expats, most of

whom are men. I don't have a sense that there would be a limit to my career path, but I do have a sense of discomfort that a lot of rugby and bar talk is actually business talk and that I would find quite hard to break into.

That's the hardest part of an organisation - when too much of business is done in airport lounges – which is probably a reflection of the fact that senior executives seem to spend a third of their life on planes. So there are lots of opportunities for people over a drink or in an airport lounge to talk about business. And I think that if your business is more confined to a traditional working environment it's much to be excluded from the real business decisions.

Female network

I have experienced something of a female network in [bank A] but it was never a formal arrangement. If I knew of something that was happening in someone else's area, that I thought she wouldn't be aware of, then I would pick up the phone and have a chat. So it was very subtle. There was nothing explicit about it, it was never "you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back". We didn't go for drinks together, we didn't go out and have lunch, it was more based on the fact that I can relate to you, we're the same age, we've spoken about the same things and if we weren't so busy we could probably be friends, and so I'll keep an eye out for you.

Neither do I go out of my way to formally mentor women. I would be quite uncomfortable with a formal mentorship role. I have never tried to say "hey, let me help you out" but I think in a far more subtle fashion I do try and steer people when I think there's something happening and I always try and do it in a way that says "look, I'd like to give you a bit of feedback, you can take it or leave it. I actually quite like feedback too", so it feels like a two way street. And I always try and leave the door open, suggesting that at any time they can pick up the phone and give me a call. I think it works because quite a lot of my female colleagues do ask me for advice, whether it's how do you deal with sexual harassment, or I'm unhappy in my job and I want to try something differently, it's quite a range of issues.

Advice to women

Be true to yourself. Don't try and adopt a style or an attitude that you believe is required in order to make you successful if it is incongruent with whom you are, because I have watched female colleagues become unstuck. I have watched them become quite hard because they have felt that that's what they needed to do and you end up losing yourself. If the job is not going to allow you to be true to your personality then find another job, because it's not worth the contortions that you put yourself through.

I have also always found that the best way to deal with corporate politics is to be as direct as possible. You just cut right through it. Don't play the political game. It's amazing we always talk about women as being capable of gossip but men do it in the work / political context way better than women ever will. Again it's a strength that the lack of ego that women have can allow you to be much more direct because you are less worried about how you're going to look. But it can be lonely if you don't have other female colleagues who you can relate to, even if they're sitting in another department three buildings removed, just a sense that there are other people in the same position as you can be quite comforting.

What could organisations do to encourage women to take senior positions?

A crèche at work is not going to change my position. I'm not going to bring my son to work. He's actually at home with a full time nanny who is a 45 year old spinster and who has spent 25 years of looking after children. The only reason I am back at work is because I found her and I know that he is probably getting better care than he would even from me because she's got so much experience. But if I were putting him into a crèche or something then I wouldn't be here.

I do think that in this country we need to get real about things like job sharing, because I think that's the only way that everybody wins. The company still wants the job done, they still want the 12 hours out of the senior executive and so even when they say to you "8 hours is okay", it's not enough and they will have to end up putting in somebody else to subsidize what you aren't doing and then sooner or later that person will take over your job. And you will also suffer. I mean I'm intensely uncomfortable about leaving work unfinished and it's one of the things I have had to deal with, as the job gets bigger. If you are trying to do that on an 8 hour day and something urgent comes up you just can't let the wheels fall off, you

have to stay and then there's all the compromise that comes with that. Whereas if you are job sharing (which presupposes that you have found somebody whose work style is completely congruent with yours, and who is very happy about sharing the job) then you can get the whole thing done, you don't feel that stuff is piling up and that you are getting to see your family.

Individual D

Background

I am the eldest of six siblings. I have xx brothers and xx sisters. My father worked in aluminium manufacturing when I was very little and then when he moved into sales our family moved to [city A] and I remained behind in [city B] when I was about four years old. I lived with my grandmother until I was about 11 and then I moved back to my parents. That had quite a significant influence on my life. My grandmother and I lived alone together. I stayed behind with her because all my father's siblings were studying at University in [city A]. When my Dad left for [city B] he didn't want her to live alone. So I stayed with her. At the time they left I had two sisters, one was two years younger than me and the other was just a baby. My parents then had three other children in [city A]. I only joined them when I was 11 and by that time all my siblings had been born.

My grandmother was an extremely strong woman. She was left a widow with 5 children at the age of 32. My father was the eldest and he was only 12. So she had to bring up all her children on her own. She was Mauritian and so she hadn't had much of an education. She was totally literate and she read a lot, but she wasn't a professional. So she did catering and things like that to bring up her children. Her husband, my grandfather who died, was extremely wealthy. He had two families, which was acceptable then in the Indian Muslim community. But I think he was very sexist because he appointed a whole lot of men as the executives of his will. He didn't appoint either of his two wives or any of his kids. These men played around with his will. My father received his inheritance the year he died when he was 57 years old, which was 45 years later after his father had died. So my grandmother was had quite a tough life but she was extremely strong and she brought me up.

The experience made me feel very independent from my parents. I would go and spend school holidays with my family or some of them would travel to come and spend time with me, they would drive down every two weeks or so. But I was quite alienated from them. I saw them as relatives. I didn't really grow up with them, and so we are very different now. We are very close but I can see that they are very different. I learnt to be very self-sufficient and take control of situations, whereas my siblings are more dependent types. They need to be close to people and they need people to help them make decisions and give them advice.

My siblings grew up with each other in a more child-centered environment whereas I grew up in an adult centered environment. There were hardly any children around me, except my friends at school. My siblings did more child-like things. They all swam and rode bicycles and played in the streets. When I grew up I read and played with older children and so I learnt to swim and ride a bike in my late 20s! My grandmother just didn't think those things were important and so I didn't think they were either. There was no regret or anything like that - it was just the way it was. I also learnt to read and write very young, because two of my aunts and uncles were studying teaching. They would visit us for long vacations and they would sit and do stuff with me, they taught me to read and write when I was very young.

Influences

I've had different influences over the years. My grandmother heavily influenced my formative years. Once I returned to my parents my father was an extremely strong influence because he politicized me. He had strong opinions about what was going on in the country at the time and he was very creative. And then later on when I became older my mother influenced me. My mother and I clashed quite a bit until I was about 17 or 18.

My father was extremely generous, very bright and very strong willed in the sense that he would be very comfortable to start and hold an argument - which was something that I definitely learnt from him. He was a very good writer and speaker, he had a very good command of language and I think I picked that up from him. He encouraged me to take part in speech competitions in which I always did very well in school. I did very well in English and literature. He was very widely read, even though he left school when he finished matric. My grandmother was financially

unable to send him to University, but he was very bright. After matric he worked and put all of his brothers and sisters through University, so he was quite a person. He was very generous, very open hearted and open minded. When I lived with them our home was open to everybody. The entire community used to be in our home, there were six of us but there were always other children playing and eating with us. My father was never very well off but what ever he had he shared with everybody, so he was a very particular kind of person.

My mother was a nursery school teacher but she had so many children that she only taught for a little while and then she mostly looked after us. But she was also a dress designer and so throughout my growing up life my mother used to make clothes for us and other people, which was great for me as I always had the most fashionable items to wear.

As a young child I think I was fairly reclusive because I lived with grandmother in this huge Victorian house. It was the kind of thing you see in a movie - with this one young child wandering around the house looking for things to do, things to read, playing on her own and following her grandmother around. When I reflect back on it, it was quite an interesting time, because my grandmother had her very strong opinions about various things. But then as I grew into a teenager I changed quite a bit. I suddenly became very gregarious. I think it must coincide with the time I went to [city A] and rejoined my parents. I became much more open to people, became more participatory and had lots of friends.

As a teenager I was very naughty and rebellious, but I did well at school so my parents couldn't really give me a hard time about it. I did all the usual things that teenagers do. I bunked school and smoked and did very usual things, I wasn't the model student from all points of view. But I think I was quite a good leader. When I was in grade 6, which is the year before you leave primary school, I was made Head Prefect even though the position was usually reserved for students in grade 7. I had quite a bit of nastiness about that, but I was okay, I managed to cope in a friendly manner with my detractors.

In my teenage years I was very out spoken. I went to a very snobbish school, a private Muslim school. It wasn't expensive but it was a bit snobbish and a lot of the

children used to hang around together based on their class and their wealth whereas I made friends across religion and across class.

University

A lot of people in my family were involved in education, especially by aunts and uncles who had a very strong influence on me because they were like surrogate parents. I never felt particularly close to my parents –not to the exclusion of my aunts and uncles. Out of the 5 of them 3 were teachers and they really loved it and were very dedicated to it. They would sometimes ask me to join them over weekends if they were doing things in the school like playing tennis. Sometimes I would sit in their classes when I finished primary classes, so I was very influenced by this whole school atmosphere.

I went to a Catholic school before I went to [city A]. My grandmother was half Catholic and half Muslim. I was crazily in love with the Nuns and I decided I wanted to be one of them at that time. Then later on it seemed like a natural progression to become a teacher and I thought it was wonderful and a great thing to do. I did fairly well at school but like any normal teenager I got very interested in boys so I didn't do as well as I'd done in primary school but I did fairly well. After school I went to University and studied English Literature, Speech & Drama and Education. I had a ball there and I just loved University, but for me it was more of a life skills experience than a means to an end for a career. My parents were really disgusted with my choices. They were very angry actually. They thought I should have gone into 'real' teaching like math's & science or become a lawyer or something like that, but you know, I was dabbling in drama and doing plays and things like that, very esoteric for them.

I really enjoyed it but I then got married very young, whilst I was still at University and against my parent's wishes. They were not keen about my marriage. They weren't very traditional Indian parents. They strongly believed in career and education. I completed my studies whilst married and then carried on studying through UNISA after that.

Career Outline

At UNISA I did communication and education subjects and then started teaching in a township school for black girls. It was the only private school for black girls in the entire country or in Southern Africa. We had students from all over. It wasn't a wealthy school because it was a missionary school. The school influenced me a lot because it was very politicized, the teaching fraternity and so on. It was a wonderful experience and I got very attached to the children.

I taught English and Drama and accounting as well. I'd done very well in accounting at school they needed someone to teach it. Then I moved to [city C] because my husband wanted to move there. When I moved to [city C] I wanted to teach in townships. It was 1986 / 1987 and I applied for a whole lot of teaching jobs. But it was very difficult to teach in communities outside your own community. That's why I went to teach in a private school in [city A]. I didn't want to just teach in an Indian school under the apartheid government. But when I came to [city C] there weren't any private missionary schools and so I had to apply through the government system and I couldn't find a job.

Eventually I applied for a position in a so-called 'colored' school. When I went for the interview the Head Principal said that I looked like a gentle soul, he didn't think I would fit in to the school so he wouldn't give me the job. He said it was full of black gangsters and wild youth and he thought I'd be completely over run by all these teenagers. I was very disappointed and then about two weeks later he phoned me and said "nobody wants this job – are you still interested?" And I said, "of course I am". And I started teaching and the children were terrible but I managed to win them over and we had a great time and I taught them for a while.

During this period my parents moved to Botswana and I used to visit them regularly. And then one day I saw an ad in a newspaper. I had always been interested in languages, I had studied it at University, and there was a job for a language editor at an education publishing company in [city C], and so I applied for the job because it was for a trainee and you would get some kind of training. I applied for the job and got it. And then in very rapid succession I progressed in the company and became the CEO. I joined the company in 1988, became a managing director of one of the business units in 1995 and then CEO in 1997. In the company I was the first female member of the board, I was the first black person on the board, I was the first

female CEO, the first black CEO. I was first black female managing director in the country actually.

In 2001 I was sitting at work one evening and I actually decided that I was bored. I'd done so much in the past 10 years that it was time to do something different. Maybe it was a woman thing. I thought that if I'm 70 years old and lying there ready to die and I look back what would be the things that I had achieved in my life that were important? Maybe the fact that millions of books that I had worked were now in schools, but that had less to do with [publishing company A] than it had to do with education. It was quite a shock and a revelation to me. I wrote my resignation that evening and a week later sold my house behind my husband's back and decided that it was time for new things.

I gave the company six months notice but I wasn't staying. A few weeks after I had resigned I sat next to the Minister of Education at a fund raising breakfast and he asked me whether I'd like to come to work for him on the national curricula. I was quite open to new challenges and maybe that's why it came along. It was one of the most fantastic experiences that I ever had. I earned 15% of what I had earned as CEO but the reward that I got was immense, and that's the kind of thing that I think women would do, more than men. I worked on the primary and secondary curricula for about three years. In between I got involved with the government's national HIV & Aids communication program, I did some work for [media company] and I also worked for [UN agency] where I trained a whole lot of African people. I also worked for the Mozambican government helping them set up a new curriculum.

After 3 years [publishing company A] came back to me and asked me whether I would like to come back. And I said, "of course not, I'm very happy and now at least I earn a little bit more than 15% of my previous salary". But they kept coming and chipping away at me for about 3 or 4 months and then eventually they asked me a very important question, and maybe there's something here about how corporations and men can learn to deal with women, and they asked me "well what do you want? What will make you come back?" Before they were making me promises but had never thought of asking me what I wanted. Suddenly the tables were turned and I thought about it and I thought I do know what would make me go back.

Firstly, I didn't want to work full time. I didn't want to work more than 60% of my time because I value what I can add to other organisations when I do more voluntary orientated work. Secondly, money wasn't important, I didn't want them to overpay me, as I would rather have the time off. Thirdly, I wanted the freedom to do things in the company that I felt like doing, without being questioned. I'm really passionate about development and research I wanted the next phase of my tenure in the organisation to have an impact in these areas. I was convinced it would add value in more subtle ways, but it wouldn't be about the business plan and so on. My other condition was that I wanted no one to report to me, except the CEO, because I didn't want to get involved in line management functions. And so they agreed. I also said that I wanted to earn exactly the same salary as the CEO because I didn't want him to feel resentful or challenged by my return.

Now I'm the Executive Chair. I have a tiny little office and I work from wherever I want too – and I've done huge things in terms of research and development work. I've helped them set up a company in Mozambique; I helped with the company in Kenya. I'm helping them in Botswana. I've done huge research in terms of teacher's perceptions of the company and the products. And I've now been doing that for two years and I'm very happy.

Challenge 1

It wasn't always easy. There was someone [X] who was the publishing manager. The way the organisation is structured, you get publishing managers, publishers who commission authors to write materials and then you get editors and trainee editors, so on the professional side of the business the trainee editor is at the bottom of the ladder. After I'd in the company for about six or eight months the company advertised through [X] for the post of an editor. I thought, "I'm doing the normal work of an editor. I'm not really training any longer, so it seems to be fairly natural that I should get this post, in fact they shouldn't advertise it they should simply give it to me". I applied to the HR department and they didn't want to give me the post. They didn't even want to interview me. I was very upset. I went to the [X] and said "I believe you've short listed but I haven't been short listed, but I'm doing a perfectly good job and carrying the full work load of a normal editor so what's the problem?" He said to me, "well you're doing the same work for half the pay so why should we promote you? We can get equally good people for the price of one and a

half so it doesn't suit us". And I was really disgusted with them. But he wasn't a very nice guy and he was fired about 4 or 5 months later, and I got the post.

Personal Attributes

I think teaching gave me a very solid foundation. I was able to work quite hard and put in long hours. The cultural environment and my ethnic background had taught me a strong work ethic that just wasn't present in [city C] or in the company that I joined. To be quite honest I think my success can be attributed to the fact that I just put in more hours than people normally did. But for me it was a perfectly natural thing to do. Also the country was starting to think about transformation at the time and a lot of the books that were developed were for markets in South Africa, as well as Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. No one in the entire building, which was the head office, had had exposure of working in African schools or had really engaged with black people. I was able to add value to their products because I had an understanding of Botswana because I had spent lots of time there, and I'd only taught in schools that weren't white. And so I had insight into what was needed. I made the books more beautiful for the children. I understood where the students were coming from, their language issues and that sort of thing. And a lot of what I produced was extremely successful.

I think initially my success was more to do with hard work and an understanding of the market in the real context, not the apartheid version of it. But I've always had leadership qualities. It has always come naturally to me. I feel a bit awkward saying this ... I don't usually say it. But from my school days I was Head Prefect for two years running in primary school and I was Head Prefect in high school as well. I was Captain of the debating team and Head of the sports team, so I had experience of that kind of thing.

Then the company restructured and they had a post for an editorial manager, although I was one of the least experienced, they offered me the post because I think they recognized I was fairly well organized. I always made dead lines. I understood the need to be well organized in a corporate environment. Because in this particular industry you pull people in who are more linguists and they don't really have organisational skills. These people are more intellectual but I seemed to

have a combination of the two. And so I set up this new department for the company and it worked very well.

Leadership

I'm the kind of manager who is fairly egalitarian. I might be the leader but I work with people and I also manage to get people to do what needs to be done. So I won a lot of respect from people and I think the company saw this and realized there's something here and so I got quite good promotions.

I can also work hard myself, so when I'm in a position of authority I don't just use the authority to get other people to do the work. I've always pushed performance which has been linked to my work ethic approach and my ability to do hard work. My legacy and my influence in the company have been to instill a culture of earning your respect and earning your value. I would also never ask anyone to do anything that I wouldn't be prepared to do myself. And even now as the Executive Chair of the Board of what has now become a huge company - I still do a lot of hands on work, so I think that's important.

I'm fairly brave and bold. I'm not afraid of new challenges. I love change. I actually seek it out in my personal life and my professional life. I get bored very easily. So because of that I'm always looking around me for new challenges and new things to do to and I've brought quite a few visionary steps into the company's history over the years. I was willing to take risks. I've worked with colleagues who have also done very well, who have many of my qualities, but sometimes just won't take those extra risks, or don't have the foresight to predict what might be coming in 3 to 5 years time. I have managed to do that on numerous occasions in my career. Being able to read the current circumstances and predict what might be happening in the future. And there are several instances I can quote in the company where I did that and which really led to amazing gains for the company.

Over the years I've also displayed the ability to spot talent. For example I brought in people that people wouldn't have thought would make it – the new CEO for example was an ordinary teacher and when I left in 2000 I recommended that he become CEO and he has done very well. I have the ability to recognize and nurture the potential in people.

I think I've also managed to make my seniors feel comfortable. I think some women can appear to be extremely aggressive and highly competitive, but I don't push agendas just for the sake of pushing agendas. I don't appear to be an activist – I'm an activist in the things that I do rather than the things I say. So I went out of my way perhaps to make board members and the MD and CEO at the time feel comfortable and not threatened, I didn't like push the feminist agenda. And I think that also contributed to my success.

Sexism & Racism

Both my grandmother and my father were extremely radical thinkers for their time and for their communities. My father taught me up to believe that I'm equal to anyone, in any circumstance. My father didn't instill it in me in a theoretical way it was more by example. He always challenged the norm. We grew up in apartheid where we weren't allowed on certain beaches, we weren't allowed to go to certain public swimming pools and my father had no compunction about driving us to these various places and instructing his children to go and do whatever they wanted to do, wherever they wanted to do it in parks, on beaches and in swimming pools. My poor mother used to get very embarrassed and say "don't do that to the children". But we would go off and play and then the policemen would come and my father would argue with the policemen in front of us. He would say "how can you do this to these poor innocent children?" and he would embarrass people in front of us. We saw this and I guess I picked some of it up from him.

My father used to help me a lot with developing debate arguments and writing essays and speeches and often it would centre on racism. He also instructed me not to stand up in school when the national anthem was sung. He let me know that he would be very upset with me if I did. So I would not stand up and not sing the anthem and if the teacher asked me what I was doing then I would say that I refuse to do this because it's an apartheid country.

My grandmother was very rebellious and very strong for her time. She was once arrested because she smacked someone at a till in a Pick 'n Pay or an OK Bizarre, because the person told her to go to the back of the queue to let a white person in

front of her. So she slapped this woman and was arrested and she just laughed. She was very audacious.

I was very influenced by these two people. Because of these experiences I have never felt that anyone has a right to inflict sexism or racism on me. I think it's quite a subtle difference between someone just standing up against it but for me it was internalized. So even if someone tries it on me I ignore it. It just washes over me. I ignore it and I stand up for who I am. I think because of that people recognize my kind of strength of character and don't actually practice that much sexism or racism on me.

So to be quite honest I haven't experienced much of it. The company has always been quite a supportive environment, even though they never had any black managers or female managers until I came along. The company's attitude was never, "we're going to appoint you to this position so be grateful for it". It was always a natural progression. The company was happy and I was happy and we both made a contribution to each other.

But I have seen sexism and racism from time to time in more subtle ways. I'm thinking of one occasion where I was very young in the job and new to management. The company had to hire a publishing manager, and they brought someone in who wasn't very bright and wasn't very good and he was an elderly Afrikaner. And I thought to myself, "well this is very odd, it's 1991 and change is about to occur and this is the type of person that the company brings in". But I didn't appear hard done by because I'd only been in the management job for about a year or two, but the guy was also fired and then I got his job.

Femininity in Business

Based on my observations and my experiences over the years I have observed that male managers tend to be more lonely, isolated and paternalistic. The female managers around me, including myself; we have generally tended to take people with us, but they are generalizations. I know one female colleague who is in a very senior position who is very paternalistic, but I think on balance women are more likely to take people with them.

Integration

I have observed that not enough integration has occurred within companies in South Africa, and particularly in this company that I worked for. It's better now than it was in 1998 when I joined but you still find the majority of warehouse packers are not white and most managers are white. And even though people may not feel like they are racist or sexist, the statistics make one wonder about that kind of thing.

One of the things I tried to do since becoming part of senior management was to encourage integration. If you look at the statistics you could say half of the company was African and the other half were white, Indian or colored, which is quite a good statistic. But when you dig a bit deeper - of those 50% African people about 90% of them were at a very low level or in sales, which is very expedient because our biggest market is the African market. So you put African people in sales but they're all managed by whites and mainly males. That kind of thing is quite subtle and I think it's quite widespread in companies still, and maybe that kind of transformation takes quite long, but unless you take very deliberate steps it will take quite long to change.

Directorship and the Boy's Club

When you get to board level you have to have a substantial amount of experience. I think the lack of women at board level will change as more women come through the pipeline. But board level positions aren't given very easily. People look for a variety of experiences and successes and not that many women have it yet. I think boards are also custodians of an almost secretive type of behaviour. Board meetings always have this aura of mystery about them and it could be that a particular way of behaving is perpetuating itself. Because if I look at the women that have got onto boards, they are usually quite strong willed, powerful, independent fighters, in other words they are more like the men.

When I first made it to the board there used to be things like golf days and a pub in the company that was visited mainly by white men. The pub used to be opened by the CEO and the MD at the time. The CEO would gather his forces about him and pour drinks on the other side of the bar. Because of the kind of person I am, this didn't offend me. I just found it ridiculous. Then there used to be these golf days

where big suppliers used to invite you for these free golf days and the guys would fly off here, there and everywhere – but I stopped all of that.

When I became MD I stopped the golf days in the unit and when I became CEO the first thing I did was shut down the bar and I said “no free drinks” because the bar was used only by white male management and I found that very odd. So I shut it down and said “this seems to be restricted only to certain people, if you want to socialize go do it on your own account and not the company’s”. I also stopped the golf day. The company used to have a private box at Newlands for rugby and cricket. I eventually gave the box back to Newlands.

I did meet resistance. People were very upset about the golf days and the Newlands box. The first thing I did was democratize the box and put together a lucky draw, and lots of warehouse people and lower levels staff, who were more in numbers, began winning these lucky draws and going to these boxes at Newlands. And then eventually when the new CEO took over he and I decided that actually we should just close it all off.

The boxes and the bar didn’t impede my career but it may have impeded other peoples. I’m not sure. It may have impeded a white woman’s career. There was a woman [Z] in the company who was really brilliant, and [X] who I had words with about not giving me the editor post, well he came in and she wasn’t given the position even though she was head and shoulders above this guy. He definitely got it because he was an older white male, whereas she was a white female. So I think there were instances of sexism prior to my arrival.

But you know I would always go the pub. I was only one of the few women and the only black person would go there. At the time I hardly even liked alcohol. But I would go to socialize with people. So I guess they thought, “Well, she’s actually integrated with us”. You know the thing about integration is that after a while the race and sex barriers diminish and disappear, and I think eventually people in senior positions just saw me as “she’s one of us” and when people feel comfortable they feel they can share things with you. That’s why the boy’s network works because men feel safe with another. So I think when they saw me as one of them and then they saw that my talents could maybe take the company somewhere, and then it wasn’t an issue.

Mentorship

In terms of closeness and in terms of relationship, there was one person in the organisation that assisted my career, but he wasn't in the company for very long. He used to be the sales and marketing director and he was what you would call a 'progressive Afrikaner'. Some of what he tried to do was very inappropriate because it was artificial, he would try to make happy families with African people but it didn't always work out. I could see that he was genuine and he and I got on very well for the short time he was there. I think he probably told the MD at the time to watch out because this woman was maybe quite good. He also gave me opportunities to address large numbers of staff. For example whilst I was a publisher he would invite me to give product presentations and things which hadn't been done before, so he gave me a lot of exposure to people within the organisation.

And then there was a woman from UK who was the head of [publishing company A] that owned a 50% stake in our company. She was an extreme left labor person from the UK, and she actually refused to come to South Africa until 1994, so she managed the board remotely. I went to England in 1992 and the first time we met each other we liked one another instantly. In 1994 after the election she came to South Africa for her first board meeting. She insisted that I was put on the board, she said, "that woman knows what she's talking about, I've met her, she's proven herself in the company, there are no females on this board, and you are going to appoint her". There was resistance from other people at the time, not the MD, but the Finance Director who subsequently left the company. He and I clashed, but always very politely.

But there was more aggressive resistance from the new Sales & Marketing Director who was a white male and who was very competent. At that time I was a Publishing Director. And [person Y] who was the person from the UK said I should be made a board member, but the Sales & Marketing Director had been in a senior position for about a year or two before longer than me. The MD felt very uncomfortable, they thought that it was unfair. They felt the Sales & Marketing Director's nose would be out of joint and it would be risky. But [Y] insisted. She came three times that year. The first time that she came she said, "we have to get a female on to this board and we have to get a black person on to this board" and she sowed the seeds. The

second time she came she said it's got to be me, and these are the reasons why and so on. But it was happening behind closed doors and although people argued about it I wasn't there to witness it, I just heard about it.

Then she came and spoke directly to me. It was interesting because the MD didn't come to speak to me. [Y] came to say "we'd like to put you on the board, we'd like to make you a director, it's a little bit unusual because you've been in this position for a very short time but it is an important position, you will be the Publishing Manager of this company". The company was fairly small at the time so it was one of the four or five most senior positions. I asked for an hour to think about it. I then went back to her and said, "I actually refuse because I know these men are going to be terribly upset, especially the Sales & Marketing Director and I have to work with them". So she was like, "well that's ridiculous, you're a woman and you should take the opportunity and take the challenge". And I told her that I wasn't fearful of the challenge, I was extremely grateful and flattered that people had thought of me but there's also appropriate behaviour and people have to serve their terms and things like that.

She came back a few months later and by then the MD had started talking to me. And eventually I was appointed a Director. And I had terrible times with the Sales & Marketing Director and the Finance Director. There was one incident when the three Directors went away and had a drink up one day, and all three of them had terrible accidents that night. One got locked up, one broke his hip and the other one resigned. And it was specifically because I had been made a Director of the Board. They were venomous. I think it was to do with the fact that I wasn't there for that long and it was a leg up. It would be a very easy thing for me to say to you now, because it would really support all sorts of feminist agendas, that they were resentful and the boy's club and so on, but I think that they were just terribly upset that I did it so quickly.

Challenge 2

From my side I was very open hearted and very open minded, and I was slightly embarrassed that I had got this leg up so quickly. I knew that I was good and I knew that I had my team behind me. I had managed a huge number of staff and had been elevated very quickly in the company and I knew that I was trying my best. I

just felt embarrassed that they felt disempowered and unappreciated by the company. So I was very careful in my dealings with them. I approached them very sensitively. And [X] who was this very nice guy that I got one well with and who wanted the integration, he helped because he facilitated between the Sales & Marketing Director. I mean there were fights. There was one meeting when the Sales & Marketing Director just said, "this is crap, I don't have to work with you, you're ignorant and what do you know?" And I just said "I don't have to hear this, you must judge me on the work that I'm doing" and eventually it eased up. This particular guy had built up resentment over the years but in the end I won his respect because I went on to change the company's fortunes, from a company that had 10% market share to one that had 30%. I really was the architect of that, so had they had any thoughts in their mind that I was a black woman and getting a leg up, that was dispelled soon after that.

It would have been very easy to leave during this difficult time but I enjoyed the work tremendously. I had also become divorced at the time and I guess my career was by then very important to me. It was also a fantastic industry to be working in and I was in a senior enough position where people respected me enough to let me do whatever I wanted to do. They allowed me to start lots of alternative publishing ventures that were extremely left wing, which then ended up being commercially very successful. I started a Freedom Fighter series as ANC members started getting un-banned and rushing into the country between 1992 and 1995. I would network with them and bring them to talk to us at conferences and I think it was a culture shock to the company, but I think they enjoyed it and they were ready to take the challenge.

There was another particularly challenging incident where someone had been abusing company funding. He had a girlfriend in another province so he went to work in that Province every Friday and flew back every Monday morning. He did genuine work there but it was just very odd, and he was in a very senior position and there was no one above him to argue against. I called him into my office and explained to him that this was wrong. I was like, "look I come from the same province, nothing would please be more than spending every weekend in [city A] but this is not on. Your subordinates don't have this privilege and maybe they deserve this thing more, so you are going to have to stop it". And so then I gave it to him writing. And he was absolutely livid and furious.

And then later I was actually recruited to go and become MD of another publishing company. I resigned from my position as MD. My staff was very upset because this was just before the big up swing in market share. But this particular guy suddenly went back to a year ago when I had pulled him up short for this kind of behaviour and he wrote me this long diatribe, like a five page letter “well you’re now leaving and I just want to tell you what I think of you. Who do you think you are? My parking bay this ... and you’ve taken this privilege and you’ve done that, and you’ve stopped me from doing this, and you’re just a little shit upstart”. This particular thing was basically racist and sexist and a personal attack. And I read this letter and I thought that it wasn’t worth fighting against because I’m leaving in a couple of months.

The day I was supposed to leave which was about two months after I got this letter, these people flew down from the UK and said “you can’t leave, you’re the architect of this new wave of what’s happening in the company and look at all these products and we’re on the brink of something big”. But for me it was the perfect time to leave, I had nothing more to change. But they begged me to stay. And they basically inferred that I would be the next CEO. Anyway my farewell party turned into a welcome back party and thankfully the other publishing company as was in the same group and so the people from the UK sorted that out. The next day I was back in my office. And then this guy came up to my office and he was shaking like a leaf. He shut my office door and he said, “I just wanted to tell you that I am so sorry that I wrote that letter, it was actually one of the worst things I could ever have done in my life and it was so insulting to you.” And I said, “I’m here, I’m here to stay, and we’ve always had to work together so I’ve never taken any of it personally”. And I think that’s a good thing if you can rise above situations and not take things personally always.

Work Life Balance

My second husband is an extremely supportive person and he really gave me many legs up. During my first marriage I was very young and I didn’t feel that I wanted to have children. And as it turns out my first husband couldn’t have children, but it didn’t really bother me at all. And then after that, the next phase was that I was very busy with my career so I didn’t give it much thought. And then I married again in

1994 and after a couple of years I did feel that I wanted to have children. I think it was because I had done a lot in my career and I was in a fairly good relationship. I did get pregnant a few times and had miscarriages, but I was never really devastated or depressed about that. As a human being I felt fulfilled, I love children. And then I guess the kind of profession I was in, that involved doing things for children.

I'm not sure whether it's a female thing but I think men tend to go home and forget the office. But women tend to integrate so much that it's important that I integrate home and work life. That's why I deliberately negotiated a position where I have the opportunity to be flexible. If I want to do home things I do it and then I will work till 12am at night. And if I go away to Mozambique and work for ten days in a row I can come back and I don't go into the office for a week. That flexibility between home and work is very important to me. And I don't think men need that type of thing as much as women do.

Expressions of Confidence

I think articulation is an important characteristic if you want to be successful as a woman. When I first joined the industry there was a particular language that men spoke as opposed to women. Women were seen as the publishers and the editors and fairly left wing on the whole, and the men were seen as the go-getters and the people who were more in sales and marketing and management. And there were particular ways that they would behave. I mean the men, probably even to this day, would speak more loudly. Certainly in the past they spoke more loudly, were very confident, confident enough to present new ideas and things. And even I probably would have been a bit nervous of doing things like presentations in the first couple of years of my career.

Challenges for women

People take longer to recognise women's strengths and skills and so maybe it takes longer for them to be promoted into more senior positions. I have observed that men tend to climb the ladder more quickly. I think women tend to operate in a more egalitarian and collegial way than men and so they don't necessarily take credit early on for things that they have achieved. In fact women often wouldn't even

recognise that they should be taking the credit for something, because they would feel it was a team effort. Whereas men, even those men that do work in a team, they are quite up front about claiming the credit for themselves.

Women are just more in touch with people around them and themselves, generally. And I've worked with a lot of men and women in varying positions in relation to myself. Generally I find that men don't really want to go to places, which make them uncomfortable. I think women integrate their intellect and their emotions more than men do and because of that they are more sensitive. Women don't take the credit, not because they're shy and withdrawn but because they just feel there has been a team effort behind it.

The value of women

Firstly I think it's very important to have an integrated mix of approaches within any organisation. I think the more different kinds of thought processes and behaviours you have the more whole any organisation is. I think in South Africa it is particularly important to encourage integration.

What can organisations do to promote women's interests?

I think women are better self-managers than men are, because they have observed their mothers integrate work and home life. Women have always had to do that integrating and balancing. And they have to find time for themselves, which is a huge challenge, because women tend to prioritize work or family. I think if organisations can reach a point where they can allow flexibility for women then they would be better at retaining women. But I think it is very hard for the men to let go of the corporate framework that they are working within. But I think now, slowly, with the new age influence on corporations and individuals, maybe it is starting to change and a little there is more integration between men and females at work, which allows for more flexi-time and the ability to work from home.

It is difficult though because of the way the corporate counts your work. The more visible you are the more people believe that you are adding value, although I've never been one to believe that. I've never admired somebody who's at the office till 8pm or 9pm because I'm not sure whether the person sitting next to them who left

at 5pm actually did more qualitative work – but unfortunately the way the corporate world works at the moment is that people do tend to value that kind of visible contribution.

It should be about the impact that you have rather than the hours that you put in, and there are people – I think women in particular who can do a lot more in less time and manage multiple projects. My female colleagues and I have done that over the years and I know there are males who work who tend to want to work in a more directed and defined way and get it done and then do the next thing. I think maybe this multi-tasking thing is another thing. Women should be given more opportunities to work in that way.

Women's network

I have often thought about the notion of a female network, and at one stage long ago there was an organisation called 'Women in Publishing' that the woman [Z] who left all those years ago, she set it up and I was a member. But then it disintegrated and died. I don't think women really operate in that way. It's counter intuitive for women because they really place a lot of emphasis on value, integrity, quality and women want to be placed in positions because of what they've done and what they've achieved.

There were many times over my career where people have asked me whether my career success was due to the fact that I was black or female. I feel very hurt by those statements. I'm not sure now whether African females feel hurt or whether they feel it's their right and that sort of thing because of equity and legislation.

The language of business

Language is very important in South Africa. In my industry where you work with language all the time, you can get someone who is very bright and very hard working but just can't express themselves on paper or verbally and it's career limiting. For example women have a different linguistic database in their heads, which imposes limits on their careers.

For example, I had a colleague working with me. She is a very Ubuntu type of person. Extremely bright, articulate but she's also very facilitative and team orientated. I hired her to do teacher training on products, which she did very successfully. Then I put her in a management position and she would have to do presentations to senior management and other business units. Her language would be "we did this or the teachers came up with this suggestion ...". She would use a whole particular set of her vocabulary and just didn't twig that there was another vocabulary going on. I was able to put on the lens of the Anglo-Saxon male because I'd really fraternized with them for years. I was able to put their lens on my eyes and look at her and say "she looks wishy-washy and she looks like someone who will never make it into senior management because she just can't be trusted to make decisions. She looks like someone who will never be able to manage poor performance and fire people". Yet I have known her since I was 18 and she's a very strong person. I took her aside and I said to her "I have to tell you this is how you come across. And I know you - that's why I can tell you this, you're very bright and you're very strong, but you've got to try and integrate some of the other corporate jargon into the way you articulate and express yourself". This happened years ago and recently we were talking and she said that was one of the most single most important conversations she'd ever had and she'd changed her whole approach after that.

That's the glass ceiling, it's saying "she's done a lot, she's a valuable person but she's never going to really cut it in the boardroom, she's going to use all this jargon with outside shareholders and they're going to panic that she's some kind of mother earth". I think the glass ceiling comes from this kind of thing. I don't think it comes from men saying that we don't want to let other women in – I think it comes from them viewing you in terms of really senior positions, from a particular framework and you're coming from a different framework and that's where the ceiling is. And when you reach that point, both parties need to integrate the way they are thinking about it. The women have to say "is there something more I have to do, is there a different way of expressing that I need to learn" and men need to say, "this woman has achieved a huge amount, naturally she should move into senior management, what is it that we are not seeing, what's worrying us?" But I don't think this conversation happens – it sounds more like it would happen in a psychologist room or something. But that's what I mean that maybe the new age approach to health and lifestyle might influence it.

Individual E

I am from [African country] and I work in the telecommunications industry as General Manager of International Business Development.

Background

I come from a family of seven children. I have three mothers and one father on my side anyway. My father had seven children and I call those children my siblings, although my mother also has additional children other than my two sisters and me. I come from an area where traditional marriages and church marriages were optional. One could take advantage of not having to go with either or going with both. My father went with both and then some!

My father had two children from a common law wife, which was my mother. I'm the second born of two girls. Then he had a son from an extra-marital relationship, although 'extra-marital' is incorrect, as my parents weren't officially married. My father had another girl with my mother so by then he had four children. After that he formally married a third woman who was then officially his wife. She had four children with my father one of whom passed away.

My culture is a paternalistic society so the children belong to the clan of the father. All my father's children were raised by him. My mother was 16 when she had my older sister and about 18 when she had me. She couldn't take care of us and she was still young enough to get married. After having 3 kids she was still only 21. So it was actually quite a godsend that she wasn't responsible for three children, as she would have struggled to provide for them. My father took care of us kids and my mother was free to go and get married which she did. She went on to have five children with her husband. So I have half-siblings on my father's and my mother's side, but I am closest to the children on my father's side as I was raised with them by my father and my stepmother. It sounds complicated but it was actually quite simple for us as our father was the constant. I only vaguely remember life with my mother. The only mother I've known consistently is my stepmother.

Influences

Growing up my father was very strict, very professional and very moral. He believes in a very high level of integrity and his work ethics are spotless. He was a [commodity] trader when we were growing up. He worked for the [Commodity] Marketing Board in our home country before being transferred to New York and then London. In London he worked for a private company. He was very hard working, he had seven kids and his wife (my step-mother) never really worked.

My father really believed in educating his daughters. He stressed the education of his girl children more than he did his sons because he felt that his sons would find their way even if they weren't very clever. But if you're not very clever and you're a girl you have very few choices in life. From his own experience, I don't know, he didn't want us to ever be the victims of men. He always felt that as long as we could provide for ourselves we could always provide for our children. He always felt that men walk away and that women rarely do.

So he was extremely strict. We got whopped quite a lot. I remember getting whipped for coming tenth in class out of 30 something students. It was my first time in a new school and a new country and I still got whopped, so he had very high expectations of us. I was never super bright but I just worked hard. There were subjects that I was good at but some that I wasn't. But I did work very hard and I think that was recognized. As long as he felt that you had done your very best he was quite satisfied.

I was in boarding school when I was five because my father and my stepmother traveled to the United States. I joined them in London when I was 6 and so I had one year of boarding school in [home country] in the 1960s, which was no joke. It was totally Dickensian. Then it was England for us where I went to the local comprehensive, which also had its ups and downs. I learnt an awful lot about protecting myself even though we had bullies and racism in the 1960s. My parents didn't really know how to deal with racism because they had never really experienced it growing up in [home country]. They always felt like we had to grin and bear it because we were guests in a foreign country and we were a minority. But somehow my sister and I didn't think we should take it because there would be big guys beating us up on our way to school and on our way back from school. They would physically beat us up and we were small.

Luckily my sister was fast and quite strong so we fought back and as a consequence we also bullied other little kids. You know it's a cyclical thing, there were little white kids that were smaller than us and we got some satisfaction beating them up before school. I regret it now but at the time these kids stood across the road from us sticking their tongues and stuff so we just did what came naturally. It was part of growing up and hopefully I haven't got any psychological repercussions from it. But it was a real experience. It toughened me up.

My stepmother was also very strict. She came from a traditional culture and she saw her girl children as assistants. She had quickly had two boys back to back, they were almost twins. We did a lot of the work in the house. We never spoke back to her. Her children were allowed to eat certain things that we weren't allowed to eat. She would serve the Sunday dinner whilst we were out at church to make sure that she had a family dinner without us. It was very painful. And she whopped us. But in retrospect and lots of therapy I have come to grips with it because all of a sudden she was married with a household of four kids and she couldn't manage. She had a husband who was out at work every day all day, who was intellectually her superior and really didn't expect her to have any intellectual capacity whatsoever. And she was very smart, she came from a middle class family in Uganda and her father was a doctor. She had at least a diploma and I think she wanted to be able to contribute to the family. I think she just felt desperate.

My sister and I used to clean the soiled baby cloth nappies that were sitting stewing and waiting for us when we came back from school and we also had to meet high expectations from our father. He would hand us a pile of books that we would have to read in a certain amount of time. I read *Great Expectations* and Shakespeare before I was nine. I also had homework and childhood and ironing to do for the household. It was extremely hard. I remember in London how miserable it was in winter. It was cold, wet and damp in those old two-up two-down houses that stank of moist wallpaper. But I had a strong sister and we made time to play and even though we got in trouble we made friends on the street and there was joy because we had each other. It was hard at that time to ever think of life as anything different so we accepted it.

I wasn't ever very sporty but at least I managed because I could run. It was expected of black kids to be good at sports, drama and good at singing. Fortunately I was good at the singing and the drama but my father fortunately or unfortunately (I don't know which) was not interested in me doing any of those things. If I were in another family I guess I would be a down and out actress but I wasn't ever allowed to pursue my interests, although he did allow me to dabble. Luckily when I went to undergrad I went to school in the States, which did, gave me a lot more freedom. I continued with drama, speech & communication, art and I studied French but my focus was an undergrad in business administration. So that made him happy it made me happy and luckily got me a living.

Career Path

I did A Levels in Geography, Economics, and Art & English Literature. Then I did an undergraduate degree in business administration in the States but was also able to focus on the subjects I most enjoyed which I think enhanced my experience immensely. I finished the four-year course in about three years. My father didn't believe in me working in the summer. He believed that he should provide for me as long as I was at school. Even if I went back to school today to do my PHD I think my father would try and pay for me because he just so believes in education. So I would go to school over the summer whilst the rest of my classmates got paid summer jobs and things like that. But I still did do some paid work. I didn't believe in asking my father for money to socialize. I mean he had seven kids, he was living in [African country] and I'm asking him for dollars so I can go and party on the weekends. No. I worked and I sold trousers and I did several other odd jobs and was quite independent financially.

Between undergraduate and graduate I went to school in France at a small language school in the East of the country. That was a real life experience because I was exposed to real Africans and Africans from all over the continent. For me it really set off something. I'd always been interested in Africa but I just didn't really realize how diverse and how beautiful African people and its peoples were. I learnt this mostly through partying and not through any organized cultural experience! I dated many different people. The different perspectives of people were just such an eye opener. I'd had very little interaction with real African people coming straight

from Africa and enjoying the European experience for a change. So I developed a real interest in Africa whilst learning French.

Then I went onto grad school in the States and did a Masters of International Business. In graduate school academically I did better than I have ever done because I was really under pressure to find a job afterwards. The safety net that my father had laid under me was going to be pulled as he could only support me so long. I first did some work for a Professor doing some work on women in development and women in business. It was interesting but I really didn't think it was going anywhere. It also wasn't very well run.

I found a job in international business and economic development in [American city]. It was a small company that did a lot of bidding for new projects and implemented them. It was very good for me. I got a really good multi-million dollar project in private sector development and privatization in sub Saharan Africa that I managed. What I really did was identify talent and then deploy people to go out to African countries and do studies. They would then come back and I would edit their reports and make sure that we got paid. It was very good because I got a lot of exposure to business.

I didn't go "in country" although I soon realized that people who were going "in country" didn't have much more experience than I did but that they had African experience. And I was like "how much African experience can you get – I'm African!" But these people would be able to talk about the privatization of the government of [country X]. They would understand how they were going to privatize, which sectors and what kind of interest there was in the market. So I realized that I wasn't really that exposed. I had a real mission at that time to get the experience. And that was really hard because you have to have experience to get experience so you are looking for a break.

I got my first break in Indonesia when our Project Liaison Officer was pregnant and had to be away for four months on maternity leave and we needed someone to manage a project "in country" so I went to Indonesia. It was really fascinating and I had never thought about going to Asia. Culturally and intellectually it was brilliant. When I got back my company wanted me to focus on Asia. But I knew that as much as it was fascinating I didn't see myself flourishing there. The cultural differences

were just too much and there were just too many hurdles that I had to get over in order to be really effective. I didn't want to be pegged as an Asian specialist. So I got another job as Project Manager for a company that did the same, as the first company but was larger.

This company had some really great projects and had divided Africa into two divisions; projects for Western Central Africa and project for East Southern Africa. I was put into Western Central because I had French. So I worked in a project in [African country X] and then I knew I was definitely in the right place. Then the two departments merged and I was seconded to a project in South Africa and came out here for a four-month stint to do an assessment of emerging black businesses.

That's really when I fell in love with South Africa because I realized it was a cross between first and second and in between worlds and I felt that I could do well here. The project I was working on was indigenized and I applied for the job as financial manager and I got it. That was really very cheeky of me because you know – finance and me! But I passed two audits, set up the systems and trained a real accountant to come in. For the first nine months I was earning dollars and then after that they wanted me to become a fully local person. But I thought, "If I want to go local let me do something where I'm not worried about getting caught as being a fake". So I trained someone up for the project and then I got a job for [consultancy company A] which was again business development orientated but across Africa. During that time I met my husband, got married and had a child. When my daughter was about four months old I had a meeting with [telecommunications company] to find out how they could use the [consulting company's] offices to do some groundwork in countries where they wanted to get licenses.

This woman came from the telecoms company and spoke to me. It turned out that we went to the same graduate school in the United States. That was a school that was known for international management and had a very strong alumni network. They called it a 'mystique' where people are able to access other professional people. So it just so happened that I had a connection with this woman. We started chatting, she asked me what my background was and she was like "we need someone like you in our business, why don't you come and talk to my boss". Within a week I had a job offer and within a month I had changed jobs and joined the

[telecommunications] company focusing again on mainly Western and Central Africa because of my French.

I believe in merit. I think I get paid well enough for what I do. But I also think that my work is now at a level where I can use some creativity. I'm not totally under my boss's wing. I'm not totally under a system. I can create my own systems. At the end of the day my love is Africa, people and networking and I get rewarded in my work for doing for I love and am good at, which I think is quite a unique situation. But of course it's a lot of hard work and I have to meet very high expectations in the business that I do. So far I have been able to meet those expectations.

Next Steps

I'm now a General Manager and my next step would be to become a Group Executive. But it's unlikely in my position because of what I do for there to be an Executive position, according to the current structure. Although frankly I don't think I would be doing anything differently except that I would get more money and I would get more lifestyle benefits. And really life isn't all about money. I make enough to take care of my daughter and me and we go on holiday every year. And I'm quite happy. And because I work hard I get substantial bonuses and raise every year. So being an Executive is really just another title.

I have some ambitions outside of work and I'm contemplating those. They will not be income generating but they will definitely be something I enjoy. And they will probably be something to do with children. I am passionate for children and I would like to be able to do something with them. I'd like to build a small camp or something where kids can come and do educational and fun things that I can do with them. There maybe a small price to pay but that would just be for sustainability. I would like to have women involved in the business as shareholders so it is a sustainable project for women who actually have no other form of income. But I haven't crystallized it yet and it would be three or four years down the line.

Personal Attributes

As a consequence of my background I set very high expectations of myself and I set very high expectations for my daughter. However I have become better at

moderating those expectations. For example, I think my daughter will be quite artistic but I want her to be able to have a balance and for me to be able to accept that balance. It's easier for me to do it for my daughter. It's harder for me in my own life. I think I have a very hard time moderating my behaviour. I work hard. I don't know how not to work hard. I don't know how to be laid back. I don't know how to do just enough at work to get by. I have to excel or nothing. I mean I just don't feel adequate if I don't put in my very best effort. I do think I get taken advantage of at work but for me it's about the big picture.

For me success is being able to do my job well and being motivated to do the job that I do. Being rewarded financially of course but also getting some satisfaction out of it. It's a means to an end, it's not my life and I have to remember it. So when you're doing your job it has to be the best that you can do but it must also enhance a certain aspect of your whole life. I think success, my success, I think is down to hard work and I think that's the foundation. I work hard. I believe in giving it my all.

I believe in a good product but I also work very well with people. I can't do what I do without my team. If my team doesn't trust me and doesn't have respect for me I know that I will get shoddy results so I think I work very well with people. I give people that I work with enough latitude to feel that their contribution is appreciated and valued but also that they are professionals like I am. I am no better than them I just happen to be the head of a particular project. If you give respect you get respect back. And I think I've got a few skills that help in my job as well, academically I think I've got the right background, but I'm also methodical and I do pay quite a bit of attention to detail even though I'm not controlling at all.

Leadership Style

I have got a very empowering management style. I work with professionals and I believe that the more responsibility you give people the more ownership they take over their area and the better the product, so I don't believe in a fully hands on approach. At the end of the day I know I'm responsible for the outcome so I need to be involved, but I do try to give people responsibility because I like my own independence to make my own judgment and to take responsibility for what I do.

I think there is a difference between men and women's leadership styles. I've worked with men and women and I've really enjoyed working with the women. I've worked with extremely strong women and not so strong women so I'm not saying that all women are great managers. But I've found that women are driven in a very different way. They believe in really working with people as opposed to having people work for them. I think that makes all the difference. I like to feel that people work with me as opposed to working for me. They don't call me "boss" and we have an equal relationship.

I've also found that men aren't such great communicators. For me, I like to know exactly what is required in a job. That usually necessitates an in depth discussion which could bring out areas where I feel that I could actually add value. Those areas may not be apparent if I were just given a two-liner, which says "would appreciate document on this subject". It's far better to talk and ask "what do we really want, what's the objective?" In this respect I've felt that communication has always been better between a woman supervisor and me. I've felt that it's always been easier to say, "this is how we can enhance the process" as opposed to saying "here's the report". The openness of discussion can really benefit the final product.

I went to a convent school and I went to boarding school and I don't want to be in a strict environment at my work. We spend so much time at work that I believe in bringing people in. Even if it's a silly question I will bring people in. I ask people "what do you people think?" My boss may pose a question or a really puzzling opportunity and I really want to get people's feedback. Even if I may know the answer it's amazing what you can get from people when you get them around the table. These people aren't under any pressure. It's not a deliverable, or rather it's not their deliverable it is my deliverable. And after all I work with professionals who have been employed because they bring something to the table and if you don't use them, what's the point?

I do find that men don't tend to bring other people on board and they like to take credit for "the" deliverable. I've had men at my work place ask me what my opinion is on a certain project that I am working on and then they regurgitate what I have said and send it to the CEO and claim it as their opinion. The CEO will call me and he will say, "This project that you are working on, so-and-so says that we should be doing this ..." and then you feel like a stupid idiot saying, "that was my idea" so you

have to overcome that. One shouldn't be afraid of saying "actually that was my idea and in fact I can enhance it by doing something more". So you have to have balls especially when there are people that you are working with who see work as a competition. And that's when you have to roll up your sleeves and say, "this is what I am able to do". But it's rare, if I have to do it then I do it but you know it's the game.

Confidence

I have had an experience where I've felt that a woman manager hasn't been as confident as I felt that she should be. That impacts on the whole team and it impacts on you as well. As a woman I feel like I have to moderate how I approach things because I don't want my boss to feel that I am trying to intimidate her. I think women are a lot more sensitive and will try and make sure that everybody feels comfortable. It's hard work but it yields results. I also feel that men who may or may not be skilled at what they do, it's easier for them to exude confidence and intimidate people around them. And I don't think women would normally do that, I haven't had that experience with women. But sometimes you feel that women can launch a bit of a come back. I've seen some men try to intimidate some women and then the woman comes back very harsh because she has too. The women have to remind people around them that they do not want to be moddy coddled and that they do not want to be treated any differently from anyone else.

In my particular case today I haven't experienced any of these issues but my boss is in an extremely elevated position and there are people who will try and cut her down because her education level is not the same as theirs, but she is strong and she has had to come out strongly, come out fighting, which is more energy than anyone wants to expend. But it's less and less frequent and the more we achieve the less it becomes a question.

Role Models / Mentorship

I'm lucky that I have a very strong woman as my immediate supervisor. She is also the breadwinner of her family. She has three young children, the youngest is four. She's older than I am and her husband contributes to the family in other ways other than financially. So she sees herself in a lot of ways as a single mother because a

lot of weight is put upon her. So she's accommodating as much as she can be towards my own position now as a single mother. But she's also extremely demanding because she has strict KPIs that are attached to mine. If I am not productive I impact her ability to be productive. So we have a dependent relationship. I will travel for her if she really needs to have time for her kids, if I can do the job. We're willing to do that for each other. But it's a personal agreement it's not necessarily a formal thing. It's a personal thing. I try not to abuse it and I only use it when absolutely necessary. Like I have to go on vacation this weekend because I am going through a divorce and I only have my daughter for half the holiday. And we're going through an extremely busy time at work. My boss can't go on holiday but she knows she can go another time and she will have access to her kids at all times, so I'm going. And it will be difficult for me and it is difficult for me because of my background. It's very difficult for me to leave things hanging. I hate to hand over to others. But that's what I've got to do because I have to be with my child for the next two weeks. So I'm lucky that I have my boss because it would be very different with a guy who has a wife at home who is taking care of all the family commitments. He has only to do his work. So I am lucky. But I cannot say that the company itself is very supportive. We don't have any real benefits for single parents.

Racism & Sexism

I have experienced from my black colleagues quite a lot of animosity. It's sort of a lack of understanding of who I am and maybe less interest in what I bring to the table. I was once accosted by a senior person within my first year or two at the [telecoms company]. I was told quite rudely that the white South Africans who were running the company felt that they could fool the black South Africans by putting a black face, like me, in a senior position. She told me that I did not meet the empowerment criteria and never would and that I should also feel some kind of guilt because I did nothing towards the alleviation of apartheid. I did not take part in the struggle, they did, and it's unfair that I should come and be the person to reap the rewards. And even though I had felt some of this tension nobody had ever actually come to me. In fact this particular person felt that she had had some bad experiences where people had been very arrogant about their access to education and their exposure to the world. I came back with "look I have made a commitment to South Africa. I have chosen to be in South Africa. I have married a South Africa

and my child is South Africa. I could live anywhere in the world if I wanted too but I have chosen to live here. I pay taxes more than most people and I'm doing it without having the ability to have any influence over my destiny because I can't vote".

Since then we have developed a very good relationship and in fact she was posted up to Nigeria and is in now more Nigerian than the Nigerians and she doesn't want to come back to South Africa. She realizes that she has grown and there is a difference between her and the stereotypical black South African who hasn't got any exposure. She sees a real gap between herself and the rest of her countrymen and so the gap between us has narrowed. We don't discuss it because it's no longer relevant but we have come to terms with who we are.

But those kinds of attitudes have never impeded by career. I would never let it. I've always been the odd person out in schools, or work or wherever and I think you could dwell on being the odd person out and take any negativity that comes your way personally but you will never get above a certain level. So I take it. People say that I give in too easily or I take a lot crap but that's fine because I know that I have got my eye on the bigger picture and if I want to achieve there are some things that I will want to make a compromise on. So if someone is personally upset with me I don't let it impact my big picture. I deal with it and I move on. There are some things that get me down but you know if you can't deal with it, you might as well give up now.

The Men's Network

I have never experienced the men's network. My work is not South African. The networking that I have to do has to be out in Africa, so I don't get much value out of a golfing day. And besides I don't manage work / life balance very well so if I have spare time I do try and spend it with my daughter or with myself. I work from 8am-8pm everyday. If I see my daughter before she goes to bed I'm lucky, and if I can drop her off in the morning for school it's a joy. To spend four hours on a golf day talking to people that I know will not enhance my career or my life I don't have time for it. And I don't think it has limited my career in anyway.

The Women's Network

I think women help one another out in various ways. I've got a small group of women friends who help me immensely in keeping my head straight. They all come from different walks of life, different ages and do different things. They all know my daughter so I can trust them with my daughter after school. But I don't have time to belong to a formal organisation, I really don't. I haven't seen it expressed in more subtle ways in my place of work. I mean we have a kind of a sisterhood and we get together for coffee once in a while but it's not consistent but it is a light support system. We're all in different departments, we're all at different levels, there's very little in depth interaction. We all work hard and as soon as the bell rings we're all off trying to do the shopping, getting home to our kids and just trying to have a life.

Work / Life Balance

I don't balance my life very well. I have a lot of external help, which you can only get on the continent. I have a fantastic Nanny who I've known since way before I got married and she's a part of my family. She has been my daughter's Nanny since my daughter was five weeks old so they have a very firm bond between them. Although she is literate she's unfortunately not that well educated so she's unable to help my daughter with her homework. So now I have employed an au pair who is college educated and who can drive. She picks up my daughter from school because I am unable too and she does homework with my daughter and they also practice music together. But I have a lot of out goings in terms of employing these two people.

I started traveling a lot for my job when my daughter was only five months old. I was still breast-feeding. I breast fed my daughter until she was thirteen months. I went to Burundi, Cameroon, Rwanda and Ivory Coast. In the Ivory Coast I was away for three weeks and that's when I decided I had better wean this child because I couldn't stand it any more but joining the telecoms company was a real shift in gear for me. Usually women will downsize when they have a baby but I ended up sizing. Mainly because my husband was an artist and didn't have great earning power, and influenced by my background, you know I don't take responsibility lightly. I would have loved to have enjoyed my child's infancy but I actually felt very anxious about making ends meet. I always felt it was up to me to make those ends meet with very little assistance from my husband. I knew that if I wasn't great at my job I would always be mediocre and I didn't want to ever be in a position where I didn't have a job. I knew that everything that my child needed depended on my husband and me

at the time. At the end of the day to be perfectly honest I knew that at some point I would divorce my husband and I had to make sure that I had laid a foundation for myself and my child that would be sustainable, so yes, I was very driven.

Female Representation

I think in senior positions at the company where I work it's probably as low as an eighth, maybe a little bit more. I think the board is probably 20% women. I think we could do with more women but we could also do with more international representation. We have two francophone countries and I'm the only person at headquarters that can speak French and I'm not fluent. I mean I can do business in French but I'm not fluent. We may at some point have a business in an Arab speaking country but we have nobody who understands Arabia or speaks Arabic. Or we may need someone who can speak Portuguese for Mozambique or Angola and so on. So we need to become, especially at the senior level, an international company. We need to look at having more women or rather more international women or people on board so we can absolutely be more diversified and add value to our operations at the right level.

The value that women offer

I think we should have more qualified women and I think where there are qualified women in the work place that should be nurtured. Our Chief Technical Officer is now a woman and is going out to Zambia, which is a first, I think, on the African continent. We should be seeing more of those. In South Africa in the last ten years the company has grown some highly skilled women who should be given every opportunity to advance themselves. So I think there should be special efforts and targets made to force change in the organisation.

I think women add value but I don't think they're any better than men because at the end of the day the business is worried about its financial success. Of course I believe in same pay, same job and all that kind of stuff. But apart from that I think that women can do just as well. And one has to find a management style that works for that and if it's not productive you have to change it. So I don't think that women are better than men, if you get the results you get the results.

What can organisations do to encourage women in the work place?

I've been at [telecoms company] for seven years. My exposure to the whole organisation is limited as I've worked in a specialized area but the women that I have worked with have been very fortunate and we've grown a lot. Nobody has dropped out for the sake of children, ever. Nobody has dropped out after getting married and not come back to work. In fact nobody has even moved to another job. So the company must be doing something right. But I don't think it has to do with financial compensation, I think it's because we are in a very fast moving area and it's challenging and it's a very hard area to just let go of because of the excitement and the exhilaration.

There are a lot of women in my area and we've done well. But I think that some women do leave jobs because they're not being compensated either financially or emotionally at work and they find other alternatives more appealing, being able to stay at home and take care of kids could be value enhancing for them. But I just don't have much association with those women in the company. My role as a working mother is for me unquestionable. It would be nice if we could have a crèche at work, or a gym at work that would alleviate some of the stress of having children and having to run around and pick kids up. It's not going to happen unfortunately. We've been pushing for a crèche for a very long time and for one reason or another it's not going to happen. We'll make do. We're growing and our kids are growing.

Advice to Other Women

First and foremost I would say "hard work, hard work and hard work". But I also think that you must try and think out of the box and be creative. Try to think of other ways of meeting your objectives. But also be confident enough to know that you can do the job as well as anyone else, and other people are just as stupid as you are and that you are here to learn. You can only learn if you are willing to accept your weaknesses and see opportunities for growth via those weaknesses.

Professionalism is very important, try and look the part. It will help boost your confidence and I think for a woman that is very important. In South Africa it is not stressed very much, but again with my background, I believe in first appearances and that that you only get one chance. Dressing in a corporate manner doesn't

mean that you are not creative and it doesn't mean that you can't be your own person.

Try and find an area where you excel and make sure that you are not afraid of showcasing what you do well. A lot of women are very good at certain things but feel inhibited in some way or another. They feel that it is not their place to show how good they are because they don't want to show another woman up or even worse put a man down. I think if you are yourself and if you do have good things that you can showcase then you shouldn't hesitate. It's a way of getting ahead without having to fight for it. It's just about demonstrating what you can do.

When you have difficulties one must never have a problem for asking to help and getting support from other people around it. Men are terrible at that. You find them in a little corner just stuck on one thing, whereas women are in a corner chatting over coffee, resolving an issue and getting buy in at the same time. I find some men do work independently and are also alone, whereas they could have had feedback and interaction and workshops and all sorts of things, you know over coffee or a quick break.

Individual F

Background

I was born in [region x] in a village called [y]. I am the last of eight children although unfortunately three of my brothers and one of my sisters passed away. So we grew up as a family of four children. I have one brother and two sisters and I am the youngest of the family. My father was a businessman in the village where we lived. He was the general dealer. My mother was absent for my early years, she worked as a domestic housekeeper and so she had to live in with her employees. That was a challenge for us but as soon as my parents accumulated enough money to put us through school my mother joined my father in the local shop.

I can't really say whether I identified with one of my parents more than the other. Culturally of course you would tend to be closer to the mother than the father, because you give the male a lot of space and respect. It's also difficult to recall because my parents passed away quite some time ago. My father died in 1975

when I was at secondary school and when my mother passed away just after I had just finished my matric.

My mother was very strict and she was a perfectionist. She wanted things to be done the right way or not at all. She was a disciplinarian but I am so grateful that she brought us up the way she did, because we managed even after our parents died to keep that discipline going. My father was also very strict but not such a vocal person. He was much quieter. Maybe he was a bit softer sometimes. But you know, fathers don't generally spend as much time with their children and so they tend to give kids a little more leeway.

I stayed at home whilst my elder sisters studied or were at boarding school. I was the one who was most at home with my mother. I think I learnt a lot from her. For instance, I am the best cook in the family!

At school I was a people's person so I was always amongst friends. I always invested a lot in terms of relationships. I am not the type of person who will let go of a relationship. Even if there are challenges in the relationship I work on it because I find it is very hard to establish meaningful relationships. So I have friends that have been friends for many years. Often we don't see each other because everyone is living their own lives but once in a while we email or make a phone call. We're still a very tight network.

I got my matric in 1976, which was a difficult time in South Africa's history. The Soweto Uprisings made school life quite unstable so it was quite an achievement to even get my matric. After finishing school I thought about nursing. I had applied to the only black hospital in Gauteng and was waiting to hear back from the nursing college. During this time the headmaster at my school was a teacher short. He came to my home and offered me a short-term job, filling in as a teacher. So straight after my matric I was employed as a teacher, the youngest teacher in the school ever. I enjoyed it for a while but I realized that teaching wasn't for me. However, having said that, I find that these days I am a natural teacher. I'm not sure why I didn't pursue teaching back then. It could have been the environment of course, because teaching today and teaching in those days was completely different.

I was also helping my mother out in the business. After my father passed away my mother wasn't able to run the business by herself. It was my father who had looked after the books and had taken care of the money. When he went we found that the business was being exploited by several of our sales people who had got the company into debt. I had to take care of the running of the business. However, shortly after my 18th birthday my mother went into hospital and she never came back. After that my brother and I had to make a decision on who was going to run the business full time. I had taken care of the business for about a year and during that time I had met my husband who was working in Jo'burg. So my brother had to come back. He's since done a good job with the business, I mean it will never be Pick'n Pay but considering the area in which the business is based, he's done well.

Career Path

Despite being married, I found that I was really driven to complete my studying. I knew I had to do something more than just my matric. My brothers and sisters had always been committed to helping me finance my education and with their help I enrolled on a three-month marketing course at [college]. By this time I had completely changed my mind about nursing and I had got a job working in reservations at a [hotel group]. After about a year I was promoted and my job was to take care of the office and about four other workers. That was a real confidence booster, getting that recognition early. At the time I asked myself, "What is it that I have? Because I've been given an opportunity without the skills set to back it up".

The [hotel group] trained me a little but I wanted something more formal; something that I could actually say was a skill of mine. So I registered for a one-year course in marketing. I did that part time. I used to hop onto a taxi from town x into Jo'burg every Saturday morning and then I would hop back. I could have done it via correspondence but I really wanted to benefit from the interactive elements of learning. The learning part of the course takes part in the classroom where you are challenging each other's point of view, when reading a book on your own that's your only point of view. I used to think to myself "I have got one day off a week and I'm going to use it". I used to work six days a week so on Sundays I would be back in the office but every Saturday without fail I came to Jo'burg to do the course. My husband and my in-laws (who we were staying with) were very supportive. I wouldn't have survived without them.

Later the [hotel group] re-organized into different divisions, one of these divisions was going onto a computer reservation system. The group asked me to stay in Jo'burg and go on a three-month computer-training course. I came to Jo'burg and stayed in a hotel for three months. In this respect I've always seen myself as having angels around me, angels that have given me opportunities and when I've been given those opportunities I've really embraced them. I worked really hard on that training program, I went back to the hotel and implemented the system and it all worked out very well.

By now I was part of the management team in a big hotel. I felt comfortable there and I knew that the people around me knew that I could be trusted with responsibility. Around that time my husband was transferred to a new town in a different province. I stayed behind for a while because I wasn't sure about transferring to the group's hotel that was based in that area. It just didn't generate the kind of dynamic environment that I was already used too. Then my husband found an opportunity for me at a [domestic airliner]. So I moved to be with him and I really started enjoying my new work. All the young girls at the time aspired to be part of the airline industry and wear the uniforms.

I started off running the reservation office in town and within two years time I was asked to take over the marketing & sales of the area. That's when I started to think "okay I need to get a three year diploma in marketing". I didn't tell the company what I was doing. I just went off and did it. I studied part time again. The company only learnt about what I was up to when there was this marketing conference on in Jo'burg and I wanted the company to sponsor a free flight so that I could attend it. I went to the MD and told them I was studying and that there was this interesting conference on and well, "Could I go?" The MD responded by saying "wow, we were not aware of this". Immediately he organized the airline to book me a ticket and they paid for my three days in Jo'burg. I think they were really impressed that I had taken the initiative to invest in myself.

I did the course for about a year and a half but I wasn't sure that marketing was what I actually wanted to do so I transitioned to three-year degree in administration. It was always a very conscious decision for me to be able to profile myself and take advantage of my opportunities. I looked at my life and I thought, "I have been

recognized even though I don't have anything behind me" but I also thought "this luck will not be with you forever" and so I considered what I could do to raise my competitive advantage. I was always looking out for what I could do differently from other people so that I could get recognized.

Mentoring

When I started working for the airline there was a guy [A] that joined soon after me. [A] was my boss but he was based in Jo'burg. Somehow he recognized something in me. He was very old and he saw me as something of a daughter but in those days this was a very delicate relationship. It was unheard to have a black face working at the kind of level I was in the airline industry. But [A] really had a heart. He was an honest person. He would sit down and open up and tell you if he wasn't happy with your performance. He would always try and make you see the other side of the argument, rather than be subjective and look at your own side.

[A] presented me with some great opportunities. I remember one time when we were due to give a tourism presentation to some foreign business leaders. He asked me to put the presentation together for him. I had to go out and research and prepare the presentation. The first day we were hosting the Americans, the second day we would talk to the Europeans and then the third and forth days were reserved for the Asians. We worked on the presentation together and went back and forth on various revisions. After it was done he invited me to help him with the presentation. He did the first and the second presentations and then after that he wrote a note to me and said "I have a very important call. If I'm not back you must run with the presentation". I felt like I was going to throw up. Of course he didn't come back and so I had to stand up to do the presentation. That was the worst. I will never forget it. I was so scared. I thought my voice wouldn't come out but of course once you start the presentation you're mind is diverted and you forget about the nerves. Then before I knew it I saw [A]. He was standing right at the back of the room and he was holding up both his thumbs, as a way of congratulating me.

This was a great experience because [A] had obviously planned for me to do the presentations, but he had planned it without exposing me. Some managers expose you. They put you on the spot when you're not ready. He didn't do that. From that day my confidence really excelled. After that I flew overseas and I did a lot of

presentation and exhibition work for the airline, which allowed me to win a lot of respect within the company. Since then I have realized that you need to give people opportunity. You will never know the potential that people have in them until you give them an opportunity. I try hard in my current position to recognize people with potential and with the correct attitude and to give them opportunity in a safe environment. It can really kill people's confidence if you expose them too early.

Racism

As I mentioned earlier, in the South Africa of the 1980s it was unusual to have a black face working in the airline business. I remember one awful time when I was sent by the airline onto a course that was again based in Jo'burg. It was a three-month course and for three months this one white lecturer could not or would not look me in the eye. If I had to ask a question he would pretend he hadn't heard until my colleague would ask the question on my behalf. Then he would respond but he would respond to my colleague rather than to me.

From our office there were three of us enrolled on this course. One of them was a white woman, one of them was colored and there was me. After the first week on this course the colored woman and I wanted to go home, because the environment was absolutely unbearable. We were made to feel like we were nothing, absolutely nothing. I remember one night we stayed up crying until about 2am. And then one day we made a decision to say "No, we are better than this. We are going to be above this and we're staying". Of course some days I would come back and be more depressed than my friend and she would try and pep me up, and then other days it would be my turn to encourage her. We aggressively adopted a strategy to say "I have left my family. I am in Jo'burg. I can't go back and be a quitter. Rather than spend the whole time crying we are going to study". At the end of the three months we both got gold. No one else on the course got gold. Our lecturer had to shake our hands and that was the first time that he looked me in the face.

Challenges

The airline company for which I worked had bought an intercontinental commercial jet that could be hired for private use. The jet had made about three trips when the MD stepped into my office almost shaking. He was basically about to be fired as the

three trips were really unsuccessful. He put a report onto my desk and said “read this and come into my office in one hours’ time with a recommendation”. I read the report and when I stepped into his office he said “the next trip is in four weeks time and I am going to be flying the airplane (because he was also a pilot) and you are going to be flying with me as the cabin crew, so go and get yourself a license”.

I went back to my desk and I was pretty upset. The MD had been really aggressive with me, but still, I phoned around and organized training for myself in emergency aviation medicine, swimming training, fire training and so on. I got the license, told the MD and he was over the moon. I also did some investigating. Having done marketing & sales I had formed some good relationships with some high level individuals (government ministers and so on) through PR work. I interviewed them as customers and found out what their likes and dislikes were. I then went to the MD and said, “This is the situation. Am I empowered to make decisions around certain issues or not? If you want this venture to be a success then you have to empower me” and so he did. I fired the caterer for instance. Someone had contracted a Swiss caterer that just weren’t equipped to serve our customers. They would serve gourmet food whereas our customers wanted pap and meat. I even interviewed the President’s chef to find out what his favorite foods were, so that we could serve it to him on a journey. Anyway the next flight was a real success. The President even went so far as to ask for me to be present every time he flew on our jet. That was very flattering but I made it clear to the company that cabin crewing wasn’t my job but that I would do cabin attendance if the President was flying. I did it for PR purposes for the airline.

Leadership Qualities

Whilst working for the airline my husband and I divorced, by that time we had a couple of children together, two boys. But work was great and I was moved to Jo’burg as divisional manager, which meant I was responsible for our operations in five or six airports around the country. This must have been around 1995 and by that time political change was upon South Africa. The company was trying to create opportunities for black people in ‘quick win’ areas such as cabin attendance and ground crew. The challenge was managing people’s expectations. A lot of the black employees felt that I was going to be on their side and hand out favors to them,

whereas the white employees felt vulnerable and threatened by change. So I had to be very sensitive.

One day I told my boss that I was going to have a “race meeting” because I was tired of this really terrible vibe in the office. I told him I was going to have two meetings, one with the blacks and one with the whites because I wanted to tell the truth – I didn’t think I could be completely direct if I had blacks and whites in a mixed group. Besides we were trying to build a team across racial divides and to have everyone in the same room together would not have been helpful. I called in the black employees and I said “the truth must be told today”. I said “guys - what are you doing? Don’t think that you have arrived because of the color of your skin. You have got to work hard. You’ve got to show people that you can make it. If you don’t take this responsibility you are going to ruin this opportunity for yourself and for others. Don’t think about it as your own future - think about it as the future of the country. I’m not here to hand out jobs to people who aren’t qualified. I’m sorry, that’s not my agenda. But I will try as hard as I can to make sure that the environment is conducive for you to excel so you are not going to be set up for failure. I will be there for you, but you’ve got to work for it yourself. The reality is that this is South Africa. You can leave this airline and join another company but these are the issues that we have to deal with so be mature enough to develop a strategy to deal with it in a non confrontational manner”. Then I walked out and I went into the second meeting with the other group. I felt very relieved after these meetings.

Some people were very angry with me and the way I came across but after a few days I was getting feedback from people that actually said “you were right”. They still weren’t happy with me but over time it got a lot better. I was managing about a third of the airline at that time, with about 800 people reporting to me. I dealt a lot with these kinds of issues. I was forever trying to facilitate between people and make the teamwork.

Generally my leadership style is participative. I like engaging people. I like coming up with ideas. I think I’m creative but I need to involve people to say “this is what I’m thinking, what do you think” and start breaking it down until it is in pieces and in doing that people add value to the idea. There are however situations when you need to make a decision. You can’t call meeting after meeting. So for project work I will engage people but if there’s an executive decision that needs to be taken that I

will take it, it's my call and I make that decision. I then inform people that maybe affected by that decision or may be influenced by that decision.

For example, I have recently worked on a sexual harassment case that has involved a very senior manager. It has been a very sensitive issue in the company. Until a decision was made I kept the matter to myself. This individual resigned (an outcome that I had pushed for) and I knew that that would really shake things up. I immediately informed the stakeholders in Europe about what was happening. I had to be strategic in terms of the stakeholders that I engaged. I needed people to support my position in case others turned against me. At the same time I knew that the resignation would become hot gossip in the company. So I called in my HR team and I said to them "this is the situation, this is what you need to know, this is the decision, these were the challenges, these are the messages that are coming from other divisions" and I asked them to manage it whilst they were sitting in the smoking room. I asked them not to be part of the speculation. I also didn't want them to be taken by surprise.

So I think my strength is really working with people and giving people the bigger picture. I don't make demands of people, I try and give them the context in which they are working so that they are able to contribute. I don't want to limit people's potential nor do I want to deny the company and myself the opportunity to benefit from an employee's potential.

My old boss used to call me a slave driver. My staff knew I was a slave driver. My HR meetings would start at 2.00pm on a Friday and sometimes they would carry on till late at night. And then I would say "we need to close the week and we need to prepare for next week, so let's do it" but at the same time we would try and make it fun. My staff always realized that it's much easier because then you are never stressing about preparing yourself for a meeting on Monday – as you've done it already.

Self Improvement

The policies in the airline then changed and senior positions were open for everyone to apply. I applied for the position of General Manager for Corporate Services and got the job. I remember walking out the interview and thinking I

wanted to vomit because I didn't think that I had done at all well. But I got the job and it was great. Throughout my whole time at the airline I had been educating myself by studying part time. I had applied for and won a scholarship at [a leading business school in America] and I went on a leadership development program there for six weeks. I remember flying back from America and thinking that I had so much to learn. You know in a comfortable work environment you can easily become big headed and think "I am getting all this recognition and I am great". But in the classroom nobody knows who you are or what you've achieved and they just treat you relative to how you behave in the classroom.

The leadership course fired me up to do my MBA part time. The company sponsored me. Every Tuesday and Thursday night I would go off to my classes. I completed my MBA and was then selected for a scholarship in another senior management program with [a college in the UK]. So I went over to the UK and I did a three-month senior management program. I was anxious about leaving the company at this time because the business was going through a really difficult time. Whilst I was in England I learnt that the airline would in fact be liquidated. It was really sad being away from the team during that time. I felt incredibly sad as this company had been my entire life for so long and I had invested so much in it. I would cry over the phone with my colleagues. But again, it was another lesson. You read about hostile takeovers when you do your MBA but this time it was really happening around me. I learnt that you should trust but trust with your eyes open and be aware of what is happening around you.

After finishing the course in the UK I came back and joined [a telecommunications company] as a general manager, before joining an international sports wear company as their South African HR Director. I joined this company [a global producer of electronics] about six months ago, again as the HR Director and since joining things have been really busy.

Personal Attributes

My attitude has always been that you can never know everything. Even if you have to steal with your eyes – then learn. I also work with people. I embrace change and I'm open-minded but I'm not a walk over and when called upon I can be firm. I've also always worked within a team environment and I am able to challenge issues

without challenging the person. I've also got a lot of my opportunities from identifying gaps where I can add some value. If there is a gap then fill it. It will put a lot of pressure on you, a lot of stress on you, but take it as an opportunity to say "some one is not here for a reason".

I've also always done things that have widened my scope. For me it is essential to broaden your knowledge so that you can contribute to other divisions or businesses within the group. For example, last night this woman called me, she is part of the company that I now work for. She's going on leave and she asked me to cover for her in Nigeria, Morocco and Egypt whilst she's away. At first I said I needed to think about it and that I would get back to her. I bought myself some time to apply my mind to it. I thought, "Maybe this is an opportunity to understand the issues in different countries in Africa". It ties in nicely with a conversation that I was having with my boss the other day. My boss is based in [a European city] and we were discussing how we were going to re-organize HR globally. We were discussing the implications for our resources. I was defending our HR department's head count here in South Africa because BEE on its own is massive in terms of the work needed to implement our programs. My boss was okay with what we were doing here in South Africa but wanted me to be willing to take over for HR for Africa as well. So the request that came yesterday fits into my game plan. Although the whole thing will put more pressure on me because it means no social life and it means my kids are going to suffer.

Working Mother

Being a working mother is not easy, it's hard. It's hard because of the time that you need to invest at work. In the aviation industry there were lots of women at the lower levels but fewer women in management positions. There was a lot of traveling required and I think that that's when I really started trying to manage my time. I made sure that I have a good support system at home. When I was traveling overseas a lot my husband was not there, but I had a good neighbor who was a second mother for my kids and I had a good housekeeper. I invested in them because I knew without them I would not survive. I would be traveling and having sleepless nights worrying about my kids but they were brilliantly taken care of by these two women. When we moved to Jo'burg I had to create a structure that would facilitate my work. I have friends that I rely on and that have since become

part of my family. But I also have my helper who has been with me forever, and without her I would not survive. For me to be able to be productive I need to make sure that my kids are taken care of because then the company can have 100% of me.

Drive

I am driven by a fear of failure. Failure is a nightmare for me. For instance, I've really struggled with the fact that my marriage failed and that that is somehow a reflection on me. I always say to young people that come to me for advice "it takes two to tango". I probably should have dealt with my marriage differently in hindsight in order to invest in that marriage but I definitely have "am I going to fail?" complex. Also early on [A] drove me to succeed and I really didn't want to let him down. I didn't want to disappoint him. This was a man who against all the odds recognized me as a female and as a black female. In a way he risked his profession by taking me under his wing and I was like "I can't disappoint him". Every night before I went to bed I would close my eyes and think of something to do with work and then I'd be like "no, I can't leave it for tomorrow". So I would jump out of bed and I would do whatever needed to be done because I could not bear to disappoint him. Recognition for me is also important. I'm not saying recognition in terms of people saying "wow" but it's about self-recognition, for me to say "well done girl, despite the odds you made it" that's enough for me.

The Challenge for Women

Being successful in the work place is really about being who you are, and being a woman, bringing the element of being a woman to the work place. I find that as women we get challenged all the time and we tend to want to become men because the culture has been created by men we have to fit in. So we have to try and be heard and sometimes being heard means being taken seriously, and there are times when you have to really be assertive and you have to push your way. But as many times as possible you should try and relate to people as humans, don't be confrontational because you don't want to bruise their ego, but you have your facts, and your facts must be right in order to be taken seriously.

In the beginning of my career I used to spend quite a lot of time preparing for meetings and presentations. My fear was always, “what is someone asks this question?” and I found that fear put a lot of stress on me. I created a database at home where I used to store all my information. I definitely worked harder as a woman. You have too. You are conscious about what the men are thinking about you. If you’re a woman, if you’re a black woman, you have to work harder to show that you are not a token. It’s a real challenge. On Monday morning we will come in here and the guys will be fooling around before a meeting and they won’t be prepared, whereas I will be working on Sunday afternoon making sure that I am very well prepared. I’m always aware of having to prove my worth.

We are fortunate at this company now as the country’s CEO is a female and the Financial Director is female. When I started here there was an issue of a sexual harassment case that had been pending for many months. When I arrived I looked at the case and started calling the people that had lodged their grievances and I was like amazed at the attitude taken by the company. I had to sit down with the CEO and the FD and I said “I’m sorry guys. You cannot expect this to disappear. It is here with us and if we don’t fight it and create a positive environment for women to work in then we are allowing these harassment issues to actually pass us by”. I just refused to be a part of it. I insisted that we follow the process. The feeling that I had was that there was a boy’s club at the company. I suggested that an independent arbitrator come in and assess the facts and the case is now at the CCMA. The man who allegedly committed the sexual harassment was like “you know what, it’s been done before. The last person just got a letter”. So sometimes you’ve just got to really shake things up for people to take issues seriously. It makes you unpopular in the short term but if you are consistent in applying your principles then it makes you popular. I am a disciplinarian and I did get that from my mother. If I want to be respected I need to treat people fairly and be consistent in how people are treated.

Advice to Women

The work environment means that women spend more time at work than they spend at home. For people to achieve their potential they need the space to be themselves. So bring that soft element to work but be firm. It doesn’t have to be a matter of one way or my way only or talking down to people, talk to people as

colleagues irrespective of whether it's a receptionist or not. You will be surprised, if you can open them up, the things that you can learn from them. So I believe in a company that uses its heart and its head, you have to go back to the head all the time but it's the how you are at work that's important. So that's really my passion. Have empathy towards people, understand where people are coming from, they are not just numbers they are human beings and they have feelings just like you.