



**SCHOOL OF  
BUSINESS &  
FINANCE**

**PROGRESSION OF WOMEN INTO SENIOR LEADERSHIP IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION (DIRCO)**

by

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### **Declaration of own work**

I, Malose James Kola, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “progression of women into senior leadership in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)” is my own original work. All sources have been acknowledged and correctly reported, and that this thesis has not been submitted at any other university for examination or awarding of an academic qualification.

Malose James Kola

11 November 2022



## Abstract

The post-1994 South African government promulgated legislation focusing on gender equality and the advancement of women in public and private institutions. This study examines the factors influencing women's career progression within the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), a public sector division of the South African Ministry of International Relations and Cooperation. The qualitative study in the form of a case study which comprised a purposive sample of ten women occupying senior leadership roles in DIRCO. Data collection used semi-structured interviews through the MS Teams Online platform. The key findings identified institutional, individual, and sociocultural factors that impede women's career progression into senior leadership roles, although the legislation noted above mediated the same within public organisations. Firstly, institutional factors included the nature of diplomatic work, the masculine organisational culture, and the deployment of political appointees in diplomatic services, which collectively reinforced the glass ceiling phenomena for women. Secondly, individual factors related to work-life balance challenges for women as career advancement involved long office hours, after-hours engagements, and diplomatic postings impacted family life demands. Thirdly, sociocultural factors negatively affecting career progression included stereotypes about the role of women in African society, religious beliefs, implicit and explicit ethnic discrimination, and in some cases, sexual harassment within the dominantly male diplomatic profession. Notwithstanding these barriers and challenges, South African legislation has mandatory provisions for organisations to comply with gender equality, women empowerment, and advancement policies. The study concludes that despite promulgating laws enforcing gender equality, barriers to women's career progression in senior leadership roles still exist in different guises within DIRCO and the public sector. The key recommendations are that the government and critical stakeholders proactively address the barriers through effective monitoring, consultation with women and key stakeholders, and widening the debate to break down the social-cultural barriers and stereotypes across the different economic, social and political spheres.

**Keywords:** career progression, gender, senior leadership, women, diplomacy, foreign service.

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*“Tloga tloga e tloga kgale, modiša wa kgomo o tšwa natišo šakeng”*

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## **Dedications**

I dedicate this thesis to my niece Thato Mashabela, nephews Mangcoba & Phetolo Ngcobo and, my late grandparents Malose James & Maria Mampane Kola, Johannes Mzilamuzi Shikwambane and Cyril Manyane.



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## Abbreviations and acronyms

AU	-	African Union
CEE	-	Commission for Employment Equity
COO	-	Chief Operating Officer
COVID-19	-	Coronavirus Disease
DIRCO	-	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DG	-	Director-General
EE	-	Employment Equity
FSO	-	Foreign Service Officer
HOM	-	Head of Mission
ILO	-	International Labour Organisation
MOFA	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTSF	-	Medium-Term Strategic Framework
NDP	-	National Development Plan
NSG	-	National School of Government
SADC	-	Southern African Development Community
SMS	-	Senior Management Service
Stats SA	-	Statistics South Africa
UDHR	-	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	-	United Nations



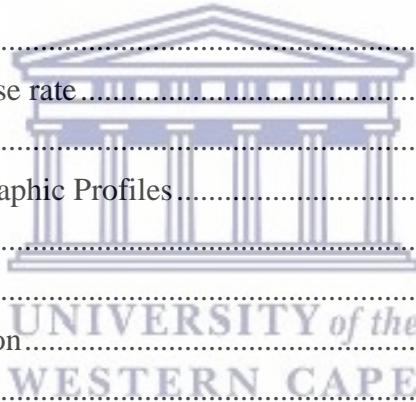
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# CHAPTER 1

## 1. Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the study, aims and objectives, problem, rationale, significance, limitations, and finally, the chapter outline for the study. The study examines the progression of women into senior leadership roles in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

### 1.1 Background of the study

There has been some progress towards empowerment and advancing gender equality in the South African workplace over the last 27 years (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The Stats SA (2021) second-quarter labour survey 2021 estimates that women accounted for 43,4% of total employment, and out of that, only 33,1% of women occupied senior leadership roles, while 66,9% were men in senior leadership roles. Unfortunately, in South Africa, women still encounter additional challenges in accessing employment opportunities. Once employed, further appointments to decision-making roles remain elusive (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

The participation of women in public policy and strategic levels in South Africa has been minimal (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). The main reasons include a lack of commitment toward increased participation of women and insufficient political knowledge about their representation in decision-making (Dlamini, 2016a; Gouws, 2008; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). However, the Department of Labour points out that South African labour laws are adequately equipped with policies, regulations and strategies to speed up workplace transformation (Department of Labour, 2020). Further, these policies and procedures can only be effective if implemented (Hlebela & Mpehle, 2020).

Hague and Harrop (2004) point out that in European countries, women had no rights to participate in politics nor get involvement in leadership and public affairs until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They further state that most European countries did not recognise women's franchise rights (Hague & Harrop, 2004). Gauja (2014) highlighted the prohibition of women in politics and participating in such processes have become part of the history, noting that women Athenians had

no voting rights, and they were also denied the right to participate in political processes, and were viewed not being equal citizens. The exclusion of women from political participation and decision-making even after democracy had birthed ancient Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Gauja, 2014).

The participation of women in decision-making roles was recognised as a right after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 (Mende, 2021). Adami (2018) cites the UDHR Articles 2 and 21, stipulating equal enjoyment of political rights without discrimination based on race, gender, colour, religion, sex, political, language or any other status. Kassa (2015) states that even though women constitute fifty percent of the world population, they remain underrepresented in processes that involve decision-making at all levels of governance globally. Dlamini (2016) further states that women continue to be dominated politically, socio-culturally, economically and physiologically by their male counterparts. In addition, Hlebel and Mpehle (2020) point out that although women make up more than fifty percent of public sector employees, men continue to lead the public sector in decision-making. In turn, the number of elected women representatives in middle and senior management, leadership and decision-making roles at the various levels in the public service is still deficient despite the increasing number of women engaged in formal employment (Tariq & Syed, 2017; Omotayo, Oladele, & Adenika, 2013). Nelson Mandela, the former South African president, highlighted that “Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression” (Naidoo, 2018; Sing, 2010; Molekane, 1996).

Goldman (2016) observes that the post-1994 South African government promulgated laws and policies to advocate for women to be promoted into senior leadership roles in the government and the private sector. Broadly, the South African democratic government has attained notable progress in setting up a context where women feel they also belong in government departments (Hlebel & Mpehle, 2020). However, not much progress has been made in accomplishing political power (Dlamini, 2016a), and they remain vastly underrepresented in leadership roles at all levels. Globally, the number of women in leadership roles in several government structures, such as national, provincial and municipal/local government, is still deficient (Tariq & Syed, 2017; Omotayo, Oladele, & Adenika, 2013). The challenges in accessing opportunities, resources and support in the public and private sectors account for the low representation of women in leadership

roles (Moraka, 2015). Invisible and cultural beliefs rather than discrimination are the main barriers behind the underrepresentation in leadership roles for women to the advantage of men in organisations (Barker, 2015).

The 21<sup>st</sup> Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) Annual Report, 2020-2021, provides a comprehensive analysis of barriers to workforce representation in public and private sectors for the 2018 to 2020 financial year (CEE Annual Report, 2022). Some obstacles to women's progression include the glass ceiling, work-life balance, gender bias, organisational culture, non-flexible hours for women, and lack of networking opportunities and mentorship programmes to support women (Barker, 2015).

## **1.2 The organisational structure of DIRCO**

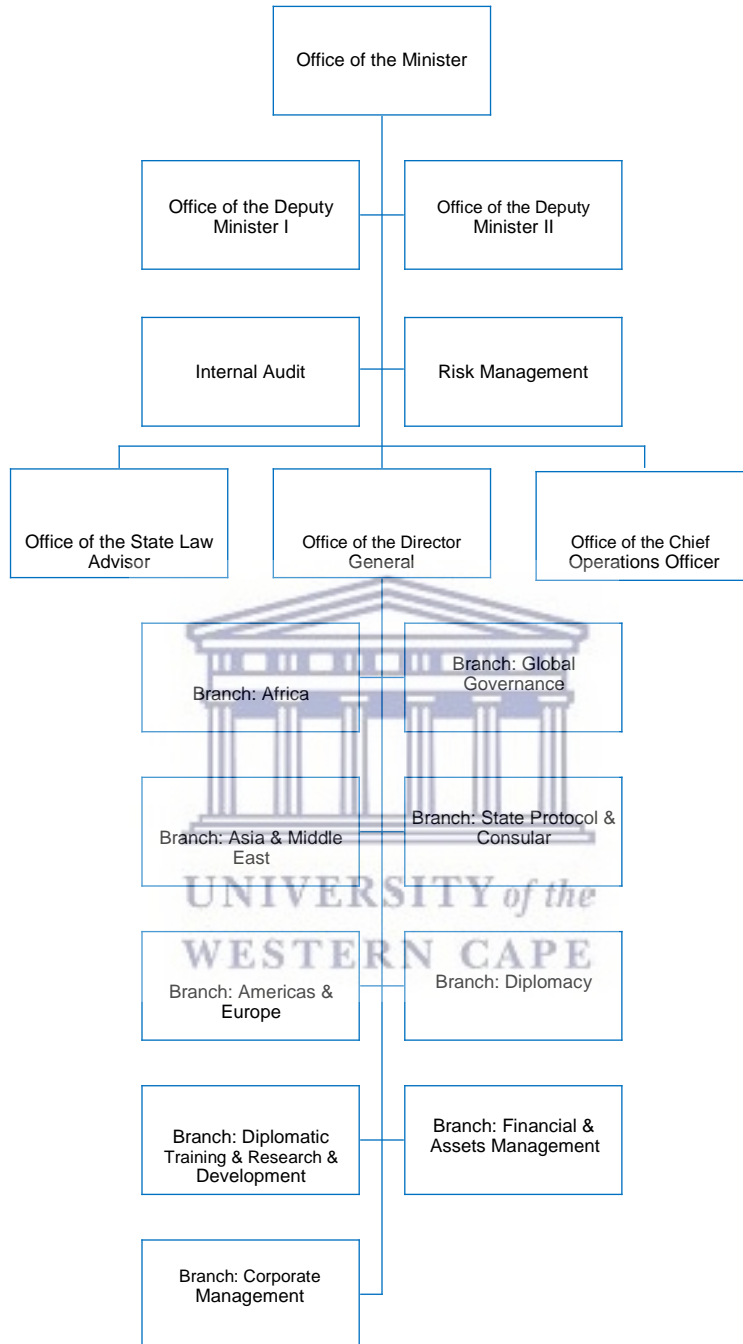
DIRCO comprises the office of the Minister, two (2) Deputy Ministers, the Director-General and ten (10) branches/departments headed by Deputy-Director Generals. The branches are as follows:

- Chief Operations Officer,
- State Protocol and Consular Services,
- Financial and Asset Management,
- Diplomatic Training, Research and Development,
- Corporate Management,
- Global Governance and Continental Agenda,
- Africa,
- Asia and the Middle East,
- Americas and Europe, and
- Public Diplomacy.

The staff complement of DIRCO is 2400 officials, of whom 1726 are stationed at the Head Office and 674 at South African missions abroad.

**Figure 1. Approved DIRCO organisational structure**

Source: Directorate: Organisational Development, DIRCO (2020)





### **1.3 Department of International Relations and Cooperation**

The South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation, commonly known as the Foreign Ministry, in line with Ministries of Foreign Affairs around the world, have diplomatic representation in the form of embassies, high commissions and consulates. The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (1963) are the two critical instruments for the establishment of diplomatic relations between countries and permanent missions by mutual consent of states (Bruns, 2017). The international conventions are ratified by all United Nations (UN) member states (Bartholomeusz, 2009). Being party to the UN, South Africa has also signed and ratified the two conventions (Bruns, 2017). Both conventions have been incorporated into the domestic law of South Africa through the Diplomatic Immunity and Privilege Act, No. 37 of 2021. The Act is administered and overseen by DIRCO.

The overall mandate is outlined in the Department's Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025, the blueprint of the foreign policy of the South African government, which articulates the imperatives for the realisation of South Africa's foreign policy objectives (DIRCO, 2020). The primary goals focus on addressing the challenges of inequality, unemployment and poverty through the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission, 2013). The key deliverables support the drive toward developing a stable and inclusive economy (DIRCO, 2020). The South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation is the leading government institution in pursuing foreign policy objectives through managing and coordinating domestic role-players towards the achievement of the foreign policy objectives. South Africa has an Embassy or a High Commission in every African country except Sierra Leone, Libya and Somalia (Department of International Relations, 2019).

### **1.4 Core functions of DIRCO**

The strategic focus of DIRCO, stipulated in the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2019 – 2024, guided by the vision set out in the NDP - Vision 2030, is aligned with the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) 2030 Agenda together with relevant international treaties and agreements (DIRCO, 2020). The Department is further guided by the policy directives of South Africa's political principals,

especially those informed by the national priorities set out in the State of the Nation Address of each year (DIRCO, 2020).

DIRCO implements its mandate by employing traditional political diplomacy complemented by economic diplomacy. The Department executes its mandate through the following processes and procedures:

- monitoring international developments;
- developing and advising the state on policy options;
- communicating the South African government's policy positions;
- protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of South Africa;
- providing consular assistance to South African citizens abroad; and
- assisting other government departments.

South Africa, a signatory to the Vienna Convention 1996, maintains relations with other countries through diplomatic missions abroad and international organisations to enhance its international profile. DIRCO implements the national foreign policy mandate (DIRCO, 2021). Rose (2005) notes that the work done by embassies and consulates improves bilateral trade and exports. One key aspect of the many functions of diplomatic missions abroad includes tourism promotion and ensuring that assignments contribute positively to tourism inflows (Gil-Pareja, Llorca-Vivero, & Martínez-Serrano, 2007).



Nečas and Andrassy (2018) state that in most countries, Ministries of Foreign Affairs assign employees to represent their country in diplomatic missions abroad. The employees in diplomatic missions perform different roles, including political, economic, cultural affairs, and mission administration. Thus, the employees are sent to foreign countries to negotiate and maintain cordial relations and mediation between the respective governments.

## **1.5 An overview of DIRCO**

### **1.5.1 Definition of a diplomat**

A diplomat is a public servant appointed by the government to be part of a diplomatic delegation to conduct diplomacy with other states as a diplomatic envoy, diplomatic representative, or diplomatic employee in the Department of Foreign Affairs (Gharibeh 2016). The person should have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of domestic and world dynamics and be capable of discharging mandated duties by applying the acquired knowledge in the best interest of their country in a foreign country (Neumann, 2008). Neumann (2008) identifies two distinct types of diplomats in terms of those “working abroad” and “working at home”. Those working in the field focus on collecting and processing information abroad, while those stationed at the headquarters engage with interpreting and producing data for critical internal and external stakeholders. Constantinou (2013) cautions against reducing the work of a diplomat simply to information and intelligence gathering or even the releasing and spinning of media news and events. Therefore, different descriptions of diplomats and the nature of diplomatic knowledge are debatable (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). Sharp (1999) observes that diplomats regard themselves as men and women who engage with the world in the service of their countries and thus perform political and administrative functions within the different ranks in the foreign service organisation.

### **1.5.2 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs)**

In South Africa, Foreign Service Officers are recruited into DIRCO through vacancies advertised by the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), in line with Chapter 5 of the Public Service Act, 1994, as amended (South Africa, 1994). The Act does not include the appointment of Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consul Generals, as the power to appoint these officeholders are provided under Section 84(2)(i) of the Constitution of South Africa (South Africa, 1996) and lies with the President of the Republic. Diplomatic work entails some functions, including frequent international visits and being stationed abroad. Therefore, DIRCO employees are often expected to embark on international travel primarily on short prior notice.

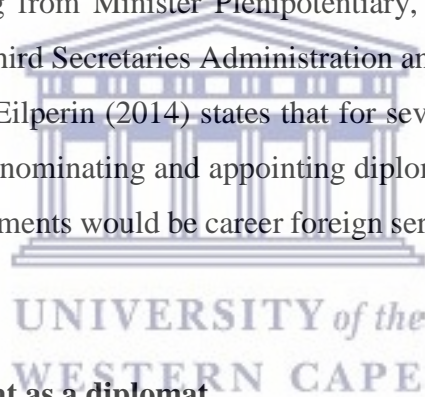
### **1.5.3 Selection of and designation of diplomats**

The history of diplomacy indicates that Ambassadors and High Commissioners are appointed to represent their nations and to directly interact with host nations within an international system

(DIRCO, 2011). An ambassador is the highest-ranking official in diplomatic practice (Bruns, 2017). Article 14 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961, recognises three types of diplomatic representation (Arias & Smith, 2018).

- Ambassador or High Commission or Nuncio accredited to the Head of State;
- Envoy or Minister or Internuncio accredited to the Head of State; and
- Chargé d'affaires, accredited to the Foreign Minister.

The Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations (1961) prescribes that the Head of a Diplomatic Mission represents the sending State and is responsible for acting in that capacity. In line with the Vienna Convention, the sending State must ensure that the receiving State agrees to the selection of the person, the Head of a Diplomatic Mission, who is then approved by the countries of destination (Nečas & Andrassy, 2018). The appointment of other officials to different positions or roles depends on the size of the mission and location (Roberts, 2009). There are various positions in a diplomatic mission ranging from Minister Plenipotentiary, Counsellors, First Secretaries-political or administration and Third Secretaries Administration and Attachés, mainly drawn from other government departments. Eilperin (2014) states that for several decades, the United States had followed a 70-30 rule when nominating and appointing diplomats for United States missions abroad, whereby 70% of appointments would be career foreign service officers and the rest would be reserved for political allies.



#### **1.5.4 Criteria for appointment as a diplomat**

The South African Foreign Service Act (No. 26 of 2019) provides a legislative mechanism that supports the authority of DIRCO to achieve the national foreign policy objectives (DIRCO, 2019). In turn, creating a professional and unified foreign service under the management of DIRCO is one of the objectives prescribed by the respective Act. The Act establishes laws that govern the foreign service, which considers the same to be a different organisation within the public service. Thus, the specific rule is separate from the general law governing the public service (DIRCO, 2019). Prior to the introduction of the Foreign Service Act, the management of the Foreign Service and the regulation of the conditions of employment of foreign service personnel and related matters were regulated by the Public Service Act 103 of 1994 (South Africa, 1994).

The main objective of the Act is as follows: (i) to provide the Republic of South Africa with a professional Foreign Service that is functioning and well managed. (ii) to make provision for the operations of the Foreign Service that meet requirements that are suitable and supportive of the global environment. The Act further prescribes the criteria for appointing a Head of Mission (HOM) and the appointment of diplomats/ambassadors/HOMs according to the Constitution of South Africa. The appointment of ambassadors is governed under Section 84(2)(i) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa, 1996). Netzloff (2011) noted that in the late sixteenth century, an ambassador was considered an honest person sent abroad to represent the country. Ching (2017) states that the appointment of ambassadors includes political appointees who are not members of the foreign service. The political appointees are drawn from different sectors and appointed by the Head of States and Ambassadors and High Commissioners, regarded as high-level positions. For example, in the case of Kenya, Munene and Mwanzia (2011) report that after Kenya's independence under the late former President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials were drawn from different economic and various social sectors. They further state that before that, the Foreign Ministry comprised professionals. However, Ambassadors appointments are somehow based on cronyism and considered trusted allies of the President. The appointed ambassadors were responsible for opening up embassies in foreign countries. The decision by the late former president Kenyatta is not unique to Kenya. Other countries, including the United States (US), have a history of political appointments, where the policy on political appointments is based on factors such as political party campaign financing and payback for their support during presidential campaigns (Hollibaugh, 2015).

In the context of DIRCO, employees are deployed to different countries abroad to promote bilateral and multilateral relations with other countries. The DIRCO Placement Policy (2015, p. 13) states that employees are posted for a minimum of four years outside the country. Rouban (2003) argues that the politicisation of the foreign service is understood to involve the appointment, promotion, retention, or dismissal based on political criteria instead of merit. The appointment of political appointees ultimately leads to a bloated public service (Simson, 2016). Suleiman (2003) states that growth in the number of political appointees tends to delegitimise and also hinder service delivery. Arias and Smith (2018) said that political appointees are rewarded with diplomatic appointments for their past political service.

Fisher (1966) pointed out that concerning the United States government, one of the tasks of a Foreign Service Officer involves conducting business in the host country, which may depend on the needs and requirements of the latter.

In South Africa, the deployment policy of cadres of the African National Congress (ANC) as a ruling party has been vital in deploying people who are loyal to the party and placing them in critical public sector roles to consolidate their power and control (Mlambo, Zubane, & Thusi, 2022). Hoffman (2013) maintains that the ANC's deployment policy allows for corruption, no transparency and a lack of accountability in the public sector. During the tenure of President Barack Obama (2009 to 2017), political appointees accounted for 37% percent of ambassadorial appointments. The number of political appointees reached its highest during the tenure of President Donald Trump (2017 to 2021). Compared with Ronald Reagan's and Gerald Ford's terms in office, approximately 38% percent of political appointees were appointed ambassadors. While President Bill Clinton together with President Jimmy Carter both had approximately 27%, President George W. Bush and George H. W. Bush, his father, had about 30% and 31% percent, respectively (Eilperin, 2014).

These trends cited in the politicisation of the diplomatic services illustrate the absence of laws or rules that regulate or prohibit the practice of political appointees as Ambassadors and High Commissioners. Further to the lack of guidelines on the limit on the number of appointments that can be allowed between career and political appointees, the absence of laws governing the selection of Ambassadors creates challenges for the public sector wage bill and bloats the organisational structure. Subsequently, career paths and succession planning within the organisation, particularly in senior leadership roles, are impacted by the entry of political appointees into the system to the detriment of the progression of qualified and experienced career senior foreign service officers who may have to wait for long periods to progress to senior levels such as Ambassadors and High Commissioners.

**Table 1: Gender composition of top, senior and middle leadership of DIRCO, 2018**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Top leadership	11	5	<b>16</b>
Senior leadership	146	114	<b>260</b>
Middle leadership (Professionally qualified and experience specialists)	551	490	<b>1041</b>

Source: Annual Report for 2017/18, p152 (DIRCO, 2018).

### **1.6 Problem statement**

This study examines the factors influencing the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO as defined by Section 21 of the Employment Equity Act (EEA). The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) 2017/18 Annual Report (DIRCO, 2018) reported that women constituted 44% of senior managerial and 31% of top management positions, respectively. The progression of women into senior leadership roles has not matched the growing figures in the labour market. In as much as women are bettering their levels of education and entering the labour force, there is still a low representation in the number of women at the top and in decision making roles.

Although in academic literature, women leadership has been researched considerably ((Farmer, Wardrop, & Rotella, 1999; Farmer, 1997; Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira & Bosangit 2017). However, there is insufficient literature on women in decision-making roles in the African continent. The existing literature to a large extend documents women in political leadership and does not go deeper into the underlying factors in detail (Nkomo & Ngambi 2013; Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel 2018). Furthermore, not many studies traversed the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in the South African public sector context and, particularly, the foreign service, which is the focus of this study (Mello & Phago 2007; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Bangani 2020). This study explores the progression of women into senior leadership roles uniquely in DIRCO from the standpoint of women who already occupy senior leadership roles. Being part of the senior leadership in the foreign service or diplomacy has its own set of unique challenges, a study gap which this study seeks to explore. In addition, challenges faced in the diplomatic career are different from any other departments in the South African public sector.

## 1.7 Rationale for the study

The South African Department of Labour points out that labour law is adequately empowered through various policies, regulations and strategies to speed up transformation in the workplace (Department of Labour, 2020; South Africa, 2019). Strategies and procedures can only be effective if implemented (Hlebelá & Mpehle, 2020). Evidence indicates that women's participation in public policy and decision-making levels in South Africa has been minimal (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Women constitute 51% of the 58.78 million population, which equals thirty million of the total population, with only 32% occupying senior leadership roles (Stats SA, 2019). Notwithstanding the government's introduction of affirmative action policies to remove structural barriers to the promotion of women (Thomas, 2002), empirical research studies must examine the progression of qualified and competent women into senior leadership roles across all economic sectors in South Africa.

Research evidence indicates barriers to women's career progression that include a lack of commitment toward the growth of women's participation and the lack of sufficient knowledge about women's representation in decision-making roles (Dlamini, 2016a; Gouws, 2008; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). For further empirical evidence on the noncompliance by various players with relevant pieces of legislation that seek to redress the legacies of the apartheid system, such as the Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 as amended; the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998 and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 53 of 2003, see Madlala and Govender (2018) and Erasmus (2015). Matebeni (2021) highlights the negative impact of African culture that recognises males as societal leaders and the influence of cultural norms and beliefs deterring the implementation of agreed national, regional and domestic protocols and conventions on the role of women in society (Mzangwa, 2016).

Kurtz, Linnemann and Williams (2012) point out the effect of the prevalence of structural discrimination in the private sector. Barker (2015) identifies the barriers to the progression for women, including the glass ceiling, work-life balance, gender stereotypes, organisational culture, non-flexible hours for women, the inadequacy of networking chances and lack of women-oriented mentorship programmes. The barriers cumulatively account for the low numbers of women leaders and decision-makers at the various levels in the public and private sectors (Tariq & Syed, 2017; Omotayo, Oladele, & Adenika, 2013).



This study contributes toward understanding these factors and their influence on women's career progression into senior leadership roles in DIRCO.

## **1.8 Aims and objectives**

The study explores the factors noted above and how they positively or negatively influence women's career progression into senior leadership roles in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation.

### **1.8.1 Objectives of the study**

The objectives are as follows:

- a) To explore the nature of career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO, South Africa;
- b) To identify the factors influencing the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO;
- c) To evaluate the barriers and challenges to the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO; and
- d) To draw recommendations and strategies for policymakers, key stakeholders, and future research.

## **1.9 Research questions**

**RQ1** What is the nature of career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO?

**RQ2** Which are the factors that influence the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO?

**RQ3** What are the barriers and challenges to the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO?

## **1.10 Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on women's career progression, gender mobility, and participation in decision-making within public organisations. The findings will contribute toward policy review at various levels of the organisation. Secondly, the results will indicate the way forward for the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO and the public sector in general. Further, the study will help to make informed decisions on addressing the factors impeding or otherwise the career progression of women in the public and private sectors.

### **1.11 Limitations of the study**

The first limitation of this research study was the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic during the study period, which restricted face-to-face interviews. Thus, COVID-19 affected and influenced the availability of respondents who were working remotely, which made it challenging to schedule interview appointments due to participants' personal and family circumstances. Some interviews were postponed as no suitable time could be found, while interviews were cancelled due to poor network connectivity.

Time constraints and busy schedules limited the number of participants as the prospective respondents cited busy work schedules and demands compounded by remote working protocols. At the time of the research study period, the researcher was stationed outside of South Africa, working in Rwanda, Kigali and had to make appointments and schedule online meetings with participants worldwide and in different time zones. Most study participants were based in South Africa, DIRCO Head Office and South African Missions Abroad (Embassies, High Commissions and Consulates). The time constraints and circumstances influenced the interview timing and duration. In addition to the reluctance by potential respondents to participate, some withdrew on short notice citing personal reasons.

### **1.12 Beneficial outcomes of the study**

This study has identified factors influencing the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in the public sector. This study is critical because it seeks to inform DIRCO about the challenges women employees encounter in advancing to senior leadership roles within the organisation. The study highlights the gaps and makes policy recommendations for DIRCO to promote gender inclusivity in all leadership roles. The analysis of the study also adds to the existing body of knowledge on women in leadership. The study will create awareness regarding gender equality in the public sector and diplomacy and the importance of gender balance in leadership. Additionally, the study advocates for the creation of mentorship opportunities to enhance the advancement of women who aspire to take leadership roles. Hopefully, this study will encourage HR and recruitment panels to consider gender inclusion in the recruitment process.

### 1.13 Chapter Outline

This research study is organised into five chapters:

**Chapter One** presents the general introduction, study background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study and its scope.

**Chapter Two** reviews and critiques the relevant literature and theoretical perspectives and definitions underpinning the study, identifies the research gaps and presents the conceptual framework that guides the analysis.

**Chapter Three** presents the research methodology, the justification for the research design, data collection methods, sampling protocols, and approaches to data analysis and outlines the reliability, validity and ethical considerations.

**Chapter Four** presents the research findings, data analysis and presentation, interpretation and discussion of the main findings.

**Chapter Five** presents the study conclusions, recommendations for practitioners and future research.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2. Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature, definitions and theoretical perspectives on careers, career progression and empirical research evidence on factors influencing women's career progression into leadership roles. Subsequent sections discuss career development theory, definitions and perspectives of careers, senior leadership roles and the conceptual study framework.

#### **2.1 Feminist perspective**

Feminism rejects the patriarchy and challenges the culture of male dominance (Bryden & Madore, 2016; Galloway, Kapasi, & Sang, 2015). The feminist approach seeks to review, interrogate, and draw attention to the bias and oppression of women by challenging and calling attention to traditional scholars to consider the discourse on women in leadership as a category of analysis (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015; Nagy & Hesse-Biber, 2013). Hekman (2015) argues that philosophically and socially, feminism interrogates the identity of women, equal rights and the political, economic and legal imperatives that define the status of women. Letherby (2015) states that the adoption of the feminist methodology in research is convenient as it respectfully recognises the subjective nature of the phenomena directly from the female participants. The adoption of feminist theoretical perspectives for this study takes cognisance of the historical context of South Africa, where women are being discriminated against socially, politically and economically (Gouws, 2008).

#### **2.2 The feminist perspective on gender and roles**

Feminist theories aim to understand gender inequality and advocate for social change (Carreras, 2017). The feminist perspective provides conceptual lenses for creating inclusive organisations and highlights the concerns of people affected by organisational processes besides women (Calás & Smircich, 1996). The feminist perspective argues that women have as much potential as men and should be given equal rights and opportunities to exercise their potential to address the injustices (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016). Emerging in the 1970s, the feminist perspectives emphasised finding women's voices and other oppressed groups in the quest for social justice and

social change (Blair-Loy, 2001). Thus, researchers informed by the feminist perspective advocate for social justice and social change by focusing on the voices of women and other disadvantaged people, notwithstanding that gender is the primary driver for different forms of domination in political, economic, cultural and social contexts (Calás & Smircich, 1996). The feminist perspective questions the hegemony of males and the gendered status quo. Paramount to feminism is the need to understand why women continue to be marginalised (Lorber, 2010) and to explore social and political practices to bring about reform (Greguletz, Diehl, & Kreutzer, 2019).

Structural discrimination in domestic spheres is the main reason behind the marginalisation of women (Meeussen, Begeny, Peters, & Ryan, 2021). Bailey, LaFrance and Dovidio (2019) refer to the androcentrism phenomena as practices that marginalise femininity by projecting masculine points of view through one's worldview. Relatedly, Barker (2015) argues that androcentrism projects the masculine and male point of view worldwide, resulting in the marginalisation and oppression of women and marginalised groups. Thus, androcentrism underpins gender bias in society through recognition of male experiences and the frequent projection of men in the media.

Hansen (1997) highlights the salient factors that diminish women's opportunities and ability to fully exploit their potential. The primary power disparity between men and women continues to compromise the attempts by women to attain ideal roles in two-parent families (Blair-Loy, 2001). This is followed by self-esteem, stereotyping, socialisation and self-efficacy (Hansen, 1997), which perpetuate the inequity in the struggle for women to change the status quo (Hansen, 1997; Blair-Loy, 2001) as men are continuously regarded as the expected standard for good, and as better than women.

### **2.3 Career development theory**

Career development refers to a lifelong process through which an individual chooses an occupation in society (Multon, 2006) and provides a sense of empowerment for people (Maree, 2009). Maree (2009) points out that career development involves integrating three interrelated processes: the formation of career interests, selection of career choices and academic options and ultimately, performance and educational persistence in occupational pursuits. Patton and McMahon (2014) highlight that career development involves an individual's life, which embraces the environment,

the individual, the interactive processes and change. Further, career development is a non-linear, continuous process that includes related career events (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Repetto (2001) states that career development is a learning and growth process which increases and improves an individual's professional repertoire and behaviour.

Super's theory (1950) of vocational development proposes that career development is a lifelong process which incorporates personal and environmental factors (Stead & Watson 2006). It further postulates that after an individual has completed a particular developmental task of a specific stage, they are regarded as having portrayed career maturity (Stead & Watson, 2006). However, the main weakness of Super's theory is its implications that career development is a linear process while ignoring the potential influence of external factors (Stead & Watson, 2006).

Mathabe and Temane (1993) argue that career development in South Africa has been influenced by its history and the legacy of apartheid, and its policies of separate development for black and white racial groups, which subsequently influenced the trajectory of career development for the different racial groups. Thus, apartheid history shaped the prevalent economic, social and political environments, which negatively impacted the career development of the previously oppressed groups in terms of access to opportunities and distribution of wealth (Maree, 2009).

Watson (2009) argues that the past, present and future influence career development. Career patterns in South Africa remain skewed in favour of previously privileged people (Maree, 2009). Stead and Watson (2006) postulate that following oppression by the apartheid system and its laws that prevented black people from having access to resources, present laws are aimed at promoting gender equality. However, there are still too few women being appointed in leadership roles and they are subject to future influences such as work-life balance and social expectations. Thus, career choice was limited as previously disadvantaged groups were forced into certain job types or careers irrespective of their personalities (Watson, 2009). This supports the argument that some racial groups in South Africa were victims of an unfair apartheid system and its practices.

The democratically elected government of South Africa introduced the following pieces of legislation to facilitate career development in the public and private sector: the Human Resource

Development Strategy of 2001, the Skills Development Act of 1998 and the Labour Relations Act of 1995 (Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2011). These policies and pieces of legislation assisted in providing access and opportunities for skills development.

#### **2.4 Role congruity theory**

Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory postulates the low number of women in leadership roles result from expected characteristics of male strong leaders such that the incompatibility of both genders and puts women to be less favourable as compared to men. Thus, role congruity theory suggests that alleged inconsistency between the role of women and responsibilities in management leads to two forms of perception, firstly, that women are not ideal to be in leadership and secondly that the character of women is not suitable for leadership roles. As a result, women are disadvantaged, and pushed away from leadership opportunities. Role congruity theory is applicable in this study because it gives insight to address gender issues. It states that to achieve gender equity in all levels, it is paramount to first engage women in leadership.

Eagly (1987) states that the society perceives women as low status individuals in comparison to men. The perception arises from societal norms and expected responsibilities and the gender stereotypes lead to a greater social variance between males and females. Eagly and Karau (1991) reported that men seemed well suited for leadership roles while women face challenges in progressing in managerial roles. The societal perceptions are that men are more focused than women (Hogue, 2016) and under-value the shared attributes of women such as empathy and love different from qualities such as male-oriented assertiveness (Bongiorno, Bain & David, 2014).

## **2.5 Career development and self-fulfilling prophecy**

According to Thomas (1923) and Merton (1948), a self-fulfilling prophecy is a psychological phenomenon whereby an individual predicts or anticipates something and whereby the prediction or expectation comes true simply because the person believes or anticipates that it will and, in turn, behaviours are aligned to fulfil this belief (Bolin, 2022). The implications are that fictional future scenarios shape how people view the present, informed by their interpretation of social, historical and cultural trends that present in their historic moment. Further, the theory postulates that the definition of a situation has an influence on the present which ultimately influences lifelong future actions and personalities of individuals. Madon et al. (2018) point out the ability of social beliefs to change and shape an individual's reality and behaviour.

In many ways, career development can be perceived as a self-fulfilling phenomenon where people create consequences regarding events based on previous knowledge. Thus, expectation in the realisation of the prediction can shape career outcomes, since an individual believes and anticipates that something will happen, which in turn shapes and influences the alignment of behaviour to satisfy the beliefs (Madlala & Govender, 2018). Further, Merton (1948) argues that self-fulfilling prophecies can maintain prejudices against other people.

## **2.6 Career: Definitions and perspectives**

The term "career" is used in different contexts and has different meanings (Coetzee, 2006). Gysbers and Moore (1981) define a career as a process that encompasses roles, places and experiences accumulated over the lifetime of an individual. Van Maanen and Schein (1977) describe a career as a process containing a sequence of evolving work experiences over a lifetime (Gysbers & Moore, 1981; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). At the same time, Schreuder and Coetzee (2006) define a career in terms of the respective sequence of employment-related experiences. Inkson, Gunz, Ganesk and Roper (2012) define a career as an ongoing relationship that is formed between an individual and their work, the link that is created between people and



organisations (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh and Roper (2012) further indicate that there is an ongoing relationship between individuals and their work, which connects them with organisations over time. Thus, a career refers to the progression throughout one's working life that involves promotions (Abessolo, Rossier, & Hirschi, 2017) and provides a link between people and the organisations they work for, drawing from the internal and external perspectives of their experiences (McGuire, Polla, & Heidl, 2017).

The concept of a career refers to how people define themselves regarding their work, drawing upon the history of their work life and decisions (Schein, 1996). Currie, Tempest and Starkey (2006) further define the notion of careers as work done over a lifetime and the succession in the levels of posts, salary improvement and added responsibilities. Bergmo-Prvulovic and Hansson (2019) propose that the definition of a career should consider the context of the workplace in terms of the sequence and work experiences collected by an employee over time (Gysbers & Moore, 1981; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). In contrast, the traditional view of a career primarily focuses on the hierarchy and competition for limited promotional prospects (Baruch, 2006). Herr, Cramer and Niles (2004) argue that a career is unique to everyone and is based on dynamic and evolving personal choices and decisions encountered over a lifetime.

This study adopts the perspective by Herr, Cramer and Niles (2004) that a career is unique to everyone and is based on personal choices and decisions as it explores women's career progression into senior leadership roles within DIRCO.

### **2.6.1 The significance of careers**

Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh and Roper (2012) further argue that a career has two specific role players, the individual and the organisation. Further, the organisation as the employer engages with the individual through ongoing interaction over a while (Dosunmu & Adeyemo, 2018; Potgieter, Coetzee, & Ximba, 2017). Herr, Cramer and Niles (2004) point out that a career is unique to everyone and is based on personal choices and decisions. In contrast, Gottfredson's (1981) theory postulates that an individual's career objectives develop based on the gender fields of work and the associated differences of prestige (Junk & Armstrong 2010).

Dai and Song (2016) point out that a career is characterised by self-identity, the realisation of goals and perceived opportunities for promotion. Relatedly, Eith, Harald and Claudia (2011) state that individuals assess their career success and make career decisions based on self-identity and realisation of goals rather than exclusively on promotions or salary (Dai & Song, 2016). Meade (2000) points out that the experience of career success is personal and should be regarded as personal experience and accomplishment as employees highly value the importance of career success (Dai & Song, 2016). However, the effects of family factors on career success are equally important in making personal career development decisions (Dai & Song, 2016), evidenced by the positive interrelation between work and family on career success (Agrawal & Singh, 2021). O'Neil, Brooks and Hopkins (2018) emphasised that career readiness and families are central to one's success and that individual success is influenced by individual and family characteristics, respectively. Fan, Cheung, Leong and Cheung (2014) further state that an individual's decisions on career readiness and choice are closely linked to the role of the family and cultural values.

O'Neil, Brooks and Hopkins (2018) suggest that additional research is needed in order to adopt a holistic approach to researching the careers of women to better address their careers and lives. The relationships between women's personal and professional lives need to be further explored to deepen further our understanding of their career choices (O'Neil, Brooks, & Hopkins, 2018). Holistic approaches could identify the links between personal and professional lives and the extent to which people make their career choices (Elley-Brown, Pringle, & Harris, 2018).

### **2.6.2 Career progression**

Career progression refers to improvements in higher occupational mobility shaped by education and further training attainments and work experience gained in the advancement of one's career (Härkönen & Bihagen, 2011; Manzoni, Härkönen & Mayer, 2014) argue that career progression to a great degree is dependent on education and attainment of qualifications; thus, employees with tertiary degrees tend to access prestigious occupations on entry into the labour market while those with lower qualifications tend to lag. Müller and Marcus (2003) support the argument that the point of entry into the labour market plays a vital role in the entire working career. However, in some instances, some people might not meet the specific skills required in the workplace (Ismail, Ferreira, & Coetzee, 2016; Botha, 2014).

There are constraints faced by individuals such as the previously disadvantaged individuals when it comes to career progression, who end up being more dependent on job opportunities for survival rather than out of choice (Abrahams, Jano, & Van Lill, 2015). Lawrence (1990) points out that employees are rewarded for loyalty and service in employment and gain promotions, salary increases and climb the internal job ladders. O'Mahony and Bechky (2006) point out that the advantages of career progression for both the organisation and employees include the supply of readily available labour force as employees gain promotion, wage increases and career development. Career progression is faster in the early stages and stabilises later as employees reach occupational maturity (Manzoni, Härkönen, & Mayer, 2014).

## **2.7 Gender and careers**

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities ascribed to men and women created in cultures, societies and families and embraces expectations of the behaviour, characteristics and aptitudes of men and women (Stead, 2013). Baden and Goetz (1997) point out that the concept of gender is used to differentiate between masculinity and femininity and in official documentation as an option to determine whether one is female or male (Baden & Goetz, 1997). Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their own capability in performing a particular task successfully (Luthans & Ibrayeva, 2006). Kral, Janoskova, Podhorska, Pera and Neguriță (2019) highlight the significance of sex differences in career self-efficacy with respect to traditional and non-traditional occupations. Women tend to demonstrate a stronger career self-efficacy in female-related jobs such as secretarial or social work. At the same time, men are found, to have stronger career self-efficacy in male-related jobs (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995). Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira and Bosangit (2017) argue that male-dominated industries turn to disadvantage women and that women are regarded as less competent when compared to their male counterparts. This may explain the reason why they are prevented from core knowledge clusters (Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira, & Bosangit, 2017) and face barriers to networking in male-dominated occupations (Grugulis & Stoyanova, 2012; Fisher & Kinsey, 2014).

Acker's theory (1990; 1992) of gendered organisations provides an explanation of the imbalance of power between men and women and why women are regarded as subordinates in organisations.

In “Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations”, they further articulate that the segregation of work based on gender is evident in organisational practices (Acker, 1990). Drawing from Acker’s theory (1990, 1992), Kantola (2008) argues that the differences in social context between males and females are produced and replicated in organisations. They further point out the fact that during organisational social events, the gendered division of labour is recreated through the assignment of certain roles to women which portray them as “mothers” in departments and having them take on responsibilities and tasks that are similar to those at home (Kantola, 2008).

Farmer (1997) focused on the persistence of women in science careers and social learning theory in developing ideas on women’s career theory. Theoretical propositions by Farmer (1997) identified instrumentality as crucial to the success of women in careers highlighting those instrumental traits and qualities that were previously termed as masculine. Instrumentality traits include characteristics such as self-sufficiency, independence and feeling in control (Farmer, Wardrop, & Rotella, 1999; Farmer, 1997). Farmer (1997) postulated that women do not intrinsically possess feminine traits such as sensitivity and nurturance and that they employ a combination of multi-layered roles beyond the traditional breadwinner pattern adopted by males. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) point out that careers of women are more complex and different from those of men due to the conflict that exists between work and family. Women’s participation in labour markets is restricted by under-representation in various fields and professions which is worsened by entry into low-paying and lower job positions (Scheuermann, Tokar, & Hall, 2014).

Women’s careers often experience disruptions characterised by breaks in between that are longer than those of men, and their periods are shorter, suggesting that their careers are of less importance than that of men (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Britton, 2017). Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira and Bosangit (2017) point out that in spite of the growth in the number of women in the labour force their careers are disjointed due to the frequent interruptions and breaks. The reality feeds into the narrative that women mostly remain in lower-level and lower-status roles rather than aspire to access higher levels (Junk & Armstrong, 2010). Lirio (2014) points out that the life of women is a juggling act requiring balancing and fulfilling multiple responsibilities at work interspersed with

long meetings, work travel and home responsibilities (Hill, Miller, Wiener, & Colihan, 1998; Kalliath & Brough, 2008). In many ways, women face challenges integrating family and work roles (Farmer, 1997).

Women are underrepresented at senior leadership levels of organisations (Hill, Miller, Benson & Handley 2016; Diehl & Dzubinski 2016; Klatt, Eimler & Kramer 2016), while men dominate work careers at the expense of women. The UN Women Annual Report 2019-2020 (2020) indicated that the under-representation of women applies to both private and public and sectors. McKeever (2017) reported that in the case of South Africa, the apartheid system was the reason behind the lack of developmental opportunities for the groups that were previously disadvantaged, including women. In South Africa, the historical inequalities and constraints prevented the previously underprivileged groups from effective participation in the economy (Dosunmu & Adeyemo, 2018). Van Esch, Hopkins, O'Neil and Bilimoria (2018) further pointed out that understanding the characteristics of the relationship between gender and careers requires further empirical research in contemporary societies.

## **2.8 Gender stereotyping and career progression**

Stereotypes refer to causal attributions that are conceived by people (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Further, stereotypes create perceptions that men possess specific skills and traits that enable them to succeed in mathematics, science, technology and engineering, which women do not have. People who use stereotypes often rely on stereotypical attributions of groups to explain group disparities (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Pauker, Ambady, & Apfelbaum, 2010). Maume (2016) points out that gender stereotyping remains a restricting factor for women and perpetuates traditional beliefs and cultures that subject women to roles such as mothers, caregivers and housewives, which continue to limit and negatively impact their achievements (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender stereotypes perpetuate unfair discrimination against women (Castillo-Mayén & Montes-Erges, 2014). Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that stereotypes are mainly used to explain why certain groups are found in certain organisational positions. Cundiff and Vescio (2016) point out that gender stereotypes explain why women continue to be under-represented and the resultant over-representation of men in senior leadership roles. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) point out that traditional beliefs concerning gender roles regard women as mothers and homemakers, limiting their participation in society.

Mihalčová, Pružinský and Gontkovičová (2015) point out that the effect of gender stereotypes results in the low representation of women in strategic levels. They state further that in cases where women are promoted to managerial positions, they have to consider that this will result in their having less time for their private lives since they devote less of their time to hobbies than men. Osituyo (2018) reports that women are naturally subordinate to their male counterparts which perpetuates the stereotypes that women cannot face challenges in managerial roles (Osituyo, 2018). This is further supported by Gneezy, Niederle and Rustichini (2003), who noted that stereotypes threaten women and cause stress in circumstances whereby they are traditionally considered less competent than men. Gneezy, Niederle and Rustichini (2003) point out that the performance of women can be affected by stereotypes, as they are made to believe they are not as competent as men.

Maume (2016) argues that women work for more paid and unpaid hours than men, but resilient stereotypes still consider the latter as the leading providers in the household. Further, the stereotype of the male manager prevails as people describe a good manager in terms of qualities which typically characterise men (Schein, Muller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). Similarly, individuals taking on gender-stereotype incongruent roles, such as a woman occupying executive positions, are often confronted with harsher criticism for mistakes they make than would be the case with a person in a gender-congruent position (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010).

## **2.9 Senior leadership role and career progression**

The different perspectives and definitions of leadership make attempting to establish consensus on the phenomenon untenable (Vilkinas, Murray, & Chua, 2020), as evidenced by the diverse and often contradictory meanings and perspectives of leadership (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1996; Denis, Langley, & Sergi, 2012). Allen (2018) defines leadership as a process that involves an individual influencing a group of people to achieve a common goal. In turn, Yukl (1989) defines leadership as a process involving the influence of individuals to agree and understand what needs to be achieved and the most effective way on how to do it. The common emphasis in the above definitions is the relationship between people (followers) and those designated as leaders. There is convergence in views of leadership, that depict leadership as a process and that involves influence,

setting goals, achievements and the involvement of people (Yukl, 1989; Allen, 2018; Seo, Huang, & Han, 2017).

Leaders are expected to inspire and motivate subordinates to perform and achieve organisational objectives and goals above the expected set standards (Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich, & Stewart, 2018). Bennis (1989) argues that leaders are clear as to what they want to do both professionally and personally and are prepared to deal with failures and even face setbacks. Thus, an effective leader is responsible for providing guidance and sharing the knowledge with employees in order to achieve better performance and maintain expected high quality. According to Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich and Stewart (2018), leaders motivate the behaviour of subordinates by changing the latter's attitudes, beliefs and assumptions. In order to inspire and direct individual effort, leaders are expected to improve awareness of the importance of outcomes of the organisation which in turn induces subordinates to transcend their interests for the benefit of the organisation (Wright & Pandey, 2009). Similarly, leadership is critical in building structures and creating organisational climates that motivate teams to achieve set expectations (Wipulanusat, Panuwatwanich, & Stewart, 2018). Iqbal, Anwar and Haider (2015) posit that leadership has become a new practical approach for managing employees and organisations.

Senior leaders develop the future vision and motivate organisational members to want to achieve their dreams and improve their performance (Buller & McEvoy, 2012). The qualifications that shape the senior leadership role include knowledge, skills, values, personal qualities, and behaviours (Karadag, 2017). These qualifications or characteristics are inextricably linked with political, economic, and social factors making it imperative for the senior leadership role to require a wide range of skills, tools, technique and resources (Seo, Huang, & Han, 2017). Iqbal, Anwar and Haider (2015) argue that effective employee performance is dependent on the proper match with the capability of the leader to lead. Further, effective leadership is subject to situational factors that include the leaders' abilities, preferred leadership style, and behaviour and the competency of employees (Iqbal, Anwar, & Haider, 2015). Leaders are expected to handle and manage change while focusing on the long-term and the overall vision through taking calculated risks while simultaneously concentrating on people and organisational values, and the requirements of the profit motive (Iqbal, Anwar, & Haider, 2015). Additionally, top-quality leadership is essential for achieving the mission and vision, promoting the core values and objectives of the organisation

(Iqbal, Anwar, & Haider, 2015) and managing the changes in the external environment (Al Khajeh, 2018). Leaders establish objectives, design strategies, policies, and methods that enhance effective and efficient achievement of the organisational objectives while directing and coordinating the collective efforts towards organisational activities (Al Khajeh, 2018). Leaders guide and allow employees to participate in decision-making processes while fostering a sense of belonging for them; however, few women are moving up to senior leadership roles (Magliano, Macefield, Ellis, & Calkin, 2020).

Organisational performance is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon and requires achievement of actual outputs that can be evaluated against intentional outputs, goals and objectives (Shin & Konrad, 2017). The performance of an organisation involves three core areas that are associated with profits or return on investments, economic value for shareholders and performance in sales (Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015). Al Khajeh (2018) points out that leadership styles associated with high organisational performance may have negative and positive impacts on the performance.

## **2.10 Institutional factors**

### **2.10.1 Organisational culture**

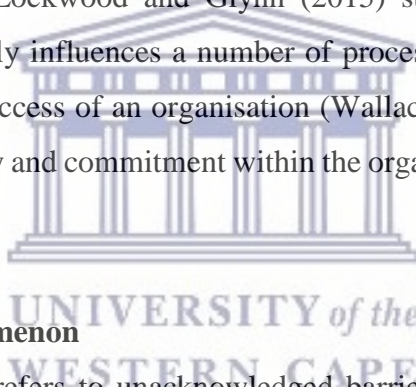
Schein (1985) defines organisational culture as a set of common beliefs and values shared in an organisation which influence how people think, perceive and act. The phenomenon is also defined as the norms and ways of doing things by members in an organisation that distinguish them from any other organisation (Jaques, 1951; Hofstede, 2005). Hofstede (2005) further defines organisational culture as a set of work styles, beliefs, values and systems that differentiates one organisation from another. Broadly, the definitions and interpretations of organisational culture draw from diverse disciplines informed by equally divergent assumptions (Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, 1991). The definition of organisational culture is associated with artefacts, societal value systems, beliefs, values, and basic assumptions of organisations (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019) and is reflected in the organisational norms and practices that have been used over some time (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015). Organisational culture is manifested in the shared perceptions of organisational systems, though work practices that exist within organisational units may be exhibited differently within the same organisation (Feldman & Msibi, 2014).





Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, (1991) point out that while organisational culture may be gender-neutral, the assumption of objectivity does not prevail: it is one of the significant barriers impeding the advancement of women in organisations (Feldman & Msibi, 2014), as some components of organisational culture tend to lean towards a particular gender while excluding the other (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019). For instance, a culture that demands long working hours significantly favours men as they are perceived to be capable of meeting such demands compared to women who have other responsibilities outside of work (Nemoto, 2013). Invariably, organisational culture affects the performance, employee behaviour, creativity and innovation, knowledge management, learning and development within organisations (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015).

Graham, Grennan and Harvey (2019) highlight how organisational culture depicts top executives as among the top five factors that contribute and increase the value of companies. Feldman and Msibi (2014) point out that the leadership of an organisation influences and shapes the organisational culture. Giorgi, Lockwood and Glynn (2015) state that organisational culture unintentionally and unconsciously influences a number of processes within an organisation and plays an important role in the success of an organisation (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1991) and positively influences productivity and commitment within the organisation (Martin & Siehl, 1983; Sørensen, 2002).



### **2.10.2 The glass ceiling phenomenon**

The glass ceiling phenomenon refers to unacknowledged barriers or sets of barriers to career advancement of women and people of colour (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Morrison, White and Van Velsor, 1987; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001) and are discriminatory in nature (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). Cook and Glass (2014) highlight that the glass ceiling phenomenon impedes the career mobility of women and minorities in organisations. Omotayo, Oladele and Adenika (2013) noted that the glass ceiling phenomenon is noticeable in the restricted career advancement of women at higher organisational levels despite their possessing suitable formal qualifications, relevant experience and skills (Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013). Moraka (2015) pointed out that the prevalence of the glass ceiling effect prevents women from advancing and representation in higher level decision-making roles.

Moraka (2015) further pointed out that even though the prospects for the development of women are improving, the glass ceiling effect still exists in contemporary organisations.

Osituyo (2018) reported that workplace barriers impede the career progression of female employees within the public service sector in South Africa. Bombuwela and De Alwis (2013) cited the effects of the glass ceiling on the career development of women executives in the private sector organisations in Sri Lanka. Public and private sector organisations have failed to employ, retain and promote women to senior leadership roles at the same rate as their male counterparts (Cho et al., 2015). The consequences of the glass ceiling include employee demotivation due to the lack of career advancement, which ultimately results in low productivity (Victor & Shamila, 2018). The negative impact of high turnover is costly for organisations (Ragins, Townsend, & Mattis, 1998). More significantly, the glass ceiling effect impacts the advancement of women which results in low representation of women in organisational decision-making processes (Omotayo, Oladele, & Adenika, 2013).

The post-1994 South African democracy inherited an economic and social system that was characterised by disparities and gender imbalances that favoured men (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). Despite the improvement in the entry of women into senior leadership roles in South Africa as compared to the past decade, breaking through the glass ceiling still remains a challenge (Hlebela

& Mpehle, 2020). The post-1994 labour and related articles of legislation stipulate that organisations should have equal opportunity clauses in their organisational policies that ensure that employees are not prejudiced regarding employment opportunities based on colour, race, ethnicity, gender or sex (Hlebela & Mpehle, 2020). Notwithstanding the legislative provisions driving organisational initiatives to redress the situation, the glass-ceiling effect remains one of the main hindrances to the career progression of women into leadership roles in the workplace (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016; Shrestha, 2016; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010).

### **2.10.3 Institutional factors in the diplomatic work context**

The foreign services and diplomatic profession are traditionally male-dominated and characterised by power structures that reinforce gender inequalities which make it difficult for women to enter diplomacy and occupy high positions (James & Sluga, 2015). Despite the absence of formal barriers preventing women from serving as diplomats, ministers of foreign affairs have been resistant to women entering the diplomatic field (Townes, Kreft, & Niklasson 2018). Enloe (2014) argues that wives of diplomats seem to be a significant part of international politics for employees working in countries where they have no previous experience and depend on family support (Conroy, McDonnell & Holzleitner, 2018). Collings and Isichei (2018) stated that in expatriation, competing family responsibilities and other constraints tend to be stressful, thus deployment to international assignments as a family unit can be problematic as it usually requires one's partner to give up the continuity of their own life.

Some of the key challenges related to international assignments include competing family responsibilities, short notice before travelling and the duration of the assignment (Conroy, McDonnell & Holzleitner, 2018). The decision to relocate for undertaking an international assignment can be problematic and cause work-family conflict as the family life is uprooted from its domestic location to another location abroad (Lirio, 2014). Hutchings, Lirio and Metcalfe (2012) point out that the decision to accept international relocation for work tends to become difficult as employees may need to consider their partner's career. Welch, Welch and Worm (2007) highlight that those international assignments involve frequent international travelling to visit foreign projects, business units and international markets. Further to employees travelling abroad to attend meetings, conferences, and engagement with foreign stakeholders on an ongoing basis, Collings and Isichei (2018) warn of health-related issues related to high levels of stress (see also Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007).

### **2.11 Individual factors**

Networking refers to the building, strengthening and intentionally sustaining connections with others with a view to furthering personal career objectives (Wolff & Moser, 2017). In turn, networking provides opportunities for developing contacts and contributes to information sharing, the building of trust among colleagues and potential job opportunities (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen,

2015; Williams, Chandra, & Kristine, 2012). Forret and Dougherty (2004) report that engaging in networking is crucial for career success and facilitates access to critical career-building resources such as technical knowledge, advice, strategic insight and emotional support (Gino, Kouchaki, & Casciaro, 2022).

However, professional networks among women are less powerful and effective than those of men which creates structural barriers that exclude women from robust networks and cause them to build fewer effective networks than men (Kouchaki, 2014). Greguletz, Diehl and Kreutzer (2019). Williams, Chandra and Kristine (2012) point out that exclusive powerful networks such as hunting and golf and similar social events exclude women from participation. Strong networks are mostly formed outside formal meetings and further strengthened in after-hours meetings (Williams, Chandra, & Kristine, 2012). Women tend to remain excluded from powerful, informal networks which place them at a disadvantage in terms of forming alliances and developing access to critical organisational knowledge (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; McGuire, 2002).

Nemoto (2013) linked strong male networks to the masculine organisational culture where men are expected to engage with clients while women are excluded from engagements which take place after-hours. Nemoto (2013) further noted that women need to emulate and adopt masculine qualities in order to be considered and included in male-dominated events. In response to these exclusive male networks, some organisations allow for the establishment of formal networks for women that are not as strong and powerful as their male colleagues (Williams, Chandra, & Kristine, 2012). Overall, networking is critical in career development and is positively related to variables such as motivation, performance, career goals, organisational mobility, mentoring, promotions, salary and career satisfaction (Spurk, Kauffeld, Barthauer & Heinemann, 2015).

### **2.11.1 Work-life balance**

Organisational pressures result in women and men devoting more time in work roles, often leading to work overload, long working hours and unstructured social hours (Vasumathi, 2018). White and Maniam (2020) highlight that flexible working arrangements are regarded by most employees as a key component towards achieving a better work-life balance. Saina, Pio and Rumawas (2016) state that work-life balance enhances employee satisfaction and achievement of harmony between work and

private life responsibilities. Further, proper compensation systems optimise the performance of employees and work-life balance (Saina, Pio, & Rumawas, 2016).

Male and female employees experience work pressures that significantly affect the quality of family life (Doble & Supriya, 2010). Women pressured at work find it difficult to take care of their children and dependents (Vasumathi, 2018). The primary source of satisfaction for women is balanced work and family life. At the same time, for men, the main focus is work responsibility, recognition and greater satisfaction from work at the cost of family (Doble & Supriya, 2010). The increase in the number of women in the workforce globally and their active participation in the economy has brought changes in the family dynamics, particularly the role they play in the family system (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020). Challenges for women emanate from the demands of full-time office jobs and family responsibilities at home (Shukla & Bagali, 2016). In turn, family responsibilities and life opportunities influence women's career opportunities (Lirio, 2014) hence the need for women to ensure that the two factors are balanced (Shukla & Bagali, 2016). The life of a woman is a juggling act of multiple responsibilities they must fulfil at work, including long meetings, work travel and home responsibilities (Lirio, 2014; Hill, Miller, Wiener, & Colihan, 1998; Kalliath & Brough, 2008).

Apperson, Schmidt, Moore and Grunberg (2002) comment that long working hours, work overload, psychological demands and frequent travel requirements negatively impact work-family life balance (Apperson, Schmidt, Moore, & Grunberg, 2002). Shukla and Bagali (2016) point out that men outnumber women in international business travel (Lirio, 2014) and need to balance business travel with family situations and demands (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). International travel directly impacts the family structure, imposing more restrictions on women than men due to family demands, especially when young children are at home (Lirio, 2014). Overall, international business travel disrupts personal and family routines as people spend more time away from home for extended periods and often travel by plane for longer distances to meet other global business demands, adversely impacting global managers (Lirio, 2014). However, the needs for business travel for an international career, particularly international travel, requires further research (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012; Lirio, 2014).

Work life balance depends on the person's ability to accommodate personal and family needs, work and family demands (Lirio, 2014). Akuamoah-Boateng (2020) points out that balancing work, personal life and family demands is an emerging challenge for employers and employees. The global increase in the participation of women in the workforce has brought about changes in family dynamics with respect to the roles played by women in the family system (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020).

The post-1994 South African government introduced progressive legislation that promotes healthy working environments that embrace the needs of women (Akuamoah-Boateng 2020). However, existing policies are still failing to address the complexities of the historical past and legacies left behind by the unjust system which remains unfavourable for career women (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020).

## **2.12 Sociocultural factors**

### **2.12.1 Societal values and beliefs**

Social stereotyping creates expectations of what women can and cannot do (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017). Embedded societal values limit the access to education for women, leading to high illiteracy levels, which preclude women from participating in leadership roles (Gouws (2008). The stereotypical perceptions of the traditional roles of women compound beliefs that women are too emotional and lack confidence (South African Commission of Gender Equity, 2007) and perpetuate masculine traits and behaviour for leadership roles (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017). Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) pointed out that in the African culture, men take the lead and women are expected to follow, thereby reinforcing masculine restrictions on the role of women within the African organisational context.

Nyoni, He and Yusuph (2017) contend that historic and traditional cultural norms associated leadership with muscularity and the male gender (Goldman, 2016). The gender differences in leadership (Eagly & Karau 2002; Eagly & Johnson 1990) are evident in leadership styles and differences in communication styles (Nyoni, He, & Yusuph, 2017). However, Mushtaq (2016) argues that gender differences do not exist in leadership. Doubell and Struwig (2014) cite some positive correlations between groups of women based on their demographic profiles and

perceptions of the factors that influence their career success, while O’Neil, Brooks and Hopkins (2018) highlight the disconnect between the expectations and perceptions that junior and senior women have of each other. Importantly, women in senior leadership roles are expected to engage in career assistance behaviours for junior women employees who believe that senior women leaders can do more to advance their careers (O’Neil, Brooks, & Hopkins, 2018). The expectations are aligned with the assumption of solidarity behaviour (Mavin, 2008) that projects often unmet expectations of career assistance and career advancement behaviour between junior and senior women in leadership (O’Neil, Brooks, & Hopkins, 2018). Despite the increasing representation of women in the workforce who account for 46.8% of the labour force in the US and 51.5% in managerial and professional roles, they continue to be under-represented at the executive level (Catalyst, 2016). Zarya (2017) pointed out that women constituted 6.4% of chief executive officer positions of Fortune 500 companies in 2017, from 4% in 2012.

The perceptions on women taking up leadership roles are that men should occupy leadership positions with women confined to supporting men in leadership roles (Davidson & Cooper, 1992). Mushtaq (2016) argues that leadership has been associated with men and portrayed in terms of the male behavioural styles given the relatively low numbers of women in leadership roles. Thus, the image of a leader is cast in the image of a male figure which is changing radically as the number of women occupying leadership and managerial roles over the past decades has increased (Tasnim, Hossain & Enam, 2017). The numbers are increasing for women entering the labour market and competing for employment opportunities with their male counterparts (Orden & Bradburn, 1969; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015). Despite these increasing trends, women remain largely underutilised at decision-making levels (Terjesen, Aguilera, & Lorenz, 2015). Regarding South Africa, economic needs have seen a growth in the number of women joining the labour market (Patel, Govender, Paruk & Ramgoon, 2006) which historically had side-lined women irrespective of their racial identity (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Klenke (1996) and Kelan (2008) point out that early research on leadership was conducted by men who focused on male leaders, and the low representation of women in such roles resulted in descriptions of leadership based on masculine characteristics. However, Nyoni, He and Yusuph (2017) point out that leadership is genderless and that should be based on the abilities of the leader.

Yet women continue to face stereotypes, social challenges and discrimination and stereotyping (Nyoni, He & Yusuph, 2017; Barker, 2015) which impede them from advancing into senior leadership positions (Tariq & Syed, 2017). Subsequently, societies are left impoverished due to the untapped talent of women, which impoverishes societies further, and negatively impacts the developmental trajectories of nations (Schwab 2019). Given that women account for one half of the human capital globally, investing in women's talent is imperative for them to grow and reach self-actualisation (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016; Schwab, 2019). Dlamini (2016a) highlights the need for organisations to maximise the talent of women as a strategic necessity in leadership positions in the global economy and society.

### **2.12.2 Ethnicity and cultural groups**

McGee (2018) demonstrates that ethnicity and cultural variations in addition to other factors contribute to different experiences of career progression for women. Ethnic minorities are likely to experience cultural and institutional/organisational barriers to career progression (Alexander & Arday, 2015; Rollock, 2019). The lack of representation of minority groups impacts on career progression, as individuals from those minority groups are likely to have negative perceptions about their own career success (Wanelik, Griffin, Head, Ingleby, & Lewis, 2020). Bhatt (2013) adds that individuals from minority groups have lower chances of being promoted and have lower prospects of finding role models. Wanelik, Griffin, Head, Ingleby and Lewis (2020) suggest that ethnic minority women are more likely to endure self-doubt and are likely to experience challenges to their own authority, compared to their white female counterparts, due to the fact that they have suffered discrimination based on their sex and ethnicity.

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) point out that in African culture, men take the lead and women follow, thereby reinforcing the masculine view on the issue of women in leadership within the African organisational context. Goldman (2016) also supports the view that leadership is associated with muscularity and the male gender due to historic and traditional culture norms. Shahriar (2021) points out that in the Pakistani culture, women are not allowed to choose career over marriage or their family responsibilities. Traditional roles of women may also lead to the belief that women are not capable of leading and, therefore, culture can create perceptions of what women can and cannot do (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).



Women are constantly reminded that their purpose in life is to raise children, do household chores and take care of their husbands (Shahriar, 2021). Morris, Hinton-Smith, Marvell, & Brayson (2022) argue that the mere presence of policies that address diversity and equality does not necessarily demonstrate that organisations are addressing existing ethnic and gender inequalities.

### **2.13 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and equal rights for women**

Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa, 1996) prescribes rights that specifically focus on improving the employment environment. These prescripts form part of the regulation of the labour market promulgated by the government in order to create conducive work environments for women to fully realise their potential. The labour rights are entrenched in the Constitution and enforceable in law to address the injustices of the past (Madlala & Govender, 2018). The main relevant legal Acts are as follows:

- Labour Relations Act, Act No 66 of 1995, which is the foundation of labour law in South Africa.
- Basic Conditions of Employment Act, Act No75 of 1997, which seeks to improve the minimum conditions of employment.
- Employment Equity Act, Act No 55 of 1998, which deals with the equal opportunities and the eradication of unfair discrimination in the workplace.

The Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 promulgated and enshrined the development of employment equity plans and annual submission of reports by employers to the Department of Labour on the progress made in terms of employment equity (Burger & Jafta, 2006).

### **2.14 Women's rights in the workplace**

The post-1994 democratic South African government introduced a number of laws and policies that addressed the injustices of the apartheid dispensation underpinned by the ethos of restoring social justice and equality and empowerment of women. Some of the government legislation introduced to improve the conditions in South Africa include the Constitution of South Africa of 1996, White Paper on Public Service Transformation of 1996 and the National Development Plan 2030 of 2013 (Madlala & Govender, 2018). The legislation seeks to create an environment that is more equal and democratic in the utilisation of existing human capital (Seierstad, Wamer-Soderholm, Torchia, & Huse, 2017).

Gender equality, women's rights, prevention of discriminatory actions and promotion of the right of women to equally participate in all spheres (Van der Waldt, Fourie, Van Dijk, Chitiga-Mabugu, & Jordaan, 2019) are fundamental human rights enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa (Ndinda & Okeke-Uzodike, 2012). The post 1994 government prioritised the educational status and improvement of women (James, Auerbach, Desai, Giliomee, Krog, & Tlakula, 2000). However, the research discussed above overwhelmingly indicates that this progress is insufficient, especially at leadership levels as evidenced by the high enrolment numbers of women in tertiary education and participation in the formal economy (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2019). The Basic Conditions of Employment Act No. 75 of 1997 and the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 introduced new labour practices that empower women to effectively participate in the economy (Barker, 2015; Adendorff, Keown, & Amansure, 2020; Burger & Jafta, 2006).

The South African laws protect and promote equal employment opportunities for all citizens. Previously disadvantaged people such as women, people living with disabilities and black people (Adendorff, Keown, & Amansure, 2020). Mello and Phago (2007) point out that attempts by government and organisations to implement the Employment Equity Act have not been effective due to a lack of engagement between the government and the private sector. The Employment Equity Act No.55 of 1998 seeks to promote the implementation of affirmative action to redress past unfair discriminatory practices that limited the access of women to leadership roles (Mello & Phago, 2007). Similarly, Diner (2014) points out that the Employment Equity Act legitimises the struggle for equity to redress gender equality and the creation of conducive workplaces for women.

Notwithstanding the legislative framework, discrimination and prejudice remain the most significant deterrents to the career progression of women (Dlamini, 2016a). However, Mathur-Helm (2005) reports marked improvement toward the promotion of gender equity in the public sector and Parliament that redresses gender inequality. Further, more comprehensive women's representation in Parliament enhances the opportunities for advocating and promoting laws and policies that benefit women (Mathur-Helm, 2005).

Related pieces of legislation that support women empowerment in the workplace include the Commission on Gender Equality and the South African Framework Policy on Women's Empowerment (Department of Labour, 2020). South African organisations are key players in transforming the cultural, economic, political, structural barriers that confront women in the workplace (Cloete, Bunting & Maassen, 2015).

Mayer, Oosthuizen, & Tonelli (2019) argue that organisations, as implementers of employment equity, contribute towards embracing equality and equity in workplaces in order to improve subjective experiences of employment equity in South Africa. The implementation of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) in the workforce should be more diverse, democratic and inclusive (Moraka & Jansen van Rensburg, 2015). However, 27 years after 1994, the envisioned transformation seems to be slower (Mayer & Barnard, 2015) as shown by the mismatch between racial quotas in meaningful work and societal demographic profiles. Despite the streamlined government policy that seeks to include women at all levels, there are serious challenges with respect to employment equity in the South Africa retail sector (Roman & Mason, 2015; Mathur-Helm, 2005). Notwithstanding the highly regulated South African work environment, few women have managed to reach senior leadership roles (Mathur-Helm, 2016). Barker (2015) argues that in spite of the belief that discrimination is the main cause of the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in organisations, the other aspects of discrimination are the invisible barriers and cultural beliefs that favour men to dominate in leadership roles.

### **2.15 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development**

The SADC Protocol underscores the fundamental obligations of member states to work towards creating a world that guarantees that the dignity, equality and liberty of women should be integral to their lived experiences (Munalula, 2011; SADC, 2008). The SADC countries signed the Protocol that enshrined the adoption of efforts towards achieving equality for women on 17 August 2008 (Munalula, 2011). The adoption of the Southern African Development Community Protocol on Gender Development by member states seeks to coordinate the implementation of agreements at regional, continental and international levels (Selebogo, Ojatorotu & Kamidza 2015; Womin, 2013). Thus, the SADC Protocol commits member countries to eliminate all forms of unfair

discrimination against women and to achieve gender equality and equity in the region, harmonizing the development and execution of respective gender legislations, programmes, policies and projects (SADC, 2008). The SADC Protocol prescribes targets and timeframes within which member states should legislate the inclusion of gender equality in their country's constitutions (Womin, 2013) in line with set targets and time frames. The Protocol abolished the minority status of women and legally compels SADC member states to speed up efforts toward advancing women's rights and equality in the region (Selebogo, Ojakorotu, & Kamidza, 2015).

The SADC Protocol stipulated time-bound commitments for national constitutions of member states to embed and champion gender equality and equity to achieve 50% female representation in political and decision-making roles (Selebogo, Ojakorotu, & Kamidza, 2015) and guarantee equal pay for equal work, as well as equal opportunities and the eradication of unfair discrimination (SADC, 2008). Further, it commits member states to ensure that women occupy 50% of key decision-making roles in the private and public sectors and the full participation of women in economic policy formulation and implementation (Womin, 2013).

Munalula (2011) points out that unlike all other regional agreements, the SADC protocol is legally binding and advocates the empowerment of women and the mainstreaming and promotion of policies and implementation of policies that protect human rights (SADC, 2008). The Protocol states that member states should allocate resources towards implementation of protocol obligations in areas such as human resources, budget allocation and technical expertise (Munalula, 2011). A formal committee structure made up of senior officials is required to oversee implementation of the Protocol was established at the Secretariat regional level (SADC, 2008). Munalula (2011) points out that the main focus of the Protocol is the public rather than the private sector, and the extended implementation phases that encourage non-compliance by member States that thereby weaken enforceability. The success of the implementation of the Protocol depends on the extent to which member states are accountable for their results (Munalula, 2011), in view of the absence of a framework to which member states can report achievements and manage performance.

Obligations towards the fulfilment of the African Union's Women Protocol have been weakened by non-compliance by the member states (Forere & Stone, 2009). As a member state of SADC,

South Africa is complicit in the weakening of the women's advancement protocols (Forere & Stone, 2009), as treaties invariably leave room for member states to implement the provisions individually in a manner that is best suited to the respective state, dependent on its political, social and economic circumstances. However, there is no clarity on not allowing flexibility for countries to use their discretion in implementing the Protocol provisions, thus the view that the implementation of the SADC protocol is not feasible (Forere & Stone, 2009).

### **2.16 International conventions & protocols and the advancement of women in the workplace**

The Constitution (South Africa, 1996) and the relevant laws prescribe that South Africa should comply with its obligation to promote the empowerment of women, also as a member state of the United Nations (UN) and International Labour Organisation (ILO), and in line with various international directives such as the ILO conventions. The ILO and the UN have developed protocols aimed at empowering, promoting and protecting women in the workplace and society (UN Women, 2020). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identified and reviewed progress on resolutions and the implementation of the agenda adopted in 1995 on the challenges faced in the advancement of women (UN Women, 2015).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an initiative of the UN that seeks to prioritise plans and strategies for advancement of women around the world (UN Women, 2015; UN Women, 2020). The Beijing Declaration binds member states to commit and set measurable and achievable targets that ensure substantial increases in the representation of women in all political, economic and social spheres (UN, 2015). The Declaration further states that member states must aspire to achieve an equal representation of gender in administration and political positions through positive action (UN Women, 2020). South Africa, as a member state, is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and is obliged to implement these protocols.

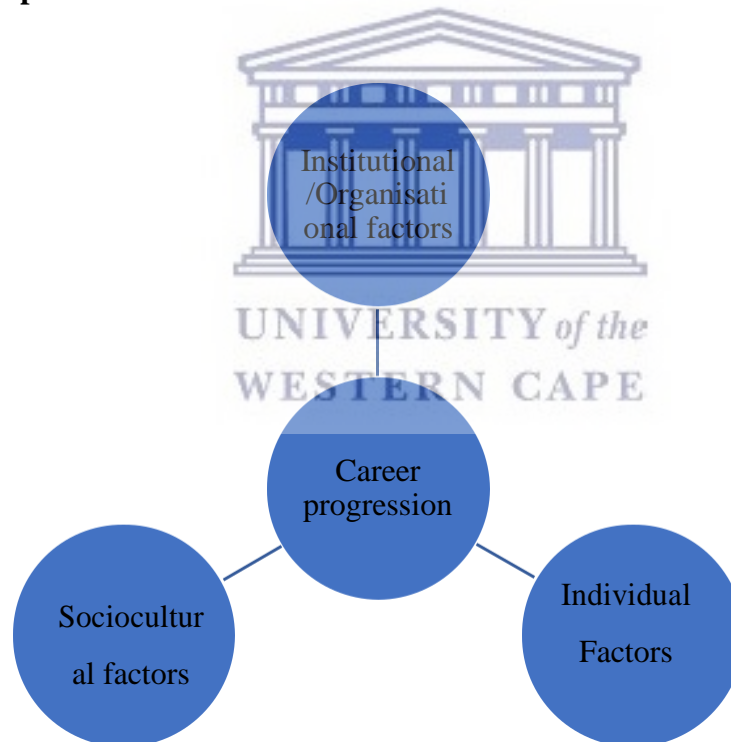
The low representation of women in leadership roles persists in South African, largely due to limited access to opportunities, resources and support, resulting in fewer women in leadership roles in the public and private sector (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016). Thus, South Africa still lags behind in terms of compliance with its international obligations specified by the Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action, African Union Protocol on Women and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (Munalula, 2011). Forere and Stone (2009) report on the ongoing gender awareness programmes, conferences and training on the advancement of women. Despite the adoption of international conventions at the continental, regional and national levels to promote gender equity and development (Munalula, 2011) there is need for more work to be done towards bridging the implementation gaps (Forere & Stone, 2009).

### 2.17 The Conceptual framework

Mushtaq (2016) states that a conceptual framework represents narratively or graphically the main considerations within a research study. A conceptual framework further explains a dimension based on the theories using research questions that have been formulated in order to assist both the researcher and the reader to find answers (Mushtaq, 2016).

**Figure 2: Conceptual framework**



Source: Adapted from Hofstede (2005)

(i) *Institutional/Organisational factors:*

These include organisational culture (Schein, 1985), norms and ways of doing things adopted by members in an organisation that distinguish them from any other organisation (Jaques, 1951; Hofstede, 2005). This further entails the set of work styles, beliefs, values and systems that differentiates one organisation from another, the artefacts, societal value systems, beliefs, values and basic assumptions of organisations (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019). Institutional/organisational factors are among the significant barriers impeding the advancement of women in most organisations (Feldman & Msibi, 2014; Greguletz, Diehl & Kreutzer, 2019), particularly elements of organisational culture that tend to favour a particular gender while excluding the other (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019). As mentioned above, the glass ceiling also prevents women from advancing to higher level decision-making roles (Moraka, 2015).

(ii) *Individual factors*

These include individual factors such as work life-balance (Saina, Pio & Rumawas, 2016); networking opportunities, and building, strengthening and intentionally sustaining connections with others with a view of furthering personal career objectives (Wolff & Moser, 2017); and opportunities that facilitate access to critical career building resources and strategic insights (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2014; Greguletz, Diehl & Kreutzer, 2019),

(iii) *Sociocultural factors*

These include the African culture (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009); continuing historic stereotypical beliefs and traditional gender roles that regard women as mothers and homemakers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005); and other sociocultural elements that are related to beliefs and the behaviour of people (Masovic, 2018).

## 2.18 Summary

This chapter critiqued the relevant literature on organisational, sociocultural, individual, legal and international conventions on the advancement of gender and women. It also explored the theory of career development and defined the career construct and its implications. Literature on career progression, gender, and career and leadership roles and related factors was reviewed. The conceptual framework used in this study draws on institutional, individual and social-cultural factors as building blocks towards understanding the career progression of women into senior leadership positions in organisations.

The next chapter presents the research methodology.





## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3. Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology, research approach, research design, data collection methods, sampling method, study population, data analysis approaches and ethical considerations.

#### 3.1 Qualitative research approach

A research design refers to a plan and procedure of how the researcher intends to conduct the research (Du Toit & Mouton, 2013). The design presents the assumptions underpinning the data collection methods and data analysis (Harreveld, Danaher, Lawson, Knight, & Busch, 2016). Thus, the research design consists of decisions about the assumptions and methods of how data was collected and analysed (Chih-Pei & Chang, 2017). The research onion model comprises of multiple layers that are organised in a similar way to the layers of an onion and highlights different types of research methodology, depending upon the objective of the study. The model (Saunders et al., 2007). The four different types of research philosophies include interpretivism, positivism, realism, and pragmatism (Saunders, 2007). This study adopts interpretivism research philosophy to explore a deeper understanding of the underlying factors influencing career progression of women in DIRCO.

Qualitative research methodologies enable people to ascribe meanings, thoughts and feelings to the situation in which they find themselves (O'Neil & Koekemoer, 2016). The study adopted qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, thoughts and feelings on experiences of women with specific reference to career progression within DIRCO (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018). Non-numerical data expressed in words and expressions were collected using the interview method (Alase 2017).

The qualitative research approach was deemed suitable for exploring the subjective meanings and deeper understanding of individuals' perspectives on the social realities and the career progression of women through multi-explorative methods (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018).

Qualitative data was more amenable to understanding the lived experiences of people within the organisational context and the influence of sociocultural, individual and related factors on the same (Apuke, 2017).

Quantitative methodologies seek to test hypotheses and identify the cause and the effect of relationships (Hammer, 2011). Upjohn, Attwood, Lerotholi, Pfeiffer and Verheyen (2013) point out that the quantitative research approach uses numeric descriptions mostly interval or ratio techniques to make a judgement using predetermined close-ended data collection instruments (Cunliffe, 2011). The quantitative research approach was deemed unsuitable for this study which sought to explore the lived experiences of women from their viewpoint. The study seeks to contribute to empirical qualitative studies on women in leadership in line with observations by Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) who highlighted that most studies on women in leadership are based on quantitative methods.

### **3.2 Interpretive paradigm**

The interpretive paradigm posits that reality is socially constructed and comprises multiple meanings and depends on each person's interpretations and realities (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to gain more depth through looking at perceptions, realities and experiences of a particular social context (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The interpretation enables the researcher to understand the subjective lived experiences of participants through the meanings and interpretations of the shared realities (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012) with specific reference to career progression (Potgieter & Barnard, 2010). The interpretive paradigm was found suitable for exploring the perceptions of women on career progression into senior leadership roles within an organisation. The interpretative paradigm enabled the researcher to uncover the multiple realities faced by women from their own perspective through words and texts regarding the factors influencing the career progression of women into senior leadership roles within DIRCO.

Understanding the subjective reality or ontology of research interest is explored through the participants' socially constructed meanings, interpretations and realities. In turn, what constitutes knowledge or epistemology on the subject is constructed through understanding and exposition of the narratives and perceptions to draw out new meanings and worldviews that contribute to the body of knowledge on the phenomena (see Saunders et al, 2018:145).

### **3.3 Case study design**

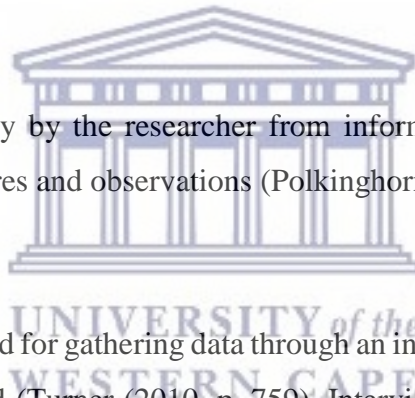
This study adopted the case study design to examine and present data within real-life situations (Yin, 2014). Case studies explore the phenomenon, situation, event, organisation, individual or group within a real-life context using multiple methods (Yin 2014). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) point out that the case for research may be an individual, group, an event, an association, an organisation, a change process or any other form of subject. The advantages of a case study are that data is generated in a real setting which ensures the authenticity and practicality of the information gathered (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). The case study research design was considered suitable for the in-depth investigation, holistic, and comprehensive investigation of the phenomena (Yin, 2018) of the study research interest. Further, the case study approach enabled the illumination of insights into gaps that exist (Alase, 2017) in the body of knowledge on career progression of women into senior leadership roles with specific reference to DIRCO and the public sector in general.

### **3.4 Data collection methods**

Primary data is collected directly by the researcher from informants using techniques such as interview schedules, questionnaires and observations (Polkinghorne, 2005).

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Interviews refer to techniques used for gathering data through an interaction between the researcher and the individuals being studied (Turner (2010, p. 759). Interviews were conducted in order to collect data through interaction with respondents and provided the researcher with the flexibility to explore and probe the life experience of respondents (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2007). Interviews enable economic and effective ways of collecting data (Alshenqeti, 2014). Verbal communication between respondents and the researcher (Wilson, 2012) enable the exchange of information (Bowling, 2002).



### **3.4.2 Semi-structured interview**

Semi-structured interviews were used to solicit as well as to obtain in-depth information and understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. Semi-structured interviews are important in data gathering in exploratory studies and allow probing for elaboration and meanings (Paine, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were considered suitable for understanding the lived realities and challenges faced by women with respect to career advancement and progression into senior leadership roles.

The verbal communication between respondents and the researcher enabled probing and clarification on the experiences on the progression of women into senior leadership roles. The researcher asked respondents open-ended questions about their personal experiences on the career progression of women into senior leadership roles within DIRCO. The process enabled the researcher to probe for elaboration and explanation on the respective responses.

Face-to-face interviews were restricted by the Coronavirus pandemic, also known as COVID-19, during the period the study was conducted. The Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) online video conferencing technology programme was used to conduct the interviews. Respondents were familiar with MS Teams which was widely used in DIRCO at the time. With the informed consent of the respondents, the researcher used the MS Teams video conferencing technology to record and file the data collected during interviews. The calendar applications embedded in the platform were also used to schedule interviews and set reminders for participants. The MS Team platform enabled the researcher to reach and interview participants who were based in South African Embassies, High Commissions and Consuls General all over the world.

### **3.5 Document analysis**

Key documents consulted in the study include the following:

- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,
- South African National Government Gazettes,
- The 20<sup>th</sup> Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report 2019/20,
- Statistics South Africa Annual Report on Employment Equity,
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - Summary report

- DIRCO documents which included information related to the research topic:
  - The Annual Reports covering the 2015 to 2021 period,
  - Strategic planning reports 2015 to 2021,
  - Foreign Service Bill,
  - Ambassador's diary,
  - Approved 2015 human resource placement policy, ○ Approved recruitment policy,
  - The Sub-Directorate Statistical Information and Organisational Structure,
  - The Directorate Organisational Development Report

The documentary information enhanced understanding of the study context with respect to DIRCO, an overview of the South African public service, information on women's representation, organisational statistics and the historical context which extended beyond the perspectives of respondents. Overall, the documentary evidence corroborated observations and interview data and provided rich data that complemented information from public documents obtained from the online domains of relevant government departments and classified documents formally requested by the researcher, after prior approval from the Director-General.

### **3.6 Population**

The study of a population constitutes the total group of people from whom the respondents are drawn (Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo & Bastos, 2016). The population at the time of the study was 125 women in senior leadership roles employed by DIRCO

### **3.7 Sample**

Campbell et al. (2020) state that purposive sampling involves the researcher selecting suitable respondents that would be able to provide the most valuable and relevant information. The purposive sampling technique was found to be better suited to the aims and objectives of this study, and it is widely used for qualitative research (Klassen, Creswell, Plano Clark, Smith & Meissner, 2012). A purposive sample comprising a group of individuals who share similar attributes was selected as the study sample (Mitchell & Jolley, 2004). The sample participants were deemed to have the requisite experience and deeper knowledge of women's career progression in DIRCO.

The study sample comprised ten (10) and was of the view that additional participants may not yield any new evidence. Thus, the view that saturation principle was obtainable with the sample of the participants (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam & Jinks, 2018). The participants were drawn from diverse roles and responsibilities, functional areas, years of working experience in DIRCO, age, race, educational background, rank, and those located in South Africa and South African missions abroad.

The selection criteria were that participants must be women with five years minimum experience, occupying senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The selection sample ensured representation in terms of branches/departments of the organisation, such as Office of the Chief Operations Officer, Public Diplomacy, Protocol, Corporate Management, Diplomatic Training, Research and Development, Finance and Asset Management, Asia and the Middle East, Europe and Americas, Global Governance and Africa (See Table 2 below).

**Table 2: Demographics of the study sample**

No.	Branch	Rank	Experience	Race	Location
1.	COO	Chief Director	10	African	RSA
2.	Public Diplomacy	Director	5	African	RSA
3.	Protocol & Consular Services	Director	5	White	RSA
4.	Corporate Management	Director	10	African	Abroad
5.	Finance and Asset Management	Director	10	White	RSA
6.	Diplomatic Training, Research and Development	Deputy Director-General	20	African	RSA
7.	Asia and Middle East	Director	5	White	Abroad
8.	Europe and Americas	Chief Director	20	African	Abroad
9.	Global Governance	DDG	15	African	Abroad
10.	Africa	Chief Director	15	Coloured	Abroad

### **3.8 Pilot study**

Malmqvist, Hellberg, Möllås, Rose and Shevlin (2019) assert that a pilot study is a minor study carried out to test the data collection instruments and timings prior to conducting the main study. A pilot study was carried out, and the results enabled the researcher to refine research questions, identify the best methods to pursue the study and estimate the time required to complete the main study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018). A further purpose is to assist the researcher to test the practicability of the study in real-time and make necessary amendments (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018). The pilot study to first test the data collection instrument involved open-ended interviews with three female participants who did not form part of the main study. The pilot study indicated challenges with semantics and omissions, and time requirements which were amended and rectified in the main study.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

Data analysis is a process of producing meaning from the raw data collected (Yin, 2018). The data analysis process involved identifying themes, patterns and categories emerging from the data (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The interview notes and, where consent was granted, video and audio recordings were made and transcribed (Al-Yateem 2012; Terreblanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The recorded interviews provided a beneficial record of the content (Al-Yateem, 2012).

#### **3.9.1 Content and thematic analysis**

Content analysis is a representation of responses by participants, while thematic analysis interprets participants' meanings (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). Qualitative content analysis was employed to search and point out underlying themes in the data. The analysis of qualitative data involved reduction, interpretation and classification (Lillis, 1999) of the interview notes and transcribed notes from the audio and video recordings. After editing and cleaning, the data was coded using numbers indicating similar answers for easy summarising and analysis.

The coding process involved classifying the answers to questions into meaningful categories to identify the emerging patterns (Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Similarly, the analysis of the open-ended interviews from the MS Teams platform recordings was coded following the same protocols to identify patterns and themes (Liu, 2016).

Key patterns and meanings were identified, and data were categorised into themes. Thereafter, themes were identified for each to answer the central research questions. The emerging themes were further developed with reference to literature to compare the findings of the study with existing empirical research evidence.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness of the study**

Shenton (2004) states that establishing trustworthiness in general is out most important in making certain that the data interpretation is precise and authentic. Trustworthiness in qualitative is referred to as the level of confidence in data, explanation, and clarification, and as well as methods that are utilised to warrant the quality of the study (Pilot & Beck, 2014; Stahl & King (2020). Oates (2006) mentions the four components of trustworthiness that guarantee that interpretation of data is credible, confirmable, dependable, and transferable.

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer credibility to the correctness of findings as well as the endeavour of researcher to try and illustrate that the phenomenon that is being scrutinised is a true picture of what is being presented. Marshall and Rossman, (2006) mention that credibility makes sure that there is alignment between data and data analysis as well as the research objectives. The credibility of the study could be attained through the use of several methods including, interviews and focus groups, that are suitable within qualitative research as well as recognised methods in research (Kreuger & Casey 2009; Padgett, 2016). To ensure credibility, interviews and discussions of the focused group must be tape recorded as well as rewritten verbatim in order to strengthen the accuracy of the data being collected (Bryman, 2008, Goodman & Evans, 2010, Krippendorff, 2013). Therefore, thought the study, the researcher was objective by remaining neutral and avoiding sharing his own opinions when interviewing respondents. Additionally, the researcher recorded interviews using MS Teams and transcribed the responses of responses verbatim to enhance the correctness of the collected data.



### **3.10.2 Transferability**

Transferability is concerned with authenticating to what extent can the findings be suitable outside the study situation or setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015). Transferability refers to the characteristic of trustworthiness that spells out the level at which the study illustrates that the findings can be applied to other similar situations (Noble & Smith, 2015). The researcher used the thick description method to ensure transferability, enabling the judgment of the research context to fit other contexts. Additionally, the researcher made use of purposive sampling which assisted in only selecting participants who were deemed to have relevant knowledge and experience. Therefore, this study could also be helpful to other departments in the South African public service where women are underrepresented in senior leadership roles.

### **3.10.3 Dependability**

Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011) cite that the dependability of a research is centred around a documented research process that is logical and trackable, for the purpose of ensuring that what is being researched is a true representation of reality. Anney (2014) states that dependability refers to the firmness of findings or data collected over time. Dependability is employed in order to consistently illustrate the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The researcher explored the progression of women into senior leadership in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). The study employed the interview guide to make sure that there is consistency and validity in the collected data and making sure that the results are reliable.

### **3.10.4 Conformability**

Conformability refers to the barometer to judge whether the research objectives and results, are in accordance with other researches (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Shenton (2014) cites that the reflexivity approach is beneficial in qualitative research for the reason that it generates alertness for the researcher to be wary of the setting, which continuously do away with the prejudice during data collection. To guarantee the conformability, the researcher explored the objectives as identified, to corroborate the product for accountability was based on the collection of data, how it was recorded and finally analysed. Additionally, the researcher utilised reflexivity approach to ensure conformity.

The researcher enhanced confirmability by making the process of the research clear and making sure that the findings and analysis are linked to the data in a manner that can be simply comprehended by everybody else.

### **3.11 Ethical considerations**

Upholding ethics and ethical principles are essential aspects in the research process and reporting data truthfully and protection of participants (Harreveld et al., 2016). The research was cleared by the University of the Western Cape Research Ethics Committee on 20 October 2021, HSSREC Reference Number (HS21/8/19) (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained written permission from the Director-General of DIRCO to conduct the study (see Appendix B). Informed consent from respondents was obtained in writing and verbally before the start of the recording of the interview. Additionally, the MS Teams platform also notified participants that by taking part in the session, they also gave consent that the session would be recorded. Each interview participant was informed that the research was for academic purposes only, that their names would not appear in the study, and that this practice of anonymity protected their identity. Prior to the interviews, respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time. Respondents were informed that the data would be protected and kept under secure custody by the University for a period of five years.

De Pelecijn, Decoene and Hardyns (2021) state that trust may positively contribute to the willingness of respondents to participate; its absence might have contributed to the reluctance of potential respondents to participate, and some who withdrew on short notice citing personal reasons. To overcome this, the researcher wrote emails to individuals humbly requesting them to participate in the study; the email was accompanied by a letter of approval by the acting Director-General of DIRCO giving approval for the study, an ethical clearance letter from University of the Western Cape, and information sheet about the research project. Additionally, the researcher also identified himself and introduced himself as a DIRCO employee who was conducting the research study for academic purposes.

The researcher took due care and respect for persons being interviewed, obtained consent from the respondent and the protection risk of harm, minimising risk to respondents, fair distribution of research and equal treatment and upheld high standards to ensure ethical handling of respondents. During all phases of the research study, the researcher was sensitive to the ethical considerations that guide scholarly research. The researcher also adhered to the ethical standards of scholarly research and the University of the Western Cape UWC's standards guiding ethical research in order to preserve the integrity of the research study.

The researcher refrained from inappropriate research practices such as compromising the research design information, inaccurate reporting of findings, misinterpreting results and hiding information from the study. The researcher considered the best interests of participants during the open-ended interviews by being sensitive to participants. The researcher also ensured that participants were protected from any harm, physically or emotionally. Participants were also informed that they should alert the researcher should they experience any discomfort during the interview.

The information obtained from the study would be used for academic purposes only. Lastly, with the COVID-19 pandemic still on the rise, the researcher conducted all interviews using the MS Teams platform, therefore, avoiding any physical contact during the study.

### **3.12 Confidentiality of the study**

Kamanzi and Romania (2019) state that confidentiality is an agreement that limits access to the information of a subject. In this research, the researcher pledged to limit the subject's information to those with a need to know, being the University of the Western Cape. Due to the sensitive nature of DIRCO, any record that was classified was handled in line with departmental policies and was only used for academic purposes. To eliminate any possible breach of confidentiality, the data collected was securely stored in a password-protected computer and also saved on a cloud account for backup by the researcher. Additionally, all respondents were informed of the confidentiality of data collected for the study during the interview.

### **3.13 Summary**

This chapter presented research methodology employed in conducting this study. The justification for the research approach and design was discussed. The rationale for the data collection methods, population, sampling method and approaches to data collection analysis, validity, reliability and ethical considerations have been explained. The next chapter presents the study findings.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4. Introduction

The main research objective was to examine the factors influencing the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. This chapter presents the data analysis and findings on the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The qualitative research design was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm that emphasises an in-depth understanding of the multiple meanings and socially constructed realities within the context in which it occurs (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Data analysis is presented first followed a by discussion of findings in the context of the literature and empirical evidence. The first part presents the biographical/demographic data followed by the qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics. The following section discusses the sample characteristics and findings on respective issues.

#### 4.1 Sample size and response rate

The purposive sample comprised ten women in senior leadership roles, and nine of the ten women were interviewed in the study. The respondents were deemed to have relevant knowledge and experience on the main research objective. The respondent return rate is shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Respondent return rate**

Sample size targeted	Sample size participated	Percentage
10	9	90%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>90%</b>

Table 3 above shows that 9 of the 10 respondents (90%) were interviewed.

## 4.2 Biographical variables

The biographical information in terms of race, years of working experience, functional area of work in DIRCO and the level of education of the respondents is shown in Table 4 below. A description of each of these variables is presented below.

### 4.2.1 Biographical/Demographic Profiles

**Table 4: Profiles**

Variable	Frequency (9)	Percent (%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
African	5	56%
Indian	1	11%
White	3	33%
<b>Years of working experience</b>		
0-5		
6-10		
11-20	5	56%
21 and above	4	44%
<b>Academic qualifications</b>		
Matric	1	11%
Bachelor's	3	33%
Honours	2	22%
Master's	3	33%
<b>Deployment Area</b>		
HQ (RSA)	7	78%
SA Missions abroad	2	22%

Table 4 above indicates the following biographical characteristics of the respondents: Firstly, the ethnicity background shows that five, the majority (56%), are of African ethnic background, followed by three who are White (33%) and one Indian (11%) from the respective ethical backgrounds. The years of experience show that most of the respondents (56%) have 11-20 years while 44% have 21 years and above working experience. The academic qualification profile

indicates that 33% held bachelor's and master's level degrees respectively and 22% had honours degree level qualifications. The deployment area profiles show that the majority (78%) were based at the Head Office in South Africa while 22% were in South African missions outside of South Africa

#### 4.2.2 Ethnicity

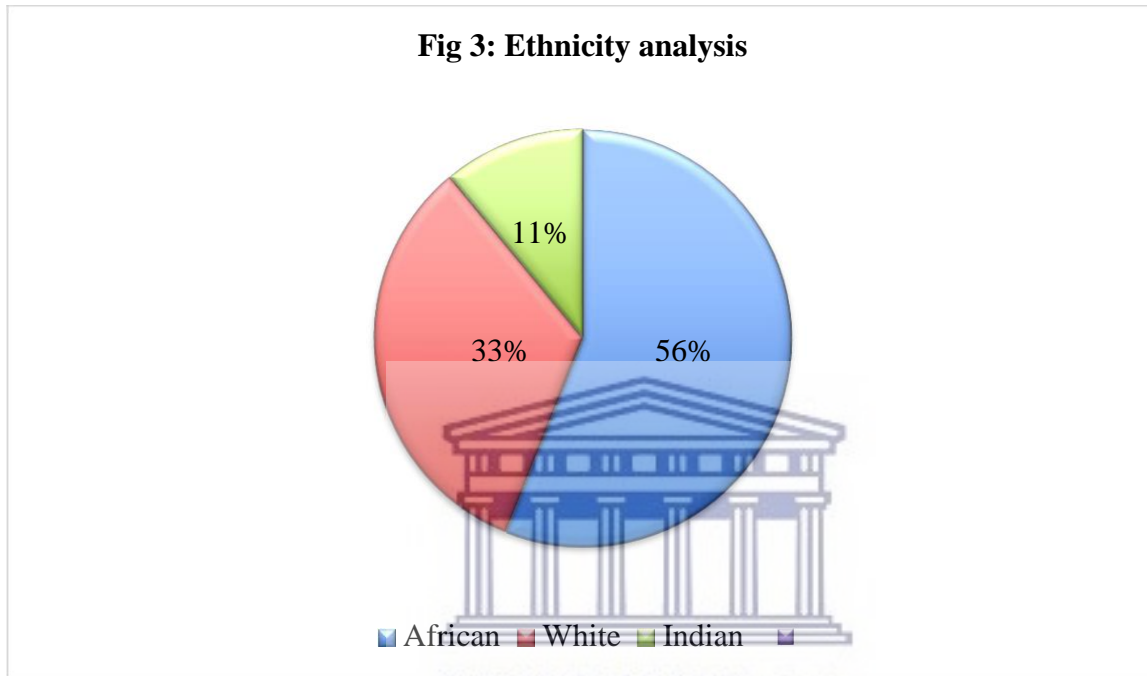


Figure 3 indicates that the majority of the respondents (56%) were from the African ethnic group while Whites constituted 33% and the Indian ethnic category were 11% of the study.

### 4.2.3 Work experience

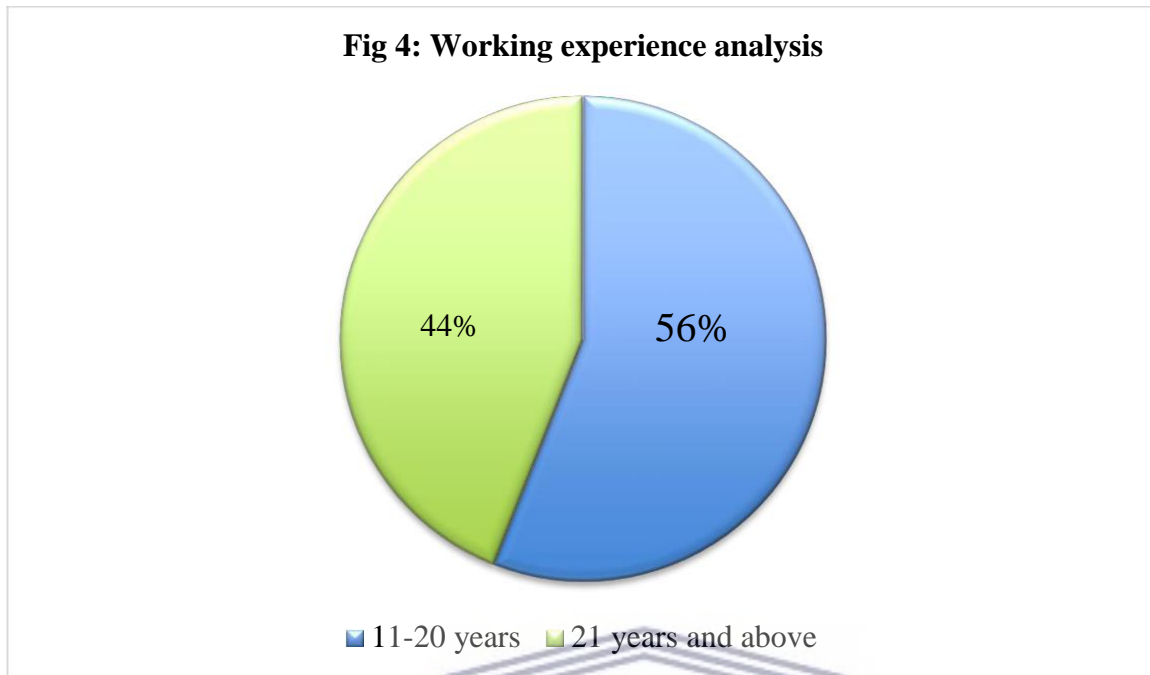
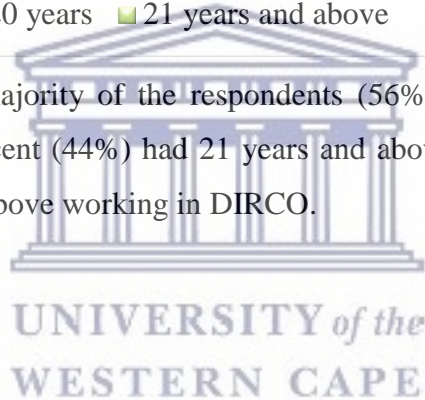


Figure 4 above indicates the majority of the respondents (56%) had 11-20 years of working experience while forty-four percent (44%) had 21 years and above years of experience ranging from 0-5 years to 21 years and above working in DIRCO.





#### 4.2.4 Academic qualification

**Fig 5: Academic qualification analysis**

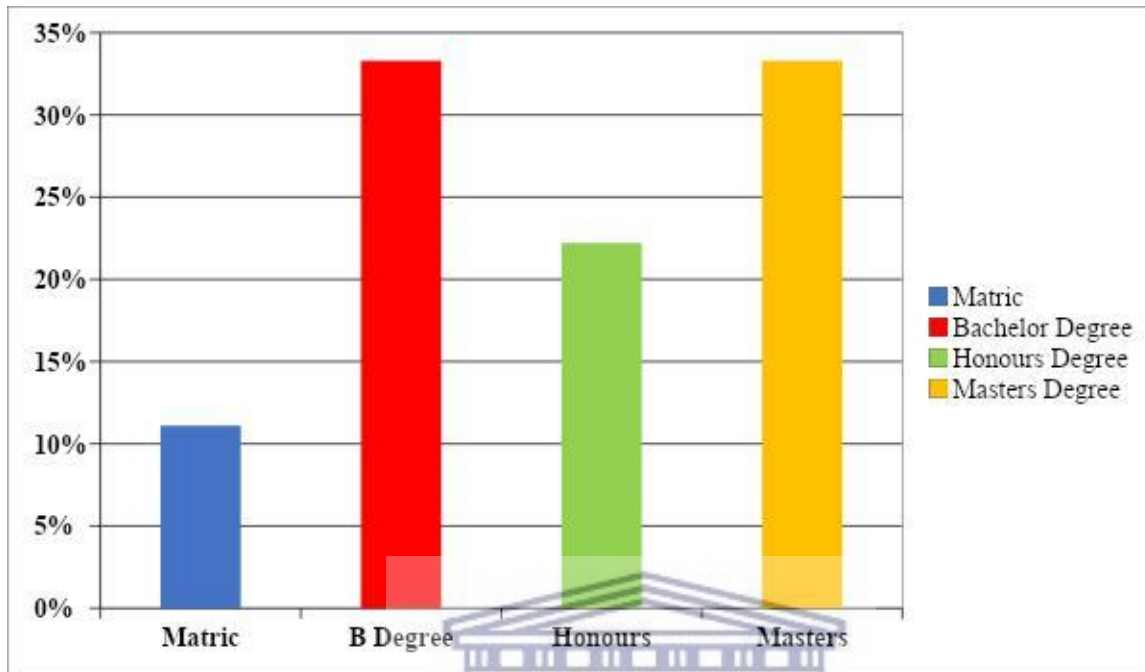
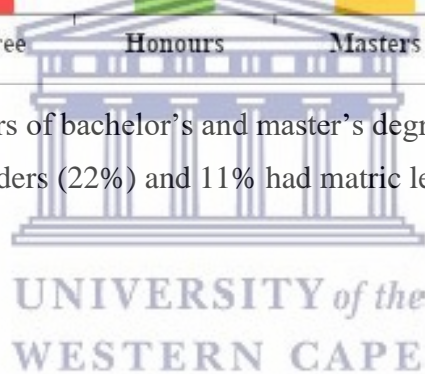


Figure 5 above shows that holders of bachelor's and master's degrees constituted 33% respectively, honours degree holders (22%) and 11% had matric level qualifications.



#### 4.2.5 Deployment area

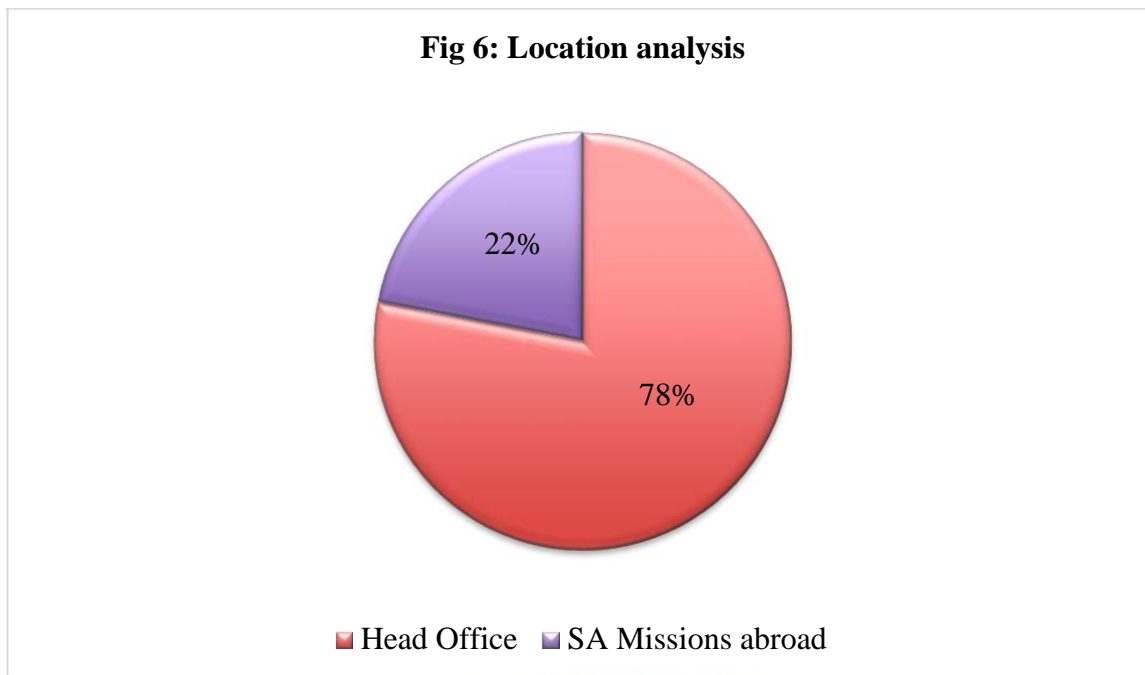


Figure 6 above indicates that the majority of the respondents were based at the DIRCO Head Office, in South Africa, and 22% were located in different South African diplomatic missions abroad.

#### 4.2.6 Area of business

The table below indicates that the majority (67%) of the respondents had line function (core business) responsibilities within the Foreign Service division, 33% of whom worked in Administration (Support Service). The majority of the respondents (6) were from Foreign Service and three from the Administration functional area.

**Table 5: Branch and functional area**

Participant	Branch/Area of business	Functional Area
P 1	Global Governance & Continental Agenda	Foreign Service
P 2	Protocol & Consular Services	Administration
P 3	Africa	Foreign Service
P 4	Africa	Foreign Service
P 5	Africa	Foreign Service
P 6	Director-General	Administration
P 7	Africa	Foreign Service
P 8	Chief Operations Officer	Administration
P 9	Africa	Foreign Service

**4.2.7 Organisational designation**

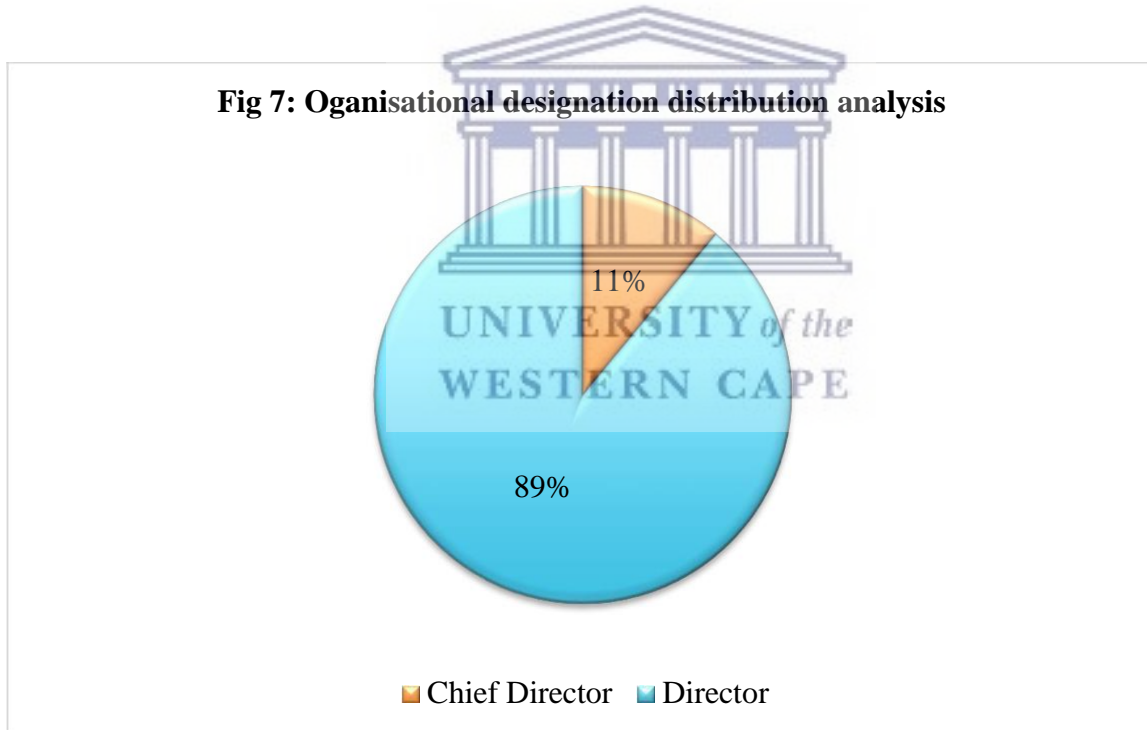


Figure 7 above shows that the majority of the respondents (89%) were designated as Directors, and 11% were Chief Directors within the DIRCO organisational structure. Respondents consisted of a diverse representation in terms of branches and/or areas of business within DIRCO.

### 4.3 Data Analysis

To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, the respondents were assigned codes. For example, Respondent 1 is represented by the code “PR”, and respondent 2 is represented by “PS”:

**Table 6: Assigned codes**

Code	Characteristics/details
Respondent 1 – PR	The researcher gave her the nickname Lily, a flower name. She is white, occupies a Director role, with over 21 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in line function.
Respondent 2 – PS	The researcher gave her the nickname Daisy, a cheerful flower. African, Chief Director role working in line function with over 21 years of working experience in DIRCO.
Respondent 3 – PT	The researcher gave her the nickname Lotus, an aquatic flower. White, Director role with over 21 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in line function and currently serving as a Head of Mission abroad.
Respondent 4 – PU	The researcher gave her the name Jasmine, a fragrant flower. White, Director role with 37 years’ experience in DIRCO. Working in administration.
Respondent 5 – PV	The researcher gave her the name Hibiscus, a flower with bright petals. African, Director role with over 11 years

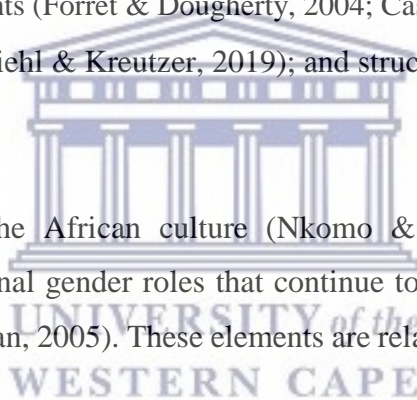
	of working experience in DIRCO. Working in line function.
Respondent 6 – PW	The researcher gave her the nickname Dahlia, a flower of Mexican and South American origin. African, Director role with over 11 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in administration.
Respondent 7 – PX	The researcher gave her the nickname Orchid, known as an elegant flower. Indian, Director role with over 21 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in line function.
Respondent 8 – PY	The researcher gave her the nickname Iris, a beautiful violet flower. African, Director role with over 11 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in Life Administration.
Respondent 9 – PZ	The researcher gave her the nickname Periwinkle, a quick-spreading flower. African, Director role with over 11 years of working experience in DIRCO. Working in line function and currently serving as a Head of Mission abroad.

Content and thematic analysis were used to code and develop themes. A theme refers to a subject or topic presented in written work and describes relational ideas from the data (Bazeley 2018). The themes that emerged from the data provided the analytical framework for analysing the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The themes that emerged in the data analysis were as follows:

*Institutional factors* include organisational culture (Schein, 1985); norms and ways of doing things by members in an organisation that distinguish them from any other organisation (Jaques, 1951; Hofstede, 2005); set of work styles, beliefs, values and systems that differentiates one organisation from another. These factors are collectively associated with artefacts, societal value systems, beliefs, values and basic assumptions of organisations (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019). Institutional/organisational factors are among the significant barriers impeding the advancement of women in most organisations (Feldman & Msibi, 2014). There are organisational culture elements that tend to favour a particular gender while excluding the others (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019).

*Individual factors* include work-life-balance (Saina, Pio & Rumawas, 2016); networking and how it enhances the building, strengthening and intentionally sustaining connections with others with a view to furthering personal career objectives (Wolff & Moser, 2017), and facilitates access to critical career-building resources, strategic insights (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2014; Greguletz, Diehl & Kreutzer, 2019); and structural barriers (Greguletz, Diehl & Kreutzer, 2019).

*Sociocultural factors* include the African culture (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009); and historic stereotypical beliefs and traditional gender roles that continue to regard women as mothers and homemakers (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). These elements are related to the beliefs and behaviour of people (Masovic, 2018).



## 4.4 Main findings

This section presents the analysis, findings and discussion on institutional factors followed by individual and sociocultural factors, respectively.

### 4.4.1 Institutional factors

#### 4.4.1.1 The nature of diplomatic work

All the respondents cited the nature of diplomatic work as a significant challenge and subsequent barrier to the career progression of women. Respondent PT stated that:

*Diplomacy is a 24-hour profession.*

This culture of working around the clock was cited as prohibitive for women employees who have family responsibilities. The findings support Aggestam & Towns (2019), who reported the male-dominant culture of diplomacy as a practice and its influence on the inevitable recurrent pattern of over-representation of men in the profession of diplomacy. Similarly, Respondent PS highlighted the challenges faced by women in diplomatic service when she fell pregnant and had to travel overseas on duty for two months:

*The organisation could not guarantee me that my pregnancy would be supported medically during my assignment overseas. Basically, I was being told, you are on your own.*


The findings echo observations by Conroy, McDonnell and Holzleitner (2018) on challenges faced by women on international assignments that compete with family responsibilities in terms of the often-short notice given prior to departure and duration of the assignment. The findings indicate that diplomatic work perpetuates gender inequalities (James & Sluga, 2015) and the belief that foreign services and diplomacy are traditionally male dominated. This to some extent reinforces the view that implicitly or otherwise, foreign affairs ministries have been resistant to women entering the diplomatic field (Towns, Kreft, & Niklasson, 2018).

For women, expatriation competes with family responsibilities and tends to be stressful (Collings & Isichei, 2018) thus undertaking international diplomatic assignments as a family unit can be

problematic as it usually requires one's partner to give up continuity in their own life (Collings & Isichei, 2018). The decision to relocate to undertake an international assignment can be regarded as a source of work-family conflict as the family life is uprooted from its domestic location to another location abroad (Lirio, 2014). Thus, the decision to accept international relocation for work tends to be difficult as employees may be required to also their partner careers into consideration as well before taking a decision (Hutchings, Lirio & Metcalfe, 2012). Diplomacy involves travelling internationally, as part of the job to visit foreign projects, business units and international markets (Welch, Welch & Worm, 2007), which include attending meetings, conferences, and engagement with foreign stakeholders on an ongoing basis (Collings & Isichei, 2018) which is related to high levels of stress (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007).

Three respondents (33%) reported that organisational factors contributed towards the slow progression of women into senior leadership roles.

PV highlight the situation as follows:



*Being able to even take up the post became a mammoth task in terms of getting the necessary approvals, even though I did incredibly well in the interview.*

In her view, even though she had a proven track record of brilliant work performance, getting a promotion into a senior leadership role was hard. The respondent further stated that it was much harder to progress into senior leadership roles for young women.

#### **4.4.1.2 Organisational culture**

Organisational culture refers to a set of common beliefs and values shared in an organisation which influence how people think, perceive and act (Schein, 1985); and to norms and ways of doing things by members of an organisation that distinguish them from any other organisation (Jaques, 1951; Hofstede, 2005). Hofstede (2005) further defines organisational culture as a set of work styles, beliefs, values and systems that differentiates one organisation from another.



Respondent PY highlighted the manifestation of the organisational culture with respect to the career progression as follows:

*Openly, they talk about empowerment, but somewhere behind closed doors, you don't see the empowerment happening. Organisations can be brutal, I am not saying that DIRCO is, but I think it's inherent in every work environment or organisation, where there are certain decisions taken at an executive level. However, the people who implement those decisions would just follow what they have been instructed to do. That has been the history or what we have been accustomed to, that only men or women who do not have children would be given opportunities.*

PR described her experience as a woman working in DIRCO as very fulfilling, as having joined DIRCO straight from university was a very empowering experience. She referred to her tour on duty in New York and serving at the United Nations during South Africa's first term as a Non-Permanent Member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

*My experience in New York really asserts my career for life.*

PW stated that having joined the organisation from the private sector, she did not find it easy to adapt to the organisational culture. This was expressed as follows:

*When I started, it wasn't so easy, especially in my line of work and being a young woman, getting into an environment where the majority of senior management was male.*

PY highlighted that she never felt they belonged in DIRCO:

*I never felt I belonged in DIRCO, purely because I came from a state-owned enterprise. DIRCO is very hierarchical. People tiptoe around people, purely because of the position they hold and the influence they have.*

She pointed out that in her previous job she was afforded the opportunity to interface with people who were more senior to her in terms of rank. Further noting that in her previous job as a Deputy Director, she was able to call a meeting with a Chief Director or a Deputy Director-General and be able to provide policy guidance. However, that kind of interaction in DIRCO is different due to the fact that the position one holds is valued more than what one contributes as a person. PY additionally shared her experience as a woman having been unfairly treated by other women and that she started experiencing the unfair treatment when she progressed to a senior leadership role. She expressed this as follows:

*It only got to be tough when I became a director and worked with a woman who was insecure and used her position, my bad experience was not with a man, but it was actually a woman who treated me badly.*

Based on the quotation above, an inferiority complex by a woman senior manager was also highlighted by one respondent PY, which was noted and acknowledged. One respondent also commented on how people are feared based on the position they occupy, as opposed to the value they add to the work. I believe this is as a consequence of the male-dominated culture that women in the organisation are being exposed to. This was also noted, as it is in line with the social identity theory; in this case, women in senior leadership roles may lack confidence and feel isolated and uncomfortable. While the observations from PY are acknowledged, they cannot be used to generalise. However, the observations are helpful, as they provided an understanding of what PY had to endure under the leadership of a woman who does not treat other women with respect.

The finding above also signals challenges facing some women in leadership roles, the psychological effect of self-doubt, and doubt from their subordinates and peers. The finding indicates that although women are represented in senior leadership roles, there still exist several stereotypes, which not only include organisational bias, but also insecurities based on individual bias. To some extent, the findings on gender-to-gender mimic masculinity among females which in turn legitimises existing gender barriers (Moalusi & Jones, 2019).

PU referred to her personal experience with being sexually harassed and indicated that it seemed that when issues of sex are raised in DIRCO, there is an unwillingness to address them. While acknowledging the positive changes over the years since joining DIRCO at the junior level more than thirty years ago, PU cited the pervasive challenges of sexual harassment and how that impedes the career progression of women: She explained this as follows:

*My career has been quite a happy and very successful one. Since 1996, we have seen quite a shift as far as women are concerned. However, there are a number of underlying issues that still need to be addressed, such as sexual harassment.*

The findings support Graham, Grennan & Harvey (2019) on organisational culture elements that tend to favour a particular gender while excluding the other, with bias towards male employees (Nemoto (2013 and potential negative effects on female employee performance, behaviour, creativity and innovation, knowledge management, learning and development (Giorgi, Lockwood, Glynn, 2015). Feldman and Msibi (2014) argue that the leadership of the organisation influences and shapes the organisational culture and how the same unintentionally and unconsciously influences a number of procedures in an organisation as well as its success (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1991). Similarly, the organisational culture influences the productivity and commitment within the organisation (Martin & Siehl, 1983; Sørensen, 2002).

#### **4.4.1.4 The glass ceiling phenomenon**

The glass ceiling phenomenon refers to unacknowledged barriers or sets of obstacles to the career progression of women and people of colour (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Respondents reported the presence of unacknowledged impediments to the career progression of women in senior leadership roles in DIRCO. This was aptly stated by Respondent PZ as follows:

*My experience working in DIRCO was not good when I started, because I was placed in Branch Africa, which was male dominated. I felt alone, with nobody to talk to.*

Regarding the appointment of males as ambassadors, PU said,

*This is just one example of how at times, women are not valued in DIRCO.*

Most of the respondents highlighted that DIRCO was a male-dominated and challenging environment for women and particularly for those joining outside without diplomatic experience. The narrated reality by respondents reflects observations by Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum, (2018) and Towns (2020) on the military roots of the diplomatic profession when male diplomats were appointed as envoys to represent their respective countries.

PZ described her personal experience when she found herself in a situation where she had no one to talk with to share what she was experiencing at the time. She indicated that it would have been better if she had other women to talk to about the challenges. She further stated that depending on rank, women's views are not always valued in meetings:

*If you are a director, ooh well! they might listen, but if you are a Chief Director or Deputy Director, then they will listen.*

All the respondents reported that women tend to be overlooked when it comes to promotion despite having the qualifications and relevant experience. They pointed out that men are prioritised when it comes to ambassadorial appointments. PS referred to her own experience that despite having been a Chief Director with three years' experience she was appointed as a Deputy Head of Mission whereas male colleagues who were junior to her were appointed Ambassadors.

She expressed the experience as follows:

*That experience was purely based on my skin colour, because the white counterparts who are entering DIRCO at the same level as me, while I was more experienced, yet they were coming straight out of university.*

The racial dimension cited above supports Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) who reported that African female leaders experience subtle discrimination, which hinders their career progression. In addition, Dlamini (2016b) emphasises that black women experienced greater oppression during the years of colonialization and apartheid in South Africa. Booysen and Nkomo (2010) contend that the intersectionality of race, class, and gender have interconnected influences on each other and should be analysed together. It was also noted that due to its ambiguity and little understanding, subtle discrimination is difficult to detect and remediate, or even address (Jones, Arena, Nittrouer, Alonso & Lindsey, 2017).

PR reported the shift towards recognition of women in DIRCO as both the Minister and Deputy Minister were women during the period this study was conducted. Despite these changes, PR pointed out that:

*We still have a long way to go, some initiatives have started to get women into senior leadership roles, but it is still not where it's supposed to be.*

PR reported that the trend is as follows:

*Yes! I think we do have a gender-inclusive culture in the senior leadership.*

Most of the respondents reported that they had witnessed women coming up into senior roles with the highest leadership committee in DIRCO, known as the Director-General's Forum, having women, such as the acting COO and female Deputy Director-General. However, they pointed out that gender balance is still lacking in DIRCO.

PY stated that DIRCO is male dominated:

*In general, DIRCO is man heavy and also in its approach to things.*

PV referred to a time when they were interviewed for a director position:

*My interview panel for the director position was all male.*

Notwithstanding the gender imbalance, some of the respondents pointed out there is proactive awareness within DIRCO regarding the promotion of women and recognition of International Women's Day where the Minister sends out messages to all women in DIRCO as well as the celebration of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence (GBV). According to the respondents, the campaigns at creating awareness of women's rights and gender equality have become more and more visible in DIRCO.

PR indicated that as senior management in DIRCO from a substance point of view:

*We do take a gender-sensitive approach when we make decisions, even when we craft our country's positions on issues in multilateral forums, even the Minister is quite sensitive about those issues. Therefore, when there are issues related to development, peace and security issues or even elections, we are very strong to say 'let there be a gender mainstreaming perspective into all these priorities.'*

PR further stated that DIRCO has integrated gender mainstreaming into its foreign policy and that this is clearly reflected in its Strategic Plan, Medium Term Strategic Framework, and Departmental Annual Plans (DIRCO, 2020). The respondent further indicated that the National Development Plan, African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or UN 2030 have also ensured that gender is mainstreamed in all issues. The findings indicated that DIRCO through its foreign policy mandate shows a commitment to gender diversity, equality and representation. Additionally, the Minister as the political head, supported by the Acting Director-General as the accounting officer, is championing the promotion of gender equality. The proactive shift towards the inclusion of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda in foreign policy focus and peace diplomacy is in line with similar efforts in countries such as Canada, Australia, Sweden and Norway (Aggestam & Towns, 2019).

The findings reflect observations by Towns (2020) who points out that despite the growing numbers of women in Foreign Affairs departments in recent years, the majority of ambassadors in diplomatic positions are men. This is further supported by Osituyo (2018) who reported the impact of workplace barriers on the career progression of female employees within the South African public service sector. Oladele and Adenika (2013) report the influence of the glass ceiling phenomenon on the career advancement of women at higher organisational levels despite their possessing suitable formal qualifications, relevant experience and skills (Nekhili & Gatfaoui, 2013).

The glass ceiling phenomenon reported in this study correlates with the literature that points to the consequences of gendered social systems designed by men and work roles categorised by gender, which permit discrimination and stereotyping (Thams, Bendell, & Terjesen, 2018). Women remain voiceless even after breaking the glass ceiling as they continue to be overlooked for promotion and occupy supportive work roles, while their male counterparts have the freedom to exercise their power (Motshegwa, 2013; Eagly, 1987). Thus, the glass ceiling effect is still prevalent and prevents the advancement and representation of women in higher decision-making structures in organisations (Moraka, 2015).

Moraka (2015) further pointed out that even though the prospects for the development of women are improving, the glass ceiling effect still exists in contemporary organisations. Both public and private sector organisations have largely failed to employ, retain and promote women to senior roles at the same rate as their male counterparts (Cho et al., 2015). (Victor & Shamila, 2018) state that the consequences of the glass ceiling include demotivation of women and low productivity. Overall, the findings concur with Omotayo, Oladele, & Adenika, (2013) that the glass ceiling effect impacts the advancement of women, thereby accounting for the low representation of women in decision-making roles in organisations. Although the status of women in senior leadership roles in South Africa has improved compared to the past decade, breaking through the glass ceiling still remains a challenge (Hlebela & Mpehle, 2020).

Change may be slow in South Africa which inherited a system characterised by disparities and gender imbalances that favoured men (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). However, legislation requires organisations to implement equal opportunity clauses in their organisational policies that prevent prejudicing employees on the basis of colour, race, ethnicity or sex for any employment opportunities (Hlebela & Mpehle, 2020). Notwithstanding the organisational initiatives to redress the situation, the glass ceiling effect is one of the main hindrances to the career progression of women into leadership positions in the workplace (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016; Shrestha, 2016; Booysen & Nkomo, 2010)

#### **4.5 Upward career mobility and diplomatic posting**

The majority of respondents mentioned the lack of promotional opportunities as one of the barriers preventing women from progressing to senior leadership roles in DIRCO. PR mentioned that what matters more in DIRCO is not so much about upward mobility but access to a diplomatic posting which provides better financial earnings. The potential financial earnings influence the interest of women in taking up diplomatic postings abroad instead of waiting for promotion to senior leadership roles. While PX pointed out that even though posting has some financial benefits for employees, most of the respondents stated that for women in DIRCO, taking up a diplomatic posting abroad is a temporary option due to the scarcity of promotional opportunities in senior leadership roles.

PR stated the status quo as follows:

*There are two types of diplomats, there are those who say, 'I want to go out on a diplomatic posting abroad after every two years.' So, for these officials, career progression in terms of rank might not be a priority for them. Some officials prefer serving abroad rather than being stationed at head office.*

The respondent added that:

*Then you get the other one like me, who in my 22 years at DIRCO, I only had one diplomatic posting abroad. Because when I came back to South Africa, I asked myself whether I wanted to go back abroad or wait and see whether any prospects for promotion are there.*



Respondent PR explained that according to the DIRCO recruitment policy, employees on diplomatic posting abroad are not eligible for promotion unless an employee is left with six months of their posting abroad. She added that the unavailability of promotional posts and the lack of certainty as to when posts will be advertised is frustrating and demoralising for employees, especially women. All the respondents mentioned that the lack of vertical progression is worsened by the absence of a succession plan, talent management or a career path policy in DIRCO.

## **4.6 Individual factors**

### **4.6.1 Work-life balance**

Work-life balance enhances employee satisfaction and achievement of harmony between work and private life responsibilities (Saina, Pio & Rumawas 2016). Research evidence highlights that organisational pressures result in women and men devoting more time to work roles, which often leads to work overload, long working hours and unstructured social hours (Vasumathi, 2018). Thus, the need for organisations to adopt flexible working arrangements that enhance better work-life balance for employees (White & Maniam, 2020).

Most of the respondents highlighted that work life-balance has been a challenge. The majority of respondents felt that the need to balance work and family life might be the reason why there are only a few women taking leadership opportunities in DIRCO. However, PT had a different view and pointed that:

*When one woman makes the decision to choose family over career success, this does not mean all women want the same thing.*

PW points out that occupying a senior leadership role has affected her personal life. She describes the situation as follows:

*Having to juggle the travelling responsibility that comes with work, for example, as a mum, I can never say that I am 100% there for my two kids.*

This supports observations by Munn and Chaudhuri (2016), who reported the difficulties faced by women in balancing work and family demands and that work-life balance among employed married women remains a challenge (Reddy, Vranda, Ahmed, Nirmala, & Siddaramu, 2010).

PW added that:

*My husband had to be a father and a mother to our children at the same time. For my husband to see me come back home for a few weeks and go again, you can imagine what that does to him.*

PW pointed out that the job was not only demanding but required one to also consider their spouse whenever an opportunity for a diplomatic assignment abroad presented itself. She indicated that making the decision to go abroad with or without her family involved planning for the future of every family member including their partner's career.

This draws out the challenges faced by female diplomats trying to start families and cope with career pressures compared with their male counterparts (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum 2018). In most cases spouses of male diplomats are inclined to accompany their partners on diplomatic assignments abroad and fulfil the role of a diplomatic spouse, as opposed to spouses of female diplomats who generally do not agree to take up a break from their careers during their partner's diplomatic assignments abroad (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung & Skirton, 2014).

#### **4.7. Sociocultural factors**

Social stereotyping creates expectations on what women can and cannot do (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017). Societal values limit the access to education for women leading to high illiteracy levels that preclude women from participating in leadership roles (Gouws (2008). Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) pointed out that in African culture men take the lead and women follow which reinforces the masculinity view on the role of women in leadership within the African organisational context.

#### 4.7.1 Sociocultural factors and career growth

All nine respondents agreed that sociocultural factors make it difficult for women to progress and felt that society expects them to act and behave in a particular way. PX expressed her experience:

*I've been asked on several occasions, why do I wear the hijab and why do I choose to dress as a Muslim woman, especially in light of the position I hold.*

PX further indicated that she has heard remarks that are not politically correct from senior leaders regarding her adherence to the dictates of her faith and social values. She explained that on one of the foreign trips when she led an official delegation for South Africa, she encountered a person of senior stature in an African country who did not recognise the role that women can play. She recalled that the individual quizzed her delegation leadership as follows:

*Why does South Africa send women and children to lead delegations?*

She further explained that she felt that comment was an insult to her and the South African government. She noted that she was encouraged by trends in countries such as New Zealand, that elected a young woman Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern who carried her baby to parliament and was still able to run a country during the period this study was conducted.

Emphasising the sociocultural stereotypes on the role of women PW pointed out that:

*Women are expected to mother kids, bath, cook and feed her family, and her husband is seen as the breadwinner and the head of the family.*

Most of the respondents were of the view that social and cultural stereotypes impose conditions and expectations on how women should carry themselves, especially that males should be the head of the family. Some respondents indicated that the removal of sociocultural stereotypes would result in transforming the mindsets of the organisation, organisational culture and management practices.

PZ pointed out the presence of sociocultural beliefs and stereotypes apparent in the working environment. She indicated that in cases when she was the only woman in a meeting with male colleagues:

*They expect you to serve them tea or coffee during breaks*

Relatedly, PX pointed out that she was once mistaken for the spouse of one of the Heads of Mission while she was attending a conference of Heads of Missions.

PT recounted that she was told by another woman ambassador while performing her duty as a corporate service manager in one of the SA Missions abroad which involved a security-related function that:

*A Head of Mission at one point who was also a female said to me that a woman cannot be a security manager, because it is too dangerous for a woman and that if I was dealing with any security issues, she insisted that there must be a male colleague with me. I found that extremely surprising, especially coming from another woman, questioning whether I was a senior that I was basically not up to the task of being security manager as well.*

She further stated that:

*I think if we have to be honest with ourselves, the South African cultural approach to women is quite a chauvinistic one.*

Most of the respondents pointed out that sociocultural factors constrain the progress and career aspirations of women in leadership roles (Hofstede, 2010). Societal expectations put pressure on women, especially those women who are career-oriented (Hofstede, 2010). However, all the respondents noted that some progress has been made over the years in DIRCO, whereby a growing number of women occupy senior leadership roles.

#### 4.7.2 Ethnicity and cultural groups

Rashed (2017) stated that employees from specific tribal affiliations are treated differently than employees who belong to other affiliations.

Respondent PV and PY reported that both males and females tend to progress on the basis of their tribal affiliations rather than merit. They further indicated that tribal affiliations and ethnicity seem to influence promotion and progression within the organisation. They further stated that influential individuals from particular tribes and ethnic groups tend to advance the promotion and progression of their kith and kin in DIRCO.

Respondent PV expressed the situation as follows:

*If you look at the ethnicity issue in the department, you can tell under whose tenure a certain tribe seem to have made serious inroads and progressed because of cultural “comradism” and familiarity from people who come from either the same region, who speak the same language and have family relations. If you do look around DIRCO, you would see that this is a factor.*

She added that:

*even if there is a change of administration and another administration comes in, the modus operandi remains the same.*

Respondent PY stated that it does not matter whether one was a man or woman. What matters sometimes is whether one came from a particular cultural community, such as Xhosa, Afrikaner, or Indian. She noted the presence of pockets of ethnic influence at the top that determines whether one would progress or not:

*It really depends on the cultural group that would have the influence at a particular point as to whether they value the role a woman plays or not.*

She further indicated that based on particular cultural beliefs, married women were denied opportunities to grow professionally. Thus, women are categorised on the basis of their socially identified gender and cultural expectations that protract from inequality (Barker, 2012).

Most of the respondents were of the view that ethnicity, tribal affiliations, cultural identities and political party affiliation to some extent influenced the progression of women into senior leadership roles. PU pointed out that the deployment of Heads of Mission was based on political affiliation, as a growing number of political appointees were brought into DIRCO from outside and appointed to positions of Ambassadors and High Commissioners. Respondents were of the view that it was unfortunate that not everyone was afforded the same opportunities, as it seemed that the appointments being made were based on political affiliation, which then impacted the career progression of women in senior leadership roles in DIRCO.

#### **4.8 Mediating factors**

South Africa has promulgated laws, legislative mechanisms and structures that promote gender equality in the workplace and society at large. Subsequent amendments to relevant laws and emerging legislative frameworks in South Africa have created opportunities for the empowerment of women (Ndweni & Ozumba, 2021).

The respondents acknowledged the role of the legislation in creating gender equity and advocated for the advancement and empowerment of women in society in general and the workplace in particular.

PR expressed the status quo as follows:

*I don't think that laws have anything to do with this challenge. I think we are one of the most progressive countries in the world. We have the most liberal constitution which ensures women's equality and representation at all levels.*

All the respondents do not see the legislation as a barrier to the progression of women. Instead, they believe that the legislation supports gender equality (Goetz, 1998; Kahn & Motsoeneng, 2014; Doorgapersad, 2016).

Overall, the main findings have highlighted the existence of institutional, individual and sociocultural factors that hinder the career progression of women in DIRCO.

The next section presents a summary and interpretation of the main study findings.

#### **4.9 Discussion: Summary and Interpretation**

The primary study findings have highlighted the negative influence of institutional/organisational, societal cultures and individual factors on the career progression of women in the male-dominated diplomatic profession. More significantly, the male-oriented nature of diplomatic work, an organisational culture that perpetuates the glass ceiling phenomenon, ethnicity and cultural biases are the main barriers to the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The mediating role of the South African laws and legislation on the advancement and empowerment of women is recognised as a significant contributor to the progression of women in DIRCO, as evidenced by women who continue to occupy Deputy Director-General positions. However, no woman has ever been appointed Director-General in DIRCO under the democratic government.

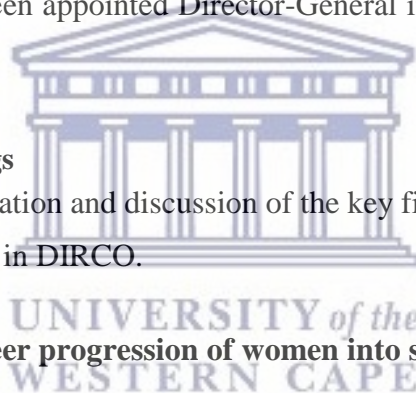
#### **4.10 Interpretation of Findings**

This section presents an interpretation and discussion of the key findings on factors that influence the career progression of women in DIRCO.

##### **4.10.1 What influences the career progression of women into senior leadership roles?**

###### **(i) Organisational culture and career progression**

This comprises prevalence of beliefs, values and basic assumptions (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019), work styles, beliefs, values and systems (Hofstede, 2005). The study identified beliefs and shared values around the male-oriented nature of diplomatic work, and apparent discrimination against women for senior leadership roles and deployment to foreign missions despite having the requisite qualifications and experience. The apparent and unconfirmed sexual harassment and exclusion of



women as well as the sporadic promotion of women are all indicative of a male organisational top leadership (Feldman and Msibi (2014) which unintentionally and unconsciously influences a number of processes within an organisation (Wallace, Hunt & Richards, 1999) detrimental to the career progression of women in the organisation.

**(ii) The glass ceiling phenomenon and career progression**

Women in this study with relevant experience and educational qualifications were overlooked for promotion, even in favour of male juniors. The lack of promotion and upward career mobility was due to unacknowledged barriers or a set of impediments that the organisation failed to address (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Gender-based discriminatory practices were evident in the study and negatively impacted the career progression of women into senior positions such as Ambassador roles and related senior leadership roles.

**(iii) Sociocultural factors**

Social stereotyping creates expectations of what women can and cannot do (Bear, Cushenbery, London, & Sherman, 2017). The women experienced social pressures which impeded their progression and confidence in working within the masculine work context. Respondents from African ethnic origins expressed challenges with assuming leadership roles at work and at home to earn more money as well as uprooting the family in pursuit of career progression, due to the African cultural beliefs that men should take lead as head of the family (Nkomo & Ngambi (2009); respondents from the Muslim ethnic group felt uneasy wearing their religious hijab garment at work. Some of the women reported that leading DIRCO delegations within the African continent raised similar social stereotypes inherent in the African culture among the respective African senior leaders who expected males to lead DIRCO foreign delegations.

**(iv) Ethnicity and cultural grouping**

The study further revealed that ethnicity, tribal affiliations, cultural identities and political party affiliation implicitly and explicitly influenced the career progression of women in DIRCO. The observations by Dlamini (2016a) that as well as race, women experience sexism and prejudice informed by race, ethnicity, age and social class were evident in the study.



**(v) Individual Factors**

The nature of diplomatic work involving international travel and after-hours engagement caused work-family tensions for most of the respondents in the study. Further, constant relocation and uprooting of families was not favourable for the progression of women. For the respondents in the study the work-life imbalance denied them prospective promotion opportunities which affected job satisfaction and achievement of harmony between work and private life responsibilities (Saina, Pio & Rumawas 2016). Respondents who adopted coping mechanisms reported work overload, long working hours and unstructured social hours (Vasumathi, 2018) and the inability of DIRCO to adopt flexible working arrangements for women employees (White & Maniam, 2020).

The nature of diplomatic work, sociocultural stereotypes and the work-life imbalance significantly impacted the ability of women to create networks and build relationships crucial for career progression (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010; Socratous, 2018). The respondents were of the view that their male counterparts were able to make use of networking opportunities to strengthen their career progression (Glass & Cook, 2016).

**(vi) Mediating Factors**

The South African legislature has promulgated laws that enshrine equal rights for women, promotion and advancement in public and private organisations, as well as related social and economic spheres. The positive impact on career progression was cited by all the respondents in the study, notwithstanding the slow process. However, respondents referred to the appointment of a female Minister and her Deputy to lead the Department of International Relations and Cooperation as a positive sign and commitment by the government and public at large with respect to gender equality.

**4.10.2 Does gender influence career progression in DIRCO?**

The study has identified barriers and challenges impacting the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The gender-based discriminatory barriers hindering the career progression of women (Stead, 2013) include firstly: institutional/organisational factors which include the institutional work roles framed as male related jobs (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz,

1995; Duberley, Carrigan, Ferreira & Bosangit, 2017), and the nature of diplomatic work and the organisational culture. Secondly, the imbalances between work and family for women who have to cope with the demands of motherhood and social stereotypes of the role of women embedded in the social-cultural fabric. These factors restrict their career mobility and participation in labour markets (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Thirdly, the dominant social-cultural stereotypes perpetuate unfair discrimination against women (Castillo-Mayén & Montes-Erges, 2014), account for the dominance of males in specific positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the under-representation of women and over-representation of males in senior leadership roles (Mihalčová, Pružinský & Gontkovičová, 2015; Cundiff & Vescio, 2016).

#### **4.11 Summary**

This chapter presented the study findings and discussion on the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO, further, to interpreting and discussing the study findings within the context of the literature and empirical research evidence. The next chapter presents the study conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5. Introduction

This chapter presents recommendations and conclusions of the study as well as proposals for further research. The recommendations of the study are based on the perspective of themes. Literature was reviewed, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed in order to answer the research questions. Both the data collection and data analysis approaches allowed the researcher to understand the career progression on women phenomenon within the context women already in senior leadership roles within DIRCO and further allowed the participants to share their own personal experiences.

#### 5.1 Conclusions

##### 5.1.1 Conclusion on Research Question 1

*RQ1:* The nature of career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO, South Africa.

Notwithstanding the evidence of increasing numbers of women progressing into senior leadership roles in DIRCO in compliance with legislation on gender equity, empowerment barriers and challenges still exist which require proactive top management attention. The main barriers and challenges identified in the study include institutional factors, specifically, the indoctrinated historical dominant masculine nature of the diplomatic profession was constant across the case study. The male dominance is supported by an organisational culture and work role practices that are biased towards males, thereby failing to reflect and ensure gender equality. This historical male dominance explains the evidence on the perpetuation of inequality and the status quo in DIRCO.

### 5.1.2 Conclusion on Research Question 2

**RQ2:** The factors influencing the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO.

Although entry into the workforce tends to be easy for women, their progression slows down after the middle level and in most situations, regardless of their technical and professional qualifications or achievements, women are prevented from progressing to reach the top.

The male-oriented organisational culture in diplomatic work is one of the main factors impeding the progression of women. The subsequent glass ceiling phenomenon is evident and pronounced in political cadre deployments to take up diplomatic roles at Ambassador level, which in the majority of cases results in the side-lining of career women professionals in DIRCO, regardless of whether the political appointees are male or female. Sociocultural factors inherent in the African culture influenced women from progressing in a masculine work context. The study further revealed that ethnicity, tribal affiliations, cultural identities and political party affiliation implicitly and explicitly influenced the career progression of women in DIRCO.

Individual factors influenced the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO and that the lack of gender sensitivity in the diplomatic field found to be amongst the reasons why women opt not to take up senior leadership roles. More significantly, the nature of work involving constant travelling, and after-hours engagements weigh against work-life balance imperatives for female employees across the board. Similarly, family demands, and timing create barriers for females who have to contend with raising children and the challenges of uprooting spouses to take up posting abroad. Lastly, the study found that the mediating factors were found to have a positive influence on career progression on women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. Collectively, the study found that the above-mentioned factors tend to influence women from progressing and taking up senior leadership roles.

### **5.1.3 Conclusion on Research Question 3**

**RQ3:** The barriers and challenges to the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO.

Whilst there are a number of barriers and challenges to the progression of women advancing into senior leadership roles, the research results revealed that institutional/organisational, sociocultural, as well as individual barriers and challenges do impact the progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. The nature of diplomatic work and the organisational culture, sociocultural factors within the diverse South African society were found to create barriers to the career progression of women as stereotypes on the role of women in society and religion have great import in organisational work practices and processes. Moreover, ethnicity, tribal affiliations, cultural identities compounded by political cadre deployment are found to be amongst the barriers and challenges that hinder women from progressing and as a result they are under-represented in senior leadership roles in DIRCO. Thus, the motherhood stereotype within the social context potentially restrains women from taking up senior leadership roles which entail long working hours and taking up roles socially considered the preserve of males. The overall assessment of the research findings indicated that institutional/organisational, sociocultural, as well as individual factors are some of the barriers and challenges that were identified in the study. The barriers and challenges manifested themselves in the form of perpetual unfair discrimination against women in DIRCO.

## **5.2 Overall Conclusion on the study**

These aims and objectives of the study were achieved as significant information was collected with regards to deepening and broadening the understanding of the phenomenon. Specifically, this study sought to explore the progression of women into senior leadership roles using a qualitative approach through a case study of the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation. At the outset it was established that although South Africa has made progress towards empowerment and advancing gender equality in the last 27 years, there is a need for research. In addition, limited research has concentrated on women's career progress into senior leadership roles in the South African public sector.

The research objectives of the study were to firstly, explore the nature of career progression of women into senior leadership roles in the South African public service, focusing on DIRCO. Secondly, to identify factors influencing the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO. Lastly, evaluate those identified barriers and challenges to the progression of women and draw recommendations for policymakers, key stakeholders, and future research.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Based on this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### **5.3.1 Organisational culture change management**

It is recommended that more care should be taken by DIRCO in establishing an organisational culture where women, in general, are treated equally to men, recognised and catered for, for example through gender policies and practice, recruitment and promotion, placements abroad, training opportunities, etc. The data further revealed that even though the organisational structure reflects women as being adequately represented, some respondents reported that their contributions were sometimes overlooked. Therefore, it is proposed that women who are already occupying senior leadership roles should also be able to contribute to shaping the organisational culture to create an environment that is inclusive for women. This can also plant a seed in DIRCO for more women to think of progressing to more senior leadership roles.

The findings confirmed that diplomacy is a profession that is gendered and that it favours masculinity, despite 21<sup>st</sup> century innovations. Women senior diplomats are still rare, which confirms that diplomacy remains a gendered institution. Masculine culture therefore remains prevalent, which as a result constrains female diplomats and turns a blind eye to matters of gender in the conduct of diplomacy. Additionally, the findings also suggest that gender discrimination does exist in organizations and that equal opportunities are not provided for women in the workplace. Despite these findings, respondents remained positive and motivated about the progress made thus far in advancing the careers of women in senior leadership roles at DIRCO.

### **5.3.2 Talent management & succession planning**

There is a need to have a succession planning policy in order to recognise and promote meritocracy within DIRCO. It is further recommended that through effective talent management, DIRCO can ensure that more competent and qualified women can progress into senior leadership roles. The talent management plan should include recruitment and placements, training, performance management and a development system. Additionally, talent management plans may assist in encouraging more women to avail themselves for senior leadership roles without having to feel they might end up being another token appointment. This will have an impact on individuals regarding their potential career achievements, which as a result also affects their self-efficacy and their choices in making critical career decisions.

### **5.3.3 Accelerating the proposed criteria for placement of Senior Management Service (SMS) members abroad that would be incorporated with the placement policy**

The Branch Corporate Management in DIRCO, supported by the Sub-Directorate: Placement, should review the current Placement Policy and the criteria for placement of SMS members in missions abroad. Once a review of the Placement Policy has been undertaken, the revised policy must be circulated throughout DIRCO, including missions abroad, to reach all its employees, even those who are not SMS members. In accordance with Section 5(3) of the Foreign Service Act (No. 26 of 2019), all Heads of Mission must be fit and proper persons, the importance of having relevant knowledge, skills and experience; and the Act also highlights that the diversity of South Africa must also be considered when making appointments. Therefore, standalone criteria should be incorporated into the departmental Placement Policy. The proposed criteria for placement should attend to the immediate and future vacancies.

Lastly, the proposed inclusion of standalone criteria should be applied when appointing a Head of Mission which will ensure that a competent, capable and professional diplomatic corps is able to advance South Africa's foreign policy objectives through the nomination of suitably trained and qualified SMS members for transfer to South African missions abroad.

#### **5.3.4 Capacity development for women in DIRCO**

There is a need for a capacity development programme for women only. This will empower women to understand and clarify their career ambitions, strengths and leadership skills in preparation for advancement into senior leadership roles. The internal training and human resource development structures should be in cooperation in the design of a women's leadership capacity development programme in consultation with the National School of Government (NSG).

#### **5.3.5 Mentorship support programme for women in DIRCO**

The organisation should introduce mentorship programmes for women, as this is one of the enablers of career progression for women into senior leadership roles (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). A mentorship programme could assist in easing the transition and prepare the ground for those women who aspire to take up senior leadership roles in DIRCO. This should include mentorship support, with regard to which respondents indicated that in the past, women would simply be assigned a mentor or a mentee without taking the functional areas into consideration. One respondent indicated that a mentor who was mostly in line function/foreign service would find themselves with a mentee who was in support function/administration, which in turn created misalignment. It is therefore recommended that a mentorship support programme that is based on mutual interest between the mentor and mentee be developed by the Directorate: Gender and Diversity Management in DIRCO. The lack of mentorship support may lead to women who progress into senior leadership roles being left to work out things by themselves.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for further research**

This study contributes to the growing body of empirical research evidence on career progression into senior management roles in the public sector and the private sector in general. Future research should explore the reality in other public sector departments and ministries as well as conduct comparative studies within the public and private sectors for the same category of women. Findings from this qualitative study could be enriched by future studies adopting different methods and sample sizes for different categories of women.



## 5.5 Summary

This chapter presented the conclusions on the nature of the career progression of women and the factors constituting barriers and challenges to advancement into senior management roles in DIRCO. The recommendations focus on areas for attention by management and key stakeholders to enable the advancement of women. The key areas cited include proactive organisational culture and practice change programmes, women-centred capacity development, and mentorship programmes. The insights from women occupying senior leadership roles on their shared lived experiences working in DIRCO pointed out critical barriers and challenges that require commitment by DIRCO as it strives towards enhancing gender equality and women empowerment across all organisational levels. This study has achieved its main objective in providing insights into the lived experiences of women in senior leadership roles in DIRCO.



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## **Appendices**

**Appendix A:** Approval by the Ethics Committee

**Appendix B:** Approval by the Acting Director-General of DIRCO

**Appendix C:** E-mail request to participate in a research study

**Appendix D:** Consent Form to participate in a research study

**Appendix E:** Research Instrument





UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE



20 October 2021

Mr MJ Kola  
School of Business and Finance  
**Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences**

**HSSREC Reference Number:** HS21/8/19  
**Project Title:** Progression of women into senior leadership in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)  
**Approval Period:** 18 October 2021 – 18 October 2024

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology, and amendments to the ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

**Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for the duration of the project.**

For permission to conduct research using student and/or staff data or to distribute research surveys/questionnaires please apply via:  
<https://sites.google.com/uwc.ac.za/permissionsresearch/home>

*The permission letter must then be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.*

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

*Ms Patricia Jozias  
Research Ethics Committee Officer  
University of the Western Cape*

NHREC Registration Number: HSSREC/J10416-049

Director: Research Development  
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international relations  
& cooperation

Department:  
International Relations and Cooperation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Mr Malose Kola  
Student: Masters in Commerce (M. Com)  
University of the Western Cape  
E-mail: [malosek9@icloud.com](mailto:malosek9@icloud.com)

Dear Mr Kola

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION**

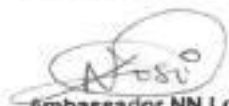
Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the Department of International Relations and Cooperation towards your postgraduate studies, provided ethical clearance has been obtained.

The Department notes your research topic as "Exploring factors influencing the career advancement of women into senior leadership roles in the South African Public Service: a case study of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)" and that participation in the study is voluntary.

Permission is subject to adherence to all government policies and procedures. Our organization will assist the student in anyway possible in order to obtain the required information.

Kind regards

UNIVERSITY of the  
WESTERN CAPE

  
Ambassador NN Losi  
Acting Director-General  
Date: 14/04/2021

Ngqiso ye Yelizwe le Inkamandla ye Dimeji ye Dikotheshiphele • Letapha le Zibamano le Yeholobhokiso Oshelengiso ka Madzabisi • Letapha le Dikamant  
le Dikotheshiphele le Thixo • Umnyango Wezokufakwa-Nakulawintsho kaNcwadi-Ncwadi • Likho Letokolokwane Bemise kanye Nakulawintsho  
zama • Iibhe lezokufakwa nakulawintsho yezizwe ngamaZwe • Umnyango kaThixo-wozom nakulawintsho kaNcwadi-Ncwadi • Mkhawulo ka  
Yelizwe ka Dikotheshiphele ka Yeholobhokiso • Mkhawulo ka Yeholobhokiso ka Madzabisi • Depelwele ka Yeholobhokiso ka Madzabisi ka  
Batho Pele

**Batho Pele - putting people first**

## Appendix C

Dear Madam

My name is Malose Kola, First Secretary: Political in Kigali. I am writing to you in my private capacity as a Masters student (M. Com) in the School of Business and Finance (SBF) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

It is my humble wish to invite you to participate (individually) in my research project entitled “Progression of women into senior leadership in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)”. The research project is part of my studies towards a Masters Degree in Commerce (M. Com) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

The study involves completing basic demographic information and an online video recorded interview. The semi-structured interview should not take more than 30 minutes at most.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I believe that your wealth of experience and participation will make an invaluable contribution towards generating a solution-based knowledge in the subject matter which could help the organisation in supporting women who aspire to occupy senior leadership roles.

For ease of reference, I have attached herewith all relevant documents such as Consent Form to be complete and signed by prospective candidate, Ethical Clearance Certificate, Gatekeepers Letter duly signed by the Acting Director-General, Ambassador NN Losi and information sheet to prospective participants. Please note that Ambassador Losi's letter grants me permission to conduct the study in the department.

If you do agree to participate in this study, I kindly request you to respond and indicate to me with a suitable date and time in order to secure the interview.


A separate e-mail will then be forwarded with a Teams Meeting link.

Thanking you in advance.

Kind regards

**Malose Kola**  
**+27 84 953 1718**





**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & FINANCE**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project: Progression of women into senior leadership in the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).**

Y/N

The study has been described to me in language that I understand.

My questions about the study have been answered.

I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will.

I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

I agree to be [videotaped/audiotaped/photographed] during my participation in this study.

I do not agree to be [videotaped/audiotaped/photographed] during my participation in this study.

Participant's name.....


Participant's signature.....

Date.....

**Student contact details:**  
Malose James Kola  
Email: [4177063@myuwc.ac.za](mailto:4177063@myuwc.ac.za)  
Tel: +27 84 9531718

**Supervisor's contact details:**  
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Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences  
University of the Western Cape  
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**Head of Department contact details:**  
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W: <http://www.uwc.ac.za/>

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Appendix E

**Section A: Biographical Information**

Ethnic origin:

African Coloured

Indian

White

2. Year of working experience in DIRCO 0-5

years

6–10 years

11–20 years

21 years and above

3. Highest Qualification

Matric

University Degree/Diploma

Honours Degree

Master Degree


Doctoral Degree



4. Branch/Area of business currently stationed at?

.....

## Section B

1. Tell me about your experience as a woman working in DIRCO?
2. Do you think that women are adequately represented in senior leadership roles in DIRCO?
3. Do you think DIRCO has a gender inclusive culture in its senior leadership?
4. What are the factors influencing the progression of women in senior leadership roles in DIRCO?
5. How are those factors influencing the career progression of women into senior leadership roles in DIRCO?
6. In your view, which of the following factors hinder the progression of women to leadership roles:  


1. Organisational, 2. Socio-cultural, 3. Individual and, 4. Mediating factors)?
7. Do you think occupying a leadership role has affected your personal life in any way?
8. What recommendations do you propose that can assist women to progress into senior leadership roles?

Thank you for participating in this research.

Should you have any queries please contact Malose James Kola at [4177063@myuwc.ac.za](mailto:4177063@myuwc.ac.za); +27 84 9531718