

Perceptions Held Towards African Female Leaders in The Financial Services Industry Based on Schein's Descriptive Index (SDI)

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Abstract

Previous researches indicate a lack of representation of women within leadership roles. This presupposition is a universal phenomenon requiring extensive focus. Within the South African context, this lack of representation is exacerbated by the intersection of race and gender, against the backdrop of the historical context. Legislation and organisational practices have made progress in increasing race and gender representation in leadership roles within organisations, however, the pace of progress is slow, and barriers remain pervasive. Within the financial services industry, and banking specifically, organisations seem Western and predominantly represented by white males in leadership, thus making the advancement of African females into leadership roles a challenge requiring further attention. This paper examines the perceptions held towards African female leaders within the financial services sector, with special focus on the banking industry. A quantitative approach was employed through the distribution of questionnaires based on Schein's Descriptive Index (SDI). The results were analysed through factor analysis and indicated three factors considered to be positive and thus perceived as characteristic of African female leaders and two factors considered to be negative and thus perceived as non-characteristic of African female leaders.

Keywords: African Female Leader, Banking Financial Service, Perceptions, Schein's Descriptive Index.

Introduction

The scarcity of females in leadership roles in organisations is a global phenomenon, with transformation policies and practices a global focus in attempts to achieve gender and race equality. Within the South African context, the need to address race- and gender imbalances is widely recognised. This means that South Africa has placed substantial focus on enabling all to enjoy full labour and economic participation (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). Within the organisational context, where representation of previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs) continues to be a challenge; this has translated into legislation and human resources (HR) practices to encourage the transformation of the workforce to one that embraces diversity and equitable representation.

Understanding the progress organisations have made in addressing the imbalances of the past and achieving representation in their organisational structures, specifically regarding females in leadership, has generated greater attention. These imbalances created challenges for those previously disadvantaged, such as poor access to education and employment, resulting in disparities that have had an impact on, especially, representation of African females in leadership roles.

The number of females in leadership positions in South Africa is growing, as indicated by the females in Corporate Leadership censuses of 2006 and 2011 (Business female's Association of South Africa (BWASA), 2011a). Compared to its international counterparts, South Africa is displaying greater representation of females as directors and executive managers; however, the pool of female executive and non-executive directors remains small (BWASA, 2011a). Despite the intervention of legislation and employment equity targets and guidelines, the ratio of male to female leaders remains unbalanced, with companies across various industries having been shown to have less than 30% female senior managers. This percentage is higher in government institutions, where females occupy 35% of senior management roles (BWASA, 2011a).

The focus of the present study is on African females in leadership positions in the financial services industry, with a specific focus on the banking industry. The term 'African' as it is employed in the present study relies on its use in the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, where the term 'Black people' is considered a broad term that refers to Black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians. The study aims to gain a better understanding of how African female leaders think they are perceived, as well as how they are, in fact, perceived.

Historically, in South Africa, African females have been viewed as subservient. This perception is not aligned with the traditional perception of a leader, who is generally perceived to be White and male (Stanley, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to understand African female leaders within the South African context.

Meagre empirical literature exists on African females in the leadership domain (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). An intentional focus is required to understand African females in leadership roles in South Africa in the context of the country's history, societal expectations of females, practices to promote the advancement of females, dilemmas of work-life balance, as well as cross-gender and race relationship dynamics.

Background

In a context where the development of African female into leadership roles is deemed an imperative and aligned to diversity and transformation, talent management, and economic and labour participation, it is important to understand the impact of perceptions of African female leaders on these females, as well as the female leader-employee relationship. HR practices such as diversity awareness, transformation programmes and targets, leadership development programmes, and talent management are designed to promote the development of previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs), with a specific focus on female. These practices are implemented to foster

a culture of inclusion of those previously disadvantaged, and their impact, therefore, cannot be excluded. An understanding of cultural context and the impact of the country's history on the experiences and progress of African female leaders is indeed crucial.

On a societal level, several governing laws have been implemented to encourage representation within the South African work context. The Employment Equity Act has played a critical and substantial role in this regard, leading the efforts towards representation and equity in organisations. The Act provides guidelines of expectations regarding representation in organisations and defines the parameters of discrimination and affirmative action measures. The implementation of these guidelines for representation at senior level has raised questions regarding tokenism and merit, as well as the ability of PDIs to perform these roles and whether excellence is being sacrificed for the sake of employment equity. Broad-Based Black Economic empowerment (BBBEE) as a practice came into effect in South Africa in 2003, in an attempt to address the imbalances of the past, but the benefits of BBBEE have been enjoyed mainly by Black males (BWASA, 2011a). The disparity in the experiences of genders is especially evident in the greater representation of males in senior positions, as well as the overall reaping of financial benefits from this legislation.

The issue of correcting inequality requires dedicated societal and organisational focus. So important is the issue of representation, that there is an emergent request for gender diversity to become non-negotiable within organisations and be a pre-requisite for organisations being listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) (BWASA, 2011b). Appropriate policies and legislation are imperative in creating equity, as is evident from South Africa's improved representation. Societal influences are translated to organisations, and it is important that these influences are mirrored in organisations' policies. It is this interplay of societal and organisational influence that will drive the required shift. Understanding African females in management and leadership is an area that requires considerable research (Nkomo and Ngambi, 2009). Acquiring empirical knowledge has great importance for the development of theory regarding African female leaders within the South Africa context, to enhance the knowledge of academics, practitioners, managers, and organisations. This knowledge will enable them to identify the appropriate interventions to drive and support the representation of African females as managers and leaders in South African organisations, which will directly impact their labour- and economic participation.

The industry in which individuals work also contributes to the experience of African female leaders; the specific focus of the present study is banking within the financial services industry, due to the tremendous pressure it has been under since the economic downturn. The management of financial institutions and whether different management approaches could have prevented the global economic crisis is one debate that has arisen (Nelson, 2011). The financial crisis has had a significant impact on the economy and organisations, and organisations within the financial services industry have had to place greater emphasis on surviving the crisis. Therefore, leadership styles that may contribute to recovery, such as innovation and stimulation should not be restrained. Greater representation in leadership positions may provide the required leadership behaviours after the financial crisis (Desvaux, Devillard, and Sancier-Sultan, 2009). The relationship between individuals and organisations impacts gender identities, thus the need to look at aspects of the organisation's role (Ely and Padavic, 2005, 2007). Different types of organisations may lend themselves to differences in the way in which females undertake leadership positions (Eagly and Carli, 2008).

In the South African context, 10.5% of the contribution to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and 4% of employment representation come from the financial services sector. Of the financial services sector assets, banking represents just over 50% (Banking, 2012). Major contributors to the total banking assets are the four primary banks in South Africa, namely ABSA, Nedbank, Standard Bank, and FirstRand (which comprises First National Bank (FNB), Rand Merchant Bank (RMB), Wesbank, and Ashburton). Combined, they represented approximately 84% of total banking assets at the end of June 2012. With this representation, a considerable amount of employment is provided by the four major banks. The banking sector in South Africa employs 150 000 people, with the four major banks employing over 95% of this population.

Financial services play a significant role in the sustainability and growth of the South African economy. Research conducted by Fasset in South Africa in 2009 indicated that females constitute 48% of all professionals, and that 34% of females are managers. In 2007, according to Fasset, the percentage of African females in executive and senior management in the financial services sector was 3.4%, a growth of 1% from the 2003 result of 2.4% (Fasset, 2009). This illustrates the limited representation of Black females in the financial services industry. It is therefore important to understand how African female leaders are perceived.

Research Problem

African females were previously disadvantaged through a lack of full labour participation. This resulted in limited representation of African female leaders in senior leadership roles in organisations. This imbalanced representation formed the basis for the introduction of legislation and transformation and organisational practices to encourage the participation of African female. These practices to encourage participation have met with arguments regarding the eligibility of females to fill these senior roles, whether there is any merit in the leadership styles of females, and whether African female leaders can be good leaders.

Research aim and objective

The primary objective of this paper is to explore perceptions held in the financial services industry about African female leaders.

Literature Review

This section contains the literature review of the study.

How females are perceived

In defining perceptions, these may be considered as a process through which people shape and infer their sensual imprints in order to make sense of the environment they live in, which results in peoples' perceptions of their reality that impact their behaviour (Robbins, 2005). In considering what contributes to people's perceptions, several factors may be at play such as their situation, aspects within the perceiver themselves, or aspects of the target (Robbins, 2005). When it comes to forming decisions about others, people focus on observing behaviour, and from this they try to ascertain if it is internally or externally caused, which is referred to as attribution theory. The challenge with attribution theory is that individuals are inclined to undervalue the influence of external factors and, in turn, they overrate the effect of internal factors in forming their judgments and opinions about others' behaviour. What may at times occur is that people exhibit selective perceptions, as they selectively deduce meaning from what they see based on personal factors such as personal attitudes, interests, experiences and background. Contracting this stereotype may occur when individuals

are not judged on merit, but rather on another's perception of the identified group with which the said persons are associated (Robbins, 2005).

Perceptions of females' effectiveness within managerial positions have globally continued to remain questionable, with undertones of negative and unfavourable references, as evidenced in British research studies such as Judge (2003 as cited in Anderson, 2013), whose article featured in *The Times*, titled, "Women on the board: Help or Hindrance?" In her study, Judge (2003 as cited in Anderson, 2013) argued that although females from Britain in leadership positions complied with Employment Equity (EE) initiatives for business and the community, female leaders were negatively impacting company performances, which were measured by the share price at the time. Studies like these by Judge (2003 as cited in Anderson, 2013) highlight invisible barriers, which hinder the growth of females in leadership positions and the perpetual negative perceptions of their ability to lead organisations.

An evidence-based proposal states that once placed into leadership roles, females' performance is judged quite harshly and is constantly under scrutiny, with often negative performance feedback (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). This can also be related to and seen when considering the concept of the "agentic penalty," which, according to Livingston, Rosette and Washington (2012), refers to the backlash that females in leadership positions suffer in reaction to their display of agentic behaviours such as assertiveness, dominance, competitiveness and other unyielding traits, which form part and parcel of leadership demands. Apparently, this agentic penalty occurs because these behavioural traits are perceived as being incongruent to the prescribed gender roles. Furthermore, Livingston, Rosette and Washington (2012) suggest that a predicament that female leaders and not their male counterparts experienced is being able to show emotions that are agentic, as well as similar behaviours, and not face judgement because of it. Even more significant is their explanation that African female leaders will undoubtedly face agency consequences, which are similar and probably more so than those that White female leaders experienced that exhibit agency. This factor can be related back to the theory mentioned in Chapter One and Schein's (2001) description of the 'think manager – think male' prejudice (p. 675); however, with the added connotation of racial bias. Hence, Livingstone *et al.* (2012) propose that it is in this context then that the perception that the White male represents the prototypical leader, applies; which further implies that it is plausible to assume agency disadvantage for Black females to be considerably greater, as neither their gender role nor their race is considered to be representative of the traditionally assumed leadership characteristics (Livingstone *et al.*, 2012).

Cohen and Broschak (2013) highlight the fact that the assumption is that females will have better performance feedback and success for feminine defined leadership roles, for example, when they occupy positions of leadership within Human Resources divisions; while conversely, for measures of leadership that are considered to be traditionally masculine, the effectiveness of females as leaders and their leadership approaches are often considered to be inferior to those of males. These kinds of biases and views stem from and encourage what Schein (2001) calls the 'think manager – think male' unfairness and prejudice (p. 675). This could, therefore, imply that there are likely to be more female leaders within more "feminine" or "support" areas, as they would be more positively received here. According to Cohen and Broschak (2013), views within the work environment and organisations indicate that employees prefer male supervisors over female supervisors; and that a significant number of male managers continue to be sceptical about the effectiveness and success of female leaders.

Interestingly, it appears that it is not only males in the workplace who hold such perceptions of female leaders, since fellow female employees, subordinates and colleagues also do. In South Africa's context it is even more complex and dynamic in nature because of the historically racial and ethnic disparities, which also play an influential role in gender and leadership stereotyping. Hence, it is important to explore an historical account of females.

Historical account of the development of females

Researchers that have engaged the topic of African female leaders are cognisant of the fact that females have been central to the survival and sustenance many societies for more than fifty years. They act as unpaid care-givers, organizers, innovators, shock absorbers as well as change agents. Women have always play these roles behind the scenes, while assisting their male partners (Dlamini, 2004; Amoateng and Heaton, 2007; Al-Krenawi, Graham, and Gharaibeh, 2011; Mbatha, 2011; Tamale and Bennett, 2011; Sanya, 2013 as cited in Dlamini, 2015). The roles that females have played have, therefore, been varied and diverse. Tamale and Bennett (2011 as cited in Dlamini, 2015) highlight that the representation of African females across all sectors of society have shown a significant increase from 1963 working alongside males. The reach and growth of females have been expansive across industry, as well as amongst layers of management and leadership.

Catalyst (2004) indicates that directors are critical in all sectors in terms of the role that they play in making decisions. They add significant value to the welfare of their organisations, as well as to broader society, based on their leadership mandate, which engenders trust. In addition, they provide fair direction and requisite recognition and compensation for everyone in the organisation. Directors are considered to be key leaders, whether they are in the public or private sector. Often, over the years, females have had to assume subordinate roles both at home and in the workplace; however, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen a gradual improvement in females holding managerial positions (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Additionally, the number of females that have broken the so called "glass ceiling" (Williams, 2013) can be observed from academia, where young females enrol for tertiary level courses within previously male dominated professional domains such as science, engineering, finance and technology.

The Grant Thornton International Business Report (IBR) (2013) explores the representation of females at senior levels within the corporate world, globally, and examines opportunities for growth in representation to become sustainable and to achieve equity. A latest survey, which explored the views and expectations of 13 000 large businesses that are privately managed, mid-sized and listed organisations from across 44 economies, indicates that in South Africa females occupy a quarter of top decision-making roles. This has been the status quo since 2009, which is inadequate with merely 28% of senior management roles being filled by females (IBR, 2013). Compared to international businesses, this situation does not appear to be unique to South Africa, as global averages show marginal improvements. Year-on-year there has been a promising 3-point growth globally amongst females in senior management, placing 24% of businesses with females in senior management positions (IBR, 2013). This shows recovery from the decline that was experienced previously, which may be somewhat attributed to the global recession. This means that although there was an increase since 2012, the growth has remained slow since 2009, with a 24% global representation (IBR, 2013). Currently, comprising 35% of the global workforce, the question at hand is whether females will ever be equally represented in the workplace (IBR, 2013).

Even with the growth of female representation at senior level, males continue to dominate representation. When considering the African context specifically, limited current data exists around females in management positions (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). Over the past 40 years there has been a significant general change in the representation of females, globally, with growth in their representation in leadership positions owing to greater volumes of females entering the working world; however, greater efforts must be made to progress the growth of females to senior leadership positions. The findings indicate that of those South African businesses that were surveyed in the IBR, 21% did not have females in senior management positions. Efforts from organisations to ensure gender integration at all levels has been said to be more achievable and visible in organisations that have higher proportions of female executives (Cohen and Broschak, 2013). The IBR also indicated that poor representation of females extends to board level positions, as South African boards only comprise 15% of female members, compared to 19%, globally, and 26%, in the BRIC economies (Hern, 2013). The challenges faced globally around representation of females in leadership also translate to the South African context; this is explored further in the next section.

Women in leadership within the South African context

From a South African government perspective, the prioritisation of females' advancement was indicated at the 2013 State-of-the-Nation address by then president, Mr Jacob Zuma, which had a specific reference and commitment to creating gender equality through the "Gender Equality and females Empowerment Bill". Improving the status of females within the South African context remains critical for government, hence the Gender Equality and females Empowerment Bill aims to promote the growth of females into decision-making roles and structures (Zuma, 2013). Further efforts by female executives, which have been geared towards the development of females, include hosting initiatives such as the "Women in Finance and Leadership Conference", which was held in November 2010, in South Africa (Brent Personnel, 2013). This conference addressed issues, which relate to female empowerment, gender transformation and its significance for finance executives. Furthermore, it explored ways in which females were fundamentally creating change and altering the business landscape in all sectors, and how the savviest companies were responding to this.

Despite increased progress made by South Africa in recent years in the growth and representation of females within the working context, there continues to be massive under-representation (Catalyst, 2004). In terms of female board directors, South Africa has a mere 7.1%, while Australia has 8.4%, Canada has 11.2%, and the US has 13.6%. This shows that compared to other countries, South Africa is a laggard (Catalyst, 2004). An area where the growth of females' representation was significant for South Africa was in the field of Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), which displayed a remarkable improvement from 14% in 2012 to 32% in 2013. The representation of females in Chief Executive Officer (CEO) roles, however, continues to be a challenge and remained low year-on-year with minor improvements (Hern, 2013).

In terms of planning to hire females in South Africa, local businesses were amongst the leaders, as they intended to hire more females in 2013, hence 32% of South African organisations indicated this intent compared to 17% BRIC organisations and 15% global organisations (Hern, 2013). A further strategy to appoint more females to senior management roles was used by employing talent management and additional programmes that recognise the various roles that females play and to allow for innovation. Flexible work arrangements are a means that were identified for South African businesses to use

to make themselves more alluring to females, hence 53% of South African businesses that were surveyed had flexible work arrangements in place compared to 67% globally, and 40% of the BRIC businesses, which proved significantly less flexible (Hern, 2013). Despite this, the representation of South Africans compared to global proportions indicate that South Africa ranks third in terms of organisations that hire females as senior managers and ranks eighth in terms of having females represented with opportunities and roles at senior management level (Grant Thornton International, 2013).

In their research within this realm, Grant Thornton surveyed the role of females in business for the last 13 years and state that 75% of South African organisations have hired females, offering them opportunities at senior management. The global average is much lower than this at 59%, while 26% of overall opportunities at senior management in South Africa currently have females occupying these positions, which in itself is 7% greater than the global average (Grant Thornton International, 2013). This reflects the notion that opportunities at senior management are available for South African females. However, there are still significant challenges that they face at this level, including achieving parity and reaching top management roles such as the C-suite and serving on the organisation's Board of Directors. These challenges and the like are what many refer to as 'the glass ceiling', which prevents them from obtaining the coveted top jobs (IBR, 2013). This reinforces the continued presence of a patriarchal society. The percentage of female board directors is, therefore, still low, portraying South African work environments as hindering females from attaining roles that allow them to be decision makers and to hold significant influence and authority in organizations. We continuously hear of equal opportunity in South Africa; however, it appears that statistically, through their reporting of representation, that some organisations in South Africa have not sufficiently evolved to empower females by affording them the ability to lead and manage, whilst they share broader leadership skills, knowledge and competence with females (Hern, 2013). This indicates that within the South African context, transformation has but touched the surface in raising consciousness about gender-based discrimination and injustice, whilst the barriers that exist in organisations for females' career advancement and opportunities for them to grow, remain; resulting in limited examples of females being placed in top positions within organisations. This affirms that implementation of employment equity measures and legislation in South Africa have not removed the pervasive bias in career mobility and promotion for females and segregation of work (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010; Hern, 2013; IBR, 2013).

The success of government quota systems that drive change is highly dependent on their implementation. When probed about whether they would support quotas to legislate greater representation of females being represented on executive boards of large listed organisations, it was encouraging to see that 60% of South African businesses that participated in the IBR indicated that they would support the quota system (IBR, 2013). The global comparison shows that a mere 37% of businesses that were surveyed were in support of government-enforced quota systems (Hern, 2013).

Race and gender stereotyping

Within leadership research there is a glaring gap in depth is that of studies that use race and gender as a lens through which to explore perceptions of females as managers. A consistent trend in current studies is merely to compare male and female perceptions (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). Prior to the work of Booyesen and Nkomo (2010), Tomkiewicz, Brenner, and Adeyemi-Bello (1998) is one of the limited research products that investigated race and managerial stereotypes

through Schein's index. These findings showed that there was a substantial similarity in feedback that was produced regarding those who are White, and the feedback from managers; however, when considering how respondents rated Blacks in comparison to managers, there was no alignment, hence producing insignificant results. These findings indicate that there is a case for race having an influence on managers' perspectives. The limitation that was identified was that the combination of respondents' race and gender was not explored (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010).

Examining gender and race concurrently, as proposed by intersectionality, means that a study of gender must include race, as perceptions and experiences are influenced by both, while development of identities is, therefore, based on the experience of both race and gender (McCall, 2005, as cited in Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). These identities can at times be contradictory and are influenced by context, with gender identity being presented as an intricate part of deeply ingrained identity based on race (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Andersen, 2005; McCall, 2005, as cited in Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). During an individual's life various identities are continually formed, reconstructed and reinforced, and these are influenced by society's structures and institutions. Within society gender incorporates connotations and is entrenched within the backdrop of racial categorisations, which have hierarchies and practices that privilege some groups and, conversely, subordinate others (Acker, 2006, as cited in Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010).

Variances in organisational positions are not located solely within gender and males and females' nuances but extend further to add influences of specific race groups, ethnic backgrounds and social status. This acknowledgement of interconnecting race and gender underlies the importance of social location and standpoint, which are two significant theoretical concepts (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). According to Booyesen and Nkomo (2010), social location is the position that a person occupies in society in respect of gender, race, sexual orientation, and so on. Depending on the power that one is afforded within a category, and how the categories intersect, social locations can be privileged and oppressed; hence behaviours and perceptions are influenced by where within society people are located, and the power or lack thereof, which is associated with this location (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). The second concept of standpoint has been described as an important view, which disadvantaged or oppressed groups could possess regarding the role of power relations within society, as the group's location in intersecting hierarchical structures creates the formation of standpoints and not individuals (Hill-Collins, 1998, as cited in Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010).

The experience of racism and sexism may also be lived and experienced in differing ways based on the individual's race and gender. The circumstance for Black females would indicate that their race and gender identities would afford them a different type of prejudice than White females or Black males, positioning Black females as potentially "invisible" (Davis, 1981; Bell, 1992; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008; Fryberg and Townsend, 2008; Sesko and Biernat, 2010, as cited in Biernat and Sesko, 2013). This view refers to proto-typicality, which can alter based on the number of varying characteristics that the individual is considered to have. This invisibility proposition indicates that Black females may face various discriminations, which may protect them from typical race and gender discrimination. The negative consequence, however, is that the invisible is less likely to be represented in community and their faces and contributions less recognised and acknowledged (Fryberg and Townsend, 2008; Goff, Thomas, and Jackson, 2008; Sesko and Biernat, 2010; Johnson, Freeman, and Pauker, 2012, as cited in Biernat and Sesko, 2013). The invisibility argument

indicates complexity in the lived experiences of Black females, which suggests that they do not have the same expectations of dominance as White females and Black males, hence they are less likely to experience negative reactions for displaying leadership behaviour that is dominant. In terms of this dominant behaviour, Black females and White males were judged alike, whereas it was less tolerated in White females and Black men; in other research there was little tolerance for failure amongst Black females than amongst others, with Black females leading unsuccessful organisations being judged more harshly as being ineffective in comparison to Black males, White males and females, in general (Rosette and Livingston, 2012; Livingston *et al.*, 2012, as cited in Biernat and Sesko, 2013).

While there is a gap in terms of research depth from an intersectional viewpoint and how it impacts leadership, as well as stereotypes around the combined contributions of race and gender as dynamics, there have been researchers who have studied the importance and implications of it within organisations (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Hite, 2004; Bell *et al.*, 2003; Acker, 2006, as cited in Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). Bell and Nkomo (2001) conducted research that explored how race combined with the aspect of gender to influence female managers' lived experiences, as well as their working lives and careers. This study considered both White females and Black females and the results showed that the experiences of the two groups differed, as well as their perceptions of challenges and blockages to their growth and ability to climb the corporate ladder. From the Black female group's perspective, the impact of racism as a barrier and sexism as a discriminatory practice, was described as an undesirable aspect of their workplace experiences. Conversely, the White females' group did not share this sentiment, as they cited having more opportunities and growth in their careers; however, they described notable obstructs to their career success, which were rooted in their gender. Based on the research, Bell and Nkomo (2001) conclude that Black females experience racism, as well as sexism daily in organisations, while conversely, White females are advantaged because of their race, but marginalised because of their gender. In considering Black feminist theory, Bell and Nkomo (2001, pp. 168-169) identified that relying on their heritage of being viewed culturally as strong Black females to produce the required positive assessments of themselves, was an approach that Black females used to allow themselves to tolerate the judgement and prejudice that they encountered daily within organisations (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). In the McKinsey (2017) North America study they identified that females' experiences are meaningfully shaped by the intersection of race and gender, since females of colour, particularly Black females, experience more hurdles, challenges and a steeper-path to travel in their leadership journey. These females cited less support and slow promotions as directly impacting on them, thus impacting their perceptions of access and opportunity for promotion.

There have been studies that were conducted on race and gender within the South African context. Booyesen (1999) describes notable differences in race and gender and how they impact peoples' views of their nation's culture, specifically those connected to "collectivism, gender differentiation, humane orientation and future orientation" (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). Littrell and Nkomo (2005), however, found in their study that there were no statistically significant differences in their work amongst the views of Black males and White males, and amongst the views of Black females and those of White females from their indicators when describing favoured leader behaviours. What is evidenced in this research to date is that research cannot depend on gender alone when considering organizational issues such as manager stereotypes, as it can be reasonably expected that the race and gender of an individual combined, and not merely gender alone, may in

fact influence perceptions that individuals and groups of managerial stereotypes hold (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). This, therefore, alludes to the fact that perceptions play a specific role, which requires further understanding, hence exploration of the role of perceptions.

Research Methodology

The study comprised the distribution of questionnaires based on Schein's Descriptive Index (SDI) composed of 92-items. A total of 415 individuals from the financial services sector responded, and the resultant data were statistically analysed. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

The means and standard deviations for the SDI were considered according to the respondents' perceptions of the characteristics of African female leaders. Table 1 below reflects the results of the respondents' perceptions of African female leaders based on their ratings of the 92-item SDI on a five-point Likert scale. On this scale, a score of 1 indicated *Not characteristic of African female leaders*, a score of 2 indicated *Somewhat uncharacteristic of African female leaders*, 3 indicated *Neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic of African female leaders*, 4 indicated *Somewhat characteristic of African female leaders*, and a score of 5 indicated *Characteristic of African female leaders*. The data for the 92 items they were sorted into smaller groups by calculating the mean for every item and then assigning it to a group based on the mean value. Items with $M > 3$ were grouped as positive or characteristic of African female leaders, and items with $M < 3$ were grouped as negative or not characteristic of African female leaders. The table below indicates the items that were characteristic of African female leaders and the items that are not characteristic or uncharacteristic of African female leaders.

Table 1. Positive and negative items; (respondents' perceptions of the characteristics of African female leaders)

Characteristic of African female leaders	Not characteristic or uncharacteristic of African female leaders
9 Neat	89 Demure
74 Self-confident	55 Dawdler and procrastinator
22 Intelligent	62 Not conceited about appearance
61 Ambitious	70 Nervous
8 Values pleasant surroundings	72 Hides emotion
82 Strong need for achievement	64 Hasty
81 Helpful	17 Devious
19 Independent	49 Shy
36 Competent	40 Aggressive
27 Talkative	88 Selfish
26 Sophisticated	83 Deceitful
91 Strong need for monetary rewards	85 Bitter
18 Interested in own appearance	38 Vulgar
39 Sociable	
31 Competitive	
33 Cheerful	
37 Understanding	
90 Kind	
58 Well informed	
23 Persistent	
92 Self-reliant	
1 Curious	
53 Humanitarian values	

3 High need for power	
66 Desires responsibility	
42 Grateful	
47 Objective	
15 Courteous	
28 Strong need for security	
67 Self-controlled	
41 High self-regard	
7 Leadership ability	
52 Intuitive	
16 Emotionally stable	
80 Tactful	
54 Knows the way of the world	
77 Assertive	
65 Obedient	
71 Direct	
50 Firm	
45 Aware of feelings of others	
69 Decisive	
84 Generous	
76 Steady	
2 Consistent	
73 Authoritative	
87 Skilled in business matters	
51 Prompt	
11 Creative	
34 High need for autonomy	
20 Desire for friendship	
4 Sympathetic	
24 Vigorous	
12 Desire to avoid controversy	
30 Analytical ability	
68 Modest	
86 Logical	
14 Frank	
35 Able to separate feelings from ideas	
63 Strong need for social acceptance	
75 Sentimental	
6 Adventurous	
57 Industrious	
32 Wavering in decision	
59 Not uncomfortable about being aggressive	
29 Forceful	
79 Dominant	
10 Uncertain	
60 Reserved	
43 Easily influenced	
48 Speedy recovery from emotional disturbance	
5 Fearful	
25 Timid	
78 Feelings not easily hurt	
46 Passive	
44 Exhibitionist	
13 Submissive	
21 Frivolous	
56 Quarrelsome	

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

Table 1, above, provides an overview of all the positive and negative items' ranking, ordered from highest to lowest, based on the mean value of ratings of African female leaders by respondents. Of the 92 SDI items, 79 items were perceived as positive characteristics, and therefore considered as typical characteristics of African female leaders, since these had mean values greater than 3, while 13 items were perceived as negative characteristics, and therefore considered uncharacteristic of African female managers, as these had a mean score of less than 3. The 79 items that were characteristic of African female leaders, as perceived by respondents, were: neat, self-confident, intelligent, ambitious, values pleasant surroundings, strong need for achievement, helpful, independent, competent, talkative, sophisticated, strong need for monetary rewards, interested in own appearance, sociable, competitive, cheerful, understanding, kind, well informed, persistent, self-reliant, curious, humanitarian values, high need for power, desires responsibility, grateful, objective, courteous, strong need for security, self-controlled, high self-regard, leadership ability, intuitive, emotionally stable, tactful, knows the way of the world, assertive, obedient, direct, firm, aware of feelings of others, decisive, generous, steady, consistent, authoritative, skilled in business matters, prompt, creative, high need for autonomy, desire for friendship, sympathetic, vigorous, desire to avoid controversy, analytical ability, modest, logical, frank, able to separate feelings from ideas, strong need for social acceptance, sentimental, adventurous, industrious, wavering in decision, not uncomfortable about being aggressive, forceful, dominant, uncertain, reserved, easily influenced, speedy recovery from emotional disturbance, fearful, timid, feelings not easily hurt, passive, exhibitionist, submissive, frivolous and quarrelsome. On the other hand, the following items (on the right of the table) were not typical characteristics of African female leaders, as perceived by respondents: demure, dawdler and procrastinator, not conceited about appearance, nervous, hides emotion, hasty, devious, shy, aggressive, selfish, deceitful, bitter and vulgar. To understand how ratings compared across the four groups of African female leaders, females, successful middle managers, and males that respondents were rating, the following section compares the differences and similarities in rating of African female leaders, females, successful middle managers, and males by respondents.

Overview of exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was performed as a dimension-reduction technique. The main ability of factor analysis is to clarify the relations that exist among a significant number of observed variables by means of a reduced composition of factors. The 72 positive items forming a positive group and 13 negative items forming a negative group of the SDI were exposed to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS Version 25. The varimax method was used. Before the PCA was performed, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was established. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO-MSA) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were performed to establish whether factor analysis was necessary. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the KMO index ranges from 0 to 1, with 0.6 suggested as the minimum value for a good factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity produces as its output a chi-square, whereby $p < 0.05$ indicates significance. The process of using factor analysis is positioned as the most suitable for this study (Taherdoost et al., 2014). Eigenvalues with a value of 1.0 and above were retained, and total variance extracted of 60% was considered. Factor loadings of 0.5 and above were retained in the rotated component matrix. The table below indicates the results

of the exploratory factor analysis of the positive characteristics that emerged from the data.

Exploratory factor analysis

For the positive group of characteristics, exploratory factor analysis was done, using the KMO-MSA (Kaiser, 1970) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity from which three factors were extracted. Factor 1 was called *Intrapersonal capabilities*, which focused on the behaviours occurring internally for African female leaders and related to themselves. Factor 2 was called *Interpersonal capabilities*, which focused on the behaviours occurring between African female leaders and others, or other variables. Lastly, Factor 3 was called *Internal derailers*, which focused on the behaviours that African female leaders exhibit that have the potential to become obstacles to their progress. Factor 1 contributed 36.692% of total variance explained, Factor 2 contributed 9.792% of total variance explained, and Factor 3 contributed 5.180% of total variance explained; the sum of the total variance explained was 51.664%, which was below the suggested threshold value of 60% by 8.336%. Factor loadings were above 0.5, meaning that these were important to the factors they are measuring.

With the Negative group of characteristics, the KMO-MSA and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were similarly applied, and two factors were extracted. Factor 1 was called *Destructive characteristics*, indicating behaviours that may have the ability to be harmful, and Factor 2 was called *Withdrawal characteristics*, referring to the potentially protective behaviours that may cause avoidance. Factor 1 contributed 47.647% of total variance explained, and Factor 2 contributed 11.74% of total variance explained; the sum of the total variance explained was 59.387%, which was slightly below the suggested threshold value of 60%, by 0.613%. Factor loadings were above 0.5, meaning that these were important to the factors they were measuring.

Factors uncharacteristic of African female leaders

Through the factor analysis process applied to the negative group of factors uncharacteristic to African female leaders, four items were deleted owing to low factor loadings, which showed that they did not measure what they intended to measure, leaving nine characteristics that emerged as two factors. The means that the characteristics in these two factors were all below three. In considering the attributes under these factors, and respondents' perceptions of characteristic and uncharacteristic behaviours of African female leaders, possible reasons are explained for those in the neutral category in the event of high neutrality, where applicable. The following figure provides a pictorial view of the uncharacteristic factors.

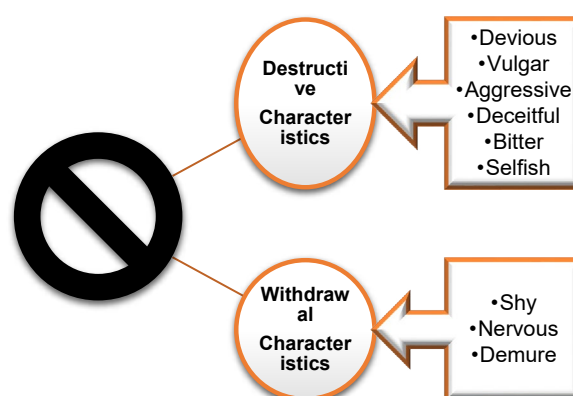


Figure 1: Factors that are uncharacteristic of African female leaders

Perceptions of African female leaders in relation to negative characteristics

The first factor that was identified relates to destructive characteristics. This refers to behaviours that may have the ability to be harmful. In relation to the characteristics under this factor, respondents indicated that African female leaders are not naturally devious, vulgar, aggressive, deceitful, bitter or selfish in their leadership approach, as reflected by the low mean scores. The second and final factor under the negative characteristics is withdrawal characteristics, which refer to potentially protective behaviours that may foster avoidance, or make African female leaders withdraw. In relation to these characteristics, respondents indicated close views in terms of whether African female leaders were perceived to be shy, nervous and demure in their leadership approach, which was indicated by the low mean scores.

Factors characteristic of African female leaders

Through the factor analysis process applied to the positive group or factors characteristic of African female leaders, a total of 39 items were deleted owing to low factor loadings, indicating that they did not measure what they intended to measure, leaving 40 characteristics, which emerged as three factors. The mean scores for the characteristics in these three factors were all three and above. In considering the attributes under these factors, respondents' perceptions of whether or not the behaviours are characteristic of African female leaders, are discussed, and possible reasons are explained for those who fall under the neutral category of choosing neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic in the event of high neutrality, where applicable. The following figure provides a view of the characteristic factors.

Perceptions of African female leaders in relation to positive characteristics

The first factor that was identified was intrapersonal capabilities, which refer to behaviours that occur internally amongst African female leaders, or inherently inside themselves, and, which relate to them. In considering leadership theory and application, these capabilities could be aligned to those of trait-based theories, which assume that individuals are inherently born with certain capabilities, talents, abilities, characteristics and attributes, which naturally make them more suitable to fulfilling leadership roles rather than leadership capabilities that are taught (Robbins, 2005 and Malos, 2012). They present a view of traits that are inherent in African female leaders as opposed to a measure of leadership effectiveness. In relation to the characteristics under this factor, respondents indicated that African female leaders are considered to display these attributes in their leadership approaches. The characteristics within this factor were considered to be descriptive of African female leaders, as mean scores under intrapersonal capabilities for African female leaders were moderately high to high mean values.

The second factor that was identified was interpersonal capabilities, which referred to behaviours between African female leaders and others, or other variables. In considering leadership theory and application, these capabilities could be aligned to those of behavioral-based theories, which assume that there are components of leadership that can be taught, coached and developed. In other words, individuals are not born as leaders (Malos, 2012 and Robbins, 2005). Some of the behavioral leadership aspects would be leaders structuring their and their teams' roles for goal achievement; the degree to which they focus on the task; the level of trust that they have and respect for subordinates' ideas; the concern and care that they have for subordinates' welfare; and display of appreciation and support (Robbins, 2005 and Tabernero, Chambel, Curral and Arana, 2009). These elements of sympathy,

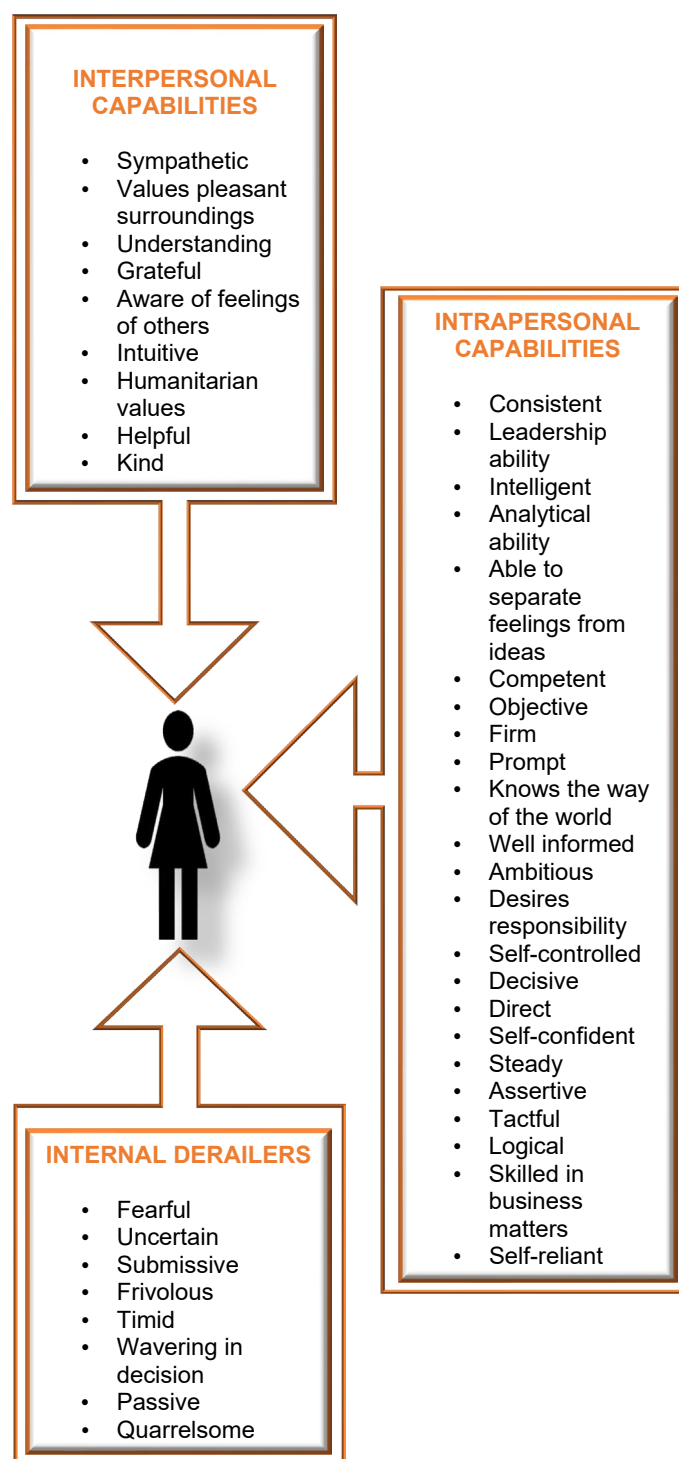


Figure 2: Factors that are characteristic of African female leaders

kindness, caring and understanding the feelings of others, are described under this factor. The characteristics within this factor were considered as descriptive of African female leaders, as all had high mean scores.

The third and final factor that was identified was internal derailers. This refers to behaviours that African female leaders exhibit, which have the potential and ability to become obstacles in their progress. In relation to the characteristics under this factor, respondents indicated that African female leaders are considered to display some of these derail attributes in their leadership approaches.

Discussion and Conclusion

African female leaders were confirmed as not being perceived to display destructive and withdrawal characteristics. It cannot be assumed that the status quo will remain in perpetuity; therefore, to ensure that this perception remains, it is important that appropriate measures are implemented to manage destructive and withdrawal characteristic. One recommended practice is implementation of regular feedback mechanisms for African female leaders to solicit regular feedback as assessments of their leadership, and for those that they engage with to be able to proactively provide feedback. Hence, should any of the destructive or withdrawal characteristics begin to emerge in future, they will be able to actively work on improving these perceptions. Feedback on African female leaders' leadership capabilities can actively contribute to their personal development, resulting in positive perceptions of African female leaders. The recommendation is for a formal feedback process to be implemented through 360-degree feedback on the leadership characteristics of African female leaders, and how they are experienced and perceived by subordinates, peers and managers of African female leaders. This will confirm if perceptions are positive or negative, and where negative perceptions are identified, appropriate measures can be implemented to address areas of development to create positive experiences and perceptions of their leadership.

In terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities, African female leaders were perceived to display characteristics under both factors. The opportunity that African female leaders face in this regard is to enhance their abilities in respect of these characteristics to a higher proficiency to be perceived more favourably. Mentoring, coaching and sponsorship are important as enablers to development and to enhance proficiency. The premise is that this focused guide from an individual with experience served to speed the rate of development when individuals perceived that they were not ready for development or needed support to elevate themselves. Also, in transitioning between roles and during times of uncertainty, mentors, coaches and sponsors assisted with the transition. Organisations have an opportunity to establish formal mentoring, coaching and sponsorship programmes for African female leaders to leverage in their leadership development, while a component of this would also be to define the difference between the benefits of mentoring, coaching and sponsorship, and their application. This directed one-on-one support of the African female leader provides an opportunity to enhance their existing intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities, based on their unique needs and context. Thus, resulting in enhanced capability and leadership proficiency, which contributes to constructive, encouraging and positive perceptions of African female leaders.

In terms of internal derailers which are behaviours that African female leaders exhibit, that have the potential and ability to become obstacles to their progress, since African female leaders and females, in general, were the only groups to be perceived as fearful, uncertain, submissive, timid, passive and quarrelsome, and not successful middle managers and males. In addition to these characteristics, African female leaders and females were also considered to be frivolous and wavering in decision making. Although categorised as in the positive group of factors owing to them being characteristic of African female leaders, these behaviours have a negative connotation and diminish the perceptions of African female leaders. The recommendation to address internal derailers is that structured, formal development interventions should be established in the development plans for African female leaders to address this directly. The proposed focused on on-going learning and development to up-skill African female leaders should

assume two forms. The first is development of personal mastery, creating a space to understand one's self, personal drivers, historic background and how it has shaped them, leadership style and their shadow side, resulting in internal derailers. The second component to ensure that they have sufficient confidence and credibility is to benchmark the technical and functional competence, which is required for their leadership role, and to ensure that they receive adequate training and development to be proficient and competent. This combined approach of personal mastery and technical development should result in the improvement and hopefully elimination of internal derailers, and significantly improve perceptions of African female leaders.

These recommendations provide the singular perspective of perceptions of African females in isolation. Nevertheless, if implemented, they may improve the way African female leaders are perceived.

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