

**Cultural Observations facing Women Managers:
A South African Perspective**

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Abstract

The South African National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality and women emancipation by government, present the opportunity for women to make useful of business and political advantages to their benefit. A knowledge gap was identified during literature study regarding factors that affect women in leadership positions. Also barriers inhibiting women's advancement beyond glass ceiling. The policy document on women advancement is a direct attempt by government to influence and direct the course of events in the labour market today, by introducing measures that can promote the success of professional women towards their career path. The methodology used was of a quantitative approach. The findings showed that there are many cultural barriers and recommended some organisational change approach that could be relevant in addressing the current problems faced by management in providing solutions in addressing their diverse workforce, especially women in leadership positions.

Key words: Organisational Culture, women, managerial positions, Organisational change Gender equality

Introduction

Women in South Africa count for 52 percent of the total population according to Central Statistic (2006) and contribute 41 percent of a

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total national labour force. There is no doubt that an increase in women's economic participation is a crucial key to economic growth and wealth creation. Sidelining women would be a major sacrifice to growth as well as economic stability of a country. Thus, the repeal of laws and the enactment of equity legislation and affirmative action has led to favourable atmosphere for women in business and in other social spheres of areas of life, be it political sports and education (Moleke, 2005).

The South African National Policy Framework and gender equality of 2001 was established together with South African Women Entrepreneurship Network (SAWEN) to mainstream gender. This commitment by government to emancipate women is seen as a transition providing a favourable atmosphere in which women are presented with opportunities to freely participate in their talents and in their society and other activities. Their participation is based on their taste which is crucial ingredients of business skills in a free market system that leads to efficiency, equitableness and equilibrium. In a report on Pretoria news a South African news paper by the South African Reserve governor, Marcus (2011), she articulated that South African women hold 19.3 percent of top senior positions in management as relatively compared to their counterpart in Australia 8 percent, Canada 16.9 percent and US 14.4 percent on gender economic empowerment. One of the contributing factors why South Africa is performing more on gender parities compared to other developed countries relates to the fact that South African government committed itself by introducing gender equality and women emancipation framework in 2001. This was done as a measure to reduce poverty amongst women and to bring women on board in management. While this debate, Webster, (2011) argues that women are still dramatically under-represented despite a marginal increase in 2010 over 2009 figures. It is also stated that Germany has embarked on a quota system for women in order to mainstream gender equality since female executive in top companies are a rarity (Webster, 2011).

There have been a number of reasons why women did not participate equally in business with their male counterparts. The past policies were more gender insensitive and hence, government intervention. Although, the situation has changed via repealed laws and legislation, fundamental social change requires more integration of women in business, politics and in education than has so far happened since the transition to democracy.

Thus, Marcus (2011) further argues, that women tend to be much more hesitant to use the power that goes with the position. They do not leverage off the position they have to the degree they can. Hence women need to be empowered in the organisation to think outside the traditional white box, in order to apply the ideas and power that goes with the position. It is therefore crucial for the organisation in their quest to sustain the competitive advantage that they both integrate men and women managers in a meaningful way. In order to sustain an innovative culture that encourages all its employees, people through a participative leadership that rewards and recognise their human capital. Women managers have to learn their organisational culture and lead by example to inspire followers, using their gentle approach without sacrificing their femininity. This can be achieved through respect and dignity in order to reap employee's commitment that will unleash their potential and attain organisational goals.

Although, cultural patterns in a society takes long to change. Beliefs, stereotype, values and people's observations take long unless government or politicians change the way things can be conducted (Mathipa, 2000). The SANPF and Gender Equality were established for this purpose. According to Moloto (2011), the Business Woman Association of South Africa reports every year about women representation in different managerial levels in different economic sectors. The results indicate that women representation in South Africa in 2010 is as follows:

- 3.6 percent of chief Executive Officers and managing directors
- 5.8 percent of chairpersons
- 14.6 percent of directors
- 18.6 percent of executive managers
- 34.3 percent of senior managers

Although the number of directors have doubled in the past six years up to 7.1 percent to 14.6 percent it does not look impressive considering that women make up to 52 percent. South African government is still confronted with many challenges to transform gender disparities.

The primary purpose of this paper is to gain an understanding of how culture observations impede the promotion of women in leadership position in South Africa. This paper further reports on the results of a study that was conducted in Gauteng, South Africa. Finally it aims to establish how far private and public sectors have promoted gender equities. The paper also endorses some

suggestion to employers, government and women employees who are ready for promotional careers in management.

Background

There are many definitions that are available from literature on the concept of culture. In this paper the concept of culture will not vary from its usage from other sciences, but the emphasis will be more confined to culture in the organization. As defined by Word Web (version 6, 2010), culture is the attitudes and behaviour that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization. Therefore, it is within the culture of human beings to aspire to become better in respect of their manner of existence. The desire to achieve a better way of living is in fact practical evidence to the human mode of living that is grounded upon the view that human beings are homo economic beings who thrive on labour. The urge to work is an inborn one and is propelled by a strong cultural believe that in this world there is nothing for nothing and as such every person must live out of the sweat of his/her brow (Mathipa,2001).

In this context, women as human beings have too, a valid case regarding recognition of their legitimate aspirations because in striving for them, they similar to their male counterpart, also apply the necessary intellectual and physical capacity plus skills commitment and perseverance. Consequently, equal merit based treatment without discrimination should be the first criteria for promotion; and only if it fails to bring about equity can it be tempered with. Hendricks, (2004:18) sees culture from a perspective of a social environment that discourages women to pursue career path in the field of science, technology and engineering. The cultural perspective is also seen as impediments that are deliberately used in the work place to deny women promotions, simply because it consigned women to the home environment. Thus, stumbling blocks such as cultural stereotypes are prevalent in South African organizations.

Culture as a concept is a very complex area to deal with. From an Organisational point of view, it will relate to values, beliefs of how managers “walk the talk” and say about things (Oden, 1997:3). It also relate to enhancing organisational performance through people. Therefore, women managers if fully integrated in the organization are an asset that no one can match or debate to the contrary. Corporate culture calls for values, beliefs that are rooted in people that dictate the way to behave and norms that are universally accepted. In real terms organisational culture, as well as national

culture, impacts on the way gendered identity and roles are viewed. Gendered values and perceptions are constructed within a corporate environment with the results that an inclusive, genderless corporate culture will positively impact on women's professional success.

South African organizational culture was one that was for many years white male dominated and is still alleged to be a society that has different rules and roles for men and women. (Ramagoshi, 2001). Unfairness still takes place regardless of the view that social equality is one that is feasible in organizing principle for shaping equality of life and circumstances of living individuals and groups in society, as well as for structures of all human relations (Gill, 1990:11).

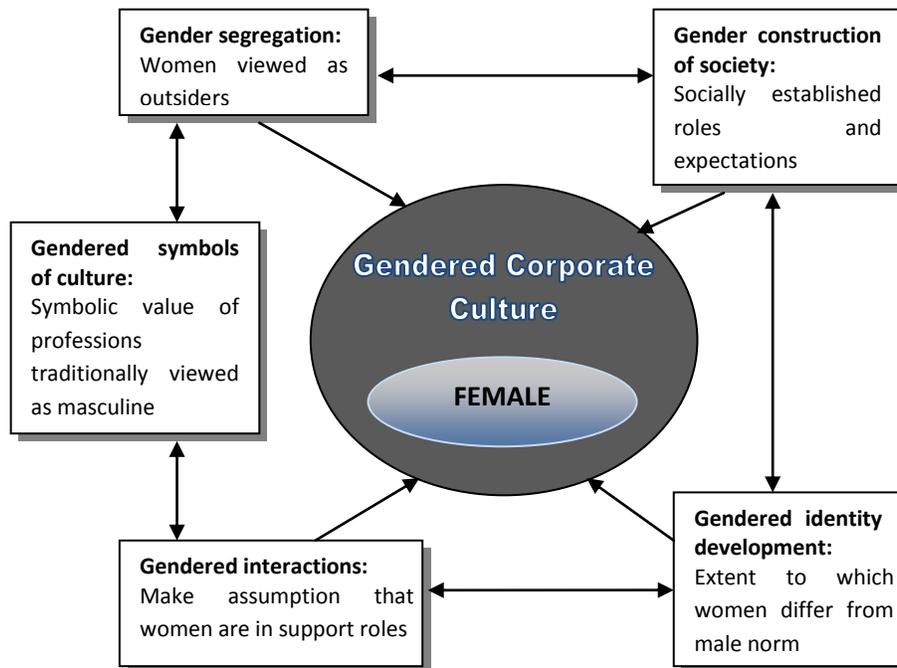
Cameron and Quinn (2006:37-45) provide a clear distinction of the types of cultures that can be found in an organization such as follows:

- Clan culture is more family type and focuses on the internal matters that are very flexible. Such cultures are more accommodative of change. Flexibility would suggest that scheduling meetings for woman managers who have children will not be excluded or sacrificed. It is important for management to build a climate of support that is acceptable regardless of whether it applies in any organizations circumstances, irrespective of whether who manages it.
- Adhocracy culture embraces an extremely dynamic and external focus. The environment fosters innovation adaptability and entrepreneurial work place. In this case women managers may see the environment as hostile and not supportive of their nature and management will resist change if the incumbent is seen not conforming to the environment. Subtle sabotage that resist change in the form of the institutionalized politics that are weak are prevalent and will not readily promote women in managerial positions.

In South Africa, male role models dominate the corporate culture. Women's biggest problem is patriarchal and male domination. They were brought up to fear their fathers or males and this culture is inculcated in their so upbringing. In the absence of role models in the managerial levels, those who occupy positions of power in the corporate, tend to apply the prevailing male norms and values to themselves, in the principle of role concept. Due to this practice, they view men as role models and mentor because, of the relatively low percentage of women in those career groups. They quickly learn "masculine" to manage in their orientation which enforces the male manager stereotype and confirms the negative female stereotype.

The South African organizational culture therefore embraces the concept of a culture that is more male orientation, highly subservient, supportive and of submissive quality. Culture that depends on the “man” at the helm because they dominate the corporate in which men are supposed to be assertive, tough and focused on material success while women are suppose to be more modest, tender, and concerned with quality of life is biased and outdated (Hofsted,1998:6-7). The masculine characteristics of management such as aggression, competitiveness that are expressed in the language and ideas of management are worrying and a challenge to women managers. The democratic South African society stands for a culture in which both men and women are supposed to be tender, modest, and concerned with quality of life. A strong culture that is supportive by participative leadership from both men and women with the ability to inspire and empower people and drive the company through product and process innovation to increase organizational effectiveness and exceed organizational goals is embraced. There is a need for women managers to promote their traditional cultural values such as support, empathy and open communication in order to remain successfully integrated in the corporate culture.

Figure 1: Interaction of gendered culture processes



Source: Adapted from Singh (2008:5)

According to Singh (2008:5), an inclusive corporate culture is the one in which diversity is managed and has the added advantage of increased business performance. Transformed organisational culture in the work place requires an inclusiveness of the fullness of diversity of men and women rather than the stand-alone policies and practises that are not integrated into the organisational strategy and its culture. South Africa's diversity workforce poses indeed a challenge to organisations to adapt to employment practices. Failure to integrate or adapt so, can only perpetrate the masculine culture that women learn and thus sacrifices their femininity (Tsoka, 1999). Although leading a change management and implementing change management in a gendered organisation is not an easy task, it is for this reason that Harwood (2006:158-160) embraces the idea of "Trojan Horse" strategy where in actions of subtle and accomplished through the backing of internal supporters.

According to Gloster (2011:38) women who have succeeded in traditionally male-dominated industries proved as tough as any of their counterparts. They accord toughness as qualities a woman must have, in addition to other qualities for which they are selected. They achieved their position on merit, and their male counterparts have come to recognize their contribution and are applauding their stride. The gender equality has indeed come a long way in the battle for women emancipation. Although, some women feel it is not enough. Like all over the world women representation in business and in political sphere is still a concern. In Germany, it is reported by Beyer and Voigt in Spiegel that female executives are a rarity. The lawmakers have done little to empower women. On the contrary, the African development forum (ILO, 2008) lamented that women still experience greater challenges and that the ratio between male and female employment-to- population was 22.7 percent. The South African government through its policy intervention of mainstreaming gender is a crucial stepping stone for women at large. Although research also suggests that women in many organizations in South Africa still faces barriers to their progress and upward mobility like their counterparts in the rest of the world (Erwee, 1994). They are over represented in pink-colour jobs in contrast to professional and technical positions. They tend to hold lower paid and less skilled jobs. Those who are in top managerial position they seem to be hesitant to use the power that goes with the position (Gill, 2011).

Nevertheless, these women play an important role in shaping the future landscape of the young democracy.

Women in Leadership Position in South Africa

Figure 2: The participation of women in leadership positions



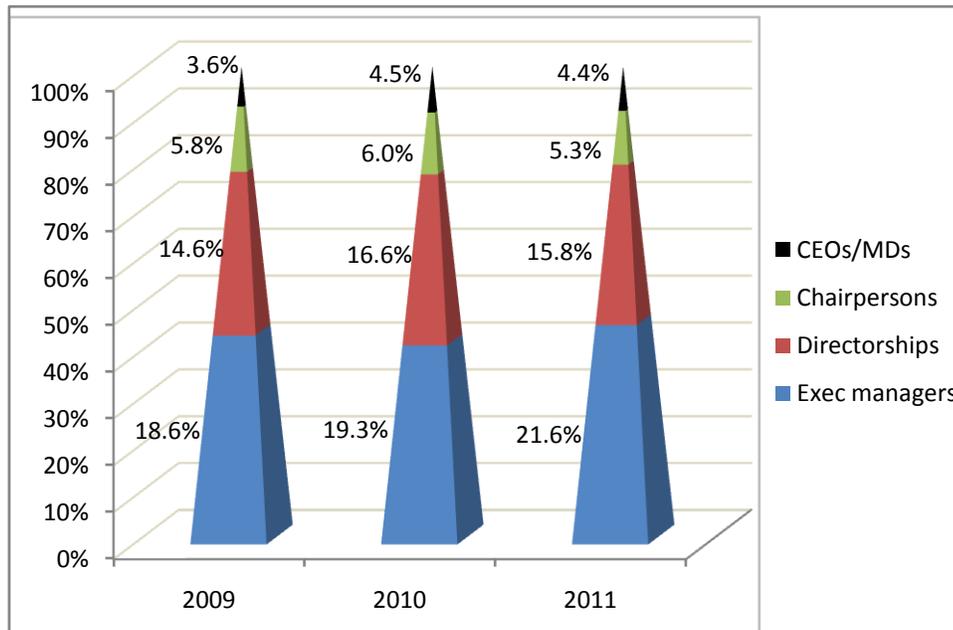
Source: Adapted from South Africa Gender Indicators (2009)

Despite the enactment of policy framework and gender equality that has come so far, the position of women in management, since 2007-2009 still indicates that women are underrepresented as compared to their male counterpart in the work place. The figure indicates that in 2007 there was an increase of 41 percent in managerial positions. In 2008, there was an increase of male managers from 59 percent to 62 percent while the statistical figures reflect a decrease on the appointment of female managers. However even of more importance are the 2009 indicators. From the given figures, there was a sharp decrease from 36 percent to an amazing 25 percent. While the interventions of gender equalities are documented, the decrease of women in managerial positions is not impressive in 2009, when compared with a rise of male counterparts. There is a serious need for policy makers in the country to transform the gender practice in order to achieve an equitable result that will reflect a true democratic nation that stands for justice and fairness.

According to the deputy minister (Ntuli,2011) of the Department of trade and industry (dti) point out that the policy document of SAWEN, that is intended to lobby government and private

institutions to policy , legislation affecting profiles of women in national and international are affirmed. The ministry of Technology for women in business (TWIB) is also committed to ensure that women in the department make use of their favourable business opportunities that are offered in technology. TWIB programme is an initiative to broaden the participation in all spheres of government to reach an even bigger number of women. The department of Trade and Industry is engaged in pursuing gender empowerment and poverty eradication in all levels and continue to play a meaningful role in growing the economy and encouraging the active participation of South African women.

Figure: 3. Women in leadership positions in 2011

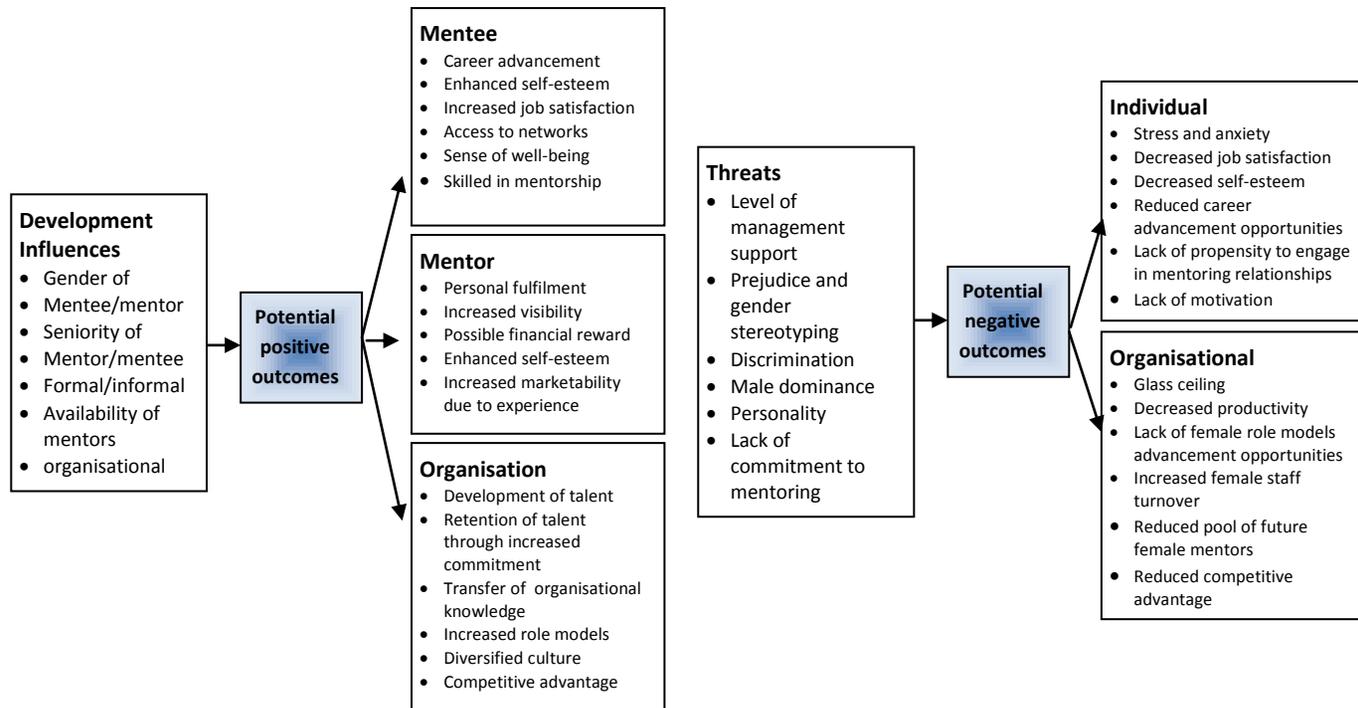


Source: Adapted from BWA South African Women in leadership Census 2011

The statistics illustrate a huge underrepresentation of women in positions of management, regardless of the number of increase of women's education levels and representatives in the different employment sectors. This can only suggest that interventions to

attain an equitable dispensation for women is not fully utilised in addressing women's underrepresentation and this led to women being underutilised.

Figure3: Strategic Model that will enhance mentoring relationships for women in the corporate



Source: Adapted from Woolnough and Davidson (in Bilimoria & Piderit, 2007:170)

Figure 3 indicates the impact of mentoring relationships for women. It is very clear that when women in management are mentored there exist potential positive outcomes that organisations can benefit from whereas in the absence of mentorship one can clearly see that the contrary gives out negative outcomes that is not beneficial to the organisation. Even though there seems to be some amount of advantages of mentoring and coaching in equipping women for success, gender gap seems not to be closing enough. It is well imperative that an organisation that is readily to advance its diverse workforce will reap the benefit of high profit margins. Luhabe (1997) argues that women bring with them the multitasking and gentle approach in management.

Results

The results of the Observations on Cultural tradition

Culture is seen as an act of transmitting or handling down knowledge to succeeding generations and not performed in a vacuum, but within a societal environment, which the culture is supposed to be passed over from generation to generation. This should not imply that tradition itself is inherently a static thing, tending always towards the quiescent, but on the contrary, tradition, although moving from the past, keeps itself abreast by not only informing the present, but also interacting with it, so that in such interaction it also contributes significantly towards shaping the future. In this respect, tradition "holds a special place among the customs, conventions, folkways and styles which are the building blocks of human cultures" (Bottomore, 1990:676).

Past experience, shows that there are jobs that were traditionally designated for women exclusively, such as child nurturing, cooking, and so on. In respect of this prescription, the response was different. Table 1 indicates that 20.5 percent of women and 12 percent of men strongly disagreed with the statement that, on average, a stay-at-home mother is a better mother than a woman who works outside the home at least part-time. Therefore, the reflection tells us that many South Africans still considers that a woman's place is at home rearing the children. Thus, a lot needs to be done to debunk the myth,

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because men can also do that which was previously reserved for women in the form of nursing, sewing, cleaning and sweeping.

**Table 1: The results of the Observations on Cultural tradition
Cultural traditions are a barrier to the advancement of women in leadership position.**

Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Neither agree Or disagree		Slightly		Agree		Strongly agree		
Count	Table	Count	Table	Count	Table	Count	Table	Count	Table	Count	Table	Count	Table	
23	12.0	22	12.5	4	2.4	13	7.1	10	5.4	16	8.7	10	5.4	Male
38	20.5	23	12.5	4	2.3	9	4.9	11	6.1	5	2.2	7	3.5	Female
51	32.5	45	25.0	8	4.7	22	12.0	21	11.5	21	10.9	17	8.9	Total

The statistical finding revealed that the observations of some men are changing in that they view work done by women as equally important as those done by men. The (P=0,000).

**Table 2: The results of the Perceptions on promotion
Cultural perception on the promotion to the advancement of women in leadership position**

Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Neither agree or disagree		Slightly agree		Agree		Strongly agree		
Count	Table %	Count	Table%	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	
28	15.4	28	15.0	4	2.2	5	2.7	6	3.3	8	4.2	7	3.9	Male
53	29.1	33	18.1	1	0.9	1	0.4	2	1.4	1	0.5	5	2.9	Female
81	44.5	61	33.1	5	3.1	6	3.1	8	4.7	9	4.7	12	6.8	Total

The chi-square significance test showed the (P-value test <0.0001).

Women bring a wealth of valuable experience to their positions, even though they may not have the formal qualifications. Some possess experience in a range of community activities, including paid policy work, unpaid political community work, union work, board memberships and paid work in non-governmental organisations. The career opportunities of black participants were hindered under discriminatory preferential learning through actual involvement in a wide range of organisations outside of the academic field (<http://www.findarticle.com>). Therefore, equating maleness with effectiveness and, femaleness with inappropriateness and inadequacy is wrong. The statistical finding indicated in Table 2 that 29.1% of female respondents strongly disagreed and 15.4% of male respondents disagreed that women lack the skills to manage. The p-value test on this variable indicated that ($p=0, 00$), a range which means that the significance of the test is not noticeable.

Table 3: The results of the Perceptions on Sacrificing Feminity.
Cultural perception on the promotion to the advancement of women in leadership position

Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Neither agree or disagree		Slightly agree		Agree		Strongly agree		
Count	Table %	Count	Table%	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	
6	3.3	10	5.5	2	1.1	2	1.1	7	3.9	40	22.2	19	10.5	Male
2	1.1	5	2.8	2	1.0	3	2.0	5	2.8	30	16.7	48	26.7	Female
8	4.4	15	8.3	4	2.1	5	3.1	12	6.7	70	38.9	67	36.5	Total

The chi-square significance test showed the (P-value test <0.0001).

For women to be successful in the organisation, they do not have to sacrifice some of their femininity. This is accorded to the lack of mentors in the managerial level, thus women tend to apply male norms and values to themselves, which are not natural to women thereby creating negative stereotype reinforcements. The results indicated that 26.7% of women strongly agree, while 22.2% of men agree with the statement that women do not need to sacrifice their femininity to be accepted in their managerial roles.

The lack of female mentors in top positions may result in women learning the so called “masculinity” approach to management and contrast their gentle approach.

The ‘p – value’ test indicated a significance of 4.5% ($P = 0.0001$) between men and women regarding perceptions on sacrificing femininity in management.

**Table 4: The results of the barriers in Executive positions
Cultural perception on the advancement of women to compete for executive positions**

Strongly disagree		Disagree		Slightly disagree		Neither agree or disagree		Slightly agree		Agree		Strongly agree		
Count	Table %	Count	Table%	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	Count	Table %	
5	2.7	6	3.3	1	0.5	3	1.6	4	2.2	34	18.6	34	18.6	Male
1	0.5	1	0.5	1	0.6	2	1.1	4	2.2	28	15.3	59	32.2	Female
6	3.3	7	3.8	2	1.1	5	2.7	8	4.4	62	33.9	93	50.8	Total

The chi-square significance test showed the (P-value test <0.0001).

There was a 13.6% difference of men and women managers regarding the competition for executive positions. The response rate indicates that 32.2% of women strongly agree with the statement as well as 18.6% of their male counterparts strongly agree. This indicates that although some women are positive, there are those who feel that top executive positions are meant for men. This aspect conveys with the statement that in the absence of female role models or mentors, women cannot possibly imagine that they could be in boardrooms or be decision makers. To them, these corporate domain assumptions are deeply rooted in masculinity. On the other hand 18.6% of men is indication that there is a perception of change, most important is the fact that men and women make unique contributions that can be combined in a synergy which can ultimately give organisational competitiveness and strategic advantages that are required both nationally and internationally in the current dialogue of management paradigm. Marcus (2011) states that South Africa currently had 6% of its board chair positions held by women. In her debate, she emphasises that the chair of a board is a “very important and influential position that can be used to significantly impact on policy matters”, including gender issues.

Research Methodology

The research was exploratory in nature. A hypothesis was not formulated. Hypothesis tends to predict in advance what the researcher seeks to research, thus the researcher conducted research using a quantitative approach and observations and discovering views of women manager’s organisations in Gauteng. The reason was that Gauteng has the largest business sectors in South Africa. The area was accessible to the researcher, thereby curtailing the cost of personal interviews. A seven-point-Likert – type questionnaire was used during the empirical study focusing on the respondents’ views about perceptions of women as managers. It was divided into sections A and B respectively. Section A focussed on respondents and Section B provided biographical data about the respondents. The empirical research was aimed at the sample of certain private and public firms in South Africa.

Sample

A convenient sample of 195 businesses in Gauteng province was drawn. The empirical research was aimed at a sample of certain private and public firms, whereby personal interviewing was used as the method of data collection. Gauteng Province was selected

because of its accessibility for the personal interviews and to limit costs. Furthermore, Gauteng is the fastest growing region as well as the economic hub of the South African economy. Thus, the sampling procedure was based on the principle of randomness and the selected firms constituted the elements of the target population. Quantitative data was brought together for the final analysis and the response rate was 86 percent.

Data

Information was acquired from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources of information consisted of periodicals, books, textbooks, dissertations and newspapers. In this manner a ground theory approach was followed and additional theory developed inductively from the study as the investigation went on. The primary sources were composed of key persons in selected companies. 195 structured questionnaires were distributed. Hence, interviews and appointments played a very large role in this study, through such instruments as the structured questionnaire. The primary sources were dealt with through the qualitative approach, for such an approach allows the researcher to actually record data in the subject's own words. The data obtained was finally processed by computer, using a statistical software package for Social Sciences (S.P.S.S.). Where applicable, percentages were rounded off, according to accepted practice, to the nearest whole number.

Chi-Square test was used to test the independence of two or more variables in a contingency table. In this study, it was used to compare men and women on several indices as shown in the contingency table. The chi-square test compares the observed frequencies with expected frequencies. The larger the difference between observed and expected frequency, the more likely it is that there is a statistically difference between categories.

Findings

A culture of transformation leadership is an instrumental to gender equality. Most organisation in South Africa are founded on patriarchal vies which reinforce social relations rather than challenge them. Organisations remain male- biased, whereby commitment to transformation is not effectively taking place. Male domination often excludes women deliberately or devalue their contribution, giving rise to disabling environment for women's advancement that is associated with negative outcomes on

performance. It is thus, imperative for women in leadership positions to challenge the rules, and not to play by them.

The statistical findings of the study indicated that, in Gauteng Province, management positions are still dominated by white, Afrikaner men. Although, a considerable number of respondents exhibited a positive change in attitude towards women as managers, the majority was conservative and biased against women. The findings prove a subtle negative attitude towards the advancement of women and that those women find it difficult to conceptualise the idea of managerial position simply because cultural dimensions observed as perceptions was perhaps an indicative of the lack of female mentors in management. Over all analysis the cultural perceptions indicated a positive change towards accepting women as managers.

Women cannot be aggressive in business situation that demands it and those they were less capable of learning mathematical and mechanical skills than men while. Therefore, any organisation that is committed to gender equality in the work place is the one that adopt:

An organisational culture that is conducive to the advancement of women as one in which diversity is valued in the recruiting and development of employees.

Organisations that wish to achieve success in the advancement of women as managers should begin by changing their organisational cultures, as the perception held by employees play an important role in their behaviour, which in turn influences those cultures.

Organisational change

Training has critical role to play in enhancing organisational change and not a stand-alone initiative. Increase in women's representivity creates more role models to which other women can aspire and thus work hard. It is also important that recruitment procedures should be aimed at redressing women's representivity in senior levels. It is of critical importance that organisations should accelerate programmes for women with potentials and promote gender compliance with gender-sensitive behaviour.

Conclusion

According to Marcus (2011) South African women count 19.3 percent in senior positions compared US, Australia and Canada. However they still hold lower paid and less skilled jobs. Thus, government's serious endeavour to fight gender inequalities is a stepping stone to eradicate poverty (Moleke, 2005). Nonetheless, social equality is one flexible organising principle that fundamentally influences the hips according to the norm that demands that all individuals in society be accorded equal civil, political, social liberties, rights constructive and opportunities quality of life circumstances of living persons and communities, as well as human relations. It is therefore important to note that what needs to be done in order to bring about change and equality is not only to pass legislation, e.g. the Equity Act, but to walk an extra mile in the form of harnessing women managers effectively to foster and inculcate change in people's attitudes, mind-sets, values and perceptions regarding their leadership role. Women are indeed capable of playing the game in the corporate world and society as a whole.

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