

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**Barriers inhibiting women progression to leadership positions within  
KwaZulu-Natal municipalities: A case of eThekweni Municipality**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

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With the quoted words from the bible scripture **“For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power”** (Philippians 4:13 - New World Translation).

I would like to thank Jehovah God for providing me with strength throughout this journey and for surrounding me with individuals who encouraged and supported me to complete my dissertation.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is whole-heartedly dedicated to my wonderful and supportive children, Vuyo and Lwandile Mfungula, who have been my consistent source of inspiration and given their utmost support and never-ending love.

Both of you have been my best cheerleaders.

## ABSTRACT

Despite these several laws that are enshrined in the Constitution, women are still underrepresented in leadership and senior management positions, and there is still much that needs to be done to address gender inequality in the workplace. Gender equality is a top global priority reflecting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number five which aims to achieve gender equity and empower girls and women equally to their male counterparts. Although women have made unprecedented strides in climbing the ranks of middle management positions in government, they are still less presented in senior leadership positions, particularly in local government which includes municipalities. The study aims to identify and assess barriers that prevent the progression of women in senior leadership positions in municipalities within KwaZulu-Natal, with specific reference to eThekweni Municipality. The study employed a qualitative approach that opts for a phenomenological research design to identify the socio-cultural phenomenon that predominates in municipalities and creates hurdles that hinder women from advancing into top management positions. The data collection used semi-structured one-on-one interviews with a purposive sample of 10 managers in various municipal business clusters. With the use of an interpretative paradigm, the researcher was able to elucidate the various realities that women experience in pursuing senior leadership positions within the eThekweni Municipality. The study found that eThekweni Municipality's organisational culture and climate predominantly supported gender prejudices that favoured men. Other factors identified were associated with gender stereotypes that perpetuate traditional roles and functions, which creates unbalanced opportunities and expectations of what women can and cannot do. Similarly, factors that affect them as individuals, such as their lack of confidence, lack of mutual support, and dual responsibility were found to be hindering women's progression into senior leadership positions. The study also provided a precis of measures that may be taken by the municipality to ensure that gender transformation occurs with greater speed to enable women to advance to top management roles. These include change management programmes, close monitoring of gender policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference.

**Key Terms:** Gender Discrimination, Gender Equality, Gender Equity, Gender Transformation, Leadership, Local Government, Municipality, Organisational Culture, Women's Empowerment.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership is a momentous topic on a global agenda due to the persistent problem of male supremacy in both public and private organizations (Poltera, 2019). Although women have made unprecedented strides in climbing the ranks of middle management positions, they are still less presented in senior leadership positions (Netshitangani, 2019). According to Women Watch (2007), women's representation remains low in both emerging and advanced countries in a variety of decision-making and leadership capacities. It is no different in South African municipalities, as women advance through the ranks, they persistently push against obstacles that keep them at the bottom. The metaphor "the glass ceiling" refers to these transparent barriers confronting women in their attempt to climb their career ladder and occupy leadership roles (Sabharwal, 2013). The implementation of change has always been agonizingly slow in South Africa, even though the country has been a democracy for more than 25 years. The women's inability to break through the ceiling into higher levels remains a political and economic problem.

As most women enter the workforce in eThekweni Municipality, they have always aspired to senior leadership and management roles as opportunities avail themselves. However, despite their ambition, motivation, and confidence they are still in the minority when it comes to performing their roles in the public and taking on leadership roles. Although there have been strides since the democracy, the municipality has long been male dominated to this day and women still face a complex of inequalities with gender at the forefront. Phakeng (2015) contends that because women must work twice as hard to establish their worth as compared to men, they are viewed as ambitious rivals at most times. To lessen their influence, gender politics has harshly embodied these rivals in patriarchal stereotypes.

Although other previous research concentrated on the leadership of women in the workplace, there is still little academic literature that focuses on barriers women encounter in their quest to lead and manage in South African municipalities, particularly in the eThekweni Municipality. As a result, the study aims to investigate and discover the key factors that hinder

women employees from reaching leadership positions within municipalities, focusing on the case of eThekweni Municipality.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

In South Africa, August is referred to as “Women’s Month due to the women’s demonstrations and protests that took place 64 years ago, when more than 200,000 women protested against the laws passed by the apartheid government. The fight for a non-sexist nation was advanced by this protest by bringing the fight for women's rights to the fore. South Africa’s implementation of various policies such as the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, and the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution, inter alia, was intended to regulate the workplace concerning diversity and achieving equity. These laws were put into place as part of a mission to put corrective measures in place to address past transgressions and advance women in leadership positions. Despite these several laws that are enshrined in the Constitution, it can be argued that women are still underrepresented in leadership and senior management positions, and there is still much that needs to be done to address gender inequality in the workplace (Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Consequently, the level of discrimination in employment quotas in the local government has increased due to the rising number of disappointing roles played by South African public organization leaders, particularly at the municipal level, in addressing the scourge of employment equity (Erhardt, Werbel & Schrader, 2010). For instance, these institutions' policymakers now control who receives what by manipulating politics, disregarding the ideals and principles of employment equity.

Given that the government is not solely responsible for achieving employment equity, municipalities are given a significant amount of responsibility for enacting policies following the provisions of the Employment Equity Act that will advance employment equity in the municipality by lowering the number of victims of employment equity, particularly women (Horwitz, 2014). Like many municipalities in South Africa, eThekweni Municipality is expected to abide by the Act. Developing and advancing female employees into leadership roles is part of compliance. However, there are currently very few female executives in the eThekweni Municipality organogram. Despite several policies in place, which were designed to better gender and equity promotion programs, eThekweni Municipality still faces challenges when it comes to the inclusion of women in positions of leadership. Statistics indicate that the average number of women in senior management is 26% across the executives of eThekweni

Municipality. This recurring shortage of women in leadership positions shows evidence that despite strides made by women in educational gains, they are still largely employed in low-skilled occupations, and Sweetman (2000) views it as a shame.

In dealing with human rights violations, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa calls for affirmative action policies as redress to all vulnerable groups. However, since the advent of democracy, eThekweni municipality has focused on progressive policies to address issues related to gender equality without acknowledging that the effectiveness of legislation greatly depends on how it is executed and implemented. This means great care was taken to ensure that the laws are in place whilst disregarding the fact that how these laws are implemented presents an opportunity to close the gender gap and enable women's participation in senior leadership positions. This factor has been the greatest challenge for female employees, and failure to close the gap will result in a decrease in employee motivation levels, which will then negatively impact productivity and ultimately service delivery. Although there has been extensive research on the subject of women in leadership roles, the research of the study is necessary to identify the barriers that prevent women from realistically climbing the corporate ladder and, of course, to propose strategies for accelerating pathways specifically for women to be hired into leadership roles, with specific reference to eThekweni Municipality.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

eThekweni Municipality as a major employer has made a great effort in implementing redress for past transgressions, mainly affected by gender inequality. To address historical imbalances and prepare women for top management positions, the municipality has implemented policies and various programs that foster inclusion to close a gender gap, such as succession planning, development, and training, talent management, and employment equity. While there has been a substantial uptake in the appointment of females within the municipality, these advancements were not at the appropriate senior level. This is supported by the eThekweni Transformation report released on 24 March 2023, which revealed that women are more prevalent in skilled occupation levels as well as in lower levels of the municipality. It depicted that the top management requires gender transformation as women are under-represented at this level. This suffices to say that women continue to encounter barriers that prevent them from achieving leadership positions despite discernible changes in legislation and support. Although it is no doubt that eThekweni Municipality has made progress in some areas regarding representation

in the employment of women, there still exists a discerning gap in the senior and top management levels of the organisation. When it comes to holding leadership positions and carrying out their roles, women continue to be the minority and experience discrimination (Evans et al., 2014). The low percentage of women in the top management level of eThekweni Municipality results in dominance and reinforcement of male interest.

Evidence suggests that although a substantial amount of research has been previously conducted as per contextual factors of women leadership, however, the causes and contributing factors are continuously changing over time, due to the impact of digitalisation, urbanisation and globalisation. The scholarly research has concentrated on issues of gender disparity, how gender affects women's leadership, gender inequality, and obstacles that prevent women leaders from ascending the corporate ladder (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). The sparsity of available studies on barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions within South African municipalities adequately supported the significance of this study. Moreover, there has been no study that has attempted to investigate this perceived gender inequality in leadership positions within eThekweni Municipality's context. Therefore, the originality of this study is justifiable as it intends to identify and assess barriers that prevent meaningful participation of women in senior leadership positions in municipalities within South Africa, a top global priority reflecting Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number five which targets to achieve gender equity and empower girls and women equally to their male counterparts (Manyena, 2016; Nhamo, Muchuru & Nhamo, 2018).

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What factors inhibit women from progressing to leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality?
- What skills are necessary for women to advance to leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality?
- To what extent do existing policies and programmes strive to promote women to senior leadership level in eThekweni Municipality?
- How can these factors be addressed in order for women to occupy senior positions in eThekweni Municipality?

## **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The following research objectives were set for this study:

- To conduct an analysis of the barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality.
- To investigate what women need in eThekweni Municipality to enable their advancement into senior leadership positions.
- To critically examine the extent of compliance with legislative and policy framework for employment equity in eThekweni Municipality.
- To proffer strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The feminist perspective served as the theoretical framework for this study, and as such, it shaped and informed data analysis. The word "feminism" refers to the emancipation of women from the oppression that results from their gender identity being different from that of men. It is predicated on particular ideas, some of which have conflicting goals (Arat, 2015). The feminist theory argues that various challenges societies face have a gender-specific dimension that needs to be addressed to achieve equality between men and women (Poltera & Schreiner, 2019). According to Nienaber and Moraka (2016), the feminist viewpoint argues that women should be granted equal rights and chances to use their ability to confront injustices because they are equally as capable as men. The feminist theory has the dual goals of giving women a voice and refuting the male-centric viewpoint that holds that the experiences of males are normative.

As a theoretical framework, this study adopted the feminist theory as it is connected to the values and principles of social work, such as equality, respect, and social justice. The two concerns that feminist theories try to address are "Where are women?" and "Why is this situation as it is?" (Schwartz & Scott, 2010, p 49). This correlates with the objective of the study, which is to explore the barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions within KwaZulu Natal municipalities. Moreover, Letherby (2015) asserts that using a feminist methodology in research is sensible since it acknowledges the subjective nature of

the data obtained directly from female participants. Hence, the feminist theory was adopted so that the researcher would be able to listen to women's voices and comprehend the barriers they face in a workplace that has a culture that values men.

According to Samkange (2015), numerous feminist theories generally concur that the deep-rooted, gendered, and sexual disparities that women face are the reason they are oppressed in contemporary communities. However, they take different tacks when it comes to resolving these disparities (Arat, 2015). The approaches range from liberal to radical to socialist to postmodern to Black feminism. An in-depth discussion of these approaches and how they serve as theoretical frameworks will be presented in Chapter Four of this thesis.

### **1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

According to Tracy (2013, p. 240), the significance of a study is often assessed in terms of whether the findings transform, extend, or complicate a practice, body of knowledge, or theory in different or important ways. The study was significant primarily in terms of subsequent commitments that South Africa has made regarding the conventions and declarations on equality between women and men. It contributed to assessing how well South Africa as a country has met its constitutional and national development goals on gender quality, concerning local government. The study provided value to the existing research by filling the chasm about why to date women are still facing gender barriers, particularly within the South African municipalities. The study will be beneficial not only to the reader but policymakers and influencers, corporates, and society in general as it further highlights the insufficiencies of the policies and initiatives in place to address gender inequality and further hindrances to women from ascending to senior leadership positions.

### **1.8 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY**

Emergent concerns related to gender equality discourse have attracted several arguments from researchers and scholars alike. To increase women's involvement in decision-making positions, the government has set a target of public service employment equity of 50 percent at all levels of senior management. The slow progress toward reaching the set target indicates

potential challenges that may be slowing down the rate of women in top management which warrants scientific research.

## **1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

According to Wilson, (2010) research methodology is the predetermined method used to conduct research. The goal of the research design and methodology is to explain how data was gathered, generated, and analysed. On the other hand, the unit of analysis examines *'the what of the study'* that is being researched or investigated (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Therefore, this section outlines the plan to fulfill the research study, including research design, research approaches, study site, and target population. The sampling, data collection, and measurements are also outlined, followed by a brief of the data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

### **1.9.1 Research Design**

Research design provides a 'conceptual framework' for a researcher to answer questions and ensure that scientific principles are followed (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). The study employed a qualitative approach that opted for a phenomenological research design. A phenomenological approach analyses and describes the meaning of an experience, frequently through the identified relevant participants, to produce an exhaustive description of ideas that reflect the meaning of the lived experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), a phenomenological approach attempts to understand people's perspectives, understanding, and perceptions of a situation. Therefore, the design was appropriate for this study since it allowed for face-to-face in-depth interviews to access deeply ingrained information derived from experiences, which can often influence reasoning and decision-making. In addition, it explored and elaborated on gender disparities in the eThekweni Municipality and pinpointed their causes.

### **1.9.2 Research Paradigm**

Olsen, Lodwick, and Dunlop (1992) assert that a paradigm is a pattern, ideas, values, framework, and structure or system of academic and scientific assumptions. Research paradigms inevitably mirror people's views of the current world and the one desired for the future. (Lather, 1986). According to Gephart (1999), research paradigms have been divided

into three separate philosophical categories, namely, positivism, interpretivism, and critical postmodernism. Positivism is about discovering and presenting the truth using evidence (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). According to Walsham (1995), the positivist view claims that scientific knowledge is created by facts, while its ontology view sees reality to be a separate entity from society. In other words, the positivist position emphasizes engaging in research in settings where variables can be controlled and manipulated. On the other hand, the interpretive paradigm concerns looking at the world from an individual's point of view. According to Walsham (1993), the interpretive tradition does not have any 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories because they are assessed based on how 'interesting' they are to the researcher and other professionals in related fields. The third category which is critical postmodernism is formed by combining two worldviews, which are critical theory and postmodern scholarship (Gephart, 1999). Critical scholars assume that human beings have historically created and are reproducing social reality (Myers, 2009). The critical theory aims to uncover the "truth" and "understanding within the social context" by dissecting the "text" or "hidden curriculum" (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003, p. 33). Having examined the three research paradigms, this study made use of the interpretivism paradigm since it was more investigative, expressive, and clarifying. Using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews, the proposed study investigated, outlined, and provided thorough justifications for the underlying causes of gender imbalances at eThekweni Municipality.

### **1.9.3 Study Site**

The study site was eThekweni Municipality in Durban. The eThekweni Municipality is located in the KwaZulu-Natal province, on South Africa's eastern seaboard. According to the eThekweni Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2020/2021), the municipality has a 2297 square meter area that stretches from the Tongaat in the North to uMkomaas in the South, climbing up Westward and Inland to Cato Ridge.

The map below shows the location of Durban within eThekweni Municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa and the composition of the Municipal area.



with a sample of women and men who occupy both senior management and executive management positions within all units and clusters of eThekweni municipality. The non-probability sampling was used to select respondents using a combination of purposive sampling and availability sampling techniques. By employing the purposive sampling technique, the researcher was able to exercise her judgment in choosing participants who would most effectively address the research questions and achieve the research objectives considering their knowledge of the investigation (Sharma, 2017). The availability sampling technique was also used to select a sample based on the participants' availability and willingness to participate in the research study.

### **1.9.6 Sample Size**

A total research sample of 10 participants was purposively selected across all nine clusters within eThekweni Municipality. The selection of a sample size of 10 was justifiable as stated by Guest, Bruce, and Johnson (2006) that a sample size of 8 to 12 is suitable for a qualitative study. The sample included women and men in senior, executive, and top management positions with at least five years of experience in their management roles within their Clusters. The inclusion of males in this study ensured that a more thorough account of the gendered perspectives, opinions, and voices was taken into account more fully.

### **1.9.7 Data Collection Methods**

Giorgi (2009, p. 122) points out that “what one seeks from a research interview is as complete as possible of the description of the experience that a participant has lived through”. In achieving this a semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data from the selected sample. This method of interviewing made sure that the questions asked during the interview related to the research questions, that an interview guide was used to keep an eye on the direction of the questions, and that respondents were asked the same questions throughout the interview (Adewumi & Ogunnubi, 2019). Since the use of an interview guide was not intended to limit either the researcher or the respondent, the researcher was able to ask questions beyond the list of predetermined questions for a more thorough and nuanced understanding of responses (Adewumi & Ogunnubi, 2019). In conducting the interviews, a voice recorder was used to record the responses. The use of audio tape was in line with the claim made by Birks and Mills (2011) that an audio recording may add to the security of the researcher’s valuable

data. In addition to the audio-tape recording, the researcher also took notes during the interview to make sure that all responses were captured in case some of the audiotapes were not clear enough to be transcribed.

### **1.9.8 Data Quality Control**

Creswell (2014, p. 201) makes a distinction between qualitative validity and qualitative reliability as two aspects of data quality control. While qualitative validity refers to verifying findings' accuracy using specific procedures, qualitative reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher across various researchers and projects. For this qualitative study, the data quality control was ensured by applying trustworthiness strategies suggested by Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis and Bezuidenhout (2014, p. 258), which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility which refers to the accuracy of data interpretation was achieved by ensuring that respondents' overall views were sufficiently reflected in the research findings by reporting their precise responses. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of one study can be generalised and applied to other settings or contexts. In this regard, it was achieved by ensuring that the findings of the study are understood within the context of eThekweni Municipality and the reader has enough knowledge to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings they are familiar with (Seale, 1999). According to Merriam (1998, p. 205), dependability is the degree to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in the same context. The dependability of the study was attained by using the interview guide to ensure that the data was obtained consistently, that it was valid, and that the results were trustworthy. Lastly, confirmability involves the researcher's interest in the objectivity of the study. This was achieved by ensuring that the research report reflected the opinions and experiences of the respondents rather than the researcher's ideas.

### **1.9.9 Data Analysis**

The data analysis process begins after the initial interviews or observations and ends at the end of the research. This qualitative study employed content analysis to examine the qualitative information obtained during the interviews. According to Sekeran and Bougie (2016), content analysis is the systematic gathering and analysis of the text's content, such as reports and transcripts. To analyse and interpret the qualitative data for this study, content analysis was used to ensure that any recurring themes that were identified could effectively address the research questions. The NVivo qualitative software was used to identify recurring themes from

the transcripts (Creswell, 2014). The analysis and presentation of the data were achieved through three strategic steps, namely, data reduction, data display, and data conclusion. Firstly, the data was transcribed from audio to text. Secondly, the data was broken down into a set of themes using codes. A code was linked to a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or a larger section of the data (Struwig & Stead, 2001) Lastly, the data was interpreted, given a meaning, and conclusions deducted from the identified themes.

#### **1.9.10 Ethical Considerations**

Before the commencement of the research, the participants were made aware of its purpose, objectives, and scope. Participants were given a consent form to fill out, on which they could express interest in participating. The anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were achieved by removing any identifying characteristics before the information was disseminated. Participants were made aware that the study only served academic purposes and that their participation in it was voluntary. In addition, a letter of informed consent was submitted to eThekweni Municipality to obtain permission to conduct the study. Before the start of data collection, an application for ethical clearance was submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for approval.

#### **1.9.11 Limitations of the Study**

There are possible limitations that could affect or have an impact on a study of this magnitude. In terms of this study, the first limitation was the issue of race. This study viewed women as a single-gendered group that experiences exclusion and oppression on an equal basis regardless of race and culture. This was a limitation as Giddens and Sutton (2013, p. 655) provide a broader perspective on how White women's experiences typically differ from those of Black women. Another limitation of the study was regarding generalisability. Perceptions and experiences related to the research issue were influenced by the level of rank, experience, and length of time spent in the eThekweni Municipality. Additionally, the research was delineated to one province, KwaZulu-Natal, and more particularly to the eThekweni Municipality. This might not provide a precise picture of how the local government in South Africa is transforming overall. As a result, it's possible that the findings cannot be generalized to every municipality throughout every province in the whole country.

## 1.10 KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following table depicts the key terms and definitions used in this study.

**Table 1.1: Key Terms and Definitions**

| <b>KEY TERMS</b>              | <b>DEFINITIONS</b>   |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Gender</b>                 | Refers to a social and cultural construct of roles, behaviors, expectations, and traits that society deems suitable for men and women.                                 |
| <b>Gender Discrimination</b>  | Refers to the unjust or prejudiced treatment of people or groups based on gender roles and relations.  |
| <b>Gender Equality</b>        | Refers to the principle that people should be treated with equal rights respect, and opportunities regardless of their gender.   |
| <b>Gender Equity</b>          | Refers to the process of ensuring justice and fairness in the allocation of opportunities, responsibilities, and resources between women and men (Morris, 2003)        |
| <b>Gender Transformation</b>  | Refers to the significant adjustments made to an institution to ensure that women and men are fairly and equally represented   |
| <b>Leadership</b>             | Is the ability to inspire, guide, and persuade individuals or groups to take a course or accomplish a common goal (Louw & Venter, 2013)                                |
| <b>Local Government</b>       | Refers to the local sphere of government, which comprises different municipalities.  |
| <b>Municipality</b>           | Is an institution of local government that governs a specific region, like a city or town.   |
| <b>Organisational Culture</b> | A collection of shared values and beliefs that affect how individuals think, perceive, and behave inside an organization (Schein, 1985)                                |
| <b>Women's Empowerment</b>    | Is the process of enhancing women's social, economic, and political power capacitating them to have more control over their lives (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002). |

## 1.11 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters to satisfy the objectives of the study. An outline of each chapter's contribution to the research is found below.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation to the Study**

This chapter provides a general overview of the background of the study and the context of the research problem. It outlines the research questions and objectives which focus on analysing the barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality. It discusses the existing theories in relation to the research objectives of the study. Additionally, the significance and justification for the study are explicitly viewed

through the lenses of academic significance and South African government legislation. Furthermore, the chapter describes the research methodology that was applied during the study's data-gathering and analysis process. Lastly, this chapter chronicled expressly the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter discusses the literature review that succinctly covers the research problem and questions. It viewed the history of women in the workplace to ascertain how their employment transformed from the pre-industrial era to the industrial age, up until the Industrial Revolution era. The chapter provides statistics on South Africa's workforce representation to determine whether the country has improved women's status in the workplace. Other items discussed in this chapter are the theories and explanations for the barriers inhibiting women's advancement into senior leadership roles. The section concludes with a discussion of the application of the South African gender transformation program to the local government of eThekweni Municipality, as well as how society views women's leadership to that of men.

## **Chapter 3: Gender Inequality in Leadership: A Global Perspective**

This chapter provides a conceptualisation of a global perspective on gender inequality in leadership. The chapter explores an international and African context of gender inequalities in terms of opportunities and the representation of women in leadership roles. Therefore, it highlights the gender gap that exists between men and women regarding the accessibility and chances to managerial positions utilizing data acquired from a few countries in the United States, Europe, and Africa. It further explores the status of women in the South African Municipalities, using eThekweni Municipality as a case study.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the research design and paradigm that was used as well as the methodology employed to delve into the research problem and come up with a significant theory for tackling the research questions. The study site, target population, sampling, data collection, and measurements are also outlined, followed by a brief on the data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This chapter provides a detailed exploration, discussion, and interpretation of the study's findings. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The data was analysed and presented in four primary themes that emerged from the data. The first section of the data analysis presents the demographic/biographical data, followed by the qualitative analysis. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The main objective of this study was to analyse the barriers inhibiting women's progression into leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality. Therefore, this section discussed barriers that were identified as hindering women's progression into leadership positions. Four measures that eThekweni Municipality could employ to accelerate the pace at which women are promoted and appointed into senior leadership positions were also discussed in this chapter.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusion**

This chapter summarizes the research questions and objectives to establish if the findings achieved the study's objectives. The chapter also included a synopsis of each chapter that provides a quick rundown of the findings of each chapter. The findings of this study, showing how each objective was achieved and what the conclusion drawn from the findings were also outlined in this chapter. This chapter also included an outline of the recommendations based on the findings. The researcher further discussed the limitations of the study, recommended areas of future research, as well as the conclusion of the study.

### **1.12 CONCLUSION**

Chapter One sets the context and background of the study with a clear explanation of the research problem, research questions, and the research objectives that directed the research process. The chapter highlighted the significance as well as justification for the study. The research methodology and the elements of research ethics that were employed to preserve the integrity of the research process were addressed. The limitations of the study together with an outline of the chapters wrapped up the chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter builds on the introduction from Chapter One through an extensive literature review. According to Hofstee (2006), a literature review is a review of previous academic work that includes a thorough, critical, and contextualized analysis of the theory underpinning the work to learn from other researchers about their theoretical and conceptualizations of problems, their empirical findings, and the instruments they employed and their results. Textbooks, journals, magazines, the internet, and previous works of similar research are used as sources of review literature. These primary sources aid in clarifying, supporting, and directing each stage of this study, from developing the research topic to disseminating and applying research findings.

The literature review is organized into nine sections. The first section gives an outline of the difficulties faced by female managers in the workplace by drawing on a review of the history of women in the workforce. It discusses how the employment of women transformed over the years, from the pre-industrial era to the industrial age, up until the Industrial Revolution era. As the discussions of this study are founded on legal and policy frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment at the national, regional, and worldwide levels, the second section deliberates on the policy and legislative provisions to provide the legal backing for all subsequent discussions and arguments. The third section offers data on the workforce's representation in South Africa to determine whether the country has made any progress toward improving women's status in the workplace. The data provided by the Department of Labour in its 22<sup>nd</sup> Commission for Employment Equity Report is comprehensively analysed. In the fourth section, this study delves deeper into the origins and history of a local government that is traditionally male dominated. The fifth section attempts to dissect the debate around women's inclusion and exclusion in positions of authority at work. The review of the literature shows that the local government frequently leaves little to no space for women's authority and agency and by making it difficult for them to participate in or raise controversial gender issues, they aim to exclude or at least, reduce the effective women's actual participation in development processes (Manqe, 2018). This gap allowed the researcher to discuss the barriers inhibiting women's advancement to leadership positions in the sixth section. The theories and

explanations for the barriers are divided into three distinct types based on their causes. The barrier types are organisational factors, societal gender stereotypes, and personal factors.

In the seventh section, the researcher assesses the status of women's participation, representation, and influence on local government leadership positions within the general framework of feminist theories that can be used for defining and explaining the circumstances surrounding the rate of gender transformation that influences women's advancement into senior leadership positions in municipalities. The section explores the South African gender transformation programme, specifically, its legislative framework and its application to the example of the local government of eThekweni Municipality. The following section discusses how women's leadership is perceived by society in comparison to the leadership of males. The last section of this chapter discusses the study's theoretical framework. This study adopts a feminist theory as the fundamental theoretical framework. In this section, there is a detailed explanation of how feminist theory is applied and why it is crucial to the current investigation.

## **2.2 WOMEN'S HISTORY IN THE WORKPLACE**

This section presents information about the history of women in the workplace to determine whether the world has made any progress in improving women's status in the workplace.

### **2.2.1 Women and Work in the pre-industrial Era**

In South Africa, many centuries ago, most women did not have jobs outside the home, and those who did were young and single. In that era, women and men usually worked side by side in family businesses. According to Montgomery and Collette (2002) and Freedman (2010), farming was the main industry in the colonies and subsequently in the 1800s. This implied that both working men and women were tough and physically strong. Although both sexes worked together to clear land, cultivate crops, and tend to livestock in pre-industrial periods, Burnette (2008) contends that agriculture was a primary source of employment for women. It was widely believed that women's employment in the workforce was a requirement for social acceptance and empowerment. Men worked at jobs requiring physical strength, while women took care of the household and the children. Men were engaged in competitive occupations that paid well outside of farming, including merchant shipping, shipbuilding, printing, and brewing, giving them an economic advantage over women. Only a few trades were predominately performed by women. They carried out simple duties and produced things like soap and candles. These

kinds of businesses were regarded as appropriate for women because they represented the field of "women's work". On the other hand, men were given the chance to control significant businesses. Men held most of the power and ultimately had an advantage over women since they earned much of the money.

### **2.2.2 Women and Work in the Industrial Age**

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, much of the work that women did was done in the home. Women were expected to perform traditional tasks like cleaning the house, laundry, sewing, and maintaining clothing. They were also active in raising children and assisted in running the farm's operations. Women continued to work, but now it was performed outside the home or in someone else's. During the first three-quarters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became common for both middle-class and affluent houses to employ servants. According to Duiker and Spielvogel (2007) and Freedman (2010), many women worked as housekeepers, cooks, and other domestic helpers, often starting their careers as young girls.

However, as the Industrial Revolution progressed, the conventional role of women started to shift. The necessity for education was realized as more and more women started to struggle for their rights. Women started working so they could provide for their families. Teachers were in high demand, and many of them were female. Men saw teaching as a continuation of women's "natural role" as child-nurturing nurtures. Some women started operating their own farms as tenants. According to Burnette (2008:51), most of these women farmers were likely widows who transitioned to farming after their spouses passed away.

Mining Minerals Sustainable Development Southern Africa (2001) makes reference to South Africa and notes that historical gender patterns persisted into the industrial era. Women continued to work in the home, while men worked in the mining industry. Women were left to care for the household while men became the only source of income. A significant shift in gender roles, relationships, and responsibilities is necessary for both women and men to move beyond such traditional and relatively static gender roles and into a world where men and women can be seen as being of equal worth and dignity, equal workers, and earners.

### **2.2.3 Women and Work in the Industrial Revolution Era**

Due to changing notions of masculinity and femininity, industrialization resulted in a reinterpretation of gender roles as well as a division between the home and the workplace.

Women faced pressure to pursue higher education and professional occupations due to a lack of employment possibilities. In turn, this led to an increase in living conditions, higher earnings, and freedom from parental and patriarchal control (Kramarae & Spender, 2000; Spielvogel, 2012). Women have advanced significantly in the 21st century, which was unthinkable even 50 years ago. As proof of significant changes in women's roles in society, the growing participation of women in labour market and higher education is frequently cited (Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso, 2006). According to Evertson and Neramo (2004), while women's participation in paid employment has expanded significantly, men's engagement in household chores has not increased to the same degree. Berger (1992) contends that starting in the middle of the 1920s, the position of women in the labour force changed because of industrial development. This presented new difficulties and had an impact on women's professional life. Even though women in South Africa's major cities made more money, their options were still limited because of racial and gender stereotypes, as well as laws and regulations that were out of their control and that discriminated against them. Family expectations regarding roles had a part in whether rural women chose to remain in their communities or sought out more options by relocating to cities.

The region's customary structures and institutions, as well as the status and authority of women, were all irrevocably transformed by the migrant labour system. According to Britton (2005), the removal of young, productive males from rural society is a system that began with colonization and intensified throughout apartheid, leaving disproportionately high numbers of women and children in those areas. In comparison to men, women often found themselves in less secure positions, particularly when it came to having control over or access to work, land, and other forms of economic opportunity. In actuality, the repercussions of this physical isolation on black South African women were extensive and long-lasting, affecting not just their family structures and economic prospects but also their access to fundamental health and education facilities.

Over the past years, there have been changes for women regarding employment, with more women transitioning from working in their own homes to being employed in paid jobs outside of their homes. In agreement with the researcher, Conway (2012) asserts that working conditions and possibilities for women have unquestionably improved from what they were in the past. In South Africa, women now make up a much larger share of the workforce and are

being paid for their work. However, the data provided above indicates that despite improvements in women's employment over the past years, there are still significant employment inequalities between women and men. Women are still discriminated against and disadvantaged, as evidenced by the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles and their greater prevalence than males in unpaid caring responsibilities. Grey-Bowen and McFarlane (2010) contend that because women continue to spend more time on household duties than men do, they have fewer employment opportunities and slim chances of assuming roles of responsibility and leadership in organizations, where they would be paid more than men. To eradicate these gender imbalances and improve the status quo in the workplace, there is a need to receive government and legislative support.

### **2.3 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

The discourse of women's participation in leadership roles has remained in a central place in debates on gender aspects of South Africa's nation-building. Despite the significant progress our government has made in terms of racial and gender equality, women continue to be confronted with institutional gendered challenges. Several states have commended the South African government for introducing several policies and legislation to solidify and realize women's right to equal treatment. Such policies and legislation gave women opportunities to participate actively in issues affecting their standard of living (Gouws, 2010). However, studies reveal that the exertions of the government have not yielded many positive results as South Africa's leadership is still divisive due to the lack of representation of women in senior leadership positions (Joseph, 2022). This revelation was acknowledged in 2011 by the chairperson of the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), Commissioner Beatrice Ngcobo where she stated, "There are women in Parliament and good laws to protect women, but when it comes to implementation, people at the frontline are mostly men. They won't give up power so easily" (Barclay, 2011). The erstwhile Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities in South Africa, Ms. Lulu Xingwana also concurs and stated in her 2012 address that "South Africa has some of the most progressive policies that are aimed at advancing women empowerment and gender equality. However, the challenge remains the capacity to translate such policies into implementation" (RSA, 2012, p. 134). Furthermore, Matoane (2015, p. 7-8) contends that there exists a gap between the policy and legislative landscape and the actual, practical, day-to-day realities concerning gender transformation in the local government. Making sense of these assertions is worrying as they are an indication that South

African municipalities exhibit an inadequate representation of women in senior leadership positions. Following are some of the various legislative policies and frameworks that have been instituted by South Africa to address gender inequality, particularly regarding resolving this problem in the workplace.

### **2.3.1 The Constitution of South Africa**

Gender inequalities in South Africa have been addressed by the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, the country's highest legal document, whose ultimate goal is to construct and build a society where both men and women are equal irrespective of race or other disparities. The South African constitution was derived from the Freedom Charter's goals in fulfilling its promise of a democratic, non-racial, and unitary state (Esterhuysen, 2003). Section 9(3) of the Constitution states that neither the government nor any individual may engage in direct or indirect discrimination based on gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, or any other ground or combination of grounds listed or unlisted in section 9(3). In this regard, equality is emphasized in the Constitution as being the complete and equal exercise of all freedoms and rights. Scribner and Lambert (2010) claim that the approval of the Constitution was a crucial first step in a plan to overcome the historical disparities between women and men in South Africa. The South African Constitution, according to Bauer and Taylor (2005:249), "incorporates individual rights along with a wide array of social and cultural rights, and establishes a clear commitment to overcoming past injustices, while recognising diversity." Gouws (1996) asserts that all women in South Africa did not get official recognition as equal citizens until the adoption of the "Bill of Rights." The Republic of South Africa's constitution is regarded as the supreme legislation because it was the result of prolonged political debates before and after the country's first democratic elections (Cawood, 2004).

### **2.3.2 Employment Equity Act**

The Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998 is another significant piece of legislation that acknowledges the inequities in occupation, employment, and income that exist within the country's labour market as a result of apartheid and other unlawful legislation and practices. This Act was adopted to improve equal chances in the workplace and end unjust discrimination because these discrepancies have caused pronounced disadvantages for some groups of individuals (women, blacks, and people with disabilities) which could not be rectified by just repealing discriminatory legislation. This could be accomplished by putting affirmative action

policies into place to address the employment disadvantages experienced by historically disadvantaged groups, and by guaranteeing fair representation across all occupational levels and categories in the workforce (Thomas, 2002). Organizations are expected to implement effective employment equality measures and to demonstrate the efforts they have made to develop, train, and retain members of historically underrepresented groups, and to establish equal employment opportunities through these measures. The Employment Equity Act of 1998 mandates that businesses treat their workers with respect on both a social and moral level and respond to their legal rights and claims in a way that upholds moral principles of justice and fairness (RSA, Employment Equity Act, 1998).

### **2.3.3 Commission for Gender Equality Act**

The Commission for Gender Equity (CGE) is one of the independent constitutional institutions established in terms of Section 187 of the South African Constitution of 1996. The establishment of this Commission was to promote respect for gender equality and the protection, development, and attainment of gender equality. This constitutional entity is relied upon to build, support and uphold the ideal of a free and equal society in all essential and practical ways. The primary responsibilities of the CGE in South Africa are the promotion, defence, advancement, and realization of gender equality (RSA, 1996). As part of its delegation, the CGE has been given the responsibility of carrying out duties at the national level, including investigating and reporting on gender-related complaints, monitoring and evaluating institutional gender practices, conducting research, educating the public, advocating for change, and offering advice on matters of gender equality in South Africa (South Africa Media and Gender Institute, 2013).

The Commission on Gender Equality (2011) revealed that since 1994, the South African government's initiatives to advance women's empowerment and gender equality have been hailed as a beacon of best practices around the globe. This is due to the powerful political will that was shown through the establishment of institutions like the Office on the Status of Women (OSW), housed in the presidency, the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), and other institutions that make up the national gender machinery. These organisations have been set up to foster gender equality and women's empowerment. According to Waiganjo (2014), this Commission indicated the commencement of institutionalized National Gender Machinery (NGM) in the National policy framework. Furthermore, the approval and implementation of

significant laws and policies represent another milestone in the growth of gender equality and women's empowerment in the local government.

#### **2.3.4 The National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality**

The National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, 2000, was established by democratically governed South Africa to address gender discrimination and to advance the status of women in the workforce. This framework is a mechanism that serves as a guide for the development of practices, procedures, policies, and laws that will ensure equal opportunities and rights for women and men in all realms and institutions of government, the workplace, community as well as family. According to Mvimbi (2009), this legislative framework suggests that issues of gender should not be relegated to secondary status, but be given priority, and placed at the top of government agendas. This suggests that achieving gender equality ought to be the focus of government business, its agencies, and the private sector, rather than treating it as an ad-hoc goal. In agreement with this assertion, Ruppel (2008:21) further indicates that “the policy framework provides mechanisms and guidelines for all sectors and other stakeholders for planning, implementing, and monitoring gender equality strategies and programs in order to ensure that these would facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment, which is the overarching goal of this framework.”

#### **2.3.5 Gender Policy Framework for Local Government**

The Department of Provincial and Local Government established a Gender Policy Framework for Local Government in 2007 to provide direction and support to local government regarding gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women in response to the under-representation and under-participation of women in local government in South Africa (Hicks, 2011). Outlining a comprehensive institutional system to implement mainstreaming of gender, this policy framework advocates for a women's caucus to serve as an empowering platform for a committee of gender equality as well as for female council members to oversee municipal gender mainstreaming processes from a political perspective. This framework also serves as clear and practical guidance on when and how councils should mainstream or integrate gender into their internal processes and functions.

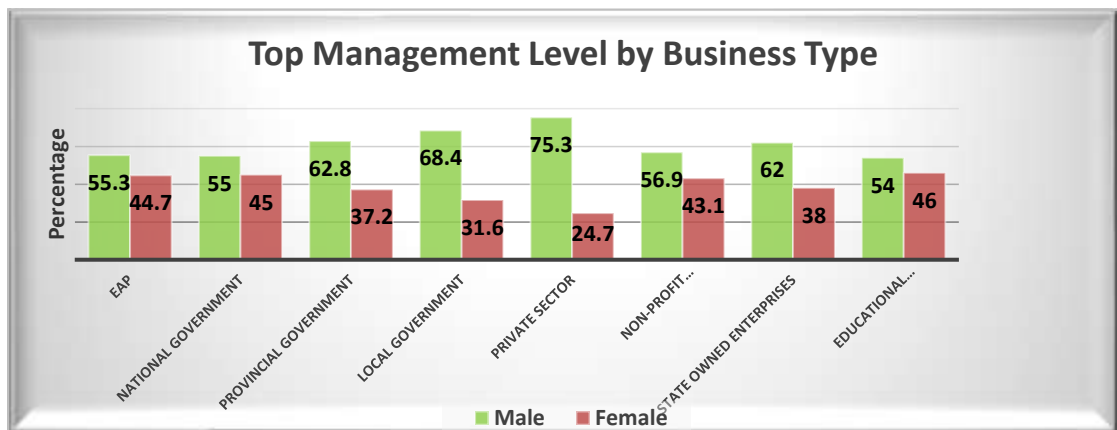
This framework's overarching objective is to support local government in carrying out its developmental responsibility, ensuring that women do not remain in underprivileged circumstances. This means that local government must be able to address gender mainstreaming in all its policies, plans, and practices to ensure that gender equality is promoted and job opportunities for women are generated. This framework also calls for the creation of institutional arrangements, particularly gender focal points in local governments, and it mandates that these efforts be financed with defined performance targets. Furthermore, the framework includes provisions for career development, equal and fair hiring practices, and an overall improvement in the working circumstances for women in local government.

Given the foregoing, it is clear that South Africa, through the adoption of multiple statutory frameworks, has established a foundation for gender equality and equitable employment opportunities in the workplace. Even though the required legal frameworks must be in place to guarantee gender equality and the equal employment of women, simply having these documents in place will not alter the status of women; only their successful application will do this.

#### **2.4 REPRESENTATION OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKFORCE**

As alluded to above, South Africa has instituted several statutory and regulatory pieces of legislation to address gender equality and promote women's position in the workplace. These prescripts are a part of the labour market regulation that the government has issued to create conducive workplaces that enable women to reach their full potential. Whether these directives have resulted in equal employment for women will be addressed in this study. Women's societal and workplace roles should demonstrate that laws promoting gender equality are being upheld. Despite the government strategies that seek to include women at all levels, women are still significantly underrepresented in all sectors, according to the Department of Labour (2022), which indicated this in its annual 22<sup>nd</sup> Commission for Employment Equity report. The report also shows that South Africa's workplace transformation is moving at a very modest pace and that males continue to dominate all occupational levels and across all industries. This assertion is supported by the figures, graphs, and discussions below, which are based on an analysis of the employment data supplied by designated firms in their employment equity report submitted for the 2021 Employment Equity reporting cycle.

**Figure 2.1: Workforce Profile at the Top Management Level by Business Type**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

Figure 2.1 above depicts that men made up the majority of top management in almost all business sectors in 2021, with women holding fewer than 50% of these positions. Even though the South African government reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality, this statistic reveals that women held less than 50% of the top managerial positions across all three realms of government, with local government having the lowest percentage at 31.6%. Men made up an incredible total of more than 60% of the workforce in the private sector and state-owned enterprises. The sector with the highest proportion of women in top management, accounting for only 46% of the workforce, was the educational institution. This is not surprising because the sector of educational institutions is generally thought to be dominated by women.

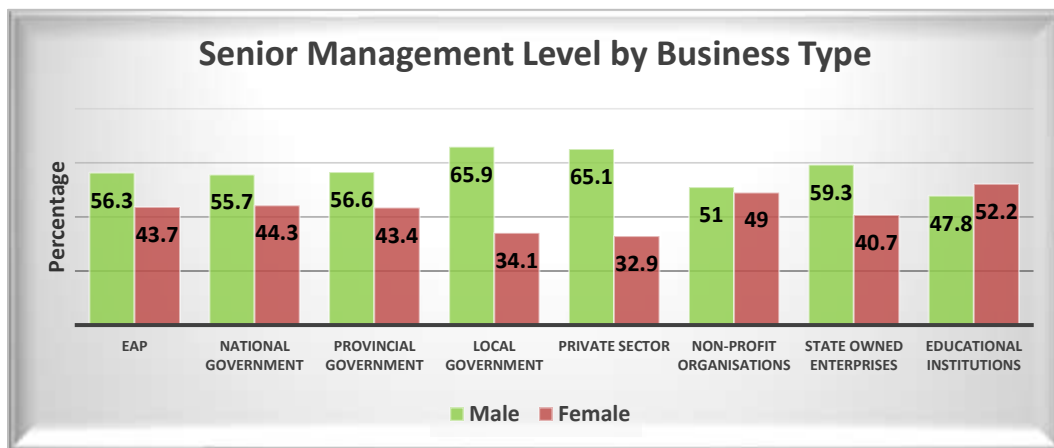
**Figure 2.2: Top Management Level by Gender (All Employers)**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

Figure 2.2 above shows that from 2019 to 2021 men continued to dominate the workforce throughout the three years although the trend over the years has been a slight increase in female representation, which resulted in a 1.4% increase. This over-representation is perpetuated by barriers that impede women from ascending to this level, such as the preference for men in terms of promoting, recruiting, promoting, and providing opportunities for skills development at this occupational level.

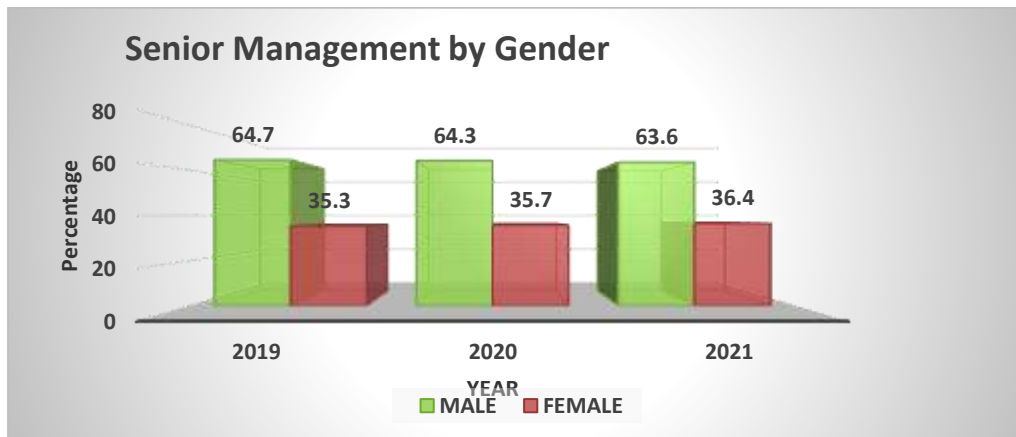
**Figure 2.3: Senior Management Level by Business Type**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

At the senior management level, a similar trend to the top management level is observed. Figure 2.3 above reveals that the representation of women at this level is significantly under-represented, although the situation is slightly better than at the top management level. In practically all sectors women accounted for less than 50% of senior management positions. There has been little improvement in both the national and provincial governments, with men counting for more than 55% of positions and women holding more than 40%. The data shows that the situation is still dire in the local government and private sector where women were employed in just above 30% of the workforce. Educational institutions are the only sector in which women hold more than 50% of the senior management position.

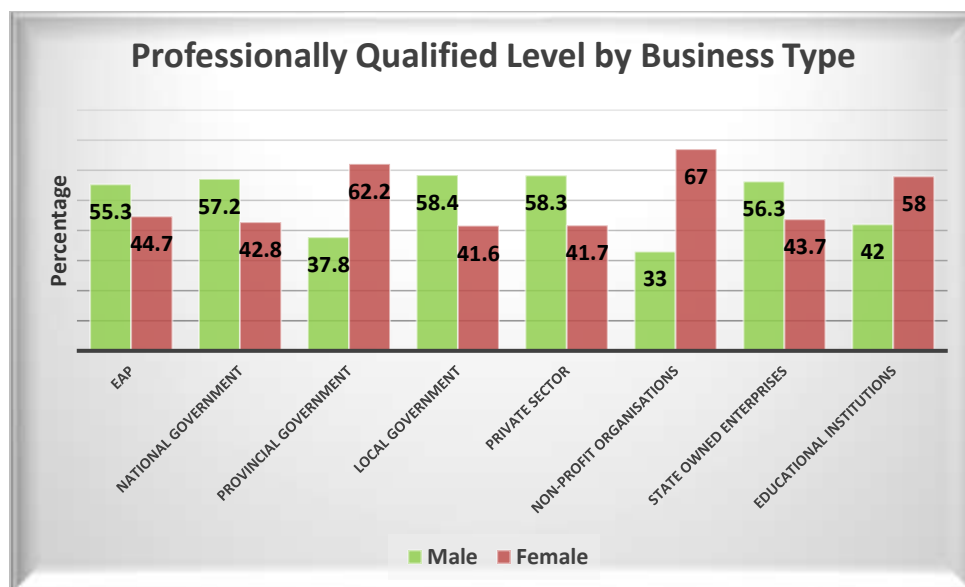
**Figure 2.4: Senior Management Level by Gender (All Employers)**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

At the senior management level, although there is a slight improvement in female representation (0.7%), the male group continues to dominate at this occupational level. The data shows that the representation of women at the senior management level in the year 2020 was 35.3%, slightly increased to 35.7% in 2020, and again increased in 2021 to 36.4%. Therefore, the overall trend shows a very slow upward trend, which indicates steady progress in advancing women into senior management-level positions. However, it should be noted that the progress noted is still far from equal employment.

**Figure 2.5: Professionally Qualified Level by Business Type**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

Figure 2.5 above demonstrates that at the professionally qualified level, more women are employed in most business types compared to top management and senior management levels. However, practically all industries continue to be dominated by men, except for the provincial government, non-profit organisations, and educational institutions, where women make up 62.4% of the workforce. The highest percentage of women employed at this level was in non-profit organisations, where women were employed in 67% of positions. Although there were more women employed at this level of professional qualification than in top management and senior management, decisions were not taken at this level.

The situation is intensely gloomy in local government, where women held 41.6% of the positions and was the lowest percentage at the professionally qualified level. The underrepresentation of women in local government implies a need for the demands and agenda of women to be driven at the municipal government agenda. Furthermore, it makes it more difficult for the municipality to provide effective service delivery because competent and skilled women are being marginalised (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2019).

**Figure 2.6: Professionally Qualified Level by Gender (All Employers)**

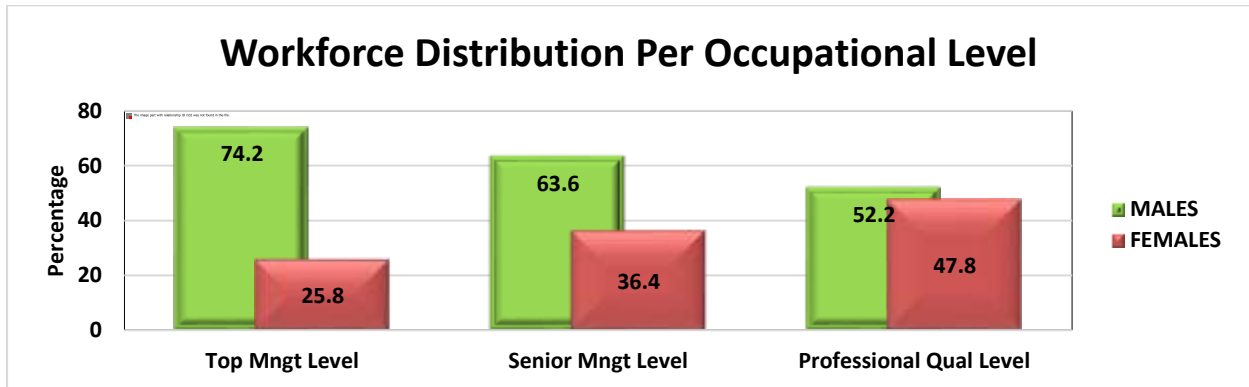


**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

Figure 2.6 above shows that at the professionally qualified level, the dominant gender is still male as women occupy less than 50% of the positions. It is also indicated that females are performing much better at this occupational level compared to other levels, as women held more than 47% of positions. There has been an upward trend from the year 2019 to 2021 in terms of the representation of women at this occupational level. However, what continues to be worrisome and challenging to comprehend is the transition in the progression to the top management and senior management levels. It should be emphasized that this provides more

support for the claim that women encounter a glass ceiling at the professionally qualified level because it shows that they have the experience and abilities needed to move forward.

**Figure 2.7: Workforce Distribution Per Occupational Level (2021)**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

Figure 2.7 above illustrates that in the year 2021, men dominated all the different occupational levels. At the top management level, men were nearly three times more prevalent than women. Men outnumbered women at both the senior and the professionally qualified levels albeit the gap was closing. Amongst the three occupational levels, the top management level had the highest proportion of males, 72,4%. The data above clearly demonstrates that women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions, even though South Africa has made great strides in putting the necessary policies and directives in place to pursue gender equality, given the fact that women are more well-represented at the professionally qualified levels than at the top and senior management levels.

The fundamental question that is presented by the persistent huge discrepancies between male and female employment and that will be answered by this study is ‘What are the barriers that inhibit women from progressing to top positions, considering a better representation at the professionally qualified level?’ While there are many reasons to applaud the efforts that have been made to incorporate women into the workforce, substantial efforts should be made to appoint more women to top and senior management positions, especially in local government where the gender gaps are huge. Equal opportunities in the workplace would only remain a hollow slogan for South African women if the laws and policies in place are not successfully enforced to end inequality in the workplace.

## 2.5 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AS AN INSTITUTION

According to Chapter 7 of the South African Constitution, municipalities make up the local sphere of government and are the formal lowest tier of the country's democratically elected government. As a result, the term “local government” is used throughout this dissertation in reference to municipalities, and depending on the source cited, the two terms may occasionally be used interchangeably. As opposed to the national and provincial spheres, which are closest to the populace, the local government is the domain of government. According to Gomme (1987, p. 1-2), local government is defined as:

*“The portion of a country or state's overall government that is administered by authorities under the control of the state authority but elected by qualified people living in or owning property in particular localities that have been formed by communities that have similar interests and a shared history”.*

This means that local government is a crucial component of the political system that underpins national governance. Consequently, it serves as a representation of a legal idea as a body corporate with a juristic person (Muttalib & Akhar, 1983). The local government as outlined in the Local Government Handbook (2021), South Africa has 257 total municipalities as a result of its integration efforts, including 205 local, 44 district, and 8 metropolitan municipalities. Following the 2016 local government elections, several important demarcation modifications went into effect. The following is how municipalities are classified into 3 categories, with each category serving a particular purpose:

- **Category A (Metropolitan):** A municipality that administers heavily populated urbanised areas and is responsible for carrying out all local government duties within its jurisdiction.
- **Category B (Local):** A municipality that is the third and most local level of local government and that shares municipal executive and legislative responsibility and authority in its area with a category C municipality within its boundaries.
- **Category C (District):** A municipality that executes some of the functions of local government for a district.

Each municipality has a Council that has both legislative and executive power to undertake municipal duties of fulfilling fundamental requirements and delivering basic needs and services. The overarching goal of all councils as government spheres closest to the people is to implement a local government that is actively engaged with communities and groups. As outlined in the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the goal is to discover sustainable strategies to address the social and economic demands of the communities while also enhancing their quality of life. The objectives of local government are further outlined in the White Paper as follows:

- To provide a democratic and accountable government for local communities.
- To ensure the provision of basic services to communities in a sustainable manner.
- To promote social and economic development.
- To promote a safe and healthy environment.
- To encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government.

The Local Government's actions are guided by policies that are formulated and implemented as crucial functions. Their responsibility is to represent local communities and constituency concerns to the federal, provincial, and national governments, as well as other relevant authorities and sectors (Exiner, 2016). Setting forth a plan of action and ensuring that the desired outcome is realized are the two main responsibilities of local government. Among the roles in planning are council plans, budget plans, municipal plans, and strategic statements. Local government is therefore a complicated environment that demands management expertise, ability, and resources. Additionally, in order to succeed in delivering high-quality services, local government leaders need the full cooperation of the community at large. This is especially true of Metropolitan Councils because of their additional basic and secondary healthcare, education, safety, and security duties. Political, economic, and social development can only be genuine and meaningful when citizens are given forums for expression and some kind of influence over local issues. In agreement, Sikander (2015, p. 171) highlighted that "Local government institutions have evolved to play a significant role not just in supporting or upholding democratic values but also in quickening the rate of development. Because they are elective in nature, they have enabled effective engagement and involvement in the local area's development.

## **2.6 WOMEN'S POSITIONS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Prior to 1994, South African society severely repressed women, Black women in particular, and did not afford them the same opportunity as men to apply their managerial talents and competence, particularly in senior leadership positions in the public sector (Mello & Phago 2007). Job discrimination and reservations were legalized practices, and certain groups were barred from access to leadership roles based on their ethnicity and gender (Nkoana, 2010). It has been 29 years since the establishment of a democratically elected administration that adopted and established clear goals to correct and solve the inequities of the past. The South African political transition gave a platform for ensuring that the public service is reformed and is representative of the country's demographics, especially at the management level. As has been alluded to above, the democratically elected government has passed laws and established institutional frameworks to address the long-term effects of a highly unequal society. More women are expected to be appointed to leadership and top management roles in municipalities for local government to show that it is receptive to these laws and legislation and wants to ensure that faster transformative progress occurs. It is disappointing that this is not the case, as women continue to experience the realities of a gender-biased society in the workplace despite statutory and institutional protection. Naff (2010) asserts that these government-set goals have not been attained. Even today, South African women confront numerous obstacles in terms of social representation and generally don't have a voice. Maseko (2013) contends that women are still underrepresented in several leadership and decision-making positions despite being prevalent at lower levels. According to Stivers (2002), women are frequently "on tap" but infrequently "on top".

Institutional racism in local government dates back to a time when opportunities and rights were based on gender and race. Women's exclusion from the workforce is frequently a result of social contracts and is institutionalized by cultural and social conventions that uphold gender inequity. According to Mello and Phago (2007), sociocultural theories have historically viewed women as naturally inferior to men and presented gender-related benefits to men at the expense of women. This historical patriarchy has an impact on both official and informal interactions between people as well as the chances provided to women in the workplace (Bangani, 2019). According to Manqele (2018), the local government frequently leaves little to no space for women's authority and agency and by making it difficult for them to participate in or raise

controversial gender issues, they aim to exclude or at least, reduce the effective women's actual participation in development processes. Dlanjwa (2018) concurs with this status quo and further emphasizes that gender equality in local government is not accorded adequate attention since it is considered an issue that local government administrations must resolve. As a result, there is still a problem with women being underrepresented in decision-making levels. Shabangu (2015) argues that considering this, it is essential that national programs enable the inclusive and effective engagement of women, including the creation of an enabling environment that encourages women to grow and participate in decision-making platforms, including local government.

It is essential that women are represented in leadership and decision-making roles within local government because here is where most service delivery concerns affecting women, including housing, electricity, water, roads, and more, are taken into account (Hunt, 2014). The representation of women and effective participation on an equitable basis in local government guarantee that issues impacting women are discussed, included in a budget and executed with priority. Reiterating the significance of having women in senior roles in municipalities, Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2013) contend that having women in leadership positions in local government will give them the ability to influence decisions made locally to ensure that municipalities are gender sensitive and capable of promoting the empowerment of women. Women's involvement in local government issues may result in more effective and efficient service delivery, which is probably better for the whole democratic system. Women's knowledge of household requirements can be turned into information for planning for service delivery, resulting in a positive feedback loop of gender-sensitive policies and more highly valued engagement of women (Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2013). According to Phillips (1991), giving women access to positions of leadership and decision-making is fulfilling justice, as he points out that "just as it is unjust that women should be cooks and not engineers, so it is unjust that they should be excluded from the central activities in the local government." The European Network of Experts (1997, p. 8) contends that:

*"A balanced representation of women and men at all levels of decision-making guarantees better government. Because of their history as a group, women have their unique perspectives. They have different values and ideas and behave differently. Increased participation of women in decision-making will create a new culture and shed new light on how power should be exercised. Women attach great importance to the quality of contact between people and are less individualistic than men. The validity*

*and trustworthiness of democracy will be in question if women continue to be absent from different institutions of society.”*

Therefore, it is crucial that women are fully represented and included in senior leadership and roles of authority within local government.

## **2.7 BARRIERS INHIBITING WOMEN’S ADVANCEMENT TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

Various scholars contend that there are several reasons why women remain underrepresented in leadership and management positions in both the private and public sectors. The metaphor of the ‘glass ceiling’, a transparent barrier that prohibits women from progressing up the corporate ladder beyond a certain point, is one of the phrases most frequently used to explain the reasons for the low representation of women in management positions (Morrison et al., 1987). However, as noted by Auster (1993), the glass ceiling is not positioned in one spot, but a collection of numerous, widespread, and varied instances of gender bias that regularly take place in both covert and overt ways. Today, the so-called ‘glass ceiling’ refers to an imperceptible but essentially unbreakable barrier that prevents women from achieving the highest levels of the corporate world, regardless of their qualifications, abilities, and accomplishments.

Theories and explanations for the barriers that lead to a dearth of women in senior management roles can be divided into three distinct types based on their causes. Barriers in the first category are those brought on by organisational factors, and they result from causes of gender inequalities that frequently favour the hiring, promotion, and retention of men over women, particularly in positions that make up the typical career paths of senior management positions. In the second category, societal gender stereotype barriers are based on arguments that center on patriarchal societal institutions, family systems, sociocultural factors, and cultural norms. Lastly, there are the individual barriers which are self-imposed barriers that become a wall between women and senior leadership positions. These include a lack of confidence and self-esteem, leadership identity formation, and a double burden.

Hence, this section will review the literature in order to explain those barriers that contribute to women's underrepresentation in management positions. The literature review will primarily be based on searches in Google Scholar, Emerald Group Publishing, ABI/INFORM Global, as

well as the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences databases, which allowed for the examination of various journals.

## **2.7.1 ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS**

These have been identified as structural and cultural impediments within organizations that have resulted in the underrepresentation of women at the senior leadership level.

### **2.7.1.1 Organisational Culture**

Barriers faced by women in moving up the corporate ladder embrace the impact of cultural beliefs and practices. The concept of culture is multifaceted due to its lack of a universally agreed-upon definition (Bellot, 2011). Numerous disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, organizational behaviour, and managerial sciences have studied organizational culture. However, various research converges on some common themes that reflect people's beliefs, norms, and values that guide their social interactions. Stewart and Zaaiman (2015, p. 118) define culture as the material and symbolic components of human society that constitute a way of life, which are spread through social interaction. According to Schein (1985), organizational culture is a collection of shared values and beliefs that affect how individuals think, perceive, and behave inside an organization. According to Tharp (2009), culture can be compared to the "glue" that ties an organization together or the "compass" that gives direction. These two analogies imply that culture is crucial in tying people together and filling in any gaps that may exist within an organization, as well as in giving them direction. Leaders help new members find their way around the organization by giving direction and significance so they can adapt.

According to Schein (2010), organizational culture is categorized into three levels, which are basic assumptions, shared values, and artifacts. Basic assumptions are accepted beliefs and conventions that are derived from past events. In general, several disciplines influenced by widely varying assumptions are used to define and interpret organizational culture (Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, 1991). While organizational culture may be gender-neutral, Wallace, Hunt, and Richards (1991) note that there is no assumption of objectivity. Feldman and Msibi (2014) regard this as one of the major barriers preventing the advancement of women in organizations since some aspects of organizational culture tend to lean towards one gender while excluding the other (Graham, Grennan, & Harvey, 2019). For example, a culture that encourages long

hours at work considerably favors men since they are seen as more able to meet these expectations than women who have other obligations besides their jobs (Nemoto, 2013). According to Rodgers-Healy (2008), the majority of organizations have masculine cultures because decision-making positions have been reserved for males. Martin and Barnard (2013) attest that masculine culture was unable to meet the unique physical, identity, and work-life balance needs of women. The employee's behaviour, performance, learning and development, creativity and innovation, and knowledge management within organizations are all impacted by organizational culture (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015).

Shared values are a set of rules that guide members to accomplish common objectives. Some values are outlined in various policies and regulations, but others are accepted by members and are reflected in their conventions and beliefs (Schein, 2010). Organizational culture portrays top executives as one of the top five elements that contribute to and increase the value of organizations (Graham, Grennan & Harvey, 2019). According to Feldman and Msibi (2014), an organization's leadership shapes and influences its organizational culture. Various studies corroborate that organizational culture has a significant impact on a variety of organizational processes, productivity, and commitment, and plays a crucial role in the success of an organization (Giorgi, Lockwood, & Glynn, 2015; Wallace, Hunt, & Richards, 1991; and Sørensen, 2002). A study by Davies, Broekema, Nordling, and Furnham (2017) found that as men and women ascend into more senior management positions, their work values diverge dramatically. Male senior executives placed a high value on making a profit, wanting to succeed, and being technology-driven, whereas their female counterparts placed value on empathy, the urge to express oneself, and socializing. Gender-based tensions are likely to develop as a result of these opposing values and extend to the rest of the workforce since leaders are crucial in setting the values that form the foundation of workplace culture (Hendrikz & Engelbrecht, 2019).

Artifacts are hazy, which makes it simple to identify them but difficult to interpret them (Schein, 2010). Even while artifacts can be seen, felt, and heard if new members don't seek clarification within the organization, they won't comprehend the lingo, the dress code, or the behaviour within the group. Despite receiving social and professional recognition, women in top management positions still encountered obstacles due to the organizational culture, indifferent team members, and a lack of trust from superiors and subordinates (Macarie, Calin

Emilian, & Mora, 2011). The well-being of leaders and the effectiveness of their unit may suffer from a lack of supportive resources in the face of increasing job demands (Savage, 2019). According to Morcos (2018), culture is a reflection of employee experience and ultimately influences the success of an organization.

### **2.7.1.2 Corporate Policies and Practices**

Corporate policies and practices related to gender equity, advancement, and career development are frequently cited as key elements of the 'glass ceiling that keeps women from reaching the highest levels of management. According to McStravog (2010), human resources practices and policies in organizations do not do enough to remove barriers that keep women from rising to senior or top executive positions. Organizational recruitment and selection procedures do not specifically target women for positions. According to Mohamed and Romlee (1990), job advertisements are problematic because they frequently emphasize traits that are more often associated with men than with women, and they often use terminology that is distinctly male-oriented, such as stating that the applicant is expected to perform under pressure, command respect, and emphasize prior expertise. These factors all deter prospective female candidates from applying for open senior executive positions. Player, De Moura, Leite, Abrams and Tresg (2019) advocated that the selection and hiring criteria favoured men over women for leadership positions. Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2013), also agreed with the researchers and further contend that women are not given the necessary skills for management posts in local government because of gender equality policies being implemented incorrectly. The United Nations Development Programme (2021) corroborates this view by noting that gender inequality in the workplace is often strengthened by recruitment and selection practices that favour the employment of males over women since leadership roles have often been portrayed as masculine, hence they belong to males.

Whether the hiring criteria for directors are based on abilities, experience, or performance is up for debate (Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015). This criticism is based on the existing claims that women don't have the credentials and work experience essential to be appointed to top executive roles (Storvik, 2015). Marshall (2001) contends that disagreements over qualifications thwart efforts to recruit women for these senior top positions. However, more research is demonstrating that distinct and higher expectations prevail for women to be nominated to boards (Singh, Terjesen & Vinnicombe, 2008). Therefore, research not only

validates the need for women to possess a high level of education to be appointed to executive positions but also attests to the fact that females who are already at those levels possess an even higher level of education than their male counterparts (Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2010; Simpson, Carter & D'Souza, 2010). According to Bilimoria and Piderit (1994, p. 1471), women "continue to be blocked in their rise to the top" despite having the necessary educational credentials for senior executive positions. This suggests that a lack of qualifications is fabricated to discriminate against women and encourage inequality. The lack of women in senior management in South African municipalities is a clear indication that there needs to be a significant overhaul of the entire selection, recruitment, and promotion process.

### **2.7.1.3 Training and Development**

Various studies by other scholars (cited in Govender & Vyas-Doorgapersad 2013) reveal that corporate practices at the local government level are disproportionately affecting females because some municipalities do not invest in setting up training and development programmes to redress the gender imbalance within the working environment, and senior management positions are not being offered to women at an equal rate for men. Other studies conducted by the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs Division in the United States highlighted that most human resources departments are lacking in training employees about equal opportunity regulations and are not offering support to women for them to advance to senior positions of decision-making. These findings are alarming since training and development are essential for providing women with the required skills to be in leadership positions (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020). Inadequate leadership training and development on specific decision-making and management skills have detrimental psychological effects on women's career aspirations, and they impede women from advancing to senior leadership roles. (Fritz & Van Knippenberg, 2017). According to research on both national and local governments, women need to continue ongoing support and training. It is asserted that doing so would help in the retention of women in the workforce and assist them in acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to advance to leadership roles (Vanlangenakker, Wauters & Maddens 2013). Although there are more women in management due to the increased number of women pursuing higher education, statistics from the Department of Labour analysed above revealed that this does not help their management careers advance further as almost 50% of those are still stuck at the lower levels of management.

#### **2.7.1.4 Gender Wage Gap**

Given the enormous increase in women's educational attainment and their expansion into previously male-dominated sectors, one might anticipate a reduction in the gender wage and employment gap in the labour market (Pettit & Hook, 2009). Giele and Stebbins (2003) contend that even though women's employment has become significantly more similar to men's, women's job continues to be characterized by lower compensation. This is corroborated by research done by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2019) at the Emfuleni local municipality, which showed that there is a sizable pay gap between men and women in the Emfuleni municipal area, which promotes a stereotypical mindset in the entire municipality and can obstruct women's recognition and gender equality within the municipal government, regardless of their expertise and abilities. There are various reasons that lead to women earning less than males. Institutional obstacles and cultural perceptions of women's capabilities prevent them from advancing to managerial and higher-level roles in organizations. Women managers are often paid less since they are more likely to be appointed to roles requiring less education. The starting pay for women is still often lower than the starting pay for males in the same position and performing the same work (Freedman, 2010). Even in fields where women and men are equally qualified, men are more likely to occupy positions with greater skill requirements or better income. At the time of recruitment, men are offered larger overall salary packages, which often include bonuses, ancillary benefits, company automobiles, cell phones, and travel reimbursements. These benefits may not always be provided to women (Rowley & Yukongdi, 2009). Many managerial positions, according to Sussman, Steinmetz, and Peterson (1999), include substantial traveling, relocation, or extended work hours. Due to their obligations to their families, women may find it challenging to handle the responsibilities of the workplace. As a result, women often opt for less difficult careers that are more flexible but are probably less likely to lead to career development and higher pay.

#### **2.7.1.5 Lack of Mentorship and Role Models**

Over the last decade, mentorship has drawn a lot of attention in feminist literature as an essential tool for women's career progression. According to Meschitti and Lawton Smith (2017), mentorship refers to a relationship-based process in which the mentor, who has more experience and expertise helps the mentee who has less knowledge and experience. Mentoring is essential for organisations to close the gender gap that exists between women and males.

Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016) state that effective leadership requires access to gender-specific guidance and support. Moore and Wang (2017) also claim that senior leadership mentoring boosts organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, according to Heath (2012), mentorship is crucial for helping women balance their professional and home lives.

For women to succeed in advancing to positions of decision-making, mentoring is one of the crucial techniques they must invest in. Mentorship is important for career advancement and might be even more important for women's success than for men (Bilimoria and Piderit, 2007). In agreement with this statement, Mcilongo and Strydom (2021), support that mentorship is a useful strategy to support the professional advancement of formerly underprivileged women in the South African public sector. Most women who have progressed into managerial roles in corporations attribute their success to mentorship, while those who don't succeed at these levels blame a lack of mentoring.

The challenge in South African municipalities is that women often lack influential mentors or sponsors, understandably with the low numbers of women executives. Fewer women than males hold senior executive roles in businesses, which has reduced the number of same-sex mentors available to younger women. The persistent gender stereotyping of leadership is exacerbated by women who are already in high positions and not willing to support their female subordinates to advance in their careers. 'Queen Bee behaviour' is a term used to describe female executives who, alienate their female colleagues and hence obstruct the advancement of more junior women (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011, p. 47). According to Prpic, Oliviera, and Hemlin (2009), the lack of effective mentorship may even be detrimental to women's careers because it affects their productivity, job satisfaction, and ability to grow in their jobs. Due to the dearth of female role models, women have to look outside their gender to find mentors. Crossing gender lines can be problematic for younger women since their interactions with their male senior colleagues may be interpreted incorrectly. When a male decides to mentor a younger woman, he typically invests less time and effort in her, preventing their relationship from being perceived as sexual (Headlem-Wells, 2004). The paucity of female role models has made it difficult for women who want to advance in the corporate world, as Silva et al (2012) mentioned that one negative effect of lacking access to senior-level mentors is a decreased possibility of obtaining a crucial position that fosters professional progression.

## **2.7.2 SOCIETAL AND GENDER STEREOTYPE FACTORS**

Societal and gender stereotypes are another impediment to women's career advancement. Women are underrepresented in senior management positions because of societal expectations regarding the roles of men and women (Macarie et al. (2011). According to Sowjanya, Krishna, and Rao (2017), patriarchal societal institutions and family systems commonly prohibit women from eschewing prescribed roles like raising children, taking care of in-laws, and taking care of the family in favour of career growth. Schwanke (2013) claims that sociocultural factors play a part in the presumptions and stereotypes that hinder women in leadership positions, especially in workplaces where men predominate. In many cultures, women are defined by what they ought to be or do for males. According to cultural norms, a married woman's primary responsibility is to support her husband's professional aspirations by giving him moral and emotional support. While the spouse is gone studying, it is generally expected that women will handle all chores and family responsibilities. Ely and Meyerson (2000) point out that because most cultures and traditions are patriarchal, organizational practices frequently support and reflect men's circumstances and experiences.

In explaining the basis of gender stereotyping in the workplace, the social role theory asserts that people typically behave following the social norms associated with their gender (Eagly and Cowley, 1986). Women, for instance, are seen as carers in both the professional and home environments, but men are considered heroes due to their power and agency (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Due to perceived competing ideas about masculinity and femininity in the workplace, stereotypes and negative reactions develop (Clow & Ricciardelli, 2011). Women leaders, for instance, are more likely to experience prejudice since it is believed that they are unable to lead effectively (Eagly & Schezny, 2019). According to the research done by McStravog (2010), women who aspire to be in leadership roles are inhibited by stereotypes that see leadership as an exclusively male function. Other researchers show that there is a consensus on cultural expectations and behavioural that males are naturally better at being leaders and have the necessary leadership qualities (Williams, 2000). However, Billing and Alvesson (2000) discovered that both men and women possess leadership skills. Their differences lie in the circumstances in which their traits are applicable. Males tackle difficulties with a tough mentality and can think analytically to solve problems and make plans. They are careful to avoid letting their emotional and personal problems get in the way of doing their work on time. Instead, they work through challenges and make the appropriate decisions. On the other side,

the qualities that define female leadership are cooperation, interdependency, acceptance, integration, understanding, empathy, sensitivity, and compassion. Women are also good in situations that require ingenuity and innovation.

Heilman (2012) asserts that gender stereotypes contribute to prejudice against women's performance in positions and occupations that are often associated with men. If they succeed, women are also held to normative norms of rejection, punishment, and violation. According to Maharaj et al. (2008), males feel threatened when women hold positions of power, and conversely, women may feel helpless and unable to stand up to men in positions of authority. According to Winter et al. (2001), a woman may not be recognized as a leader if she adopts a man's style or behaviour. This runs counter to the argument made by Appelbaum et al (2003) who contend that female leaders should acquire both masculine and feminine traits to increase their chances of succeeding in positions of leadership. Appelbaum et al. (2003) claim that acting in a feminine way is perceived as being indicative of incompetence.

These societal and gender stereotypes prevent women from moving up the organizational hierarchy, which may also prevent the most qualified women from becoming senior leaders.

### **2.7.3 PERSONAL FACTORS**

#### **2.7.3.1 Lack of confidence and self-esteem**

It has been found that women's career aspirations lag behind those of their male counterparts at most career stages. According to Hentschel et al. (2019), women are more stereotyped compared to males and describe themselves as less competent and assertive than males. Contrarily, men were thought to be less stereotyped. Women tend to underestimate their abilities and in contrast to men, they do not think of themselves as being capable of holding senior positions. Larsson and Alvinus (2020) found that women in gender-mixed and female-dominated workplaces judge their leadership competence more favourably than women in male-dominated organizations, who believe their competence to be weaker. This point of view is in line with Herbst's (2020) assertion that, in many situations, women have lower success expectations than men in a variety of endeavours. Sastry (1991) also contends that women tend to have low self-esteem about having qualities that are valuable for managerial behaviour.

Women constantly strive to become perfect, and when they falter, their confidence suffers. Women will observe how their male co-workers take chances while remaining cautious until they are certain they are fully prepared and competent. Ironically, trying to be perfect prevents women from accomplishing very lot. Men who are ill-equipped and underqualified don't hesitate about stepping forward. Too many women still hold back despite being overqualified and equipped. Only when they are flawless do women feel confident. Confidence and competence are traits related to success in life. Women lack confidence, though, and they continue to be woefully underrepresented at the highest echelons of society. To advance in their careers and reach the level of decision-making, women must build their self-confidence.

### **2.7.3.2 Leadership Identity Formation**

A woman's self-perception as a leader is a complicated process in which non-work factors, including gender, have an impact on her perception of herself as a leader at work as well as her job choices, ambitions, and career path for leadership (Humberd, 2014). Karelaia and Guillén (2014) cite that women will experience less conflict the more positively their gender identities and leadership are perceived. There has been a lot written about the differences in leadership between men and women as well as the cultural beliefs that shape each gender's leadership practices. The differences in leadership between men and women as well as the cultural beliefs that shape each of their leadership philosophies have been extensively discussed in the literature. Men are thought to be aggressive, imposing, and self-assured, whilst women are thought to be more compassionate, perceptive, and loving toward others.

However, researchers concur that senior women executives struggle to carve out a unique leadership identity in contexts where men predominate. According to Mgcotyelwa-Ntoni (2017), discriminatory practices based on disability, age, and ethnicity were used against women working in several government agencies in South Africa. The double-bind theory states that women who hold executive positions have masculine characteristics while yet being linked with femininity in terms of outward appearance (Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014). According to Drydakis et al. (2017), women with masculine personality qualities were more likely than those with feminine personality traits to be able to access male- and female-dominated occupations. The same research by Drydakis et al. (2017) revealed that women with strong masculine personality traits made more money than women with dominant feminine personality traits.

### **2.7.3.3 Double Burden**

According to studies, another barrier to women's career advancement is the double burden syndrome, where they are responsible for their household chores and caregiving responsibilities and yet also advancing in their careers. Organizational pressures demand women to spend more time in their jobs, which frequently results in work overload, lengthy workdays, and unscheduled social hours (Vasumathi, 2018). Women are expected to strike the best possible balance between their work and family commitments. This agrees with the views of women in the Australian-commissioned study, *The Leadership Challenge: Women in Management* (2014) which indicated that women bear an excessive amount of responsibility for their homes and families while also being expected to work. Changes in family dynamics, notably the role that women play in the family system, have been brought about by the rise of women in the workforce globally and their active participation in the economy (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020). The demands of full-time office work and family duties provide difficulties for women (Shukla & Bagali, 2016). Women need to make sure that the two aspects are balanced because, in turn, family obligations and life opportunities affect their career growth opportunities.

The Australian-commissioned study, *The Leadership Challenge: Women in Management* (2014) claimed that there is little cultural sensitivity because, in workplaces, time spent at the office is still viewed as a strong indicator of work commitment, which negatively affects women's family lives, health, and productivity. Martin and Barnard (2013) contend that organisations continue to be structured and function in ways that are not always supportive of women's career paths and their need to balance work and family responsibilities. According to Rutherford (2001), these cultures act as barriers for female employees to ascend to top positions.

Post 1994, the South African government, enacted progressive legislation that supports safe workplaces that prioritize the needs of women (Akuamoah-Boateng 2020). However, the historical complexity and legacies left by the unfair system, which continues to be unfavourable for women who aspire to be in leadership roles, are still not adequately addressed by current policies (Akuamoah-Boateng, 2020). These findings call for a need for organisations, in this study municipalities to devise strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions.

## **2.8 LEADERSHIP**

The definition of leadership is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon including those who lead, those who follow, and the circumstances. According to Louw and Venter (2013), leadership is the capacity of one person to persuade another to take a particular course or accomplish a common goal. The role of leadership is crucial in positions of power because it necessitates one to be a strategic thinker, have high behavioural complexities, and be emotionally intelligent because it involves working with people, which makes it closely related to management and administration. Rincon, Gonzalez, and Barrero (2016) concur and further elaborate on other authors who stressed the distinction between leadership and management, noting that management is more concerned with order, stability, and discipline while leadership is linked to ambiguity, creativity, and positive change. Historically, the idea that male and female lifestyles have different goals or purposes has been put forth to explain why there aren't many women in positions of senior leadership. Rincon et al. (2016) emphasized the historical perception of women's leadership as being associated with "people-centered" and therefore seen as supportive, whereas men are associated with "task-oriented" and therefore more visible and official, resulting in biases against women. Literature has explored the idea that barriers to women's advancement in complex modern organizations typically arise because society associates leadership with men. According to Hofmeyr and Mzobe (2012), this is because it is believed that leadership tasks require more masculine traits often associated with men, including being dominant, aggressive, rational, and task-oriented – than feminine traits traditionally associated with women, such as being nurturing, emotional, caring, intuitive and people-oriented. Thus, the perception that men make better leaders than women was created. According to Littrell and Nkomo (2005), leadership is gendered, and earlier studies show that leadership behaviour is seen as being masculine, a quality associated with men, and therefore obviously a gender stereotype. Eagly (2007) asserts that in the USA, women are increasingly viewed as having excellent leadership skills which help to improve performance. Contrarily, most employees still favour male over female bosses, despite women's excellent leadership abilities.

In the South African context, leadership and "Ubuntu" are closely related, with former leaders like the late Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, and historian Shaka Zulu serving as role models. Nkomo (2011) cited the various leadership philosophies in South African history, highlighting

the autocrat Shaka Zulu, the late Nelson Mandela, who exhibited a "servant leadership trait," and former president Thabo Mbeki who exhibited an "inflexible leadership style." In terms of political leadership, women are thought to be more transformative and lead in a participative, non-hierarchical manner. Their management style is more inclusive, cooperative, and consultative. It is more focused on the issues facing women than on the actions of specific people (Morna & Tolmay, 2010). According to Drage (1997, p. 88), women holding senior positions in local government "accelerate the pace of change, promote collaborative styles of leadership and decision-making, broaden perspectives, and move communities forward." The World Economic Forum (2016) revealed that 44% of board positions in Iceland were held by women, placing it first in the world for having females in their top leadership positions, which is a definite step forward for workplace equality. However, the "14% wage gap" between women and men overshadowed their accomplishments. This led to a global media backlash and a protest, which eventually caused Iceland's gender pay gap to be reduced to match that of the majority of Western nations (World Economic Forum, 2016). This further emphasized the uneven progress toward gender equality and provided a glaring example of how persistent gender inequalities can coexist with the progression of women into senior positions in advanced economies. The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is one of the few gender inequalities that are still evident, according to Starnski and Son Hing (2015), who also noted that most industries are still "male-dominated," including entry-level positions.

Female representation in senior leadership positions has emerged as a key indicator of the advancement of gender equality in the workplace, as well as a key policy objective (Chanavat & Ramsden, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2010). As a result, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2016) emphasized the need for organizations to adopt a variety of initiatives to hasten the achievement of gender equality on boards with the help of authoritative guidelines on best practices and legally binding bodies. By utilizing networking, mentorship, and training programs, organizations that are subject to intense public scrutiny have also made an effort to increase the representation of women in their leadership structures. Elias (2018) also emphasized the significance of women holding leadership roles and leveraging their essential skills, such as empathy, collaboration, teamwork, and nurturing nature, which inspires others to reach their full potential. In addition, the author stressed that when men and women combine their various qualities and skills to work together, their various perspectives, ideas, and market insights will result in improved problem-solving capability and performance, demonstrating

how the inclusion of women in leadership roles improves the performance of people and organizations. Despite the progress made in closing leadership gaps so far, there is still work to be done to address current obstacles and difficulties.

## **2.9 PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

Numerous studies have shown that society usually associates leadership with males. This, according to Hofmeyr and Mzobe (2012) is a challenge because it is believed that leadership tasks call for more masculine traits – often associated with men – such as being task-oriented, dominant, rational, and aggressive – than feminine traits—often associated with women—such as being caring, intuitive, nurturing, and people-oriented. As a result, the idea that men make better leaders than women was born. Even when there is evidence to the contrary, it is common for people to assume that men's leadership styles are very different from women. Eagly (2007) asserts that in the USA, women are increasingly regarded as having superior leadership traits in the USA compared to men, which helps to improve performance. However, even though women are terrific leaders, most employees still prefer having male bosses. According to research by Helgensen (1990) (cited in Smith, 2000), women tend to lead from the middle of an organization rather than the top in a hierarchical command like men, and their focus is mostly on connections rather than hierarchies. This suggests that women are perceived to be 'web leaders' because they obtain knowledge from various sources within organizations, unlike men who are identified with a 'hierarchical leader' who is dependent on a chain of command (Smith, 2000). Maddock (quoted in McStravog, 2010) asserts that women in senior management exhibit common traits that might be advantageous to organizations. These traits include a deliberate approach to change, a focus on social objectives and inclusive management, a preference for collaborative work, and a principled but detached attitude that inspires enthusiasm.

In terms of political leadership, women are thought to be more transformative. They lead in a participative, non-hierarchical manner. Their management approach is more inclusive, cooperative, and consultative. Drage (1997) opined that women in top roles in local government expedite the rate of change, encourage teamwork in leadership and decision-making, expand viewpoints, and advance communities. Their leadership style is more focused on the issues facing women than on the behaviours of specific people (Morna & Tolmay, 2010). This is demonstrated by the fact that women in politics have taken on roles that were previously

thought to be reserved for men and have helped to shape important issues for women, such as paid maternity leave and equal pay for equal labour (Evertzen, 2001).

## **2.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Theories can be thought of as essential instruments required to explain occurrences in our daily lives (Bryman & Bell, 2011). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), theories are the relationships between constructs that support the structuring of knowledge. On the other hand, a theoretical framework is understood to be a collection of concepts that serve as a collection of theories (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016). A theoretical framework, according to Grand and Osanloo (2014, p. 13), is a collection of theories that are used to help the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the study problem. Stated differently, the utilization or acceptance of a theoretical framework serves to give a thorough justification for the questions, research topic, goals, and objectives of the study. Crucially, a theoretical framework is used to prevent mistakes in selecting the appropriate methodology for a given study (Creswell, 2013).

The feminist theory served as the theoretical framework for this study, and therefore it is used to shape and inform analyses of data. The feminist theory argues that various challenges societies face have a gender-specific dimension that needs to be addressed to achieve equality between men and women (Poltera & Schreiner, 2019). In the past, women have experienced severe discrimination, including a lack of human rights, a lack of independence from their spouses, and the belief that they are less intelligent than males. Women have historically been seen as less than fully human in many countries. As a result, women are inherently subordinate to males and are consequently dominated by them. Feminism rebukes the culture of male supremacy and opposes the patriarchy (Bryden & Madore, 2016). The term "feminism" refers to the process of releasing women from the oppression they endure due to their gender distinctions from men. It is founded on a set of ideas that can occasionally conflict and have different goals (Arat, 2015). By challenging and encouraging traditional researchers to analyse the literature on women in leadership as an area of study, the feminist approach tries to review, question, and call attention to the prejudice and oppression of women (Baksh & Harcourt, 2015).

Feminist theory defines women's oppression, explains its causes and effects, and suggests ways to end it. According to Nienaber and Moraka (2016), the feminist viewpoint argues that women

should be granted equal rights and chances to use their ability to confront injustices because they are equally as capable as men. According to Samkange (2015), numerous feminist theories generally concur that the deep-rooted, gendered, and sexual disparities that women face are the reason they are oppressed in contemporary communities. However, they take different tacks when it comes to resolving these disparities (Arat, 2015). Every approach is deeply concerned with social and personal growth and links the political and personal spheres. Equality feminists contend that politics should disregard gender and they advocate for a strategy of inclusion in political institutions where women participate equally with men and in the same numbers (Lovenduski, 2005, p. 29). Other feminists argue that political institutions are not only patriarchal but also that women representatives would become political men and be indistinguishable from male representatives if they were to seek inclusion in the political institutions as they are currently set up. Furthermore, they contend that political institutions are not only patriarchal but that attempting to be included in them in their current form would turn women representatives into political men who cannot be distinguished from male representatives (Lovenduski 2005, p. 30). In other words, they assume that equality means uniformity, which diminishes the value of femininity and ultimately perpetuates sexism. These unique perspectives that attempt to solve the disparities between men and women in society come in a variety of forms and range from Radical to Liberal to Socialist/ Marxist feminism and many others.

Radical feminism is considered one of the revolutionary feminist viewpoints that aims to address the underlying causes of gender disparity. It argues that women experience discrimination and are made to feel less valuable than men due to sexual orientation disparities (Gray & Boddy, 2010). Radical feminists support profound social change that eradicates gender-based discrimination while opposing established systems that uphold patriarchy. This is supported by Gwirayi (2010) who asserts that radical feminists advocate for the extreme eradication of male supremacy since it fosters disparities between genders.

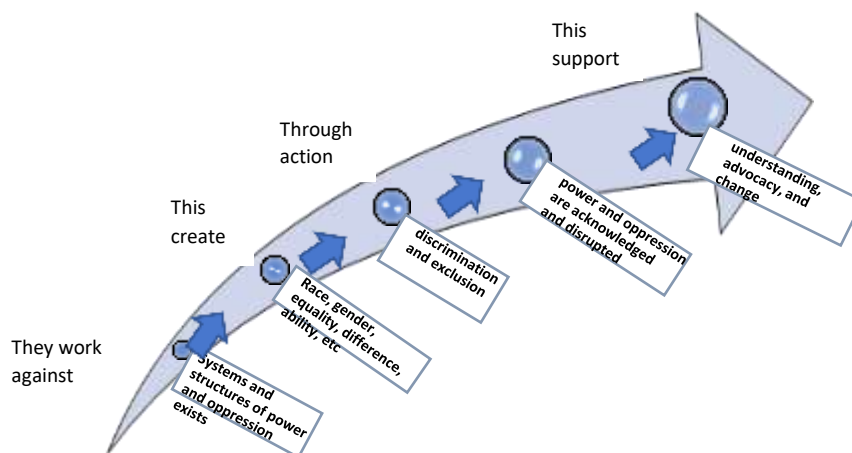
Liberal feminism challenges the socialization process that tolerates gender inequality while advocating for equal opportunity through law as a gradualist strategy to improve the position of women in society. According to Friedman, Metelerkamp, and Posel (1987), liberal feminists urge women to take advantage of opportunities irrespective of barriers that are primarily brought about by the legal systems and gender role stereotypes. Samkange (2015, p 1174)

contends that whereas radical feminism is very "revolutionary," liberal feminism takes a "moderate" stance and complies with the law while addressing issues of oppression and inequality.

Socialist or Marxist feminists encompass both socioeconomic disparities and social justice perspectives. According to Gray and Boddy (2010), this perspective on feminism holds that capitalism, which offers males greater chances in the workplace, is the source of women's oppression. For many years, women were viewed as the property of males and as essential components of the capitalist system. Marxist feminists condemn the male-dominated capitalists' control over the means of production, which allows women to be exploited (Arat, 2015). Marxist feminists contend that the deconstruction of our capitalist society is the first step toward achieving gender equality (Gray & Boddy, 2010). This viewpoint addresses issues including uneven compensation, barriers to tenure or success in particular disciplines, and the frequent absence of family-friendly policies in many municipalities. Socialist feminists claim that women can only truly attain freedom by fighting against cultural and economic oppression (Arat, 2015).

A feminist theoretical model is shown in the accompanying graphic, which starts with the idea that there are systems in place that oppress and work against people. Subsequently, the model demonstrates how oppression stems from overlapping identities, which can lead to exclusion and discrimination. The model illustrates the notion that oppressive systems may be overthrown to promote understanding and change through knowledge and action.

**Figure 2.8: Feminist Theoretical Model**



**Adopted from:** Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research

Feminist theoretical viewpoints were adopted for this study in consideration of South Africa's historical background, which includes social, political, and economic discrimination against women (Gouws, 2008). Feminist theory relates to women's experiences at the intersection of several kinds of subjugation based on race, ethnicity, gender, age, politics, religion, and as well as other factors such as appearance and ability. Furthermore, the use of the feminist theoretical model in the study was because the researcher is a middle-aged black woman who identifies as a feminist. After all, the researcher is passionate about releasing women from oppression, including those who exist in the places of work. The researcher holds a middle management position at eThekweni Municipality as the Senior Manager of the Management Services Department. Therefore, the researcher is not divorced from the issues that will be addressed by this research. Bailey, Leo-Rhynie, and Morris (2000) contend that feminist analysis puts the researcher on an equal footing with the subject matter, recovering the entire research process for examination of the study's findings.

## **2.11 CONCLUSION**

The literature review covered historical data about women in the workforce, and it showed that opportunities and working conditions for women have undoubtedly improved since then. However, the data provided in this chapter indicates that despite improvements in women's employment over the past years, there are still significant employment inequalities between women and men. The chapter argued that women are still confronting several barriers at the workplace, despite every attempt made to tackle these issues. The chapter identified the barriers that inhibit women from progressing to senior leadership positions, as emanating from organizational factors, societal gender stereotypes, and individual or self-imposed factors.

Some of the various legislative policies and frameworks that have been instituted by South Africa to address gender inequality in the workplace were also discussed. Although some of these policies have a global perspective, the government's commitment is examined through interaction with its local and national policies. To investigate whether the policies and frameworks have been effectively implemented, the literature review also analysed the representation of the South African workforce. The analysis depicted that males continue to dominate all occupational levels and across all industries, and workplace transformation is progressing extremely slowly. The chapter also looked at the idea of leadership, which is crucial to understanding how women interact with their subordinates.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **GENDER INEQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Worldwide gender equity is a phenomenon, and countries are fiercely striving to be the best at implementing it to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Countries around the world are concerned about the underrepresentation of women in positions of employment even though research indicates that there are more women than males on earth. Women have long faced barriers to employment and have been subjected to various types of discrimination on a global scale. When women got access, they were typically hired for jobs at lower occupational levels inside organizations. Women continue to be underrepresented in various professions, most notably in high-level positions, despite the long-standing anti-discrimination legislation across the globe.

Today, it is widely believed that men and women should have equal access to opportunities and treatment, without considering any potential negative effects. In South Africa, there are constitutional mechanisms in place to anticipate the execution of legislative frameworks for gender equity that have been in place for more than 20 years. A fundamental question raised in this paper is ‘How much do these legal frameworks function to advance women to high leadership positions?’ In addressing this significant research question, this chapter's discussion of gender inequality in leadership will concentrate on three contexts: an international setting, in Africa, and South African municipalities.

#### **3.2 GENDER INEQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP: AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

Internationally, the majority of women have few prospects for leadership in the municipal sector, and the existence of institutional impediments does not create opportunities for women to succeed or remain in politics. Women from a variety of backgrounds frequently experience these difficulties more severely or with compounding effects. Prejudices, deliberate discrimination, restrictive laws or practices, and triple-burden duties are only a few examples of these systemic problems.

Local governments must foster an environment where women feel confident and are given encouragement in their administrative and political leadership positions and where more

women participate in both decision-making and policy creation to address these structural problems. Although municipalities all over the world have begun implementing some gender-inclusive and inclusive strategies, women are still disproportionately underrepresented in senior management roles. However, it can also be said that some countries have made significant progress in reducing the gender gap. According to the World Economic Forum (2022) report, the global gender gap has been reduced by 68.1% in 2022. North America leads all other regions in closing the gender gap across the 146 nations included in this report, with a rate of 76.9%. Europe, which has whittled down its gap by 76.6%, is next in line. Latin America and the Caribbean, which has closed 72.6% of its gender gap, are in third position. The progress towards parity in Central Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific is in the middle, at 69.1% and 69%, respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa is in sixth place with 67.9%. The Middle East and North Africa, which has reduced its gender gap by 63.4%, is further down the list and lags Sub-Saharan Africa by more than four percentage points. The region with the lowest performance is South Asia, which closed its gender gap by 62.4% in 2022. In the paragraphs that follow, we will discuss how much of a "gender gap" currently exists between men and women regarding the accessibility and opportunities to managerial positions. The study will concentrate on the data gathered for select countries in the United States, Europe, and Africa.

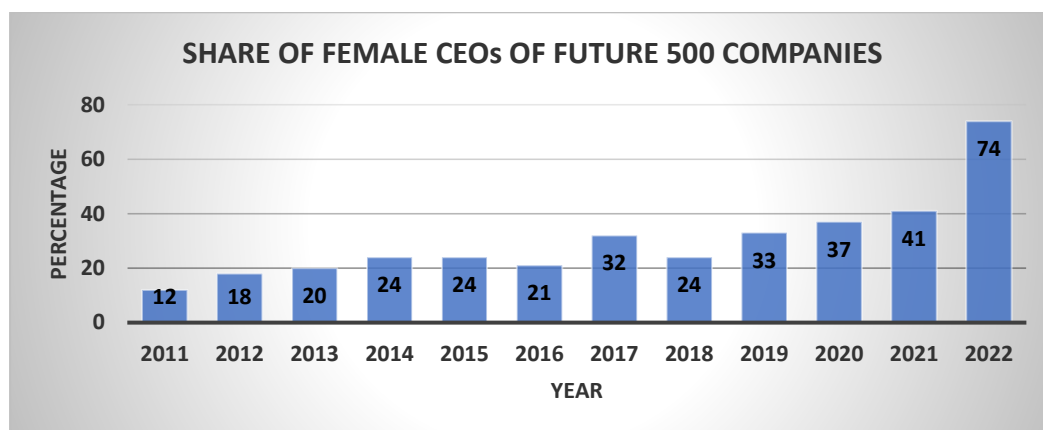
### **3.2.1 United States**

In the United States (US), the discussion of women in leadership is topical because there is some evidence that they are advancing historically in both politics and business to prominent positions. For instance, in June 2017, 32 of the Fortune 500 businesses had female CEOs, including some of the biggest firms, such as General Motors, Pepsi, and IBM (McGregor 2017). Hillary Clinton also made history in 2016 when she became the first woman to receive a major political party's nomination for president of the United States. The advancement of women into some top leadership roles that historically have been reserved for males raises concerns about whether or not the gender gap in US leadership is being closed.

Despite these women's achievements, data reveal that women still don't make up a majority of senior leadership positions in the corporate and governmental domain in the United States. The non-profit group Catalyst performs a census annually to illustrate the participation of women in leadership positions in major US corporations. Companies on the Fortune 500 list make up most of the population of the aforementioned census since, in addition to having the biggest annual revenue in the United States, they are also usually regarded as the most powerful and

important businesses. According to the data collected by this census, women made up nearly half of the workforce (44.3%) of listed 500 companies in 2017, but their representation in leadership and management was less strong, with only 36.4% of lower to intermediate management positions, 25.1% of senior management positions, 19.9% of company board positions, and 5.4% of the chief executive position held by women (Catalyst 2017). According to research by Mercer (2020) of more than 1,100 organizations worldwide, there is a leaky funnel for women in management positions, with their representation declining as the levels rise. This study indicated that in 2020, the representation of women was 42% at professionals level, 37% at managers level, 29% at senior managers level, and only 23% at executives level. There are still a lot of inequalities in the representation of women in the top leadership positions, even though progress is being made toward gender equality and inclusion. The data in the accompanying graph shows how many women have held executive management roles as CEOs in the future 500 companies during the past 10 years.

**Figure 3.1: Female CEOs of Future 200 Companies (2011 – 2022)**



**Source: Catalyst Knowledge Centre (2022)**

The information above illustrates unequivocally that there has been very little progress made in terms of the number of female executives in major corporations in the United States. From 2011 to 2014, the representation of women increased almost consistently before reaching a level in 2015, when there were 24 female CEOs. The numbers decreased in 2016, hitting a low of 21, before progressively increasing to 74 in 2022. The high figure of 74, however, only equates to a 15% female presence at the top of the largest corporations in the country.

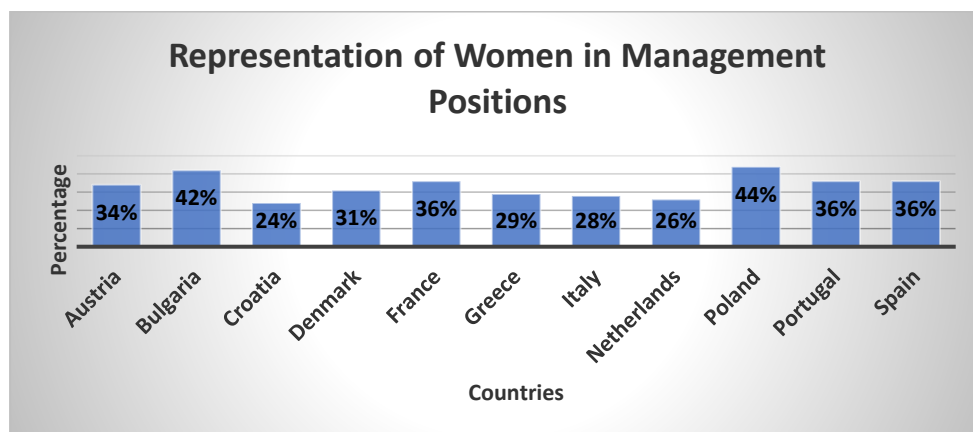
While great progress has been made in recent decades, the United States still lags behind many other equally developed and less developed countries in terms of the presence of women in high-level positions in American politics. The United States was outranked by 25 other nations

as of 2022 in the global Gender Parity Index, which compares gender inequalities between countries based on political, economic, and social factors. According to the Statistical Report on Women in Politics in the US (2023), there was a 24% representation of women in the US Senate in 2022, which has been the case since 2019. In the same year, women occupied 28% of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives, which is a sharp increase from 2017 when the share of women in the House was 19.1%. The share of women in the US Congress also increased in 2022 and reached 27.9%, In 2022, the proportion of female senators in the US had increased to 24%, as it had done so since 2019. Women held 28% of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives in the same year, which is a significant rise from 2017 when the proportion of women was 19.1%. Additionally, the report indicates that the proportion of women in the US Congress rose to 27.3% in the same year of 2022.

### 3.2.2 Europe

In several European countries, the representation of women in senior executive roles has significantly improved during the past ten years. However, women still hold less than a third of senior management roles in the majority of the countries. It should be emphasized that depending on the country, the situation differs greatly. The European Commission has created a database that compiles data on the representation of women in various decision-making organizations, including the political and economic spheres. The database offers details on the gender split in major corporations across various countries' decision-making domains. The database considers major businesses that are traded on each country's stock exchanges. The graph below depicts the proportion of women in senior management roles in some of the most significant companies in Europe during the fourth quarter of 2019.

**Figure 3.2: Representation of Women in Management Positions - European Countries**



Source: European Commission (2019)

The data for different countries shown in the graph above demonstrate that Poland has a generally better situation for women in decision-making positions than the rest of Europe. With 44% of its management positions held by women, Poland stands out in this regard and may be regarded as having a fair representation of women at the executive levels of major corporations. Similarly, the drive for substantial progress toward gender equality in Bulgaria also seems relevant to highlight, given that the statistics show that 42% of women hold management positions. The necessity of both political and legislative actions to support the transformation towards a gender balance is acknowledged in the European Commission's report on the representation of men and women in leadership roles (European Commission, 2016). The report claims that countries with enforceable laws in this field have seen the biggest improvements in the representation of women in corporate leadership positions.

The statistics on women's representation in management positions in major European corporations show that the initiatives taken in various countries have yielded favorable outcomes. Nevertheless, the average percentage of female executives in some of the biggest corporations in the European Union remains far from a scenario of gender balance, although significant progress has been made in this area. According to a poll of the working population conducted by Eurostat in 2016, women made up 33% of all executives in the European Union, a percentage that has essentially not changed since 2006 (Eurostat, 2016). The European Commission includes data on the existence of women in positions of highest importance within an organization in the aforementioned database on the engagement of women at various decision-making levels. In 2016, there were 5% of women holding managing director or executive director positions in significant enterprises in the European Union. Women are also less represented than males at political decision-making levels as seen by the 28% female representation in the parliaments and 27% female representation in the governments of the member states of the European Union (European Commission, 2016).

### **3.2.2.1 Netherlands**

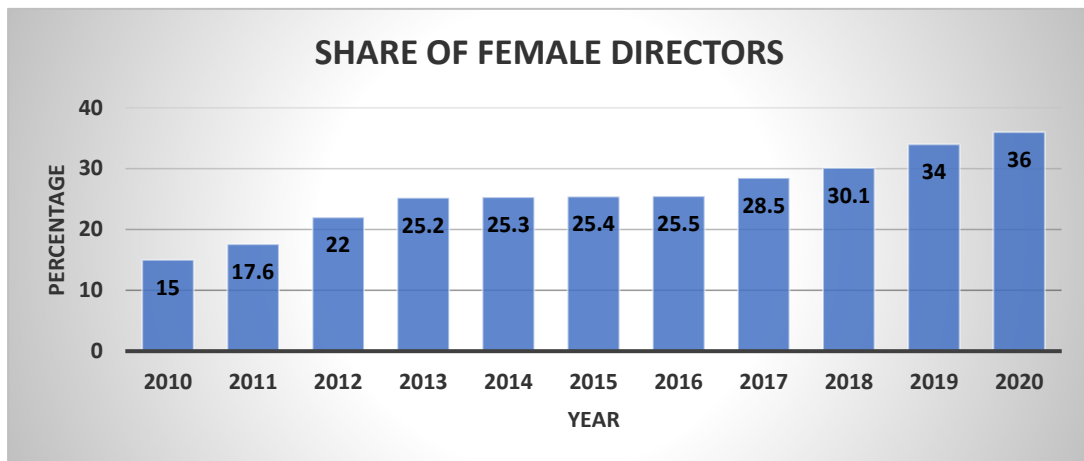
In terms of gender equality, the Netherlands prides itself on being a world leader. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), the Netherlands is placed third in the European Union (EU) on the gender equality index achieving 77.3 out of a possible 100 points. Its rating is 8.7 points higher than that of the EU. The Netherlands has improved its score by 3.3 points since 2010, but its position has not changed. This country's ranking has increased by

1.4 points since 2019. This transition has been driven by advancements in the electricity and health spheres.

Gender equality is regarded as having been attained in the Netherlands because of the high rate of female labor participation there compared to other European nations (Celis, Outshoorn, Meier & Motmans, 2012). The media is where this tendency is most apparent, with numerous articles authored by both men and women asserting that feminism is no longer necessary. However, there has been opposition to several matters, including the representation of women in politics. The notion that equality between men and women has been attained and that there is no or very little prejudice within society contributes to the Netherlands' status as a "tolerant" nation. But, until the pillars were dismantled in the middle of the 1960s, the idea of tolerance was a component of a system of non-interference with other pillars (Van der Veer, 2006).

Even though there has been a noticeable increase in the number of women in corporate leadership roles over the past ten years, gender equality is still far from being achieved in the workplace today. Women still hold too few senior roles, particularly at the top executive levels. According to a study commissioned by the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament (2021), when the quota law was passed in 2011, the percentage of women directors of the largest listed companies included in the database of the European Institute for Gender Equity was just under 18 percent. The ratio of female directors increased by 3.7 and 3.6 percentage points respectively over the following two years, reaching just over 25% in 2013. The percentage of female directors only gradually improved over the next two years, and by the time the quota rule expired on January 1, 2016, it was still at 25.5%, which is below the target of 30%. After that, up until 2020, women's representation among directors grew steadily, reaching more than 36% in the biggest publicly traded corporations in that year (Lückerath-Rovers, 2020). The statistics on the share of female Directors on the boards of significant listed companies in the Netherlands, as shown in the graph below, illustrate how dramatically underrepresented women are on corporate boards.

**Figure 3.3: Share of Female Directors on the Boards- Netherlands**



**Source: Adapted from the European Commission (2019)**

The data analysis above shows an increase in women's representation in managerial roles in the Netherlands' large enterprises over the past ten years. However, this development has been relatively sluggish, and there are still fewer women than the average European in corporate leadership roles in Netherlands enterprises. This situation falls short of the goal set forth by 2007-approved legislation promoting gender equality (Ley Orgánica 2007), which recommends that corporations in the Netherlands increase the representation of women on their boards of directors to achieve a balanced presence of both men and women.

Among the various research we have evaluated, the metaphor of the "glass ceiling" is one of the phrases most frequently used to explain why there are so few women in managerial roles. In accordance with this theory, as women move up the corporate hierarchy, they encounter several hidden, insurmountable obstacles. According to the report written by the U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), these barriers were identified as social barriers, like prejudices and gender stereotypes; organizational barriers, like those relating to hiring procedures or corporate culture; and governmental barriers, like a lack of dedicated oversight of legal compliance.

Hoyt (2012) uses the metaphor of the labyrinth of leadership to suggest a categorization of these various types of obstacles that prevent women from achieving higher-level positions. This author contends that the explanations for the underrepresentation of women in executive roles can be divided into three major categories: those relating to human capital, those linked to gender differences, and those tied to prejudices. These traditional

gender roles cause variations in some workplace behaviours between men and women, which may lead to a corporate culture that is less supportive of women's professional advancement. As a result, on an organizational level, women frequently have fewer possibilities and motivations for promotion than men. Similarly, stereotypes about what women should look like and act like frequently cast doubt on their capacity for leadership and can negatively affect women's access to executive roles on both a social and economic level.

There are many strategies that can help organizations get rid of barriers based on gender and get an equal representation of men and women in leadership roles. Companies that are cognizant of the advantages that might come from having women in senior leadership roles work to develop and implement policies that aim to achieve gender parity in these roles. Accordingly, some adjustments, like flexible scheduling or work calendars that allow for greater compatibility between one's work and family lives, may favor women's access to leadership roles (Cooper & Lewis, 1999). Governments must create legislation to convince corporate executives of the value of expanding women's professional development possibilities. In this regard, public administrations have undertaken a variety of efforts in recent years to promote women in their admission to executive roles (European Commission, 2011). The gender balancing laws implemented by various European Union nations have had a significant impact. Particularly noteworthy is the situation in Norway, where the legislation mandates that women must make up at least 40% of the board of directors of public enterprises (Matsa & Miller, 2013). Some countries, including Italy, France, Spain, Netherlands, and Germany have followed suit from the Norwegian model and enacted quota legislation with penalties for non-compliance.

### **3.3 GENDER INEQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP: AFRICAN CONTEXT**

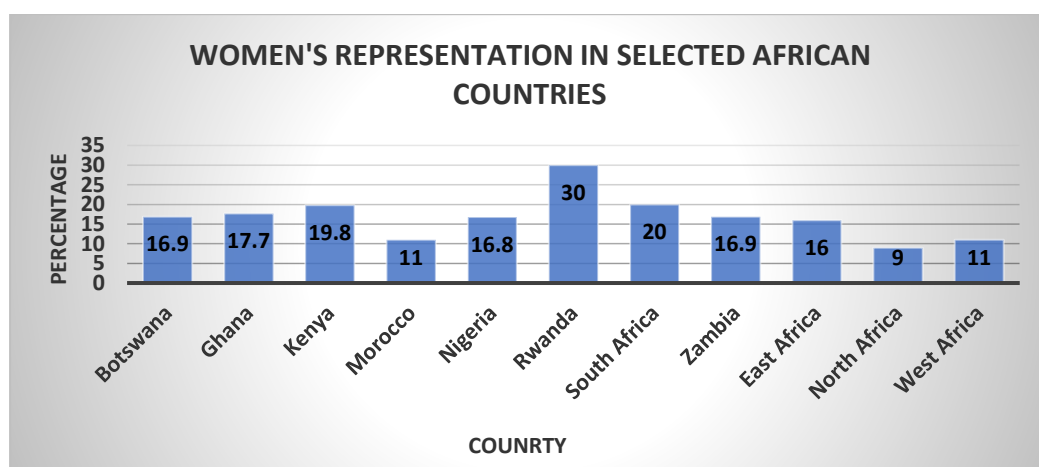
For African countries, gender inequalities in terms of opportunities and the representation of women in leadership roles have grown to be crucial issues. This is partially due to the adverse implications that the absence of women from the workforce may have on poverty alleviation and sustainable growth. Therefore, it is not surprising that practically every nation in the world today has gender equality on its public policy agenda. Focusing on gender equality in the workplace is crucial in Africa for at least two reasons. First, the fight against poverty cannot be won without women employed in the right jobs. This is not only due to the tangible and

associated role that employment plays in the well-being of families but also because of the autonomy it gives women in contributing to family matters, particularly in favour of children's healthcare and education. Second, gender equality in the workplace should be improved from a rights-based approach merely on the grounds that, as acknowledged worldwide, everyone deserves the same possibilities.

Consequently, one of the most significant developmental issues currently facing countries worldwide, particularly those in Africa, is gender equality in employment. In the African setting, it is obvious that there are fewer women in high management roles than there are men. According to Amponsah and Boateng (2021), after years of steady advancement for women in national politics in Africa, with women like Joice Mujuru (former vice president of Zimbabwe), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (former minister of finance of Nigeria), Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (former president of Liberia), and Joyce Banda (former president of Malawi) holding positions of power, the progress is now being lost. The employment level of women is comparatively lower than that of men when looking at employment rates beyond 30 years of age, which can be regarded as appropriate to be promoted to higher management positions (Department of Census and Statistics, 2015). Even though women make up a sizable fraction of the population in several African nations, there is still a lack of female representation on corporate boards. According to the African Development Bank (2015), just 12.7% of corporate board positions in Africa are typically held by women. Murray (2010) asserts that there are differences among countries in how women advance to the upper levels of society, which may be a result of the socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts of the various nations. As a result, there are notable differences in the representation of women on boards across African nations. The statistics from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicate that South Africa has the greatest percentage of female board members at 20%, whilst Côte d'Ivoire only has 5.1% female corporate board directors.

The following figure illustrates the female representation on corporate boards in selected African Countries in 2019.

**Figure 3.4: Representation of Women on Corporate Boards - African Countries**



**Source: McKinsey & Company: Women Matter-Ten Years of Insights on Gender Diversity (2017)**

Figure 3.4 illustrates the significant underrepresentation of women on corporate boards in selected African countries. Less than 50% of the roles were held by women across all nations. It should be noted that, albeit slowly, progress has been made on diversifying boards in other developed and developing nations. Particularly significant advancements have been made in Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya, where women hold, respectively, 30%, 20%, and 19.8% of board positions.

As has been mentioned, women have advanced considerably in the workplace over the previous years. However, according to the aforementioned data, women hold senior executive roles in business and politics far less frequently than males do (Sule et al., 2017). According to the vast majority of surveys, women continue to face significant barriers that keep them from advancing in their careers and taking on leadership roles. The analysed research shows that there is a general agreement that social and cultural prejudices act as impediments to women moving up the organizational chart and hierarchy.

### **3.4 GENDER INEQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP: SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITY**

Gender equity is still a challenge in all Government spheres, including the national, provincial, and municipal. In South Africa, the reasons for the disparity are multiple and include social-cultural norms, a culture of patriarchy, religion, politics, insufficient institutional processes, a lack of adherence to institutional procedures, a lack of knowledge concerning gender

mainstreaming, and a lack of techniques for monitoring and evaluating gender equality, to name a few (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). Institutional racism has a long history in South Africa, where access to opportunities and rights is determined by one's race or gender. Kornegay (2000, cited in Bangani, 2019) emphasizes that socio-cultural norms of all groups characterize women as inferior to men in South Africa and as a result place them in the status of minors in both the public and private domains of life. While men normally have more sway in social situations, women are less inclined to grab the reigns of decision-making in the private realm. The author further asserts that the workplace is significantly impacted by the historical legacy of patriarchy that affects fundamental informal and formal human connections. This historical patriarchy according to Hendrickse (2004 cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2018) had an impact on both official and informal interactions between people as well as the chances given to women in the workplace. Additionally, it frequently provides little to no opportunity for women's authority and agency since it makes it challenging for them to participate in or bring up sensitive gender problems, which results in women's participation in development processes being ineffectively low (Manqele, 2018). According to Lues (2005), these barriers constitute the reason for the restricted participation of women in decision-making processes across a variety of sectors of life. They slowed down the liberation of women, denied women their human rights, and prevented the country's economy from growing.

According to the White Paper, municipalities must proactively make sure that the racial and gender structure of leadership reflects the demographic makeup of South African society, to address the issue of women's unequal representation in management echelons, particularly among top management. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2016) points out that to eliminate the constrictive developmental policies of the past, South Africa has adopted several legislative frameworks, including the promotion of gender equality in the workplace. However, there is still a social, economic, and political disparity between men and women who hold positions of decision-making, which inhibits women's potential. This circumstance suggests that there are still obstacles preventing women from rising to leadership roles in most municipalities.

According to the research done on Capricorn District Municipality (CDM) by Mathebula (2014), CDM has not attended to the implementation of gender equality policies to ensure fairness and equity. The prevalence of women in managerial positions within the CDM is a presumption that the municipality prefers to promote males into management positions over their female counterparts. The Capricorn District Municipality acknowledges the problem of

women's underrepresentation in top-management roles; however, it fails to put its intentions into effect because it is apparent that women receive little consideration for top management jobs (Mathebula, 2014). According to Marumo's (2014) study of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, issues with gender inequality in the municipality include patriarchy because society continues to be divided along traditional gender lines, with women still viewed as primary caregivers for their families as mothers and wives. Furthermore, involvement in politics is still seen as a domain for men. The study also noted that men predominate on the council due to the belief that men form greater leaders than women (Marumo, 2014). This supports the argument made by Hofmeyr and Mzobe (2012) that leadership roles are thought to require more male than feminine attributes.

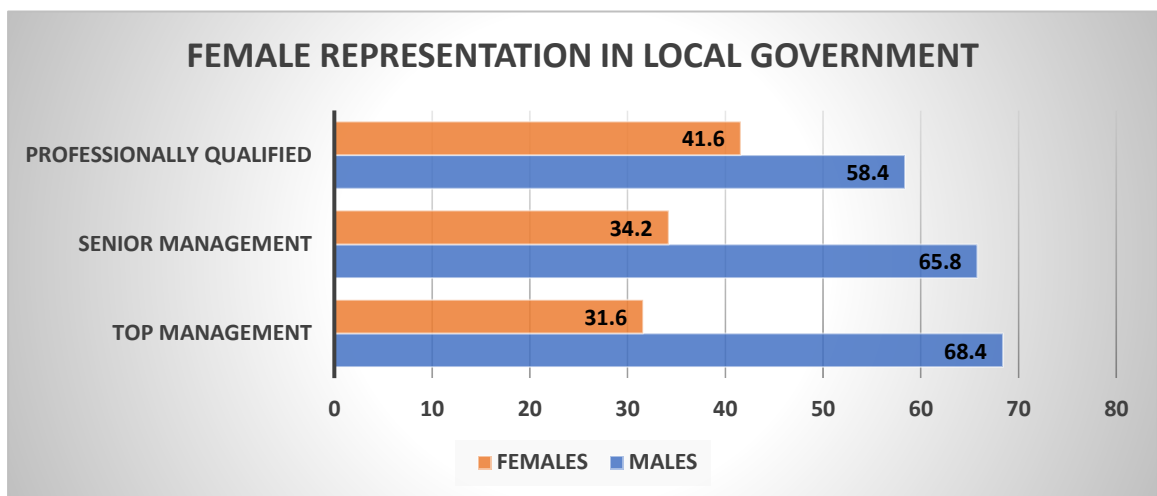
Gender challenges exist in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality, KwaZulu Natal Province as well where, according to Manqele (2018), there is still a gender imbalance in the executive council leadership positions held by men and women. The study found that women are underrepresented in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality even though both male and female council members carry out the same leadership responsibilities and tasks. Manqele (2018, p.65) further states that:

*“at Mtubatuba Local Municipality there is no gender policy, no women’s empowerment policy, and no department for gender equity. Furthermore, there is an official employed for special programmes which cover gender issues and others such as a youth desk, for people living with a disability and so forth. Gender issues are not a priority, and there is also no specific budget allocated for gender issues and no gender programme in place”.*

According to a study by Ralebona (2014) in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, female managers in the City of Johannesburg are aware that there are insurmountable barriers that hinder their efforts to advance up the corporate ladder to senior management positions. Ralebona (2014) further emphasizes the fact that for generations, these stereotypes have prevented women from actively participating in the workforce and from having fair opportunities for managing their careers. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2014) states that there are still certain municipalities that do not invest in providing training programs for gender analysis, and in addition, women are not given opportunities to assume professional responsibilities. It is clear, as pointed out by Schwartz and Scott (2010), that women continue to face discrimination and stereotypes about their place in society, which frequently lowers

their prospects of achieving high leadership positions. Women have not made as much progress as they could since the Employment Equity Act was passed in 1998, despite providing the necessary legal framework to address inequities brought on by apartheid-era discrimination in the workplace. This view is affirmed by the statistics provided by the Department of Labour (2022), which depicts the underrepresentation of women in Local Government as presented in the following graph:

**Figure 3.5: Representation of Women in Local Government**



**Source:** Adapted from the Department of Labour (2022)

The above diagram emphasizes the fact that, despite overt efforts and advancements toward gender equality over the years, women still lag males in terms of empowerment and equality. This is despite the mechanisms put in place after 1994 to ensure that governance systems across all domains of government, businesses, and entities, transitioned from a closed system to an inclusive one that encouraged, among other things, gender equality.

### 3.5 GENDER INEQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP: ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

The eThekweni Municipality is the third-largest metropolitan municipality in South Africa, one of eight metropolitan councils in the country’s local tier of government. In terms of location, the eThekweni Municipality is located on the east coast of KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. According to the Statistics SA (2021) Mid-Year Population Estimates, the population is predicted to rise by an average yearly percentage of 1.13% every annum to reach about 4095412 million people in 2023. In terms of gender, women make up 51% of the eThekweni

population (Statistics South Africa, 2018). This suggests that, in the ideal scenario, the employment percentage of men and women should be almost equal, albeit this percentage or ratio would be lower due to things like pregnancy, parenthood, and women opting to stay at home. The municipality has a staff complement of ± 24,000 permanent incumbents. The following table depicts a disaggregated overview of the staff complement of the municipality as of 31 August 2023, broken down by occupational levels, racial makeup, and gender.

**Table 3.1:** Overall eThekweni Municipality Staff Complement as Of August 2023

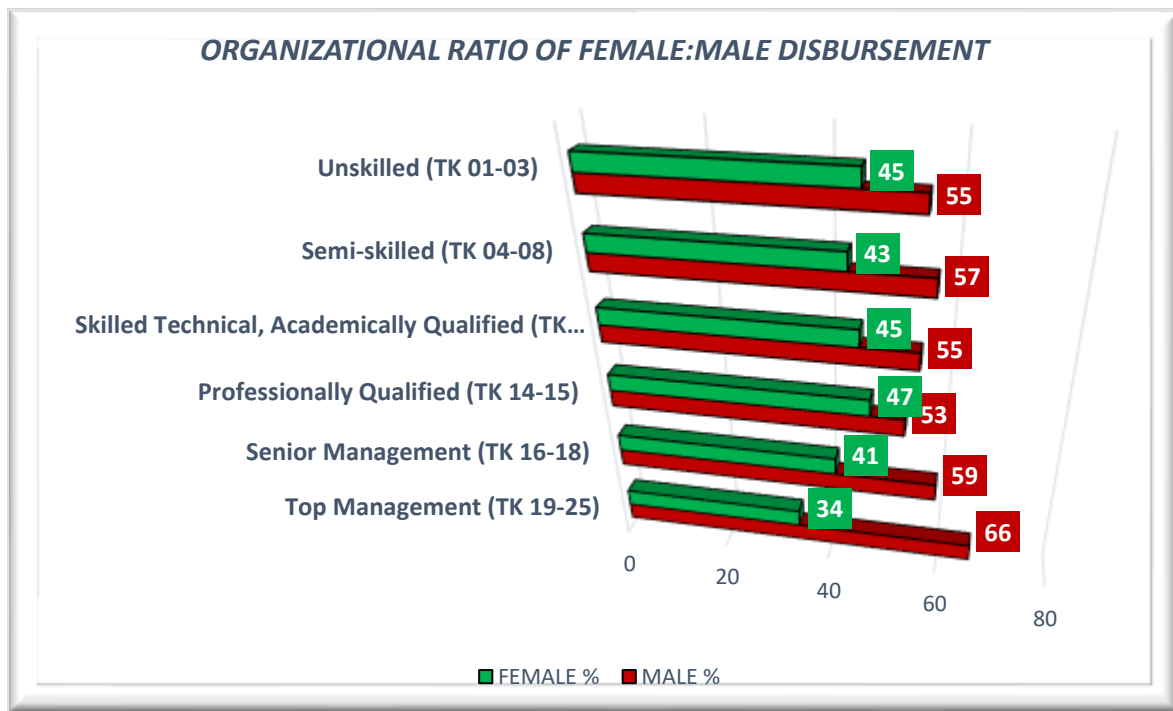
|   | LEVEL    | OVERALL ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY STAFF COMPLEMENT BASED ON OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL AS AT AUGUST 2023 |             |              |             |              |              |             |             |             |              |               |             |
|---|----------|---|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
|   |          | MALES   |             |              |             | TOTAL        | FEMALES      |             |             |             | TOTAL        | ACTUAL        | PWD         |
|   |          | AM  | CM          | IM           | WM          | MALES        | AF           | CF          | IF          | WF          | FEMALES      | TOTAL         |             |
| Top Management  | TK 19-25 | 68  | 2           | 13           | 3           | 86           | 36           | 1           | 6           | 2           | 45           | 131           | 4           |
| Senior Management   | TK 16-18 | 131   | 10          | 95           | 18          | 254          | 128          | 3           | 39          | 9           | 179          | 433           | 6           |
| Professionally Qualified, Experienced Specialists and Mid-Management  | TK 14-15 | 305   | 19          | 126          | 32          | 482          | 325          | 16          | 79          | 12          | 432          | 914           | 11          |
| Skilled Technical, Academically Qualified Workers, Junior Management, Supervisors, Foremen, and Superintendents | TK 9-13  | 2939  | 173         | 1098         | 212         | 4422         | 2943         | 110         | 457         | 62          | 3572         | 7994          | 92          |
| Semi-skilled and Discretionary Decision Making  | TK 4-8   | 5131  | 136         | 842          | 41          | 6150         | 4098         | 133         | 428         | 56          | 4715         | 10865         | 143         |
| Unskilled and Defined Decision Making   | TK 0-3   | 1734  | 21          | 217          | 6           | 1978         | 1501         | 45          | 74          | 2           | 1622         | 3600          | 29          |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL</b>  |          | <b>10308</b>  | <b>361</b>  | <b>2391</b>  | <b>312</b>  | <b>13372</b> | <b>9031</b>  | <b>308</b>  | <b>1083</b> | <b>143</b>  | <b>10565</b> | <b>23937</b>  | <b>285</b>  |
| <b>PERCENTAGE</b>   |          | <b>43.1%</b>  | <b>1.5%</b> | <b>10.0%</b> | <b>1.3%</b> | <b>55.9%</b> | <b>37.7%</b> | <b>1.3%</b> | <b>4.5%</b> | <b>0.6%</b> | <b>44.1%</b> | <b>100.0%</b> | <b>1.2%</b> |

**Source:** Transformation Office of eThekweni Municipality

The above table is an overview of the eThekweni Municipality staff establishment as of August 2023, provided by the Transformation Office within the Human Capital Unit. The municipality had a total of 23937 permanently employed employees. The total number of males in the municipality’s staff establishment was 13372, consisting of 10308 African, 361 Coloured, 2391 Indian, and 312 White. Female staff establishment representation consisted of 9031 African, 308 Coloured, 1083 Indian, and 143 White, making a total of 10565. In terms of gender distribution, male employees make up 55.9% of the workforce, while their female counterparts make up 44.1%. This is not an ideal situation as the split does not proportionately reflect the demographics. This gender imbalance puts constitutional responsibility in jeopardy to empower women and disregards legal requirements.

## FEMALE VERSUS MALE REPRESENTATION IN ALL OCCUPATIONAL LEVELS

Figure 3.6: Organisational Representation of Females at eThekweni Municipality



Source: Transformation Office of eThekweni Municipality

The graph above shows that even though the eThekweni Municipality has had a slight improvement in representation in employment, gender disparity is still a prevalent issue across all occupational levels. The analysis showed that males still dominate the workforce, holding more than 50% of positions from the top management echelons down to the unskilled ones. At both the unskilled and skilled technical levels, the female population was 45%, compared to the 55% population of males. At the semi-skilled level, 43% of the workforce is females whereas 57% is male. The Professionally Qualified level had at least demonstrated encouraging progress toward gender parity, since they had at least a 47 percent representation of women, which is closer to an ideal situation. This is hardly surprising given that research has revealed that women in South Africa only ever hold lower managerial roles, which has a long-term negative impact on their careers (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020). Women are unable to perform well since they hold inferior managerial roles, which limits their abilities to grow into top leadership positions. The transition to senior management and top management levels, where gender inequality is clearly defined, continues to be concerning and difficult to

understand. Males constitute an enormous 66% of these positions, compared to a record low of 34% females, and 59% of men to 41% females, respectively. This situation lends further credence to the idea that there is a glass ceiling that women encounter at the professionally qualified level as there are fewer women in the senior and top management levels. The analysis unequivocally shows that women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making positions in eThekweni Municipality, given that South Africa has made considerable achievements in putting the required policies and directives in place to seek gender equality. Considering a better representation at the professionally qualified level, a crucial question brought up by the underrepresentation of women in the top and senior management levels is: ‘What are the barriers that inhibit women from progressing to top positions?’

### **3.6 CONCLUSION**

Globally, the increase in female employment has created additional opportunities for women to hold higher leadership positions. However, there is no denying that women have experienced a variety of difficulties and workplace discrimination especially when it comes to mounting the corporate pyramid. The purpose of this chapter was to identify the barriers that prevent the advancement of women into high management positions. Consequently, this chapter explored how much of a "gender gap" now exists between men and women regarding the accessibility and chances to managerial positions utilizing data acquired from a few countries in the United States, Europe, and Africa. The chapter discovered that while a few countries have made more progress than others in implementing specific laws or initiatives to address the dearth of women in business decision-making positions, far too many are unaware that this is even an existential issue. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology utilized to investigate these situations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section of the study sets out the research methodology and design that underpins the study. The study design, according to Bryman (2016), is an outline for a generation of evidence that has been chosen for answering questions. Therefore, this chapter encompasses a discussion of the research design and paradigm that was used as well as the methodology employed to delve into the research problem and come up with a significant theory for tackling the research questions presented in Chapter One. The study site, target population, sampling, data collection, and measurements are outlined, followed by a brief of the data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study employed a qualitative approach that opts for a phenomenological research design to describe and explain the socio-cultural phenomenon that predominates in municipalities and creates hurdles that hinder women from advancing into top management positions. Bryman (2016) asserts that qualitative research is utilized to provide narrative and in-depth explanations of phenomena. The study used qualitative research to fully comprehend the feelings, emotions, and meanings of women's experiences with a focus on advancement in their careers within eThekweni Municipality. The gathering of qualitative data was made possible by interactions with management in various municipal business units, which oversee the implementation of municipal laws and policies. A phenomenological approach analyses and describes the meaning of an experience, frequently through the identified relevant participants, to produce an exhaustive description of ideas that reflect the meaning of the lived experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), a phenomenological approach attempts to understand people's perspectives, understanding, and perceptions of a situation. Therefore, the design used is appropriate for this study since it allowed for face-to-face in-depth interviews to access deeply ingrained information derived from experiences, which can often influence reasoning and decision-making. In qualitative research, participants are encouraged to speak for themselves and offer their viewpoints. As a result, it is a collaborative process in which both the researcher and the study participants benefit from one another.

Due to their dynamic and complicated nature, qualitative methodologies are most appropriate for research on leadership. This strategy, according to Conger (1998) calls for a deeper immersion in the research location and provides the chance to capture an ongoing viewpoint in the investigation. The existence of this phenomenon enables in-depth examination, reflection, and fast interpretation of the researcher's intricate observations. According to Kumar (2015), qualitative research design is more adaptable than quantitative research design, which relies on exact and thorough measurements, conducting experiments to gather data, and utilizing pre-set equipment. According to Hammer (2011), quantitative approaches are used to test hypotheses and determine relationships' causes and effects. This study, which aimed to comprehend people's lived experiences within the confines of an organization and the influence of sociocultural and individual factors, was inapplicable to the quantitative research approach. Given the exploratory character of the study and the limited population size, a qualitative methodology was most appropriate. According to findings made by Nkomo and Ngambi (2009), who noted that most studies on women in leadership are based on quantitative methodologies, the study aims to add to empirical qualitative studies on women in leadership.

In addition, the study created a body of knowledge regarding the barriers that are standing in the way of women advancing to leadership roles by using the eThekweni Municipality as a case study. Bryman (2016) claims that a case study is utilized to acquire an in-depth analysis of one specific example, which generates data against theoretical analysis. The benefit of a case study is that the information is acquired in a real environment, guaranteeing its validity and applicability (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). The case study research design was thought to be appropriate for the comprehensive investigation of the phenomena of the study research interest (Yin, 2018). In addition, using a case study approach allowed the researcher to shed light on information gaps regarding how women advance into senior leadership positions with particular reference to eThekweni Municipality (Alase, 2017). According to Sibanda (2015), one drawback of the case study is that the information gathered, and the conclusions drawn from this kind of research might not be all that useful or pertinent outside the case study's confines.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Olsen, Lodwick, and Dunlop (1992) assert that a paradigm is a pattern, ideas, values, framework, and structure or system of academic and scientific assumptions. Research

paradigms inevitably mirror our views of the world we live in and the one we want to live in (Lather, 1986). According to Gephart (1999), research paradigms have been divided into three separate philosophical categories, namely, positivism, interpretivism, and critical postmodernism. Positivism is about discovering and presenting the truth using evidence (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). According to Walsham (1995), the positivist view claims that scientific knowledge is created by facts, while its ontology view sees reality to be a separate entity from society. In other words, the positivist position emphasizes engaging in research in settings where variables can be controlled and manipulated. On the other hand, the interpretive paradigm concerns looking at the world from an individual's point of view. According to Walsham (1993), the interpretive tradition does not have any correct or incorrect theories because they are assessed based on how interesting they are to the researcher and other professionals in related fields. The third category which is critical postmodernism is formed by combining two worldviews, which are critical theory and postmodern scholarship (Gephart, 1999). Critical scholars assume that human beings have historically created and are reproducing social reality (Myers, 2009). The critical theory aims to uncover the "truth" and "understanding within the social context" by dissecting the "text" or "hidden curriculum" (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003, p. 33). Having examined the three research paradigms, this study made use of the interpretivism paradigm since the study is more investigative, expressive, and clarifying.

The interpretive paradigm postulates that reality is created by society, has several meanings, and depends on the perceptions and realities of each individual (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The authors further posit that the interpretive paradigm helps the investigator to comprehend the individual real-life experiences of participants using the significance and meanings of the shared realities specifically concerning professional advancement. This view is supported by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), who assert that the interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to get deeper depth by examining the perceptions, reality, and experiences of a certain social environment. The interpretive paradigm was more amenable to investigating women's perspectives of career advancement into senior leadership positions within an organization. With the use of an interpretative paradigm, the researcher was able to elucidate the various realities that women experience from their point of view regarding the variables impacting the advancement of women into senior leadership positions within the eThekweni Municipality.

#### **4.4 STUDY SITE**

The study site was at eThekweni Municipality in Durban. The eThekweni Municipality is in the KwaZulu-Natal province, on South Africa's eastern seaboard. According to the eThekweni Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2020/2021), the municipality has a 2297 square meter area that stretches from the Tongaat in the North to uMkomaas in the South, climbing up Westward and Inland to Cato Ridge.

#### **4.5 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE**

A population is the total number of individuals, units, or elements with a particular set of characteristics from which a sample is taken (Sekaren & Bougie, 2016). Therefore, the population of this study was all women in leadership positions within eThekweni Municipality. The municipality has a total of two hundred and twenty females in its senior management, executive management, and top management levels. Since there is a belief that the term 'gender' refers to both women and men, the study also included three hundred and forty men in leadership positions to help the researcher better understand the gender dynamics and how men view and perceive women in leadership and decision-making. The primary research population was made up of study participants from the executive leadership levels, namely, the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Head of Units, Deputy Heads, and Senior Managers who are the custodians of the administration in eThekweni Municipality.

The eThekweni Municipality consists of nine Clusters, and each one represented a stratum from which participants were chosen. The researcher used a list obtained from the Human Capital unit to identify female and male senior management with five or more years of experience in their roles within their Clusters. A total research sample of 10 participants was purposively selected across all nine clusters within eThekweni Municipality. The selection of a sample size of 10 is justifiable as stated by Guest, Bruce, and Johnson (2006) that a sample size of 8 to 12 is suitable for a qualitative study. To ensure the inclusion and diversity of experiences provided by participants, the researcher ensured that each cluster was represented in the sampling. The sample included women and men from senior, executive, and top management levels. The inclusion of males in this study ensured that a more thorough account of the gendered perspectives, opinions, and voices is considered more fully. The participants were purposively selected using the following criteria:

- The participants must have five or more years of experience in their management positions. The researcher felt that having held the aforementioned managerial post for five years would have provided participants with a greater chance to gain insight into their role, their obligations, and the challenges the job bears.
- The participant must have spent five or more years in the Cluster. This made it possible for the incumbent to comprehend the dynamics of the particular cluster.
- The participants must be willing to voluntarily participate in a study.
- The participants must have agreed to sign an informed consent form.

#### **4.6 SAMPLING STRATEGIES**

In qualitative research, sampling is a method of diversity management that ensures that the variation and different types of the phenomena being studied are represented as broadly as possible in the empirical data, unlike quantitative research which employs sampling to advance the logic of statistical generation (Flick, 2007). According to Sekaren and Bougie (2016), there are two different types of sampling strategies, namely the probability, and non-probability sampling techniques. Probability sampling provides every component of a population an equal chance of being chosen as a sample. As a result, it endorses the real representation of the population and results in a more comprehensive generalisation of findings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, is a technique in which not every member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen as a sample (Wilson, 2010). The study conducted one-on-one interviews with a sample of women and men who occupy both middle management and senior management positions within all units and clusters of eThekweni municipality. Marshall and Rossman (2011) reiterate that the researcher should be able to determine, about all relevant variables, a universe of possible population as well as its variability in order to select an appropriate sample. The authors have also pointed out that the size is based on many complex factors from the sample population. This is seen as a method of assembling a group of specifically chosen cases, items, or events—in this case, women in management positions in eThekweni Municipality—for building a corpus of empirical examples for researching the phenomenon of interest (Flick, 2007).

Ten participants were chosen using the non-probability sampling method, which is used when the population's elements are not solely randomly or fortuitously chosen, but

rather purposefully and deliberately chosen (Burns & Burns, 2008). The female managers who were included in the research investigation were selected using a combination of availability sampling and purposive sampling techniques. In contrast to random sampling, purposeful sampling involves choosing selected cases for a specific reason. It is intended to focus on a limited subset of situations that will provide the most insight into a given phenomenon. The objective is to offer a sample that will address the research question(s) posed by the study (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011).

Since the researcher worked in a municipal setting at the time of conducting the study, the sample was chosen based on familiarity with the population, the judgment of what was going on in eThekweni Municipality regarding women's advancement, the scope of the research aims, and the appropriateness of the sample to the objectives of the study. This viewpoint is in line with that of Babbie and Mouton (1998), who define purposive sampling as the process of choosing a sample based on the researcher's personal knowledge of the population, its components, and the nature of the study goals. According to the qualitative research paradigm, the informant sample was purposefully chosen for its relevance to answering the research questions that the study aimed to address rather than being chosen to ensure population representation of the population. The appropriateness in qualitative research is to determine the extent to which the sample reflects the subject matter of interest, as opposed to quantitative research, which frequently bases its assumptions on the use of large, randomly chosen samples to guarantee that the sample is representative of the overall population.

The following table lists the participants' pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Each participant's position, and number of years in the role, are all listed in the table.

**Table 4.1:** Study Sample Demographics

| No. | Pseudonym | Cluster                        | Designation    | Management Level | Sex |
|-----|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-----|
| 1.  | Lily      | Finance                        | Deputy Head    | Executive        | F   |
| 2.  | Sunflower | Governance and Inter-relations | Senior Manager | Senior           | F   |
| 3.  | Iris      | Community and Emergency        | Deputy Head    | Executive        | F   |
| 4.  | Tulip     | Economic Development           | Senior Manager | Senior           | F   |

|     |          |  |                |           |   |
|-----|----------|--|----------------|-----------|---|
| 5.  | Rose     | Corporate and Human Resources          | Senior Manager | Senior    | F |
| 6.  | Daffodil | Corporate and Human Resources          | Senior Manager | Senior    | M |
| 7.  | Gardenia | Trading Services                       | Senior Manager | Senior    | F |
| 8.  | Orchid   | Human Settlements and Infrastructure   | Deputy Head    | Executive | F |
| 9.  | Daisy    | Office of the Chief Strategic Officer  | Senior Manager | Senior    | F |
| 10. | Dahlia   | Office of the Chief Operations Officer | Senior Manager | Senior    | M |

**Source:** Author's compilation

#### 4.7 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

During the process of collecting data, the study used triangulation which involved collecting data using multiple approaches to increase the validity and credibility of research findings. These are primary resources which involve interviews and observations, as well as secondary resources which involve perusing the official and archival documents.

##### 4.7.1 Primary Resources

According to Blanche and Durrheim (2002), various techniques of data collection, such as interviews, mail questionnaires, telephone interviews, and diaries, can be utilized. However, for the purposes of this study, an interview was used. Describing the interview, Vogt, Vogt, Garder, and Haeffele (2014:41) posit that it is an "interaction between researchers and participants in which the questions and answers are open-ended and in which the answers are usually coded qualitatively". According to Turner (2010), interviews are methods for acquiring data through communication between the subject of the study and the researcher. Interviews can be face-to-face, over the phone, in focus groups, structured, semi-structured, or unstructured. In this study, the researcher employed primarily face-to-face semi-structured interviews because they have the ability to produce rich and comprehensive descriptions of the life experiences and ideas of the informants (*Refer to Appendix 'E' for the interview structure and questions*). With this style of interviewing, the interview process is opened to a better

understanding of how respondents create and use meaning in social interactions. Unlike in organized interviews, it enables respondents to respond more on their terms (May 2011). Interviews were carried out to gather data by interacting with participants while providing the researcher the freedom to delve into and enquire about respondents' lived experiences (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for gaining a grasp of the lived realities and difficulties women encounter in advancing their careers and moving up to senior leadership positions within eThekweni Municipality. The researcher was able to probe and clarify respondents' perspectives about the advancement of women into senior leadership positions through verbal communication with the respondents. The researcher posed questions that were open-ended to respondents regarding their perspectives on the advancement of women into senior leadership positions at eThekweni Municipality. Through the approach, the researcher was able to ask each respondent for more information and an explanation. An interview guide was used to monitor the course of the questions to make sure that the questions asked during the interview genuinely related to the research topics and that respondents were asked the same questions throughout the interview (Adewumi & Ogunnubi, 2019). It ought to be noted that the interview guide was used to allow for organized data gathering rather than to impose restrictions on respondents' patterns of answer.

To carry out the interviews which took place during business hours, appointments had to be scheduled with the respondents. Prior to conducting the interviews, a consent form outlining the study's objectives and its rationale for being carried out was emailed to the respondents. The interviews were conducted according to a schedule with pre-set questions. The questions in the schedule for the interview were merely meant to spark conversations and not compel the participants to give a specific response. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes, and as the conversation went on all responses were recorded using a voice recorder. The use of audio tape is in line with the claim made by Birks and Mills (2011) that an audio recording may add to the security of the researcher's valuable data. The researcher also used notetaking to supplement the audio tape recording to make sure that all responses were captured in case any part of the meeting's audio recording became too unclear for transcription.

### **4.7.2 Secondary Resources**

Additional materials were used in addition to the primary data. The secondary sources included research conducted by other scholars, especially publications in journals and books, white papers, governmental gazettes, as well as official archival records from the eThekweni Municipality. This body of material helped the researcher to understand the viewpoints and conclusions of earlier research on the subject.

## **4.8 DATA QUALITY CONTROL**

For this qualitative study, the data quality control will be ensured by applying trustworthiness strategies suggested by Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2014), which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **4.8.1 Credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) attribute credibility to the accuracy of findings as well as the researcher's efforts to attempt and show that the phenomenon under examination is a true representation of what is being presented. In the opinion of Marshall and Rossman (2006), credibility ensures that the goals of the research are in line with the data as well as the data analysis. To ensure the credibility of the data being gathered, the respondents' overall views were sufficiently reflected in the research findings by reporting their precise responses. The credibility of the study was attained by incorporating respondents' comments verbatim in the study results to ensure that what was recounted in the interview was reported.

### **4.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability is a quality of trustworthiness that describes the extent to which a study shows that its conclusions can be transferred to other similar situations (Nobel & Smith, 2015). In other words, it is focused on determining how much the results are applicable outside of the study circumstance or location. In this regard, transferability was pursued by ensuring that the findings of the study were understood within the context of eThekweni Municipality and the reader had enough knowledge to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings they are familiar with (Seale, 1999). Furthermore, transferability was achieved by making sure that the study's findings are simple to apply to different contexts without necessarily generalizing.

### **4.8.3 Dependability**

According to Merriam (1998), dependability is the degree to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in the same context. According to Schurink, Fouché, and De Vos (2011), the dependability of research revolves around a logical, recorded research procedure that can be tracked, to guarantee that the subject of the research is an accurate reflection of reality. To ensure the dependability of the findings, the study used the interview guide to ensure that the data was obtained consistently, that it was valid, and that the results were trustworthy. Also, the researcher ensured the accuracy of the findings and the fact that they were supported by the data gathered during the interview. In addition, dependability was guaranteed by adhering to and ensuring that all pertinent ethical guidelines were followed in the study and the reporting of the study's findings. By way of example, all respondents' comments and the problems of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were all preserved.

### **4.8.4 Confirmability**

According to Baxter and Eyles (1997), confirmability is the yardstick used to determine whether the research's goals and findings are consistent with those of other studies. Also, confirmability involves the researcher's interest in the objectivity of the study. This necessitates making sure that the study report reflects the informants' views and experiences rather than the researcher's opinions or personal traits. This suggests that the researcher should follow the rule of objectivity and refrain from having personal biases (Guba, 1981). For this study, confirmability was achieved by ensuring that the research report reflects the opinions and experiences of the respondents rather than the researcher's ideas.

Furthermore, the consistency of the results further confirmed the confirmability. This was made sure of by distributing the interview transcripts and results to the appropriate stakeholders for cross-examination to assess the relationship and coherence between the interview questions, the respondents' responses, and the interpretation of the results.

## **4.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Yin (2018), data analysis is the process of extracting meaning from the unprocessed data gathered. The data analysis process involves creating, developing, and validating ideas that develop over time and as more data is collected. It also involves gathering and carefully examining data and identifying concepts, themes, and patterns in the data to

represent the interpretation of the meaning the respondent intended (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). The data analysis process begins after the initial interviews or observations and ends at the end of the research. This qualitative study employed content analysis to examine the qualitative information obtained during the interviews. According to Sekeran and Bougie (2016), content analysis is the systematic gathering and analysis of the text's content, such as reports and transcripts. To analyse and interpret the qualitative data for this study, content analysis was used to ensure that any recurring themes that are identified effectively address the research questions.

The NVivo qualitative software was used to identify recurring themes from the transcripts (Creswell, 2014). The analysis and presentation of the data were achieved through three strategic steps, namely, data reduction, data display, and data conclusion. Firstly, the data was transcribed from audio to text. Secondly, after editing and cleaning, the data was broken down into a set of themes using codes. A code was then linked to a word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or a larger section of the data (Struwig & Stead, 2001) Lastly, the data was interpreted, given a meaning, and conclusions deducted from the identified themes.

#### **4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Maintaining ethics and ethical principles is crucial to the study process, to reporting findings honestly, and to participant protection (Harreveld et al., 2016). According to Silverman (2000, p. 201) when researchers conduct research, they are actually operating in the participants' private spaces. Creswell (2014) states that the researcher must show respect for the informants' rights, values, needs, and preferences. Therefore, appropriate steps must be taken to uphold strict ethical standards to safeguard the rights to anonymity, confidentiality, and respect of participants.

To achieve suitable ethical standards, the methodology of the research along with the procedures adhered to accepted norms to achieve suitable ethical standards. The study followed the rules set forth by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The researcher obtained written consent from the eThekweni Municipality to carry out the study (*See Appendix 'C' - Gatekeeper's Letter*). The questions on the interview guide were written with ethics in consideration. This was done to make sure that the respondents' morale was not in any way impacted by the study's conclusions. Prior to

the interviews, respondents were informed that participation in the research was completely voluntary and that they might opt out at any time or they may opt not to participate at all. Participants were made aware that the study was conducted solely for academic purposes, that their names would not be included in the results, and that their identity was secured by the use of anonymity. To protect respondents' privacy and interests, private information was once again strictly avoided. Before the interview began to be recorded, informed consent was gained from the respondents verbally and in writing.

According to De Pelecijn, Decoene, and Hardyns (2021), trust may bolster respondents' keenness to participate, whilst inadequate trust may cause potential respondents to be reluctant to join and others to abruptly quit on account of personal concerns. To get around this, the researcher sent emails to respondents courteously requesting them to take part in the study, along with letters of approval from the Acting Head of the Organisational Development and Change Management Unit of the eThekweni Municipality, an ethical clearance letter from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and an information sheet about the study.

#### **4.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There are possible limitations that could affect or have an impact on a study of this magnitude. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) assert that the study may be constrained by factors outside of the researcher's control, such as time, money, or information availability. These must be recognized. In terms of this study, the limitation was related to the difficulty in finding a time when the interviewer and the interviewee were both available which made it difficult to select a time for the interview. Additionally, there was a time constraint because most of the participants had to reschedule their first meeting with the researcher owing to other obligations at work. This caused the appointment to conflict with another appointment. Therefore, due to participants' last-minute commitments, some appointments had to be rescheduled for a later time. All of these circumstances had a substantial negative impact on the research's timeline and other logistical aspects, particularly because they delayed the exercise of gathering data. Another limitation of this study was the issue of race. This study viewed women as a single-gendered group that experiences exclusion and oppression on an equal basis regardless of race and culture. This was a limitation as Giddens and Sutton (2013) provide a broader perspective on how White women's experiences typically differ from those of Black women.

Another limitation of the study was regarding generalisability. The research findings are the perceptions of a specific sample of people within eThekweni Municipality. The impressions of gender equality and the advancement of women in the municipality will also differ because both men and women made up the research sample. Perceptions and experiences related to the research issue were influenced by the level of rank, experience, and length of time spent in the eThekweni Municipality. In addition, as pointed out in the first chapter, the research was delineated to one province, KwaZulu-Natal, and more particularly to the eThekweni Municipality. This might not provide a precise picture of how local government in South Africa is transforming overall. As a result, it's possible that the findings cannot be generalized to every municipality throughout every province in the whole country.

#### **4.12 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has given a rationale for the selected research approach. Regarding the subject of the investigation, the decision to choose qualitative approaches over quantitative ones has been explored. The chapter also discussed the interpretive paradigm which was found to be more amenable to investigating women's perspectives of career advancement into senior leadership positions within eThekweni Municipality. Ten individuals were chosen from different clusters within the eThekweni Municipality using a purposive sample strategy. A semi-structured interview method was used to acquire data from the respondents regarding their perspectives on the advancement of women into senior leadership positions. The four indicators of trustworthiness served as an efficient quality control for the data collected, and content analysis was used to appropriately analyse all the data. The issues pertaining to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability have been discussed. The chapter also explained the ethical considerations as well as the limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this study was to analyse the barriers inhibiting women's progression into leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality. This chapter discusses the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The interpretative paradigm provided the framework for the qualitative research approach, emphasizing a thorough comprehension of the various interpretations and socially constructed realities within the environment in which they occur (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Thematic analysis was used to analyse and understand the qualitative data. A theme is a subject or topic that appears in written work and characterizes connections between concepts found in the data (Bazeley, 2018). The process of thematic analysis involves a researcher identifying and developing themes to give the acquired qualitative data significance. It is considered a beneficial tool for qualitative researchers since it allows them to analyse data with greater complexity (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The data received was analysed, coded, and presented in the following primary themes that emerged from the data:

- 1) Demographic profile of participants.
- 2) Compliance with gender equity legislation.
- 3) Factors that affect the pace of women's progression into leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality.
- 4) Strategies to promote women to senior leadership positions

The first section of the data analysis presents the demographic/biographical data and is then followed by the qualitative analysis. The sample characteristics and relevant findings are dealt with in the section that follows.

#### 5.1 SAMPLE SIZE AND PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSE RATE

The purposive sample was made up of ten individuals from senior and executive management levels, eight of whom were women and two of whom were men, and all participated in the study's interviews. It was determined that the respondents possessed pertinent knowledge and expertise related to the primary research goal. The following table depicts the participant's response rate:

**Table 5.1: Participants' Response Rate**

| Sample Size Targeted | Participants Responded | Percentage  |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| 10                   | 10                     | 100%        |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>10</b>              | <b>100%</b> |

The above table 5.1 indicates that all ten (100%) participants were interviewed.

## 5.2. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Before the participants were able to answer questions about the primary research questions, they were asked for their demographic information, which was used to verify that each informant was qualified to take part in the study and would make a significant contribution to the effort to address the research questions. The table below displays the participants' demographic data, which includes occupational level, educational background, years of work experience, and age group. Each of these factors is explained below.

**Table 5.2: Demographic Profile**

| VARIABLE                         | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>Occupational level</b>        |           |            |
| Senior Management (TK16-18)      | 7         | 70%        |
| Executive Management (TK19-TK23) | 3         | 30%        |
| Top Management (TK25)            |           |            |
| <b>Educational Qualification</b> |           |            |
| Matric                           |           |            |
| University Degree / Diploma      | 2         | 20%        |
| Honours Degree                   | 4         | 40%        |
| Master Degree                    | 3         | 30%        |
| Doctoral Degree                  | 1         | 10%        |
| <b>Work Experience</b>           |           |            |
| Up to 5 years                    |           |            |
| 6-10 years                       |           |            |
| 11-20 years                      | 7         | 70%        |

|                    |   |     |
|--------------------|---|-----|
| 21 years and above | 3 | 30% |
| <b>Age Group</b>   |   |     |
| 18-30 years        |   |     |
| 31-40 years        | 3 | 30% |
| 41-50 years        | 4 | 40% |
| 51-60 years        | 3 | 30% |
| 61 years and above |   |     |

The demographic characteristics of the respondents depicted in the above table are as follows:

### **5.2.1 Occupational Level**

The table above shows that 70% of respondents were at the Senior Management level whilst (30%) were at the Executive level within eThekweni Municipality. Considering their senior operational level, the involvement levels of such calibre of management could foster insightful and dynamic leadership discussions.

### **5.2.2 Educational Level**

The table above depicts the wide-ranging and diverse qualifications, which the participants were studying. All respondents completed matric, with 20% having a university degree, 40% with an Honours degree, 30% with a Master Degree, and 10% with a Doctoral Degree. This demonstrates unequivocally that eThekweni Municipality's female senior managers have the educational background required to advance into positions of decision-making. These varied qualifications could allow people to engage in lively conversations about gender inequity from a variety of angles. It can also generate multifaceted knowledge from the educational setting. These diverse educational levels could assist participants in contributing to vibrant gender inequality discussions from various viewpoints. It can further produce multi-dimensional knowledge from their academic environment.

### **5.2.3 Work Experience**

According to the analysis, the bulk of research participants (70%) had between 11 and 20 years of experience, while 30% had 21 or more years of experience. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that most women in management roles meet the prerequisites for management at the municipal level. This aspect is relevant when assessing the knowledge and expertise needed to

advance into top leadership roles because women have been deterred from getting leadership exposure. This could create a stable cohort of female leaders and help the eThekweni Municipality's top leadership body become more gender balanced.

### 5.2.4 Age Group

The age profile of the participants is also shown in the above table. The age demographics of the respondents were used to assess their experience, maturity, and character. The age range of the respondents indicates that they were between the ages of 31 and 60. Of the participants, 40% were in the age group of 31 to 40, and 30% were in each age group of 31 to 40 and 51 to 60. As a result, this suggests that the participants were responsible, experienced, and capable of addressing issues of service delivery.

## 5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The respondents were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The research participants have been broken out in detail in Chapter 4 (table 4.1). Additionally, the researcher assigned codes to de-identify respondents as per the following table:

**Table 5.3: Codes Assigned to Respondents**

| CODE                      | CHARACTERISTICS  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Respondent 1 – P01</b> | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Lily, a resilient and easy-to-grow flower. Middle-aged African woman working as a Deputy Head within the Finance Cluster. Has almost 20 years of working experience.                   |
| <b>Respondent 2 – P02</b> | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Sunflower, a strong bubble flower. African woman in the early fifties, serving as a Senior Manager for almost 20 years in the Governance and International Relations Cluster.          |
| <b>Respondent 3 – P03</b> | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Iris, a flower that symbolizes wisdom and positive change. African, female Deputy Head with more than fifteen years of experience within the Community and Emergency Services Cluster. |
| <b>Respondent 4 – P04</b> | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Tulip, the extraordinarily vibrant flower. African, academic woman with a Doctoral Degree and  |

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
|                            | more than twenty-one years of experience, serving as Senior Manager within the Economic and Development Cluster.   |
| <b>Respondent 5 – P05</b>  | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Rose, a classic and versatile flower. Young African woman with just above ten years of experience, currently working as a Senior Manager within the Corporate and Human Capital Cluster.   |
| <b>Respondent 6 – P06</b>  | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Daffodil, a cheerful and charming flower. Indian male, working as a Senior manager within the Corporate and Human Capital Cluster. The respondent has been working in eThekweni Municipality for more than 15 years.                         |
| <b>Respondent 7 – P07</b>  | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Gardenia, a flower that conveys the message of self-reflection, intuition, and protection. African female, with a Senior Management role in Trading Services Cluster over 15 years of working experience.                                    |
| <b>Respondent 8 – P08</b>  | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Orchid, a refined sophisticated, and mysterious flower. African female serving as a Deputy Head within the Human Settlements and Infrastructure Cluster. The respondent has more than 21 years of working experience.                        |
| <b>Respondent 9 – P09</b>  | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Daisy, a patron flower of beauty and fertility. White female, serving as a Senior Manager within the office of the Chief Strategic Officer. The respondent has more than 21 years of working experience.                                     |
| <b>Respondent 10 – P10</b> | The pseudonym given to the respondent was Dahlia, a flower that symbolizes growth, positivity, and creativity. Young African male with over 15 years of experience in the eThekweni Municipality. He is serving as a Senior Manager within the office of the Chief Operations Officer. |

## 5.4 PRESENTATION OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### 5.4.1 Compliance with the gender equity legislations

As was covered in earlier chapters, eThekweni Municipality has put in place initiatives aimed at improving the status of women in the workplace, but whether these initiatives have resulted in equitable job opportunities for women, will be addressed in this section. The respondents were asked to rate the extent to which eThekweni Municipality has made an effort to advance women into senior management roles in accordance with the laws and policies on gender equity. In response, they all conceded that while regulations such as Employment Equity (EE), Recruitment and Selection, Talent Management, and Performance Management policies were created to address the disadvantages faced by designated groups in the workplace and guarantee their fair representation across all professional levels in the workforce, the truth is that these measures are ineffective. At the upper managerial echelon, women were still not fairly represented.

Lily stated that the top leadership levels of the municipality were not complying with the legislation since, of the nine clusters, only one was led by a female Deputy City Manager (DCM), while the other clusters were led by men, including the Municipal Manager who is a male. She further stated that when it came to the Heads level, in the entire municipality only five females were heading various units, and the remaining Heads were males. She concluded by saying that:

*“It seems as if there is no intention of trying to get more women to those levels”*  
(P01/2023).

According to Dahlia, the municipality has existing policies, programmes, and interventions that aim to equip women for leadership positions. He mentioned the EE policy that is backed by the Constitution Act, and the Talent Management initiative. He noted that while there has been a lot of progress in the last six years, there is still a long way to go because there are still pronounced gender disparities in senior management. To accentuate his point, he said that:

*“If you look at the numbers at the executive level of eThekweni, out of 9 DCMs, only one is a female. Previously we had two females at that level, and when she left it was males who were given the acting role. Even at a Head’s level, we are still having a domination of males. I so wish these policies and interventions to progress women*

*could be implemented with intent, rather than implemented for compliance purposes” (P10/2023).*

This was further supported by Rose, who noted that at the DCM, Head, and Deputy Head’s levels there is not much representation of women, especially in Trading Services, Human Settlements, Economic Development, and Finance Clusters.

*“I know we have transversal policies and processes such as Employment Equity, Talent Management, Performance Management process, and Workplace Skills Programme. However, I feel they do not prove to be effective; they are just a tick-box exercise. Having EE is just a compliance issue, it’s more about the organisations having numbers than necessary developing women into senior positions. Then there’s a Performance Management policy linked to the Workplace Skills Programme which works only if you have a boss who can link the two and is willing to push you in the right direction. Women’s growth is somehow dependent on your boss whether they are willing to allow you to shadow them to the executive meetings” (P05/2023).*

Gender awareness was obviously not given priority in the municipality, as evidenced by the informant's statement that women's advancement depends on their employers' willingness to support them. This statement, in my opinion, leaves a lot to be desired. The leadership at the echelon of the organisation had shown little or no commitment to implementing equity policies effectively. As stated by one respondent, to ensure that women are fairly represented in work prospects, leaders in the municipality need to change their mindset and show commitment to the matter of employment.

According to Orchid, even though the leadership of the municipality has implemented an Employment Equity policy that is trying to get a fair representation of women not only in leadership positions but also in terms of the demographics of the whole municipality, unfortunately, the organization still has numbers that are skewed as there are more males in key positions. She said that:

*“I know statistically that we have not met the EE target in terms of getting women fairly and equally represented in positions of leadership. However, I always like to be optimistic, especially since I’m sitting in a leadership position which suggests that these policies are impactful. It might not be at the desired stage yet, but we are making huge progress” (P08/2023).*

Participants acknowledged that eThekweni made extensive progress in having women employed in some of the occupational levels. At the senior leadership positions, they were not in compliance, and it was evident upon a comparison of the establishment that there is quite a disparity in the representation of women in top leadership positions. It seemed as if compliance with the gender equity legislation depended on the occupational level. To support this point Tulip said:

*“It is prevalent that when you look in pockets, generally you would conclude that there is a representation of women in the municipality. However, when you look at the top position level, you’ll find a predominance of males. For instance, the Economic and Development Cluster has only males as the Unit Head. When you cascade down to the Unit level, the executive management for the Economic Development Unit as well as the Electricity Unit are males only. In terms of the DCM level, we had two female DCMs previously. When one of the female DCMs departed the municipality, the acting DCMs were males. It is obvious that our Municipality has not transformed yet”* (P04/2023).

Sharing a similar view to the above, Gardenia argued that the municipality was not compliant with the prescripts of the Employment Equity Act of 1998. She substantiated this by saying:

*“With the focus on the various clusters within the municipality, female representation is minimal to none. Considering all the deputy city managers including the city manager, the ratio is approximately 90:10 – with females representing 10%. This is completely incomparable and unacceptable considering all prescripts that are in place to redress such inequalities. In all essence, the organization is deficient about female representation even at other various levels of management including Unit Heads and Deputy Heads level and this surely requires a higher intervention”* (P07/2023).

The section highlighted that eThekweni Municipality was not doing well when it came to the progression of women into top management roles. Even while the necessary legal frameworks were in place to ensure gender equity and women's equal employment, the situation of women could not be changed by the mere existence of these documents; only their successful application could do this. Based on the collected data, I have observed that more women have been employed in eThekweni in a substantial number of roles, especially in lower and middle management in the last few years. Although there are many reasons for applauding the efforts

undertaken to increase the number of women in the workforce, it is reasonable to assert that top management in the eThekweni Municipality was generally undergoing a sluggish process of gender transition, and therefore, significant efforts ought to be made to promote more women to key positions.

#### **5.4.2 Factors affecting the pace of women's progression into leadership positions**

The primary goal of this study was to identify and comprehend the several barriers that prevent women working for the eThekweni Municipality from advancing to leadership roles. Many respondents cited a few factors as obstacles that women face in their pursuit of leadership roles within the municipality, including the factors on eThekweni Municipality's setting as an organisation, factors on societal gender stereotypes, and factors on women as individuals. The large cohort of respondents who were interviewed obligingly stated that these obstacles prevent the municipality from balancing gender representation as required by the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, Employment Equity Act No.55 of 1998, and other laws. These factors and their eventual development into impediments to women's career advancement will be further discussed in the following paragraphs.

##### **5.4.2.1 Factors on eThekweni Municipality's setting as an organisation**

###### **a) Culture of the organisation**

Most participants firmly believed that prospects for women to rise through the ranks and assume senior management roles in the municipality were hindered by the organizational culture and climate. As discussed in Chapter 2, organizational culture refers to a group of common values and ideas that influence how people think, see, and act inside an organization. The result of the study revealed that a male-dominated culture endured in the eThekweni municipality and that male-dominated morals and values are present in most operational areas. These factors foster the preservation of an organizational culture that is hostile to women, particularly at the top and senior management levels.

There was some agreement among respondents that the lack of gender balance in top management contributed to the rate at which gender transition was taking place in the municipality. This imbalance is a result of the inequalities between males and women in the workplace and society at large. Women are oppressed in numerous situations including the workplace, the church, and the family, due to male domination and chauvinism. Consequently, women's subjugation moved from society to the workplace, where they continued to be

confined to lower-level roles. Daisy argued that given that our municipality is located in KwaZulu-Natal province which is mostly rural and has a strong national cultural identity, national culture may permeate the municipality and shape deeply ingrained patriarchal gender stereotypes, values, and norms that are dictated by views of men's superiority and women's subservience in society.

The respondents stated that women's advancement was not happening at the right pace in our municipality due to the gender imbalance. To affirm this Daffodil said:

*“When you investigate or assess the establishment of the city, particularly the filled posts at the executive management level, you can see that there is a gender imbalance in the executive management. For me, I think the background of the life that we live in our country, province as well as eThekweni as a city is still affecting the pace at which women are progressing into senior management positions. Most people in our province are still living in poverty where you find that resources are not fairly distributed and, in most cases, it affects the females as it was affecting our mothers in the past. This makes females be left behind when better job opportunities come” (P06/2023).*

The same view was shared by Dahlia and Orchid who contended that women's oppression was encouraged by the background and the disadvantaged history of the country. To support his view, Dahlia said:

*“For me, we are still underrepresented in terms of females at the executive management level. Before and during the apartheid era women were deprived of equal rights to males, as a result, you find that the development of women and introduction of women into senior positions in the workplace has been delayed” (P10/2023).*

Sharing the same view Orchid said:

*“We come from a historical error where there was discrimination against women, so we have a shortfall from that point of view” (P08/2023).*

Similarly, Iris (P08) argued that it was considered insulting in some cultures for a woman to hold a leadership role. She added by saying that society had taught women to submit to their husbands and stay at home to care for the kids and family. She went on to say that this male domination affected how women were seen, which affected their ability to progress in the workforce.

Adding to the problem of a culture that hinders the progression of women into top levels within the municipality, most respondents indicated that the eThekweni municipality has an exclusive culture that marginalizes gender, and women most times feel disrespected and excluded. Women leaders have encountered more challenges to their position of authority, with co-workers or subordinates opposing their judgment or capabilities. Referring to this, Daffodil argued that at the operational level, there is a reluctance and ability of staff to acquiesce and comply with female authority and directives. He further justified his argument and said:

*“I’ve seen it in our organisation whereby a male manager refuses to take instructions from a female Senior Manager. As an organisation, rather than solving the issue at the root cause, we seem to redeploy and make alterations to the reporting lines within the establishment to pacify as it were” (P06/2023).*

The shared perception was that most workers in the municipality have been undermining female authority by disparaging women's leadership styles and suggesting that men are more suitable for positions of responsibility. This disdainful conduct hinders women's capacity to lead successfully and fosters an unhealthy workplace atmosphere. Rose elaborated on this viewpoint, stating that:

*“Our municipality has adopted a cultural mindset within KwaZulu Natal, where African males do not want to take directives from females” (P05/2023).*

However, Lili had a different view from other participants because she felt that there was a mutual respect relationship between women leaders and their subordinates. She indicated that as a female leader, she has experienced a level of respect even from older males and women who report to her. She substantiated this by stating her personal experience and saying:

*“Currently I have only women reporting to me directly and our relationship is perfect. We are all focusing on taking our organisation forward. I also experience the same with junior male employees in the department, our working relationship is cordial” (P01/2023).*

When Lily was probed further and asked to indicate if she shares the same view when it comes to her male counterparts, she responded by saying:

*I can't say the same with my male counterparts who are at the same level as myself. I feel they still believe women have no say and they can't make important decisions. This is more evident when they're talking in the boardroom, they tend to exclude women in*

*their conversations even though they are in the same space. Whatever conversation or decision they make is centred around them. So, I think it is the senior level that is a problem” (P01/2023).*

These different views suggest that women were still excluded and discriminated against in the municipality in the same way it prevailed in society in general. This was evidenced by certain acts such as male dominance at the senior management levels, male management's attitude towards women, and the opposition to women's authority.

#### **b) Ineffective Implementation of Gender Policies**

The study's findings showed that the eThekweni municipality had plans and policies in place regarding gender; however, the rate at which top management transformed its gender composition appears to have been hindered by the management's poor execution of these plans and policies, which were intended to establish gender equity across all occupational levels. Sunflower made a compelling case that although gender policies were in existence, women were not benefiting from them because of mismanaged implementation. Regarding her views about the ineffective implementation of gender policies, she affirmed that:

*“There are policies and strategies like the Employment Equity, Talent Management, Performance Management, and Workplace Skill Plan in the eThekweni municipality. However, there is a lack of commitment from the side of the municipality in terms of ensuring that those policies and initiatives are implemented correctly” (P02/2023).*

Her argument corroborates the information provided by other respondents. They said that the purpose of the Workplace Skill Plan was to guarantee that training and education closely matched the municipality's demands. It extends to external higher education institutions in addition to the internal courses. Women have a choice to select any course they want for their career development; the issue is that these courses must align with other initiatives such as Talent Management and Performance Management, which are meant to formally assess management and identify gaps in women's career development. This way, when women select courses, they make sure that the courses meet performance requirements. Therefore, if the performance assessment is not carried out appropriately, women cannot select the right courses that will prepare them for leadership roles.

Echoing the same sentiments, Daffodil pointed out that there is an Employment Equity policy in place that seeks to achieve employment equity in the eThekweni Municipality by promoting

equal opportunity and fair treatment through the elimination of unfair discrimination, implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantage in employment experienced by designated groups including women and to ensure their equitable representative in all occupational levels in the workforce. He further indicated that this policy is concise and descriptive, so it tells us based on what we have, whether we're in excess or underrepresented in terms of men and women, and also what are the variations in the numbers that need to be implemented within the organization. He then indicated that the challenge was the management's incorrect implementation of this policy. He substantiated this point by saying:

*“The implementation of the Employment Equity policy in correcting the discrepancies is linked to the Recruitment and Selection processes. However, because of the deficiencies within the recruitment process and the lack of metrics for the recruitment appointment process, we use the policies incorrectly because the appointments that we see are to the converse of what is being identified within those policies” (P06/2023).*

It appears that many respondents agreed that one of the issues impeding women's advancement into senior leadership roles has been the inadequate execution of gender policies. Expressing the same sentiments, when Daisy was also asked to comment on her view that there was a challenge with the execution of equity policies and initiatives, she elaborated by saying:

*“The municipality has implemented two particular initiatives, one being assisted education and the other one being talent management because over the years there has been one of the predominant cases of the appointment of males over females as there was the logic that women are missing certain prerequisites that are fundamental requirements of the post that is required. So, these initiatives are supposed to drive the capacity and capability enhancement of individual employees including women. As a concerted effort these initiatives, should be deployed to proactively identify, mentor, and equip potential incumbents to step into the various management-level positions. Unfortunately, when it comes to the recruitment process, the municipality disregards the core purpose of these initiatives, it's sort of been lost in translation to the point now where it is not adding value or assisting in the appointment of women into the executive positions” (P09/2023).*

### **c) Lack of Support**

The findings of the study demonstrated that there were shortcomings in the eThekweni municipality related to women's lack of management support, which was seen to be impeding their advancement into senior leadership roles. A majority of respondents believed that management's support for women's advancement which can be assured through providing mentoring to women and offering tailored training programmes that will provide them with the capabilities needed to be better leaders may accelerate the pace of gender transformation to enable women to access top management positions. It was determined that eThekweni municipality's ability to narrow the gender gap between men and women depends on its ability to support women. However, according to the respondents, there was a lack of commitment and support for the development of opportunities that would help women who want to become leaders advance, and this barrier was thought to be one of the causes of the low number of women in decision making positions of the municipality.

Echoing the same sentiments, Sunflower indicated that there is not much support from management and male counterparts. To accentuate this point she stated:

*“In my case personally, there is a lack of formal assessments of one's performance to understand where the shortages or inefficiencies are in terms of skills and competencies”* (P02/2023).

Essentially, what the respondent disclosed was the absence of management support in identifying and providing the training required to help women advance and prepare for positions of leadership. Tulip echoed the previous argument when she pointed out that to hasten the process of gender transformation and enable women to rise into top management roles, top management needs to support women and provide them with the necessary grooming. She further supported her statement by giving the example of her own experience by saying:

*“Using me as an example, when I started working for this municipality as a Project Manager, the then-cluster DCM had a high regard for me and it gave me a great deal of confidence because I always knew that I had someone who was behind me 100% and giving me all the resources I needed. Having that support contributed to my ability to advance upwardly in the job hierarchy. For me, it's not enough to give women a role and then step off and not provide support”* (P04/2023).

Iris concurs with these points of view and goes on to assert that receiving the support that women need can improve their productivity and efficiency in the municipality, which might ultimately result in the advancement of women. She gave an example of her encounter and said:

*“Bringing it back to me, I remember various times when I had to convene a project meeting with various stakeholders from different levels of occupation. That meeting could not sit without the back-up and support from my Unit’s Head. Sometimes, it would take a couple of months before it convenes if I’m coordinating those meetings alone and he doesn’t vouch for me, that meeting will not happen. However, if I include his name in the mail, people will turn up because they will see that he supports that specific project. So, I think management support is key in assisting women to take leadership roles” (P03/2023).*

The study revealed that eThekweni municipality has a predominance of men, which makes things intimidating for women to operate freely. Daisy (P09) claimed that due to the past apartheid and upbringing, females experience a level of discomfort when they are working in a male-dominated environment. She provided an example of the situation and said:

*“In the Engineering sector, there are more males than females, and naturally, that can intimidate women. To break the barrier, women have to step up until there are enough of them” (P09/2023).*

In agreement with Daisy, Orchid pointed out that the slow rate of gender transformation among top management in the eThekweni municipality could be attributed to management's lack of support as it appeared that the predominantly male workplace was seen to be intimidating to women. She elaborated on this and said:

*“I experienced this when I was working in one of the corporate companies, I was the only female in my department. I remember with every meeting, trying to be inclusive as much as possible, my boss would acknowledge everyone but would give me a special mention, which would make me uncomfortable. Being the only African and only woman in those meetings, he kept referring to me as a ‘Black diamond’ and someone adding colour to the room. As a result, all focus was on my capabilities as a woman. With so much attention on me, I ended up failing because of psychological factors. If I was in an environment where gender was balanced, I wouldn’t have felt so intimidated. Hence,*

*I'm saying women are not advancing to these senior positions because they're intimidated by males and they are not provided with necessary support” (P08/2023).*

Considering the aforementioned factors, it is evident that women need greater workplace support to advance to positions of top management. Therefore, for women to flourish in the municipality, a supportive environment must be established.

**d) Lack of experience and exposure to leadership positions**

Respondents of the study also revealed that management support can be attained by ensuring that women are provided with the necessary experience and exposure to top positions as a strategy to develop them for leadership appointment prospects. Iris (P03) asserted that women lack experience and those top positions require people with experience and exposure. She indicated that having the relevant technical qualifications alone is not enough for women to be recognized for work opportunities, but the right experience and exposure also count. She further elaborated and said:

*“As women, we probably now have the qualifications because most women are found in institutions of higher learning and are fairly represented even in the fields that were previously lacking women, such as the Engineering field. For me, we need to accumulate experience and exposure to those positions” (P03/2023).*

Dahlia agreed with Iris’s argument and further commented on the inability of implemented gender strategies to support women in getting opportunities for getting experience and exposure needed to advance to top-level positions. He said:

*“Women in all honesty have not been afforded proper opportunities to grow within our workspace. In most cases, we talk of Employment Equity, but still, women are not afforded opportunities to act in vacant senior positions. We need women to be trained practically for leadership roles so that they develop independent leadership characteristics and be recognized as suitable for top positions. Women need to be given acting positions within the municipality, and that should be done intentionally. I think the intention has been lacking from the side of the employer to provide women with opportunities deliberately, not like by the way” (P10/2023).*

On the question of why then females are underrepresented if they possess the required qualifications, Orchid (P08) responded as follows:

*“There is no magic, you must accumulate experience and exposure. What is currently happening, when I advertise a post, I see more males who are applying than women, simply because males have quite a lengthy experience since the working environment is conducive for them and has been around for quite many years” (P08/2023).*

Supporting this argument, Sunflower stated her opinion and said:

*“Maybe our female employees do not apply for the senior positions. If they do apply, maybe I can say that they lack the required experience because I fail to understand why they would not be appointed if they possess the right qualifications and skills” (P02/2023).*

Regarding the argument that women do not advance because they often lack the necessary experience and exposure for upper management, Lily emphatically stated:

*“We do know that there are a lot of women whose are educated in our municipality, so education qualification is not a barrier. With their education, lots of women can make impactful decisions. We have seen in most instances where women made decisions that are good for the organisation, and for the people they work with. But the challenge is that they’re not given the opportunities to be at those levels” (P01/2023).*

The respondents in the study viewed experience and exposure to top management positions as crucial and have the potential to accelerate the advancement of women into top management roles in the municipality. They contended that while exposure possibilities are available at the lower occupational levels through learnerships and internships, they are lacking at the managerial levels. They indicated the need for females at the management level to be provided with opportunities to act on vacant positions to offer them experience and exposure that will prepare them for higher senior roles.

#### **e) Lack of Recognition**

The study revealed that the inability of the organisation to recognize women has inadvertently hindered women’s upward mobility within the municipality. Most women indicated that they usually have to prove themselves to get management recognition and that they must put in extra effort to be respected. In Gardenia's opinion, one of the barriers to women's advancement she undoubtedly encountered is the fact that to gain the respect and recognition of others, a woman must work twice as hard as a man. Respondents argued for the recognition of the good work women do for the municipality, irrespective of their qualifications or experience.

Sunflower agreed with other respondents, and she further commented by saying:

*“There is a lack of recognition of those women who are qualified to be in those senior positions. You find that these women are performing at their best levels, but they are not recognised the way it is supposed to be” (P02/2023).*

Lily reiterated her condemnation of the lack of recognition for women and stated that this has resulted in competent and skilled women leaving the municipality in search of greater opportunities elsewhere. She stated that:

*“We have seen those who were in senior management who felt they needed to move out of the organisation for them to be able to advance themselves. Unfortunately, we lost good leaders in the organisation just because they have not been recognised for the value that they give to the organisation. Those women could have advanced to top positions and done the municipality proud but due to the lack of recognition, they have left” (P01/2023).*

Dahlia also supports the view that at eThekweni municipality there is a lack of women’s recognition, irrespective of their contributions to the organisation. He elaborates by saying:

*“Before 1994 when women were afforded opportunities in the workplace, they were given responsibilities that were mostly domestic whilst males were given responsibilities with better opportunities. I think eThekweni has inherited the traits of undermining women by giving them responsibilities that will not progress them” (P10/2023).*

#### **f) Gendered Work**

The result of the study revealed that the gendering of positions which emerged from the idea that some jobs were exclusively kept for men and others for women, may have an impact on how quickly women progress into top managerial roles. Referring to the status quo of eThekweni staff establishment, respondents regarded executive-level positions as reserved for males since those levels were overly subscribed by males, and females were primarily focused on lower administrative roles in the municipality. Tulip highlighted that eThekweni has a view that in certain portfolios you need a male because a woman will not be able to perform. She further supported her view by saying:

*“I think when you look at the situations and issues that eThekwini is currently dealing with, such as the construction mafia, business forums, and catalytic projects, very often it has become a norm that women cannot handle those. Women tend to be given portfolios that are basic and more administrative. It is known that those complex and difficult portfolios are the ones that can assist women in being recognised, unfortunately, women are shunted aside” (P04/2023).*

Tulip’s view suggested that gender stereotypes persist in eThekwini, and women are still undervalued for positions of senior management. To elucidate this lack of confidence in women, Daffodil stated:

*“There are these indirect factors that tend to create agendas of some sort when dealing with the appointment of certain positions. In areas where operations are technical, such as Electricity, Water and Sanitation, Cleansing and Solid Waste, and Engineering type of units, what we’ve seen over the last more than a decade is that in these particular areas, there is a tendency to appoint males in all of the different executive management positions. We have seen changes in those leadership positions, but the constant has been that it’s been a revolving appointment of males” (P06/2023).*

Sharing the same sentiments, Iris indicated that there was a period when a plethora of males were appointed as Heads of Units, including the Head of Real Estate, the Head of Economic Development, the Head of eThekwini Municipal Academy, the Head of City Integrity and Investigation Unit, and so on. It appears only men were suited for such portfolios and that no women were qualified for them. She further explained by saying:

*“In our municipality, I think we are accustomed to most of the top positions being held by males. Looking at the DCM level, it appears that the only portfolio in which they would prefer to have a female is the Corporate and Human Capital Cluster” (P03/2023).*

The advancement of women is significantly impacted by the gendering of positions within municipalities. Sharing the same view, Sunflower argued that this gendering of work intentionally limits the vertical mobility of women. She explains as follows:

*In some instances, to ensure that women do not strive or perform to the best of their ability, they are assigned boring projects and ones that will not afford them the*

*opportunities to form networks, strive, and be recognised by others. For me, gendering of work is a big hindrance to women's advancement” (P02/2023).*

After carefully considering the assertions made above, one concludes that women's advancement into leadership roles may be hampered by the gendering of work where certain roles are customarily assigned to males over females. The gendering of work exacerbates gender inequality in the municipality by promoting stereotypes and limiting women's possibilities for upward mobility.

#### **g) Political Interference**

The significance of politics in local government operations is widely recognised since it influences the course of public services, infrastructure projects, and community development programmes. Many of the respondents, however, indicated concerns about the expanding prevalence of unjustified political interference in municipal administration affairs, which they saw as impeding the advancement of women into senior leadership roles. It was believed that this political interference impacted the growth of women. This claim is supported by Sunflower's views, which highlight that:

*“There is a lot of political interference and the top executive-level posts are politically contested. So, if there is a lot of political influence, the likelihood is that women will not be appointed to those positions” (P02/2023).*

The respondents of the study revealed that city executives were frequently given directives from politicians designating particular people to specific positions, especially in the top occupational levels of the municipality. To comply with the directives from politicians, the municipality has been known for appointing individuals with political connections, disregarding employment equity. Lily argued that women were side-lined in top management positions because they were not politically inclined or connected enough, which limited women's opportunities for advancing into senior leadership positions. She further elaborated by saying:

*“The challenge is that politically we know that politically active people are mainly males, and they are the ones who are making most of the decisions in the organisation. I sense a lack of dedication to promoting women's participation and a lack of political understanding regarding their inclusion in decision-making, which I regard as one of the things that hinders women from getting into those senior positions” (P01/2023).*

When asked if she agreed with the reasoning that women were not politically inclined, Lily responded by saying:

*“I completely disagree with that implication because women are actively breaking down barriers and influencing the political landscape as societal norms change. We have seen a lot of women in our municipality participating in politics equally with men. I think they are being excluded from top positions based solely on their gender”* (P01/2023).

The study's findings also indicated that one of the factors impeding women's advancement into senior management roles in municipalities is the political deployment of section 56 and 57 managers. The respondents argued that there was a tendency for the process to lean towards the deployment of men. According to their point of view, the political deployment had an impact on women's likelihood of being considered for senior management roles in municipalities because it leaned towards politicians rather than individuals who met the requirements of the position. Supporting this view, Daisy made the following assertion:

*“Since positions at the executive and senior management levels are politically deployed, there are no minimum educational requirements. The prerequisites are to be a member of that political ruling party and actively participate in its structures”* (P09/2023).

Supporting the idea that the slow rate of women's advancement can be attributed to political deployment, Daffodil also argued that:

*“These deployment appointments are not being undertaken against what are the specifications and the requirements of incumbents to perform within those positions. What we are seeing is that the appointment of those incumbents into those positions is per the political imperative. Once again, it comes down to the mentality that exists within the organisation, because the political arena has evolved, but our municipality has failed to keep up with the revolutions in terms of having the right representation within leadership positions. The appointment of comrades in influential positions discouraged eligible people from applying, particularly women, whenever those top management posts became vacant”* (P06/2023).

When asked to comment on the view that political deployment affected the transformation of the municipality, Rose shared a contrasting view by saying:

*“To believe that politics should have no role in the appointment of individuals to key positions within our municipality is irrational. All public service institutions engage in political deployment, which is informed by policy decision-making. The appointment of section 56 and 57 positions such as the City Manager and Deputy City Managers are influenced by the politicians at the provincial level. However, what is viewed as a challenge in implementing employment equity is when politicians are recommending their preferred individual without considering the qualification requirement of the position” (P05/2023).*

#### **5.4.2.2 Factors on Societal Gender Stereotype and Perceptions Regarding Women in Leadership Roles**

The study found that another impediment in preventing women from achieving leadership roles is societal gender stereotypes. They perpetuate traditional roles and functions, which creates unbalanced opportunities and expectations of what women can and cannot do. According to Daisy, as previously mentioned, since the municipality is in a province that is primarily rural and has a strong national cultural identity, national culture may penetrate the municipality and form deeply embedded patriarchal gender stereotypes, values, and norms that are dictated by views of the superiority of men and female servitude in society.

##### **a) Societal Gender Stereotypes**

Most respondents concurred that women find it challenging to advance into leadership positions because of cultural preconceptions. Supporting this view, Tulip pointed out that the basic premise of these gender stereotypes is the suppression of women and the dominance, power, and control of males which is evident in how roles and work are distributed in the municipality. She further stated that:

*“I’ve seen that there is a stereotype held by the management of eThekweni municipality that certain roles belong to males because women are not capable of handling those. These stereotypes contribute to women’s under-representation in leadership roles” (P04/2023).*

Sunflower also agreed with this view and she contended that the stereotypes influenced the status quo of the municipality concerning the underrepresentation of women. She further argued that yesterday's injustices were carried over into today's society as women inherited the same discrimination that afflicted their mothers. These prejudices support the maternal concept,

which lays the burden of providing for and raising children on women and restricts their freedom of movement. Women's traditional duties are sometimes dictated by conventional stereotypes, which depict them as caring figures, homemakers, or carers, rather than being strong, logical, and critical. When Sunflower was asked to support the view that societal stereotypes are affecting the pace at which women are progressed into top positions, she said:

*“Societal stereotypes are a hindrance to women in progressing to leadership positions. As an add-on to that, it could be unconscious biases from males. As it is well known that women need to balance work and life issues, men occasionally worry that if they assign us jobs that would push us to a higher level, they will be overburdening us. While the intention to lessen the workload for women may be positive, it is limiting the opportunities of being recognised for top leadership roles” (P02/2023).*

Iris pointed out that stereotypes in the municipality had an impact on the distribution of positions and roles, which significantly impacted the progression of women into leadership positions. She clarified that many professions, including engineering and other technical roles, are regarded to be exclusively male professions. She gave the following explanation of the prevalence of stereotyped behaviour in the municipality:

*“Certain tasks are said to be beyond the capabilities of women. For instance, the Fire and Emergency Unit is predominately male because stereotypes imply that women are less proficient in performing physically hard jobs. Also, the cultural stereotype that holds that women in African culture are not permitted to dig a man's grave has an impact on the distribution of grave-digging duties at the Parks Unit” (P03/2023).*

The respondents concurred that gender role expectations remain deeply ingrained and that women sometimes find it challenging to contribute to meetings' discussions without offending the men in attendance. They were of the view that gender stereotypes were dictating how women were expected to conduct themselves in the working space. Tulip used the interview as a chance to express her annoyance by stating:

*“When we come to a meeting setting, sometimes I often have to catch my tongue and can't talk freely or relate. There is always a feeling that as a woman I can't talk to a male colleague anyhow even though they're equivalent to me. Our upbringing cannot be negated because subconsciously, it is taking over, and we feel that men are superior. Sometimes you want to put a point across, but you let men go before you because you*

*avoid being seen as an aggressive woman and that's not how they expect to see women relate" (P04/2023).*

The above findings offered valuable insights into the implicit prejudices women encounter in the workplace, enabling a better understanding of how their jobs have perpetuated their stereotyping as members of society who have no intrinsic value.

### **b) Perceptions of Women in Leadership Roles**

The study additionally revealed the gender stereotypes prevalent in the eThekweni municipality, such as the idea that women belong at home caring for and raising children and are followers rather than leaders impacted the women's chances to accede to top leadership levels. Rose indicated that women leaders in the municipality are subject to judgment and criticism based on preconceived notions, which hinders their efficacy and career growth prospects. She asserted that gender stereotypes perceived women as emotional leaders. However, she refuted this assertion and stated that:

*"I think gender stereotypes that women cannot lead because they are emotional beings are illogical. If you take into consideration areas where you have female leaders, such as in Australia where they have a female president, you find that women can lead rationally" (P05/2023).*

Over time, when a woman assumed a leadership role, there was general unease among organisations, society, and even the government. To support that claim, Gardenia disclosed that people typically exhibited tense and uncomfortable attitudes whenever a woman assumed a leadership role, even in seminars or meetings or seminars. She further indicated that people sometimes prefer male leaders because they assume that women are hormonal and deal with a lot of biological issues. Lily, on the other hand, debunked the notion that women were not suited for leadership roles, preferring to be nurturers and supporters. She maintained that the traits that are confined to women are essential in effective leadership. To support her statement, she elaborated by saying:

*"You cannot be a leader and not be empathetic when leading people who have families. As a leader, your purpose is to make sure that the organisation succeeds. But if the people behind the organisation's success are having challenges, you need to show empathy towards them. In our municipality, we always emphasize consequence management. I believe there is no consequence management without nurturing. You*

*need to find out what the issues are behind someone who is failing to do what is expected of them and be able to help them understand their responsibilities and then they'll be able to do what is right” (P01/2023).*

Orchid also disagreed with the view that women cannot lead because of their emotions, however supported that women display emotions more than their male counterparts. She indicated that although some people are born with specific leadership traits, others can be developed with training and practical experience. She further elaborated her point by saying:

*“As women, we care too much. We want to treat work as if it’s a child that is suddenly going to break down, or we personalise work, which we shouldn’t. I have more than 300 workers reporting to me, who are adults and dealing with their issues. Therefore, I cannot expect them to be like me. But there was a time when it would break me down when they were not doing what I expected them to do, I would feel like I was failing. After I learned to master my motions, I was able to put my feelings aside and deal with the issues effectively. So emotional intelligence is a skill that I learned with experience” (P08/2023).*

When Iris was asked whether women in the municipality are portraying leadership skills when leading people, she stated that, in comparison to departments headed by males, those managed by women were thought to be the highest-performing departments because women have developed leadership skills over the years. Sharing the same sentiment with Orchid concerning the view that women have acquired leadership skills, she purported that:

*“I have observed myself and I’ve come a long way in terms of trying to control my emotions, especially in the boardroom space. It is a skill to be able to control your emotions as a woman. So obviously, there should be some training to enable women to quickly access those leadership skills, including assertiveness and confidence. And these skills are not learned only from the book, but also come with experience” (P03/2023).*

It was intriguing to have a male respondent provide an opposing viewpoint, stating that personal traits, experiences, and abilities, rather than gender, define leadership. Dahlia went on to expand on this, stating that:

*“I don’t mean to come across as a chauvinist, but I think to the contrary. Generally, I wouldn’t mind a female or male leader because I understand that in leadership what is*

*important is the qualities and capabilities. It is known that as a public service, we've suffered greatly due to some poor decisions that were made by male leaders before. However, in other instances where females have been given opportunities to lead, they have failed to do the organisation, themselves, and other women justice by making poor decisions that have undermined their capacity for leadership and their legacy. Looking at the current state of our city, I think males are more capable than women to lead the organisation” (P10/2023).*

Dahlia was asked to clarify what seems to be lacking in how women lead compared to males. He answered by firstly pointing out that eThekweni is currently faced with lots of hard tangible challenges which include service delivery, insufficient budget, and shortage of equipment and materials. He then argued that the culture that exists within the municipality requires someone who is a disciplinarian, who can stand by their decision, and who can change the culture of the organisation without any fear or favour. He further stated that these qualities were not presented by women in areas where they were leading. He supported his perception by saying:

*“When looking at the few areas where women have been leading, you've seen lots of a lack of leadership. Women leaders are good but currently, eThekweni needs someone with good leadership skills and who can command respect from everyone in this male-dominated area. I think the ground is not levelled enough for women to lead. If you were to put women into key strategic positions without testing them, it would be a setup for them and then we would end up saying that women have failed again without looking at the instances. So, we need drastic change management to level the ground for females so that they get fair opportunities” (P10/2023).*

While he emphasised that leadership is not inherently based on gender, I observed that Dahlia had a perception that women had fewer capabilities than men. This view was aligned with other respondents' perceptions of leadership, as they also indicated that gender is not a prerequisite for leadership. Sunflower explained this by saying that:

*“Leadership does not matter whether you are a male or female, as long as that person has appropriate skills like being a communicator, and listener, can lead followers, make others feel valued, goal-driven, results orientated, and their decisions are not based on emotions” (P02/2023).*

Orchid concurred with Sunflower and stated that:

*“My preference for leadership is not based on gender but on the qualities and traits of the individual. Both males and females have their issues, so what is important is no longer about the gender of the leader but is having alignment in terms of values and strategic thinking” (P08/2023).*

When respondents were asked to indicate their gender preference when it comes to leadership, most of them indicated that they wouldn't mind any gender. However, Lily disclosed that she was content in the women's leadership roles. This was confirmed by her statement saying:

*“I will definitely choose a female leader anytime because I believe they have a nurturing character which is good for the organisation” (P01/2023).*

#### **5.4.2.3 Factors on Women as Individuals**

The findings of the study indicated that another barrier to women advancing to leadership positions was women themselves. When it came to expressing their ambition for careers, women in the municipality were observed to be falling behind their male counterparts.

##### **a) Lack of Self Confidence and Self Esteem**

Women saw themselves as unprepared for leadership roles because they believed that senior positions posed difficulties and that top management roles belonged to males. Their lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem were two common ways that they displayed their self-doubt. According to Rose, the reason women were underrepresented in positions of senior management was that they lacked self-confidence and self-esteem in applying for senior positions. Sunflower agreed with Rose and argued that women's opportunities for advancement were also affected by their lack of confidence in themselves, as a result, they were hesitant to apply for senior leadership roles. She elaborated on her argument by saying:

*“I honestly think if women apply and don't get to those positions, maybe they lack self-confidence in themselves or required competencies. Women also fear criticism, which links to a lack of confidence. They are scared to be criticised or negatively judged by others when they are wrong” (P02/2023).*

Dahlia shared the same sentiments with Sunflower and Rose that women were not applying for top management jobs because they were afraid of the challenges that come with those positions. He pointed out that:

*“I think what is affecting women is their intent. Women do not believe in themselves; they are lacking self-esteem. This is a great concern because other factors we have discussed are historical things that we have very little to change about. But this one is the current and the future, and therefore, very critical” (P10/2023).*

Orchid concurred with other respondents by indicating that women in the eThekweni municipality were not fairly represented in top management positions because they lacked self-confidence and assertiveness. She added that:

*“What is happening currently is that, when I advertise a senior post, I’ve got more males who are applying than females, which shows that females were afraid to apply for senior positions even though they have the required qualifications. In a case where women with the requirement of the position did have the courage to apply for the vacant position, you find that during the interview the males come across as stronger because of their level of confidence and assertiveness” (P08/2023).*

#### **b) Lack of Mutual Support**

The findings of this study also suggested that a possible factor influencing the pace at which women advance into senior leadership roles could be their lack of mutual support. The term that refers to this tendency among women to neglect supporting one another is the "Queen Bee syndrome." Women who exhibit negative attitudes or impede the advancement of other women are prone to this tendency. The respondents concurred that women tended to undermine one another rather than encourage one another, which hindered their advancement into senior leadership roles. Tulip said that women were not supporting one another because they were envious of one another. Women’s competition and jealousy would constitute a harsh indictment of behaviour, such as getting promoted because you were in love with your boss or being appointed for leadership and decision-making roles over someone who believes she is more worthy. Such hatred diverts attention away from the more significant and critical issues facing women in leadership and decision-making roles.

When respondents were asked to indicate their gender preference when it comes to leadership, Tulip answered by saying:

*“Without sounding contradicting what we have already discussed, I prefer males because I get along very well with them. When it comes to female leaders, I’ve sometimes seen professional jealousy among females, or ‘Queen Bee syndrome’.*

*Jealousy is our thing as women, we don't want to see other women succeed"*  
(P04/2023).

The same argument was raised by Orchid who also indicated that women already in positions of authority were not supporting their subordinates out of fear of competition and jealousy. She further indicated that women in senior leadership roles were seen to be trying very hard to be like their male counterparts and do things normally known to be male characteristics. She clarified this point by saying:

*"I have observed my female ex-superior who used to be in a top leadership role, that she felt as if having women next to her made her look weak, but felt stronger when she was surrounded by males, and leading them. She ended up failing to create a space for women next to her. As a female leader, I make a great effort to ensure that I can support other women who aspire to be where I am. I try to create a supportive environment that facilitates women's empowerment and advancement into higher positions"* (P08/2023).

Although Orchid's observations are acknowledged, they are not appropriate for generalisation. However, the observations are valuable because they shed light on Orchid's experiences under a woman leader who does not support other women. When probed further and asked whether women subordinates were supportive of their female leader, Gardenia indicated that women competed, they did not want each other. She added that:

*"We also have females who would behave differently towards a female leader vs a male leader. As a female leader, you find that women who are subordinated to you sometimes tend to sabotage you and not support you. But when they report to a male leader, they respect and support their leader"* (P07/2023).

Despite the gender agenda's propensity to see women as the victims of discrimination, the above arguments reflect that women are their own worst enemies. The study revealed that women are competing, oppressing each other, and failing to support each other. The lack of mutual support impacted the rate at which women advanced into senior management roles in the municipality, which in turn affected the gender transformation.

### **c) Women's Dual Responsibility**

The result of the study further indicated that women suffer from the so-called "double burden syndrome," in which they are focusing on their careers but are still accountable for taking responsibility for their households and providing care for the family. All respondents shared

the same sentiments in acknowledging that women are expected to deal with the challenges of work-life integration as carers at home and professionals at work. However, the study revealed that women often encountered expectations and difficulties when juggling several roles simultaneously.

According to Iris, a married mother of three, there are unequal power dynamics between men and women in the home and society at large. This bias in the gender distribution of domestic duties also disadvantages women who intend to become senior leaders. She went on to say that:

*"As a woman, there are moments when I find it impossible to strike a balance between my obligations to my family and my career." I feel that my duties as a wife and mother are compromised, even though I am appreciative of my senior position and its financial benefits"* (P03/2023).

The study revealed that women were expected to strike a balance between contradictory expectations from home and work. Society expects women to take care of their families and children. Women in managerial roles may be expected to put in extra time at work or travel several days for meetings that require them to be away from home. This created a challenge for women as they found it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work and family. The study found that because of the pressures of balancing home and work, women were deterred from applying for top management positions. Daisy argued that women may be at a disadvantage when expected to work long hours. She stated that:

*"As a mother, it affects me to come home late when my children are sleeping. I want to see to it that they eat, assist them with their homework, and hear how their day went, it is my responsibility as their mother. You know that males sometimes have reservations about sharing domestic duties with women, which is an added barrier to women wanting to progress to top leadership positions"* (P09/2023).

Tulip also agreed with other respondents that there was a challenge in balancing expectations at home and work, which affected the rate at which women progressed into leadership positions. She elaborated by saying:

*"I don't think you can take away the maternal role from women. The fact that I'm a Senior Manager, I might be able to hire a domestic helper who can assist with taking care of my kids. Ultimately at the end of the day, I will have to make sure that they are looked after properly in the way that I would look after them myself if I had time. The*

*supervision still takes away time for me to focus on my career. In that role, you can't say you can't attend meetings or travel away because of family responsibilities, you need to balance your expected roles. I often say I envy the many options or opportunities that males have” (P04/2023).*

Gardenia asserted that women are at a disadvantage due to biological factors, as they sometimes become pregnant while pursuing professional advancement. She further indicated that the situation is exacerbated by the lack of flexible policies that support women's specific requirements associated with biological factors. She then claimed that biologically, only women can become pregnant, which would hinder their probability of being appointed to high positions since they might have to be away on leave for up to six months. Tulip supported this assertion and stated:

*“Since I've been here there was a period when I was away for six weeks because of my biological factors. I was hospitalised for a routine operation which was a result of being a female. To me, this absence from work was caused by the differences in the gender biological factors cause a male would not go for this routine operation. This affects us greatly as women” (P04/2023).*

The results in this section revealed that women in eThekweni Municipality face numerous obstacles or impediments that prevent them from advancing to positions of leadership. The respondents identified several barriers that women overcome in their pursuit of leadership roles within the municipality. These barriers were grouped into three main categories, including factors on eThekweni Municipality's setting as an organisation, factors on societal gender stereotypes, and factors on women as individuals. Some of the issues raised on eThekweni Municipality as an organisation included the culture of the organisation, ineffective implementation of gender policies, lack of support for women, and political interference, to mention a few. Respondents affirmed that prospects for women to rise through the ranks and assume senior management roles in the municipality were hindered by the organizational culture and climate. Other issues revealed by the study were factors associated with gender stereotypes that perpetuate traditional roles and functions, which creates unbalanced opportunities and expectations of what women can and cannot do. Lastly, it was revealed that women's progression was hindered by factors that affect them as individuals. These factors relate to their lack of confidence, lack of mutual support, and their dual responsibility.

### **5.4.3 Strategies to promote and appoint women to senior leadership positions**

The result of the research provided evidence that there is no single strategy that would speed up the rate of gender transformation on its own, it could be done only by a combination of different strategies. The study identified four specific measures or strategies the eThekwini Municipality can employ to advance women into leadership positions. These measures were the change management programmes, close monitoring of gender policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference.

#### **5.4.3.1 Change Management Programmes**

The study found that women's opportunities to advance through the ranks and take on senior management positions in the municipality were hampered by the organisational culture and climate. According to the respondents, there was a persistent male-dominated culture in the eThekwini municipality, and most operational areas still adhered to male-dominated morals and values. There was some agreement among respondents that women's advancement was not happening at the right pace in our municipality due to the gender imbalance. Change management was considered one of the strategies that eThekwini Municipality could employ to facilitate gender transformation that will propel women into senior management roles. Daffodil referred to change management as a philosophy and the catalyst for transforming an organisation.

According to Dahlia, change can help transform the culture of eThekwini municipality as well as the mindset, behaviours, and perceptions of an organisation towards women's leadership. Rose agreed that change is needed in the municipality because it has a big role to play in accelerating the pace of gender transformation, but she indicated that it should not be looked at from only a mindset point of view but also from a process perspective which will influence the mindset and the behaviours. The study revealed that the rate at which top management transformed its gender composition appears to have been hindered by the poor execution of these plans and policies, which were intended to establish gender equity across all occupational levels. Therefore, change management could benefit the organisation by changing how the processes are implemented. Referring to changes that the organisation needs to make in terms of the processes, Rose elaborated:

*“If you look at our processes, why are we not linking the TM process to the PM process to WSP because those three processes are talking to each other. If you are identifying*

*someone as part of your TM process just because of a performance score not because of a skill or strength, then there is a flaw in that TM process because you may be good at something technically but you're happy being a specialist, it doesn't mean necessary you want to go and supervise people. But also, in the case where you got a good score and you want to supervise people, how can WSP help you in ensuring that you have a good skill set? Therefore, these processes need to talk to each other” (P05/2023).*

This view was also shared by Lily who argued that change management would help the municipality to effectuate the gender policies and intervention within the organisation. She indicated that these policies and interventions are beautiful on paper, but they are not yielding the intended results because they are implemented in completely independence of one another. She confidently stated that:

*“We have TM, which I do not think is doing anything to advance talent for both women and males. The coaching and mentoring are not happening even for people who have been identified as successors. When a senior position sometimes left by a woman becomes vacant, they appoint males, whilst we have these EE, TM, and PM processes which are supposed to ensure that we balance the scale at the top level since women are underrepresented” (P01/2023).*

Additionally, the respondents thought that change management was essential to improving the municipality's recruitment processes. Iris contended that the employment adverts clearly state, in bold that **‘eThekweni Municipality is guided by the principles of Employment Equity. Women and people with disabilities are strongly encouraged to apply’**. However, the organisation's establishment depicts few women in top leadership positions, which indicates that women were not considered for senior appointments. She further suggested that it should be explicitly stated in the job advertisements that **‘women will be given preference for this position’**. Changing the recruitment process by being intentional in recruiting women will encourage more women to apply for the vacant senior positions which may increase the opportunities for women to be appointed to the top levels of the municipality.

Change management would assist by transforming the organisation from a mindset perspective as well. According to the respondents, it was difficult for women to advance into leadership positions because of cultural and societal gender stereotypes, which created unbalanced opportunities and expectations of what women can and cannot do. Iris brought up the fact that

stereotypes in the municipality had an impact on the distribution of positions and roles, which significantly impacted the progression of women into leadership positions. Rose indicated that women leaders in the municipality are subject to judgment and criticism based on preconceived notions, which hinders their efficacy and chances for professional advancement. She asserted that gender stereotypes perceived women as emotional leaders, whilst males were perceived as leaders. With change management programmes, the culture of the organisation could be transformed and move away from the stereotypes and perceptions that are a hindrance to women in progressing to leadership positions. Rose argues that:

*“As an organisation, we need to transform and move away from stereotypes that perceive women as emotional beings who cannot lead effectively. There are rare cases of women in leadership positions where you will find them emotional, disrespectful, not applying any logic or irrational when they interact with certain people, and even being deceitful. Once again, that is a character thing as opposed to the gender. So, we need change management to transition away the organisation from those stereotypes”* (P05/2023).

Adding to the argument above, Dahlia purported that another challenge that women are facing is that we as males are very quick to judge women without putting ourselves in their shoes. This view suggests that changing the mindset of males is much needed to ensure that they understand the barriers that women are facing in the workplace. Women are oppressive by cultural practices, which see men as superior and women as minor or subjugated to men’s authority. Gardenia revealed that when women assumed leadership roles in meetings and seminars, people typically exhibited tense and uncomfortable attitudes. Dahlia supported that assertion and stated that:

*“Before you even make a mistake or take a decision, if you are going to be in a leadership position and there is already an adverse perception of you, that will have an impact on you. I feel it is critical that our culture changes and see females as equal and better leaders and as people who can contribute positively to our organisation and society”* (P10/2023).

Looking at the role of change management from a behavioural component, it would assist in changing the attitude of people within the organisation. The study revealed that there is an adopted cultural mindset within the municipality that undermines female authority by

disparaging women's leadership styles and suggesting that men are more suitable for positions of responsibility. Rose further indicated that due to that culture, African males do not want to take directives from females. Daffodil supported Rose in saying that women leaders encountered challenges to their positions of authority, with co-workers or subordinates opposing their judgment or capabilities. Justifying his claim, he said:

*“I’ve seen it in our organisation whereby a male manager refuses to take instructions from a female Senior Manager” (P06/2023).*

Rose argued that change management could change that attitude and behaviour of saying ‘I can’t be told by women what to do’. If people cannot take instructions from female leaders, disciplinary processes should be applied. This means that change management will redress the ineffective culture of the organization through holistically inculcating a system of value cultures and ethics and facilitating the required transition, through the resolute adoption of a change strategy and implementation of necessitated, tactical change programmes. The change management should be implemented specifically looped from top-down and bottom-up. There should be a will from the top management to implement change programmes in the organisation, because these programmes bear different fundamental objectives and outcomes to the specified occupational levels. According to Dahlia, change management will go to a very large extent because once the culture of the organisation is transformed, people’s families and society at large will be transformed.

The previous arguments posited that the municipality ought to use change management in order to expedite the rate of gender transformation, which would facilitate the advancement of women into leadership roles. It was suggested that the change must start from the top leadership. Currently, it seems as if the leadership has no will to transform the organisation in terms of having a fair representation of women in top leadership positions. Although the organisation is talking about meeting the employment equity target for the next years to get more women into leadership positions, there are no signs of will. Daffodil also indicated that the municipality is at a precipice in terms of culture and climate and, therefore needs both radical and rapid change. Emphasizing his argument, he said:

*“We need specific programmes to address the real issues of culture and climate. We do not need to just transform slightly; we almost need to do a complete 360-degree change.*

*Our change needs to come from the top and be cascaded to the other levels at the bottom” (P06/2023).*

#### **5.4.3.2 Close Monitoring of Gender Policies**

The study revealed that the municipality has made progress in terms of implementing policies and interventions, such as the Employment Equity, Talent Management, Performance Management, and Workplace Skill Plan which were intended to establish gender equity across all occupational levels. However, there is still a concern about the pace at which top management transformed its gender composition. Although gender equity policies and interventions were enacted, most participants indicated that women were not benefiting from them because of mismanaged implementation. Daisy recommended that these initiatives should be deployed as a concerted effort to proactively identify, mentor, and equip potential incumbents to step into the various management-level positions. The study revealed that this was not happening as Daffodil argued that the policies and initiatives are undertaken with complete independence. He contended that the policies and initiatives put in place are not linked or talking to each other, thereby decreasing their effectiveness.

The respondents recommended close monitoring of the implementation of gender policies as one of the strategies for achieving equal representation of women and men in top leadership positions. The monitoring is critical in terms of assessing the achievement and impact of the implemented gender policies, to ensure that women are benefiting from them and that inequality is not exacerbated but rather reduced. Referring to the monitoring of gender policies as one possible way to achieve equality in the municipality, Daisy said:

*“If we hope to see a significant change in our municipality and see women being recognised for senior roles, we need to closely monitor and evaluate the long-term effects of gender policies” (P09/2023).*

Sunflower shared the same sentiments on the importance of close monitoring of the processes but revealed a lack of commitment from the side of the municipality in terms of ensuring that those policies and initiatives are implemented correctly. She indicated that:

*“Unfortunately, when it comes to the recruitment process, the municipality disregards the core purpose of these initiatives, it’s sort of been lost in translation to the point now where it is not adding value or assisting in the appointment of women into the executive positions. To strengthen their role and ensure their integration there should be a close*

*monitoring of the outcomes and impact of the implementation of these initiatives”*  
(P09/2023).

With close monitoring, it will be feasible to gauge whether the policies and initiatives are being implemented as per their vision and purpose and follow through on them as a combined concentrated effort, not rudimentary policies or programmes implemented in different units and departments within the municipality. It remains crucial to hold individuals in positions of authority responsible for the implementation and monitoring of policies and interventions about gender equality and women's empowerment. However, it was recommended that the monitoring should be in full circle to the fact that it starts from the top of the organisation and works its way to the bottom. Considering the evidence of gender imbalance at the top executive levels, it is not unreasonable to assume that gender policies and interventions are not being monitored in terms of their impact and outcome.

The study revealed that there is a component in the Human Capital Unit responsible for employment equity in the municipality. Their role is to review the employment equity targets and determine if they were met. However, the executive management of each business unit within the municipality has a responsibility for adhering to the employment equity requirements which will ensure equal representation of men and women in senior leadership roles. In line with this perspective, Gardenia suggested that all DCMs, Heads, and Deputy Heads should have their performance agreements incorporate the key performance indicators for employment equity that pertain to women's advancement.

Daffodil echoed this suggestion, arguing that the municipality should enforce stringent monitoring and impose sanctions on the unit when it fails to comply with the employment equity requirement. He emphasised by saying that:

*“When monitoring was undertaken and it was determined that there was non-compliance with implementing in terms of implementing a complete process of the intervention, the sanctions must be enforceable. The problem that we have is that currently the monitoring is not done effectively, so you have a situation where contravention in any shape or form is eliminated from the measures that allow for accountability and responsibility to the point that it impacts women”* (P06/2023).

### 5.4.3.3 Empowerment of Women

Women's roles and expectations in society and culture have significantly deteriorated, hindering their advancement to high leadership positions. The widespread perception that men are more naturally endowed with certain leadership qualities including authority, and that women are more suited for caring for the home and children has made it more difficult to achieve gender equity. Somehow, this view has deprived women of the chance to be acknowledged for specific roles within municipalities.

Respondents viewed the empowering of women as one of the strategies that can be employed in expediting the rate of gender transformation that will see women advancing into top leadership positions. It was revealed that to empower women, the municipality would need to have education and training programs aimed at equipping women with the necessary skills to enable their upward mobility. When respondents were asked to share their thoughts in terms of women being equipped with the necessary education for leadership roles, Lily responded with confidence and said:

*“We know for a fact that there are so many educated women in our organisation, so education is not a barrier to ascending women into leadership roles” (P01/2023).*

Tulip supported Lily and stated that women have qualifications and other technical skills required for senior management roles. Most respondents acknowledged that the municipality has training programmes and assisted education which are aimed at empowering individuals who aspire to grow in their careers. The study further revealed that these programmes and leadership training are very generic and not effectuated. Respondents recommended that the municipality effectively implement women empowerment initiatives by rolling out a purpose-driven training programme. To elaborate on this suggestion, Daffodil said that:

*“When you look at the programmes in our workplace skill plan, there are courses like emotional intelligence, negotiation skills, diversity, and leadership skills to mention a few. But those programmes are very basic, general, very rudimentary, and most importantly they are not tailored specifically for women. I, as a man can go for any of those courses and sit in the same room as a woman and receive the same empowerment. But the truth is that we’re not the same mind with the same characteristics” (P06/2023).*

Dahlia supported Daffodil and indicated that the municipality should have an intent objective of empowering women. To attain gender transformation, sometimes the municipality needs to

favour women or be biased towards them and be radical about those decisions. To support his argument, he gave a scenario and said that:

*The previous government was very direct in developing the businesses of the Whites. It was intentional regarding the education of the Whites. That is why even today, 30 years later after democracy, still businesses for the Whites are dominant and thriving. These are the results of the government that was intentional in developing businesses. For us as the municipality to realise the gender transformation, we need to be intentional when developing women, it must not be a by-the-way thing” (P10/2023).*

Although Sunflower agreed with other respondents, she raised that women have the necessary technical education. However, she indicated that once you are in the leadership position, there is probably a small degree that is applied in terms of technicality, but a lot of leadership is dependent on soft skills in terms of how you manage and interact with people. She further argued that soft skills cannot be taught to adults. Most respondents revealed that women need to be trained practically so that they develop an independent leadership character. This could be accomplished by management giving women who meet the technical requirements a platform to be mentored and assisted to gain expertise relevant to jobs in top management. Supporting that sentiment, Orchid argued that:

*“There are measures in place to try and achieve gender equity, like the EE policy which has been in place for quite a long time, but we still have not closed the gender gap. For me, I think women need experience and exposure to these leadership positions, which can be achieved by mentoring them” (P08/2023).*

The study also revealed that the empowerment of women can be achieved by management giving women opportunities to act in vacant positions within the municipality. Acting in vacant positions can offer opportunities for women to hone their leadership skills, and display their capabilities, which may lead to recognition for future career advancement. Sharing the same sentiments Gardenia indicated that:

*“Academics can serve another purpose in developing women for leadership positions, but women need practical experience as well to be fully equipped for those roles. My concern is that men have typically been given greater chances to take on leadership roles than women, and women have been excluded from these opportunities. There is a course for alarm when you observe the dominant male in the first three levels of the*

*executive structure. That's the reason I believe that giving women the opportunity to fill acting roles is a strategy that could assist in increasing their chances for advancement" (P07/2023).*

Accordingly, respondents concurred that the empowerment of women should be amongst the organisation's top priorities for achieving gender transformation. Dahlia maintained that the municipality needs to empower women and support them until they are ready to assume leadership roles. He stated that:

*"We need to develop and support women properly. In a home, when a child is starting to walk, they get help from parents. They are not just left alone outside to walk on the rough surface, but they are protected so that when they fall, they fall on a softer surface. Eventually, when they grow, they can walk on the harder surfaces alone. Similarly, I think we need to help women as they grow, by not throwing them in the deep end hoping that they will fail and allow males to assume power. We need to be patient in developing them" (P10/2023).*

#### **5.4.3.4 Redress of Political Interference**

The study revealed that there was a challenge of political interference in the municipal human capital management operations in the municipality. Many respondents agreed that women's advancement into senior leadership roles was hampered by political interference in the hiring process for leadership positions. According to the respondents, redressing political interference is perceived as one of the strategies to ensure equitable representation of men and women in top leadership positions in the municipality.

According to Sunflower, the candidate to be appointed for the position is known before the interviews are undertaken. She further contended that to foster gender transformation in the municipality, interference with appointments should be discouraged by ensuring that appropriate individuals are appointed to the top leadership positions. Supporting this argument, Iris stated that:

*"We need to start hiring for fit, in line with the service delivery demands. We have seen qualified women being excluded from the appointment of senior management positions because of political interferences. Politics is contradicting itself as it is supposed to advance treating all employees equally, regardless of their political affiliation or gender" (P03/2023).*

This suggests that the interference of politicians in the recruitment process has ramifications on the municipality's ability to deliver services efficiently. With service delivery issues already discussed in the paragraphs above, the municipality must hire individuals in top management positions based on merit to be able to deliver services that meet the expected quality levels.

The study also showed that nepotism was a problem that the municipality needed to address because it was impeding the appointment and advancement of women into top roles. To eliminate this challenge of nepotism, Tulip contended that the human capital component needs to make sure that recruitment and selection processes are open, equitable, and predicated only on merit. Daffodil agreed with other respondents and further pointed out that politicians should be workshopped about gender policies to foster adherence to these policies, which will ensure gender transformation. He further indicated that:

*“Although we appreciate the role of politicians in our City, we need to foster a good political-administrative interface. Sometimes politicians need to be reminded about not crossing their line and interfering with administrative affairs” (P10/2023).*

The study analysis shows practical ways of addressing factors that are barriers to women from progressing to top positions. The respondents identified four strategies that the municipality can employ. These included change management programmes, close monitoring of gender policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference. As revealed by respondents, change management was regarded as a catalyst for transforming an organisation, as it was believed that it would transform the organisation from a process perspective, mindset perspective, as well as behavioural component. Respondents also recommended close monitoring of the implementation of gender policies as one of the strategies for achieving equal representation of women and men in top leadership positions.

Empowerment of women was argued as one of the strategies that can be employed in expediting the rate of gender transformation that will see women advancing into top leadership positions. This is to be achieved through education and training programmes specifically aiming at equipping women with the necessary skills to enable their upward mobility. Other respondents also identified mentorship in the form of acting in vacant positions, as another strategy to support women in developing an independent leadership character. Lastly, the study also supports the significance of redressing political interference which was regarded as hampering the hiring process for leadership positions.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyse the barriers preventing women from advancing into leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality. The research, based on qualitative interviews, revealed that the municipality is not doing well in promoting women into top management roles. Despite legal frameworks for gender equity and employment, the situation of women remains unaddressed, highlighting the need for improved strategies.

The main objective of this study was to analyse the barriers inhibiting women's progression into leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The section highlighted that eThekweni municipality was not doing well when it came to the progression of women into top management roles. Even while the necessary legal frameworks were in place to ensure gender equality and women's equal employment, the situation of women could not be changed by the mere existence of these documents.

The result of the study revealed several barriers that women surmounted in their pursuit of leadership roles within the municipality. These barriers were grouped into three main categories, including those about eThekweni Municipality's setting as an organisation, those to societal gender stereotypes, and those about women as individuals. The study analysis also identified four measures that eThekweni Municipality could employ to accelerate the pace at which women are promoted and appointed into senior leadership positions. These consist of a change management programme that would transform the organisation from a process perspective, mindset perspective, as well as behavioural component. Other measures identified include monitoring the implementation of gender policies, empowerment of women, and lastly redressing political interference.

## CHAPTER SIX

### GENERAL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the entire study in terms of the themes that were identified and based on the questions and objectives of the research. The chapter begins with a synopsis of the research objectives and research questions to make it easier to refer to the findings, discussions, and recommendations. The first section of this chapter discusses the summary for each chapter whilst the second part focuses on discussing findings with the focus being on the recommendations that emerged from them.

#### 6.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aimed to answer the following research questions through the achievement of the research objectives as presented in Table 6.1 below.

**Table 6.1:** Research Objectives and Research Questions

| Research Objectives   | Research Questions   |
|---|--|
| To analyse the barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions in the eThekwini Municipality.                      | What factors inhibit women from progressing to leadership positions in eThekwini Municipality?                                   |
| To investigate what skills women in eThekwini Municipality need to enable their advancement into senior leadership positions.         | What skills are necessary for women to advance to leadership positions in eThekwini Municipality?                                |
| To critically examine the extent of compliance with legislative and policy framework for employment equity in eThekwini Municipality. | To what extent do existing policies and programmes strive to promote women to senior leadership level in eThekwini Municipality? |
| To proffer strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions.   | How can these factors be addressed in order for women to occupy senior positions in eThekwini Municipality?                      |

## **6.3 SUMMARY FOR EACH CHAPTER**

### **▪ Chapter 1: Introduction and Orientation to the Study**

This chapter sets the context and background of the study with a clear explanation of the research problem, research questions, and the research objectives that directed the research process. The chapter highlighted the significance as well as justification for the study. The significance and justification of the study which served as a motivation to conduct the research were discussed followed by the research methodology and the elements of research ethics that were employed to preserve the integrity of the research process. The limitations of the study together with key terms were also outlined. Lastly, the outline of the chapters was discussed to provide an overview of what this dissertation comprised.

### **▪ Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter discussed the literature review that succinctly covers the research problem and questions. It viewed the history of women in the workplace to ascertain how their employment transformed from the pre-industrial era to the industrial age, up until the Industrial Revolution era. The chapter also discussed some of the various legislative policies and frameworks that have been instituted by South Africa to address gender inequality, particularly regarding resolving this problem in the workplace. The chapter also provided statistics on South Africa's workforce representation to determine whether the country has improved women's status in the workplace. Other items discussed in this chapter were the theories and explanations for the barriers inhibiting women's advancement into senior leadership roles. The chapter further discussed the role of leadership in positions of power as well as perspectives on women's leadership. The feminist theory was discussed as the theoretical framework that guided the study.

### **▪ Chapter 3: Gender Inequality in Leadership: A Global Perspective**

This chapter provided a conceptualisation of a global perspective on gender inequality in leadership. The chapter explored an international and African context of gender inequalities in terms of opportunities and the representation of women in leadership roles. Therefore, it highlighted the gender gap that exists between men and women regarding the accessibility and chances to managerial positions utilizing data acquired from a few countries in the United

States, Europe, and Africa. It further explored the status of women in the South African Municipalities, using eThekweni Municipality as a case study.

- **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

This chapter discussed the research design and paradigm that was used as well as the methodology employed to delve into the research problem and come up with a significant theory for tackling the research questions. The study site, target population, sampling, data collection, and measurements were also outlined, followed by a brief on the data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as limitations of the study.

- **Chapter 5: Data Analysis and Interpretation**

This chapter provides a detailed exploration, discussion, and interpretation of the study's findings. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The data was analysed and presented in four primary themes that emerged from the data. The first section of the data analysis presents the demographic/biographical data, followed by the qualitative analysis. In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research results derived from the information gathered from the qualitative interviews. The main objective of this study was to analyse the barriers inhibiting women's progression into leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality. Therefore, this section discussed barriers that were identified as hindering women's progression into leadership positions. Four measures that eThekweni Municipality could employ to accelerate the pace at which women are promoted and appointed into senior leadership positions were also discussed in this chapter.

- **Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion**

This chapter summarizes the research questions and objectives to establish if the findings achieved the study's objectives. The chapter also included a synopsis of each chapter that provides a quick rundown of the findings of each chapter. The findings of this study, showing how each objective was achieved and what the conclusion drawn from the findings were also outlined in this chapter. This chapter also included an outline of the recommendations based on the findings. The researcher further discussed the limitations of the study, recommended areas of future research, as well as the conclusion of the study.

## 6.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section determines if the research purpose was achieved through fulfilling the following objectives:

- **Objective 1: Analysis of the barriers inhibiting women's progression**

In Chapter 2 the researcher examined the literature on various barriers inhibiting women's advancement into senior leadership roles. The literature review suggested that barriers that inhibit women from progressing to senior leadership positions emanate from organizational factors, societal gender stereotypes, and individual or self-imposed factors. These barriers portray women as being inherently inferior to their male counterparts in the workplace and support the myth that they are incapable of holding leadership positions. The assertions in the literature review are confirmed by the research findings as presented in Chapter 5. The study revealed that women in eThekweni Municipality face numerous obstacles or impediments that prevent them from advancing to positions of leadership. The findings of the study indicated that eThekweni Municipality's organisational culture and climate predominantly supported gender prejudices that favoured men. A male-dominated culture endured within the municipality and male-dominated morals and values were present in most operational areas. Other issues revealed by the study were factors associated with gender stereotypes that perpetuate traditional roles and functions, which creates unbalanced opportunities and expectations of what women can and cannot do. The results of the findings vehemently expressed that women's progression was hindered by factors that affect them as individuals. These factors relate to their lack of confidence, lack of mutual support, and their dual responsibility. These barriers subject women to inequality as their prospects of rising through the ranks and assuming senior management roles in the municipality were hindered by those.

**Conclusions:** The findings of the study lead one to the conclusion that the barriers that affect women's upward mobility include factors on eThekweni Municipality's setting as an organisation, factors on societal gender stereotypes, and factors on women as individuals. These factors foster the preservation of an organizational culture that is hostile to women, particularly at the top and senior management levels. These barriers have a bearing on the pace of gender transformation at the top management levels.

- **Objective 2: Skills needed by women to enable their advancement into senior leadership positions.**

This study further sought to investigate what skills women in eThekweni Municipality need to serve in those leadership positions. The analysis of literature on the representation of the South African Workforce in Chapter 2 indicated that women in Local Government are professionally qualified and skilled, however, they are employed in most business types compared to top management and senior management levels. As Bilimoria and Piderit (1994:1471) asserted, women "continue to be blocked in their rise to the top" despite having the necessary educational credentials for senior executive positions. This suggests that a lack of qualifications is fabricated to discriminate against women and encourage inequality.

This was affirmed by the findings in Chapter 5 of this study which revealed that women in eThekweni Municipality have qualifications and other technical skills required for senior management roles. However, the study also revealed that in top positions leadership skills are more utilised than technical competencies. Hence women needed to be trained practically so that they develop an independent leadership character, which would enable them to be eligible for leadership positions. This could be accomplished by management giving women who meet the technical requirements a platform to be mentored and assisted to gain expertise relevant to jobs in top management. This finding is aligned with the argument made by Mcilongo and Strydom (2021), that mentorship is a useful strategy to support the professional advancement of formerly underprivileged women in the South African public sector.

**Conclusions:** Amongst other objectives that this study aimed to achieve was the determination of the required skills to enable women to advance into leadership roles. The study revealed that women possess the qualifications and other technical skills required for senior management roles, however, they needed practical training to cultivate leadership characters. Based on this finding it is concluded that the training and development programmes implemented by eThekweni are not addressing the gender imbalance within the municipality. It is further concluded that the Workplace Skills Programme is lacking programmes that are tailor-made for the development and capacitation of women, programmes are generic to both genders.

- **Objective 3: Compliance with the existing measures to advance women**

The study further sought to examine compliance with the legislative and policy framework for gender transformation that will enable women to have equitable opportunities with males. The

literature review in Chapter 2 revealed that despite the exertions of the government in terms of gender equality, South African municipalities exhibit an inadequate representation of women in senior leadership positions. The findings of the study in Chapter 5 confirm that even while the necessary legal frameworks were in place to ensure gender equity, the eThekweni Municipality was not doing well when it came to the progression of women into top management roles. The study mentioned policies such as Employment Equity, Talent Management, Performance Management, and Workplace Skills Programmes as measures in trying to get a fair representation of women not only in leadership positions but also in terms of the demographics of the whole municipality. Although there are many reasons for applauding the efforts undertaken to increase the number of women in the workforce, it is reasonable to assert that top management in the eThekweni Municipality was generally undergoing a sluggish process of gender transition, and therefore, significant efforts ought to be made to promote more women to key positions. The findings were in alignment with Matoane (2015) who contended that there exists a gap between the policy and legislative landscape and the actual, practical, day-to-day realities concerning gender transformation in the local government.

**Conclusions:** The conclusion derived from this finding is that even while the necessary legal frameworks were in place to ensure gender equity and women's equal employment, the situation of women could not be changed by the mere existence of these documents; only their successful application could do this. The findings of the study showed that the policies and initiatives were not implemented as a concerted effort, but independently. The study also revealed that although there is Human Capital Management Unit is responsible for ensuring that employment equity targets are met in eThekweni, still there is an underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. It can be concluded that the existing monitoring system is unable to enforce compliance with employment equity legislation.

- **Objective 4: Strategies to be employed to promote women**

Lastly, the study sought to recommend strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions. The result of the research provided evidence that there is no single strategy that would speed up the rate of gender transformation on its own, it could be done only by a combination of different strategies. The study identified four specific measures or strategies that the eThekweni Municipality can employ to advance women into leadership positions. These included change management programmes, close monitoring of gender

policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference. Change management was regarded as a catalyst for transforming an organisation, as it was believed that it would transform the organisation from a process perspective, mindset perspective, as well as behavioural component. Close monitoring of the implementation of gender policies was regarded as one of the strategies for achieving equal representation of women and men in top leadership positions. Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2013), also support the significance of monitoring gender policies as they contend that women are not given the necessary skills for management posts in local government because of gender equality policies being implemented incorrectly. The monitoring is critical in terms of assessing the achievement and impact of the implemented gender policies, to ensure that women are benefiting from them and that inequality is not exacerbated but rather reduced.

Empowerment of women was argued as one of the strategies that can be employed in expediting the rate of gender transformation that will see women advancing into top leadership positions. This is to be achieved through education and training programmes specifically aiming at equipping women with the necessary skills to enable their upward mobility, as well as mentorship in the form of acting in vacant positions. Lastly, redressing political interference was perceived as another strategy to ensure equitable representation of men and women in top leadership positions in the municipality. Political interference in the hiring process of leadership positions was regarded as hampering women's advancement into senior-level positions.

**Conclusions:** Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that four main strategies can be employed in eThekweni Municipality to address barriers that are preventing women from progressing into top management positions. These include change management programmes, close monitoring of gender policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS**

The recommendations will be discussed relative to each of the four themes which culminated from the research objectives. Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

### **6.5.1 Change Management Programmes**

It is recommended that effective change management be employed by eThekweni Municipality to facilitate gender transformation that will propel women into senior management roles. The change management needs to transform the municipality from a mindset point of view, process perspective, as well as behavioural component. It is further recommended that the change management start from the top leadership. Currently, it seems as if the leadership has no will to transform the organisation in terms of having a fair representation of women in top leadership positions. Although the organisation is talking about meeting the employment equity target for the next years to get more women into leadership positions, there are no signs of will.

### **6.5.2 Close Monitoring of Gender Policies**

It is recommended that close monitoring of the implementation of gender policies is one of the strategies for achieving equal representation of women and men in top leadership positions. The monitoring is critical in terms of assessing the achievement and impact of the implemented gender policies, to ensure that women are benefiting from them and that inequality is not exacerbated but rather reduced. It is acknowledged that in eThekweni Municipality, the responsibility of implementing employment equity lies with the Human Capital Management Unit. However, the study recommends that the monitoring of gender policies be driven from the top levels of the organisation to ensure complete adherence and devotion to the implementation of gender policies. To bolster the initiatives for gender transformation, it is also recommended that sanctions for non-compliance be enforceable.

### **6.5.3 Empowerment of Women**

The study recommends women's empowerment as one of the strategies to expedite the rate of gender transformation that will see women advancing into top leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality. This is to be achieved through education and training programmes specifically aiming at equipping women with the necessary skills to enable their upward mobility. The study further recommends that women be empowered through mentorship that will expose them to gain experience for their prospective positions. The study recommends that mentorship be done by allowing women to act in vacant senior management positions to gain on-the-job experience.

#### **6.5.4 Redress of Political Interference**

The study recommends that the Municipal Manager ensure that the political-administrative interface is managed effectively. The study revealed that political interference with the appointments of senior personnel in terms of section 56 and section 57 of the Municipal System Act is legislated. However, it is recommended that the municipality ensures that recruitment and selection processes are open, equitable, and predicated only on merit to ensure that the right people are appointed to the decision-making positions. It is also recommended that politicians be workshopped about gender policies to foster adherence to these policies, which will ensure gender transformation in top-level positions.

### **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The following limitations were noted during the study:

- The study disregarded the racial component of women. Women were viewed as a single-gendered group that experienced exclusion and oppression on an equal basis regardless of race and culture. This could be a limitation because White women's experiences are typically different from those of Black women.
- Another limitation of the study is regarding generalisability. Perceptions and experiences related to the research issue were influenced by the level of rank, experience, and length of time spent in the eThekweni Municipality. Additionally, the research was delineated to one province, KwaZulu-Natal, and more particularly to the eThekweni Municipality. This might not provide a precise picture of how the local government in South Africa is transforming overall. As a result, it is possible that the findings cannot be generalized to every municipality throughout every province in the whole country.

### **6.7 AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH**

The focus of this study has been on barriers inhibiting women's progression to leadership positions, regardless of their race. Future research can be focused on studying the barriers impeding the upward mobility of women in the workplace, integrating a race comparison of White and Black women's experiences.

This study has focused on identifying the barriers that prevent women from progressing to positions of leadership in the eThekweni Municipality. Since the focus of the study was on a single case study unit, it is advised that future research use a bigger sample size and compare eThekweni to other KwaZulu Natal municipalities to make the findings generalisable to other municipalities in the province of KwaZulu Natal.

## **6.8 CONCLUSION**

The primary goal of this study was to identify the barriers preventing women from advancing into senior leadership roles and affecting the rate of gender transformation in the eThekweni Municipality. The barriers identified emanated from organizational factors, societal gender stereotypes, and individual or self-imposed factors. These barriers portray women as being inherently inferior to their male counterparts in the workplace and support the myth that they are incapable of holding leadership positions. Most significantly, they subject women to inequality as their prospects of rising through the ranks and assuming senior management roles in the municipality were hindered by those. The study highlighted the intricate nature of these barriers and the need to address a few of them.

The municipality should re-evaluate how it plans to accelerate the pace of gender transformation in senior leadership roles, taking into account the perspectives of women, management, and organisational culture. In achieving this, four strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions emerged. These strategies included change management programmes, close monitoring of gender policies, empowerment of women, and redress of political interference. A silo mentality is counterproductive to the goal of gender equality; thus, an effective strategy would place the municipality's executive management at the centre of this process with political-administrative coordination and cooperation. The strategy thus necessitates a change management component with comprehensive action plans that would steer organisational culture, corporate strategy, and execution strategies.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



27 November 2023

Sibongile Fortunate Mfungula (223143833)  
School Of Man Info Tech & Gov  
Westville Campus

Dear SF Mfungula,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006360/2023

Project title: Barriers inhibiting women progression to leadership positions within KwaZulu-Natal municipalities: A case of eThekweni Municipality.

Degree: Masters

#### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 October 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 27 November 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hialele (Chair)

/dd

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postral Address: Private Bag 354001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/research-ethics>

Founding Campuses: Durban Edgewood Pietermaritzburg Westville

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## APPENDIX C: GATEKEEPER'S LETTER



### ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE MANAGEMENT UNIT

8th Floor, Shell House, 211 Anton Lembede Street, Durban 4001  
P O Box 3234, Durban 4000  
Tel: 031 311 3092, Fax: 031 304 3500  
www.durban.gov.za

Date: 11 September 2023

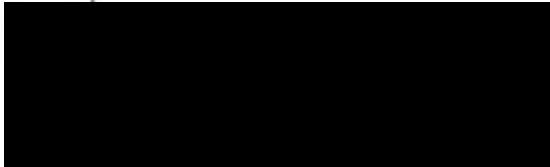
To: University of KwaZulu-Natal  
School of Management, IT & Public Governance  
College of Law and Management Studies

To whom it may concern

#### RE: PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH

This letter serves to confirm that Ms. Sibongile Mfungula (student no. 223143833) was granted permission to conduct a research project entitled "**Barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions within KwaZulu-Natal municipalities: A case of eThekweni Municipality**".

The research project was to be undertaken for the fulfilment of requirements for the Master of Commerce in Management Degree.

  
Ms. MA Gobarg  
Acting Head: ODCM Unit

Date: 15/09/2023

## APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT



### UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL  
For research with human participants

#### INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

##### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Dear Participant

My name is **Sibongile Mfungula (223143833)** from the eThekweni Municipality. I am a Master of Commerce (M Com) candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, who can be contacted at +27 83 508 6936 and [223143833@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:223143833@stu.ukzn.ac.za).

I am interested in administering an interview with you to share your experiences and observations on the study that involves research in “**Barriers inhibiting women progression to leadership positions within KwaZulu-Natal municipalities: A case of eThekweni Municipality**”. The aim and purpose of this research is to:

- Conduct an analysis of the barriers inhibiting women from progressing to leadership positions in the eThekweni Municipality;
- Investigate what women need in eThekweni Municipality to enable their advancement into senior leadership positions;
- Explore women’s perceptions on the measures to advance women towards senior management positions in eThekweni Municipality; and
- Propose strategies that can be employed to promote women to decision-making positions.

The study will conduct in-person interviews with 10 participants from different Clusters within eThekweni Municipality. It will involve the following procedures:

- ✓ The participation in this research is voluntary.
- ✓ The name will not be revealed to others.
- ✓ Participants will not be forced to participate in the study and may withdraw at any time.
- ✓ There are no potential risks involved and in the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment.

- ✓ The participation will be facilitated in the comfort of their offices and if the participant is absent, the interview can be done through a Zoom meeting.

The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be between 30-45 minutes. The study is not funded by any institution.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number\_\_\_\_\_). If you agree to participate, please sign the consent form attached to this statement.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact the researcher on mobile phone number: +27 83 508 6936 or Email: [223143833@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:223143833@stu.ukzn.ac.za). My supervisor is Professor T.I. Nzimakwe who is located at the School of Management, IT & Public Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville Campus, Durban. His email address is [Nzimakweth@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Nzimakweth@ukzn.ac.za).

The UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows:

***HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION***

*Research Office, Westville Campus*

*Govan Mbeki Building*

*Private Bag X 54001*

*Durban*

*4000*

*KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA*

*Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609*

*Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)*

-----

## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I .....(Full names of participant) have been informed about the study entitled '**Barriers Inhibiting Women Progression to Leadership Positions within KwaZulu-Natal Municipalities: A case of eThekweni Municipality**' by Sibongile Mfungula.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without any penalties.

I hereby consent/do not consent to audio-record my interview.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at +27 83 508 6936

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

### ***HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION***

*Research Office, Westville Campus*

*Govan Mbeki Building*

*Private Bag X 54001*

*Durban*

*4000*

*KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA*

*Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609*

*Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX E: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

**1. Gender**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Female |  |
| Male   |  |

**2. Occupational Level**

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Senior Management (TK16 -TK18)     |  |
| Executive Management (TK19 – TK23) |  |
| Top Management (TK 25)             |  |

**3. Cluster**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Economic Development & Planning        |  |
| Human Settlement & ETA                 |  |
| Trading Services                       |  |
| Corporate & Human Capital              |  |
| Community & Emergency                  |  |
| Governance & Inter-Relations           |  |
| Finance                                |  |
| Office of the Chief Operations Officer |  |
| Office of the Chief Strategic Officer  |  |

**4. Educational Qualification**

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Matric                     |  |
| University Degree/ Diploma |  |
| Honours Degree             |  |
| Master Degree              |  |
| Doctoral Degree            |  |

**5. Work Experience**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Up to 5 years      |  |
| 6 -10 years        |  |
| 11 -20 years       |  |
| 21 years and above |  |

**6. Age Group**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 18 -30 years       |  |
| 31 -40 years       |  |
| 41 – 50 years      |  |
| 51 – 60 years      |  |
| 61 years and above |  |

## **SECTION B: MAIN ISSUES OF THE STUDY**

- 1) Do you think women are fairly represented in leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality?
- 2) In your opinion, what are the factors that inhibit women from progressing into leadership positions in eThekweni Municipality?
- 3) What skills do you think are necessary for women to advance to leadership positions in eThekweni?
- 4) Which would you prefer if you had to choose between a male and female leader? Justify your response.
- 5) Are there any existing policies, mentorship, training and development initiatives aiming at equipping women for senior leadership level in eThekweni Municipality?
- 6) What role do you think organizational change could play in eThekweni Municipality's efforts to advance women into positions of leadership?
- 7) In your opinion, how can these factors be addressed to allow women to occupy senior positions in eThekweni Municipality?

**Thank you for your participation in this research.**

**APPENDIX F: UNDERSTANDING PLAGIARISM CERTIFICATE**



**CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION**

This is to certify that

**Sibongile Mfungula**

Has successfully completed the

**UNDERSTANDING PLAGIARISM  
ONLINE SHORT COURSE**

Administered by

The University Teaching and Learning Office (UTLO)

Issued date: 9 October 2023



**Professor Rubby Dhunpath**  
Director: Teaching and Learning



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