Readiness of Senior Managers in Appointing Women into Managerial Positions: Evidence from Ethekwini Municipality in South Africa

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Purpose – Although the issue of gender equality is as old as human life, women are still marginalised members in the workplace. Despite various studies investigated about the marginalisation of women at the workplace, no study has been conducted to assess the willingness and readiness of senior managers to appoint women into managerial level positions. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to assesses the readiness of senior managers in appointing women into senior managerial levels specifically focusing on eThekwini Municipality in South Africa. **Design/Methodology/Approach** – This study adopted a qualitative research approach and exploratory research design. A sample of 25 senior managers were selected using purposive sampling technique. Both interviews and focus groups were used to collect empirical data. **Results** – The results revealed that senior managers were willing to appoint women into managerial positions. However, there were a few senior managers that found it a challenge to appoint women into managerial positions because of the influence of stereotypes. The results also indicated that there are very few women in managerial positions because women lack appropriate experience, lack of self-esteem, inadequate monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the employment equity policy and plan. **Discussion** – The culture of appointing women into managerial position should be promoted by giving senior managers support or incentives to support gender equality in workplaces. There is a need to hold accountable the few senior managers who are struggling to appoint women to managerial positions, in addition to giving them coaching on organisational transformation. The study should be replicated using the quantitative research methodology to measure senior managers' readiness to appoint women into managerial positions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally the progress on women's visibility and participation in the corporate boardroom indicates that there are gender inequalities in the workplace, as well as in government spheres, both in developing and developed countries (Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidi, 2009). Furthermore, Schein (2001:688) argues that women are still underrepresented in managerial and leadership positions. Both studies show that underrepresentation of women continues to increase regardless of international efforts to promote gender equity through legislation and other means. In the Fortune Knowledge Group Report (2016), the total number of women at Fortune 500 firms went down to 21 in total, which means just 4.2 per cent of the 500 largest US companies by revenue are led by female CEOs (Arnof, 2011). To fight the foregoing trend, the participation of women in the economy, as well as gender equality, is promoted in many countries around the globe. The promotion of women's participation in society is regarded as critical in poverty reduction efforts in policy circles (Mikkola and Miles, 2014). Also, the promotion of gender equality is viewed as a critical element for effective human development and an economic tactic (Chen, 2004). Thus, gender equality is more than a goal in itself; it's also a fundamental precondition if society is to rise to the challenge of reducing poverty, promote sustainable development and address inequality (Desai, 2010). Therefore, constraints related to gender reflect gender inequalities in resources and opportunities; though class, poverty, ethnicity and physical location may also create inequalities, gender tends to make them more severe (Ogato, 2013:372). Poor people lack resources which

makes it harder for them to meet their basic needs. It is always harder for women who live in poor rural areas or societies where gender inequality is sharp to embark on the empowerment process, as they are the ones who are disproportionately impacted by poverty.

According to Mikkola and Miles (2014), gender equality means both genders having the same power and being treated with full respect, irrespective of their sex, and is expressed in attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and policies that reflect an equal valuing and provision of opportunities for both genders. Haque, Islam, Tareque, and Mstofa (2011:19) argue that although gender equality reflects equality of access between women and men to all resources, this equality, although necessary is not sufficient to achieve empowerment. It creates the enabling context for an empowerment process but does not guarantee empowerment. Women's power refers to women's ability to influence and control their interpersonal level (Dixon 1978 cited in Haque et al., 2011:18). Female power thus can be defined as women's ability to control or change other women's or men's behaviour, and the ability to determine important events in their lives, even when older women are opposed to them (Haque et al., 2011:18). The underrepresentation of women in managerial positions in general and within the municipality was discussed. The studies that have been done have investigated and explored various barriers that prevent women from being appointed and promoted into managerial positions, but very little has been done to investigate to what extent senior managers are ready to appoint women into management positions. Meaning, was the readiness of senior management in the workplace investigated before the implementation of affirmative action measures? Very few studies focused on documenting the readiness of senior managers, especially men, to support the agenda of appointing women into management positions, taking into account gender beliefs and societal exposure and experiences. This study was motivated by the 17th Commission of Employment Equity report (CEE Report,2017), which revealed that women are still underrepresented in top and middle management positions in South Africa, across all industries. This has prompted an interest to evaluate the readiness of senior managers in appointing women into managerial positions, to find out the extent to which senior managers are ready to appoint women into managerial positions, and to establish how they can be assisted to become ready to appoint women into management positions.

The studies indicated common responses, that gender difference and stereotyping result in few women being appointed into management positions, but it may happen that there are other reasons that cause senior managers to lose the desire to appoint or promote women into leadership roles. For example, preparedness in terms of systems, environment and cultural mindset. This area has been broadly neglected as the majority of literature on women in leadership positions has focused on gender differences, stereotyping and gender leadership roles. Therefore, further investigation was required to explore the readiness of senior management to appoint women into senior management levels, especially in local government. The appointment of women into managerial positions has been a challenge within eThekwini Municipality in South Africa for the past five years, therefore the employment equity report shows low levels of women representation at senior management level. The 2014-2018 Employment Equity plan which expired at the end of June 2018, had numerical targets for women representation at management levels, which were not achieved due for various reasons. The Segalo (2015:70) report indicates that research has mainly focused on assessing gender equality in relation to women's representation in political structures at national and provincial levels. This increase has not been noticeable in management positions at the local government level, particularly at the eThekwini Municipality. Therefore, it is very important to evaluate the readiness of senior managers in appointing women into managerial positions, to better understand the underlying factors that contribute to this problem. The recommendations will assist in the implementation of the successive Employment Equity Plan 2018-2022 (Sithole and Williamson, 2012:3) hopefully leading to an increase in the number of women in management positions. The study sought to achieve the following objectives, i) to understand senior managers' willingness and readiness to appoint women in managerial positions; and ii) to establish the reasons for having so few women in managerial positions. This paper covers the literature review, methodology, results, conclusion and discussion

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender is not a synonym for sex and is also not about biological differences, but about expectations and qualities that people give to men or women, and which appreciation people give to this (Beekman, 2015:35). According to Badey (2013:97), gender is a socio-cultural construct that is used as a sex-role identity to highlight gendered activities and access to power and resources, with notable gender inequalities. Based on the above

definitions and descriptions of gender, it can be argued that gender "embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household" (Badey, 2013:98). Gender inequality refers to hierarchical gender relations, with men above women, and women being regarded as inferior and less valuable solely by virtue of their sex (Mikkola and Miles, 2014). Depending on the surrounding people and environment, the identities of both men and women have been multiple and always fluid (Cornwall, 2007:27). This means that gender is not static but an unstable entity. Nanda and Warms (2014) describe gender as a cultural construction, which makes biological and physical differences into socially meaningful categories that seem reasonable and appropriate. Gender differentiates or defines the roles of women and men in society, as well as the social status differences (Beekman, 2015).

3. GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

In addition to the Gender Action Plan, the gender mainstreaming strategy was adopted by the Beijing Platform for action in 1995 as a global strategy to achieve gender equality and to ensure that development goals are effectively achieved through the incorporation of gender viewpoints in the development process (Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead, 2007:1; Nkhonjera, 2011). According to Ryan (2007), the mainstreaming strategy aims at advocating questions concerning gender equality as being the core issues in all decision-making assemblies and policies, institutional structures and resource allocation. The Southern African Development Corporation (SADC) adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy with the commitment to abolish laws that discriminate against women and prohibit their access to finance, land, and other resources. SADC is a Regional Economic Community established in 1992 to promote "socio-economic development and sustainable and equitable economic growth" and comprises of 15 African states located in the southern part of Africa which include; South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Madagascar, Seychelles, Namibia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Lesotho, Angola, Botswana, Tanzania, Malawi, Mauritius, and Swaziland (SADC, 2015). The corporation established a Gender Unit in 1996 to facilitate and coordinate gender mainstreaming in all SADC institutions at regional level.

Further, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women was assigned to monitor the implementations of the strategy. However, the gender mainstreaming strategy is linked to more disappointments than triumphs. According to Nkhonjera (2011), changes brought by this strategy are minimal to non-existent, as women continue to remain marginalised and the transformation of structures and institutions to ensure women's full participation remain a challenge. Bryan and Varat (2008) assert that the failure of this strategy is because of various issues such as the lack of challenging the policy environment within which gender mainstreaming processes operate, inadequate resources allocated to this work, institutional features that have blocked change, and the way in which gender mainstreaming processes have been implemented. Companies globally are not maximising the value of diverse thinking by not including women in the bottom line. In 1945, the United Nations Charter was adopted by world leaders. One of the principles that was agreed upon was equal rights for men and women. Furthermore, protecting and promoting women's human rights is the responsibility of all States by developing and implementing legislation to ensure the acceleration and empowering of women. World leaders gathered again during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York and adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and goal no. 5 focuses on gender equality and to empower all women and girls. It is a violation of legislation in South Africa to deny someone a job, promotion and development based on gender.

Gender is one of the listed grounds of unfair discrimination under the Employment Equity Act (EEA), however, cultural biases and societal stereotypes deny both men and women equal opportunities in the employment sector. The EEA is not the only legislation issued to promote equality in South Africa, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000 is also aimed at prohibiting unfair discrimination and harassment. No one is allowed to discriminate against anybody because of their race, gender and disability. The domestic division of labour and patriarchal conventions about men and women's roles continue to remain a problem in both developed and developing worlds, undermining the efforts that women's movements around the world have been putting in trying to address the issues of patriarchy. This is the reason why changing social behaviours and norms still remain significant in all parts of the globe (Desai, 2010). Moreover, gender helps to understand gendered activities and access to resources and power. Türmen (2013:411) argues that women have less access over and control of productive resources such as credit, income, land, and education. Malan (2014:8) adds her voice by saying that most women in Africa are

side-lined when it comes to employment, education and rights to assets, preventing them participating in the economy fully. As a consequence, they become heavily affected by unemployment, resulting in poverty.

Women across the globe remain relentlessly under-represented in the education fields that are mainly growth-enhancing such as mathematics, science, engineering, and technology (Adema and Thévenon, 2014). Instead, they are forced into these disciplines which groom them for traditional roles such as nursing, community service, or secretarial work. Very few women have access to institutions of higher learning and those who do, enter specific stereotyped fields (Malan, 2014: 8). Also, policy makers often continue to see the benefits of educating girls and women in terms of improving family health and welfare, rather than preparing women for a more equal place in the economy and in society. Women's lack of skills partly explains why they continue to be confined to the poorer paid and more casualised forms of paid work (Kabeer, 2005:18). In addition, women bear the burden of lack of land, this keeps women in poverty, causing a vicious circle of challenges at different levels of society (Muhibbu-Din, 2011:1).

4. WOMEN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKPLACE

Mikkola and Miles (2014:44) also mention that gender hierarchy continues in the form of gendered segregation of the labour market, combined with the fact that the female sectors of the economy are generally paid less and valued less. The discriminatory practices against women in the workplace that were experienced during the apartheid era are still continuing to happen. Women are secluded from particular leadership positions and employment types by prescribed social norms and traditional rules. This is because women's lives tend to be centred around the household, and for those women who are working, they are still involved in traditional roles, regarded as feminine jobs, as this provision of care is largely considered to be women's terrain, irrespective of whether they are paid or not paid (Nagaraja, 2013:45). Therefore, gender embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household, and reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies (Badey, 2013:98). Furthermore, the socially constructed gender roles which place women in the home with housekeeping and child-raising duties, and men as heads of the household, have over the centuries, consistently reduced women to second class citizens, and have denied them equal opportunities to the fortunes of life. Badey (2013:98) further contends that is it because of this differentiation of socially prescribed expectations created to define women's and men's roles, that the potential from the definition of sexual characteristics through biology gave rise to the concept of gender. The power inequality between women and men, with women having little to no power, is one of the major restrictions that hinder women's achievements.

The consistency of men and women in terms of their different roles, access to resources, and decision-making processes is partially influenced by the patriarchal society (Türmen, 2013:411). The African National Congress (ANC) Gender Paper defines patriarchy as an ideological construct of a system encompassing ideologies, beliefs, values and practices underpinning the organisation and structure of society – resulting in unequal power relations between women and men. Patriarchy is deeply embedded in rural areas, especially those areas that are still led by chiefs and traditional leaders. It reinforces the subordination and suppression of women in all spheres of life, making gender equality impossible to achieve. Living in an environment where men are given certain privileges and access to resources remains a challenge that should be addressed urgently (Jegede, 2009:128; Dickerson, 2013:102). Likewise, the same above-mentioned patriarchy influences women to respond in defined ways, often accommodating and deferring to male interests, which remains the case in most rural areas in post-apartheid South Africa. In a patriarchal society, a woman is deemed to be submissive to a man; this may also be the case with cross generational relationships in which one has a younger female dating a much older man or vice versa.

Recent results published in South Africa are not promising for the county to achieve equal opportunities for men and women (CEE report, 2017). Last year, 31 per cent of South African organisations, women were not part of, and did not contribute in any form at senior management levels. Most women are sitting in positions where managerial skills do not matter. The latest Businesswomen's Association of South Africa (BWASA Census Report, 2017) census on women in leadership indicates that 22 per cent of board directors are women, but only 7 per cent are executive directors. Women are just filling the chairs and not given an opportunity to make strategic decisions. Furthermore, only 10 per cent of South African CEO's are women, yet women make up a large number of society's population. Organisations have not created women friendly spaces at decision-

making levels. Overall, the percentage of women in senior leadership roles has not moved much, with representation increasing steadily at just a 2 per cent increase from 2004 to 2017. South Africa is on an equal footing with the rest of the African region, where 29 per cent of senior leadership roles are held by women, and it performs better than some developed countries, such as the United Kingdom (19%) and Australia (23%). However, the percentage of CEOs who are women in South Africa (10%) is lower than the global average of 12 per cent (Fajardo and Erasmus, 2017). In Africa, particularly South Africa, certain changes have been made although women's representation is still low. The contributing factor is a cultural belief that women are inferior to men. According to Højgaard (2002:15), leadership cultural structure plays a huge role in differentiating the role between women and men. In his study in Africa, Ngcongo (1993:5) indicates that men are the decision makers and women the followers.

In addition, the Skills Development Act of 1998 was issued to promote development amongst men and women in the workplace and to improve the level of skills to ensure fairness. A lot has been done to create an environment to empower and ensure gender equity, at both national and international level, for example, policies and advisory bodies are in place to promote equal opportunities for men and women. The number of women leaders in SA is still very low, as per the 17th annual Employment Equity Commission Report (CEE Report, 2017), with 22 per cent of female representation in top management and 33 per cent at the senior management level. The current situation indicates there is not much difference with international research outcomes and it advances the point that senior managers are not fully prepared to appoint women into managerial positions. Men continue to hold the highest positions in the employment sector. The report still shows the appointment of women being celebrated after almost 20 years, which should not be the case. An aggressive and deeper understanding of the issue to be explored. One of the government approaches to deal with gender issues is through the national gender policy framework, a guideline for both the public and private sector which outlines and priorities gender equality. The main aim is to do away with apartheid created discriminatory practices. It facilitates equal access, and allows different sectors to customize their gender policies and integrate the principles of the framework, for example, economic empowerment of women and access to employment. It is in line with the SA constitution, that men and women should be afforded equal opportunities, both in society and employment. Hence, the 50 per cent quota was announced, and even the public sector has not realised the gender split of 50/50. Most municipalities are still dominated by males in senior management positions. The statistics show that just 22 per cent of senior management positions are filled by women, which is an indication that organisations are not progressing towards achieving gender equity. In addition, this shows that there are still challenges faced in SA as a country, in reaching 50 per cent gender equity in government and public spheres, therefore there is a need for further research in this space (Kwa-Zulu Natal Local Government Indaba, 2018).

5. AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON FACTORS THAT HINDER WOMEN'S PROGRESSION TO SENIOR POSITIONS

Tearle (2004:9) argues that often when women are assembled in a group they share examples or experiences about how they are discriminated against by being put down, labelled, stereotyped, ignored or harassed by their male counterparts. However, she believes that women should not look at what others are doing in terms of placing barriers in their progression, but should rather consider what they can do to make it better. Often barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions have been described by the metaphor, "the glass ceiling". This phenomenon was introduced in 1986. The "glass ceiling" represents a hidden difficulty for women and other minority groups, which prevents them from moving into senior management (Wagner, 2015:41). Eagly and Carli (2007:64) argue that even though the "glass ceiling" metaphor exists, there are many barriers that women face even before they get to a position of having to deal with the glass ceiling. They argue that women and men do not have equal access to entry and midlevel positions, and that they face a variety of challenges in their journey to management positions. Therefore, they suggest that a "labyrinth" metaphor should be used to show that it prevents women from progressing to senior management positions. "Labyrinth" can be described as "a complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way; a maze". They describe five obstructions that women face. These are: vestiges of prejudice; resistance to women's leadership; issues of leadership style; demands of family life; and underinvestment in social capital" (Eagly and Carli, 2007:64). In this study, barriers that women face can be categorised into organisational barriers; gender stereotypes; organisational cultural barriers; and career

planning practices. Factors such as cultural values, ethnicity and class usually reinforce gender inequalities. Women still experience the triple burden of family labour, a heavy domestic workload and a high fertility rate, and as a result of this gender inequality they are prohibited from contributing significantly, both in the household and the community (Khan and Bibi, 2011:133).

Gender stereotypes -Gender stereotypes hinder the development of women and this is accredited to gender stereotypes, even though there are promising indications that among the top managers, women are doing extremely well as leaders and managers (Von-Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden and Shochet, 2011:1312). Jonsen, Maznevski and Schneider (2010:549) argue that people use stereotypes as a shortcut to predict how people will behave, and what their abilities are. They also argue that stereotypes are enforced by society, which results in different expectations for men and women. Another stereotype argued by Shrader, Blackburn and Iles (1997:355) is that women in management are not strong enough, and easily disrupted by family commitments. The "think manager, - think male" concept has largely contributed to the low statistics of women at managerial levels. This phenomenon creates a culture wherein the leadership potential of women is overlooked. A study conducted by Schein, Mueller, Lituchy and Liu (1996:33) indicates that both women and men believe that traits associated with managerial success are more likely to be held by men than women. Decades later a similar study was conducted to test if the stereotyping against women still exists and it has been found that the "think manager - think male" mentality still exists, meaning men continue to see women as less experienced than men in managerial positions. These results were also discovered amongst male management students in China, Japan, UK, USA and Germany. It is clear that gender stereotyping is happening throughout the world and women are side lined, which is not advancing the agenda of gender equity (Schein, 2007:6).

Influence of organisational culture -Williamson (2007:234) cites Tylor (1924) who is viewed as the father of anthropology, and defines culture first as, that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. This means that society influences culture, while institutional or organisational culture will be influenced by societies. Mihail (2006) said that organisational cultures can influence the progression of women to senior management positions in the public sector.

Organisational hindrances - Brandl, Mayrhofer and Reichel (2008:77) argue that different countries have different cultures, which play a role in the division of work within certain professions. Society has specific views of what women's roles should be, and their role in the wider society. These assumptions involve the extent to which women differ from men in terms of their capabilities, skills and preferences. The above assumptions refer to a study that was conducted in the United Kingdom. It was discovered that women believe that there is a lack of understanding regarding different qualities that people possess in management. Accordingly, the study proved that understanding equal opportunity values reduces the perceptions of gender-based differences in terms of strategic integration and the traditional soft functions. It goes on to explain that organisations create invisible barriers such as working and flexibility of hours, which affect working mothers. This impacts negatively on the progression of women, as some might decide to leave their jobs and focus on their families, at the same time trying to find another job which will offer more flexibility. It is imperative to gauge and understand the different perceptions that employees have of the management style of female bosses (Brito, 2008). Naturally, women are nurturers, hence they might utilise different managerial styles. It is also important to understand that people are individuals and, therefore, display different personalities and managerial styles (White and Özkanli, 2010:3).

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a set of related concepts and guides the researcher. This study is guided by various theories that have contributed a vast amount of knowledge, namely, on gender differences, gender leadership and gender stereotypes. Feminine and masculine theories, as well as local and global statistics are discussed at length to understand whether leadership is based on muscles. These pieces of theories assist in critical engaging of the issues of women in managerial positions. Feminist theories have served as a foundation in women leadership, gender equity and stereotyping. Further, they have played a key role in understanding how men and women perceive each other in the workplace. The figures show how women have moved up the corporate ladder, particularly in South Africa. In addition, the challenges and benefits of implementing

diversity programmes assist organisations to add to the bottom line. Most researchers use masculine and feminine traits to illustrate the underrepresentation of women in management. According to social theories, men and women are perceived differently thorough socialisation, men being strong and women as care takers. When Carli and Eagly (1999) examined men and women for a variety of qualities in leaders, they found that differences in gender roles and positions in communities place women in weaker positions. This belief is then translated to the world of work where men occupy senior positions, and women occupy mostly administrative positions. Role congruity theory suggests that women are less likely to be promoted into leadership positions than men, and most of the time women receive negative feedback compared to male leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002:573).

7. METHODOLOGY

This study implemented an exploratory qualitative approach which is inductive in nature. In order to meet the objectives of this study, a case study approach was used. The non-probability technique was used, particularly purposeful sampling, in choosing and selecting the senior managers who had leadership experience in appointing women into managerial positions in the eThekwini Municipality. The population at senior management level was four hundred employees, however, a total number of 25 senior management employees at the eThekwini Municipality was selected as a sample size. This sample consisted of female and male participants, to show gender differences in views as well as perceptions. Focus group sessions were scheduled for one hour and the participants were divided into two groups of ten participants each. These groups were selected based on gender and race to ensure the quality of the data. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the remaining five participants. The researcher also moderated and administered the process, following a set of structured questions. The questions were designed and pre-written in the form of an interview guide. Given the nature of this study, thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The data was analysed and interpreted to give meaning to the eThekwini Municipality's senior management and staff, and to tax payers. To ensure that the study is free of bias and consistent, and that it is testing the validity and reliability of the data, questions were the same for all the groups and were not changed. Moreover, the researcher took notes to ensure accuracy and data integrity. Finally, the participants' responses, perceptions and views were not manipulated. For the purpose of this study, content validity was developed, and referred to how well the questions assessed the readiness, appointment and management positions as constructs. If the participants were not comfortable to participate for whatever reason, they were allowed to excuse themselves. The process was voluntary in nature and what was discussed between parties remained confidential.

8. RESULTS

This section of the paper presents and analyses the findings generated in this study. The following research questions are answered in this section: i) what is the willingness and readiness of senior managers to appoint women in managerial positions? and ii) what are the reasons for having so few women in managerial positions?

8.1.WILLINGNESS OF MANAGEMENT TO APPOINT WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Participants were asked to share their views on the willingness of senior managers to appoint women to managerial positions.

Willingness to appoint women managers

The study found a high state of readiness among senior managers to appoint women in managerial positions. This was attributed to the gender equity policies and

procedures that had been developed and approved to support gender equality in workplaces. A participant put it this way:

> *In terms of our Human Resources Unit standards, the first preference for the position becomes a woman. One has to submit a sound motivation should a male [be] recommended for the position. This is a good approach; however, the challenge is this is applied inconsistently thus seeing other Departments still being flocked by male appointments* (Interviewee 5, 2019).

Another participant added that:

I think [the] eThekwini Municipality management is serious about appointing women towards management positions because annual targets are set by all department on how many women they would like to employee/appoint in different levels of management positions. Report back sessions are also conducted to share the achievements and non-achievement (Interviewee 1, 2019).

The findings suggested that there was willingness among the senior managers to appoint women to senior positions. This was influenced by the gender equity policies and procedures put in place by management. At an operational level, when a position was earmarked for a female, a male would not be appointed because it would not be approved at the executive level unless there were strong reasons and motivation for appointing a male. Govender and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2013) found that some municipalities were making an effort to implement workplace gender equality policies and programmes to allow women to access and enjoy the same rewards, resources and opportunities enjoyed by men.

Struggles to appoint women managers

The study however found that some senior managers were struggling to appoint women to managerial positions. A participant reflecting the views of a few participants said that:

Some senior managers are struggling to appoint women in managerial positions. As a result, senior management is compelled in terms of employment equity targets to meet the gender ratio set but still there are challenges of bias and stereotypes to make it happen (Interviewee 1, 2019).

The view above showed that there were stereotype challenges in appointing women into managerial positions. Thus, gender bias or stereotypes affected women's opportunities to rise in leadership. However, Wagner (2015) argued that some senior managers were not biased but instead were taking precautions. Instead of just appointing women to meet employment equity plans, they wanted to appoint women who were ready to manage. Chaloupka (2017:80) cautioned organisations not to be naïve and think that any man and woman could lead, and neither should organisations be naïve and think that stereotypes no longer existed among senior managers.

8.2. REASONS THERE ARE FEW WOMEN IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Participants were asked to share the reasons that there were few female senior managers at the eThekwini Municipality.

Lack of commitment

A participant said the following, reflecting views of other participants:

Over the years there have been no commitment from top officials to develop and implement gender equity policies to change and give opportunities to women who are marginalised and discriminated due to their gender (Interviewee 6, 2019).

Another participant said that:

The problem I find is that we do not have political will from senior managers to ensure that women are not unfairly discriminated against on the basis of being women (Interviewee 2, 2019).

The findings showed that there was lack of commitment on the side of some senior managers to implement gender equality policies at workplaces. This did not come as a surprise because Morgan (2014) reported that though government remained committed to women empowerment, there were challenges in implementing gender equality policies in all government structures. Pfeffer (2015:65) argued that there were few senior managers willing to ensure that women's profiles of senior management level reflected the profile of all genders. In agreement, Morgan (2014) found that lack of implementation of the gender equality policy was contributing to the pervasive impunity across government structures.

Lack of skills and training

A participant, reflecting views of other participants stated that:

The challenge is women's failure to prepare for the managerial positions by obtaining [the] relevant qualifications and competencies (Interviewee 6, 2019).

Another participant said that:

Women lack skills in the area of decision making, problem solving, planning, and management required for managerial positions in the municipality (Interviewee 3, 2019).

The finding suggested that women lacked professional skills development because of lack of training. In agreement, Morgan's (2014) study highlighted that lack of training and education was a barrier to women's potential to get senior management positions.

Lack of experience

A participant, reflecting views of other participants reported that:

The number of years' experience required hinder women from getting managerial positions. How does one get experience if not given a chance to have the required experience? Unfortunately, these senior positions have been occupied by men from time immemorial therefore it is men who have the experience needed (Interviewee 5, 2019).

The findings suggested that women's lack of appropriate work experience, in spite of their qualifications hindered them from progressing into senior positions. Morgan (2014), in agreement, said that paternalism led some organisations to restrict women's opportunities to gain the required experience. In support of the finding, Wagner (2015) said that the default model of many organisations entailed that women needed to work harder than men to get the experience needed for a promotion.

Lack of self-esteem

Reflecting the views of other participants, one participant said:

A lot of women are afraid to lead, especially in departments that are male-dominated. It is lack of self-esteem that is hindering women from taking up managerial positions (Interviewee 8, 2019).

Another participant had this to say:

The issue is that the existing potential women leaders are afraid of the unknown to take the mantle for senior positions (Interviewee 2, 2019).

The study suggested that women had low self-esteem, therefore, they failed to trust themselves to lead with excellence. In agreement, Morgan (2014) found that women who had low overall sense of self-worth or personal values were less likely to vie for senior positions because they were not able to appreciate themselves as capable managers. As a result, senior managers gave preference to male incumbents when appointing into managerial positions.

Inadequate monitoring and reporting on implementation of succession planning of the equity policy

One participant had this to share:

The national equity policy clearly state that there is [a] need to increase equity in access rates of women in managerial positions to deal with the past injustices against women in the workplace (Interviewee 3, 2019).

Another participant said that:

Unfortunately, there is no monitoring system to ensure that gender equity policies are implemented to ensure that men and women profiles in managerial positions reflect the gender composition of South Africa (Interviewee 4, 2019).

The finding suggested that there was a lack of political will among senior managers to translate the gender equity policy into practice, where women who deserved senior positions were promoted without looking at their gender. Sandberg (2013) argued that as long as there were no pragmatic senior managers in municipalities, it would be difficult to have the needed gender equality and diversity in the municipality.

8.3. STRATEGIES TO HELP SENIOR MANAGEMENT TO APPOINT WOMEN INTO MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Participants were asked to share their views on the above theme.

Leadership programmes

A participant reflecting the perspectives of other participants said:

> There is need for senior managers to develop leadership programmes for
>
> women to boost their leadership and management potential (Interviewee 3, 2019).

Another participant said that:

> I think leadership programmes [are] the way [forward] for women in the municipality to develop their personal leadership skills (Interviewee 1, 2019).

The finding therefore suggested that women needed to attend more leadership programmes or symposia to enhance their managerial capacity. The finding was supported by Wagner (2015), who attested that leadership training programmes could help women to achieve their professional goals and deliver managerial results for their organisations.

Development opportunity

Reflecting the view of the majority of the participants, one participant said:

> Women should be offered development opportunities. Women need development opportunity to address their particular needs to make them rise to managerial positions (Interviewee 5, 2019).

This was reported as one of the key strategies that could be used by senior managers to aid in women's progression. In agreement, Chaloupka (2017) said that development opportunities could help women to consider and identify the particular development opportunities they needed to aid in their careers, and which strategies to adopt to realise their development opportunities. In support of the findings, Wagner (2015) said that senior managers should help women maximise the benefits of existing development opportunities.

Engagement and diversity inclusion programmes

The study found that there was a need for senior managers to be open to having their negative attitudes towards women challenged. "Senior managers need to have diversity and inclusion programmes" said a participant (Interviewee 3, 2019). In agreement, Wagner (2015) said that continuous diversity and inclusion programmes could assist senior managers to change their negative perceptions of women and their capabilities. In support of these findings, Jaques and Clement (2011) said that organisational structures and interactions between men and women had to be targeted, in particular male behaviour that could be toxic to women's career development. Chaloupka (2017:80) said that men who oversaw recruitment and promotion policies and procedures, and who worked as gatekeepers for development opportunities within organisations were to be targeted by engagement and diversity inclusion programmes.

Mentorship

A participant reflecting the views of other participants said that:

> I think it is important for women at [the] eThekwini Municipality to have role models for mentorship. I say so because mentoring has potential to assist women visualise becoming senior managers (Interviewee 2, 2019).

Another participant said that:

> I think women should be provided with structured mentorships in the municipality to allow them to learn from each other. I had a mentor when I got my first job, at that time I was 21 years [old]. She made [me] realise that there [was] a solution to every problem and I learnt how to be an effective communicator (Interviewee 7, 2019).

In agreement, Chaloupka (2017:81) argued that mentoring was an important way of developing leadership skills among women, for themselves and others. In support the of the view above, Jaques and Clement (2011)

said that leadership mentoring for women was the tried and trusted method for developing the appropriate skills for women to lead in any senior position.

Coaching

The study found that senior managers considered coaching by them as a tool for empowering women to achieve senior leadership, because it affected several aspects of their lives, as discussed below. Reflecting the views of the majority of the participants, one participant talked about the issue of confidence:

I truly believe that women need coaching in the area of confidence if they are to take up senior management positions. Many women do not believe in themselves… that they can be senior managers and deliver service just like men (Interviewee 3, 2019).

Chaloupka (2017) also identified confidence as a key area that senior managers needed to focus on in women, if women were to progress to senior leadership. Jaques and Clement (2011) said that coaching could play a vital role in helping women to build up their confidence, specifically prior to a move to a senior position.

Another participant talked about the importance of coaching as a sounding board for ideas:

If women can be coached in [being] sounding board[s] for ideas, then we will have more women offering themselves for senior management position[s] in the municipality (Interviewee 6, 2019).

The study indicated that moving into a senior position could be a lonely experience for women, therefore there was a need for managers to put in place a sounding board for ideas in coaching programmes. Jaques and Clement (2011) agreed and said that coaches could help women to cope in the early days by acting as a sounding board to help them develop confidence in their ideas.

Another participant talked about the importance of coaching in relation to organisational culture:

For me, senior managers should consider coaching because it can help women to be ready to deal with their organisational culture at the municipality, which is a serious challenge for women (Interviewee 3, 2019).

Findings suggested that coaching could help women to find their way through to leadership.

Other participant said that senior managers should consider coaching to help women with networking:

Women need coaching as far as networking is concerned. Many women are not aware that networking is a crucial aspect of organisational functioning. If you have a network then you will have people to support your aspiration for a senior leadership position (Interviewee 1, 2019).

The finding implied that senior managers had to prioritise the need to coach women in network development. Jaques and Clement (2011) said that though attempts were being made to put networks in place for women, the networks were not yet mature enough to give women the support they needed to take up senior positions. Thus, coaching could play a valuable role in helping women to adopt strategies to start networking across genders.

Another participant talked about the need for senior managers to prioritise coaching to help women make the right impression:

Let me speak from experience. It was through coaching that I learnt to make the right impression. Before then it was hard for me to present myself in the right manner within the culture of the municipality (Interviewee 4, 2019).

The meaning of this finding was that coaching women to be professional and approachable could help them to face the challenges of senior positions.

Another participant talked about coaching needs for a work-life balance:

… Coaching would help women achieve work-life balance. I have seen that women more than men get affected by the issue of balancing work and family commitments (Interviewee 8, 2019).

The findings suggested that senior managers should consider coaching women on the work-life balance affecting their career development and values. Kay and Shipman (2014) agreed that work-life balance coaching

programmes could have a positive real impact on women's career advancement because it addressed practical life issues.

Women's comfort zone

A participant had this to say:

> There are few women willing to leave their comfort zones and take [the] risk to apply for jobs that are more demanding (Interviewee 6, 2019).

In agreement, another participant said that:

> Some women are so comfortable in their zones that they do not want more responsibility and accountability required in senior level positions (Interviewee 6, 2019).

The findings implied that some women at the eThekwini Municipality were too relaxed or comfortable with their current jobs, and that they did not see a need to aspire to senior managerial positions. In agreement, Sandberg (2013) argued that society was designed to make women not aspire to senior positions because their main perceived role was of being home caretakers. This made it hard for women to be ambitious like their male counterparts.

Management style

The study found that women were hindered in getting senior managerial positions because of their management styles:

> As women we are brought up to be more emotional and people think that we cannot be balanced in the manner we make decisions (Interviewee 2, 2019).

Another participant said that:

> Women want to be men at work. We fail to be women and do work in the woman ['s] way. In our effort to be assertive we fail to tread the middle line and behave like witches from hell. This makes men think we are not suitable for senior positions (Interviewee 2, 2019).

The findings suggested that there was a belief/stereotype that women were soft and would therefore struggle to lead organisations with complicated management problems, therefore they were excluded from senior positions. In agreement, Sandberg (2013) said that women were hindered from assuming senior management positions based on over-generalised beliefs that women lacked the thick skin needed for leadership.

Work-life balance

Findings showed that women were hindered from getting senior managerial positions because of work-life balance challenges:

> Work-life balance tends to swerve women more towards family life than for men. Men are expected to be providers, whereas women are expected to be more of home partners nurturing children and families (Interviewee 4, 2019).

The view above indicated that it was difficult for women to pursue senior positions because of family responsibilities. In agreement, Wagner (2015) said that family responsibilities that hindered women from aspiring to leadership roles were prescribed by society, making it difficult for women to achieve equilibrium, where the demands of senior positions, personal life, and family life were equal.

Organisational culture

A participant depicting the views of other participants said that:

> What I have seen is that structures, practices and policies in the municipality were developed with the understanding that senior managers should be men (Interviewee 2, 2019).

Another participant said that:

> We work in a male dominated municipality with a male dominated organisational culture where managers, just like at home where they have wives, even at work they should be supported in their lifestyle by women.

This is why I think organisational culture plays a role in hindering women from aspiring for senior positions in the municipality (Interviewee 3, 2019).

The findings were clear that there was a perception in the municipality that senior positions were gendered masculine roles. In agreement, Wagner (2015) found that organisational culture begot masculine gendered roles that resulted in boorish workplace cultures which hindered women from rising through the ranks.

9. CONCLUSION

The key research questions of this paper were answered. There was willingness among senior managers to appoint women into managerial positions, enhanced by the gender equity policies and procedures put in place to support gender equality in workplaces. However, there were a few senior managers that found it a challenge to appoint women into managerial positions because of the influence of stereotypes. The results also indicated that there were very few women in managerial positions because women lack appropriate experience, lack of self-esteem, inadequate monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the employment equity policy and plan. It is concluded that senior managers at the eThekwini Municipality in South Africa had embraced the workplace equity policy, and that there were few senior managers struggling with the implementation of the policy. The study found that leadership programmes that enhanced women's managerial capacity, development opportunities, engagement and diversity inclusion programmes targeting senior managers with negative attitudes towards women, and mentorships were suggested as proven techniques for developing appropriate skills in women that can make them aspire to senior positions. The findings were supported by Morgan (2014) who provide suggestions that could be applied by managers to empower and increase the number of women in senior positions. The study also found that coaching in the area of confidence, organisational culture, networking, the art of taking, the right impression and work-life balance to be senior managers' focus areas in the coaching programme for women. The finding was supported by Wagner (2015) who found that women were breaking down some of the barriers to managerial positions by undergoing coaching on leadership and management issues, though advances had been slow. The conclusion therefore was that a senior manager should employ coaching as one of the strategies in helping women's career progression because women senior managers were just as effective as men.

Practical implications of the study

The study found that senior managers were willing to appoint women to managerial positions. This culture should be promoted by giving senior managers support or incentives to support gender equality in workplaces. There is also a need to hold accountable the few senior managers who are struggling to appoint women to managerial positions, in addition to giving them coaching on organisational transformation. The study should be replicated using the quantitative research methodology to measure senior managers' readiness to appoint women into managerial positions. The main limitation of this study is that because of time constraints, the study only targeted 25 senior managers from the eThekwini Municipality.

Contributions of the study

The study's main goal was to improve women's representation in local government sectors, especially the eThekwini Municipality. Recent reports show that women in South Africa are still underrepresented in the workplace, both in the private and public sectors. This study enabled society, especially in the workplace, to learn about senior managements' readiness to appoint women in management positions. Furthermore, it provided lessons and other factors that are unknown to women, and contributed to the knowledge of and provide the basis for future research in understanding gender leadership in the workplace. It is very critical in this democratic South Africa to continue conducting studies regarding women in leadership positions, taking into account where we come from, and the fact that there are still barriers excluding women. This inspired young women that have dreams to climb the corporate ladder. Finally, it assisted the prioritisation of diversity and investing of resources in programmes that promote women's involvement in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Charted Accountancy and other so called male dominated careers.

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