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FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SENIOR FEMALE REPRESENTATION AT AN ORGANISATION

by

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment (25%) of the requirements for the degree

Master of Philosophy

in

Leadership in Performance and Change

in the

Faculty of Management:

Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management

at the

University of Johannesburg

Supervisor: Professor Anita Bosch

October 2015
“At the current pace of change, it will take more than 80 years to achieve gender parity in economic participation.”

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Executive Director of UN Women
March 2015
DECLARATION

I certify that the minor dissertation submitted by me for the degree Master of Philosophy (Leadership in Performance and Change) at the University of Johannesburg is my independent work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

____________

Alison Palmer
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my beautiful children, Hannah and Calum, I would like to thank you for your patience, your understanding and your love, which you give me so freely, each and every day. Your words of encouragement and absolute belief in me have carried me through many challenging moments. I love you with all my heart.

To my wonderful supervisor, Anita, I have been blessed to have your guidance, support, and gentle nudging throughout my journey. Thank you for being my rock.

To my parents, Alistair and May, although you are no longer here, you will live forever in my heart. Thank you for the sacrifices you made to afford me the opportunities I have had.
ABSTRACT

The Business Women’s Association of South Africa’s Women in Leadership Census 2015 reported that only 34 of 273 JSE-listed companies and 20 state-owned enterprises had 25% or more female representation at executive manager- and board level (BWASA, 2015). Research for this minor-dissertation was carried out in one of these organisations.

The gendered nature of organisations and an organisation’s influence on its employees’ gendered behaviour in the working environment, have not yet been examined in the South African financial services context. There is, therefore, a need to investigate organisations that appear to exhibit both traditional and non-traditional gendered behaviour, to better understand the underlying factors and organisational features that contribute to this behaviour.

The aim of this study was to identify the organisational features that contributed to a high representation of women executives in an organisation operating within the male-dominated South African financial services industry. A case study strategy was utilised. The unit of analysis was senior and executive managers. A Glaserian grounded theory approach was employed, and the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for the emergence of themes that could be further interrogated, ultimately developing theory to explain the phenomenon being studied.

Following Bhaskar’s (2008) critical realist stratified ontology, it was found that a key factor was the composition of the candidate pool from which executive positions had been filled. Through a process of retroduction, two features were identified as having had an impact on the candidate pool, the first being the organisation’s attractiveness as perceived by those outside the organisation. The second feature that influenced the number of women at executive level at FS Org was the role of gatekeeper played by the CEO.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge regarding the gendered organisation, and identifies features that have promoted women’s advancement in this specific case. Recommendations are provided for further research to gain insight into organisational features across industries that contribute to the representation of women at executive management level.
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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Focus of the study

This study will focus on an organisation in the male-dominated financial sector in South Africa that has an unusually high female representation at executive management level and the possible reasons for this anomaly.

1.2 Preamble

There is a long history detailing women’s fight for equality in many facets of life, including the so-called gender pay gap and inclusion at senior levels of organisations. In South Africa, 9 August every year is recognised as National Women’s Day. This day commemorates the 1956 demonstration, when 20,000 women peacefully marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest the anti-apartheid legislation forcing African women to carry passbooks. On this day, South Africa celebrates the successes of the women of South Africa, and highlights women’s fight for equality and empowerment (Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

In 1968, there was a strike at the Ford factory in Dagenham, England, when 850 female machinists protested against unequal pay. Their work had been classified as “unskilled” resulting them in being paid less than their male counterparts (British Library, n.d.). On 24 October 1975, 25,000 women marched in Iceland to protest economic gender inequality. The Gender Equality Council was formed as a direct result of this protest, and the Gender Equality Act, which forbade gender discrimination in schools and the workplace, was passed (Bianco, 2015). More recently, the Council of Economic Advisers Issue Brief (2015) was released by the White House in the United States of America (USA) and caused a protest of a different kind. In this document, the White House confirmed that the gender wage gap in the USA was 24%. In response, several businesses throughout the country ran a campaign to charge their customers accordingly, and billed women 76% of what men would pay for the same service or product (Mashable.com, 2015).

Demonstrations such as these highlight the prevalence of gender inequality globally as well as the mounting pressure to effect change. Within this context, an investigation of organisations that have achieved gender equality at any level is important, as it may identify the factors
promoting such equality. The present study will investigate one such organisation that operates within the South African financial services industry.

This chapter commences with a discussion of the global statistics of the number of women in senior positions before examining the situation in South Africa. This sets the scene for the problem statement and research question. The motivation for the study is then examined, followed by a detailed consideration of the ontological and epistemological perspective from which the study will be approached.

1.3 Background to the study

Much research has been done on the concepts of the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, as well as barriers to the advancement of women in the workplace (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008; Kiaye & Singh, 2013; North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ryan & Haslam, 2006). Acknowledging the barriers, however, has not translated into more equitable representation of women at either senior management- or board level. According to the Catalyst Census 2012, women on boards in the Americas range from 16.6% in the USA to as low as 1.9% in Chile. Similar figures are reported for the Middle East/Africa region, while figures of less than 10% are reported for the Asia-Pacific countries. With the exclusion of the Nordic countries, Europe reports figures of 15% or lower regarding women on boards.

In an attempt to close the gender inequality gap, some countries have set targets for racial and gender representation. Between 2004 and 2008, Norway adopted a phased approach to narrowing the gender gap on public and private boards. The quotas adopted mean that seats on the boards of state-owned organisations and public limited organisations in the private sector must be occupied by a minimum of 40% men and 40% women (Reform of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act, 1999). The United Kingdom adopted the Equality Act in October 2010, which legislates against discrimination in the workplace through the protection, enforcement, and promotion of equality (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). In 2011, the Malaysian Cabinet sanctioned that, in the corporate sector, women must hold a minimum of 30% of all decision-making positions (Ahmad-Zaluki, 2012). It is therefore clear that globally, women are under-represented at senior levels within organisations, and that various legislative measures have been implemented in an attempt to rectify this.
South Africa promulgated the Employment Equity Act (EEA) in 1998, which promotes the advancement of racial and gender groups as well as persons with disabilities, who previously suffered discrimination. Despite this, the rate of gender transformation at executive management level has been slow, increasing by only 14.6% in the 11-year period from 2004 to 2015 (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, 2015). Amendments to the EEA were assented to by President Jacob Zuma on 14 January 2014, and the Employment Equity Amendment Act, No. 47 of 2013 was gazetted (Patel, 2014) which allows for increased penalties for non-fulfilment of racial and gender targets. Similar to the global legislative trend, the South African National Assembly passed the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill in March 2014 (SAPA, 2014) which requires employers to develop measures to achieve at least 50% female representation and meaningful participation in decision-making structures through gender mainstreaming.

These attempts may be ineffective in isolation. The Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa (BWASA) stated that "a wholesale SOCIETAL SHIFT is required” in order to realise gender and racial equality in the working world (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, 2012b, p. 3). BWASA’s Women in Leadership Census 2015 reported that South Africa fares better than many of its international counterparts in terms of the number of women holding director- and executive management positions. In this census, comprising 273 JSE-listed companies and 20 state-owned enterprises, only 34 companies were categorised as “top performing” in terms of female representation. The categorisation “top performing” denotes that 25% or more of both director- and executive manager positions are held by women (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, 2015).

These 34 organisations are subject to the same legislative requirements and stock exchange listing requirements as those that do not have such high female representation at senior level. One may then wonder what it is that these organisations are doing differently from the others in the sample that results in a higher representation of women at senior levels.

In order to uncover the reasons for this relatively high female representation, organisations need to be explored with a specific focus on an organisation’s influence on its employees’ behaviour (in this instance, the gendered behaviour exhibited by the organisation’s employees within the structure of the working environment) to uncover the organisational features that contribute to a seemingly progressive and inclusive outlook on gender in the workplace. Deaux and Major (1987) contend that, while interacting, participants to the interaction will change
their behaviour in accordance with what they believe to be most appropriate. This behaviour is a result of several factors, including the circumstances of the interaction, the gender identity of the participants (gender identity is discussed in more detail in Section 2.5), and the context within which the interaction occurs, all of which manifest due to human interaction within the organisation, either in the past or the present, resulting in certain organisational features. These features can contribute to or disrupt embedded beliefs about expected and acceptable behaviour of men and women in the workplace (Ely & Padavic, 2007) also referred to as gendered behaviour.

In an attempt to uncover these features and how they impact gendered behaviour, the present study will be conducted in an organisation within the financial services sector that, considering its rating as a top-performing company in the BWASA 2015 Census and its high representation of women, is outperforming other organisations with respect to female representation at executive and senior management levels. Hereafter, this organisation will be referred to as FS Org.

Nkomo (2012) provides a succinct overview of women in management through the ages. She details what could be described as ‘waves of thought’ commencing with the “think manager, think male” view (p. 30), where the attributes of leadership are associated with men. Then came the glass ceiling phenomenon, which is described as an invisible barrier that prevents women from being promoted to the most senior levels within organisations, despite having the relevant skills and qualifications (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The third wave views women as contributors, and research illustrates that women typically display more transformational behaviours in comparison to their male counterparts (Powell, 2011). Transformational characteristics are, however, contrary to those traditionally considered essential in leadership, which is why women continue to face glass ceilings and barriers to their advancement. More recent studies in the field of gender in the workplace have investigated the notion of the gendered organisation and the impact of an organisation’s culture on gender patterns, such as (North-Samardzic & Taksa, 2011; Plowman, 2010) study based on her own experiences in the United Kingdom. Such studies, however, were conducted beyond the borders of South Africa. The present study will be located within the body of knowledge of the gendered organisation, specifically within the context of a South African organisation.

At the time of the study at FS Org, women held 70% of executive management positions and made up 46% of the board (including the positions of alternate directors and company
secretary). This organisation therefore far exceeds the norm when considering executive and board-level representation of women. FS Org was identified by BWASA (2015) as a top-performing company, which provided the present researcher with an opportunity to conduct research in an organisation to uncover the features that give rise to such high numbers of women at senior levels.

1.4 Problem statement and research question

Globally, organisations show low levels of representation of women in senior management- and executive levels. The gendered nature of organisations and an organisation’s influence on its employees’ gendered behaviour in the working environment, have not yet been examined in the South African financial services context. There is, therefore, a need to investigate organisations that appear to exhibit both traditional and non-traditional gendered behaviour, to better understand the underlying factors and organisational features that contribute to this behaviour.

The aim of the present research will be to explore the features of an organisation that contribute to a progressive and inclusive view of gender in the workplace, by investigating a case organisation where there is already a high level of female representation at the executive level. By identifying these features, the business community will be given insight into the phenomenon, hopefully leading to an increase the number of women in senior positions.

The research question is:

What are the organisational features that contribute to higher female representation at the executive management level?

1.5 Motivation for the study

The importance of this study lies in the need to investigate what FS Org did differently that has resulted in a higher-than-normal representation of women at senior levels in the organisation. FS Org has managed to attract and retain skilled women at senior, executive, and board level, making it one of the 34 listed companies in South Africa to be classified as top-performing by the BWASA 2015 Census (the only South African census that provides data on women in management). This accolade is even more notable in the context of the increase in the number
of companies with 0% women in director- and executive manager positions, from 7.8% in 2010 (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, 2012a) to 17.1% in 2015 (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa, 2015).

Notwithstanding that 52% of the South African population is female, less than 31% of senior management positions and only 19.9% of top management positions are held by women (Geldenhuys, 2013). This clearly indicates underrepresentation of women at these levels in organisations.

The advantages of having women in leadership positions have been documented in several studies (Gibson, 1995; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Powell, 2011). In Powell’s (2011) study, it was found that democratic and participative styles of leadership, which are characteristic of transformational leadership, are associated with feminine traits, while autocratic and task-oriented styles of leadership which are characteristic of transactional leadership, are associated with masculine traits. This supports the findings of Gibson’s (1995) study, which found that female leaders favoured interaction and facilitation, as opposed to men’s preference for goal setting. Powell (2011) purports that the changing economic environment of the unstable, competitive global context, calls for organisations that display a more democratic and transformational approach to leadership. He continues by stating that women more than men, adopt a transformational style of leadership, indicating that organisations will benefit from having women in leadership roles.

1.6 Ontology and epistemology

It is of fundamental importance to understand the ontological and epistemological stance adopted in the present study, and the relevance thereof to the proposed research. Without this, the methodologies and processes followed to gather and analyse the data will lack clarity. Therefore, the ontology and epistemology are discussed in this section, to afford a greater understanding of the study.

Ontologically, the present researcher believes that interaction and social processes create knowledge (O’Dowd, 2003). As social beings, humans interact with others, purposefully or otherwise, influencing the decisions and behaviours of those with whom the interaction occurs. Critical realism accepts that the social world is socially constructed, and contends that there is
another world that is not dependent on social interaction for its existence — the natural world (Fairclough, 2005).

Furthermore, critical realism argues that a world of intransitive objects independent of human behaviour, knowledge or interpretation exists, and that these objects can only be known in their specific context through human interpretation and scientific enquiry (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012). Epistemologically, knowledge is therefore a social product, fashioned by former social products (Bhaskar, 2008) and the social world can only be understood and changed once the structures and underlying mechanisms that produce the social world have been identified (Wikgren, 2005). Critical realism, therefore, accepts epistemological relativism — that knowledge is always bound in context (Sumner, 2006).

The premises that firstly, knowledge acts independently of human behaviour and secondly, that it is socially constructed and therefore fallible (Elger, 2010; Mingers, Mutch, & Wilcock, 2013) support the stance that there are two dimensions — transitive and intransitive. In the transitive dimension, the knowledge object generates new knowledge (either by being the material cause thereof or the precursor to this new knowledge) whereas, in the intransitive dimension, the object is the real mechanism or artefact that acts independently of human behaviour. The aim of science is then to produce knowledge around the mechanisms that yield various phenomena in nature and, ultimately, the world (Bhaskar, 2008). In the present minor dissertation, these mechanisms will be referred to as organisational features.

Critical realism accepts epistemic relativity, but not judgemental relativity, meaning that it accepts that knowledge is local and historical, but not that all perspectives have equal validity. Critical realism cautions against epistemic fallacy — reducing ontology to epistemology (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012) so that “ontological questions can always be rephrased as epistemological ones” (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 35). Epistemic fallacy limits our notion of reality by allowing the question ‘What can we know?’ to determine such notions (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) thereby obscuring the nature of what exists with our knowledge of what exists (Fairclough, 2005). By committing epistemic fallacy, that which “cannot be known”, does not exist outside of the epistemic and methodological enactment process (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012, p. 7) contrary to the critical realist view that there is an intransitive world independent of human interaction.
Critical realism distinguishes between the “real” (world of structures), the “actual” (the world of events and processes) and the “empirical” (the “real” and “actual” that are experienced by the participants to an interaction or event) (Fairclough, 2005, p. 922). Critical realism therefore purports that the empirical (what is seen and observed) is part of the actual (what actually happens) which, in turn, stems from the real (the many possibilities that could happen, given the underlying structures) (Burgoine, 2008). For critical realists, the world consists of experiences, dialogues and occurrences, as well as existing tendencies, underlying structures and power, irrespective of whether these are perceived or even evident through interaction (Patomäki & Wight, 2000). This stratified ontology, consisting of three distinct domains, is depicted in Table 1, showing that underlying mechanisms produce events at the surface level (Reed, 2005).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domain of the real</th>
<th>Domain of the actual</th>
<th>Domain of the empirical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
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<td>Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These domains are briefly outlined below:

1. The real — these are the tendencies, powers, and causal mechanisms that, together, produce the events in the domain of the actual (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012).
2. The actual — this domain refers to the events that actually occur in the world (Clark, 2008). Such events may or may not be observed, such as human action or the Big Bang (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012).
3. The empirical — these are the human interpretations (either by an individual or from larger scientific enquiry) of what happens in the domains of the real and the actual (Clark, 2008).
Table 1 indicates that causal mechanisms are found in the domain of the real, which may manifest as events in the domain of the actual, which are then interpreted in the domain of the empirical. Events occur independently of experiences, and, when experiences are not in line with events, they are misidentified (Bhaskar, 2008). This stratified ontology allows for the description of behaviour in terms of the mechanisms that trigger the events (Archer, 1995). In the domain of the real, objects unquestionably exist, although their existence may be opaque. In the domains of the actual and the empirical, features or objects of the domain of the real can be perceived through human exploration, and knowledge of these objects can be acquired, notwithstanding the unavoidable subjectivity of those producing this knowledge (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012). Causation is identified by probing the tendencies, powers, and mechanisms from the domain of the real that produce the events in the domain of the actual (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

Causal mechanisms (found in the domain of the real) may not necessarily be triggered, and so may exist without being realised. In addition, while the products of causal mechanisms may exist in the domain of the empirical, they may be undetected by observers (Elger, 2010). Critical realism views reality as complex, and postulates that human behaviour is influenced by both agency and structural factors (Clark, 2008). Critical realists make a clear distinction between agency and structure (Benton, 2004) in that agents constantly produce and alter social structures, which, in turn, both support and inhibit social action (Archer, 1995) which may be altered by subsequent action (Elger, 2010). The more complex and the greater the number of social factors influencing the structure’s production of events, the more challenging it becomes to identify the generating mechanisms and causal links (Adamides, Papachristos, & Pomonis, 2012).

The crucial methodological approach in critical realism is the process that unearths latent causal mechanisms (irrespective of the nature of these mechanisms) that manifest as experiences in the domain of the empirical (Mingers et al., 2013). As opposed to inductive or deductive inferences, critical realists embrace *reduction*, which is the process whereby one develops a model for the aspect, condition or structure that is responsible (wholly or partly) for a particular phenomenon (Patomäki & Wight, 2000). *Reduction* is therefore the notional move from the manifested occurrence to the hypothetical mechanism(s) that produce the predispositions or inclinations under specific conditions, in order to account for the phenomenon (Adamides et al., 2012; Elger, 2010; Hedlund-de Witt, 2012; Reed, 2005). Because these underlying
(hypothetical) mechanisms are not directly experienced (rather, they manifest as events and experiences) they need to be theoretically modelled (Reed, 2005). This modelling starts with the phenomenon and the context within which such phenomenon was found (Elger, 2010) to reveal possible underlying mechanisms.

Another method used to identify and investigate generating mechanisms and causal links is **retrodiction**. This is the notional move from the hypothetical mechanism through various environments (contexts) in order to explain a specific phenomenon in the domain of the empirical (Elger, 2010).

A principal goal of critical realist-based research is to specify how and why a particular incident occurred, by examining causation and providing clear, succinct and empirically supported statements about the underlying mechanisms (Wynn & Williams, 2012). For researchers within the social sciences, critical realism is becoming increasingly accepted as a feasible philosophical paradigm, as this methodology offers new opportunities to probe organisational occurrences holistically (Wynn & Williams, 2012).

1.7 Chapter layout

The layout of the chapters that follow in this minor dissertation is as follows:

**Chapter 2: Literature review**

The current body of knowledge on gendered organisations will be discussed in this chapter, highlighting unquestioned assumptions about gender that prevail in academic literature. Attention will be paid to the manner in which gender stereotypes are perpetuated within organisations, both blatantly and subtly, leading to an identification of factors found within gendered organisations.

**Chapter 3: Research design**

This chapter will commence with a discussion of the research approach and strategy, as well as the data collection methodology and process adopted. The recording and analysis of data will then be detailed, followed by the strategies to ensure quality research. Research risks and strategies to mitigate these risks will be highlighted.

**Chapter 4: Researcher’s reflections**
The nature of the research study will require the researcher to interact with the study participants. This chapter will detail the researcher’s reflections on her experiences, and will provide significant findings from the encounters.

**Chapter 5: Findings**

Key findings from the data analysis will be presented in this chapter.

**Chapter 6: Discussion**

The findings provided in Chapter 5 will be discussed in light of the literature review provided in Chapter 2, together with additional literature pertaining to the particular findings.

**Chapter 7: Concluding thoughts**

This chapter will discuss the links between the literature and the research findings, showing how the exploratory approach facilitated the process of *retroduction* to identify the underlying factors that resulted in the high representation of women at executive level at FS Org. This will be depicted diagrammatically, within a critical realist framework.

**1.8 Conclusion**

The fight for gender equality has spanned many decades, and, although some small victories have been gained on the journey to gender parity, women are still largely under-represented at senior level in organisations. There is therefore value to be gained from conducting research in an organisation that has a high percentage of women at executive management level, to identify the factors that contributed to this anomaly.

The next chapter will examine academic literature on gender studies and the relevant research assumptions that have been made in this field. The findings of such research studies have been used to explain why there are differences between male and female, and masculinity and femininity, or even to purport that organisations are gender neutral. The theoretical outcomes from these studies have therefore been used to explain experiences in the domain of the empirical, and in doing so, have used *retroduction* (moving from theory to manifested occurrences via the study environment) to explain the event.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a discussion of some of the literature pertaining to gendered organisations and assumptions that researchers have made in their studies of organisations. This is followed by a discussion of gendered substructures and gendered identities (Acker, 2012a) evident within the organisational context, and which contribute to gendered practices. The chapter concludes by looking at the work of Bendl (2008) who identified the often subtle gendered subtexts that serve to exclude women and consider men the ideal worker.

2.1 Introduction

The topic of gender and the organisation, and how gender inequalities are created and reinforced by their embedded nature in organisations, has received attention in academic research (Acker, 2012a; Bendl, 2008; Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012; Plowman, 2010; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). There is growing agreement amongst scholars that gender is socially constructed for the purpose of identifying people as male or female, and that inequalities arise as a consequence of that differentiation (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Benschop and Doorewaard (2012) supported the view that gender is socially constructed within the realm of the organisation, noting that the social and structural practices (role orientation, status, career planning, and recruitment- and selection processes) in an organisation promote a gendered process. This implies that organisations are gendered in nature.

Ely and Padavic (2007) analysed research that had been published over a 20-year period (from January 1984 onwards), and found that, in almost 75% of the 131 articles that formed their sample, the authors failed to consider the relationship between organisations and gender. This, then, would indicate that we have a limited understanding of how gender manifests within organisations. Ely and Padavic (2007) identified three basic assumptions that other researchers had made in their studies. These assumptions were common across their sample and took the form of beliefs and statements that went unquestioned in the studies, indicating that prior research did not sufficiently consider the social construction of gender and the organisation's contribution to this. Each assumption identified by Ely and Padavic (2007) is briefly outlined below, followed by critique based on current levels of knowledge.
2.2 Unquestioned gendered assumptions from the literature

2.2.1 Assumption 1: Gender is coterminous with anatomical sex

(Ely & Padavic, 2007) found that, not only did few of the studies provide definitions of gender, but that the words ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ were used interchangeably, asserting that gender is a personal attribute inherent to an individual. This view fails to consider that gender is socially constructed, as discussed in 2.1 above.

The terms sex and gender were first differentiated in the 1960s, highlighting the social, cultural, historical, and political origination and influence on what was originally viewed as primarily biological (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008). The differentiation between sex and gender is now widely accepted, in that sex refers to one’s biological characteristics, which define one’s physiology, whereas gender refers to the aspects respectively associated with the role of being male or female, including beliefs about typical behaviour and feelings (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011). This relates to the constructs of masculinity and femininity, which are key aspects within the gender system (Ely & Padavic, 2007), and refer to the values and behaviours associated with the images of maleness and femaleness that have been socially and culturally produced (Priola, 2010).

2.2.2 Assumption 2: Gender processes largely occur outside organisations

Several of the articles researched by Ely and Padavic (2007) found that factors unrelated to the organisation, such as “childhood socialisation” (p. 1123) were responsible for differences between the sexes. Other studies that they analysed had produced null results, supporting the hypothesis that organisations are either “gender neutral” or that “things were improving for women” (p. 1124). These studies discounted the social influence of the workplace in the construction and moulding of what is considered gender-appropriate behaviour.

There are, however, scholars who support the view that organisations contribute to the creation and replication of gendered behaviour. Acker (2012a) contended that “the gendered substructure” (which refers to processes within organisations during which conventions about gendered behaviour are reproduced) perpetuates gender inequalities (p. 215). Processes that form the basis of this gendered substructure are often indiscernible, and may therefore seem gender neutral at first glance, only revealing their gendered nature upon deeper analysis. Bendl
14

(2008, p. S61) also argued that organisations are not gender neutral, as organisational discourse is built around the premise of “the law of the father” — men are established as term A or the norm, and women as term not-A or “the other”.

2.2.3 Assumption 3: Gender effects can be meaningfully separated from situational and individual effects

Ely and Padavic (2007) noted that, in some studies, factors linked to a particular gender (but mutually exclusive of gender, such as self-confidence and status as the breadwinner) were considered as possible explanations for apparent differences between the sexes. On deeper examination, however, it becomes evident that these explanations, themselves, are infused with gender connotations when addressing the issues of why women are less confident than men, and with which sex breadwinner-status is linked, thereby arguing that organisations are not gender neutral, due to the embedded nature of gender within the organisation and its culture.

The authors’ analysis further revealed that situational factors (such as relative job power, amount of cross-sex contact, income, and occupational level) were separated from the influences of sex, and viewed independently. They claimed that such studies run the risk of overlooking the links between, for example, sex, power, and organisational hierarchies when trying to isolate sex from situational factors. Dye and Mills (2012) supported this view in their argument that gendering processes are interdependent and do not occur in isolation.

Ely and Padavic (2007) argued that organisations influence and shape gender identities as part of a social process, the construction of which is greatly influenced by and from within organisations, and that power relations are inherent to gender construction.

Gender theory increased in complexity with the introduction of intersectionality, which is the belief that the gendered process cannot be viewed in isolation, but overlaps with other forms of inequality, such as race and class (Acker, 2012a). In fact, there is a widely held view that gender inequalities should not be viewed in isolation from the inequality differentiators of race and class (Benschop & Doorewaard, 2012; Berry & Bell, 2012; Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008) as gender, race, and class do not operate independently to create inequality and disadvantage (Berry & Bell, 2012). Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) extended the list of inequality differentiators of gender, race, and class to include sexual orientation in their study of the arts and culture sector in Britain. Rather than researching inequality differentiators in isolation, Acker (2006,
p. 422) argued for the study of “inequality regimes” where the interlinking impacts of gender, race, and class on inequality are researched.

Few researchers have, however, explored the theory of intersectionality in their studies. Acker (2012b, p. 209) attributed this to “complexity” (it is easier to focus on just one inequality category) and “variability” (it is difficult to research intersecting processes, as they may not be easily discernible within the organisation). The scope of the present study, however, did not allow for an investigation of intersectionality at FS Org, therefore, aspects other than gender were not researched.

Differences in the gender system (as with those systems that contribute to race and class differences) are based on inequality. This perpetuates the justification of unequal treatment (Padavic & Reskin, 2002) and authenticates the hierarchical system in which there is an unequal allocation of resources, as well as the control thereof. Consider the situation in which the man works for material reward, while the woman runs the home in the absence of such material reward (Ely & Padavic, 2007). These differences are reinforced and concretised in various ways, including the responsibilities at home, distribution of resources, work practices, hierarchical structures, human interaction, and the identities people create (Ely & Padavic, 2007) thereby organising values and meanings around these differences (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000). Due to their social nature, organisations can either reinforce or challenge the philosophies entrenched in the gender system (Ely & Padavic, 2007). Gendered behaviour is often subtly depicted, or even contained within invisible processes found in organisations. Acker (2012a) refers to these often indiscernible organisational processes that entrench and reproduce gendered conventions as gendered substructures.

Seminal writers on the topic of gendered behaviour — Acker, Ely and Padavic — examined such behaviour from different perspectives with a certain amount of overlap. Ely and Padavic (2007) provided a framework that can be used to investigate gendered behaviour. Their framework consists of three constructs, namely gender as a system, gender identity, and power. This framework, along with Acker’s writings on gendered substructures, are discussed below. By following the process of retrodiction (the notional move from theory to explain events found in the empirical world) an integrated table of features of gendered organisations (Table 2) is presented.
2.3 Gender as a system and organisational culture

Acker (2012a) considered the organisational practices that shape the beliefs about gender differences within an organisation (i.e. organisational culture) to be an element of the gendered substructure, thereby supporting the claim that gender is socially constructed (Acker, 2012a; Bendl, 2008). Beliefs regarding gender differences function throughout our social world (Harkness & Hall, 2010) with the notions of masculinity and femininity (along with maleness and femaleness) being dependent upon context (social, historical, and cultural) and influenced by factors such as class, occupation, age, religion, ethnicity, and sexuality (Priola, 2010). This is what Ely and Padavic’s (2007, p. 1128) framework terms “gender as a system”.

Once established, gender practices reinforce differences and inequalities, in terms of hierarchies, family responsibilities and work practices, and impact on how people interpret situations and how they behave. These aspects of the gender system result in men and women being associated with characteristics, values, and expected behaviours that are socially attached to each (Ely & Padavic, 2007). While assumed to be natural, this classification perpetuates inequality, due to its embedded nature in society.

The constructs of masculinity and femininity reinforce this inequality within the gender system, and relate to the socially and culturally constructed images of maleness and femaleness, together with the values and behaviours associated with each (Priola, 2010, p. 547). These images morph over time and across cultures, and become concretised by the expectations of the people within these cultures (Ely & Padavic, 2007). Consider the notion that men (more so than women) possess the characteristics needed for managerial success. This notion has changed little, despite evidence that the belief that effective management equates to maleness is unfounded (Sheaffer, Bogler, & Sarfaty, 2011).

Organisational culture upholds this inequality through gendered practices such as stereotyping, and utilising masculine models and symbols (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011). When the “think manager — think male” (Schein, 2001, p. 676) stereotypical thinking underpins the reasoning of those participating in the process of evaluating candidates for promotion, it is likely that men will be viewed more favourably than their female counterparts (Haveman & Beresford, 2011) which supports Acker’s notion of gendered substructures.
2.4 Organising processes

Research on comparable worth conducted by Acker in the 1980s, pointed to organising processes within a firm that had built inequalities into salaries, decision-making structures, job design, and supervisory power, with women being grouped into roles with lower average pay, and less decision-making and supervisory power (Acker, 2012a). This substructure of organising processes was also evident in the work of Trond Petersen, who conducted several studies in which three processes of discrimination that generate and perpetuate workplace inequality were apparent (Petersen & Morgan, 1995; Petersen & Saporta, 2004; Petersen, Snartland, Becken, & Olsen, 1997). The first of these discriminatory processes is termed allocative discrimination, which involves the organisation of women and men into different occupations, either at the recruitment stage or through ensuing promotions. The second is when women receive lower financial benefits than men performing the same function and within the same place of work (termed within-job discrimination). The third discriminatory process is termed valuative discrimination, referring to the differences in comparable worth between occupations in which women are predominantly employed (and paid lower wages) and those occupations held, for the most part, by men and paid higher wages (Stainback & Kwon, 2011).

2.5 Gender identity

Gender identity has progressed from using physiological characteristics to explain differences between women and men to employing sociology and psychology to make sense of oneself as a man or a woman (Deaux & Stewart, 2001). For feminist researchers, this sense of being a woman focuses on how the self manifests as a result of both the social construction of women’s roles and the beliefs that drive “socially acceptable behaviour for women” (Singh, 2007, p. 105). This gender substructure is created, not only by the organisational culture that moulds and reinforces gendered identities, but also by that which is brought with the individual into the organisation (Acker, 2012a). Environments that are predominantly masculine are not immune to the social construction of acceptable behaviour — think of how locker rooms containing pornographic pictures (Acker, 1990) or the pictures of barely clad women sprawled over the bonnets of cars in a mechanic’s workshop are considered acceptable, and even expected, given the environment.
The fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) have a higher representation of men than of women. One explanation put forward for this disparity is women’s belief that they do not have the ability to achieve success in these fields (Cheryan, Siy, Vichayapai, Drury, & Kim, 2011). Murphy, Steele, and Gross (2007, p. 880) put forward additional possibilities from other scholars for the underrepresentation of women in these fields, such as the “gendered socialization of boys and girls”, the “gender-role stereotypes” and even aptitude. They did, however, add an additional possibility — that of social identity threat.

Social identity threat is the belief held by an individual that he or she may be undervalued or poorly treated as a direct result of his or her social identity (Murphy et al., 2007). In Murphy et al.’s study within a STEM context, 47 Stanford University undergraduates (22 women and 25 men) watched two conference videos (one was gender-unbalanced, in that there were higher numbers of men than women depicted in the video, while the other video was gender-balanced) on the pretext that the researchers wanted to ascertain their opinion of the videos in preparation for a (fictitious) conference, while actually collecting data on the respondents’ physiological responses. The findings indicated that the women within the group reacted more acutely to stimuli in the gender-unbalanced video (evident in, among others, increased heart rates and skin moisture) than in the gender-balanced video. In addition to this, women indicated a lower desire to participate in the conference after watching the gender-unbalanced video. While this study had limitations, it is clear that the women experienced a certain level of social identity threat in the gender-unbalanced setting, which the men did not experience, as men were not in the minority in either video (Murphy et al., 2007). This study supports the view that identity is shaped, in part, by the environment.

Deaux and Major (1987) asserted that gender identity is negotiated and moulded through a process of continual interaction. In their interactive model, the authors contended that the behaviour of participants during an interaction will change in accordance with the demands of the situation, resulting in the adoption of different identities at different times within the context of the interaction and across interactions. A person’s behaviour is fashioned by the context within which interaction occurs, supporting the notion that gender identity is, for those in the working environment, also shaped by the organisational context. Acker (2012a, p. 216) supported this view by suggesting that a woman in management may feel pressure to “manage like a man” in order to be successful, as she may be viewed as ineffective, should she appear too co-operative.
2.6 Power and interactions on the job

Scott’s (1986) definition of gender consists of two primary parts. The first is that gender is an element within social relationships that is based on sex differences. The second part of her definition states that gender is a principal manner in which power in relationships is represented. Gender and power are linked in several ways: structurally (the more pronounced political and institutional power of men, as well as greater representation in higher-paying jobs); culturally (embedded stereotypes of men and masculinity representing power and strength, while women and femininity represent compliance); and in the operation of power (Ely & Padavic, 2007). Power operates externally in the form of practices, such as company policies and procedures (Acker, 1990) or informal work practices and patterns of work, and internally in the desire to either accommodate or resist the external operation of power. The external operation of power serves to sanction particular gender connotations, and the internal operation of power determines the extent to which one conforms. The interplay between these internal and external forces contributes to the gendered definition of organisational members (Ely & Padavic, 2007).

Acker’s (2012a, p. 216) gendered substructure of “interactions on the job” has a strong link with power. Situations in which there are power relations reinforce gender stereotypes (Goodwin & Fiske, 2001). Interactions between colleagues (especially those with power differences) may reinforce inequality, either overtly (such as harassment) or subtly (favouring a male subordinate’s proposal over that of a female subordinate). The power exerted by groups may also reinforce inequality, as interactions within male-dominated groups may demean or disregard women (Acker, 2012a).

2.7 Gendered subtext and organisational logic

Acker (2012a) distinguished between gendered substructure and gendered subtexts by referring to the latter as the organisational texts or work practices that mould and reinforce gender within the organisation. Gender subtexts therefore form part of the gendered substructure. Texts within organisations may present as gender neutral, but further analysis of underlying texts may uncover subtle gender distinctions (Bendl, 2008).
Bendl (2008) identified eight different gender subtexts found within 24 selected texts. Such subtexts include the fictitious equality between genders; women as ‘the other’ (p. S56); males and masculinity as the norm (p. S54); and unintentional neglect and exclusion (p. S52). Gendered subtexts may be evident within organisational logic, which is the manner in which the organisation is constructed, with hierarchies, differing levels of power, or even a team-based, collaborative organisation (Acker, 2012a).

These subtle underlying gender distinctions became evident in Acker’s research within an organisational hierarchy, wherein a woman in a support function (a secretary) performed certain management tasks for her (male) superior. However, because the role of manager and secretary were not equated, the management tasks that she performed were not scored and compared against those of her superior. Considering that all the secretaries in that particular organisation were women, the evaluation system used by the organisation had a gendered influence (Acker, 2012a).

Acker’s work on organisational logic was extended by Williams, Muller, and Kilanski, (2012) who stated that the workplace has transformed, and that teamwork, career maps and networking have replaced management-controlled appraisals, job descriptions and career ladders. With respect to teamwork, Williams et al. (2012) claimed that self-promotion is necessary in order to receive recognition, but that this may have adverse consequences for women, especially in environments dominated by men. Williams et al.’s study found that women were concerned with the “delicate balance between being assertive and being a bitch” (2012, p. 558) and that the younger women felt their views were being dismissed because of their age. Career maps were found to be equally problematic. While career maps afford employees greater flexibility in terms of career development, it was found that, due to the lack of formal policies regarding maternity leave that could be consistently applied, a caring and considerate supervisor was necessary in order to factor having a family into one’s career map (Williams et al., 2012).

Networks are key to professional success (Williams et al., 2012) so it is not surprising that the absence thereof is one of the biggest barriers to women’s career progression (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2014). In some instances, women are deliberately excluded from networks and network events (such as those held at exclusively male golf courses or strip clubs) thereby preventing women from forming the relationships that are an essential part of conducting business (Morgan & Martin, 2006). In response to this, some organisations have established
women’s networks, but these do not hold the same status in the organisation, and membership thereof may incur negative consequences (Williams et al., 2012).

In summary, considering the work of Ely and Padavic (2007), Bendl (2008), Acker (2012a), and Williams et al. (2012), there are many features that could be investigated when studying gendered behaviour in an organisation. These features, briefly outlined above, are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of Gendered Organisations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender as a system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender and identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power</td>
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*Source: Adapted from Gendered organizations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities by J. Acker, 2012; Gender subtexts — reproduction of exclusion in organizational discourse by R. Bendl, 2008; A feminist analysis of organizational research on sex differences by R. Ely and I. Padavic, 2007; and Gendered organizations in the new economy by C. L. Williams, C. Muller, and C. Kilanski, 2012.*
2.8 Conclusion

Ely and Padavic’s (2007) research unearthed three assumptions that had been made in gender research, indicating that both the social construction of gender and the contribution of the organisation to creating and reinforcing gender stereotypes have been insufficiently researched. Acker’s (1990, 2012a) work highlighted the gendered substructures found in organisations that reinforce gendered conventions, and the research of Williams et al. (2012) identified the additional factors of teamwork, career maps, and networking, which serve to perpetuate the gendered stereotypes, as well as act as barriers to organisational gender parity.

Bendl’s (2008) work analysed gendered subtexts and the often subtle manner in which women are excluded and men are considered the norm or the ideal worker. Given these findings, it is important that more emphasis is placed on researching the contribution of organisations in reinforcing gendered norms. The following chapter details the research design that was adopted to study the representation of women at executive management level in FS Org, an organisation that appears to have achieved gender equality in terms of representation at senior level.
CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore the features of an organisation that contribute to a progressive and inclusive view of gender in the workplace, by identifying the tendencies, causal mechanisms and powers in the domain of the real (as per critical realism) that have resulted in the experiences of the gendered organisation under study. This chapter details the research approach and strategy, highlighting the synergies that allowed for the collection of rich data and, through a thorough analysis, the identification of themes, which enabled the construction of core categories from which to build the theory. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the strategies employed to ensure quality research, whereafter risks specific to this study are identified, together with the steps taken to mitigate these risks.

3.2 Research approach and strategy

The value of employing a critical realist methodology in case study research has been postulated by several researchers (Elger, 2010; Fairclough, 2005; Houston, 2010; Mingers et al., 2013; Rotaru, Churilov, & Flitman, 2014). In addition to the customary attributes of case study research design (such as the participants’ dialogues and meanings thereof, and the order and undercurrents of social processes within a specific environment) critical realism values additional features such as employing mixed methods when collecting and analysing data, extracting broader inferences from case studies through the dependency on explicit theories, and engagement with candidates’ experiences which may be both probing and inhibiting (Elger, 2010).

Case study research has been defined by Yin (1994, p. 13) as “…an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.”

Considering the phenomenon under study, a case study strategy was adopted, which is appropriate for addressing a descriptive or explanatory question such as “Why or how did something happen?” In addition to this, by employing a case study strategy, the phenomenon is studied within its natural setting with the fieldwork element providing richer data (Yin, 2012).
When considering the case study design for this research, it was important to define, firstly, the case that would be studied, secondly, the unit of analysis, and thirdly, the type of case study that would be the most appropriate to extract the data to answer the research question. The present study used the organisation as the case, with the units of analysis being senior and executive managers who are integral to and are affected by the organisation. Because the case was singular, with multiple units of analysis, it was a single, embedded case study. In addition to this, the undertaking of a detailed literature review was key to determining the current level of knowledge on the topic being studied, and to ensure that the outcomes of this study would add to the body of knowledge.

A common approach to qualitative research is that of induction, whereby the researcher becomes immersed in the context of the study and slowly builds a theory based on observations and constructs (Babbie & Mouton, 2003; McLaren, 2010). This is a useful approach to conducting research in areas where theoretical knowledge is limited (McLaren, 2010) as the researcher is able to generate constructs, which are then refined as the study progresses (Preissle, 2008). Due to the nature of the phenomenon studied, induction was a valid research strategy.

The critical realist process of retroduction was adopted, with the research journey commencing at the phenomenon under study (that occurred in the domain of the empirical and within a specific context) and moving to the domain of the real in which the possible causal mechanisms could be found. FS Org is an anomaly in the financial services industry, in that it has high representation of women at the executive level, while the industry in which it operates is male-dominated. The literature review presented in Chapter 2, used the critical realist process of retroduction — looking at the various factors (both blatant and subtle) that inhibit the advancement of women in the workplace. It is therefore implied that, as long as some or all of these factors are evident, women will struggle to advance at the same rate and to the same levels as men in the same organisation.

Because there is no existing framework or model from which to analyse an organisation that appears to have equitable gender representation at executive level, an exploratory research approach was adopted. Stebbins (2008, p. 327) defined exploratory research as: “…broad-ranging, intentional, systematic data collection designed to maximize discovery of generalizations based on description and direct understanding of an area of social or psychological life.”
Exploration is therefore not an isolated approach that occurs when data collection commences, but rather is an overall approach to collecting data that assist in the development of theory through a process of continual discovery (Davies, 2006).

Inductive reasoning was used to build hypotheses and ultimately, a theory to explain the phenomenon of high female representation at the executive level in the organisation under study, while the context within which this organisation is situated is male dominated. Triangulation of data occurred through the use of semi-structured interviews and an analysis of various organisational documents.

3.2.1 Interview setting and entrée to the organisation

FS Org is housed in a large, modern structure located amidst other financial behemoths in Johannesburg, South Africa. Upon arriving at FS Org, one is greeted by large electronic boards, across which various financial indicators scroll. The reception area is large and airy, if somewhat sterile. Staff and visitors hurry about their business, some wearing jeans, others in tailored suits. Security guards guard the inner entrance that leads to the elevators.

The interview room that was primarily used to conduct the semi-structured interviews is on the ninth floor, with a sweeping view of the Sandton skyline, looking down on most of the neighbouring businesses. This impressive sight adds to the prestige of this organisation, contributing to a slight air of aloofness. The interview room contained one medium-sized table that could seat eight people comfortably. The wooden unit at one end of the room contained awards and gifts the organisation had received over the preceding years. During the interviews, the door to the meeting room was closed to ensure privacy.

Access to conduct this study was granted by one of the executive managers, under the authorisation of the CEO, with the proviso that the company’s name would be withheld. Following the resignation of this executive manager, assistance in scheduling interviews with the participants was provided by the HR Director and the HR Administrator. Participants were selected according to the sampling criteria detailed in 3.2.2.1, below.
3.2.2 Sampling, data collection methods and processes

3.2.2.1 Sampling

The focus of the study dictated that the participants had to be members of FS Org’s senior management or executive management. Participation in the study was voluntary, ensuring that there was no researcher selection bias. Both men and women were interviewed, as the aim of the study was to understand the gendered features of the organisation and the sample could therefore not consist of women only. A breakdown of the participants’ demographics is provided in Table 3. In order to protect the identity of the participants, demographic factor grouping was used.

Table 3

Demographics of the Participant Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race¹</th>
<th>Tenure in years (as at June 2015)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

FS Org’s Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual was used for the documentary analysis. The results are reported together with a more detailed analysis of policies or procedures referred to during the participant interviews. This manual was deemed to be important because it contains documents that regulate the employer/employee relationship, and hence, had the potential to provide insight into the gendered features of the organisation.

3.2.2.2 Data collection method and process of data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data-collection method in the present study. This method was chosen because it would allow themes that were elicited in one round of interviews to be taken into the following rounds, enabling triangulation. Ayres (2008, p. 811) defined semi-structured interview as “a qualitative data collection strategy in which the

¹ Race is termed in accordance with the South African classification system for monitoring equity targets.
researcher asks informants a series of predetermined but open-ended questions.” In interviews, as was the case in the present study, the interviewer is the main “instrument” for collecting the data (Punch, 2006, p. 52).

The semi-structured interviews commenced with collecting biographical information on each participant, such as race, gender, age, marital status and number of children (if any). Thereafter, the interview questions clarified when the participants had commenced working at FS Org, their reasons for joining the organisation, and their reasons for remaining there. Subsequent questions were designed to extract information from the participants with respect to the organisational features that could have resulted in the phenomenon being studied. These questions were, however, modified as the data collection progressed in successive interviews, to follow the themes as they emerged in each interview round, to identify both the organisational features and any other common aspects that arose.

While the questions posed were amended for each round of interviews, in accordance with the themes that had emerged during previous interview rounds, common questions that were asked in the initial interviews were:

i. What attracted you to FS Org as an employer?
ii. What is it about FS Org that keeps you here?
iii. What would another organisation need to offer you to attract you to their organisation?

As the themes developed, the questions posed to participants evolved:

iv. Describe the culture at FS Org.
v. What influence did the current CEO have on your decision to accept the position offered to you/remain at FS Org?
vi. Why do you think there was such a high turnover of executive committee members when the current CEO assumed her role?

Every participant was asked the following question, irrespective of the round in which they were interviewed:

vii. Why do you think there is such a high representation of women at the executive level of FS Org?
All participants were assured of confidentiality prior to being interviewed. Data collection occurred over a period of seven months and included several rounds of semi-structured interviews. Reflections in the form of handwritten field notes were kept in a file. A second set of data was collected in the form of documents. The company’s Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual, containing 23 policies was provided by FS Org to the researcher for analysis.

3.2.3 Recording of data

The interviews were electronically recorded on a Dictaphone and then transcribed by a professional transcription company. The audio files and transcripts were uploaded into ATLAS.ti for analysis. Additional copies of the audio files and transcripts, as well as the field notes, were securely stored in electronic format.

3.2.4 Data analysis

3.2.4.1 Analysis approach

A Glaserian grounded theory approach was adopted, because it emphasises theory emergence from data, and is therefore in line with the process of retroduction, as embraced by critical realists. The first presentation of grounded theory was by Glaser and Strauss in their 1967 work *The discovery of grounded theory* (Goulding, 2007). Grounded theory aims to produce an understanding of the social processes that transpire within a particular context (Lansisalmi, Peiro, & Kivimaki, 2006). The theory evolves during the course of the research, and is developed through a systematic process of data collection and analysis (Goulding, 2009). The original guidelines laid down in the seminal work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) state that a developed theory should:

i. “enable prediction and explanation of behaviour;
ii. be useful in theoretical advances in sociology;
iii. be applicable in practice;
iv. provide a perspective on behaviour;
v. guide and provide a style for research on particular areas of behaviour; and
vi. provide clear enough categories and hypotheses so that crucial ones can be verified in present and future research” (Goulding, 2007, p. 43).
The theory produced by adopting a grounded theory approach is impermanent, in that it is limited by time and context, and open to being developed through future research. Such a theory may be either substantive, meaning that it evolves from work in a particular context and does not endeavour to extend beyond the study area, or it may be formal. Formal theory reaches beyond the study area to other situations (Goulding, 2007). It is important to note, however, that, while substantive theory does not have the scope of formal theory, at a conceptual level, it may have “important general implications and relevance, and become almost automatically a springboard or stepping stone to the development of a grounded formal theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 79).

The adoption of a grounded theory approach to the present study was appropriate, due to the limited knowledge of the anomaly being studied and the need to identify the potential factors that have resulted in this anomaly, in order to build theory. This phenomenon was limited in both time (the female representation at FS Org will change over time) and context (the current context of the organisation and financial services industry will also change over time). The present study therefore researched a particular event that was time- and context specific. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the theoretical sampling technique proposed by Punch (2005) was followed, allowing for collection and analysis of data, and then further investigation of emergent themes as they became evident.

### 3.2.4.2 Analysis process

The Glaserian approach views induction as the main practice in developing theory from data via empirical generalisation (Heath & Cowley, 2004). In the present study, the first step was to conduct a literature review, to ensure that the researcher was familiar with the existing body of knowledge. Thereafter, the process of theoretical sampling, open coding, constant comparison and memo writing was followed, to allow analysis of emergent themes. This practice aided in the construction of core categories, which were refined and used to develop theory. By allowing the emergent themes to surface, the researcher was able to identify possible events from the domain of the actual that occurred as a result of the mechanisms and powers in the domain of the real that could have resulted in the phenomenon under study, which was found in the domain of the empirical. Again, it is important to note that the process of retroduction was followed to uncover the mechanisms that had potentially resulted in the phenomenon.
The data from the interviews were thoroughly analysed by the researcher immersing herself in the data, from both a visual and an auditory perspective. The interview recordings were listened to, and the transcripts were read several times. The researcher then used ATLAS.ti to code the transcripts, highlighting themes that were emerging, while keeping the main research question in mind. Once analysed, the findings from the transcripts of the first round of interviews were used to modify the questions for the subsequent round of interviews. This process was continued until saturation was reached. The main themes were identified according to the groundedness of the codes, established during the analysis process. In addition to this, when codes were linked, the density of each assisted in ascertaining key themes that were emerging and could be investigated further. These categories were grouped and linked in a logical fashion to explain the phenomenon being researched.

ATLAS.ti was not used for the documentary analysis. Rather, a manual analysis process was followed, during which relevant sections of the policies were highlighted and noted. When analysing the HR manual, careful attention was paid to the wording used, gender referencing within the policies, and the aim of the policies.

### 3.3 Strategies to ensure research quality

Tracy (2010) presented a model for excellence in qualitative research. She proposed eight criteria: a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. The strategies to ensure the quality of the present research, based on Tracy’s model, are outlined below.

#### 3.3.1 Worthy topic

The topic investigated was an industry anomaly — a gendered organisation in which there was an unusually high number of women in senior positions in the traditionally male-dominated financial industry. The research topic met the criteria of being “relevant, timely, significant (and) interesting” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840) by studying an under-researched phenomenon.

#### 3.3.2 Rich rigour

Rigour is positively associated with the trustworthiness of research findings, in that the more rigorous the research process, the more trustworthy the findings will be (Saumure & Given, 2008). The sample in the present study was relatively small, and data collection continued
until data saturation occurred. Data saturation was identified when participants were confirming data that had been collected in previous interview rounds. In addition, by using grounded theory analysis, the researcher was able to delve into themes as they surfaced, encouraging depth and richness of data. Field notes were taken, which added to the richness of the data, providing context.

3.3.3 Sincerity and transparency

Sincerity is concerned with the honesty and authenticity of the researcher, as expressed through self-reflexivity (Gordon & Patterson, 2013), the research, and the audience, while transparency relates to the research process (Tracy, 2010). The practice of self-reflexivity is part of every aspect of qualitative research, from design through to data collection, data analysis, and the writing up of research findings, and is vital in gaining the trust of the sources from which the data are to be collected, which is fundamental to a study (Tracy, 2010).

The present researcher was acutely aware of the impact she could have on the unit of analysis, and that gaining the trust of the participants was essential for transparency. As with the criterion of rich rigour, the researcher’s field notes allowed for self-reflexion during the course of this study and contributed to transparency.

3.3.4 Credibility

Credibility is dependent on the trustworthiness of the research findings (Tracy, 2010) as well as the appropriateness of the research account (McGinn, 2010). This was achieved through the triangulation of data, using multiple sources and methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews with multiple participants and documentary analysis).

3.3.5 Resonance

Resonance is the ability of the researcher to influence and affect the audience (Tracy, 2010). The present study investigated an organisation that had attracted and retained more women at senior level than other organisations, in a traditionally male-dominated industry. It is believed that the research findings will not only provide valuable theory to organisations struggling to attract and retain women at these levels, but will also encourage further research in this field.
3.3.6 Significant contribution

Despite research being conducted on the barriers to women’s advancement in the workplace, including the concepts of the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, there is insufficient research on the factors that have contributed to the success of women at senior level. This study provides insight into such factors.

3.3.7 Ethical

Ethics are of fundamental importance in quality research (Tracy, 2010) and failure to conduct ethical research may result in the researcher losing integrity, the credibility of the research being reduced (Bell, 2008) and even litigation by those whose reputation may have been tarnished. The present study followed ethical procedures prescribed by the University of Johannesburg, used ethical practices (with continuous reflection on decisions taken during the course of the study and the recording of same in the researcher’s field notes), and displayed relational ethics in the researcher’s acute awareness of actions and decisions, including the consequences of the study for the participants. This ensured that the values inherent in ethical research were upheld, and that the data were safeguarded and presented in a manner that did not infringe upon the respect, dignity, and anonymity of the participants or organisation in which the research was conducted. Ethical clearance for this study was obtained after a presentation to the university’s Research Proposal Panel.

3.3.8 Meaningful coherence

Tracy (2010, p. 848) claimed that “studies that are meaningfully coherent eloquently interconnect their research design, data collection, and analysis with their theoretical framework and situational goals.” By following the proposed methodology, it is believed that the present study was able to uncover some of the features that disrupt traditional gendered behaviour.

3.4 Research ethics

“Ethical issues in social research are both important and often ambiguous” (Babbie & Mouton, 2003, p. 528). The most prominent ethical considerations were related to the participants and organisational data to which the researcher was granted access during this study.
In order to manage these considerations, this study was undertaken:

i. following the University of Johannesburg granting ethical clearance;
ii. with informed consent of all the study participants;
iii. ensuring absolute confidentiality of information disclosed, as well as anonymity of participants in the study (participants cannot be identified from any information disclosed in this study; when reporting on the sample, the participants’ ages were withheld and biographical data were grouped); and
iv. with honesty and integrity at all times.

3.5 Research risks and mitigation

This section discusses the risks associated with conducting this study, as well as the steps taken to mitigate such risks.

3.5.1 Availability of participants

The participants who were to be interviewed worked at the executive level of the organisation. A risk was identified that it may be difficult to secure a suitable interview time. The HR Assistant of the organisation was identified by the HR Director to assist with the scheduling of interviews. The researcher was also acutely aware that interviews may need to be rescheduled, and therefore anticipated the need for her own work diary to be flexible around these changes.

3.5.2 Topics that were ‘off-limits’ and the ‘toeing the party line’

When a study is exploratory in nature, the interview may touch on a sensitive topic that the participant would be uncomfortable discussing (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). During the introduction stage of each interview, the present researcher not only assured the participant of absolute confidentiality, but also stated that, if the participant did not wish to continue the topic of discussion, that would be respected, and the interviewer would proceed to the next topic.

This mitigation strategy was also adopted when the risk was identified that participants may ‘sugar coat’ their responses in order to ‘toe the party line’. In addition to this, by interviewing multiple participants, triangulation of data was possible, as well as the identification of instances where the participant may have lacked transparency. This allowed the researcher to
further investigate the topic in subsequent interviews. In addition to this, because the interviews and subsequent analysis occurred in rounds, the researcher was able to give continuous consideration to the entire body of data as it emerged.

3.5.3 Identification of organisation, study participants and third parties

The size of the participant group was small, and the organisation operated in a highly specialised field. There was a risk that the identities of the participants, third parties, and the organisation may be exposed. To mitigate this, participants were not referred to by name, pseudonym, nor number, but by the primary document number and line item as it appeared in ATLAS.ti. Therefore, when evidence is reported using quotations, these are referenced as follows: PD 4:48 (in brackets), the first number being the primary document number and the second the line item.

Names of third parties were removed in reporting, as were all identifying criteria such as gender (unless it was relevant, but without jeopardising the anonymity of the individual), age, and tenure.

In order to protect the identity of the organisation, it is referred to as “FS Org,” with its specialisation not identified, but simply referred to as “operating in the financial services industry”.

3.5.4 Expansion of the study’s boundaries

The risk of an expansion of the study’s boundaries was identified early in the planning stage. The exploratory nature of the study meant that the researcher had to follow the data as themes emerged from the interviews. Regular meetings and Skype sessions were held between the researcher and her supervisor, to ensure that the boundaries of the study that had been agreed upon were maintained.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research approach and strategy, as well as the processes of data collection and analysis. These were carefully selected to ensure rich data and results. The grounded theory approach was appropriate, due to the exploratory nature of the
study, and to identify potential mechanisms and powers in the domain of the real through the process of *retroduction* in order to build theory.

The following chapter details the reflections of the researcher that were captured in the field notes taken during the data collection phase of this study. The findings from these reflections are discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCHER’S REFLECTIONS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present some of my experiences, which were recorded in my field notes. These were not directly addressed during the semi-structured interviews; they surfaced as subtle hints, comments, or behaviour displayed by the participants. Insights that I documented in my field notes, discussed below, provide both context and richness to this study.

4.2 Context and overview

I now realise that I was somewhat naïve when embarking on this study. I had expected easy access to the participants, who would be transparent in their views — after all, my findings would be of value to the organisation, and the participants would therefore be eager to speak to me. I was soon disappointed. I struggled to secure interviews, and was forced to reorganise my own work days to accommodate rescheduled interview dates and times.

I felt quite intimidated upon arrival at FS Org, not only with respect to its prestige, but also to the audience I was there to meet — the executive committee members of a listed organisation that wielded great power in the financial sector. Having worked in financial services, I was in awe of this financial giant, and a little jealous of my friends who could claim employment there.

Now, looking back over my research journey, I can see that my perception of FS Org had certainly altered. While I still have enormous respect for the organisation and its contribution to the South African economy, the inner workings are now less of a closely guarded secret known only to those who work there. This is an organisation that has its share of challenges and celebrations, much like other organisations. The members of the executive committee are people (not super humans) with families and personal lives. They laugh, cry, and make mistakes. I must confess to being slightly disappointed that some of the magic I had perceived to surround this organisation was gone, due to my experiences there.

There are three experiences that proved the most notable during my interactions with the participants. These are discussed below.
4.3 Sense of self

My memorandums clearly show that my sense of self altered temporarily with each interview. After some interviews, I felt motivated and invigorated, convinced that my study was going to yield rich and valuable data, while other interviews made me want to apologise for taking up the valuable time of the participant. Upon reflection, this was clearly linked to comments made and undercurrents during the interviews.

Overall, my experiences with the female participants differed from those with the male participants. Comments by several of the female participants left me with the sense that I needed to get through the interview as quickly as possible, but with the male participants, there was no rush to finish.

One interview participant kept me waiting for 15 minutes in the reception area, and did not offer an apology for doing so. This same participant constantly (and obviously) glanced at her watch for the duration of the interview, which had to be shortened, due to the late start. I found this quite unnerving, and spent time that same afternoon reflecting on the experience and questioning whether my interview questions were relevant, as well as trying to understand why this experience had left me feeling dejected.

Another participant admitted that, when the interview with me had been scheduled, her first thought was: “Do I have to?” This comment did not have as much of an impact on me as it could have, because I had spent time reflecting on what I had set out to achieve, and approached the remainder of the interviews with the view of: “What I am doing is important, and I’m not going to waste a minute of the interview time.”

The male participants, however, did not make me feel rushed or that they had something more urgent to do. One male participant suggested that we talk in a quiet area of the coffee shop, rather than in the booked interview room. Another male participant, when the end of the time for the scheduled interview was approaching, told me not to worry, as he did not have anything else planned for that afternoon, so he could sit and talk to me as long as I needed. These experiences reinforced a positive sense of self. During these interviews, the participants they were fully engaged and focused on the interview.
These experiences and the impact on me personally made me consider the concepts of time and gender.

4.4 Time, power and gender

I am a single parent of two children, aged 13 and 12. I have been a single parent for six years while trying to forge a career and complete my studies. I often joke with friends and even my children that I am a “have you” Mum, meaning that I find myself asking: “Have you brushed your teeth? Have you completed your homework? Have you made your bed?” Although I share custody of my children with their father, mine is their primary residence, and I am their primary caregiver.

I have had a few moments of frustration when my children come home from their father’s house and tell me that they had had a fantastic weekend of pizza, ice-skating, and go-karting. It is easy to play ‘Superdad’ when you don’t have to do it all week,” I find myself thinking. The expectations I have of myself — holding down a full-time job while studying and caring for two children — are not uncommon. Several of my female friends are doing the same.

Thoughts such as these came back to me when I was thinking about the interviews I conducted at FS Org. Why was it that the female participants (largely) were more pressed for time than the male participants? Is it that, as women, we feel that we have to do it all — contribute to our chosen industry and care for our families? Not that the male participants did not care for their families, but in none of the interviews was it confirmed that the male participants were the primary caregivers.

What is the impact of this behaviour by women on our families and colleagues? When I was interviewing some of the female participants, I was left feeling dejected and undervalued, due to the obvious time pressure (voiced or overtly hinted at). When considering this, I wondered whether this is how I make my children feel when I am trying to accomplish what I feel I need to in any one day.

This led me to consider whether I was an unwilling participant in some sort of power play into which I was being drawn. Some of the women who I interviewed left me with the feeling that they had more important things to do, that effectively, there was a balance of power in their favour, because I needed them more than they needed me. I must stress, however, that this was
not the case with all the women I interviewed. The men made me feel as though I had their full focus for the duration of the interview, and that they wanted to participate and give me their thoughts, because, in order for my study to have meaning, I needed honest input. I had to consider then, whether time is used differently by men and women to denote power. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.5 Reporting dilemmas

During the data analysis phase, there were points at which I was aware of the potential for subjectivity in my interpretation. This section highlights these reporting dilemmas, and briefly outlines the feelings of unease that I worked through in each instance.

Three participants’ interviews led to reporting dilemmas. The first participant, a woman, referred to herself as “a previously disadvantaged black woman” when explaining her experiences in the working world. Having grown up in South Africa and having lived through the country’s transformation from apartheid to a democracy, I often find myself gaping when well-educated, financially sound, non-white South Africans claim to be previously disadvantaged. Can someone who came from a wealthy family and attended a private school claim to have been previously disadvantaged because he or she is African, Coloured, or Indian?

This was the predicament with which I was faced when analysing this participant’s transcript. I spent a lot of time on this transcript, largely because I was wrestling with my own work experiences in this regard.

Superficial employment equity measures enforced in organisations are referred to as window dressing — where a person is placed in an organisational position with the intention of influencing the employment equity reporting numbers. I am not suggesting that this candidate or any others in positions of influence within organisations are not both capable and deserving of their roles. I am fortunate to have worked with and reported to a diverse group of people in my career thus far. My dilemma with this participant was that she certainly did not appear to be disadvantaged, and yet claimed the title.

This forced me to consider, not that she had come from a wealthy family and had attended a private school, but what her experiences had been while forging a path for herself in her chosen profession. It is quite possible that she had experienced instances of unfair treatment due to her race, either in terms of promotion, salary increases, or her perceived value-add.
The second interview that produced a reporting dilemma was with a male participant. This individual was charming, good natured, and spoke his mind. The predicament I experienced with this participant was in determining which data were relevant to the study in terms of adding value, and then questioning whether my decision to exclude other data was sound or because he was an affable person, and I did not want any negativity associated with him.

This participant was very open to discussing his experiences at FS Org and why, in his opinion, there were so many women at the executive level. Had he not been so charismatic, he would have instantly been labelled *sexist*. I discussed the inclusion of some of this participant’s data at length with my study supervisor, to ensure that I was being true to the aim of the study, and that I was reporting both accurately and ethically, which I believe I did.

The third participant with whom I found myself in a reporting dilemma was a woman. During the interview, I got the sense that she was giving me answers fit for a public relations officer, and, although I had validated certain information with other participants, she provided me with a less controversial explanation of the same event. I was left with the belief that, while she was not necessarily lying, she was sugar-coating some of her answers. This necessitated further validation with other participants, and long nights debating which data I could accept at face value and which data should be reported with caution. I believe that the data I have included in my findings are valid, and that I have reported discrepancies in opinions and perceptions of the participants, when relevant.

### 4.6 Conclusion

This short chapter outlined the three types of experiences that had the greatest impact on me and caused much reflection during both the data collection- and analysis phases of this study, as well as when I was writing up my findings. Although the incidents that led to the identification of these three themes were subtle, they provided valuable insight into the highest level of management of FS Org, as well as potential differences between men and women at this level. The reflections discussed in this chapter were integrated into Chapter 5 as part of the findings of this minor dissertation.
CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings from the various data analysis phases (following each data collection event) of the research study will be deliberated. This chapter commences with a background to FS Org, followed by a discussion on how the organisation is perceived by the public and the executive managers within the organisation. The theme of CEO leadership is then considered, with both power and personal style being identified and discussed as sub-categories of this theme.

This chapter then highlights the theme of transformation and the CEO’s awareness of the need to transform FS Org. Recruiter bias and the network of the CEO are discussed as sub-categories within this theme, followed by a detailed examination of the culture at FS Org as perceived by the study participants and a consideration of the gendered behaviour exhibited by some of the executive committee members. The findings from the documentary analysis are detailed with specific reference to FS Org’s Maternity Policy and Working Hours’ Policy. This chapter ends with a consideration of the findings from Chapter 4 — Researcher’s Reflections.

In keeping with the ethical practice of securing the confidentiality of both the participants and the organisation, as discussed in Chapter 3, participants’ direct quotations will be referenced using the primary document (PD) number, followed by the line location as found in ATLAS.ti.

5.1 Background to the organisation

FS Org operated within the South African financial services industry, an industry dominated by men — mainly white men, which reinforces the perception that the financial industry lacks diversity. This perception is widely held, and was reinforced during this study, with at least two study participants providing supporting comments:

“… a very elitist environment … it’s old, it’s white, and it’s male” (PD 2:43).

”… in the banking environment … my skin colour and my gender were against me … very male-dominated” (PD 10:48; PD 10:50).

Within this environment, FS Org is an anomaly, in that, at the time of the present study, 70% of its executive committee were women, and 30% were Black women. Although, in recent
years, FS Org did not have a male-only executive committee, the representation of women on the executive committee increased substantially after the current female CEO was appointed.

Several themes emerged from the data that were collected during the participant interviews. These themes yielded abstract conceptual categories, which are discussed in detail in this chapter.

The discussion commences with the public perception of the organisation, as well as the opportunities the organisation creates for the executives working there, before delving into the organisational leadership, the drive for transformation, and the participants’ view of gender in the organisation. The chapter concludes with the findings of the documentary analysis of FS Org’s Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual.

5.2 The organisation and its context

In this section, the organisation as viewed by the public collective, as well as by the individuals at executive level, is discussed.

5.2.1 FS Org as an employer of choice

Failure to attract and retain skilled talent is a key threat to potential business growth. PricewaterhouseCoopers’s (PwC’s) 18th Annual Global CEO Survey found that 90% of CEOs in Africa viewed the lack of key skills as a major threat to their organisations’ growth prospects (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015). In South Africa, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Bonginkosi Emmanuel Nzimande, gazetted a List of Occupations in High Demand (2014) recognising the shortage of certain skills, and took steps towards addressing the problem. FS Org was no different, often struggling to fill positions in the organisation, as identified by one study participant:

“…but sometimes, when you [are] desperate for skills, you don’t have the luxury of finding the right candidate. So there’s [sic] definitely efforts, and if you look at some of the positions — yeah, they just don’t get filled” (PD 12:219).

During the interviews, it became clear that, although FS Org as a whole was struggling to fill certain positions, it had a significant talent pool: “…we are able, today, to attract a very different talent pool than we had the opportunity [to] even five years ago” (PD 11:186).
Probing this “different talent pool” further unearthed the theme of the public perception of FS Org and how this had contributed to attracting more skilled talent.

During the interviews, three key aspects emerged that had made FS Org a more attractive employer. These aspects are discussed hereunder.

i. The uniqueness of FS Org. This primarily centred on the type of work the organisation did, its brand, and the business transactions it concluded. Although the organisation was in the financial services industry, it operated in a niche market, affording its employees a specialised working experience. One participant explained this uniqueness by likening the move to FS Org from a prior employer (who was also in the financial sector) to moving to a completely different industry: “…it is a very unique business … even though I was in financial services … I might as well have been in mining, as far as I am concerned” (PD 9:78).

ii. Prestige of working for FS Org. Due to the unique nature of the business offering and the prestige of working for the organisation, participants identified that they had increased access to networks and more opportunities to network and influence:

“…just even access to the … pipeline of CAs [chartered accountants] in this country … I would never get access to them and to be able to address them, had I not been at [FS Org]” (PD 2:37).

“This prestige had contributed to FS Org becoming an employer of choice, and while many departments within the organisation were struggling to fill specific roles, one study participant noted a substantial increase in access to suitable candidates:
“If I go back 15 years, no-one wanted to work at [FS Org]. So, recently … we have become a sort of a preferred employer … you know, the brand and what [FS Org] stands for is so valuable out there, and people … always look at [FS Org] and say, ‘Wow, you work at [FS Org]’... I remember it was an absolute struggle for me to find CAs to come and work for me. They queue up; if one of my corporate finance officers ducked today, I will have ten CAs wanting to come and work. I’ve got a choice” (PD 6:166).

iii. A woman as CEO. This particular aspect came through very strongly from the women who were interviewed. Although the first two aspects, discussed under (i) and (ii) above, are not unique to FS Org, the organisation became much more attractive to women when a woman took over the role of CEO. Of the women on the executive committee, 70% joined the organisation when the current CEO assumed her responsibilities or soon thereafter. This factor was highlighted by several study participants as one reason why the organisation had become an attractive employer to women, thereby increasing the pool of talent from which the organisation could draw. One participant stated:

“I think the moment there is a female CEO and a couple of other senior execs, then other females get attracted to that organisation, because the message, the symbol, is that this is an organisation that promotes females … and people look up and say, ‘Oh, all these females are at [FS Org]. I am pretty sure that is the place I would like to be, and I will put my CV forward’ ” (PD 10:125).

These three aspects emerged as key to having provided FS Org access to a talent pool that contained highly skilled men and women in an industry that lacks gender diversity.

5.2.2 Organisational offerings and opportunities

The public perception of FS Org, as previously discussed, allowed for a greater pool from which to draw talent. During the interviews, some significant themes that had contributed to the participants’ decision to accept the offer of employment from FS Org emerged. Although this aspect links with the organisation as a preferred employer, it is discussed separately, as it relates to individual choice, and not necessarily the public perception.

Working for FS Org provided the benefits of greater networking and access to both businesses and individuals, which may have proved challenging in another organisation. In addition to
this, the impact of particular roles, coupled with the opportunity to influence, build, and contribute to the local economy, were key themes that emerged as advantages of working for FS Org, as stated by one participant: “…it offered me an ability to have a high impact at a local level” (PD 2:35). Another participant stated that FS Org offered guidance to organisations that directly influence the South African economy:

“…we influence the budget and what happens on the budgets because they [National Treasury and Governor of the South African Reserve Bank] come and they ask … we are seen as an independent force … that’s got a lot to do with how we actually always want to do the right thing, you know, do the right thing for South Africa and to grow South Africa” (PD 6:104).

A sense of altruism emerged during the interviews. This was, however, clearly linked to working for FS Org, as the organisation afforded these employees the opportunity to make an impact on and influence the local space to an extent possibly not offered by other organisations in the financial sector, due to its sphere of influence: “…here you are, sitting in an organisation that has a bit of a national rumour to it. There is a responsibility beyond just making profit” (PD 5:105).

Two participants stated that the opportunity to effect change within FS Org was an attractive factor. One participant (PD 2:37) commented that there was a sense of excitement when the CEO explained “what a mess” FS Org was in, because this participant was passionate about transforming teams. Another participant described FS Org as “a change environment” (PD 7:90), and stated that: “…in the new environment, we are driving integration more, and alignment and collaboration, but independent of the CEO” (PD 7:108).

The theme of effecting change and having the opportunity to influence, both the organisation and the local economy, were cited as attractive features by participants.

5.3 The CEO as leader

The direct influence that the CEO exerted and the impact of this emerged as a very strong theme. The authority to make executive decisions was viewed as both necessary and problematic, while the impact of her personal approach and interactions with her team was largely regarded as a positive factor, strongly influencing both talent attraction and retention.
5.3.1 Power

The theme of power emerged early on in the data collection, and continued to develop as each participant was interviewed. One participant’s perception was that, when the current CEO took over, she exerted her power by cancelling bonuses for the executive team, as she did not believe that these were performance-based:

“She fundamentally changed away from a paternalistic culture … one of the first things she did, with a great amount of anger directed at her, was she took away everybody’s bonuses, because we just got [these]; everybody got a bonus and, it wasn’t performance-based” (PD 7:38).

This particular incident was, however, disputed. When this example of executive decision-making was put to another participant, the response was:

“No, no, no. I think that, perhaps, is slightly misquoted. What we had is at the [time] that she took over … a big impairment on the income statement … and the recommendation, which we supported at the time, was that the EXCO bonuses be cut … because of the impairment that hit the balance sheet … so, actually, that was a recommendation that was supported and went to the board … so it wouldn’t have been her sole recommendation” (PD 11:96-102).

Although the details around this particular incident were disputed, the action did indicate a level of power held and exerted by the CEO in order to achieve a specific outcome — either to prevent the undeserved awarding of bonuses, or to rectify the impairment on the balance sheet. Irrespective of the reasoning behind the cancellation of the executive committee bonuses, these were cut as a direct result of a decision or recommendation by the new CEO, possibly based on her sense of duty and/or ethics.

Other examples of the exertion of power by the CEO were cited. There had been a high turnover of executive committee members since the current CEO assumed the role. At the time of this study, only 40% (including the current CEO) of the previous executive committee remained. The balance of 60% consisted of either new external appointees or employees who had been promoted to the committee. Of the senior staff (both male and female) who had resigned within the timeframe of the current CEO assuming her responsibilities to the time of
this study, some had resigned voluntarily, and some separations had been effected through a financial settlement. One participant pointed out:

“Look, you’re the CEO, you can make any call. At the end of the day … it’s a function of money … if you’re not happy with individuals, put a number on the table… [as the individual you either] accept it, move on or fight it and something else happens” (PD 12:181).

The theme of power also emerged during a discussion on recruitment of executives. In some instances, a formal recruitment process had been followed, during which suitable applicants were interviewed by various executive committee members prior to a final decision being taken. In other instances, however, the CEO had made the decision in isolation, without consulting executive committee members. This was viewed by one participant as an abuse of power and a problematic disregard for process, because of the message it sent:

“… if I place a leadership role in my team, I really try and expose [the potential candidate] to a wider group prior to appointing. I don’t alone make that selection… I, of course, need to be happy, but I would get the rest of my management team involved … whereas all of those direct placements were sort of … informed, ‘I’ve gone and made that placement,’ … and, every time, I have gone like, ‘Jees, okay, that was quick’ or ‘that was from left field’… firstly, don’t you want to, especially if you are trying to drive a collaborative culture … for the sake of the message … to get a brilliant group of EXCO involved in that appointment … [it] has been actually a little bit problematic in a sense … it is [sic]now created this thing of: [our CEO] appoints people that are her friends, and, you know, I have had to do quite a bit of work in my team to sort of manage that ... [to show] it is not like that” (PD 9:194).

Another participant, however, viewed this as well within the management mandate of the CEO, even though it may necessitate damage control:

“You’re the CEO, you’ve got to run a business. If you see an opportunity with an opening of an individual you feel is competent for that role, fair enough … if you find individuals out there who feel there’s a great fit for where you want to take the organisation to now. Is that wrong? I think it’s a call that you make … now, if you have to do damage control. We’re in a corporate world ... if you think this is ‘lovey
dovey’ business, it’s not. You [sic] got to face reality. You come to work to have fun, to grow yourself, and see where you can take the business” (PD 12:181).

It is common cause that all CEOs have power and choose to exercise their power in different ways, depending on their leadership style. The examples cited above indicate that FS Org’s CEO adopted an autocratic style of decision-making in certain circumstances. This autocratic style places emphasis on power and control over others, and is associated with the masculine stereotype (Powell, 2011). In addition to this, consultative behaviour is closely associated with the feminine stereotype (Powell, 2011) and a woman exhibiting behaviour that is associated with the masculine stereotype may be viewed with disapproval.

Irrespective of the perceptions of how the EXCO positions were filled, the appointments had been made in a manner that was contrary to the organisation’s recruitment process as detailed in the Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual. Exceptional circumstances, during which the recruitment process need not be applied, require the approval of the CEO and consultation with the Human Resources department — when there is a “critical need for the candidate’s skills.” It therefore appears that the CEO had acted in an autocratic manner in appointing women to her EXCO, which is contrary to the organisation’s Employee Acquisition and Development process, of which the executives are listed as stakeholders. The CEO’s leadership style is discussed in more detail in Section 6.5.

It is not possible to determine whether the CEO’s particular use of power aided or hindered the high number of women at the executive level at FS Org. While she may have used her power to appoint women, thereby increasing the number of women, her actions may have displeased others, and could potentially have led to some women not taking up employment with FS Org or resigning. It fell outside the scope of the present study to make a determination in this regard.

5.3.2 Personal style

The CEO was described as someone who takes an active personal interest in her staff and the business:

“…[she] spends a huge amount of time on the floors, walking, talking, involved, going to meetings, holding town halls, working in the teams, not interfering, but being there
as a support, and weekends too ... if she knows there’s [sic] big projects on the go, or people or the IT team … doing maintenance, she will pop in for a couple of hours on a Saturday, happy to walk around, buy somebody a cup of coffee and chat. So, she is very open in that sense, and visible and wanting to hear what is happening in the organisation, and to share” (PD 5:113).

The CEO was referred to as:

“… very smart … highly, highly intelligent … [with] an interest in a wide, diverse set of topics, and she is also very street-smart. She makes sure that she is exposed to ground-breaking, intellectually stimulating industry-type initiatives, or she gets involved in things that make a difference” (PD 10:123).

It was reported that the CEO’s personal approach had been a factor in several participants’ decision to join FS Org. One participant commented that he joined FS Org due to an acquisition that had started off under FS Org’s previous CEO as “… a hostile bid … it quickly turned to a friendly acquisition or merger…” (PD 5:47) when the current CEO took over the leadership role mid-way through the deal. This same participant stated that the current CEO was “very” influential in his decision to remain at FS Org once the acquisition had been completed. She would spend time with this participant, having “… a number of one-on-one lunches and discussions around the future, personal and also business...” (PD 5:53). Another participant had been recruited by the CEO when they both attended a panel on a non-business-related matter. Again, it was the CEO’s personal approach and time spent with the individual that were key factors in this participant’s decision to join FS Org.

There was clearly great respect for the CEO, due to both her intellectual brilliance and her personal style when relating to her team. It was felt that communication throughout the business (both formal and informal) had improved since she had assumed the leadership role. She was described as someone who could discuss a wide range of topics, from economics and politics to cycling and running, often posting jokes or items of interest for the WhatsApp group created for the executive team. She was cited by some of the executive team members as the primary reason why they were still at FS Org. One participant commented: “… if I wasn’t working for her, it would certainly be something that would give me pause to think about wanting to stay” (PD 5:57).
Another stated:

“It baffles me how someone can spend [so long] here and be so different and so encouraging of change than most people in this organisation or in the industry… I don’t know how she does it, but it’s very exciting for me. And that’s what keeps me here, to be honest” (PD 2:49).

Early in her career, the CEO was identified, along with two other staff members (one female and one male) as a future leader of the organisation. She was described as a very intelligent and driven individual, and although the possibility was raised that she (and the other two staff members identified) had to prove themselves, it was denounced as being related solely to gender. One participant (who herself was identified as a future leader) felt that they had been hand-picked by the CEO at that time, despite their youth, and that they had had a drive to prove that he had not made an error in judgement:

“I think we were all so young at the time that we were appointed in those positions, and, therefore, I think, we probably had more to prove to show that we deserved it … show that the opportunity he gave us was well deserving [sic]… think about it … he did take a reasonable risk. We are in our early 30s… I think he recognised the potential, and we really, really wanted to make sure that people didn’t say ‘… [he] made a massive judgement in error.’ Because he had faith in us, we wanted to deliver on it… I think the ‘women’ angle was there, but it’s also because we were young, and it was … quite a change from the philosophy of previous, how people did things” (PD 11:192).

Another female participant, who was relatively new to the organisation, did not believe that the CEO had to prove she was capable, saying “…I don’t think, in [her] case, it was that she had something to prove. I think she just had a lot to offer and was ambitious, and she wanted to make a contribution” (PD 10:121).

5.4 Transformation

During the course of the data collection and analysis, the theme of transformation at FS Org in terms of gender and race, as well as the need for diversity to achieve the vision of FS Org, surfaced.
Each participant was asked for his or her view on why there were so many women at executive level at FS Org. One male participant felt that the CEO did not have “an agenda” to target and employ women, but had made a conscious effort to “bring in diverse points of view, and, often, those happen to be held by women…” (PD 5:97).

This view was echoed by another male study participant when asked whether the CEO was deliberately targeting women. He responded: “No, I don’t see it’s there … maybe if you look at the numbers, the numbers point otherwise, but I don’t see that…” (PD 12:229). When probed further, the possibility of recruiter bias emerged, as well as the gender composition of the CEO’s network.

5.4.1 Recruiter bias

A female participant commented that:

“… I've looked at different kinds of structures and teams … often, a female head will have more females in her division. So, I think it’s kind of ‘like attracts like,’ you know. You kind of hire the person that’s [sic] like you…” (PD 11:248).

Another participant confirmed that, in her experience “… people hire in their likeness” (PD 10:50). This was validated by several others during subsequent interviews. However, one participant believed that the CEO was targeting women for a period of time, in order to bring greater diversity to the executive team, which was male-dominated in the early days of her tenure: “…I think, for a time, she was, but I don’t think she is now” (PD 11:180).

One participant raised an interesting point, that the CEO is “…certainly gender aware … she will look very strongly at how women are treated, and she likes to see women get ahead” (PD 10:105). This then raised the question whether the recruiter bias with respect to gender was, in fact, a deliberate act on the part of the CEO. This was quickly dispelled, however, as assurances were given by participants that the high number of women at executive level was not “by design” (PD 6:120).

Further data collection indicated that the CEO was focused on transforming the organisation in terms of making it more diverse, due to the benefits of having diverse teams, as stated by several participants:
“A general principle, a very simplistic principle, is you have a diverse group of highly qualified people, and they manage to work together. You are going to [do] better than having ten women or ten males or ten black guys or ten white women…” (PD 5:107).

“I’ve only seen teams grow with diversity … you can’t have the same things and expect growth…” (PD 2:59).

This is in line with FS Org’s Employment Equity Policy, which states: “Effective diversity management will result in more innovative solutions to problems, greater opportunities and service excellence.” According to this policy, the CEO has the responsibility “to lead and champion Employment Equity initiatives.”

The data then points to the CEO targeting individuals with particular characteristics (in addition to competence), to improve diversity, in order to transform the organisation. With respect to gender transformation, initially, this may have been deliberate, but the data clearly show that the drive for diversity was not at the expense of skills and performance, and that the ability to perform the role and contribute value to the organisation were the most important considerations when making appointments at executive level, as asserted by a participant: “…if [women] came number one for the position, they would get the job. So, merit has certainly been an underlying criteria [sic] in how she makes her appointments” (PD 5:97).

5.4.2 CEO’s network

One participant, in response to the question why there were so many women at the executive level at FS Org, commented that it “just happened,” because they had “been fortunate enough to find lots of [sic] high-powered women” (PD 11:180). This was an intriguing comment — how were these women found? Further probing during subsequent interviews raised the possibility that the CEO’s network comprised more women than men:

“… [she] has been particularly successful at attracting other females to the EXCO … whether that is just her network happens to be female” (PD 9:106).

“…I think it is her network. I don’t think she is deliberately targeting women, but I think she is deliberately looking for people who are energetic, dynamic, and deliver” (PD 10:85).
“Lots of [sic] women come to talk to her … I think she attracts people of same characteristics … high-performing, strong females… I think it’s just because of that interaction. You end up having exposure to more really smart, high-powered women” (PD 11:180).

Whether the CEO’s network consisted of more women than men is difficult to determine; however, it certainly is a perception and should be considered as a possible factor in explaining the increased appointment of women to FS Org’s executive committee.

The CEO and members of the executive committee were acutely aware of transformation and that it should be driven from the top down. When commenting on the lack of men in the department for which one participant was responsible, the participant commented: “I’ve got to balance out my gender” (PD 2:65). This participant, with reference to the racial and gender composition of a successful team, also stated that the “offline rule” of “you need one of each” (PD 2:69) is a discussion that is often held with the CEO, to ensure that the team is sufficiently diverse. This need to transform was well understood by the study participants, with one participant stating:

“… if you start getting your race transformation right, it just sets the tone. If it looks like everyone is still lily white, then it is okay to appoint lily white. It follows … for gender transformation … it is the example that you set” (PD 9:206).

There was, however, a sense that, while transformation was occurring, it was slow, and that it was taking too long to cascade through to the other levels within the organisation. One participant noted that “… for some people who are leaving … the transformation agenda is too slow, so younger people come in and then leave…” (PD 7:118). This was echoed by another participant, who stated that “… the pace of transformation has been too slow. The difficulty is, because we are a small organisation and the turnover in executives isn’t that high … it is quite difficult to transform at pace at the senior levels” (PD 10:115).

While it is acknowledged that these comments on transformation refer to transformation in terms of both race and gender and are therefore outside of the scope of this study, documentary evidence indicates that the number of black women, between 2012 and 2014, had remained the same at junior management level (46%), had increased by only 3% (from 17% to 20%) at
middle management level, and had decreased by 3.75% (from 9.75% to 6%) at the executive level (confidential company report).

This supports the view of the participants that the rate of transformation within FS Org was too slow.

5.5 Organisational culture and gendered speak

The culture at FS Org has changed since the current CEO assumed her role. One participant commented that the culture had been one that was paternalistic and sexist. Stories of sexist behaviour towards women that had left them “scarred by the sexism and gender discrimination here…” (PD 7:114) as well as regular visits to what were termed “gentlemen’s clubs” emerged (PD 7:46-48).

When examples of this behaviour were put to another participant, the response was: “…having been here for… [more than four]… years and having worked very long hours on large-scale projects, that was definitely the case, and it has absolutely changed [since the new CEO took over]” (PD 10:98-103 Leila).

In terms of the current culture, what emerged during the interviews was that the executive team is blind to gender and race:

“I was not wired that way… I’m completely colourless…” (PD 2:44).

“It has nothing to do with gender. It doesn’t even cross my mind” (PD 5:121).

“…in London, they have the same as the … King Code … at least 20% of your boards must be female… I said to them … ‘Are you out of your minds?’ … I never, ever looked at a guy or a girl in work as a guy or a girl; they were always just colleagues” (PD 6:150).

“I can’t see that anyone is really gender-specific or colour-specific. At that level, look, you’re there to do a job…” (PD 12:235).

The sense that colleagues are judged on competence, irrespective of gender or race, came through very strongly:
“…there’s absolutely no distinction between whether you’re male or female. If you do the job, you get the kudos, you get the bonus. It doesn’t matter who you are (PD 6: 176).

“…when you are dealing with a colleague and you are professional, whether that person is black or white or male or female, as long as they can do the job and [the CEO] has been clear to make sure everybody is there on merit and continues to perform” (PD 5:107).

“…[our CEO] is very strongly focused on meritocracy … you have to deliver and she is demanding, in the right … in a positive way, and she is not going to accept non-delivery, and so that is her primary focus” (PD 10:115).

A very clear example of competence irrespective of gender or race was given by one participant. Under the previous CEO, there was a black woman on the executive committee who, according to the participant being interviewed, was not performing. When the current CEO took over, this particular individual left the organisation. A black woman was appointed as a replacement, who was “exceptionally competent and doing a fabulous job, and I am very pleased about that, because I think that … people do create a perception that this is race-based, when it is actually just output-based” (PD 10:113). The replacement of an under-performer with a high-performing individual of the same race and gender, supports the participants’ view that individual capability, not race and gender, is the deciding factor for appointment at executive level.

The sense is that this is strongly driven by the CEO:

“… I don’t think she sees colour one way or the other. She sees the importance of transforming” (PD 10:115).

Part of this transformation process had been to recruit those who were described as strong women who were independent thinkers:

“…we’re a bunch of quite strong … strong-minded women” (PD 2:57).
“I don’t toe the line. I’m not good at toeing the line… I don’t do what … anybody wants me to do. I do what’s right for the organisation, in a creative and innovative way” (PD 7:62).

One participant, however, had a gendered view on the behaviour of some of his female colleagues:

“…sometimes I feel that my colleagues have a little bit of a men’s disease. What I mean by ‘men’s disease’ is they are trying to prove that they are just as good as a man or just as tough as a man, and I have to sit them down and say, ‘Hey, you don’t have to prove anything, you are good enough as you are. Relax’ ” (PD 6:176).

Another participant, however, had a different view, stating: “I think that the type of women that [sic] are around the table are as ambitious, as capable as men, and, in some … in many ways, as aggressive … they are equally aggressive” (PD 10:80).

The difference between men’s and women’s interactions was noted by one male participant, claiming that men will discuss and settle a situation, whereas women will not move on as quickly: “… I got the sense that, sometimes, there is an argument, … when female members were involved … then there’s a wider, longer-term issue that’s held on to” (PD 12:247).

This was in contrast to a female participant who recounted a situation in which she overheard one of the organisation’s shareholders comment: “The girls are taking over, aren’t they?” She stated that she

“…didn’t choose to take it in a negative way at all. It’s just a cute old man saying something. But, I’m sure one of my colleagues would actually get very upset with that, but I’m very thick-skinned that way” (PD 2:78).

This same participant also claimed that “…some of my colleagues would get upset if someone called them a “chick.” I don’t even think about it; I wouldn’t get upset” (PD 2:72). This indicates that this participant does not necessarily exhibit the behaviour expected of the male participant, i.e. that his female colleagues tend not to move on as quickly as his male colleagues.
One participant did refer to his colleagues as “chicks,” and to the weekly executive committee meeting as “the henhouse,” but added that he was only joking, and that discriminating against a colleague in terms of gender was foreign to him:

“I often make jokes about ‘the henhouse’ and ‘the chicks,’ but I can’t for the life of me … it is so far out of my brain having to employ somebody and to obviously go for the male; it’s just a foreign concept to me. I can’t understand how there can be discrimination like that in the workplace… I can’t understand that you can do the same job in a bank and the male will be paid more. I can’t — it’s so foreign to me … and I know it is still absolutely prevalent, specifically in banks, that there is a hierarchy and the male gets further than the female; he gets paid more” (PD 6:164).

Both these examples indicate that, although the participants claimed to be blind to race and gender, and agreed that discrimination for arbitrary reasons is wrong, there were undercurrents of gendered speak during interactions, which were dismissed as being of a gendered nature, because these were either very subtle or considered a joke.

When probing the behaviour and reactions of women when faced with a gendered situation, one participant revealed that FS Org’s executive committee had recently undergone the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality inventory, with the results indicating that all the women were extroverts and the men introverts. When asked to describe the characteristics found in the typical female executive committee member of FS Org, this participant responded: “… extroverted, self-motivated, highly driven, building successful teams, and, I’d say, collaborative” (PD 11:124). The implication was that the female members of the executive committee were relatively unaffected by gendered interactions, due to their personalities.

The findings of the theme of organisational culture and gendered speak suggests that there is a gendered view (not only by men) of men and women within the executive ranks of FS Org, and while the culture has changed drastically from one that was “paternalistic and autocratic” (PD 7:36), there are still noteworthy instances of gender stereotyping by both men and women.

The themes that emerged during data collection and analysis, strongly indicated that there were several features of FS Org that encouraged the female study participants to accept employment there. The prestige and uniqueness of working for FS Org and the subsequent opportunities to effect change both in the organisation and in the South African economy because of its standing
in the financial industry, proved attractive. Having a woman as CEO was viewed in a positive light by female study participants and influenced some participants’ views of the organisation to one that was more gender inclusive, despite the instances of gendered stereotyping displayed by both men and women in the organisation.

The CEO’s leadership style, use of power, recruiter bias and the gendered make up of her network were cited as possible reasons for the high number of women at executive management level. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.

5.6 Documentary analysis

Upon requesting specific policies that had been referred to during the semi-structured interviews, FS Org offered the entire Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual for analysis. At the time of writing up the findings of this study, this manual was in the process of being updated, but the update was still in draft form. The manual that was analysed was dated April 2005, and had been reviewed in September 2007.

The manual is an inclusive one, citing as stakeholders the employees, management (including executives), the HR Committee, the management board, and statutory institutions. The intention of the manual is to contribute towards FS Org’s strategic intent, striving “towards an environment where people feel valued.” Ownership of the document rests with the Human Resources Department, and the document is reviewed by FS Org’s Learning and Development Department.

The employees of FS Org are referred to as either “staff” or “employees,” with pronouns to denote both genders, i.e. “his/her.” When gender pronouns are used, there is equal importance placed on each, so that no one gender is referred to in relation to another. Best practices contained within the policies do not differentiate between the treatment of men and women; both genders having equal access to training, recognition schemes, and incentive schemes. Performance management and disciplinary processes are gender neutral, in that there is no differentiation between men and women in the application of these policies and processes.

On first reading, the Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual of FS Org appears to be gender neutral. On closer reading, however, FS Org’s Maternity Policy and Hours of Work
Policy are clear examples of Bendl’s (2008) gender subtext of the ideal worker being male. These two policies are discussed below.

5.6.1 Maternity policy

The maternity policy is the only policy that differentiates between the gender of employees. Female employees are granted four months’ consecutive maternity leave with full pay. Should the baby be stillborn, the maternity leave is reduced to six weeks from the date of the stillbirth. The implication is that, as the primary caregiver, the mother needs additional time to care for and bond with her baby. New fathers or life partners are entitled to five days’ leave with full pay from the date of the birth of the baby. While this policy takes into consideration life partners and new fathers, it serves to reinforce the role of the woman as caregiver, as there is no option for the life partner or father to utilise part of the maternity leave to perform the role of caregiver for an extended period.

The policy surrounding adoption leave is slightly different, as it grants the “primary caregiver” two consecutive months’ paid leave. Here, there is no assumption that any one individual within the relationship is the primary caregiver. The differences in this policy regarding these two events are interesting.

The policy governing maternity leave allows the mother four consecutive months’ leave with full pay, yet, in the event of adoption the primary caregiver is given only two consecutive months’ leave with full pay. This is possibly due to a mother who has given birth requiring time to recover, whereas, in the event of an adoption, no recuperation is required. In the event of a birth, the father is not given paid leave equivalent to that of the mother, yet, should the father be the primary caregiver when a child is adopted, he is granted two consecutive months’ leave with full pay. The implication is that the policy contains the inherent subtext that, in the event of the birth of a child, to a heterosexual couple, the mother will be the primary caregiver.

5.6.2 Working hours’ policy

Section 6 of FS Org’s Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual details the organisation’s expectations with respect to working hours. In this section, there is clear evidence of what Bendl (2008, p. S54) termed “males as the norm.” FS Org requires that all full-time employees work a minimum of eight hours per day (excluding lunch) during a work
week that runs from Monday to Friday. Flexibility with respect to the time of the commencement of the working day is at the discretion of the line manager, on condition that the department is sufficiently staffed during the core daily hours of 08:00 to 17:00.

The overtime policy states that employees are expected to show their commitment to the business and contribute to the organisation’s success by willingly putting in extra effort when required, including working additional hours to meet their job responsibilities, within the limitations laid down in South African labour legislation. In addition to overtime, allowance is made within Section 6 of the Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual for staff on standby and on call. Although the policy does state that this work may be carried out telephonically or from home, the expectation is that such staff will be available 24 hours a day while performing this function.

Those holding management positions within FS Org are expected to put in additional time in order to achieve their job outputs, notwithstanding the fact that they are not eligible for overtime compensation. The policy stipulates that the aim is to create a high-performance culture.

The policy on working hours links working a minimum of eight hours per day, overtime, standby, and call-out to a high-performance culture, implying that, unless an employee is available during these times, a high-performance culture will not prevail, and an employee who is not available as expected is not a high performer. FS Org views the ideal worker as one who can meet these expectations with respect to availability, not taking into account life responsibilities. The maternity policy views the woman as the primary caregiver, but the working hours of FS Org do not consider these responsibilities, thereby assuming that the ideal worker is either male or not the primary caregiver — someone who is available 24 hours per day, even when at home.

One participant confirmed that there is now more flexibility at FS Org with respect to family responsibilities than had been the case historically:

“I never had that opportunity when my kids were growing up … and, so, I felt like I missed out a bit, because, at that stage, it was, ‘You have to pick.’ Now, you don’t have to, but, in the early days, it was: ‘Don’t dare come and say you want to go off an hour early because you want to go and watch a soccer match. Put in a half day’s leave’ ” (PD 11:208).
This participant attributed the increased flexibility with regard to employees’ life responsibilities to a maturing of both the organisation and those in senior leadership:

“And, so, I think, it’s because, as the organisation has matured and the women who’ve been here have matured and also had their own families…” (PD 11:200).

“… in senior leadership… we have more mature women who’ve had families … majority have had families who understand what it’s like to try and build a career and look after a family. And why should you have to choose? You can actually do both and manage that fine…” (PD 11: 202).

“If people want to go and watch their kid play a netball match or go and watch whatever the case may be … if they’ve done what they needed to and they’ve delivered and, you know, that they’ll make sure that they’ve done it, then why not?” (PD 11: 206).

Regarding the family situation of this study’s participants, there were four participants (three men and one woman) who had children aged 15 years or younger. None of the three male participants’ wives were employed full-time, thereby allowing them to perform the role of primary caregiver. The female participant confirmed that her mother resided with her family, thereby performing a large part of the role of primary caregiver. This indicated that, while there may be increased flexibility with respect to taking some time to support children playing sport or the like, the reality is that the ideal worker at FS Org is someone who is available. They are expected to work the necessary hours to promote a high-performance culture, and alternative arrangements need to be made to care for children, reinforcing the view that the ideal worker at FS Org is male.

5.7 Findings from Chapter 4 – researcher’s reflections

All three aspects addressed in Chapter 4, informed by this study’s field notes, contain elements of power. When the male participants were being interviewed, the researcher experienced a positive sense of self, and felt that these participants were engaged and wanted to add value to the study. The male participants were relaxed, and a lack of time was not used as a reason for compromise during the interview.

The female participants were (largely) different. The researcher left feeling dejected, both by comments relating to time pressures that were passed during the interview, as well as
behaviours exhibited, such as one participant continually checking her watch. In addition to this, the female participants were more reluctant to participate in the study than the male participants, because they seemingly felt there were matters of a higher priority to which they should attend. This limitation placed on available time by several of the women that were interviewed raised the possibility of links between time and power, as time could be used in power play. The time of an individual at executive level in an organisation is precious, and those wanting some of that time have to vie for it, with the executive deciding to whom they would grant it — this implies power.

The reporting dilemmas that were discussed in Chapter 4 also encompass elements of power. One of the female participants described herself as “previously disadvantaged,” thereby associating herself with having risen above adversity to reach the position of seniority and power she held. The male participants were more at ease. Even when one participant used gendered language during the interview by referring to his colleagues as “chicks” (PD 6:132), the power of his charisma lessened the potential impact of his words, to the extent that, unless one was paying attention, his comments were barely noticeable as sexist. The theme of power will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.8 Conclusion

The findings from this study can be grouped into two categories: the appeal of the organisation to potential candidates and the role of the leader. The appeal of working for FS Org is not just due to its prestige and uniqueness, but also the opportunities that FS Org affords executives to shape and influence the local economy. That FS Org appointed a female CEO was also cited as an appealing factor to women, as they felt that there would be opportunities to be successful in an industry dominated by men.

The category of the role of the leader surfaced early in the data collection phase and was a very strong theme throughout all the interviews. The CEO’s personal approach was cited as a contributing factor in several of the participants’ decision to join FS Org. She does, however, not shy away from making difficult decisions, which is evident in the high turnover of executives from the previous dispensation.

In transforming the organisation, it was agreed that the CEO was not deliberately targeting women for executive positions (although one candidate stated that, when the CEO first took
over, she could have been looking to hire women, but only for a short period). Instead, her network and recruiter bias were offered as possible reasons for the high number of women at executive level. The impact of the leader on the changing culture was also raised. Some participants claimed that, prior to the current CEO taking over the role, FS Org had been paternalistic and sexist, whereas, now, it was more transparent. Communication had improved, and it had become a performance-driven culture.

Participants claimed that they were colour- and gender blind. There were, however, elements of gendered language that surfaced, from both male and female participants, indicating that, despite FS Org’s successful gender transformation at executive levels, there were still undercurrents of gender stereotyping.

The performance-driven culture was confirmed during the documentary analysis, during which it became evident that the subtext implied that the ideal worker was either male or not the primary caregiver in the family. Management at FS Org are expected to be available as and when needed, working additional hours (without additional compensation), in order to drive a high-performance culture.

The findings discussed in Chapter 4 suggest that power was used differently by male and female executives. The male executives were more relaxed and not concerned about time during the interviews. This could suggest that they were comfortable in their roles and had an established power base that was not under threat. The female participants (largely) were subtle in their messages (both verbal and non-verbal) regarding their limited time for interviews. This could suggest that they were using time as an element of power, indicating that they had it, or that they had not yet established their power base to the desired extent, and were possibly still competing with their peers for position, or that time was limited due to other responsibilities and commitments.

The following chapter looks at these findings in light of extant research and, following a process of *retroduction*, identifies the possible underlying mechanisms that had resulted in the high female representation of women at the executive level at FS Org.
CHAPTER 6 – DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the research findings discussed in Chapter 5. It commences with a view of the reasons why FS Org is perceived as an attractive employer by external candidates, before considering the turnover of executive management after appointment of the new CEO. Factors that may have influenced the choice of candidates are then investigated, followed by a discussion of the perceived link between leadership and the culture change at FS Org after the current CEO assumed her role.

6.2 Organisational prestige, altruism and gender

The prestige of working for FS Org was cited as a factor that attracts applicants to the organisation. This was confirmed by some of the female participants, who claimed that it had been one of the deciding factors in their decision to accept an offer of employment. It was, however, not the prestige alone that influenced their decision, but also what accompanied the prestige — the opportunity to influence the local economy and/or to gain access to a talent pool denied other organisations, in order to effect positive change. This sense of altruism, which is key to organisational citizenship, is discussed in this section.

Organisational citizenship is “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p. 4).

Altruism (helping) is one of the fundamental aspects of organisational citizenship behaviour (Sharma, Bajpai, & Holani, 2011) and is linked to the female gender stereotype of women being more communal and nurturing than men (Farrell & Finkelstein, 2007; Heilman & Chen, 2005). In Simmons and Emanuele’s (2007) study of the differences in donations of money and time between men and women, it was found that women were more willing than men to donate both. Although they were unable to conclude whether altruism is innate or the result of a process of socialisation, they concluded from their study that women are more altruistic than men.
When investigating the effect of altruism on knowledge sharing, Lin (2008) concluded that, because women tend to display more altruism than men, they have a greater tendency to share knowledge than men when faced with colleagues in need of assistance, thereby exhibiting this ‘helping’ behaviour.

Not only has research found that women are more likely than men to participate in altruistic or helping behaviour (Farrell & Finkelstein, 2007; Kidder, 2002; Popescu, Deaconu, & Popescu, 2014; Simmons & Emanuele, 2007) but also, that there is a greater expectation of women in the working environment to engage in such behaviour (Farrell & Finkelstein, 2007; Heilman & Chen, 2005). This makes it less optional for women, as there is the expectation of consequences, should they fail to exhibit these helping tendencies (Heilman & Chen, 2005).

In their study of male and female entrepreneurs’ career satisfiers, Eddleston and Powell (2008) concluded that there is a link between gender identity and what business owners seek from their careers. Using an abridged version of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) participants’ masculinity and femininity dimensions were self-rated. Eddleston and Powell (2008) found that business-owner participants who were high in masculinity emphasised the importance of status-based career satisfiers (such as remuneration, prestige and social status) more so than participants who were scored low on masculinity. Participants who rated the importance of contribution to society and employee relationships scored higher on femininity. The inference is that gender identity (and not anatomical sex) is a predictor of career satisfier preferences in business owners.

The prestige of working at FS Org, as well as the influence associated with that prestige, was mentioned by five of the eight participants interviewed. Both men and women acknowledged that, to external candidates, FS Org is a very attractive employer (even when compared to global organisations) and that the influential position the organisation holds in the financial markets creates a sense of excitement:

“…this is not an organisation where you are going to become very wealthy, because it is not an investment bank; we don’t have that sort of fee income, but the attraction is to be able to do something and create something, and to be in the centre of the financial markets as well is very exciting. You are sitting in a single organisation, no matter how global that bank is. You are sitting in a proprietary organisation … there is a
responsibility beyond just making profit, and it is exciting to be in … for a lot of people that appeals, and it is exciting to be part of that…” (PD 5:105).

One participant, when asked the reasons for being attracted to FS Org as an employer, responded: “…I really just wanted to give back to South Africa” (PD 2:31). Another participant commented: “…we actually always want to do the right thing … for South Africa and to grow South Africa” (PD 6:104).

Because both male and female participants cited an attraction to FS Org because of both its prestige and the ability to influence and effect change in the local economy, no determination was made in this study as to the gendered nature of these aspects. It is, however, clear that FS Org is viewed as an attractive employer, both because of its prestige and the resulting ability to effect change and ‘help’ the local economy.

6.3 Top management turnover and transformation

In early 2012, when the current CEO of FS Org was officially appointed, the executive committee consisted of 16 members. Of these executive committee members, only four (including the current CEO) were still serving on this committee, which comprised only ten executives at the time of the current study. Of the six new executive committee members, four were new appointments and two were promoted from within the organisation. This means that 12 executive committee members had either resigned or moved out of that level of management (voluntarily or otherwise).

Turnover at the top management level is not unusual when the incumbent CEO departs (Barron, Chulkov, & Waddell, 2011; Fee & Hadlock, 2004; Friedman & Saul, 1991; Liu, Valenti, & Yu, 2012; Wagner, Pfeffer, & O’Reilly, 1984). Fondas and Wiersema (1997) suggested that this may be because the existing executives have a sense of loyalty towards the predecessor, and may either vacate their roles or act as conformists to the previous regime, compelling the new CEO to bring in outsiders. This phenomenon forms part of what is termed disruption, which refers to the changes in an organisation following a leadership succession (Friedman & Saul, 1991). Disruption unsettles organisational members’ sense of stability and security, and may have a positive or negative impact on organisational performance (Friedman & Saul, 1991; Puffer & Weintrop, 1991).
The extent of disruption has been linked to several factors, including the type of CEO successor (Shen & Cannella, 2002), tenure of the outgoing CEO, firm performance, and the expectations of the board of directors (Puffer & Weintrop, 1991). The scope of the present study permitted neither a detailed analysis of FS Org’s performance, nor the expectations of the board. However, both CEO successor type and tenure will be discussed below.

6.3.1 CEO successor type

Ocasio’s (1994) power circulation theory of control proposes that lengthy executive tenure (and organisational economic difficulty) will result in control challenges and opposition to the CEO, from both inside and outside of the organisation. Building on this theory, Shen and Cannella (2002) differentiated between insider successors (further categorised into follower successors and contender successors) and outsider successors. Each of these successor types is discussed below.

6.3.1.1 Follower successors

Follower successors are from inside the organisation, chosen to assume the role of CEO subsequent to the predecessor’s retirement (Shen & Cannella, 2002), in other words, in the normal course of the predecessor’s career life cycle. Follower successions suggest a planned appointment subsequent to a succession process (Barron et al., 2011) with such successors having knowledge specific to the organisation (Brady & Helmich, 1984). It is typical that follower successors are given the mandate to maintain the organisation’s strategic direction, rather than introduce change (Friedman & Olk, 1995) and may be restricted in their ability to effect change due to being coached, mentored, and even selected by the retiring CEO (Shen & Cannella, 2002), thereby sharing the organisational strategic outlook (Fondas & Wiersema, 1997).

6.3.1.2 Contender successors

Like follower successors, contender successors are from within the organisation, holding organisation-specific knowledge. However, such successors are appointed to the position of CEO following the dismissal of the incumbent CEO, having effectively challenged the predecessor (Shen & Cannella, 2002), and having convinced the board of directors of the lack of competence of the predecessor, giving assurances that they can produce improved firm
performance (Ocasio, 1994). Because the predecessor’s dismissal is often linked to poor organisational performance (Ocasio, 1994), there is an expectation from the board of directors that the newly appointed CEO will initiate and effect change (Shen & Cannella, 2002).

### 6.3.1.3 Outsider successors

Outsider successors are selected from outside the organisation. Boards may opt to appoint an outside successor during periods of poor organisational performance, coupled with a lack of suitable successors from within the organisation (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Although outsider successors may be preferred because they bring a different outlook and the promise of improved organisational performance and change (Shen & Cannella, 2002), there are several factors that work against their success:

i. The absence of organisation-specific knowledge may hinder an outsider successor’s ability to initiate and effect the strategic change required to improve firm performance (Fondas & Wiersema, 1997; Friedman & Saul, 1991).

ii. Another is adverse selection, because, in comparison to an internal candidate, the board of directors will find it more difficult to effectively assess the capabilities of an external candidate (Shen & Cannella, 2002).

iii. Because the top management team (often having been appointed by the outgoing CEO) has formed loyalties to the predecessor, the successor may experience hostility from within the ranks and struggle to garner support (Friedman & Saul, 1991; Shen & Cannella, 2002).

### 6.3.2 CEO tenure

Friedman and Saul’s (1991) study found that a long tenure of the preceding CEO results in increased top management turnover when a new CEO assumes the role. Furthermore, Hambrick, Geletkanycz, and Fredrickson (1993) found that the commitment of the top management team to maintaining strategic continuity and CEO tenure are directly linked, meaning that a lengthy CEO tenure promotes the continuation of the status quo, and increases the likelihood of top management turnover following a succession event.

A lengthy CEO tenure results in a passive approach to decision-making, increased risk aversion (Kor, 2006), and increased commitment to the organisation’s strategic direction (Hambrick et
al., 1993), which, with the appointment of the new CEO, may be disrupted, generating instability and insecurity amongst the top management team (Friedman & Saul, 1991). Psychological commitment to the former CEO, including a degree of loyalty (Fondas & Wiersema, 1997), may generate resistance amongst the top management team to strategic change initiated by the new CEO (Friedman & Olk, 1995; Westphal & Fredrickson, 2001).

Regarding CEO successor type and CEO tenure, top management turnover could be initiated by a new CEO being desirous of replacing current executives with those he or she trusts, and with whom he or she has an existing professional relationship (Puffer & Weintrop, 1991). Turnover may also be due to the replacement of top managers who lack the drive, creativity, knowledge, and skills to facilitate and promote the anticipated organisational strategic change (Keck & Tushman, 1993). Top management turnover could also be self-driven, as existing managers may resign due to a sense of instability or inability to accept the strategic change introduced by the new CEO (Friedman & Olk, 1995; Shen & Cannella, 2002). Certain executives may choose to resign because they are dissatisfied with not being promoted to the position of CEO (Kesner & Dalton, 1994), or top management turnover may simply reflect a decision to retire following the succession of the CEO (Shen & Cannella, 2002).

Considering the top management turnover at FS Org regarding CEO successor type and CEO tenure, there were a number of interesting findings.

Although the current CEO at FS Org assumed that role early in 2012, she had been in the employ of the organisation for almost 20 years at the time of the present study. She was identified by the previous CEO early in her career as being a future leader of the organisation, and was one of those mentored and groomed by him. Although the interview data hinted at a possible internal contest for the role of successor CEO, this remains unconfirmed:

“…there was also a huge issue when … [the previous CEO] … said to … [an EXCO member] …‘you’re going to be Deputy.’ I don’t know if that ever came out. There was [sic] a lot of issues between that and … [the current CEO] … staying on. Rumour had it she was about to move on” (PD 12:255).

The current CEO was therefore a follower successor - she was from within the organisation, was identified by the outgoing CEO several years prior to his retirement, and her selection appears to have been largely uncontested. In their analysis of CEO successor types, Shen and
Cannella (2002) stated that follower successors are unlikely to introduce considerable change to the organisation, due to the outgoing CEO exerting much influence in the process of succession, and that much of the top management turnover can be attributed to normal retirements which are planned, effortlessly allowing the new top management team to replace the previous one. The pre- and post-succession environments at FS Org were quite different.

The current CEO of FS Org initiated a number of strategic changes to the organisation within three years of assuming the role. She restructured the organisation early in her tenure as CEO, to encourage greater collaboration, as described by one participant:

“…I think she wanted to see … to force, from a structure perspective, more collaborative operating environment than the very siloed [sic] way we approached our different businesses, because there are definitely synergies to be gained…” (PD 11:86).

Towards the end of her second year as CEO, she implemented a more substantial change, which resulted in an almost complete restructuring of the executive team:

“…it became apparent off all the back [sic] of the conversations with the people that, actually, it was time for a restructure. If we really wanted to change this organisation to behave differently and operate differently and, kind of, for the future, it was going to require a drastic change, and that’s what she had the guts to do, because it was, I think, really tough” (PD 11:90).

The current CEO of FS Org transformed the executive committee to its current composition in two phases. The first occurred directly after she assumed the role of CEO, and the second occurred approximately two years later. The participants were reluctant to identify who (or how many) members of the previous executive committee had resigned voluntarily, but it is clear that the movements were a combination of ex-executive committee members being deployed elsewhere in the organisation, some resigning (either on good terms or because they were dissatisfied with the appointment of the new CEO), and forced separations (some viewed as mutually beneficial to both the organisation and the individual) involving a monetary settlement.

These events resulted in the current executive committee composition of ten — four members from the previous executive committee, two promotions from within the organisation, and four
external appointments. Promoting from within the organisation is a characteristic often associated with a contender successor. Because such successors have intimate knowledge of the organisation, they may promote those who are aligned with them and who will facilitate the desired strategic change (Brady & Helmich, 1984; Shen & Cannella, 2002).

With this transformation of FS Org’s executive committee, the current CEO, although a follower successor, had displayed characteristics associated with both a contender successor and an outsider successor. She replaced top managers she felt were not able to contribute to the strategic changes she wanted to make in the organisation, as confirmed by several participants:

“…[she] is very strongly focused on meritocracy. You have to deliver … she is not going to accept non-delivery…” (PD 10:115).

“…entirely her decision to ask a number of people to step off EXCO this year … her job is to make sure that the structure of EXCO is such that it can execute the strategy of the business … it’s not a job for life, and you are invited and you participate, but you could be asked to step off EXCO if you are either not performing … [or] if the structure no longer meets the needs of the business…” (PD 5:95).

Factors of gendered organisations (as discussed in Chapter 2) were evident in this case of executive-level turnover. It is possible that some executives left FS Org because they were not aligned with the changing culture. Ackers’ (2012a) substructure of how the organisational culture promotes the gendered organisation was apparent, not only in the previously male-dominated regime, when gentlemen’s clubs were visited, but also in the current leadership, as there were sexist undercurrents at FS Org, evident in both men and women.

In her restructuring of the executive committee, the CEO of FS Org reduced the size of the committee from 16 to ten, and brought in six new members, four of whom were external. The recruitment of these six new members is discussed in the next section.

6.4 Recruitment of executive committee members

The churn (whether voluntary or forced) at top management level created the opportunity for the CEO of FS Org to make new appointments to the executive committee and transform its gender- and racial composition. Of the six new appointments, five were women. The
possibility of recruiter bias and the composition of the CEO’s network were raised during the data collection phase of this study, and is discussed in this section.

6.4.1 Recruiter bias

“...I think we subconsciously hire in our likeness...” (PD 10:125). This was a theme that came through quite strongly during the interviews, supporting Byrne’s (1971) attraction paradigm. Although contested by Rosenbaum (1986), the attraction paradigm claims that there is a positive correlation between similarity and attraction, meaning that there is a greater attraction between people when there is greater similarity (Byrne, 1971). In Rosenbaum’s (1986) view, however, attraction is not influenced by similarity; rather, dissimilarity leads to repulsion, hence the formulation of the repulsion hypothesis.

In response to Rosenbaum (1986), Smeaton, Byrne, and Murnen (1989) conducted two experiments, which confirmed an increase in attraction when there is an increase in the prevalence of similar attitudes. They did, however, report that Rosenbaum’s (1986) repulsion hypothesis could be interpreted to mean that attraction between individuals may be influenced to a greater extent by dissimilar than similar attitudes, leading to the formulation of the similarity–dissimilarity asymmetry (Singh & Ho, 2000).

Further research by Singh and Ho (2000) revealed that dissimilarity has a more pronounced influence than similarity within the context of social attraction, but that similarity and dissimilarity have equal influence within the context of intellectual attraction. This led to the conclusion that attraction is affected differently by similar and dissimilar attitudes, based on the importance that is placed on them within the context of the interpersonal interaction. This supports Westphal and Zajac’s (1995) finding that CEOs and board members will, due to socio-political and social psychological factors, prefer to appoint those with whom they share characteristics. This is termed the similar-to-me effect, which may prevail during interviews.

Research on the similar-to-me effect has shown that, when the applicant is demographically and attitudinally similar to the interviewer or rater, the judgement of that applicant will be more favourable (Sears & Rowe, 2003). Bagues and Perez-Villadoniga (2013) extended this research to include skills, finding that a similar-to-me-in-skills influence is prevalent in interviews, as interviewers were found to attach greater importance to those areas in which they
themselves had greater knowledge, thereby forming a preference for the candidates who excelled in the same aspects as the rater.

At FS Org, the CEO restructured her executive committee, and five of the six replacements were women. The woman who was promoted from within the organisation was 30 years old when she was appointed to the executive committee. It could be argued that the CEO identified in this young woman what was identified in her by the previous CEO — a high-potential candidate. Of the candidates who were appointed from outside the organisation, one woman (also in her early 30s) was described as a “high flyer” (PD 5:105), possibly reinforcing the view that she was identified by the CEO as a high-potential candidate.

The other women who were brought into the executive committee from outside were all very successful in their own right. One candidate commented that she had been attracted to FS Org because there was a female CEO and, in her previous organisation, “…the likelihood of me becoming CEO was very slim” (PD 10:48). Another candidate confirmed that all the women on the executive committee, having undergone Myers Briggs Type Indicator assessments, were found to have extrovert personalities.

The similarity-attraction paradigm was indirectly referred to by a candidate who, when asked why the CEO had appointed so many women to her executive committee, responded: “Lots of [sic] women come to talk to her. So, I think she attracts people of same characteristics — high-performing, strong females to come and engage…” (PD 11:180).

There are a number of similarities between the current CEO of FS Org and those she has brought onto her management team at executive level. A strong possibility therefore exists that she (subconsciously or otherwise) surrounded herself with similar-to-me candidates in order to drive and promote strategic change within the organisation. Of the three executive committee members who were part of the previous CEO’s management team, the current CEO has a personal relationship with two. One candidate described their history by saying: “…[the three of us] … basically grew up together; I mean, we were married round about the same time, we got our kids at the same time; we are still personal house friends” (PD 6:106). The third executive committee member who had been a member of the previous CEO’s management team was aligned with the current CEO’s strategy of the organisation becoming less divided into silos and more integrated, indicating a similar-to-me attitude and outlook. This could explain why, when the current CEO assumed her role, these three members of the executive
committee were neither removed nor did they elect to resign, but, instead, decided to remain and to contribute to the strategic journey on which the CEO had embarked.

All four of the appointments from outside the organisation were women. When this was discussed during the interviews, the possibility that the current CEO’s “… network happens to be female…” (PD 9:106) was suggested. This is discussed in the next section.

6.4.2 Networks

In their study of gender in academic networking, Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) conceptualised both gender and networking as social practices, arguing that these can create and reinforce, as well as work against, gender equality. They referred to gatekeepers in academic recruitment — those who pursue and evaluate potential candidates for positions that may not necessarily be publically known to be available. Gatekeepers therefore have the power to influence the composition of the candidate list, and have a direct influence on the movement and distribution of academics.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) found that women’s mobility in the academic system was inhibited when the gatekeepers were predominantly men, and that male gatekeepers had a more similar-to-me (Byrne, 1971) network than women did, explaining why men more readily recommended candidates who were men. They found that women were more acutely aware of this than men, and argued that the gendered characteristics of the social environments in which these networks were formed (such as meetings at late hours and dinner-by-invitation) excluded women.

When men demonstrate a preference for male candidates, they are displaying characteristics associated with mobilising masculinities, more specifically, affiliating masculinities (Martin, 2001), meaning that they act collectively to promote masculinities, often unaware that they are doing so. This process has an exclusionary or devaluing effect on women, supporting Bendl’s (2008) gender subtext of unconscious exclusion and neglect. Connecting with others (networking, either formally or informally) is key in affiliating masculinities, as it involves aligning for benefit (of self or others). Men may fuse masculinities and work during meetings or other work interactions, so that the working environment and the processes therein cultivate and promote masculinities, further excluding women (Martin, 2001). Organisations and networking therefore contribute to the creation and reproduction of gendered behaviour.
through the gendered substructure (Acker, 2012a). Because such behaviour may be indiscernible (such as a meeting of both men and women, but in which the men discuss the previous night’s football match for the first few minutes), it reinforces the organisational perspective of ‘the law of the father,’ whereby men are assumed to be the norm and women ‘the other’ (Bendl, 2008).

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) found that women who participate in affiliating femininities (in much the same way as men affiliate masculinities) are more acutely aware that they are doing so, and view the process as a deliberate networking strategy. They also found that female gatekeepers who seek out and encourage the nomination of women (portraying Byrne’s 1971 similar-to-me behaviour) found this challenging, either because they were holding a minority position in the academic system, and so were not viewed in the same prestigious light as some of their male counterparts, or because they were accused of favouritism or making feminist choices.

Data collected during the interviews at FS Org indicated that, initially, the CEO was actively seeking out women to appoint. One participant, when asked whether the CEO had targeted women to recruit onto her executive committee, responded: “I think, for a time, she was, but I don’t think she is now” (PD 11:180). Of the four positions that were filled by external female candidates, only one did not come from the CEO’s network. In fact, this candidate was put through a formal recruitment process, unlike the other three, two of whom had been part of the CEO’s network for many years.

The position filled by one of these three candidates was not publically known to be available, as was found to happen in academic circles in Van den Brink and Benschop’s (2014) study. This candidate had been known to the CEO for many years and was part of her network. Her appointment at FS Org took one participant by surprise, leading to the perception at lower levels of management that the CEO “…appoints people that [sic] are her friends…” (PD 9:196). The candidate who had not been part of the CEO’s network for long had been introduced to the CEO during a non-work-related event, and was actively sought thereafter. This demonstrates that the CEO had actively been increasing her network and identifying talent in those she met.

Research has shown that men’s networks comprise mainly men, whereas women’s networks comprise both men and women (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). This means that the
current CEO of FS Org was in a better position to seek out female candidates, as research indicates she would have had more female candidates in her network. By seeking out female candidates, the CEO was countering the gender inequalities that pervaded under the previous “… paternalistic and autocratic…” (PD 7:36) regime.

There is a strong link between networks and power. It has already been established that gatekeepers hold considerable power, in that they can influence the pool of candidates from which a selection is made, as well as promote certain candidates over others, thereby impacting (positively or negatively) candidates’ careers (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014). Informal networks are considered social resources, because they can assist in bypassing formal processes (such as the recruitment procedure). In doing so, informal networks can have great power and influence, but only if there are members with sufficiently high status within the network (McGuire, 2002). Research has shown that, not only are men more likely than women to have influential members within their network (McGuire, 2000), but women are less likely to hold a central role in organisational networks, restricting the access and opportunities afforded to men (Ibarra, 1992).

One candidate, when commenting on the high female representation on FS Org’s executive committee, said:

“It is weird because … if the female-to-male ratio were the other way around, nobody would think that it was wrong. But, because … it is female-dominated, it is so unique, and a lot [sic] of people comment on this (PD 10:80).

In raising this point, the participant highlighted Bendl’s (2008) subtext of men as the norm and women as the other, and how the perception of a male-dominated environment being the norm permeates organisational culture.

In appointing women from her network, FS Org’s CEO mobilised femininities (Martin, 2001) in much the same way as men mobilise masculinities. She actively sought out and enticed these women to become part of her inner circle on the executive committee, as she “…is gender aware. So, she will look very strongly at how women are treated, and she likes to see women get ahead…” (PD 10:105). In doing so, she is actively (and possibly unknowingly) challenging the widely held belief that pervades the business world — that men are the norm (Bendl, 2008).
This behaviour, however, is viewed as unusual, and is often commented on by third parties, further demonstrating that networking and gatekeeping are gendered practices.

6.5 Leadership and culture

During the participant interviews, the current CEO of FS Org was compared to her predecessor, and the change in organisational culture that had resulted from this change of CEO was discussed. Because these two themes are closely related, they are both discussed in this section.

6.5.1 Personal style

FS Org CEO’s leadership style was described using a range of descriptors:

“…[she] is much more regulated, much more, shall I say, regimental. She wants things much more organised; things need to be done. With [her predecessor] it was, ‘Look, if it’s round about there, it’s okay,’ but he just had a totally different style…” (PD 6:142).

“…she has always been challenging, exciting and sympathetic, empathetic, looking for growth opportunities for her staff, a very good leader…” (PD 5:57).

“…[her] leadership … she gives me the opportunity and space to do what I need to do … because, if you’re in a change environment, you can’t have a CEO that says ‘It’s going to have to stay like this.’ She’s allowed us to influence her around structure, around culture, around how we look at competitiveness in this country … not to be small, to engage more. She’s just made some very brave and bold decisions, and taken us in a direction where we’ve all had the opportunity to influence, the new people in particular” (PD 7:90).

She was described by one participant as “regimental,” (PD 6:142) but as “empathetic” (PD 5:57) by another. Some of her decisions were considered “very brave and bold,” (PD 7:90) while still allowing her executive team to influence her. It would then appear that she possesses both communal and agentic attributes.

Communal attributes are, e.g., being kind, trustworthy, sympathetic, nurturing, and co-operative, while agentic attributes include being assertive, independent, energetic, ambitious, competent, and self-confident (Berkery, Morley, & Tiernan, 2013). Communal characteristics
are strongly associated with women, and agentic characteristics with men (Berkery et al., 2013; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2003; Eagly, 2007; Embry, Padgett, & Caldwell, 2008; Garcia-Retamero & Lopez-Zafr, 2009). Today’s organisations, in order to create a competitive advantage, require its talent to be innovative, to add value, and to work in teams (Gartzia & Van Engen, 2012), requiring leadership that is more communal than agentic (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). This implies that leadership behaviours consistent with the feminine stereotype would make for a more effective leader.

In their study of 157 Spanish managers, Gartzia and Van Engen (2012) found that leaders who have the ability “to go beyond gender stereotypes and identify with both feminine and masculine traits (i.e. androgynous)” (p. 307) could be more effective leaders. This androgyny means that an individual is able to assimilate counter-stereotypical behaviours into the self (Bem, 1974). Research has suggested that leaders exhibiting androgynous traits are not only more favourably evaluated, but are also perceived as more transformational (Kark, Waismel-Manor, & Shamir, 2012).

FS Org’s CEO was described by one participant as someone who takes an active and genuine interest in the staff working in her organisation, displaying caring and collaborative traits:

“…[she] spends a huge amount of time on the floors, walking, talking, involved, going to meetings, holding town halls, working in the teams, not interfering, but being there as a support, and weekends too … if she knows there’s [sic] big projects on the go or people or the IT team is doing maintenance, she will pop in for a couple of hours on a Saturday, happy to walk around, buy someone a cup of coffee and chat … she is very open in that sense, and visible and wanting to hear what is happening in the organisation, and to share” (PD 5:113).

Another participant stated that the CEO exhibits both communal and agentic traits:

“…she is very personable and very informal … and also is not only all about work. So, she will talk to you about cycling or running or whatever it is that you are interested in. We have an EXCO WhatsApp group, and she will post interesting cartoons … she is very informal and very approachable. I think the upside to that is that you build loyalty and you build a good relationship. The downside is that, when difficult decisions have to be taken and when things don’t go that well, it is a lot more painful for those people
to accept the negative, because they … there is [sic] much more personable relationships. So, it is a fine balance that, … keeping the personable loyalty and relationship with people and still having enough distance to allow for the difficult conversations that have to be had in business” (PD 10:91).

The CEO was described by this participant as someone who is approachable and interested in the personal activities of her staff, but who is also able to have a difficult discussion, implying self-confidence and assertiveness.

In transforming her executive committee, the CEO would undoubtedly have exhibited both masculine and feminine behaviours — at times needing to have a difficult discussion: “…if you’re not happy with individuals, put a number on the table…” (PD 12:181) — and at other times displaying more communal behaviour by having lunch with and listening to those she whom wanted to form part of her management team, engaging with them on both a work- and personal level: “…we had a number of one-on-one lunches and discussions around the future, personal and also for the business…” (PD 5:53).

Shortly before the current CEO assumed her role, FS Org acquired another entity within the financial services sector. This acquisition commenced under the leadership of the current CEO’s predecessor, and was described as “… initially … a hostile bid” (PD 5:47), but which soon “…turned to a friendly acquisition or merger…” (PD 5:47) when she assumed responsibility. Within the timeframe of this acquisition, she is described as having had the capability to switch between different leadership styles, as she not only “…dominated that transaction, … she dominated negotiations with our board completely…” (PD 5:65), but she also:

“…dealt with … all the people issues, the actual integration … and it went down to a huge level of detail, getting to know people’s names and who they had worked with, and the process for introducing the staff from a small environment gradually … everyone knew exactly who their new manager would be, who their EXCO member would be, exactly where their desk was, what their PC would look like; there were Jelly Tots on the table waiting for them, and a cup of coffee … so that just talks to her breadth and her range of being able to span issues … every little detail was thought through, and it just speaks to her intellect and her empathy and her leadership…” (PD 5:65).
Although the scope of the present study made it impossible to conclude whether FS Org’s CEO had an androgynous self-concept (Bem, 1974), it is clear from the data that she exhibited both communal and agentic behaviours.

6.5.2 Culture

Several participants commented on the culture change that had taken place at FS Org under the leadership of the current CEO, as discussed in Chapter 5. It is interesting to note that, at times, she exhibited agentic (stereotypically masculine) behaviour, such as removing certain executives from her committee, in order to transform the culture from that which was described as “paternalistic and autocratic” (PD 7:36) to one that was more collaborative: “…in the new environment, we’re driving integration more, and alignment and collaboration…” (PD 7:108).

This change in culture was directly attributed to the current CEO, with participants stating: “…she actually championed some of that culture and change…” (PD 9:176) and “…I think [the culture] changed with all the leaders, but, I think, [in her] tenure … it’s got to do with being a female, is more inclusive and collaborative…” (PD 11:78). This participant confirmed the perception of women being more likely to display communal traits, leading to greater inclusivity and collaboration in the working environment.

Some researchers have concluded that organisational culture is forged by its leaders (Kouzes, 2002; Sims & Lorenzi, 1992), while others proposed that the life cycle of the organisation connects leadership and organisational culture, with the leaders moulding the organisational culture in the early stages of its life cycle, and the culture, in turn, influencing the leaders’ behaviour as the organisation matures (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003; Javidan, Dorfman, Howell, & Hanges, 2010).

In another study, Herrera, Duncan, Green, and Skaggs (2012) proposed a relationship between culture, gender, and leadership style, concluding that the preference for gender egalitarianism in the organisation is positively related to the number of women in the organisation, as is the preference for a participative leadership style.

Albeit that the scope of this study did not allow for an in-depth investigation of the cultural change at FS Org, it is important to note that FS Org is a mature organisation, and, yet, the current CEO, with years of experience within this organisation (and who was described as
“…very, very brave…” (PD 7:72) in some of the decisions she had made) had successfully effected a cultural change in a relatively short period of time, changing the organisation to one that is more collaborative and transparent, and has “…better levels of respect than, perhaps, if you take us five to ten years ago…” (PD 12:153). Whether this culture change can be attributed to the leadership style of the CEO, the increased numbers of women on the executive committee, or to a combination of both factors is, at this time, undetermined.

### 6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research findings from Chapter 5 were considered in light of extant research, commencing with the factors that had attracted candidates to (and thereby influenced) the talent pool from which the successful candidates were selected. One such factor is the uniqueness of the organisation and the resulting prestige of being associated with this organisation. Accompanying this prestige, is the ability to effect positive change in the local economy and the increased access to talent because of the uniqueness of the FS Org offering. This citizenship behaviour of altruism is linked to the female gender stereotype (Heilman & Chen, 2005) and may have increased the number of women in the talent pool.

This was followed by an examination of the possible factors for the high turnover of executive managers when the current CEO assumed her responsibilities. This turnover allowed the CEO to appoint candidates she felt were more appropriate to the roles in order to achieve her vision for the organisation. A large part of this chapter focused on the role of the leader in recruiting these candidates, in light of Byrne’s (1971) attraction paradigm and the gendered nature of networks. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the CEO’s leadership style and the possible link to the change in culture at FS Org since her appointment.

The following chapter, Chapter 7, provides concluding thoughts by consolidating this minor-dissertation’s literature review and research findings within Bhaskar’s (2008) stratified ontology. The underlying causal mechanisms found in the domain of the real (Bhaskar, 2008) are highlighted, that manifested as the phenomenon under study, found in the domain of the empirical (Bhaskar, 2008).
CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes this minor-dissertation by consolidating the study’s research approach, literature review, findings, and discussions, thereby showing how the research question was answered. In addition to this, suggestions for future research are offered, based on factors that could possibly have impacted on the phenomenon under study, but for which no determination could be made in this study.

7.2 Discussion and study contribution

The aim of this study was to uncover the organisational features that contribute to a seemingly progressive and inclusive view of gender in the workplace by investigating a case organisation in which there was already a high level of female representation at senior levels. The research question was:

What are the organisational features that contribute to higher female representation at the executive management level?

As an exploratory study, the semi-structured interviews explored the lived experiences of the participants and identified the causal mechanisms (propositions) that had resulted in the phenomenon researched, in an organisation that operated within the male-dominated South African financial services industry. Using the critical realist process of *retroduction*, a number of factors were uncovered during the data collection and analysis phase that could explain the gender representation at FS Org. These factors are grouped into two main categories: the CEO as gatekeeper and organisational attractiveness.

Using Bhaskar’s (2008) stratified ontology, the findings of this study are represented in Figure 1, in light of the three domains of critical realism — the domain of the empirical, the domain of the actual, and the domain of the real. The phenomenon (high female representation at executive level in a male-dominated industry) manifests in the domain of the empirical. All but one of the candidates who had assumed their roles during the new CEO’s tenure were women — events that had occurred in the domain of the actual. The factors and powers (underlying causal mechanisms) that contributed to this are found in the domain of the real.
Links between this study’s findings and the factors found in gendered organisations as identified by Acker (2012a), Bendl (2008), Ely and Padavic (2007), and Williams, Muller, and Kilanski (2012) are included in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Findings of the study, depicted as features that had contributed (and possibly contributed) to the high number of women at executive level at FS Org.
In order to explain the appointment of women at executive committee level, one needs to look at the underlying tendencies, powers, and causal mechanisms (Hedlund-de Witt, 2012) or propositions that occurred in the domain of the real, and may explain the world of the actual. From the dataset, one can infer that what had happened in the domain of the actual was due to the gender composition of the CEO’s network, the influence of the attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), the prestige of working at FS Org, altruism, as well as a female CEO who encouraged other women to take up employment there, as discussed in Chapter 6.

A combination of any or all of these factors could account for the possible existence of a talent pool containing a greater number of women from which to make appointments. The role of the CEO as gatekeeper should not be underestimated, as this influential position had a direct impact on the composition of the candidate list for an available position, as discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, with reference to recruiter bias and networks.

When considering the factors that influenced the candidate pool, there is evidence of power (as identified by Ely and Padavic, 2007), in that the CEO has great power as the gatekeeper. This power to influence the candidate pool is apparent in the number of women holding EXCO positions at FS Org, and has been remarked upon as one participant stated:

“It is weird, because … if the female-to-male ratio were the other way around, nobody would think that it was wrong. But, because … it is female-dominated, it is so unique, and a lot of people comment on this” (PD 10:80).

The inference from the above is Bendl’s (2008) subtext of males as the norm. The CEO utilised the power of her network to source suitable candidates, and may subconsciously have adopted a similar-to-me (Byrne, 1971) approach, much in the same way male leaders do when making appointments.

Williams, Muller, and Kilanski (2012) identified that networks act as a barrier to women’s advancement in the workplace, both because women do not have the extensive networks that men do, and because women are often excluded from certain, more powerful male networks. The findings of the present study suggest that the CEO’s network promoted the appointment of women, as the possibility exists that she had more women in her network.
The availability of positions that were filled by the new executive members arose because of executive management turnover (either forced or voluntary). Figure 1 shows that this turnover was a direct result of the appointment of a new CEO — her leadership style, an organisational culture change, and her strategic vision serving as potential reasons for the misalignment between the new CEO and some executive committee members at that time. These changes may be attributed to her gender (although this could not be confirmed in this study) and her ability to exhibit both masculine and feminine traits in her leadership style, as well as the resulting change in organisational culture.

Within these executive management turnover events found in the domain of the real, are several gender subtexts (Bendl, 2008) and substructures (Acker, 2012a). The culture change was described as more transparent at FS Org in the period since the current CEO assumed her responsibilities. Despite this change in culture, there was still evidence of sexist undercurrents, evident in both men and women, promoting a gendered organisation. In addition to this, there is evidence of what Acker (2012a) termed gendered identities when considering the CEO’s leadership style. The CEO exhibited both masculine and feminine leadership traits, and it is possible that her leadership style conflicted with that of some of the previous executive committee members, as she was not displaying stereotypical female gender behaviour.

It is of relevance to note that FS Org has been in operation for many decades, and is well known in the financial industry and local South African context as being very influential. The mentoring of the current female CEO had taken place over a period of years, indicating that the outgoing CEO (and, undoubtedly, the board) had had a very clear succession plan in place. Until the appointment of the current CEO, the tendency had been to appoint men into the role — the history of FS Org testifies to having only ever appointed male CEOs.

Research has indicated that turnover at executive level accompanies CEO succession (Barron et al., 2011; Fee & Hadlock, 2004; Liu et al., 2012). The turnover rate at FS Org when the current CEO assumed the role cannot, in the present study, be attributed to the new CEO’s gender. However, this study did conclude that two factors, the organisation’s attractiveness and the role of the gatekeeper, had influenced the gender of the candidate pool from which the candidates were selected, ultimately contributing to the phenomenon at FS Org — that of a high representation of women at executive level in a male-dominated industry.
7.3 The study’s limitations

The present study involved a select group of participants within an organisation, limiting the experiences investigated to those of that group. Generalisability is therefore unlikely to be achieved. In addition to this, the experiences of the former executive committee members could not be obtained, meaning that no data were gathered with reference to their reasons for leaving the organisation.

Another limitation is that, at the time of writing up these findings, an interview with the CEO of FS Org could not be secured. As a result, the findings of this study relating to the features of a gendered organisation were based on the experiences of those who were executive committee members at the time of the study.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

Several recommendations for future research are made below:

i. The participants in this study were from the executive management level. This study should be extended to participants from other levels within the organisation, thereby including the full system of the organisation, not only the executive level.

ii. Because the participant group was small, more research is required within other organisations and across industries to ascertain common features that may result in high female representation at executive level.

iii. This study hinted at a link between time, power, and gender. Further research should be conducted to better understand these factors and how they impact on behaviour within organisations.

iv. Although executive turnover is to be expected during a CEO succession event, research should be conducted to ascertain whether the gender of the incoming CEO has an impact on the staff turnover rate and, if so, the reasons for this. This will assist organisations to better understand CEO succession events.

v. Pursuant to (iv) above, the influence of the succeeding CEO’s gender on organisational culture, strategic vision, and his or her leadership style should be investigated, as this will assist in developing change management interventions.
7.5 Conclusion

The present study set out to identify features that had given rise to the high representation of women at executive level at FS Org. As an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews explored the lived experiences of the participants.

This study commenced with a literature review, highlighting the work of Ely and Padavic (2007), Bendl (2008), Acker (2012a) and Williams, and Muller and Kilanski (2012). These authors’ theories are exclusionary in terms of women in organisations, and the possibility that the opposite would be found in an organisation that employs a higher number of women than men could be expected. This did not, however, form part of the findings of the present research.

Following the data collection and analysis, it was found that a key factor was the composition of the candidate pool from which executive positions had been filled. Through a process of retroduction, two features were identified as having had an impact on the candidate pool, the first being the organisation’s attractiveness as perceived by those outside the organisation. Participants stated that FS Org appointing a woman as CEO had changed their perception of the organisation, making it a more attractive prospect. In addition to this, the perceived prestige of working at FS Org and the opportunities to transform and positively impact the local economy added to the attractiveness of the organisation as an employer.

The second feature that influenced the number of women at executive level at FS Org was the role of gatekeeper played by the CEO. Both the gender makeup of her network and recruiter bias (similarity paradigm) are believed (by the participants) to have influenced her choice of candidates to fill vacant positions. While this research unearthed additional possible features (such as gender and leadership style) that could have had an impact on the phenomenon under study, it was not possible to determine whether such factors did, in fact, influence the selection of candidates in favour of women. What is clear, however, is that gender remains a guiding principle in organisations, even in those organisations that have a seemingly inclusive stance on gender.
REFERENCES


