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CONSTRUCTIONS OF CAREER PROGRESSION BY WOMEN LEADERS IN A CORPORATE CONTEXT

by

ANA CARVALHO

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at the

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Supervisor: Professor F. Crous

2017
DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis submitted by me for the degree Doctor of Philosophy (Industrial Psychology) at the University of Johannesburg is my independent work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

__________________________________
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ABSTRACT

In the context of increased representation of women in the job market and the underrepresentation of women at the most senior positions of executive leaders, an understanding of how women leaders in the corporate sphere construe career progression is particularly germane.

The aim of this study was to explore women leaders’ constructions of career progression in a corporate environment from three traditions embedded within the constructionist tradition: personal constructivism, social constructionism, and constructivism grounded in subjective lived experience. To this end the aim was further sub-divided into three sub-aims: (a) to explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progress of others in a corporate environment; (b) to explore women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-construction of career progression in a corporate environment and (c) to generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression based on their subjective experiences. Taken together, the study seeks to offer a holistic and in-depth account of the constructions of career progression by women leaders in a corporate environment.

A qualitative research design using a case study research strategy was employed in a large financial institution in South Africa. A purposeful sampling consisting of women leaders in lower, middle and senior management positions was utilised. To address the stated aim and sub-aims of the study the research design was formulated and is presented as three sequential research phases, each consisting of an independent but related study. Given the three-phased nature of the study, more than one data collection technique was applied, with data being analysed through qualitative methods. In Phase I, data were collected by means of the repertory grid technique, the methodological application of personal construct theory, and analysed by means of qualitative content analysis and the core-categorising procedure. In Phase II, data were collected using the Appreciative Inquiry method, which included semi-structured paired interviews, small group discussions, plenary discussions and written activities. Data were analysed using a collaborative data analytic approach. In Phase
III, data were collected using intensive semi-structured interviews and analysed using Constructivist grounded theory.

The findings indicated that the construction of career progression is multistoried and, to an extent, dependent on the lens applied. By linking the emergent themes to literature, conclusions were drawn about women leaders’ construction of career progression. Findings from Phase I indicated a construction of career progression of others leaning towards objective career success. Findings from Phase II indicated that women leaders co-constructed career progression to incorporate their personal and professional life with objective and subjective success criteria. Findings from Phase III indicated a construction of career progression leaning towards subjective career success.

Key conclusions reached from this study can be applied by organisations to construct an alternative path of career progression for women that takes into account the perspectives of women leaders.

**Key words:**

Women leaders  
Career progression  
Career success  
Personal construct theory  
Appreciative Inquiry  
Constructivist grounded theory
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“I said I’m not going to be somebody who doesn’t do anything, that just sits at home and becomes a housewife, there’s no way I’m going to do that.”

- Interviewee

1.1 Introduction

A challenge in the corporate context is the progression of women to the most senior positions of executive leadership. Across the world, women comprise, on average, four percent of chief executive positions (Catalyst, 2016). As Tharenou (2005, p. 31) pointed out, “The higher the managerial level, the lower the proportion of women.” The challenges facing women in 2016 remain as concerning as those in previous decades. This study seeks to address this challenge from the perspective that careers, in general, and career progression, in particular, are constructed.

The chapter begins with the motivation for the study, a conceptualisation of career progression and the background to the study. This is followed by a discussion of the problem statement, research questions, aims, and objectives formulated for the study. Additionally, a brief account of the literature review strategy is provided followed by the anticipated contribution of the study. An outline of the study concludes this chapter.

1.2 Motivation for the study

The motivation for the study was personal. My interest in women’s career progression in corporate environments stems from my work as an organisational consultant, specifically providing leadership development programmes and executive coaching services to corporate entities in South Africa. Within this environment, I have professional experience, both in coaching women in senior leadership positions and
facilitating leadership development programmes (both mixed gender and women-only programmes). As a result of this interaction, I am struck by women’s reaction to pursuing more senior leadership positions. Most striking is that, in the safety and privacy of individual coaching sessions, women shared with me how their experiences with gender discrimination, personal challenges, and role conflicts had impacted their careers. For instance, whilst coaching a senior woman, Chief of Operations at a logistics company, she spoke of her hesitation to transition to the top position, that of CEO of the South African operation, despite the fact that the current male CEO endorsed her suitability for this position. This women leader spoke of the characteristics she had observed in the current CEO and the factors she perceived as being necessary to succeed in that position, which led her to doubt her leadership capabilities. Similarly, during the facilitation of a leadership development workshop at a financial institution (attended by both male and female leaders), I observed the sole woman, in a team of five senior leaders, taking the role of secretary during a team exercise. I also noted the dominance of the male voices in the room during plenary discussions. Conversely, whilst facilitating a women-only leadership development programme, I noted that the participants not only drew strength and support from one another, but displayed greater agency in their own career development.

These incidents led me to be curious about the constructions of career progression by women leaders that might be underlying the hesitancy and trepidation of otherwise competent women to progress to more senior positions. Specifically, what do women leaders construe as being important for career progression when observing the progression of others? Additionally, stemming from my experience of women-only leadership development programmes, I wondered how a select group of women might co-construct a generative and transformative form of career progression. Then, as a result of my experience with coaching women leaders, I wondered about the constructions of career progression based on subjective lived experience.

1.3 Conceptualising career progression

In career theory the concept of career progression is typically associated with vertical
mobility in the traditional corporate career (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2012). This section explores the conceptualisation of career, career success, career progression and the divergent enactment of career.

Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom (2005) argued that career success research draws upon career theory and thus on the concepts, relationships, and assumptions in career theory. These authors defined career as “the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experience over time” (p. 179) and argued that career may be construed in accordance with the theoretical distinction between objective careers (observable positions or status) and subjective careers (individual’s own sense of career). Heslin (2005) noted that the concept of work career is applied to linear careers, where the focus of progression is upwards in a hierarchical organisation. In response to the evolving organisational landscape, where the trends are to restructure and delayer the traditional hierarchy, new career models that are increasingly non-linear are emerging, for instance protean careers (Hall, 1976, 2004) and boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Building on their definition of career, Arthur et al. (2005) defined career success as “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes in any point in a person’s work experiences over time” (p. 179). In this definition both a subjective (personally desirable) and an objective (socially desirable) view of success are accommodated. Similarly, Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz (1995) distinguished between material and psychological measures in their definition of career success: “the positive psychological or work-related outcomes one has accumulated as a result of one’s work experience” (p. 486). Based on my professional experience, I am aware of the prevailing distinctions between objective (or external) and subjective (or internal) career success as considered by Derr and Laurent (1989).

Objective career success is widely measured in terms of extrinsic career success indicators: pay, status, or promotions (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006; Hall, 2002; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007). Van Maanen (1977) construed the indicators of objective career success as mobility, task attributes, job level, and income. In addition, Arthur et al. (2005) proposed that objective career success has a shared social understanding as opposed to an individual understanding. By contrast subjective
career success is defined as the individual’s “subjective evaluations and feelings of job, career and life satisfaction, sense of accomplishment, and sense of self-worth” (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2011, p. 68). The subjective evaluation of career success refers to any factors deemed important to that individual, for instance, job satisfaction (Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, & Bretz, 2001), connectedness (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), or work-life balance (Finegold & Mohrman, 2001). For the emerging non-linear careers such as protean careers, success is driven by a psychological criterion pointing to subjective career success (Hall, 1976).

Derr and Laurent (1989, p. 456) proposed that the internal career answers the question “what do I want from work, given my perceptions of who I am and what is possible?” and the external career poses the question “what is possible and realistic in my organisation…given my perceptions of the world of work”. In this sense, the external career is an objective measure of career success and may be considered a social construction of reality and the internal career is a personal construction of reality. These authors suggested that the social construction of career (the objective career) is highly influenced by the internal perceptions of reality.

1.4 Background to the study

Studies, articles, reports, and debates on women in leadership inevitably begin with quoting statistics of the number of women in positions of senior leadership across the globe—and with good reason. Recent findings suggest that women are still underrepresented in positions of leadership, authority, and power despite the substantial number of women in the workplace. In the Standard and Poor 500 Dow Jones index of leading United States organisations indicates women represent 45% of the labour force (Catalyst, 2016). The International Labour Organisation, a United Nations specialised agency reported a decrease in the global participation of women in the labour force from 52,4% to 49,6% (Women at Work Trends, 2016). The representation of women amongst Chief Executive Officers (CEO’s) is 4.6%, 19% of board seats and 25% of senior management (Catalyst, 2016). In South Africa, the information gathered via an annual survey conducted by Business Women of South
Africa (BWASA, 2015), placed women CEOs at 3.6% of the 396 JSE listed companies. These figures stand in stark contrast to the number of women in the labour force. Given that the percentage of women in the workplace is almost 50% globally, and 45.8% in South Africa (BWASA, 2015) there is a definite underrepresentation of women at top leadership positions. Despite significant gains in education, healthcare, employment policies, and gender-sensitive legislation, there is still a glaring disparity in de facto leadership equality.

1.4.1 A case for greater representation of women at senior levels

The call for gender equality at the most senior positions of organisations is supported by a growing body of evidence that makes a business case for diverse and inclusive senior leadership (Catalyst, 2007b; McKinsey, 2007). McKinsey’s (2007) Women Matter Report investigated the link between corporate performance and women’s representation on boards. Results showed that gender diversity promotes and gives rise to more effective boards and engenders stronger market growth. Overall, the consensus is that more women representation at senior levels is advantageous and imperative to corporate competiveness as well as having a positive impact on corporate performance. A review study conducted in the United Kingdom (Women-on-boards, 2011) in mitigation for gender diversity at board levels reported the following advantages:

- accessing a wider and untapped talent pool;
- better response to the market, as women have greater influence and understanding of purchasing decisions; and
- the achievement of better corporate governance as a gender-balanced board is more likely to adhere to a code of conduct and follow conflict of interest guidelines.

The scarcity of women at the top of the corporate ladder is associated with not only the profitability of a company but also affects the pipeline of available women leaders. McKinsey (2007) identified the lack of female role models as a psychological barrier to women’s development as leaders. In organisations with few women in positions of power, Ely and Rhode (2010) noted that gender becomes particularly salient and is
negatively associated with women in lower organisational ranks, despite there being balanced representations at those lower levels. The persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles results in fewer role models for the junior women. This means that, as long as participation in senior leadership positions revolves around a predominantly male-centric model, access to key opportunities for women to positions of power and authority is effectively limited. Findings suggest that women’s relative presence or absence in positions of power in organisations affects the conditions that their junior female colleagues need to succeed.

The issue of underrepresentation of women at senior levels in organisations is also a recurrent theme in popular media and subject to heated debate. Several media articles claim that women are rejecting high-powered positions. One such article written by Sellers (2003) for *Fortune* magazine suggested that women lack power in business largely because they do not want it enough. In *The New York Times Magazine*, Belkin (2003) asserted that women are ambivalent about leadership and power, preferring to opt out, to become a full-time parent. Tischler (2004) in *Fast Company* argued that women do not have the same inherent drive as their male colleagues to compete for positions of power and authority. In response, Merril-Sands, Kickul, and Ingols (2005) challenged this narrative by stating that such assertions are based on a few samples of privileged white managers and are anecdotal. Even more important is that if such assertions are accepted as “truth” in mainstream culture, it can further curtail leadership opportunities for women. The McKinsey (2013) *Women Matter Report* disagreed with the argument that women do not want top leadership positions. Rather, the findings of their survey indicated that women at an individual level are just as ambitious as men but are less confident than their male counterparts.

### 1.4.2 Challenges facing women leaders’ progression

A significant body of research has sought to explain the lack of gender parity at the top echelons of organisations. A number of studies have examined the challenges that women face accessing top leadership positions. The overarching question guiding these studies has sought to explore why there are so few women in top leadership positions. In answer, researchers have examined a variety of complex—and at times—interwoven factors, inter alia, female leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Powell, 1990; Stanford & Oates, 1995), double bind (Catalyst, 2007a; Eagly &
Carli, 2007), and gender differences and gender biases (Heilman, 2001; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002) as possible impediments to the career progression of women. Certain studies have reviewed women’s career progression from a process level of analysis, for instance, power dynamics (Bennett, 2006; Jacobs, 2007; Ryan & Haslam, 2007), leadership development (De la Rey & Jankelowitz, 2003; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003), and value systems (Gouws & Kotze, 2007). Furthermore, researchers have used varied theoretical perspectives for evaluating knowledge, for example, feminism (Levitt, 2010; Rosser-Mims, 2010; Unger, Waltham, Sheese, & Main, 2010), constructivism, (Franks, Schurink, & Fourie, 2006; Phendla, 2004), and critical theory (Fine, 2009; Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008). These studies have contributed to the field of women’s leadership by providing critical discourse, normative outcomes, best practice frameworks for leadership advancement, and furthering the understanding of the challenges facing women in leadership.

A widely researched construct within the challenges women face in career advancement is the phenomenon of the “glass ceiling” (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010; Jackson, O’Callaghan, & Adserias, 2014; Newman, 2015) and the “glass cliff” effect (Nadler & Bailey, 2015; Ryan & Haslam, 2007) as barriers to leadership opportunities for women. These metaphors are fundamental constructions that constrain women (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The term glass ceiling is a metaphorical description for the invisible barriers that prevent women and minorities from advancing to senior positions. This glass ceiling appears to remain a barrier as reported in The Economist: “The glass-ceiling phenomenon is proving peculiarly persistent. The top of the corporate ladder remains stubbornly male, and the few women who reach it are paid significantly less than the men that they join there” (“The conundrum of the glass ceiling,” 2005, p. 67). The metaphorical term glass cliff was advanced to describe the precarious position women and minorities face when appointed at the helm of an organisation that was already performing poorly preceding the appointment (Singh, Vinnicombe, & Terjesen, 2007).

In an effort to investigate what “cracks the glass ceiling”, recent attention has focused on the factors influencing women’s career success and advancement. Tharenou (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 150 empirical studies explaining women’s career progression. Organisational opportunity structures (size and
occupational types), social capital (informal networks, mentors), and individual factors such as human capital and family were the three broad themes identified as the key influences that assist or reduce women’s advancement. Despite the identification of these factors Tharenou noted that women are still underrepresented at the top levels of management and extended her review to establish what may stop women from reaching the top. In her review, she concluded, “social capital more than human capital explains why women do not advance to executive levels” (Tharenou, 2005, p. 52) where social capital includes social contacts and human capital pertains to knowledge, skills and abilities.

More recently the notion of second-generation bias has come to the fore. Second-generation bias refers to covert and invisible barriers based on male-centric models of career and leadership practices. In their white paper on the subject, Santana and Pappa (2015, p. 2) set out the second-generation or unconscious bias facing women in the workplace as:

- Traditional images of leadership are associated with qualities that are viewed as male qualities.
- Women have few female role models at high levels of leadership.
- Career paths and work are often defined by or associated with gender.
- Women are held to higher standards and offered fewer rewards.
- Women are not part of the networks that supply information and support.
- Women face a double bind of being either competent or liked—but not both.
- The combination of work and home responsibilities is a greater burden for women.
- Women may be hesitant to advocate for themselves or self-promote.

1.4.3 Career development theories for women

Most theories of career development draw on concepts related to male constructions of career success (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007) and the majority of studies are rooted in externalised definitions of success. The consensus in career development literature is that existing traditional models of career development do not adequately examine women’s unique circumstances in the workplace (Patton, 2013; Patton & McMahon,
In his major review and evaluation of theories dealing with career development Osipow (1983) concluded: “substantial differences exist to warrant attempts to develop distinctive theories for each gender” (p. 263). Certain career theorists have expanded on traditional career development theory in order to better fit the complexities of women’s career patterns. Authors Patton and McMahon (2014, p. 138) argued that there is “considerable uncertainty about the nature and development of women’s careers”. In their review of theoretical approaches, these authors identified seven main theoretical approaches, which have application to women, segmented as follows:

- Specific theories for women: For example, Psathas (1968) and Zytowski (1969) focused on the relationship between gender role and occupational role, emphasising the central role of homemaking.
- Adaptation of traditional theories: For instance, Super (1980) expanded his career theory to a life-span approach to include the multiple roles an individual occupies. This served to acknowledge the complexity of women’s career behaviour.
- Comprehensive theories applicable to women and men: For example, the self-concept theory, composed of sex-role socialisation, social class, and ability proposed by Gottfredson (1981, 1996), highlighting the influence of gender type norms on career choices.
- Specific models focusing on individual differences: Various theories have examined individual factors that affect women’s career behaviour. For example, Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) identified four such factors—individual, background, educational, and adult life-style.
- Sociocognitive models have applied Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory to women’s career development. For instance, Hackett and Betz (1981) demonstrated support for the impact of self-efficacy beliefs on women’s career behaviour.
- Ecological or systems approaches: Systems Theory Framework developed by Patton and McMahon (1999) draws on the constructivist paradigm to examine a multitude of influences on career development. This approach acknowledges the individual’s active role in life construction.
• Relational and cultural theories focusing on the relational aspects of women’s career development, for example, Mainiero and Sullivan’s (2005) kaleidoscope career model.

The conceptualisation of career development for women suggests that career theories must take into account the changing patterns of women’s careers. Patton and McMahon (2014) put forward that the theoretical understanding of women’s career development remains incomplete and that further conceptualisation of career development is required. In support of a women-specific framing for work and careers, O’Neil, Hopkins, and Bilimoria (2008) stressed that research should expand the traditional criteria of career success to consider women-specific definitions of success. The challenge therefore is to move from universal theories to emerging theories grounded in data generated by women leaders themselves; moving from the macro to the micro; from grand theories to ones that are contextual, embedded in particular situation, and bound in time.

1.5 Problem statement and research questions

Hopkins and O’Neil (2007) noted that theory building and the testing of women’s career success continues to draw on “frameworks and conceptions derived from male constructions of work and careers” (p. 134). Career progression in literature is typically defined according to the traditional male “corporatic” career model, defined by Hopkins and O’Neil (2007, p. 133) as “linear, hierarchical progression.” Whilst some studies have investigated women’s definition of career success, the majority of studies rely on the traditional definitions of objective success within the corporate environment (Kirchmeyer, 2002; Sturges, 1999). There is a growing call for career development theories that reflect the complexity of women’s lives (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2012; Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). Authors Vinnicombe and Banks (2003) noted:

It is important to examine the context of success in terms of the research into women in management. Women’s experience of management is often significantly different from men’s because of the particular roles they fill both
at work and within life in general. This is likely to affect their definitions of success. (p. 63)

In order to enrich the understanding of women’s career development, Young and Popaduik (2012) recommended a constructivist and social constructionist perspective to incorporate individual and social processes. Specifically, these authors said that these perspectives “inform what we believe and how we act in relation to career” (p. 9). In light of these recommendations, my study follows a constructionist approach, working inductively with the intention of understanding career progression as constructed by women, individually, and socially. To this end, the research problem formulated in the form of a question is: “What are women leaders’ constructions of career progression in a corporate environment?”

To understand career progression holistically, however, one has to explore women’s career progression from three traditions/approaches within the constructionist tradition. These are: personal constructivism, social constructionism, and constructivism grounded in subjective lived experience.

The first approach, personal constructivism, assists in the study of how women leaders personally construe career progression. Evidence suggests that to become a leader, the leadership role must become a central part of oneself. This is achieved by developing deep cognitive structures associated with leadership expertise (Lord & Hall, 2005). These structures can be referred to as cognitive maps, self-schemas, meaning structures, or mental models (Magzan, 2012). One view of leadership suggests that how leaders behave and sense of self as a leader is heavily shaped by our constructions of leadership (Lord & Hall, 2005). Theorists suggest that as mental models are challenged, the individual can be open to new ways of thinking and behaviour can be changed (Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1990). Thus, there is a need to scrutinise the constructs, beliefs and mental models that drive the framework for organising the information women hold about career progression. To this end, the first research sub-question is: “What are women leaders’ constructions of the career progression of others in a corporate environment?”
The second approach would be the social construction of career progression not in terms of social construction between participant and researcher but between women themselves in a participative manner. Social constructionism holds the view that individuals construct their world (Gergen & Gergen, 2003) and that reality and knowledge is generated through social interaction (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Cohen, Duberley and Mallon (2004, p. 409) contend that careers are constituted by the individual, in “interaction with others, as she moves through time and space.” Within a social constructionist tradition, the social interaction between women may contribute to the maintenance and/or redefinition of the enactment of career (Fernando & Cohen, 2013). This is associated with one of the key assumptions of social construction— that knowledge and action go together— thus different constructions brings different forms of actions (Burr, 2015). Therefore, there is merit in examining the women’s collective constructions of career progression, which impact and are impacted by their social context. The second research sub-question is: “What are women leaders’ collective co-constructions of a generative and transformative career progression (“ours”) in a corporate environment?"

A constructivist view of career progression allows for uncovering the underlying social processes within a particular context and “starts with the experience and asks how members construct it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 197). Patton (2013) argued for a constructivist lens to understanding women’s careers, because much of career development theories do not account for the complexity of women lives. She argued that constructivism ensures the individuals’ “construction remains at the centre of career development process, not a body of theory” (p. 14). To this end, the third sub-question formulated is: “What are women leaders’ constructions of their own career progression in a corporate environment?”

### 1.6 Research aims

Informed by the research question the aim of this study is to explore women leaders’ constructions of career progression in a corporate environment. The aim is further sub-divided into three sub-aims:
• Sub-aim 1: To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progression of others in a corporate environment.

• Sub-aim 2: To explore women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-construction of a generative and transformative career progression in a corporate environment.

• Sub-aim 3: To generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment, based on their subjective experiences.

Taken together, the study seeks to offer a holistic and in-depth account of the constructions of career progression by women leaders in a corporate environment. By holistic, I mean to incorporate not only the subjective lived experience but also the shared constructions of others’ career progression and as well as the collective co-construction of career progression by women leaders. In effect, the study sought to understand the construction of career progression of “others”, “ours” and “own” by women leaders.

1.7 Research objectives

In order to address the aforementioned sub-aims, the objectives formulated are:

• Objective 1: To approach sub-aim 1 from Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory by applying the repertory grid technique.

• Objective 2: To approach sub-aim 2 from a social constructionist tradition by applying the Appreciative Inquiry method due to its transformative and generative methodology (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

• Objective 3: To approach sub-aim 3 from a constructivistic tradition by applying Charmaz (2014) constructivist grounded theory method.

The research methods associated with each objective are discussed, elaborated and defended in sections 3.2, 4.2 and 5.2 respectively.
To address the research objectives formulated for the study, this study is presented as three sequential research phases each consisting of an independent but related study. Each phase is built upon the knowledge and constructions derived from the previous phase. Sequential research is defined as a “deliberate, staged approach, where one stage will be completed, followed by another, with the aim that each stage will build upon the previous one” (Labaree, 2009). The three phases are as follows:

1.7.1 Phase I

In the first phase, sub-aim 1 “To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progress of others in a corporate environment” is addressed. The first component of this study is embedded within Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory. The main tenet of personal construct theory is that the individual actively construes events, or in other words, finds meaning through the interpretations placed on those events. Personal construct theory describes how each of us, uniquely, construes or interprets our own world. Kelly (1955) defined a construct as a particular way individuals have of “viewing, giving meaning to, or construing the individuals and events in their life and the world around them” (Hardison & Neimeyer, 2012, p. 4). Personal construct theory is embedded in the constructivist paradigm (Butler, 2009) where the individual mentally constructs knowledge. Chapter Three expands upon the theoretical framework, research method employed, findings, and discussion for Phase I.

1.7.2 Phase II

The shared mental model generated from Phase I interviews provided context to Phase II. Sub-aim 2 “To explore women leaders’ collective co-construction of a generative and transformative career progression in a corporate environment” is addressed in this phase of the study. To this end, Appreciative Inquiry, a form of positive participative action research, was selected as an appropriate approach whereby participants may collectively shape their world (Ludema & Fry, 2008). Appreciative Inquiry is rooted in social constructionism (Gergen, 1978, 2009). Social constructionism postulates “human communication is the central process that creates, maintains, and transforms realities” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 51) Thus,
interpretations may change through human interaction (Gergen 1985). From a social constructionist position, the emphasis is on the construction of a generative communal basis of knowledge by virtue of the context in which the participants are embedded (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Gergen, 2003). The theoretical framework, research method, and findings of Phase II are detailed in Chapter Four.

1.7.3 Phase III

In the final phase of the study, sub-aim 3 is addressed: “To generate a grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment based on their subjective experience”. The final component of the study was based on the Constructivist grounded theory approach as proposed by Charmaz (2014) to develop a theory grounded in data. This approach to grounded theory not only explores how participants subjectively construct meaning, but also acknowledges the researcher’s role in the construction and interpretation of the data. Charmaz (2014) aligned her theory to the term constructivism to recognise “subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data” (p. 14). On the latter, Charmaz (2014, p. 14) argued “subjectivity is inseparable from social existence” thus taking on a social constructionism perspective in that the researcher and participant have a socially constructed reality that influences the research. She stated that, “Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive processes and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). Chapter Five expands upon the theoretical framework, research design, and findings for Phase III.

1.8 Literature review strategy

The nature of the research questions, aims, and objectives, suggested this would be a qualitative study. Creswell (2013) stated that there are several modes of incorporation of the review of literature in a qualitative study. He suggested that there are three possible locations for the review. These are as follows:
• Literature review may be used to frame the study in the introduction of the study;
• In theory orientated qualitative studies, (such as ethnographies and critical theory studies), the review may be presented in a separate chapter as a fully developed and comprehensive review of literature; or
• The review may be presented at the end of the study to compare and contrast findings.

Additionally, Strauss, and Corbin (1998, pp. 49-52) listed several uses of literature review in qualitative research:

• Concepts from literature can be a source for making comparisons in the data collected.
• To familiarise the researcher with the relevant literature to enhance sensitivity to subtle nuances in the data.
• Published descriptive materials can provide descriptions of reality which may helpful to interpret the data collected.
• Researcher may draw off existing philosophical and theoretical knowledge.
• The literature can be a secondary source of data to compliment researchers findings.
• Literature can be used beforehand to formulate research questions and inform questions in interviews or observations.
• The literature may stimulate questions during analysis of data.
• Areas for theoretical sampling may be suggested by the literature.
• The literature can be used for confirming findings.

In this study the literature is presented in this chapter to contextualise the study. Following Creswell (2013) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) extant literature in this study was used to compare and contrast findings that emerged from the study.
1.9 Contributions of the study

A pragmatic approach to scientific knowledge asserts that advances in knowledge come from adopting alternative constructions that facilitate a new perspective (Butt, 2008). It is within this frame that I aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge from the standpoint of offering an enriched perspective of women’s career progression in the field of their career advancement at a methodological, theoretical, and practical level.

The use of multiple methods or triangulation brings depth to the phenomenon under investigation. Four methods of triangulation were proposed by Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999): methodological, theoretical, analytical, and triangulation of data sources. In this study, I made use of two methods of triangulation: theoretical triangulation, namely, personal construction, social construction, and constructivism) and three data collection methods (repertory grid, appreciative inquiry, and grounded theory interviews).

Flowing from a methodological triangulation, the study aims to construct a holistic theoretical perspective of women leaders’ constructions of career progression. This study, to the best of my knowledge, is unique in researching women leaders’ constructions from career progression from the three formerly mentioned theoretical perspectives. In this regard, this study aims to demonstrate congruent scientific orientation by applying three distinct research approaches in one study.

Each of the three studies suggests a particular conceptual theory of women leaders’ career progression. Following Lewin’s (1951, p.169) statement, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory”, these theories may have practical implications for women’s career advancement.

The insights gained from the study may assist in the understanding of the complexity (not to be confused with the term “complicated”) of women leaders’ career progression.
1.10 Outline of the study

This thesis consists of seven chapters. The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides an outline of the three-phase approach to this study. In this chapter the research approach, paradigm, design, and method informing the study as a whole the study is discussed. Chapter 3 presents the first phase of the study. This chapter examines women leaders’ personal constructions of the career progression of others. The chapter begins by examining the theory of mental models and Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory. An explanation of the research method, findings, and discussion completes this chapter. The second phase of the study is presented in Chapter 4. This phase of the study considers the social construction of career progression by women leaders as a collective. Appreciative Inquiry was applied as the research method. Within the chapter, the Appreciative Inquiry approach and its application to the study is discussed. The findings and discussion concludes the chapter. In Chapter 5 the theoretical framework, research method, findings, and discussion for the final phase, a constructivist grounded theory of career progression, is presented. The final chapter, Chapter 6, an overview of the study with summary of the key findings per phase is provided with a final reflection of the findings for the study as a whole. Additionally, recommendations for organisations and women in the context of career advancement are suggested. The limitations of the study and recommendations for future research conclude this thesis.

1.11 Summary

This chapter provided the motivation, background, the research questions, aims, and objectives for the study. This research seeks to assist in the call to determine what career success means to women leaders. As Hopkins and O’Neil (2007) wrote, “It is imperative… that women continue to offer alternative models of success and assist other women in doing the same so that organisations have examples of work lives managed differently but no less successfully (p.144)”. The study aims to contribute to
women’s career development theory by examining constructions of career progression.

to generate a transformative view of women leaders’ career development.
CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH DESIGN

I'm not sure how much of effort I put into that and how much of it is luck
- Interviewee

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research design for the study as a whole. Metaphorically, to borrow from the world of film, this chapter is the trailer and the next three chapters are the trilogy. To address the research question of this study, “What are women leaders’ constructions of career progression in a corporate environment?” it was deemed necessary to conduct the research in three sequential phases, each consisting of an independent but related study. This chapter outlines the research approach, paradigm, design and method informing the study as a whole. Figure 2.1 illustrates the chosen approach, paradigm, and design for the study.

![Figure 2.1 Overview of research approach, paradigm, and design](image)
2.2 Research approach

The choice of research approach is directly correlated to the research aim. There are two broad approaches to research in social sciences that provide specific direction for the design of the study, namely, quantitative and qualitative. Briefly, quantitative research is applied to investigate relationships and study cause-effect relationships and qualitative research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

In this study, I explored how women leaders in a corporate environment construe career progression. I am interested in understanding how these women interpret their experiences, that is, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Essentially, this study was exploratory and subjective in nature. To this end, the study used a qualitative approach. A researcher in the qualitative tradition studies “human action in its natural setting and through the eyes of the actors themselves, together with an emphasis on detailed description and understanding phenomena within the appropriate context” (Babbie & Mouton, 1998, p. 278). This suggests that unlike quantitative research, which collects data in form of numbers, qualitative researchers study phenomena in a natural setting to interpret them in terms of how people make meaning. This approach allows the researcher an in-depth exploration of phenomena from the perspective of the research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The following list identifies the core characteristics of qualitative research (cf. Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) referencing the current study to demonstrate that a qualitative research approach was best suited for this study:

- **Participants’ meanings:** Qualitative research is concerned with constructing meaning from the participants’ point of view. It seeks to understand how people make sense of their lives, how they construct their experiences and how they structure their social world. In this sense, the research is an interactive process whereby the researcher learns from the participants’ own
words and actions. To this end, in this study the emphasis was to understand women leaders’ personal constructions of career progression.

- **Natural setting:** Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in a real-world setting where the phenomena unfold naturally. In this study, I entered a corporate environment and engaged directly with women leaders to gain insight into how these women construct career progression.

- **Researcher as key instrument:** Qualitative research assumes that researchers collect the data themselves through observing participants, examining documents, or interviewing participants rather than using questionnaires or surveys. Data for this study were collected through face-to-face interviews and observer-as-participant in a workshop.

- **Multiple sources of data:** Qualitative researchers commonly collect data from multiple sources and review the data to organise it into categories or themes across all data sources. In this study, face-to-face interviews, shared written activities, and observed data were collected across three phases of the study.

- **Emergent design:** Emergent design suggests that the initial plan for the research cannot be predetermined. Qualitative research ought to be conducted in a flexible manner. As understanding develops, the research process may be modified as data are collected and analysed. Essentially, this study was exploratory in nature and required flexibility in research design to respond to the evolving understanding of career progression from the participants’ perspective.

- **Reflexivity:** In qualitative research, the researcher reflects upon his or her own background, experiences, actions, feelings, and conflicts during the research process. In this regard, the researcher’s subjectivity must be explicitly acknowledged during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve credibility and increase objectivity in this study, I adopted a self-critical stance to the study and the participants. To this end I maintained a research journal in which my feelings, preconceptions, conflicts, observations, assumptions, and feedback from meetings were captured.

- **Inductive and deductive data analysis:** Through an inductive process, the qualitative researcher identifies patterns, categories, and themes from the data (referred to as a bottom-up approach) in a continual interplay between themes
and data. Creswell (2014) stated that although the data analysis process begins inductively, deductive thinking allows the analysis to move forward. This study did not begin with a set of hypotheses. Instead, I collected data and then utilised inductive analysis to identify and characterise coding, conceptual categories, and descriptive themes for phase I and III of this study. In Phase II, as the researcher I was not involved in the interpretation of the data but rather the post-modern nature of this phase allowed for the participants to work inductively and deductively to identify themes.

- **Holistic account:** The aim of qualitative research is to understand the phenomena from a holistic perspective to develop a complex model of the issue under study. It is important to have an account from multiple perspectives and covering the many factors involved to build a deeper understanding of the the issue under investigation. The three phase approach to this study is an attempt to provide such a holistic and multiple account of constructions of career progression.

In sum, my research is thus underpinned by a qualitative approach which provides the opportunity to investigate—in-depth and in detail—constructions of career progression by women leaders in a corporate setting. This is congruent with Locke and Golden-Biddle’s (2002) view that a qualitative approach within the field of Industrial Organisational Psychology provides a framework to explore the constructions and meanings that people bring to work and how these interpretations may influence behaviour.

### 2.3 Research paradigm

All research endeavours embody and are influenced by a paradigm (Creswell, 2014). The term paradigm is used synonymously in social science with “philosophical worldviews”, “epistemologies” and “research traditions”. In this study, I adopt the term paradigm, defined by Babbie (2013, p. 57) as “a model or framework for observation and understanding”. The paradigm functions as a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p.17) which informs the researcher’s view of social reality. In essence, paradigms are the philosophical assumptions which provide a

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framework and foundation for the research activity by shaping the choice of research methods. My paradigm is expressed by my ontology and epistemology.

2.3.1 Ontology and epistemology

My ontology and epistemology are closely tied together. My ontological perspective embraces the idea that reality is constructed and therefore relative: multiple realities are constructed as individuals experience life in two ways, namely, on a personal and social level. Epistemologically, I hold a subjectivist view in that the researcher is not independent from what is being researched, and that the findings are mutually created, interpreted, and embedded in the context in question. Given my ontology and epistemology I crafted three research questions related to women leaders’ construction of career progression of others, the collective (“ours”) and the subjective lived experience (own). Each of these research questions is embedded in a particular tradition or approach within my chosen paradigm: personal constructivism as proposed by Kelly (1955), social constructionism as proposed by Gergen (1978, 2009) and constructivism as proposed by Charmaz (2006, 2014).

2.3.2 Constructivism and social constructionism

Prior to discussing how the three questions are addressed in a three-phased manner, the confusion related to constructivism and social constructionism needs to be addressed. These two terms tend to be used interchangeably without considering their philosophical underpinnings. Gergen (2015) highlighted two aspects where constructivism and social constructionism are comparable. The first is that central to both traditions is the notion that knowledge is a constructed process. To this point, Gergen (1995, p.27) emphasised that both constructionism and constructivism “share in their critique of the empiricist paradigm of knowledge generation”. The second aspect is that both traditions are sceptical of the foundationalist warrants of logical empiricist philosophers. Instead, both challenge the ideas that (a) “we can know the world for what it is” and, (b) “the traditional view of the individual mind as a device for reflecting the character and conditions of an independent world” (Gergen, 2015, p. 30). The epistemologies of both traditions are therefore grounded in subjectivism.
In the same vein, McNamee (2004, p. 39) regarded constructivism and social constructionism as similar due to their focus on meaning-making processes and their “shared desire in transformative dialogue.” She underscored the relational aspects of each paradigm as the bridge between the two paradigms through the centrality of dialogue in the meaning-making process.

The common foundations of constructivism and social constructionism are an important consideration for this study and so too are the differences. Gergen (2015, p. 30) presents this crucial difference thus: “where constructivism places the origin of knowledge in head of the individual, social construction places the origin in social process”. The central tenet of constructivism is that an objective reality is not separate or inherent to the individual but, rather, that reality is individually constructed. Social construction contends that realities are socially constructed through language and sustained by social processes. The interest of my study lies in exploring both, that is, the individual’s subjective construction of career progression and career progression as a function of “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). These approaches are congruent with my study, as, at the most fundamental level, the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of how women leaders personally and socially construct the phenomenon of career progression.

2.4 Research method

In this section the research method informing the study, as a whole, is presented.

2.4.1 Research strategy

A single case study as research strategy was considered the most appropriate approach based on the exploratory and subjective nature of the study. A case study design provides an in-depth view from a variety of perspectives in a real life context, with a flexible approach allowing the researcher to be led by data. A case study is defined as: “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p.18).
In empirical inquiry, a case study involves the investigation of a clearly delineated system (Babbie & Mouton, 1998) and provides a detailed description of the research setting, the participants, and an analysis of the data for themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Farquhar (2012, p. 38) suggested that a case study strategy is particularly suitable when:

- The researcher wants to generate intensive insights through in-depth investigations.
- Flexibility is required to adapt research to changes.
- Studying the research question in context.
- Investigating a complex research problem.

The emphasis of case study research is “on understanding processes alongside their (organizational and other) context” (Hartley, 2004, p. 324). Case study research may focus on a particular group of individuals within an organisation. Within this context, by utilising a case study strategy, it is possible to explore how women leaders in an organisation construct the complex phenomenon of career progression. Furthermore it provides an in-depth account of this phenomenon from the participants’ perspective. This is in line with Merriam’s (1998, p. 19) statement that a case study approach promotes “an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved”.

A further consideration for a case study strategy is the use of multiple data sources, which enhances data credibility (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Interviews, collages, and participant-observations are used in this study to contribute to the understanding of the whole phenomenon in an effort to weave together the strands of data “to promote a greater understanding of the case” (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Within the field of researching organisations, linked to the discipline of Industrial Organisational Psychology, Patton and Appelbaum (2003) have argued for the use of a case study approach as a research endeavour. These authors posit that case study research contributes to knowledge of the “individual, organisational, social, and political phenomena” (p. 63). As case study research is concerned with studying phenomena in context, it is suitable for a phenomenon such as career progression that
lies at the intersection between organisational structures and human agents (Patton & Appelbaum, 2003).

Hartley (2004) has highlighted the importance of how to exit the case study setting once the data collection has been completed. There are certain actions the researcher can take, for example, advising the key individuals of the plan to analyse the data, writing up the report, and sharing the findings. On this front, I undertook to provide feedback to the organisation and to participants by way of a seminar.

### 2.4.2 The research setting

The research setting for this research was a large financial institution recognised as leading provider of motor vehicle and asset finance in South Africa – hereafter referred to as “The Bank”. This institution is closely aligned to the automotive industry—from car manufacturers to dealerships—traditionally a male dominated environment. At the time of sampling, The Bank employed a total of 2849 people, 60% of whom were female.

The representation of women at the various management levels at The Bank is reflected in Table 2.1 as at the time of sampling (September 2014). At top management level (Grade A), the executive committee comprised of eight executive directors. Only one executive director was female. She was the Human Resources Executive and was not a participant in this study. At the second tier of management, females represented 33% of the senior managers (Grade B). In the sample for this study, 12 participants were on this occupational level. In the mid-management level (Grade C), females represented 47%, of which 32 participants took part in the study. In the junior level of management (Grade D), females held 58% of these positions. Thirty-six participants in this study were junior managers.
Table 2.1

Extract from The Bank’s gender profile per occupational level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Level</th>
<th>Total Females</th>
<th>Females %</th>
<th>ACI Females</th>
<th>ACI Females %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Management</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Management</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Management</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary Decision Making</td>
<td>1149</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined Decision Making</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The lower representation of women in top and senior management at The Bank mirrored the trends reported in research (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011), popular media (Medland, 2016; Shambaugh, 2016), and global non-profit organisations (BWASA, 2015; Catalyst, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016). Table 2.2 reflects the percentage of women in executive management position across the various industries in South Africa in a study conducted by BWASA (2015). By comparison to the financial sector segment of the table, The Bank lists 13% of the top management (executive management) as female. That said, The Bank has recognised the need to create a more diverse and inclusive culture.

In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act, No 55 of 1998 applies to all employers with more than 50 employees. The purpose of this act is to promote fair treatment of employees and redress the previously disadvantaged groups within the historical context of South Africa to ensure equitable representation at all levels and categories in the workforce (South African Department of Labour, 1994). The act seeks to end discrimination along race, gender and disabilities. In this regard and with specific reference to this study, one of the objectives in The Bank’s Employment Equity plan (for the period 2016 – 2019) is to focus on the development of women leaders and their retention in order to build a senior and middle management pipeline through
succession planning, mentoring, and coaching, leadership programmes, and meaningful performance conversations. A goal has been set to increase the number of women leaders at mid-management and junior management by 15% and 8% respectively to build the pipeline for the senior positions by 2019.

Table 2.2

South African industry comparison of women representation at director and executive management levels

![Graph showing women representation comparison across various industries.](image)

2.4.3 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research setting for all three phases of the study was The Bank’s headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa. As a psychologist consulting to organisations, I had facilitated a number of leadership development workshops for The Bank’s Learning and Development Department in my capacity as an external service provider. As such, I had an established relationship of trust with strong credibility due to the success of the leadership development programme within this bank. I approached the Human Resources Executive with my research proposal. The HR Executive was a strong proponent of women’s initiatives and programmes to support women in building their careers in The Bank. She readily tabled my research proposal at an Executive Committee meeting. Permission was granted for the research to be conducted, conditional on certain criteria. I was required to sign a research agreement with The Bank, which covered issues such as maintaining research site and participant anonymity. The informed consent form drafted for participants to sign (Annexure A) was vetted and approved by two departments: the Risk and Legal Departments.

The research participants were insiders working within the company. For the study, I was positioned as an outsider to the participants and the case study company. The study was positioned as academic research, but also framed as an opportunity for leadership development for women leaders.

It was necessary for me to have different roles at the different phases of the research. The research design for each phase helped clarify the different roles and contributions required during the process of data collection, data capture, analysis, and interpretation of results of the three phases.

Creswell (2013) notes that biases, past experiences, prejudices may shape the interpretations or orientation to the research. Due to previous working experiences at the research site, where I had worked closely with individuals at all levels of the organisation, I recognise that I may have brought certain bias to the study. In this regard, my experience with leaders during the leadership development programmes may influence the lens through which I view the participant’s narrative of the prevailing culture of The Bank.
2.4.4 Sampling

Sampling is almost always purposive in a qualitative study (Babbie & Mouton, 1998) to identify participants that are especially knowledgeable with the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). In this study, purposeful sampling was integral to exploring the research aim therefore participants were sought where the phenomenon being investigated was likely to occur. The target population consisted of women in lower, middle, and senior management positions.

The requirement for participant selection was discussed with the Human Resources Executive and the Human Resources Account Executives. The Bank maintains job grades according to an Employment Occupation system. The grades and grade description are illustrated in Table 2.3. The job grades apply to the occupational levels described to in Table 2.1.

Table 2.3

Employment occupation levels - Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Top management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Senior management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Middle management, professionally qualified and experienced specialists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Junior management, skilled technical and academically qualified workers, supervisors, foremen and superintendents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of this study, the target population consisted of women leaders in job grades B, C, and D. The Human Resources Executive advised that an additional criterion was required to adhere to The Bank’s internal policy of participation in transformation programmes. This policy stipulated that only staff rated as “High Potential” on The Bank’s Nine-Box Talent Matrix (refer to Table 2.4) are eligible to
participate in transformation programmes. Taking these criteria into account, the research population was 229 women leaders, in job grades B, C or D and rated as ‘High Potential’ on The Bank’s talent matrix.

Table 2.4

*Nine-box talent matrix*

![Nine-box talent matrix](image)

Reprinted with permission.

2.4.4.1 Invitation to participate

An invitation to participate in the study was extended to the research population via email by the Human Resources Executive and the Specialist Developer in Management and Leadership. The invitation was accompanied with a briefing providing details of the study (See Annexure B) and a survey to establish levels of leadership experience. The survey was not associated with to the research topic but rather The Bank’s requirement for selection of participants. The survey was administered with the assistance of a talent development organisation, using in-house software to manage the survey process. The results of the survey were collated by the talent development organisation and provided to me in an Excel spreadsheet. The total
number of respondents to the survey was 104 of which 92 individuals met the criteria for participation. The individuals who did not fulfil the requirements for purposeful sampling were individually advised via e-mail and provided with my details if they wished to contact me directly for more information.

I drafted the briefing that was included in the e-mail invitation, in which details of the research aims, research process, time commitment, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality were provided.

2.4.4.2 Briefing session

The 92 individuals who met the research criteria were invited to attend an hour-long group briefing session. The briefing was conducted at a conference venue at The Bank’s headquarters (Figure 2.4). The Human Resources Executive, Specialist Developer and an attorney from The Bank’s legal department were present. The purpose of the briefing was to provide the participants with my credentials, explain the purpose of the research, to contextualise the study, to explain the research process including data collection, communication of results, and the ethics governing the study. The Human Resources Executive positioned the research study within the context of adding value to The Banks’ transformation programmes. The attorney from The Bank’s legal department addressed the group about the concept and implication of informed consent. Participants were encouraged to pose questions related to the research process, concerns relating to confidentiality or The Banks’ right of access to the research findings.
Figure 2.2 Briefing session at The Bank’s headquarters

The briefing was concluded with an invitation to those individuals who wanted to be part of the research to sign the informed consent form and to complete their preferred timeslots for interviews. Eighty-two women leaders indicated interest and signed the informed consent form.

2.4.4.3 Selection of research participants

The level of interest from the research population was unexpected. This gave rise to an ethical dilemma: to further sample the participants would exclude many women in the face of overwhelming support, interest, and need from the gatekeeper (HR Executive), the organisation, and the 82 respondents. Creswell (2014) asserted that whilst there is no specific answer to the sample size in qualitative research, the size of the sample depends on the design being used. The decision to include all the volunteers also considered the research aims for Phase II. The purpose of Phase II was to explore how women leaders, as a collective, co-construct career progression in a corporate environment through action research. In this instance the following questions were taken into account:

- Could the group benefit from more interactivity?
- Could having this many participants prevent socially correct responses?
• Could the group benefit from interacting with all levels of management in the room?

In research, numbers of participants are considered a factor in order to generate sufficiently extensive information (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). In consultation with my supervisor and the Human Resources Executive, for the purposes of inclusion, it was decided that all 82 women leaders would be incorporated in the research process.

2.4.4.4 Participant demographics

All 82 women leaders were advised that they were invited to participate in three phases. Table 2.5 presents the demographic profile of the participants per phase. In Phase I all 82 participants attended the interviews. The invitation to participate in Phase II of this study was extended to the population purposively sampled for Phase I (82 participants). As indicated on table 4.5, the number of attendees in Phase II was 66. Reasons provided for non-attendance ranged from last-minute work deadlines, a group strategy session, illness, and, in one case, a death in the family. The difference between Phase I and II sample size is within the accepted 20% attrition rate. The invitation to the participants to take part in Phase III of the study was extended at the conclusion of the Phase II workshop. All 66 participants indicated their continued participation by completing a preferred time for interview on the day of the workshop (Phase II). A total of 63 participants were interviewed during Phase III. Only three participants who had initially volunteered for Phase III withdrew. One participant resigned and two participants had undergone operations and were subsequently booked off work during the period of interviews. The demographics are presented in Table 5.1. A comparison with the Phase II sample indicates a negligible change in the profile, for instance, the average age for the sample in Phase II was 40 years and for Phase III, 40 years, one month.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, data are presented in aggregate. Whilst the participants were working for the same organisation, they were not all known to each and had varied backgrounds and experiences. The participants worked in the various business units of The Bank: Human Resources, Sales, Finance, Asset Management, Risk, Operations, Information Technology, and Accounts. Participants were located
within the head office in Johannesburg and various regional offices in the Gauteng province.

Table 2.5

Demographic profile of sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic profile</th>
<th>Phase I (n=82)</th>
<th>Phase II (n=66)</th>
<th>Phase III (n=63)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Range</td>
<td>25 to 58</td>
<td>27 to 58</td>
<td>27 to 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average participants age</td>
<td>40.1 years</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td>40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 20 – 29</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 30 – 39</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 40 – 49</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 50 – 59</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ages are at time of selection. Race classification as per The Banks’ classification. B = Senior Management C = Middle Management D = Junior Management
2.4.5 Data collection

Given the nature of this study, more than one data collection technique was applied to achieve the overall research purpose. Data were collected in English. An overview of the data collection methods, per phase, follows.

2.4.5.1 Phase I

To address the stated aim of Phase I, participants were interviewed using the repertory grid technique, which is underpinned by Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory. The goal of the repertory grid technique is to allow an investigation of how the participants make meaning of their world (Hardison & Neimeyer, 2012). It brings to light the unique way in which the participants interpret the phenomenon under investigation. The repertory grid technique elicits elements from the participants concerning the phenomenon under study and a set of bipolar personal constructs that compare and contrast these elements. In this study, the elements are people who attained and failed to attain senior leadership positions within the corporate environment. The repertory grid technique was applied to each participant, individually, face-to-face and conducted in two stages: element selection and construct elicitation. Interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes. Data were recorded on the repertory grid questionnaire (Annexure D).

2.4.5.2 Phase II

The aim of Phase II of this study was to explore how women leaders, as a collective, co-construct the possibilities for career progression in a corporate environment. To best achieve this aim, a workshop framed in Appreciative Inquiry approach was conducted. Appreciative Inquiry was selected as a method because it can be viewed as a process to direct change, in so far as this theoretical approach helps create a collective image of a desired future, and guides actions that may help towards achieving that future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). A one-day workshop was facilitated at The Bank’s premises following the Appreciative Inquiry 5-D cycle, which covers the following five stages:

1. Defining the purpose of the inquiry.
2. Discovering the best of what is.
3. Dream to imagine what could be.
4. Design what will be.
5. Destiny – to enact change, learning to become what we most hope for.

Data collected included participant generated data captured in a workbook, shared written activities presented on A1 flipchart paper, video recording of group discussions, and collages presented on A1 flipchart paper.

2.4.5.3 Phase III

In order to address the stated aim for Phase III, data were collected following Charmaz’s (2014) recommendations. Data for this research question were generated through intensive semi-structured interviewing underpinned by Charmaz’s (2014) Constructivist Grounded Theory approach. Individual semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with each participant after the completion of Phase II. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded on a dictaphone with the permission of the participant. Interviews were between 60 and 90 minutes in length. The intensive interviewing process allows for the uncovering of each participant’s interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Interviews were professionally transcribed and each transcription vetted for accuracy.

2.4.6 Data analyses

The data analysis is akin to “peeling back the layers of an onion” (Creswell, 2014, p. 245). The data collected for this study were dense and rich. The sub-aims served as a guide to focus the data analyses. An overview of the approaches to the data analyses for each phase follows:

2.4.6.1 Phase I

The method of analysis conducted for Phase I of this study followed a data driven content analysis approach to qualitative data analysis. During this phase 82 interviews were conducted. Data elicited from the repertory grids were captured on ATLAS.ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programme, to
facilitate data organisation and analysis. The systematic analysis began with initial coding of the personal constructs. Codes and categories were developed by researcher utilising the core-categorising procedure suggested by Jankowicz (2004). Personal construct categories were contextualised to themes. Themes were contextualised against the categories to elicit the shared mental model of career progression.

2.4.6.2 Phase II

During the Appreciative Inquiry process, 66 participants engaged in collaborative data analyses. These encouraged the participants to assess and internalise the information generated during the process. Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) referred to this analytical process as “mining the data” by the participants themselves (p. 202). These authors argued that this process is consistent with the Appreciative Inquiry theory in that future realities are created in relationships and through conversations. In this regard, these authors strongly recommended that the researcher not analyse the data as “the observer always impacts and changes that which is observed” (p. 202). Workbook data, video recording of the group discussion, and the collages were imported into ATLAS.ti to manage the data and the themes generated by the participants.

2.4.6.3 Phase III

Data analysis and theory construction in the Grounded Theory approach is an evolving process (Charmaz, 2014). During this phase, 62 interviews were conducted. Interviews were rated based on the interviewee’s in-depth experience with—and knowledge of—career progression (cf. Ruben & Ruben, 2005). Interviews that were rated relevant to the research aim were transcribed in full by a professional transcription service. These interviews were analysed using the Constructivist grounded theory analytic techniques of open and focused coding and memoing (Charmaz, 2014). To assist with coding, transcriptions were coded using ATLAS.ti software to locate the codes and categories in the data. Interviews were analysed until data saturation was reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The process of data collection, analysis, and conceptual theorising occurred from the beginning of the research process until a theory was reached.
2.5 Trustworthiness of the study

There is considerable debate in literature as to the appropriate criteria to evaluate the validity of qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward Trustworthiness as the evaluation criterion for qualitative research as opposed to the traditional criteria associated with quantitative research of objectivity, validity, and reliability. Trustworthiness is the extent to which the data and findings are believable and trustworthy. I addressed trustworthiness of the study in terms of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) proposed four-point criteria for evaluation of qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I addressed each criterion as follows:

- Credibility: In an effort to address the question “how congruent are the findings with reality?” (Merriam, 2009, p. 213), I selected data collection methods that are valid qualitative research techniques;
  - I remained immersed in The Bank for 10 months;
  - triangulated using different perspectives and methods; and
  - engaged a peer to review the findings and met for regular debriefs with my supervisor.

- Transferability: To address the extent to which the findings could be generalised to other contexts, I provided a detailed description of the research site, participants, and data collection method and length of data collection sessions.

- Dependability: An audit trail was maintained of the research design and findings, an in-depth description of the research design and the implementation is provided.

- Confirmability: I maintained a research journal to capture my beliefs and assumptions, maintained the above-mentioned audit trail, ensured triangulation of the study via the three phase approach to obtain three perspectives, and provided an in-depth description of the methods to allow for scrutiny of findings. To enhance the confirmability of the findings I referenced
existing literature. All data, transcripts and audio-visual material are available upon request.

Given that this study comprises three phases each underpinned by a different research method, I elaborate on the issue of trustworthiness within each phase of the study.

2.6 Reflexivity

Guba and Lincoln (1981) state that in qualitative research the researcher is considered as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher’s worldview, background, culture, and experience (Creswell, 2013) have the potential to impact interpretation. To maintain rigour, qualitative researchers are encouraged to engage in reflexivity, defined as “a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 275). This entailed careful consideration of my own background in the corporate environment, my extant knowledge of career development, and all my models of women’s career progression.

Given the three-phased approach of this study, the number of participants, and the duration of the study, the keeping of various reflexive journals proved to be an invaluable and integral part of the research. Particularly useful in the reflexive process and in guiding my analytic work was Charmaz’s (2014) framework for memo-writing and Patton’s (2002) suggested questions for self-reflexivity. Memo-writing, as per Charmaz (2014, p. 164) encourages the researcher to “stop, focus, take your codes and data apart, compare and define.” The three categories of reflexive questions suggested by Patton (2002, p. 495) that I utilised to guide my reflexive journal in my research journal, the interpretation of the data and conceptualising the findings were:

- Self-reflexivity (What do I know? How do I know what I know?)
- Reflexivity about participants (How do those in the study know what they know?)
- Reflexivity about the reader (How do those reading my findings make sense of the text?)
During the course of the research process I captured thoughts, struggles, frustrations, insights, reflections, links between data, minutes of meetings, and celebrated moments I considered pivotal to the research process. I began the journal at the nexus between presenting the research proposal and approaching The Bank to gain entrée to the site. My first memo was titled *Lessons in life will be repeated until they are learnt* (see Figure 2.5).

![Figure 2.3 Example of entry in my reflexive journal](image)

To be sure, there were many lessons learnt and re-learnt as the research process unfolded. For example, despite my 20 years experience in the corporate world as a senior leader, I found myself remembering the politics of corporate hierarchy. Perhaps, because of that experience, my frustrations with the internal processes were more acute. This was especially since, as an outsider to The Bank, I was unable to directly influence the administration mechanisms. As pointed out to me by my supervisor when I shared the challenges I faced: If I experienced challenges with the culture of The Bank, how many more did my participants experience?
Phase III of this study proved to be the most emotionally taxing phase. I conducted 66 interviews and, for the most part, the interviews presented the participants with the first opportunity to reflect on their career journey. Many traumatic stories were shared with me. At times, I became overwhelmed with intense emotions. It was in my journal that I processed my feelings and reflected on the potential of biases forming as a result of the intensity of the experience. More so during Phase III than the other phases, I engaged with my psychologist colleague in debriefing sessions.

In the final stage of the study, the enormity of managing the voluminous data generated was perhaps my greatest analytical challenge. The issue of managing the data was not so much the physical location of the data but more the need to hold the interpretations of data in mind. My reflection titled *Drowning in data* attested to the complex nature of integrating the findings of three of studies to a final discussion. In this memo I wrote:

> I must reflect as much and as often as I can. By as much: if I can write down ideas straight after a session so that I do not lose the connections of ideas. Losing ideas will be easy because of the volume. I’ll forget the small detail that may be building to a concept.

Reflexivity was indeed a space between the participant and researcher, the data, and interpretation in this study.

### 2.7 Ethical considerations

In undertaking any form of research, there is an ethical dimension which must be considered by the researcher. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated “the researcher must demonstrate awareness of complex ethical issues in qualitative research and show that the research is both feasible and ethical” (p. 122). Ethical issues refer to dilemmas or conflicts that may arise during all phases of the research process (Creswell, 2013). As such, the Code of Ethics of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and the Department of Management at the University of Johannesburg provided guidance on how to deal with dilemmas and conflicts but
fundamentally, I had a moral obligation to act professionally and ethically (Neuman, 2003).

For this study, I was guided by ethics I compiled from a number of sources (Babbie & Mouton, 1998; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Neuman, 2003). The following constitute some of the ethical issues I considered but recognise that this is not a comprehensive list:

- Voluntary participation: a major tenet of research is that participation must be voluntary with no pressure or coercion brought to bear on the individual. In this study, all participants were advised that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any point.
- Do no harm: Participants must not be placed at risk, this includes physical harm, psychological abuse, and legal harm. In this study participants may experience distress in the recounting of their career journey. Should this occur, participants will be referred for counselling.
- No deception: Deliberate misrepresentation is not condoned and can be mitigated by the research design. Participants were informed of the aim of the research.
- Informed consent: A fundamental ethical principle and consistent with the participants’ right to autonomy, which translates into being informed of the purpose, nature, and consequences of the study. An informed consent form was drafted, vetted by The Bank’s legal department, and explained to the participants by their lawyer.
- Anonymity and confidentiality: Research participants are entitled to confidentiality with their personal data secured and pseudonyms used to conceal their identities.
- Accuracy: Researchers have an ethical obligation to the scientific community to ensure that data are valid, that data are interpreted in a manner that avoids misrepresentation, and there is an accurate reporting of all findings, including negative ones.
- Awareness of plagiarism: Researchers must acknowledge sources consulted directly or indirectly.
In this study, compliance to sound and ethical research practices is supported by the following documents:

1. The formal declaration of intent letter signed by the researcher (Annexure C).
2. The letter of disclosure and approval for support signed by the Human Resources Executive.
3. The letter of consent signed by the research participants. This letter of informed consent was vetted by The Bank’s legal department.

2.8 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design. The research approach and paradigm were explained. The research method for the three-phases was developed and explained. The chapter provided details of the criteria employed to ensure trustworthiness of the study. The ethics considered to ensure that the research process adhered to sound research ethics and standards concluded the chapter. A tabulated summary of the research framework for the three phases of this study is presented in Table 2.6.

The next chapter details the theoretical framework, research method, findings and discussion for Phase I of this study.
Table 2.6

*Summary of research framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Phase</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Recording of Data</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Phase I        | Personal construct theory | Structured interviews utilising the Repertory grid based on Personal construct theory | • Repertory grid questionnaire  
• Research journal | Qualitative content analysis  
Core-categorising procedure |
| Phase II       | Appreciative Inquiry   | Participative action research utilising Appreciative Inquiry embedded in social constructionism | • Interview guides  
• A1 Flip chart paper  
• Shared written and creative activities | Collaborative data analysis |
| Phase III      | Constructivist grounded theory | Semi-structured intensive interviews | • Transcribed interviews | Constructivist grounded theory coding |
CHAPTER THREE

PHASE I: PERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CAREER PROGRESSION

“I think about that the people that I mentioned the ones who are actually successful, created a brand for themselves, and I don’t have that”.

- Interviewee

3.1 Introduction

In the first phase the sub-aim, “To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progression of others in a corporate environment” is addressed (informed by the research question illustrated in Figure 3.1). To this end, the sub-aim is approached from Kelly’s (1955) Personal construct theory by applying the repertory grid technique.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the concept of mental models. This is followed by an exploration of Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory and the methodological application, the repertory grid technique. Additionally, the research method employed for this phase is explained. Thereafter, the findings of the analysis are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings.

Figure 3.1 Diagram showing research questions per phase
3.2 Mental models

Mental models matter because, not only do mental models determine how people make sense of the world but, more importantly, they direct action (Senge, 1992). A review of literature across various disciplines undertaken by Rook (2013) determined that mental models are considered internally held representations of the external environment and affect individual actions (Craik, 1943; Kelly, 1955; Senge, 1990). Various theorists have explored mental models as internal representations of reality and thinking processes (cf. Hofstede, 2001; Johnson-Laird, 1983; Kelly, 1955, Senge, 1992). One of the earliest proponents of mental models, Kenneth Craik, wrote:

If the organism carries a “small-scale model” of external reality and of its own possible actions within its head, it is able to try out various alternatives, conclude which is the best of them, react to future situations before they arise, utilize the knowledge of past events in dealing with the present and the future and in every way to react in much fuller, safer, and more competent manner to the emergencies which face it. (1943, p. 61)

Craik proposed that people carry an internal model, representative of the external world, which underlies the basis of explaining and predicting events. Mental models are defined as “a representation of some domain or situation that supports understanding, reasoning and prediction” (Gentner, 2002, p. 9684).

By studying mental models, researchers are able to explore how people perceive a particular domain of knowledge. The concept of mental models has been extensively researched in a variety disciplines, for instance, the political economy of the Euro crises (Willet & Srison, 2014), renewable energy resources (Higgins, 2014), and ergonomics (Kalantzis, Thatcher, & Sheridan, 2016). Within the discipline of organisational development, researchers have indicated a link between mental models and leadership development (Johnson, 2008), leadership effectiveness, (Magzan, 2012) and organisational learning (Senge, 1990). Developing deep understanding of mental models at work is an important skill required in career development as May (2005) wrote, “career success and value creation requires understanding what mental models are at
work and how to synchronise them such that forward momentum can be achieved” (p.79).

In organisational development literature, the notable author Hofstede (2001) proposed that people use mental programs to understand social systems. The mental programs are described through constructs, which, Hofstede (2001, p. 2) maintains are not real in the “absolute sense” but rather are defined by the individual into existence. Mental programmes are in part, unique, but also, in part, shared by others (Hofstede, 2001). He suggested three levels of human mental programming: individual, collective and universal.

Hofstede (2001) proposed that whilst at the individual level, constructions of reality are unique, at the collective level constructs (mental programming) are shared by a particular group. In Phase I, the focus was on the exploration of a shared mental model of career progression, thus the interest lies at the collective level. Hofstede (2001, p. 2) explained the collective level of programming as “shared with some but not all other people; it is common to people belonging to a certain group or category but different from people belonging to other groups or categories.” Similarly, Kelly (1955, p. 90) postulated that people may share similar personal construct systems “to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person”. This acknowledgement that shared meaning is created in similar groups provides the basis for researching a shared mental model of phenomena.

The implicit nature of mental models is a challenge facing researchers. From the perspective of Gentner (2002) and Hofstede (2001) researchers cannot directly ask people about their mental models, as people are often unable to articulate their knowledge. A theoretical framework that enables the examination of mental models is Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory and its methodological application, the Repertory Grid Technique. The principal aim of personal construct theory is to understand how individuals interpret their experiences and anticipate outcomes in terms of similarities and contrasts (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). The repertory grid is Kelly’s technique for surfacing personal construct systems (Beail, 1985). Thus, personal construct theory and the repertory grid technique presented a theoretical framework and
method of eliciting data to explore the shared mental model of the career progression of others by women leaders. In the section that follows, the key cornerstones of Kelly’s (1955) theory and relevance to this study are discussed.

3.3 Personal construct theory

Kelly (1955) developed personal construct theory in a clinical context with the aim of understanding the meanings individuals develop about themselves, the events in their life, and the world around them. For Kelly, meanings are endowed to events independent of the event itself. Personal construct theory holds that individuals perceive and organise their world by formulating hypotheses about their environment and testing them against reality. Central to personal construct theory is Kelly’s idea of man as a scientist and his philosophical worldview of constructive alternativism.

3.3.1 The person as a scientist

Kelly (1955) proposed that man as a scientist strives to “understand, interpret, anticipate and control his world for the purposes of dealing effectively with that world” (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976, p. 211). In Kelly’s words;

Mankind, whose progress in search of prediction and control of surrounding events stands out so clearly in the light of centuries, comprises the men we see around us every day. The aspirations of the scientists are essentially the aspirations of all men. (1955, p. 43)

This metaphor of scientist-like behaviour implies that individuals seek to make meaning of their world in a manner similar to that of a scientist. Ford and Adams-Webber (1992) elaborated on this notion, explaining that the individual acts as a “personal scientist” through “predicting and controlling events by forming relevant hypotheses and then testing them against experience” (p. 122), thereby creating a personal construct system. This personal construct system is constructed and reconstructed as the individual experiences events that confirm or contradict previous predictions made (Cassell & Walsh, 2004).
In a similar vein, Butler (2009, p. 4) noted that people are “theory makers” in the sense that people come to understand the world they inhabit by construing events. At a basic level, individuals build a theory about reality from their own experiences. Butler (2009) described personal construct theory as a theory about the theories individuals construe about themselves, other people, and events. As theory makers, in personal construct theory, the individual is able to:

- bind events together so that they mean more than any single event by itself;
- formalise a set of ideas into a system;
- use the framework to anticipate outcomes;
- address issues that were not thought about at the time the theory was constructed;
- test assumptions and deductions;
- inform action;
- rely on theory when in doubt; and
- flourish, so long as the theory proves fertile and useful. (p. 6):

For the purposes of this study, viewed through the person as a scientist lens, women leaders constructed a mental model of career progression as they explored opportunities for progression within a particular organisation. Past experiences of what may be required to progress and observation of others’ progression informed their hypothesis about the factors required to progress in one’s career. This constructed framework was projected into the future to anticipate outcomes of their actions. To illustrate, consider the example of a female employee who encounters her line manager for the first time. Based on this initial interaction, the employee may construe her line manager as an agreeable and self-confident individual. In terms of Kelly’s (1955) processes, the employee could construe that certain personality traits are factors in the building blocks of career progression. This construction may help her anticipate, in part, requirements for career progression. Based on the expected outcomes, she may choose to test her hypothesis that certain personality traits are characteristic of individuals who have successfully progressed in their careers. This is congruent with Kelly’s notion of person as a scientist in that the person is not literally a scientist but rather that “all persons are scientists in that they formulate hypotheses and follow the same psychological process to validate and invalidate them that characterise the scientific enterprise” (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976, p. 215).
3.3.2 Constructive alternativism

Kelly (1955) assumed a “constructive alternativism” philosophical foundation to personal construct theory. He believed that “there are always some alternate constructs available to choose among in dealing with the world” (Kelly, 1963, p. 15). Of this philosophical assumption, Kelly (1970, p. 1) wrote, “whatever nature may be, or however the quest for truth will turn out in the end, the events we face today are subject to as great a variety of constructions as our wits will enable us to contrive”.

This implies that reality is subject to a variety of alternative interpretations as individuals construe such reality from different perspectives, possibly only limited by their imaginations. Personal construct theory asserts that people can perceive the same situation differently, thus acknowledging that multiple realities exist and are dependent on the individuals’ mental construction thereof. According to this philosophy, there is no single true interpretation of reality and thus perception of reality is always subject to interpretation (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). To illustrate, consider a female employee and male line manager sitting together at a coffee shop. The event is simply two people having coffee together. However, depending on whom we ask, the meaning applied to the event is subject to various interpretations. To quote Hjelle and Ziegler (1976, p. 214), “Truth, like beauty, exists in the mind of the beholder.”

The concept constructive alternativism assumes that:

- Reality is constructed through our interpretations and assumptions of reality.
- Meaning and knowledge is derived from the way a person perceives events.
- All assumptions and constructions are subject to question and reconsideration (Butler, 2009, p. 34).

More recently, Butler (2009) and Gergen (2015) positioned personal construct theory firmly within the constructivist tradition, in that constructivism is concerned with the construction of knowledge by the individual. As with constructive alternativism, constructivism holds that there are multiple views of reality and individuals develop subjective meaning of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2014).
constructivist perspective assumes relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological events (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Relativity ontology puts forward that reality is subjective and differs from person to person, that is, multiple realities exist. A subjective epistemology advances that knowledge is constructed. Methodologically, constructivists posit that we cannot know reality through direct access but rather we understand the world in terms of mental categories or constructs. This implies that knowledge is a process of construction, in which the individual is continuously constructing personal meaning from events, thoughts, and experiences.

3.3.3 Kelly’s fundamental postulate and corollaries

Kelly (1955) presented his theory in terms of a fundamental postulate, elaborated through eleven corollaries. The fundamental postulate states “a person’s processes are psychologically channelled by the ways in which they anticipate events” (p.46). Hjelle and Ziegler (1976, p. 223) summed up the fundamental postulate thus: “how the person predicts future occurrences determines his or her behaviour”. For Butler (2009, p. 7) the significance of the fundamental postulate is that people:

- reach out to the future;
- construe events before them;
- anticipate future events based on their constructions of past events;
- able to predict what may happen; and
- strive to make sense of the world and the self.

Kelly (1955) elaborated on his fundamental postulate through eleven corollaries by which people interpret and make sense of the world. A diagrammatic summary of Kelly’s eleven corollaries is reproduced in Figure 3.2. These corollaries, together with the fundamental postulate, create a comprehensive theory about the person’s internal model of external reality.
Figure 3.2 A diagrammatic representation of Kelly’s corollaries. Adapted from *The Child Within: Taking the Young Person’s Perspective by Applying Personal Construct Theory* (p. 26), by R. J. Butler and D. R. Green, 2007, Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons. Copyright 2007 by John Wiley & Sons. Reprinted with permission.
From a personal construct theory perspective, the participants of this study were in a continual cycle of construing their own and others career progression (construction corollary). The constructs that make up the mental model of career progression are bipolar in nature, for example, a participant may discriminate hard work with sacrifice (dichotomy corollary) as their interpretation of career progression. These constructs are unique interpretations and meaningful to the participants (individual corollary) and are organised in a hierarchical system of constructs, depending on the importance of the constructs (organisational corollary) to that individual. The mental model of career progression is constructed based on the participants’ experience and observation (experience corollary). Constructs of career progression may be modified as a function of new events and experiences (modulation corollary) depending in the permeability of the construct. The constructs for this study have limited usage or range of convenience (range corollary). Constructs elicited about career progression may compete with and contradict other constructions of the phenomenon within the individuals’ construct system (fragmentation corollary). Individually, the participant will choose an alternative construct that reflects personal preference and interpretation of reality (choice corollary). Within the corporate environment, sharing of experiences and culture make it possible for participants to construe career progression in similar ways (commonality corollary) resulting in a shared mental model of career progression. In this study, as researcher, I needed to be able to relate to the participants’ construing (sociality corollary) in order to understand their constructions.

3.3.4 Constructs

The basic tenet of personal construct theory is that the individual makes sense of their world by subjectively interpreting the current situation in anticipation of future events. Kelly termed these interpretations constructs – a key theoretical concept in personal construct theory. To quote Kelly (1955, p. 7), “Man looks at his world through transparent patterns or templates which he creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed”.

Constructs are representative of the manner in which individuals give meaning to events in their life and make sense of reality. The “transparent patterns or templates” are
considered the personal constructs (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). Through the process of experiencing, interpreting, and structuring (or construing), the relationships built between the constructs are the patterns or templates that form the individual’s personal construct system. Every person has a distinct and unique system of constructs. By way of illustration, it is possible that two women considering a promotion may construe the event differently. One woman may interpret this event as stressful but the other may construe the possibility of promotion as appealing. In Kelly’s terms, reality is filtered for each of these women through different templates.

Personal constructs enable the individual to predict and control events in that the individual forms expectations about future events. This anticipation or prediction of the outcome of an event that has not yet occurred is consistent with Kelly’s notion of man as a scientist. Consistent with this view, the individual tests a given construct against events and either retains the construct, revises it or eliminates the construct depending on the outcome.

Beail (1985, p. 1) regarded the construct as a method to “distinguish similarity from difference – thus a construct is essentially a discrimination a person can make”. Kelly considered all constructs as bipolar and dichotomous as meaning is derived through discrimination. In others words, people select similarities and differences to establish relationships between concepts. These similarities (construct or emergent pole) and differences (contrast or implicit pole) are the bipolar dimensions of the construct system (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1976). Butt (2008) noted that the poles are a function of a continuum constructed by the individual rather than logical opposites. In this regard, two people may have dissimilar bipolar constructs for the same event. For example, in the construct career progression, the construct dimension of one woman may be hard work versus family sacrifice but for another hard work versus monetary reward.

3.3.5 Repertory grid technique

Kelly (1955) not only proposed a psychological theory, the personal construct theory, but also a methodological application of his theory, the repertory grid technique. Fransella, Bell, and Bannister (2004) maintained that the repertory grid technique is a
fundamental part of construct theory and is logically derived from personal construct theory. These authors described the repertory grid technique as “construct theory in action” (p. 1). Jankowicz (2004, p. 14) broadened the explanation of the repertory grid technique to “a form of a structured interview, with or without ratings, which gives an opportunity to elicit the client’s point of view, untainted by the opinion of the researcher”.

The aim of the grid is to explore the individual’s personal construct systems, enabling the researcher to access the individual’s view of the phenomena under study (Beail, 1985; Gammack & Stephens, 1994). Beail (1985, p. 2) described the usefulness of the grid in research thus: “it is a way of standing in the others shoes, to see the world from their point of view, to understand their situation, their concerns”.

Underpinning the repertory grid is Kelly’s fundamental postulate: “a person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events”. Bell (2005, p. 68) explained that “the ways are the constructs and the events are the elements”. The essential features of a full repertory grid comprises of three components; ‘elements’, ‘constructs’ and ‘linking mechanisms’ (Easterby-Smith, 1980). The basic process of the repertory grid technique is to conduct a structured interview to elicit personal constructs by asking the individual to compare and contrast a number of elements concerning a specific topic.

Jankowicz (2004) clarified that elements are examples that are representative of the phenomena under investigation and constructs are the basic units by which the person categorises and differentiates between the elements. Linking mechanisms show how the participants interpret each element relative to each construct. The methods most often employed to link elements to constructs are dichotomising, ranking, and rating. In certain instances, linking elements to constructs does not serve the purpose of the study (Tan & Hunter, 2002). For example, in qualitative research, as is the case for this phase of the study, the researcher may be more interested in the nature of the constructs to generate themes or categories underlying the constructs elicited (Bell, 2005; Tan & Hunter, 2002).

In section 3.4.5.5 of this chapter the application of the repertory grid to the data collection for this phase is further developed.
3.4 Research method

In this section of this chapter the implementation of the research design specific to Phase I is described.

3.4.1 Establishing researcher’s role

The personal construct theoretical framework allows for participant-led data in collaboration with the researcher towards a joint interpretative process (Burr, King, & Butt, 2014). In order to maintain the voice of the participant during the elicitation process, there are essential skills the researchers may employ. In my role as researcher, I applied Fransella’s (2005) suggestions in the following manner:

- In order to see the world through the participants’ eyes, I, as researcher, endeavoured to view reality from the participants’ perspective whilst remaining separate from the participant.
- To ensure that the participants’ own view of the world remained unfiltered through my own set of values, I suspended these by listening carefully to the participant and capturing the words used by the participant.
- In an effort to suspend my own construct system, I made use of laddering by asking the question ‘why’ when the participants’ responses were abstract and vague. Through the process of laddering, what the construct actually meant in practice to the participant was examined. By asking the participant, “why is this important for you?” I focused on listening to the meaning the participant attributed to the construct.
- The epistemology of construct theory maintains that there is an interdependent relationship between researcher and participant, which must be acknowledged (Viney & Nagy, 2012). To be mindful of my personal construct system and in keeping with the concept of reflexivity, I maintained several research journals ab initio. In the journals, I recorded the evolving research process, captured self-reflections and intra-subjective reflections after the personal interviews, field notes, memos, and initial data analyses.
3.4.2 Sampling

Sampling process was comprehensively discussed in section 2.4.4. For reading continuity, this section provides an overview of sampling and demographics for Phase I. In collaboration with the Human Resources Executive and the Learning Development Officer, purposive sampling was selected as the appropriate sampling method. The target population was women who had leadership experience and were considered top talent according to their performance ratings. The demographic profile of the respondents who participated in Phase I is presented in Table 3.1. Participants represented all the business units of The Bank.

Table 3.1

**Demographic profile for Phase I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Profile of the Purposive Sample Group n=82</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Range 27 to 58 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average participants age 40.1 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 20 – 29 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 30 – 39 42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 40 – 49 36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 50 – 59 12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married 62.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated 1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced 12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed 1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single 22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African 24.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured 18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White 46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Grade:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C 36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D 51.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Ages are at time of selection. Race classification as per The Bank’s categories. B = Senior Management C = Middle Management D = Junior Management.
3.4.3 Data collection

The qualitative approach to the repertory grid technique suggested by Burr et al. (2014) and Gammack and Stephens (1994) forms the foundation of the data gathering method for Phase I.

3.4.3.1 Recording of data

Personal interviews were the primary method of recording data. Participants’ responses were captured verbatim onto the repertory grid interview questionnaire. In addition, all interviews were recorded on a dictaphone (with the consent of the participant). These recordings were coded and saved on a hard drive. Responses were transcribed onto an Excel spreadsheet for the purposes of analysis.

3.4.3.2 Scheduling interviews

Scheduling the interviews was a complex process due to the number of participants. Meticulous planning was involved to integrate the interviews with the participants’ work commitments whilst being cognisant of minimising interruption to normal business processes. With this in mind, the participants were provided with a time schedule for interviews to indicate their preferred timeslot. I manually entered all participants’ preferred timeslots onto an Excel spread sheet to assist in the creation of an interview schedule.

I obtained assistance from the People Development Officer and The Bank’s meeting room co-ordinator to reserve a meeting room for the duration of the Phase I data collection period. Once the meeting room was confirmed and the interview schedule was completed, I sent a meeting request via Microsoft Outlook to each participant, individually, advising the date, time, and venue for the interview (Figure 3.3).

Interviews were conducted over the course of six weeks. A maximum of four interviews were scheduled per day. These interviews were scheduled during the working day, Monday to Thursday for 90 minutes each. I allowed a 30-minute break in between each interview. This allowed time for me to capture my thoughts and feelings after each interview.
3.4.3.3 Interview setting

The interview site for Phase I of the study was a meeting room at The Bank’s headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Jankowicz (2004) highlighted that a research interview is a social process. In this regard, in selecting the interview setting I followed Jankowicz’s (2004) recommendations:

- a quiet location to conduct the interview,
- comfortable and relaxed environment,
- seating arrangement that allow researcher and participant to sit side by side with sufficient work space, and
- no disruptions during the interview.

In addition, I selected a venue that afforded privacy and facilitated minimal disruption to the business and to the participant’s workday. The venue selected for Phase I interviews (illustrated in Figures 3.4 and 3.5) fulfilled the above criteria.
Figure 3.4 External view of meeting room at research site

Figure 3.5 Internal view of meeting room at research site
3.4.3.4 Interview style

Jankowicz (2004) advised that the usual research etiquette and interview rules apply for participants being interviewed for a repertory grid. On this note, I thanked each participant for volunteering. I assured the participants of confidentiality and that, in order to maintain anonymity, each interviewee was assigned a code. I bore the responsibility of maintaining the master list of participants and respective codes in a secure file. Bearing in mind the repetitive and unusual nature of the repertory grid technique procedure I provided a thumbnail description of the process with a practical example. I stressed the aim of the interview was to understand how they individually constructed career progression from their lived experienced and not to collect “right” answers. I concluded the introduction by presenting their informed consent form signed during the research briefing to confirm their participation and invited any questions or concerns pertaining to the research process.

3.4.3.5 Application of the Repertory Grid Technique

In their book, *A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique*, authors Fransella et al. (2004) provided a comprehensive chapter on the application of the grid in research literature. In this regard, the repertory grid technique has been adopted for research in the clinical context, psychotherapy, education settings, consumer studies, market research, politics and careers, to list a few of the extensive fields of study. Within my field of study, organisational psychology, the grid has been employed in a number of studies, for example, women’s progression in the publishing industry, (Cassell & Walsh, 2004), gender differences in performance evaluation (Dick & Jankowicz, 2001), graduate careers (Arnold & Nicholson, 1991), and employment selection (Anderson, 1990).

The repertory grid is considered a technique to access the individual’s personal constructs, open to qualitative and quantitative analysis procedures. The grid is most often utilised in quantitative studies (Burr et al., 2014), with data elicted analysed using a variety of statistical techniques. The concern raised by Cassell and Walsh (2004) is that the quantitative analysis of the grid deviates from the essence of personal construct theory, which is to understand how people make sense of the world. To quote Bannister (1995:xii), “a Frankenstein’s monster rushed away on a statistical and experimental
rampage of its own, leaving construct theory neglected, stranded high and dry, far behind.”

Authors, Burr et al. (2014) and Viney and Nagy (2012) argued that the grid is underutilised as a qualitative method. Specifically, Viney and Nagey (2012) maintain that personal construct psychology, as a constructivist theory, is epistemologically and ontologically aligned to qualitative methods. Burr et al. (2014) argued for the benefits of a qualitative approach to the repertory grid technique suggesting that this approach enables the researcher to systematically explore how participants perceive wide-ranging phenomena. These authors explained that personal construct theory “focuses upon the ‘voice’ of participants in gathering research data by being careful to describe events in terms used by participants themselves” (p. 342). For instance, where the aim of the research is to interpret how individuals make sense of their world, as is the case for this study, these authors promote a qualitative approach to personal construct theory.

In sum, the repertory grid technique offers a number of advantages in organisational studies: (a) underpinned by personal construct theory, the grid enables the researcher to explore the subjective experience of the participants to produce an in-depth descriptive analysis of the phenomena under study; (b) it is an accepted technique within organisational studies and recognised as a tool to construct shared meaning of phenomena within organisations (Tan & Hunter, 2002) (c) it is recognised as a technique with minimal observer bias, thus allowing the participant’s perspective to emerge (Stewart & Stewart, 1990) (d) Bannister and Fransella (1986, p. 54) indicated that methodologically, the technique can be applied to study individuals or aspects of a phenomenon common to groups without “violating the theoretical assumption that we are all unique” (e) Harter, Erbes, and Hart (2004, p. 29) argued for the use of repertory grids to examine comparisons between participants stating that the grid provides a “systematic sample of constructs in a given domain”.

Based on the aforementioned applications and advantages I considered the repertory grid as the most appropriate technique for Phase I based on a qualitative approach to achieve the stated research sub-aim for this phase.


3.4.3.6 Design and administration of the repertory grid

A repertory grid questionnaire was designed with the guidance of my research supervisor and based on previous qualitative research studies (Burr & King, 2009; Cassell & Walsh, 2004). A pilot study was conducted to test the questionnaire. Two women leaders, not employed by The Bank, nor related to each other, were identified as test participants. Feedback from the pilot study was documented and discussed with my supervisor. Findings from the pilot study were used to modify the questionnaire. The question posed to elicit elements was considered vague and therefore replaced. The revised questionnaire was tested and based on the findings, the modified questionnaire was deemed fit for purpose. The repertory grid interview questionnaire used in this study is presented in Annexure D.

A common method of data collection is a structured in-depth interview within the qualitative approach to repertory grid (Burr et al., 2014). In this study, the standardised interview protocol was applied to each participant individually and face-to-face, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The demographic survey was completed in the room with the participants. The interview process comprised the following steps:

**Step 1: Beginning the interview**
Participants were welcomed and informed that the purpose of the interview was to understand how they view career progression at The Bank. Participants were advised that the interest lay in their personal interpretations of career progression. Confidentiality and anonymity were discussed. Informed consent was revisited. The demographics of the participant were annotated by me on the interview questionnaire.

**Step 2: Explanation of the repertory grid technique**
To sensitise the participants to the technique, an example was presented. In this example, participants were asked to name three modes of transport (elements). Each mode of transport offered by the participant was captured onto three separate cards, for example, CAR, TRAIN, and AIRPLANE. The triad was presented to the participant with the question: “Can you think in which ways two of these are like
each other and different from the third?” Once the participants indicated understanding of the repertory technique, we proceeded with the interview.

**Step 3: Generating a list of elements**

In this study, the elements that represented the focus of the study were elicited from the participants. The elements nominated by the participants were people who—to greater or lesser extent—achieved senior leadership positions. In keeping with the dichotomy corollary, the question asked to elicit elements for the positive pole was “In the corporate context, please name three people that have progressed in their careers” The question to elicit elements for the contrasting pole was “In the corporate context, please name two people that have not progressed in their careers”. The number of elements elicited was five. The names were captured onto five cards, (approximately 7cm x 10cm in size), each card with one name. Cards were numbered one to five, with the names of the three positive elements captured alongside numbers one, two and three respectively and the contrasting elements, captured on four and five.

**Step 4: Eliciting constructs**

The constructs were the bipolar dimensions along which the women leader constructed the phenomenon career progression. To elicit constructs, the participants were presented with a triad of elements and asked the question: “Looking at this combination, in what way are two of the people similar to each other and different to the third in terms of their career progression?

The constructs generated by the participant were captured verbatim in a bipolar format: the construct common to two of the elements was captured in the “Pair” column of the questionnaire and the construct for the third element was captured in the “Singleton” column. The laddering technique was applied when responses were vague or generalised. The triads were presented in varying combinations until all possible combinations had been exhausted (Ten combinations presented to the participant in total). Visual representation of a completed combination in a repertory grid is provided in Figure 3.6.
Figure 3.6 Sample of completed repertory grid
Step 5: Concluding the interview

At the end of the interview, participants were asked three open-ended and reflective questions. These questions were:

- “How did you experience this technique?”;
- “What personal insights did you gain from this discussion?”; and
- “Any other comments?”

These questions, although not directly aligned to the research aim, provided the opportunity to assess the repertory grid technique and for the participant to reflect on her own career progression.

3.4.3.7 Research journal

Process notes, personal reflections, practical experiences, notes from meetings with my supervisor, and observations in the field were handwritten in research journals. In the journal, consideration of the possible impact of my own assumptions and behaviours were recorded. During the data analysis, I drew upon the contents of the research journal to make connections between theory and practice.

3.4.3.8 Data management

By virtue of the participant numbers, the repertory grid interview questionnaires generated a large volume of data sets. The repertory grid questionnaires were kept in a secure location at my premises. In preparation for analysis, the participants’ responses were transcribed by me onto Excel spread-sheets and imported onto ATLAS.ti to facilitated coding. This software served as a tool to assist in managing the complex task of coding, retrieval of codes and corresponding construct, writing memos, tracking changes, and categorising codes.

3.4.4 Data analysis

The conceptual framework for qualitative data analysis proposed by Creswell (2014) was adapted to guide the data analysis process for this first phase of the study. An overview of the data analysis framework and process is presented in Figure 3.7. The
method of analysis conducted followed a data driven content analysis approach to qualitative data analysis. Content analysis is defined by Krippendorf (2013, p. 24) as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from the texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”.

Content analysis was deemed the most relevant method to analyse the data for Phase I as it allows the researcher to “analyse subjective viewpoints collected with interviews” (Flick, 2006, p. 315). As this author noted, knowledge generated by conventional content analysis is based on the participant’s perspectives and grounded in the data. Conventional content analysis allows the categories and themes to emerge from the data. It is a flexible approach which can be applied to different types of data sets, such as the repertory grid, and to large data sets, as is the case in this study.

Empirically, content analysis has been applied to the analyses of repertory grids (Jankowicz, 2004; Harter et al., 2004; Green, 2004; Stewart & Stewart, 1990). Specifically, Stewart and Stewart (1990) advocated the use of content analysis when using the construct-elicitation technique of the repertory grid. Green (2004) indicated that in Personal Construct Psychology research, the most often used content analysis approach comprised of coding text units by way of a coding scheme. In comparing across grids, Easterby-Smith (1980) recommended content analysis to identify similarities. This is in line with Kelly’s (1955) commonality corollary where similarity is understood in terms of “structure, content or the conclusions drawn about events” (Green, 2004, p. 83). According to Jankowicz (2004, p. 148), content analysis is a “technique in which the constructs of all the interviews are pooled, and categorised according to the meanings they express”. To this end, content analysis allows the researcher to identify what is common across a data set and to make sense of meaningful commonalities in relation to the stated research question.

In preparation for analysing the data, it is important to determine the unit of meaning and select the text to analyse (Krippendorff, 2013).
Figure 3.7 Overview of repertory grid analysis process. Adapted from Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed., p. 246) by J.W.Creswell, 2014, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Copyright by SAGE Publications Inc. Adapted with permission
3.4.4.1 Unit of meaning

In this study, the constructs elicited by the repertory grid interviews were the units of meaning. This is supported by Jankowicz (2004) who writes that each construct is regarded as expressing a single unit of meaning. In the same vein, Harter et al. (2004, p. 29) pointed out that the “RepGrid data naturally lends itself to content analysis, since its construct dimensions are elicited in discrete chunks. This eliminates the necessity to unitise the text, which is usually the first step in context analysis of narratives.”

3.4.4.2 Selection of interviews to analyse

Krippendorff (2013) differentiated between traditional sampling and sampling techniques applicable to content analysis. Traditional sampling refers to representation of populations of individuals. In content analysis, Krippendorff (2013) extended the theory of sampling to sampling of texts, recommending that content analysts consider two populations: “the population of answers to a research question” and “the population of texts that contains or leads to the answers to that question” (p. 114). In this study, due to large sample size, the sampling technique followed a varying probability sample. Krippendorff (2013) explained that varying probability sampling recognises that not all texts are equally able to answer the research question. For the purposes of analysis, after each interview I captured qualitative comments based on the ability of the participant to respond to the interview question, the depth of responses and participant’s experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Overall, 82 repertory grid interviews were conducted and 52 were considered for analysis based on informativeness and ability to answer the research question. Analysis was conducted until data saturation was reached. This was concluded when no new data emerged and information provided on the repertory grids became repetitive and redundant (Patton, 2002). Data saturation was reached after the analysis of 34 grids. However, six more grids were analysed to confirm theoretical saturation.

3.4.4.3 Process of content analysis

To begin the processes of analysis, the repertory grids were transcribed onto Excel spreadsheets.
The constructs elicited from participant A21 for the element combinations 123, 125 and 134 are illustrated in Figure 3.8. The data items on the grid represent the construct and contrast (bi-polar construct) elicited from the participants.

![Extract of transcribed repertory grid](image)

**Figure 3.8** Extract of transcribed repertory grid

NOTE: ‘F’ and ‘M’ refers to the gender of the element selected by the participant

In order to generate a shared mental model of others’ career progression, the content analysis was conducted the following manner:

**Step 1: Data immersion**

Characteristic of qualitative data analysis is immersion in the data. Jankowicz (2004) recommended a six step procedure for the eyeball analysis of the repertory grids, to make initial observations and general reflections about the content of the data. The six-step procedure for conducting an eyeball analysis consists of answering the following questions (Jankowics, 2004, p. 81):

1. What was the interviewee thinking about?
2. How has the interviewee represented the topic?
3. How does s/he think?
4. What does s/he think?
5. Look at the supplied elements and constructs.
6. Draw your conclusions.

To this end, the repertory grids were read and re-read to familiarise myself with the data and to search for meaningful patterns. Notes based on the six-step procedure were recorded as memos on ATLAS.ti.
Step 2: Initial coding
The systematic analysis of the repertory grids began with the generation of codes from the data. Data items were coded into bi-polar construct and contrast poles. Each bi-polar personal construct was scrutinised for importance relevant to the research aim. Figure 3.9 illustrates the initial codes generated for A24 for the element combinations 145, 234, 245, and 345.

Step 3: Identifying categories
On completion of initial coding, the next step in the analytical process was to develop category-codes by reviewing the initial codes and sorting them into groups of similar or related constructs. In this manner, as suggested by Green (2004) the categories reflected the constructs from which they were developed. The final number of categories was 12 excluding the miscellaneous category. The core-categorising procedure provided by Jankowicz (2004, p. 149) formed the basis of allocating the constructs to categories:

1. Coded constructs were compared across the data set and similar constructs were placed in a category.
2. Constructs that differed were placed in new categories.
3. All data items were examined and allocated to the appropriate category, and, when required, a new category was created.
4. In the process of allocating constructs to categories, it was deemed necessary to combine, splice, or redefine categories.
5. The process was followed until all constructs were classified.

Jankowicz (2004) noted that commonly a small number of constructs are unclassifiable and cautioned against creating a category with just one item. He recommended that no more than 5% of the constructs should be categorised as miscellaneous. In this study, less than 1% of the constructs were deemed unclassifiable.

To report on the relative importance of the constructs across the repertory grids, the frequency of responses per construct was calculated. This involved calculating the percentage of responses per construct with respect to the overall responses. The assumption was that the more prevalent a construct across the responses, the greater the salience of the construct in the shared mental model of others’ career progression.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Singleton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>FPM</td>
<td>better politically articulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(because it's politically correct)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>stayed shorter period in organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>females</td>
<td>note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>had to work harder to get to where they are</td>
<td>get fast tracked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>took much longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>may get excluded subconsciously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>FPM</td>
<td>have made it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>potential value in meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>able to quicker come to a conclusion on lesser information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>quicker on their feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>FPM</td>
<td>always sought opportunity to grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>put up their hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>have the drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in meetings get point across</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>better with face to face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>FPM</td>
<td>actively seek to improve and grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>looks for opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more politically articulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>may comply &amp; say right things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>FPM</td>
<td>sent to senior management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.9** Extract from ATLAS.ti of a repertory grid with initial codes for A24
Step 4: Constructing the shared mental model of others’ career progression

The final stage of the analysis the shared mental model that reflects the meanings of the emergent categories is constructed. To this end, each emergent category was examined to explore whether similar meanings existed across the 12 categories to extract themes. Themes were contextualised against the categories. The shared mental model of others’ career progression incorporates the emergent themes, categories, and bi-polar constructs.

Step 5: Reporting the findings

Following Jankowicz’s (2014) recommendation, the results of the analysis were tabulated for the purposes of reporting. The findings are presented in tables with the following:

- A category heading and description
- Personal bi-polar construct with representative quotations that exemplify the construct (what constitutes career progression) and the contrast (what does not constitute career progression).

Step 6: Reflexivity

An analysis was conducted to determine the participants’ experience of the repertory grid method and to record their personal learnings or insights obtained during the interview.

In summary, a qualitative content analysis was followed to elicit a shared mental model of others’ career progression by women leaders in The Bank. The analytic procedure followed is summarised in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2

Summary of the content analysis process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Selecting unit of meaning</td>
<td>Unit of meaning - the bi-polar constructs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Data immersion</td>
<td>Transcribed data onto Excel. Data were read and re-read. Eyeball analysis of data to note initial ideas in research journal. Imported each repertory grid into ATLAS.ti in preparation for coding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Initial codes</td>
<td>Initial coding across the data set. Constructs compared to constructs and codes with codes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Identifying categories</td>
<td>Developed categories following core-categorisation procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reviewing categories</td>
<td>Checked if codes work in relation to the categories and the entire data set. Reviewed and refined categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Generating a ‘shared mental model’</td>
<td>Reviewed bi-polar constructs and categories for identification of higher-order categories (themes) to generate shared mental model of others’ career progression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tabulating results</td>
<td>Tabulated results with category labels, descriptions for categories, with exemplars of vivid quotations of constructs and contrasts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Coding and category development conducted by researcher.

3.4.5 Trustworthiness of the study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to enhance the quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. An overview of each criterion was provided in the previous chapter, section 2.6. The strategies to enhance trustworthiness in Phase I of this study are presented in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3

*Strategies to enhance trustworthiness of Phase I*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Application in Phase I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility</strong></td>
<td>Recognised research method</td>
<td>Personal construct theory and repertory grid technique recognised valid theory and data collection instrument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>I have a prior relationship with The Bank based on consulting and facilitating organisational development initiatives. Familiar with culture and context of organisation since 2010. Established a trusting relationship with The Bank. Remained immersed in The Bank for 10 months for research planning, organisation and data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td></td>
<td>Codes, categories, themes and interpretation tested with three peers with knowledge of The Bank and are registered psychologists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debriefing sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regular meetings with supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transferability</strong></td>
<td>Thick description</td>
<td>Detailed description provided of contextual information: case study organisation, participants, research method and time frames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sampling was purposeful: women in management positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependability</strong></td>
<td>In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated</td>
<td>Detailed description of research design, the implementation participant demographics and context is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirmability</strong></td>
<td>Bracketing</td>
<td>My beliefs and assumptions regarding career progression were interrogated through reflexive journaling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>A research journal was maintained in which practical issues, field experiences, personal reflections and various aspects of the research process were recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audit trial</td>
<td></td>
<td>An audit trial for data management was developed and maintained as part of the content analysis on ATLAS.ti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.6 Ethical considerations

Researchers must maintain awareness of ethical considerations throughout the entire research process (Creswell, 2014). In the previous chapter the ethical considerations that were upheld for the study were discussed in detail. The key principle ethical considerations such as respecting participants’ dignity, protection from harm, deception or victimisation, protecting privacy and confidentiality of the participants and of the organisation, ensuring anonymity, and fully informed written consent of all participants were adhered to during the study (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). Research findings are reported in an honest, transparent and accurate manner.

3.5 Research findings

The content analysis technique allows for the pooling of the constructs of all repertory grid interviews to categorise them according to the core meaning expressed (Jankowicz, 2004). In this tradition, the repertory grids were analysed to search for meaningful patterns of how women leaders construe career progression of others in their corporate environment. The findings are presented in three sections. The first set of findings relate to the findings of the core-categorising procedure.

Three independent reviewers (a consulting psychologist working in the corporate sector who has knowledge of The Bank, a consulting psychologist working across various industries with psychometric tools and a research psychologist in the Industrial and Organisational psychology field) examined the personal construct codes and categories. The aim of engaging the reviewers was to establish if the codes and categories allocated to the data items held up to scrutiny. The raw data was provided to the reviewers for inspection of codes and bi-polar constructs. Independently, reviewers analysed bi-polar constructs de novo. Intensive discussion was held with reviewers prior to finalisation of categories and themes to establish if any other alternative interpretation were possible.
3.5.1 Findings of the core-categorising procedure

The first set of findings relates to the allocation of the personal construct codes to categories. The repertory grids generated 1089 data items (responses) from 40 repertory grids. The initial coding of data items to personal construct codes generated 115 constructs and contrasts. Following the core-categorising procedural steps described in the data analysis section, constructs and contrasts were allocated to categories. In all, 12 categories emerged. The category label was selected that best represented the explicit content of the bi-polar constructs. The labels assigned to each category were informed by career development literature. The categories are:

- Career ambition,
- Intrapreneurial drive
- Social relationships and networks,
- People orientation,
- Personal credibility,
- Personal effectiveness,
- Work engagement,
- Lifelong learning,
- Business acumen,
- Gender disparity,
- Career management,
- Employment Equity policies.

The findings in tabulated format per category with a description of the category are presented from Table 3.4 to Table 3.15. Each category and the corresponding personal constructs and contrasts were reviewed to arrive at a description which embodies the essence of each category. In each table the construct and contrast with representative responses (quotations) used as exemplars to support the allocation are shown. An ID number generated by ATLAS.ti precedes the responses provided in the tables. The number (for example, 20:16) refers to the document number and the chronological number of quotations pertaining to that document. (A full list of responses is available upon request.)
### Table 3.4

**Category 1: Career ambition**

**Description:** The extent to which the individual persistently strives for attainment of senior leadership in the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambitious</strong></td>
<td>11:23 Both aspired to reach high level</td>
<td><strong>Low-ambition</strong></td>
<td>13:6 Don’t really want senior role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:5 High on their agenda to reach higher</td>
<td></td>
<td>32:19 “this is all I aspire to “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drive and passion</strong></td>
<td>1:15 Have the drive</td>
<td><strong>Lack of drive</strong></td>
<td>9:32 She doesn’t have the drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:25 Energetic</td>
<td></td>
<td>19:12 Drive is not there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Takes lead</strong></td>
<td>12:25 Very much person in authority</td>
<td><strong>Follower</strong></td>
<td>16:12 Will be part of the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:23 Project authority</td>
<td></td>
<td>24:18 Follows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-promoted</strong></td>
<td>2:47 Had to sell themself so people could believe in them</td>
<td><strong>Did not self-promote</strong></td>
<td>10:10 Didn’t sell himself &lt; hasn’t spoken up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30:13 Puts themselves out there</td>
<td></td>
<td>18:2 Didn’t sell herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seizes opportunities</strong></td>
<td>24:59 When opportunity arises will be available</td>
<td><strong>Spurns opportunities</strong></td>
<td>9:47 Didn’t use opportunities that were available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30:10 Put hand up for different projects</td>
<td></td>
<td>14:6 Said no to a lot of opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worked through ranks</strong></td>
<td>20:1 Worked through the ranks</td>
<td><strong>Stagnated in role</strong></td>
<td>2:16 Still in same area of the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46:1 Worked themselves up</td>
<td></td>
<td>14:14 Been in role long time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
## Table 3.5

**Category 2: Intrapreneurial drive**

**Description:** *The extent to which the individual drives to be the change-maker for organisational growth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges status quo</td>
<td>5:22 &quot;bucked the rules&quot;</td>
<td>Complacent</td>
<td>12:33 Not challenging the norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19:23 Challenges status quo all the time</td>
<td></td>
<td>19:16 Don’t challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open minded</td>
<td>20:10 Open to constructive criticism</td>
<td>Limited mindset</td>
<td>27:14 Sets own limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:16 Open minded</td>
<td></td>
<td>32:12 Old mindset,-didn’t stay relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embraces change</td>
<td>2:14 Drives the need to change</td>
<td>Resistant to change</td>
<td>15:9 Old school-couldn’t adapt to change quickly enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24:57 Eager for change &lt; embraces change</td>
<td></td>
<td>24:56 Perceives change as negative &lt; talks of years gone by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices opinion</td>
<td>9:8 Will speak up and voice opinion</td>
<td>Reserved</td>
<td>9:9 Won’t speak up but will complain afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:11 Puts his hand up &lt; raises his views</td>
<td></td>
<td>16:12 Very quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks strategically</td>
<td>11:33 Strategic level thinking &lt; bigger picture thinker</td>
<td>Operational</td>
<td>11:34 More focused on task at hand &lt; more operational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23:4 Strategic &lt; what does bank need to sustain itself?</td>
<td></td>
<td>23:9 Operational person -Do-er</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk taker</td>
<td>9:16 Not afraid to take risks</td>
<td>Risk avoidance</td>
<td>9:17 Will not take risk -not capable of thinking of outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:4 Calculated risks</td>
<td></td>
<td>12:18 Not willing to take risk on themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative</td>
<td>2:6 Drives innovation</td>
<td>Unwilling to</td>
<td>28:15 Implements the same things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:11 Best innovator at the bank</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>42:5 Set in her ways</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
Table 3.6

Category 3: Social relationships and networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to senior platform</td>
<td>11:21 Has senior exposure -easier to motivate</td>
<td>Limited exposure to 'influences'</td>
<td>38:27 Disadvantaged because reported into B forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23:8 Got exposure to right platforms</td>
<td></td>
<td>45:21 Isolated from the business process and key people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38:11 Part of 'B' forum (senior management) - reported to Executive Committee members</td>
<td></td>
<td>46:43 Lower down reporting / more obstacles i.t.o. reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had sponsor/mentor</td>
<td>38:12 Had right sponsorship</td>
<td>No sponsor</td>
<td>10:15 Don’t think she had a mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38:17 Strong sponsors</td>
<td></td>
<td>38:2 No sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19:7 Has been mentored</td>
<td></td>
<td>38:1 Contributing factor for not making it was no sponsorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>10:1 Good networks - knowing right people</td>
<td>Limited/no network</td>
<td>10:2 Doesn’t have networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:6 Networks across the business</td>
<td></td>
<td>16:14 Won’t network with the guys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:1 Networking with strategy to get noticed</td>
<td></td>
<td>33:18 Only built relationships with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built strategic relationships</td>
<td>5:4 Built alliances and relationships</td>
<td>Remains in background</td>
<td>24:31 Sits at desk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33:9 Good at building strategic relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td>26:8 Keeps in the background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41:4 Who you know</td>
<td></td>
<td>46:26 Tries to fade into background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political savvy</td>
<td>1:1 Better politically articulated</td>
<td>Does not play politics</td>
<td>5:19 Didn’t play the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15:6 Playing the game</td>
<td></td>
<td>5:35 Didn’t play politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
Table 3.7

**Category 4: People orientation**

**Description:** *The extent to which the individual empowers others and seeks to build positive relationships*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Champions others</td>
<td>2:22 Actively involved in upskilling people</td>
<td>Self-serving</td>
<td>22:18 Person will do anything to put self forward first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:13 Will guide and be supportive</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:26 Doesn’t want to grow others - just think of themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36:8 Knows how to rally teams</td>
<td></td>
<td>28:9 Reluctant to develop people due to threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborator</td>
<td>12:37 Inclusive - in fun way</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>29:9 Threatening in meeting: “listen to me very nicely”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20:20 Collaborative discussions</td>
<td></td>
<td>15:8 Autocratic - I tell, you do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35:20 Willing to share knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td>20:22 Comes across as authoritative &amp; dictatorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages people</td>
<td>2:10 Loves working with people</td>
<td>Poor interpersonal skills</td>
<td>10:25 Too focused on the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:38 Comfortable to handle people</td>
<td></td>
<td>17:15 Needs to engage to connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32:13 People engagement very good</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:35 Difficult for her to work with people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
Table 3.8

Category 5: Personal credibility

| Description: The extent to which the individual is perceived as trustworthy and responsible |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Construct** | **Representative Quote** | **Contrast** | **Representative Quote** |
| Approachable | 10:11 Staff can talk to them | Unapproachable | 22:26 Not approachable |
| | 38:18 Seen as trustworthy and approachable | | 28:4 So unapproachable |
| | 46:30 People can have conversation with them | | 46:31 Personality - arrogant / unapproachable |
| Positive attitude | 10:22 Positive attitude - never heard them complain | Negative attitude | 9:24 Very negative attitude - outright “it will fail” |
| | 12:38 Entire demeanour shows way forward - sees the positive | | 9:26 Very negative |
| Humble | 25:10 Unassuming | Arrogance | 2:38 Knowledgable but "know it all" |
| | 29:20 Not egocentric | | 20:14 Vocal comes across as arrogant and has attitude |
| | 46:11 Humble | | 46:24 Tends towards arrogance |
| Trust and respect | 2:21 Walked the floor | Untrustworthy | 11:4 Focused on playing people |
| | 38:18 Seen as trustworthy and approachable | | 17:12 Not sincere towards people |
| | 44:3 Respected & trusted | | 32:2 Lack of integrity |
| Accountable | 2:31 Take ownership of their business | Lack of accountability | 10:13 When upset she screams - blames staff |
| | 30:17 Takes responsibility for solving issues | | 2:34 Made a joke - “what I am doing is not that bad” |
| Professional | 26:6 Very well groomed | Inappropriate conduct | 15:14 Cannot filter his language |
| demeanour | 22:15 Very professional - ethical | | 18:19 Gossips and discredits |

*Note: Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.*
### Table 3.9

**Category 6: Personal effectiveness**

**Description:** The extent to which the individual has strong interpersonal skills and qualities required to work collaboratively with others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-regulation</strong></td>
<td>2:19 Keeps her poise</td>
<td>Lack of emotional</td>
<td>2:36 Over reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:19 Less emotional</td>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>30:12 Very emotional about issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:10 Calm in meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:8 Easily emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confronts issues</strong></td>
<td>12:34 Able to have tough conversations in nice way</td>
<td>Avoidance of tough issues</td>
<td>9:52 Won’t have difficult conversations with anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30:21 Deals with issues professionally &amp; head on</td>
<td></td>
<td>12:27 Want to be perceived as good guy - no tough stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35:1 When heat is on will tackle head on</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:30 When heat is on can easily run away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effective communicator</strong></td>
<td>9:38 Open communication</td>
<td>Poor communicator</td>
<td>22:10 Not listening properly - just wants to talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20:2 Willing to listen and advise</td>
<td></td>
<td>32:8 Beats around the bush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29:5 Tactful - considerate - polite manner</td>
<td></td>
<td>37:11 Difficult to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathic</strong></td>
<td>9:27 Mature/ empathy</td>
<td>Criticises others</td>
<td>29:15 Highly critical of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44:7 Will consider impact of fairness &amp; put in nice way</td>
<td></td>
<td>29:22 Belittles others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46:5 More empathic - still 'human'</td>
<td></td>
<td>29:23 Critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High confidence levels</strong></td>
<td>24:8 High confidence</td>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>24:9 Low confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27:10 Not short on confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td>27:9 Don’t have confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30:9 Got noticed quickly because of confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td>30:1 Lack of confidence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
Table 3.10

**Category 7: Work engagement**

**Description:** The extent to which the individual is highly motivated to deliver on task for organisational growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extra effort</strong></td>
<td>1:22 Willing to put effort &amp; extra mile</td>
<td>Bare minimum</td>
<td>16:8 Will do what is needed to do but won’t do more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:5 Takes on extra work</td>
<td></td>
<td>22:22 Looks for why can't be done - won't go extra mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22:21 Do anything to get job done</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:13 Works from 8 to 4 - not willing to sacrifice time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hardworker</strong></td>
<td>24:33 Hard work - networking - through the ranks</td>
<td>Does the job</td>
<td>2:46 Takes forever to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24:49 Hard work and effort; has grown up the ladder</td>
<td></td>
<td>2:49 Effort to get him to assist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37:17 Deserved position - worked hard to get there</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:28 Over promises and under delivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Committed to organisation</strong></td>
<td>2:2 About The Bank's success</td>
<td>Disengaged</td>
<td>24:15 Not involved at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:32 Strong commitment to success for entire business</td>
<td></td>
<td>35:4 Demotivated - not committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22:17 Lives Bank’s values</td>
<td></td>
<td>12:33 Dedication waning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proactive</strong></td>
<td>20:8 Proactive</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>24:39 Waiting for someone else to do it for them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24:40 Do-er but with initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>30:20 Looks to others to solve their problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32:16 Takes initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td>36:17 Waits for things to happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results orientated</strong></td>
<td>2:42 Always on the run - very productive</td>
<td>Poor performer</td>
<td>2:46 Takes forever to do something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27:5 Will make it happen</td>
<td></td>
<td>27:6 Questions if she is really going to make it happen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
**Table 3.11**

**Category 8: Lifelong learning**

**Description:** The extent to which the individual pursues ongoing self-development and professional growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuously learning</td>
<td>1:28 Continuously seeking knowledge even informally</td>
<td>Comfort zone</td>
<td>22:31 In comfort zone - won’t work to improve self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:42 Forever going on courses to learn more</td>
<td></td>
<td>24:54 Not interested in development &amp; training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:43 Grabbed opportunity to attend leader course</td>
<td></td>
<td>13:9 Never ventured outside of IR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Formal qualifications</td>
<td>1:27 Both have qualifications</td>
<td>No formal qualification</td>
<td>14:2 Might not have education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:22 Education plays a big role</td>
<td></td>
<td>42:12 Not as educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46:8 Qualification aided climb</td>
<td></td>
<td>14:21 Won’t study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-development</td>
<td>1:12 Always sought opportunity to grow</td>
<td>Limited/no development</td>
<td>12:16 Neither believe in self-development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:17 Interested in own self-development</td>
<td></td>
<td>21:3 Doesn’t do anything about her development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24:38 Take ownership of own growth</td>
<td></td>
<td>30:16 Don’t see this person getting involved in self-growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.*

*Construct “Formal education” allocated to this category as responses suggested that individuals who progressed were consistently pursuing education or ongoing training.*
Table 3.12

Category 9: Business acumen

**Description:** The extent to which the individual has a strong understanding and/or experience of the functional areas of the organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>2:9 Both knowledgeable and experienced</td>
<td><em>Lack of competence</em></td>
<td>22:6 Struggled to get to level due to not knowing the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14:18 Relies on experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>22:8 Speaks about something he doesn’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17:5 Work experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>32:4 Lacks competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>27:3 Has specific knowledge of area</td>
<td><em>Limited knowledge</em></td>
<td>24:14 Not a lot of knowledge and skill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22:5 Knew business quite well - able to make decisions</td>
<td></td>
<td>38:15 Wouldn’t be able to give opinion on something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37:5 Technically sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross functional</td>
<td>5:3 Moved into various areas</td>
<td><em>Specialist</em></td>
<td>10:32 Specialist in their divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td>13:3 Lateral moves</td>
<td></td>
<td>11:24 More technical /specialist role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36:10 Moved around the bank - different exposure</td>
<td></td>
<td>38:14 Strong in their fields but didn’t link to overall business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
Table 3.13 *Category 10: Gender disparity*

Category 10: Gender disparity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys’ Club</td>
<td>1:7 May get more exposure into inner circle</td>
<td><em>Continuously proved themselves</em></td>
<td>1:4 Had to work harder to get to where they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:8 (male) Connected to right people</td>
<td>2:7 (female) Had to work hard to get recognised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>29:3 Have families - probably easier to move</td>
<td><em>Family responsibilities</em></td>
<td>11:41 Family takes priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43:1 Took move for career growth - no spouse so easier to move</td>
<td></td>
<td>14:10 Not high priority - family comes first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Career driven</em></td>
<td>10:7 (female) Need to sacrifice family</td>
<td><em>Family first</em></td>
<td>11:41 Family takes priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25:26 Career first / just got married</td>
<td></td>
<td>25:17 Mum focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.*

*Construct “Career driven” differentiated the responses provided by participants for women’ leaders career progression*
### Table 3.14

**Category 11: Career management**

**Description:** The extent to which the individual takes the initiative in making and enacting career plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical skill/area</strong></td>
<td>5:30 Specialised in their field - high skill set</td>
<td>Support function</td>
<td>11:19 Back end design is not so visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13:13 Specialist area - highly sought after skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>13:11 Support area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37:3 Created key dependencies</td>
<td></td>
<td>38:19 Got moved away from core of bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Career planning</strong></td>
<td>27:15 Got a life plan &amp; following it</td>
<td>Limited / no career planning</td>
<td>33:12 If asked about 5yr plan – still thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34:7 Sets milestones for future</td>
<td></td>
<td>34:8 No plan for future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:13 Took ownership and planned own journey</td>
<td></td>
<td>14:4 Career is more random</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.

---

### Table 3.15

**Category 12: Employment Equity policies**

**Description:** The extent to which political factors affect career progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Representative Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affirmative action</strong></td>
<td>9:2 Initially an &quot;affirmative action&quot; position</td>
<td>Hard work</td>
<td>20:16 Had to work very hard for positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16:2 Promoted through employment equity policies</td>
<td></td>
<td>23:2 Had to work hard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Constructs are the labels assigned to describe the phenomena in the text.
3.5.2 Measure of prevalence: Categories

The measure of prevalence of responses per category is set out in this section of the findings. The repertory grid interviews generated 1089 responses which were coded into 115 bi-polar personal constructs. The personal constructs were categorised into 12 categories (excluding the miscellaneous category). By counting the number of responses per category it was possible to generate a measure of prevalence. The summary of the categories and their prevalence emerging from the content analysis of the repertory grids is presented in Table 3.16. In the table the measure of prevalence reflects the ‘Number of responses’ per category and the ‘Sum %’ column refers to the percentage of all the constructs represented in each category.

Table 3.16
Categories: Measure of prevalence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Measure of prevalence</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Sum %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Career ambition</td>
<td></td>
<td>192</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intrapreneurial drive</td>
<td></td>
<td>146</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social relationships and networks</td>
<td></td>
<td>127</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>People orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
<td>10,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Personal credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td>104</td>
<td>9,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Personal effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Work engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Business acumen</td>
<td></td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gender disparity</td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Career management</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Employment Equity policies</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1089</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. No. = ranking according to category with most responses.
Number of responses = counting number of occurrences of the phenomena in the text
Sum % = percentage of all the constructs represented in each category

92
The five most prevalent categories were “Career ambition”, “Intrapreneurial drive”, “Social relationships and networks”, “People orientation” and “Personal credibility”. Together these categories accounted for 64% of all responses.

3.5.3 Constructing the shared mental model of others’ career progression

The next stage in the analysis involved comparing the categories and the participant responses to consider potential underlying relationships between categories. Closely related categories were clustered together into higher order categories called themes. Four main themes emerged from the higher-order content-analysis of the 12 categories. The themes were named to best reflect the characteristics of the categories and the bi-polar constructs represented therein. The contrasts represented what did not constitute career progression. The final themes and categories of what did constitute career progression were consolidated to construct the women leaders’ shared mental model of career progression of others at The Bank (Figure 3.10).
The number of responses per theme and the percentage of bi-polar constructs assigned to each category were calculated. The prevalence of responses per theme is demonstrated in Table 3.17. The most prevalent theme was Individual characteristics representing 60% of the responses. The three other themes identified: Work and career behaviours, Social capital, and Socio-political policies represented 22%, 12%, and 5.5% of the responses respectively.

Table 3.17

*Themes: Measure of prevalence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Sum %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career ambition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intrapreneurial drive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual characteristics and skills</td>
<td>657</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal credibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal effectiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lifelong learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work and career behaviours</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Career management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business acumen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social relationships and networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender disparity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socio-political factors</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-political policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1089</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5.3.1 Individual characteristics and skills

The first theme represented the categories most related to the individual characteristics and skills that participants construed as impacting career progress. Individual characteristics for this purpose were deemed to include personality traits (e.g., risk taker), motivation (e.g., ambitious) and interpersonal skills (e.g., effective communicator). This theme consists of six categories: Career ambition, Intrapreneurial drive, People orientation, Personal credibility, and Personal effectiveness. Taken together, the two themes Career ambition and Intrapreneurial drive generated the majority of the responses.

3.5.3.2 Work and career behaviours

A second theme clustered the categories that pertained to self-directed behaviours towards the work, learning, and career planning that participants associated with successful career progression. This theme consists of the following categories: Work engagement, Lifelong learning, Business acumen, and Career management. The majority of the responses in this theme characterised the categories Work engagement and ‘Lifelong learning’.

3.5.3.3 Social capital

The theme Social capital is associated with the ties or bonds that the participants construed as beneficial for facilitating career progression. This theme contained one category: Social relationships and networks. Building beneficial relationships appeared to be construed as a tactic amongst the participants, rather than an individual characteristic or orientation towards work and for this reason it was considered as a unique category.

3.5.3.4 Socio-political factors

Socio-political issues are considered those regulated by policies or specific concerns of a social origin. The categories Gender disparity and Employment Equity policies fall within this theme. Gender disparity was defined as “the extent to which there are differences between men and women in terms of achieving career success”.

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Employment Equity policies are particularly relevant within the South African context as the government attempts to redress the effects of discrimination.

3.5.4 Reflexivity

To complete the findings section exemplars of the participants’ personal insights are presented. The two reflexivity questions posed to the participants after the completion of the repertory grid were:

- How did you experience this technique? (Table 3.18)
- What personal insights did you gain from this discussion? (Table 3.19)

Table 3.18

Participants’ repertory grid experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience of repertory grid</th>
<th>Repertory grid technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thought provoking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyed the self-reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting as it made me think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting, it made me think better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very insightful, things I have thought about but never said out aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to structure thinking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New way to think differently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made me think about others’ careers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed environment and felt comfortable to talk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting to see how people are the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlighted so boldly how people got to seniority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulated thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped uncover what I see about progressing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to think differently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.19

*Repertory grid interviews: Personal insights*

**Personal insights**

Theme: Self awareness

- Fear of failure held me back
- Maybe it is time to leave the organisation
- Should have taken more ownership of my life
- Could have done more to further my career
- Must have courage to speak up and stand up for myself
- Comfortable where I am but haven’t reach a ceiling
- Realised I need to be more visible
- Realised that it could be too late in my career
- You develop yourself when you mix with senior people
- Would like to be open to others and challenge everything
- Don’t need to be scared to speak up
- Need confidence to challenge
- Stop being conservative / reserved
- Questioning now if it is worth it
- Should be having conversations with my friends
- Identified own problems and not sure it is worth it
- I avoid conflict
- I want to be promoted on merit and not because of connections

Theme: Realisations about career progression

- Knowing the right people in the right places makes you visible
- Play the politics
- Voice your opinion but be aware how you act
- They ‘walked the talk’
- Important to be ‘transferable’
- Not everyone wants to get ahead
- Women have to work harder
- The Bank is male dominated
- Women limit themselves
- Realised that certain personality characteristics helped
- The unfairness in promotions
- Ambitious people who will do anything in their power to achieve
- Depends on who you report to
- It’s important to network
- Attitude and behaviour is important to career progression
3.6 Discussion

This first phase of the study sought to explore the shared (constructed) mental model of the career progression of others by women leaders in a corporate context. The shared mental model of career progression is influenced by the commonality corollary underpinned by Kelly’s (1955, p. 561) personal construct theory, which states that: “the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person.” This has practical considerations for the use of repertory grids in organisations. The commonality corollary postulated that groups working in organisations share similar experiences and construe events in a similar way (Bell, 2005; Brophy, Fransella, & Reed, 2005). The findings represent the shared construction of the participants’ personal constructions of the career progression of others (irrespective of gender) in their context.

3.6.1 Shared mental model of others’ career progression

The shared mental model that emerged as a result of the content analysis of the repertory grid indicated that there are a number of constructs that are significant when women leaders consider the phenomenon of career progression. A broad observation of the findings suggests that the elicited mental model of career progression is weighted towards vertical career progress or objective career success. In their meta-analysis Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman (2005) positively related the following factors as predictors of vertical progression: Human capital, organisational sponsorship, socio-demographics, and stable individual differences. These predictors are not dissimilar to the findings of this phase.

The shared mental model of the career progression of others is expressed in terms of four themes and 12 categories. The findings indicated that the theme Individual characteristics and skills is predominately construed as a significant contributor to successful career progression, accounting for almost two-thirds of the responses. The remaining themes, Work and career behaviours, Social capital and Socio-political
factors garnered one-third of the responses. Each of the themes will be discussed in turn.

**Individual characteristics and skills**

This theme incorporated the following categories: Career ambition, Intrapreneurial drive, People Orientation, Personal credibility and Personal effectiveness. The constructs within this theme reflect on the individual’s motivation, personality traits, and orientation towards others in relation to successful career progression.

The highest number of responses within this theme, and the overall findings, was for the category Career ambition. People who were construed as ambitious were often considered to be proactive, in that they were willing to take the lead, identify opportunities, and self-promote with the express purpose of getting ahead. Ambition to climb the corporate ladder is considered in career development literature as a key predictor of objective career success (Judge et al., 1995; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Laud & Johnson, 2012).

The drive to be entrepreneurial within The Bank was recognised as a contributing factor in career progression. Traditionally the term entrepreneurial is associated with persons who set up business independently and describes individuals who are risk-takers. In this study, the category Intrapreneurial drive describes innovators who are critical thinkers and are willing to take risks and challenge the status quo within The Bank. It is important to record that The Bank differentiated itself by encouraging an “owner-manager culture” and leveraging organisational growth through innovation. Innovation is recognised as a core competency and included in all employees’ performance reviews. It is possible that this strong focus on innovation may have contributed to the participants’ inclusion of characteristics associated traditionally with entrepreneurs in their construction of career progression.

The finding of the predominance of individual characteristics and skills when considering factors associated to career progression is consistent with research focused on the predictors of career success and personality traits. The individual characteristics that emerged from the analysis point to personality traits recognised within the Big Five personality dimensions (McCrae & Costa, 1997). For instance,
constructs such as Risk taker, Embraces change, Hardworker and Self-regulates can be associated to the personality dimensions Extraversion, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability respectively. In part, the individual characteristics construed by the participants are congruent with studies that have examined personality traits and career success. For example, Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2007) reviewed extant literature on personality traits and extrinsic career success. These authors established that there is a positive relationship between Ambition and Conscientiousness and Extraversion, which in turn are positively correlated to extrinsic career success. The trait Openness appears to have garnered less attention in relation to career progression in empirical literature. However, in the findings of this phase of this study the participants indicated that drive for innovation, an ability to embrace change, and keeping an open mind were construed as positively associated with career progression in The Bank. This may be attributed to The Bank’s strategic decision to drive growth through disruptive and innovative thinking, suggesting that the organisational strategy may be a contextual factor to consider in the criteria for career progression.

**Work and career behaviours**

The study found that the manner in which the individual is engaged at work shaped the construction of career progression. The constructs included in this category suggest that a proactive approach towards work and career management have a positive impact on career progression. For instance, constructs denoting a positive attitude towards work, such as a high degree of commitment to achieving results, were associated with successful career progression. De Vos, De Clippeleer, and Dewilde (2009) found support for the relationship between proactive career behaviours and career success in their study of graduates’ progression in the early years of their careers. The notion of proactive behaviour extended to career management by way of setting career goals and career choice. In terms of the latter, the participants indicated that being in a critical department at The Bank, for example, the finance department denoted a key dependency or having sought-after skills, for example, risk management, was advantageous for promotional prospects. This was illustrated by one of the participant’s reflections: “Where you are in The Bank and who you report to matters.”
Equally important is the width and depth of knowledge and experience attributed to people who have progressed in their careers. The attainment of knowledge and experience was associated with people who had moved within The Bank across various functional departments and/or regions. In career development literature, attributes such as educational attainment, knowledge, and work skills are variables that are commonly grouped under the concept human capital. Ng and Feldman (2010) noted that whilst it is commonly held that human capital is positively correlated to career success, less is known as to why human capital impacts career progress. In their research these authors examined the relationship between psychological mechanisms inherent in human capital and indicators of objective career success. In particular they examined the psychological mechanisms of cognitive ability and conscientiousness. The findings suggest a positive influence of these factors on career success as education and work experience increase cognitive ability and conscientiousness. The assumption is that the stronger the work performance, the better the performance ratings and thus, the greater the recognition.

Social capital
Social capital is defined as “the resources needed for careers” and includes mentorships, networks, information, and opportunities for development (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2006, p.746). In this phase of this study, social capital was construed as the “knowing-whom” of the career competencies framework (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), which included the building of strategic relationships, advantageous networks, and exposure to the senior platform. The finding at a personal bi-polar construct level Networking versus limited/no networks was second only to the bi-polar construct Ambition versus Lack of ambition in terms of the number of responses reflecting the importance of knowing-whom within The Bank as a means of getting ahead. This inclusion or proximity to the influential core at The Bank is comparable to Schein’s (1971) concept of inclusion or centrality to an influential core. Much literature has been devoted to researching the positive relationship between successful career progression and social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Seibert, Kramer, & Liden, 2001; Tyman & Stumpf, 2003). At the conclusion of the repertory grid interviews, many of the participants recognised that their failure to network, socialise, or their respective distance from the senior platform in terms of reporting structure was a disadvantage in terms of their own career progression.
Socio-political factors

The responses revealed that certain socio-political issues were construed as impacting career progress. The categories Employment Equity and Gender disparity formed part of the socio-political context construed by the participants. The Employment Equity construct received the least number of responses but nevertheless it is an important consideration in the South African context. The Bank has set out in their Employment Equity agenda for the period 2016-2019 the preference for placements at all managerial levels in the following order: African Females, African Males, Coloured Females, Coloured Males, White/Indian Females, and White/Indian Males. Thus, looking to the future the scope for career progression may increase for some women but be limited for others according to race. Some participants alluded to the feeling that the progression of certain individuals to the very senior levels of The Bank had been based solely on this agenda, but the sense was that, on the most part, the placements had been deserved. This was especially true where the individual had worked through the ranks at The Bank rather than been appointed as an external placement.

The constructs elicited in the “Gender disparity” category are consistent with research findings within the domain of women’s career advancement. In this category, career progression for men was construed as having been facilitated through exclusionary male networks, commonly labelled “Boys’ clubs”, whereas women progressed as a result of continuously proving their capability. Women were seen as having to consistently work harder to be recognised. Researchers Gorman and Kmec (2007) examined this phenomenon and concluded that women are, in fact, held to stricter performance standards.

Being career driven as women was seen as contrary to having a family. In the construction of career progression, women were construed to sacrifice their family for the sake of career, which led many participants, in their post-interview reflection, to query whether such sacrifices were “worth it”. Another construct of importance within the Gender disparity category was the ability to relocate. The requirement of being mobile, or in other words the freedom to relocate to different regions in the country to further career progression, was more readily attributed to men. This limitation would typically preclude women from taking up challenging opportunities.
required to further their own careers. Research on this phenomenon has revealed that the issue of relocation is complex and multifaceted (Baldridge, Eddleston, Golden, & Veiga, 2000). Some researchers suggest that women are willing to relocate but organisations typically assume women will not relocate based on gender stereotyping of roles. Broadly, women’s ability to relocate is closely aligned to family responsibilities.

3.6.2 Relating the constructed themes to literature

The findings of this phase are consistent with extant empirical studies that focused on the predictors of career success (Boudreau et al., 2001; De Vos et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2005; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001; Tharenou, 2001). Research studies designed to examine factors impacting career success have largely examined bivariate relationship between career success and a plethora of variables, for example, personality traits (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001), social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; O’Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011; Seibert et al., 2001) and gender (Burke, 2005; Tharenou, 2005). In a study focusing on multivariate factors that impact managerial careers Kirchmeyer (2002) identified four categories: human capital (education and work experience), individual (personality traits, gender roles, and motivation), interpersonal (supportive relationships at work), and family factors (family responsibilities).

In South Africa a paucity of research has been conducted on the factors affecting career success of women. For instance, Riordan & Louw-Potgieter (2011) studied the career success of women academics by examining variables such as work centrality and career anchors.

Ng et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of extant literature to provide comprehensive analysis of the multivariate predictors of career success. In their meta-analysis these authors suggested the following four categories that are commonly predictors of career success:

- human capital (includes work experience, knowledge, education, social capital, career planning, and political skills),
- organisational sponsorship (career sponsorship, supervisor support, learning, and development opportunities),
- socio demographic status (race, gender, marital status, and age), and
- stable individual differences (Big Five personality factors).

Whilst the above categorisation of factors that predict career success differs from the allocation of constructs to categories in my findings, most constructs identified in this research correspond with the factors identified by Ng et al. (2005) and Kirchmeyer (2002). The exception lies in the socio-political factors considered. This study is located within a South African environment wherein legislation regarding employment equity and transformation impact career progression (Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; Kruger, 2011).

The categorisation of the constructs proved to be a challenging and complex process. Three consulting psychologists in the organisational developmental field independently reviewed my findings. In principal, in the discussion with each reviewer and discussions with supervisor, the themes held up to scrutiny. It was pointed out there could be a number of interpretations dependent on the lens through which the data are viewed; for example, the themes Individual characteristics, Work and career behaviours, and Social capital may all be construed as inherent to the individual, thus, may have been collapsed into one category. Upon reviewing extant literature, an alternative categorisation of the concepts “agentic” and “communal” qualities was considered. The findings in the Career ambition, and Intrapreneurial drive categories appeared to correlate to agentic qualities (ambition and drive). The findings in the categories People Orientation, Personal credibility and Personal effectiveness corresponded to communal qualities (empathy and interpersonal skills). I considered the alternative interpretations by examining the original responses on the repertory grids and re-listened to the audio. Most especially, I paid attention to the individuals’ reflections at the conclusion of the interviews to establish how they interpreted their own responses. Participants’ constructions appeared to be segmented into the following: factors attributed to the individual, (“she or he is driven and passionate” or “she is a people’s person”); factors attributed to how individuals represented themselves in relation to the organisation, work, and career (“has a C.A.
qualification”); factors related to social behaviours and relationships (“went jogging with C.E.O.”); and factors outside of the control of the individual (gender and political). In an effort to preserve the richness and contextual meaning offered by the participants I maintained the distinction between the themes.

In constructing a shared mental model of the career progression of others, these women leaders leaned towards identifying constructs considered to be antecedents of vertical career progression (Ng et al., 2005). Specifically, in this study the top three categories in the measure of prevalence (see Table 3.16), Career ambition, Intrapreneurial drive, and Social relationships and networks have been consistently related to what it takes to progress vertically (Sok, Blomme, Tromp, & Van Muijen, 2011; Sools, van Engen, & Baerveldt, 2007; Tharenou, 2001). These findings suggest that using the lens of personal constructivism, these women leaders constructed the career progression of others as objective career success.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter the sub-aim “To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progression of others in a corporate environment” was addressed by applying Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory and executed by means of the theory’s methodological application, the repertory grid technique.

This chapter provided an overview of the concept of mental models and of Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory. Further, the research method employed to address the stated sub-aim was explained. Data were gathered from a purposeful sample of 82 women in a financial institution in South Africa by means of the repertory grid technique. Data were analysed by means of a qualitative content analysis technique (Krippendorf, 2013) and core-categorising procedure (Jankowicz, 2004). The analysis of the repertory grid techniques identified 12 broad categories which were reduced to four themes. The findings representing the women leaders’ construction of the career progression of others and a discussion of the findings concluded this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

PHASE II: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF CAREER PROGRESSION

“As women, we are more than the stereotypes and we can do more.”

- Workshop participant

4.1 Introduction

In the second phase the sub-aim “To explore women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-construction of career progression in a corporate environment” is addressed, informed by the research question illustrated in Figure 4.1. To this end, the sub-aim is approached from the social constructionist tradition by applying the Appreciative Inquiry method because of its participative, collaborative, and generative capacity.

The chapter begins with an overview of the theory, guiding principles, and practice of Appreciative Inquiry. The second part of the chapter discusses the research method employed for this phase. Thereafter, the findings of the analysis are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings.
4.2 Research method: Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is considered a process to direct change, to create a collective image of a desired future, and guide actions that may help towards achieving that future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001). Appreciative Inquiry stems from a positive approach to action research, and offers an alternative to the traditional problem-based approach to organisational change. Where conventional organisational development methods view an organisation as a “problem to be solved”, Appreciative Inquiry assumes the position that the organisation is a “solution to be embraced” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 16).

Appreciative Inquiry originated as a research method from a doctoral dissertation by David Cooperrider that challenged the basic assumptions of the problem-solving paradigm captured in Figure 4.2. Appreciative Inquiry provides an alternative paradigm that emphasises a strengths-based approach to engage stakeholders in an inquiry to what works well in organisations (Watkins & Stavros, 2010). Appreciative Inquiry is considered both “a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which is designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organisation or society as a whole” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 159).

Ludema and Fry (2008, p. 282) explain Appreciative Inquiry as “a study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best.” The basic assumption of Appreciative Inquiry is that every social system has hidden strengths and a positive core that, if uncovered, has the potential for social and organisational transformation. In the Appreciative Inquiry process, the positive core relates to the best of what exists in the social system. The process of an Appreciative Inquiry seeks to engage individuals at all levels in an inquiry into the positive core of the organisation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm 1: Problem Solving</th>
<th>Paradigm 2: Appreciative Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Felt need”</td>
<td>Appreciating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Problem</td>
<td>”Valuing the Best of What is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Causes</td>
<td>Envisioning &quot;What Might Be&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Possible Solutions</td>
<td>Dialoguing &quot;What Should Be&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Planning</td>
<td>Innovating “What Will Be”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Underlying belief: Organisation is a problem to be solved*  
*Underlying belief: Organisation is a mystery to be embraced*


Another assumption of Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the ability of groups to collaborate, through dialogue, to generate new productive directions not previously considered. Cooperrider et al. (2003, p.13) view organisations as “centers of human relatedness” and argue that, by uniting individuals around a central affirmative topic, Appreciative Inquiry allows people who share a common objective to co-construct their future. Consequently, Appreciative Inquiry may enable fresh thinking and ideas to generate individual and organisational flourishing (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008).

As a mode of inquiry, Watkins et al. (2011, p.118) state that Appreciative Inquiry “invites us to choose consciously to seek out and inquire into that which is generative and life-enriching, both in our own lives and in the lives of others.”
The key elements of Appreciative Inquiry as summarised by Watkins and Stavros (2010, p.160) are:

- A belief that the future can be built on the lessons from the best of the past.
- A search for new knowledge to enrich the images of the future.
- A theory that acknowledges that collective action is a vital part of creating a way to enact the values and vision of a group, an organisation or a society.
- A realisation that human systems can create what they imagine.

Appreciative Inquiry provided a useful theoretical framework and application to bring together the participants of this study to collaborate as a group in the exploration and articulation of new possibilities for career progressions in The Bank. The theoretical foundation of Appreciative Inquiry and the implications for research are discussed below along with a description of the inquiry process.

**4.2.1 The theoretical foundation of Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in social constructionist epistemology (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Gergen, 1994; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Social constructionism embraces the idea that a social system creates or determines its own reality (Cooperrider et al., 2003) through conversations about identity and values (Ludema & Fry, 2008). The role of language in constructing and making sense of the world is a central premise of social constructionism (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). The Taos Institute described the role of language as the creator of reality as follows:

Social constructionist dialogues – of cutting edge significance within the social sciences of process by which humans generate meaning together. Our focus is on how social groups create and sustain beliefs in the real, so do the seeds of action. Meaning and action are entwined. As we generate meaning together we create the future (Theoretical background, n.d.).

The essence of Appreciative Inquiry is this statement, in that, as people of an organisation engage in dialogue together, they sow the seeds of a future reality for the
organisation (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). Appreciative Inquiry connects with the social constructionist framework on the power of dialogue to shape social systems. McNamee (2007, p. viii), who has framed Appreciative Inquiry as a form of “social construction in action” said: “If we ask questions about what works or what gives life to a community, group, or person, we participate in the construction of a reality of potential.”

Recognising the social constructed nature of organisations, Cooperrrider et al. (2003, pp. 13-14) positioned Appreciative Inquiry in social constructionist theory guided by the following principles:

- Social order at any given point is viewed as the product of broad social agreement.
- Patterns of social organisations actions are not fixed by nature in any direct biological or physical way; the vast share of social conduct is capable of infinite conceptual variation.
- From an observational point of view, all social action is open to multiple interpretations.
- Historical narratives and theories govern what is taken to be true or valid and to a large extent, determine what scientists and lay persons are able to see.
- The most powerful vehicle communities have for changing the social order is the act of dialogue, made possible by language. Alterations in linguistic practices, therefore, hold profound implications for change in social practices.

Appreciative Inquiry is a framework with “particular principles and assumptions and a structural set of core processes and practices for engaging people in identifying and co-creating an organisation’s future” (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003, p.6). There are ten principles (beliefs or values) guiding the practice of Appreciative Inquiry. Represented in Figure 4.3 are the five core principles and five emergent principles of Appreciative Inquiry. These principles were summarised by Crous (2008) who integrated the range of principles suggested by the following authors: Barret and Fry (2005), Stavros and Torres (2005), and Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The constructionist principle</th>
<th>Words create worlds.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Momentum for large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The simultaneity principle</th>
<th>Inquiry creates change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wholeness brings out the best in people and organisations. Bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The poetic principle</th>
<th>We can choose what we study.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisations, like books, are endless sources of study and learning. What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes and even creates the world as we know it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The anticipatory principle</th>
<th>Image inspires action.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future. The more positive and hopeful the image, the more positive the present-day action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The positive principle</th>
<th>Positive questions lead to positive change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Momentum for large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The wholeness principle</th>
<th>Wholeness brings out the best.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wholeness brings out the best in people and organisations. Bringing all stakeholders together in large-group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The enactment principle</th>
<th>Acting ‘as if self-fulfilling.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To really make a change we must ‘be the change we want to see’. Positive change occurs when the process used to create the change is a living model of the ideal future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The free choice principle</th>
<th>Free choice liberates power.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People perform better and are more committed when they have freedom to choose how and what they contribute. Free choice stimulates organisational excellence and positive change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The narrative principle</th>
<th>As we weave stories, so we create lasting bonds.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The act of sharing stories about the best of the past sets in motion powerful interaction and relationships from which cooperation and desire to change will result. Stories provide coherence and by entering into stories people connect with one another and they learn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The awareness principle</th>
<th>Awareness supports the application of the other principles – it unifies and amplifies them and magnifies the effects of appreciative inquiry.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness invites us to be self-reflective and actively engaged in our relationships. By practising awareness the other principles of appreciative inquiry come alive in our daily lives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.3 Summary of 10 principles of Appreciative Inquiry Reprinted from From action research to appreciative inquiry: a paradigm shift in organisation development and change (p. 89) by F. Crous, 2008, Van Schaik Publishers. Copyright 2008 by Van Schaik. Reprinted with permission.*
These principles are central to an Appreciative Inquiry process that is generative and strengths-based. The core principles were translated into underlying assumptions by Hammond (1998, p. 20) to clarify the process of “doing Appreciative Inquiry”:

- **In every society, or group, something works:** In this study, by virtue of the fact that the Executive Directors of The Bank endorsed the study and that, as a result, were willing to support the group of participants to embark on the research process, the suggestion can be made that something positive works at The Bank.

- **What we focus on becomes our reality:** By focusing on what has worked and what worked well in the past, the participants create a sense of what is possible in their careers.

- **Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities:** Drawing on the poetic principle, the participants can explore multiple stories of success rather than searching for a singular truth about success.

- **The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way:** This assumption relates to the idea that inquiry brings change suggesting that the act of asking questions may lead to a new way of thinking about career progression.

- **People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known):** Change brings fear and anxiety (Reed, 2007). By way of affirming past successes, the participants build confidence in their ability and potential to succeed as women leaders.

- **If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past:** Building on the previous assumption, the Appreciative Inquiry processes focus the participants on expanding on the “best of what has been done” (Reed, 2007, p. 28).

- **It is important to value difference:** The Appreciative Inquiry model of organisational development reflects an appreciation of diversity in different views and perspectives. Appreciative Inquiry lends itself to giving voice to the diverse views and standpoints the various participants may hold about possibilities for career progression.
The language we use creates our reality: This assumption draws on the social constructionist principle which emphasises that “words create worlds” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 2).

4.2.2 Appreciative Inquiry as a framework for research

Appreciative Inquiry offers a framework for applied research with an emphasis on collaborative and generative processes accentuating what works best in an organisation (Bushe, 1995; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). As a research method, Appreciative Inquiry has been applied to various disciplines, for example, education and healthcare. It is, perhaps, best known as a positive action research method for application in organisation settings as an approach to organisational development and change management (Barrett & Fry, 2005; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995).

Appreciative Inquiry research is described by Reed (2007, p. 42) as focusing “on supporting people getting together to tell stories of positive development in their work that they can build on”. She says that Appreciative Inquiry may be used as a research framework over and above applying the process as an organisation development tool. Appreciative Inquiry research is thus a communal venture, engaging in an active process of telling stories, to foster change and innovation, taking into account the workplace setting. Stratton-Berkessel (2010, p. 3) noted “when you use the Appreciative Inquiry method you open participants to their mental models, belief systems, values, motivation, hopes and dreams as they share their stories of success”. Considering these characteristics, Appreciative Inquiry provided a means to promote participation, collaboration, and creation of a community of women leaders to generate transformational opportunities for career growth within The Bank.

4.2.3 Process and application of Appreciative Inquiry

The application of Appreciative Inquiry typically follows a 4-D cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2003) with the aim of highlighting the positive core of an organisation. The 4-D process includes: Discovering the best of what is, Dreaming to imagine what could be, Designing what will be and creating Destiny to enact and sustain what will be.
Watkins and Stavros (2010) added a fifth “D” for Define, as the pre-cursor to the cycle to establish the purpose for the inquiry, creating a 5-D cycle. The visual representation of the 5-D cycle is reproduced in Figure 4.4.

Appreciative Inquiry can be applied across a variety of contexts, for example, large scale summits (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998), as a micro tool for team building (Watkins et al., 2001), community consultation (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012) and coaching for development (Liston-Smith, 2008).

In this study, the process of Appreciative Inquiry was implemented with the participants by way of a collaborative workshop. An explanation of each stage of the 5-D cycle and the application to this phase of the study follows in section 4.3.6.2.

4.3 Research method

In the following section the research method and implementation specific to this phase is described.

4.3.1 The research setting

In Chapter 2 of this thesis, I provided details of the research site and my entrée to the research site. For this phase of the study, a group activity, was conducted as a workshop. The workshop was held in a large conference venue at the head office of The Bank. Permission to use the venue was obtained by the Human Resource Learning and Development Officer. In Figures 4.5 and 4.6 the photographs of the venue and materials provided for the workshop are shown. In preparation for the workshop the venue was set up with the following:

- Registration desk where participants registered upon arrival and received a name badge and a workbook
- Eight round conference tables, with seating for 10 participants per table
- Audio-visual equipment and 10 flipchart stands, paper and pens
- Materials for collages, art supplies and magazines
The Human Resources Department of The Bank sponsored the cost of the venue, refreshments and lunch for all the participants. I provided the name badges, workbooks and materials for collages.

4.3.2 Establishing the researcher’s role

The Human Resources Executive supported the research, as the purpose of the research aligned with the organisation’s stated aims for promoting women to senior leadership positions. Approval was obtained from the CEO for the participants to
attend the one-day workshop planned for Phase II as it was held on a working day (a Thursday). The workshop was considered a full day’s training and reported on in The Bank’s leadership development initiatives.

In qualitative research the role of the researcher requires careful consideration because of personal biases, values, and assumptions (Creswell, 2014). Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 15) define participant observation as involving “social interaction between the researcher and informants in the milieu of the latter.” Gold (1958) distinguishes a fourfold typology of participant observation: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. During Phase II’s data collection phase, I engaged as observer-as-participant, maintaining superficial contact with the participants by asking occasional questions (Waddington, 2004).

Given my role as observer-as-participant and the large number of participants—and in consultation with my supervisor—two Appreciative Inquiry accredited facilitators were asked to assist in the facilitation of the workshop.

The two facilitators were my supervisor Professor Freddie Crous and Dr Anastasia Bukashe. Both are accredited facilitators trained in Cleveland at Case Western University by the originator of Appreciative Inquiry, Dr David Cooperrider. Prior to the workshop, I designed the Appreciative Inquiry interview protocol and the structure of the Appreciative Inquiry process.

On the day of the workshop, I introduced the facilitators to the participants and explained my role for the day as observer-as-participant. I presented the shared mental model of career progression elicited during Phase II and positioned “Growing Women Leaders at The Bank” as the affirmative topic (Define stage) for the workshop. Thereafter, I instructed when necessary, built rapport, and observed the process.

4.3.3 Sampling

Participants for Phase II were a subset of Phase I participants. At the conclusion of the Phase I repertory grid interviews, all participants were provided with the aim of Phase
II and with information about the Appreciative Inquiry workshop. The invitation to participate in Phase II of this study was extended to the population purposively sampled for Phase I (82 participants). Participants were invited to attend the workshop via e-mail (Figure 4.7), which provided details of the date, time, and venue for the workshop.

![Figure 4.7 Invitation to attend the Phase II workshop](image)

In section 2.4.4 the sample size was presented in Table 2.5 and attrition discussed. For reading continuity the demographics of the sample group for this phase are presented in Table 4.1. In comparing the demographic profile to that of Phase I, the percentage distribution per category remained the same with only a small variation to the averages per category.
### Demographic profile for Phase II

**Demographic profile of the purposive sample Group n=66**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Range</th>
<th>27 to 58 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>40 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 20 – 29</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 30 – 39</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 40 – 49</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range 50 – 59</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Grade</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Ages are at time of selection. Race classification as per The Bank’s categories. B = Senior Management C = Middle Management D = Junior Management
4.3.4 Structure of the workshop

The structure of the workshop was designed in conjunction with my supervisor, the HR Executive and the Learning Development officer. The detailed plan of the workshop is presented in Table 4.2. The HR Executive extended an invitation to The Bank’s CEO to give the opening address, which he accepted.

On the day of the workshop, the CEO, who had over 20 years of service at The Bank, spoke at length about the historical lack of development of women and acknowledged that only as a father of adult working daughters could he appreciate the struggles women encounter in the workplace. He referred to the recently tabled Employment Equity Plan and The Banks’ commitment to growing more women leaders. He concluded his address with an invitation to the participants to present to him the outcomes of the day.

After the CEO’s address, I welcomed the participants to the workshop and provided an overview of the day. I shared the findings of Phase I and positioned the shared mental model of career progression as the topic of the workshop. Any questions, comments and reflections were encouraged. I concluded by introducing and handing over the facilitation process to the two expert facilitators.

At the end of the day, I invited the participants to share comments, thoughts and reflections about the day. Participants were also asked to provide written feedback in their workbooks. The workbooks were collected for analysis purposes. Participants were advised that the workbooks would be kept in a secure location and would be returned to them at Phase III interviews. I closed the workshop by expressing my gratitude to the participants, The Bank, the facilitators and all those people who had assisted with the logistics.
Table 4.2

*Agenda of the Appreciative Inquiry workshop*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 - 8:25</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>Registration. Tea / Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 - 8:40</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Welcome by The Bank’s CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:40 - 8:50</td>
<td>AC - researcher</td>
<td>Welcome, thank-you &amp; introduction of facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:50 - 9:00</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 9:30</td>
<td>AC - researcher</td>
<td>Presentation of the shared mental model – Phase I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 - 10:00</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Discovery exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:00</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Debrief of Discovery Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00-10:30</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>TEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-10:50</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Explanation of Dream exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:50-11:20</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Table discussion of Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:50-12:00</td>
<td>Individually</td>
<td>Individual Dream exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-12:45</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Crafting Collage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45-13:15</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>LUNCH (<em>Vouchers at the door</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:15-13:45</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Group feedback of Dream exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:45-13:55</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Explanation of Provocative proposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:55-14:25</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Craft Provocative proposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:25-14:35</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Explanation of Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:35-15:00</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Construct Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:00-15:15</td>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>TEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:15-15:50</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Group feedback: Provocative proposition and Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:50-16:00</td>
<td>FACILITATORS</td>
<td>Explanation of Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00-16:30</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Construction of Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:30-17:00</td>
<td>AC - researcher</td>
<td>Next steps, appreciation and close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The day following the workshop, I sent bulk e-mail to all the participants thanking them for their participation (Figure 4.8), and encouraged comments or questions.
4.3.5 Data collection

Data gathering in the Appreciative Inquiry approach is similar to that of traditional qualitative data gathering methods (Calabrese, Hummel, & San Martin, 2007). Since it is a form of action research, Appreciative Inquiry takes a collaborative facilitative approach on data gathering. Appreciative Inquiry protocols were used throughout the stages of the 5-D cycle.

4.3.5.1 Recording of data

Recording of data in this phase involved the following procedures:

- Structured paired interviews:
  Information from interviews captured by participants in their workbook.

- Small group discussions:
  Common themes, provocative propositions and collages generated by each small group were captured by participants on A1 flipchart paper.

- Plenary discussions:
  Plenary discussions were captured on audio-video and professionally transcribed.
Field notes:
I maintained a research journal in which I recorded the planning, implementation, and reflections on the day of the workshop.

4.3.5.2 Data management
The Appreciative Inquiry process generated a vast amount of data. To facilitate the management of the data I maintained the original flipcharts in a secure location and in addition, photographed each flipchart sheet and stored the images digitally on ATLAS.ti. All participant workbooks were photocopied and stored with the flipcharts. The original workbooks were returned to the participants during Phase III.

4.3.5.3 Application of the Appreciative Inquiry 5-D Cycle as data collection method
The Appreciative Inquiry 5-D cycle was applied as follows:

The Define Stage
The Appreciative Inquiry process begins with the selection of a topic. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) regard the choice of an affirmative topic as core to any Appreciative Inquiry; as fateful. As Hammond (1998, p. 20) points out “what we focus on becomes our reality”. For this phase, the objective of the Define stage was to intentionally choose a positive and constructive focus of career progression for the participants to work together towards a positive future (Ludema & Fry, 2008). In consultation with the HR executive, my supervisor and the facilitators, the affirmative topic chosen for the workshop was “Growing women leaders at The Bank”.

The formulation of the appreciative interview questions flow from the chosen topic. To this end, an interview protocol was designed and a participant workbook prepared. The workbook included the following: the interview protocol, a guide to the Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny stages, space for the participants to write notes and a feedback questionnaire (Annexure E). The interview questions were based on the generic Appreciative Inquiry protocol (Cooperrider et al., 2003) and finalised in consultation with my supervisor. The questions are unconditionally positive to elicit strengths in the generation of transformational co-construction of career
progression. Interview questions are presented in Table 4.3. The structured nature of the interview ensures that all participants’ voices are included in the process.

Table 4.3

*Appreciative Inquiry interview protocol*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Recall a time when you flourished and grew in your career. Describe in detail who was involved; what did you do to grow in your career; who had a positive impact on your career; what were the conditions and environment that enabled you to thrive?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2a. | What do you value about:  
  i. Your organisation?  
  ii. Your colleagues?  
  iii. Your customers?  
  iv. The senior leadership at The Bank?  
  v. Yourself? |
| 2b. | What is the single most important thing that “gives life” to The Bank, without which this company would not be the same? |
| 3. | Imagine you had three wishes that would enable you to reach your full career potential. What would those wishes be? |
| 4. | Imagine that it is five years from now and you are flourishing and growing professionally. Describe your career progression. |
| 5. | It is still five years from now and women in The Bank are flourishing in all areas of work life including leadership. What opportunities did women seize upon in order to thrive? |

*The Discovery Stage*

This stage is described as “the quest to discover what gives life to an organisation when it is at its best” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 65). The goal of this phase is two-fold: to facilitate dialogue by sharing positive stories and for the group to identify broad themes that have contributed to the success of the organisation (Cooperrider et al., 2003). The process of discovery involves paired interviews based on appreciative interview questions. The collecting of data begins the process of
identifying and locating the distinct strengths that make up the positive core of the system. After an introduction to the day and a brief explanation of the Appreciative Inquiry method, I presented the positive constructs of the shared mental model of career progression elicited during Phase I to the participants.

In order to discover the positive core of their career progression and open their minds to creative action (Fredrickson, 2006) the participants worked in pairs to interview each other to appreciate the best of “what is” (Watkins & Stavros, 2010). Interviews were conducted using the Appreciative Inquiry protocol. Culminating from the paired interviews, small groups of six or eight people were formed in which the stories were shared. This inquiry into their best experience served to remind the participants of individual strengths and of past successes that could be leveraged to create a positive future. Each group identified four to six themes in their shared stories and shared these themes to the larger group. The themes were written on flipchart paper. Similar or related themes were integrated. All participants voted for five themes that resonated with them and which they considered to be representative of the positive core of their career progression.

The Dream Stage

In the Dream phase, the group works together, envisioning the future by building on the themes from the Discovery stage by answering the question: “It is five years from now, and women are flourishing in their careers at The Bank. What opportunities did women seize upon to thrive?”

The participants worked as a collective to embody their envisioned dream through a creative process (such as storytelling, art or song) to amplify the organisation’s positive core. The Dream phase is both practical and generative in that “these images are compelling possibilities precisely because they are based on extraordinary moments from an organisational history” (Cooperrider et al., 2003, p. 39).

In the small groups, the dreams were documented on flipchart paper after which the participants engaged in creative representations (collages) of their dream (see Figure 4.9 for an example of a collage). This process created high levels of enthusiasm,
creativity, and motivation as evidenced by the inspiring images represented on the collages.

Figure 4.9 Example of a collage created at the workshop

In a plenary session (see Figure 4.10), a representative from the small groups reflected on their groups’ interviews, shared the themes that emerged from the stories and explained their respective collage. Themes and collages remained on the wall as a backdrop to the Design and Destiny stages. The presentations were video recorded, and, for the purposes of reporting, transcribed.
The Design Stage

In the Design stage, the participants collectively construct a new social architecture to make their preferred future a reality. The Design stage focuses on the best of what is and moves towards co-constructing future possibilities as envisioned in the dream (Watkins & Stavros, 2010). This phase requires in-depth dialogues about which organisational structures and systems will support the realisation of the preferred future (Cooperrider et al., 2003). These are encapsulated in a provocative proposition which bridges the best of what is with what might be in a manner described by Barrett and Fry (2005, p. 67) as the participants “bringing the new organisational world into being”. The provocative propositions are bold possibility statements, written in the present tense, to give form to the collective Dream. A photograph of a provocative proposition crafted by the participants is provided in Figure 4.11.
In the final task of the Design stage, the participants defined the social architecture to give concrete expression to what principles, people, and practices would be required to work towards the ideal future (see Figure 4.12 for examples of initiatives designed by one of the groups).
In a plenary session (see Figure 4.13), a representative from each small group presented the group’s provocative propositions and social architecture. During this discussion, one of the facilitators captured on flip chart paper the practical elements (actions or initiatives) co-constructed by the participants that would give expression to their career progression. Similar initiatives were merged into larger ideas with the consensus of the participants.

Figure 4.13 A group representative feeding back during a plenary session

The Destiny Stage

The purpose of the Destiny stage is to ensure the realisation of the visions of the Dream and of the provocative propositions through innovation and action (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Ludema & Fry, 2008). Watkins and Mohr (2001) point out that the Destiny stage is on-going through a continuous process of learning, adjustment, and improvisation to sustain the momentum for transformation. The Destiny stage, in effect, transforms the organisation culture into what Cooperrider et al. (2003, p. 177) term “an appreciative learning culture” to create a cyclical Appreciative Inquiry process.
Practically, the participants engage in a dialogue about how to action the Dream and Design (Watkins & Stavros, 2010). In this study, the facilitators first presented to the group the common actions co-constructed by the participants during the design stage. The participants were provided with six stickers each, with which to vote for initiatives which they considered as exciting, powerful, or would best create opportunities for women to flourish in their careers at The Bank (see Figure 4.14). The initiatives were ranked in order of votes. A final list of five initiatives was identified. Participants self-organised around the five initiatives by “voting with their feet” (Ludema & Fry, 2008, p. 287). The participants walked towards the initiative they most wanted to work on post-workshop. The final activity involved the working groups spending 30 minutes constructing the beginning of a design process to bring to life their desired future.

![Figure 4.14 Example of initiatives crafted during the workshop](image)

An overview of the full Appreciative Inquiry process followed for the collaborative workshop, based on the 5-D cycle, is given in Table 4.4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Define: | • Affirmative topic choice: Growing Women Leaders at The Bank.  
• Presentation of the shared mental model of career progression elicited during Phase I through repertory grid interviews. |
| Discovery: | • Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry and overview of 5-D Cycle.  
• Paired interviews conducted using Appreciative Inquiry interview guide.  
• Interview conversations focused on a peak experience of when the participants flourished in their careers.  
• Peak experiences shared in small groups and participants identify common underlying themes culminating in the positive core. |
| Dream: | • Collaboratively, in small groups, participants construct a dream of women flourishing at The Bank.  
• Dreams are based on the positive core developed in the Discovery stage.  
• In the small groups participants create a visual representation (collages) of the dream.  
• Themes and collages shared in plenary session. |
| Design: | • Explanation of Design stage and guidelines for crafting provocative propositions.  
• In small groups, provocative proposition crafted.  
• Small groups co-create social architecture for women to grow in their careers by capitalising on opportunities at The Bank.  
• Social architecture shared in plenary session. |
| Destiny: | • Common design elements captured on flip-chart paper by facilitators.  
• Participants voted for five initiatives which they considered would give expression to the dream of women flourishing in their careers at The Bank.  
• Initiatives ranked according to most votes. Participants grouped similar initiatives into broader initiatives.  
• A final list of five core initiatives was identified.  
• Participants self-selected into work groups for the initiative that most resonated with them.  
• Work groups discussed action steps and created initial plans to meet post-workshop |
4.3.6 Data analysis

During the Appreciative Inquiry process the participants engaged in collaborative data analyses, which encouraged the participants to assess and internalise the information generated during the process. In keeping with the Appreciative Inquiry frame, this encompassed the identification of themes of life-giving force by the participants. Watkins et al. (2011) refer to this analytical process as mining the data by the core group. These authors state that this process of mining the data is consistent with the Appreciative Inquiry theory that future realities are created through relationships and conversations. In this regard, the authors strongly recommend that the facilitators not analyse the data as “the observer always impacts and changes that which is observed” (p. 202).

4.3.7 Trustworthiness of the study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria to enhance the quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. An overview of each criterion was provided in the Chapter 2 of this thesis. The strategies to enhance trustworthiness of this phase of the study are presented in Table 4.5.

Reed (2007) highlights the importance of creating an audit trail in Appreciative Inquiry analysis due to the complex approach of addressing research aims in an Appreciative Inquiry process. Adding to the complexity is the participation of the participants in the data analysis process possibly leading to multilayered and multifaceted interpretations of the data. From this perspective, Reed (2007) states that it is important to be transparent in recounting the research process, the context, and the stages in analysis, including details of who was involved in the process.
### Strategies to enhance trustworthiness of Phase II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Application in Phase Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility:</td>
<td>Recognised research method</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry is recognised as valid research method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prolonged engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td>I have a prior relationship with The Bank based on consulting and facilitating organisational development initiatives. Familiar with culture and context of organisation since 2010. Established a trusting relationship with The Bank. Remained immersed in The Bank for 10 months for research planning, organisation, and data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation of data</td>
<td></td>
<td>In this study, I made use of two methods of triangulation: theoretical triangulation, namely, personal construction, social construction, and constructivism) and three data collection methods (repertory grid, appreciative inquiry, and grounded theory interviews).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability:</td>
<td>Thick description</td>
<td>Detailed description provided of contextual information: case study organisation, participants, research method, and time frames. Sample was purposeful: women in leadership positions; subset of Phase I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful sampling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Detailed description and implementation of research design, participant demographics, and context is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated</td>
<td>Detailed description and implementation of research design, participant demographics, and context is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Audit trial</td>
<td>An audit trail for data management was developed and maintained on ATLAS.ti. A research journal was maintained in which practical issues, field experiences, personal reflections, and various aspects of the research process were recorded.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.8 Ethical considerations

Researchers must maintain awareness of ethical considerations throughout the entire research process (Creswell, 2014). In the previous chapter, the ethical considerations that were upheld for the study as a whole were discussed in detail. The principle ethical considerations—such as respecting participants’ dignity, protection from harm, deception or victimisation, protecting privacy and confidentiality of the participants and of the organisation, ensuring anonymity and fully informed written consent of all participants—were adhered to during the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). The Appreciative Inquiry process is constructive and participative and therefore not damaging to the participants as they are in control of the process. Research findings were reported in an honest, transparent, and accurate manner.

4.4 Research findings

This section presents the findings of the collaborative analysis undertaken simultaneously by the participants throughout the implementation of the Appreciative Inquiry method. The findings represent the following stages:

- Discover stage: A summary of the positive core
- Dream stage: The visual representations and explanations of the dream crafted by each group
- Design stage: Provocative propositions and social architecture crafted by each group
- Destiny stage: The work groups commitment to action the dream and the design

The final set of findings presented focus on the participants’ responses to the following reflexive questions:

- What are your overall impressions of the workshop?
- What did you value about today?
- What is your one stand-out moment of today?
- Any other comments?
4.4.1 Findings - Discovery stage

Best stories from the interviews in pairs were shared in groups. Themes were extracted from these stories. By means of a democratic voting process themes were integrated and selected. Table 4.6 presents, in no particular order of importance, the five top themes chosen to represent the positive core of women’s career progression.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Representative quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive manager</td>
<td>“Business head supported me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Manager connected me with different levels of management”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Manager who let me experiment and grow”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving validation</td>
<td>“Trusted to do the job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The deciding moment was when someone believed I had the potential to be a leader”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to learn and study</td>
<td>“Attending courses”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Furthering my studies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Attending the leadership development program”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space to grow</td>
<td>“Environment was conducive for growth”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Environment was enabling – allowed room for error”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Freedom and flexibility to be creative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging role</td>
<td>“Asked to present to Executive Committee”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Recognised as someone to take on the challenges”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2 Findings - Dream stage

Participants individually considered their own personal dreams and shared these dreams in their small groups. As a collective, the small group summarised key themes
in answer to the question: “It is five years from now. Women in The Bank are flourishing in all areas of work life including leadership. What opportunities did women seize upon in order to thrive?”

To complete the Dream stage, the groups crafted a visual representation about women thriving at The Bank. This representation was informed and inspired by the themes. The themes and corresponding collage generated by each group are presented in Figures 4.15 to 4.23. Included in the figures is a summarised version of the explanations shared by the participants for each collage. The summary is not my interpretation of the collage but rather a collation of each group’s own interpretation of their collage.
Interpretation of their collage:
The mechanism to achieve the Dream was to create a clear plan for development that included developing a strong brand, increasing one’s emotional quotient, continued formal and informal learning. This group titled their collage “I did it my way”. This envisioned dream began with challenging the stereotypes to which women are subjected, indicated by the image of a woman holding cords, giving the impression that she is technologically challenged. The light bulb moment refers to their realisation that, by pursuing their dreams, they will be better wives and mothers. To assist with the areas of development, identifying a mentor was highlighted as key. The Dream was that by 2020, these women would have created work/life balance and would be flourishing in their careers.

*Figure 4.15 Group 1: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage*


**THEMES**

- Self-promotion
- Emotional understanding
- More conversation
- Shift in parenting role = gender base
- Job sharing
- Changed cultural mind-sets
- Outsourcing
- Support – family taken care of
- Outfits – image change
- Different maternity benefits
- Study days

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Group’s interpretation of their collage:

Central to this group’s collage is family and the creation of underlying structures (or outsourcing) to assist with household responsibilities whilst pursuing their career aspirations. Part of the Dream was to create balance in life, achieved through job sharing. To achieve this dream, financial security was identified as critical so as to not place the family at risk. The ideas of building self-confidence, creating balance, and challenging the stereotypes about women were seen as essential components of this group’s Dream. Continuing to innovate, the ability to adapt and to never stop dreaming were indicated as key elements required to flourish in their careers.

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*Figure 4.16 Group 2: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage*
Group’s interpretation of their collage:
The theme for this group was captured in the image placed at the centre of the collage with the caption “I am African Queen, boss-lady and girl next door”. The Dream is that women see themselves as powerful and capable of achieving so much more and not limiting themselves (represented by the image of the woman in the box). The wish is for women not to be treated as sexual objects but as individuals with a powerful brain who can think for themselves (represented by the picture of the famous Hollywood actress, Angelina Jolie, at the podium making a speech with men standing behind her). This Dream raises the awareness of strengths, capabilities, of ‘what you put out there’, overcoming challenges and never giving up (represented by the picture of Tina Turner). The essence of this groups’ Dream is that women can have a family and a successful career by acknowledging their strengths.
### THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self: Equal opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High levels of EQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking variety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Task:** Maternity leave  
- Paternity policy  
- Visibility output

**Organisation:** Level playing fields  
- More women in leadership roles  
- Equal sponsorship  
- Innovation  
- Women comfortable and confident

**Group’s interpretation of their collage:**

The central theme in this group’s Dream is the creation of gender-neutral practices at an organisational level. The Dream built on some of the positive core elements of career progression, for example, opening up networking opportunities beyond the golf course, flexible work environments and equal opportunity in the workplace. Changing maternity policies to shared parental leave would enable women to pursue their careers. Five years hence, this group envisaged women at the forefront of innovation, self-confident, and leveraging off sponsorships not based on who you know but rather work output.

*Figure 4.18 Group 4: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizing opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of “Pay it Forward”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives – equal pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility – time and mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship – continuous reinvention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well balanced – work/life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge – Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking and maintaining trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting each other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group’s interpretation of their collage:
The five-year Dream for this group was grounded in the need for flexibility to spend time with family and to take their leadership to the next level. Represented in this collage are components foregrounded for that purpose: passion, hard work, formal education, informal learning by observing successful leaders, negotiation skills, and personal image. This dream included the celebration of culture and women supporting women in recognition of commonality.

Figure 4.19 Group 5: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage
**THEMES**

Taking up challenges
Seize opportunities
New ventures
Active mentors
Letting go of traditional definition of work
Gender ratio in Exco
Continued leadership courses
Formalised policies throughout the company
Flexibility
Solid support structure

*Group’s interpretation of their collage:*

The five-year Dream for career progression represented in this collage is based on the creation of support structures that allow for balance between family and seizing opportunities for career growth. Structures such as flexibility in work policies and gender ratio at executive level were considered crucial for women to take hold of opportunities to elevate women to senior leadership.

*Figure 4.20 Group 6: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage*
THEMES

More job opportunities
More caregivers
Women kinder to each other
Dot.mobi
Work from home
Dial in facilities
Flexi – reduced hours
50% women in Exco
Flexibility
Different way of working
Job sharing
4-day working week

Group’s interpretation of their collage:
The focus of this group’s Dream was on structuring work around the unique needs and dynamism of women. To support women’s unique needs, the Dream included a women’s day (for example, for visits to gynaecologists), flexibility in terms of work schedules and leveraging off technology to enable work from home. Male-centric networking such as golf was challenged to incorporate networking opportunities in environments that are conducive for women. The necessity for women to support each other in brand building was underscored by the recognition that women tend to be more critical of each other.

Figure 4.21 Group 7: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage
THEMES
More women in leadership
GM Level / CEO
Flexibility – longer maternity leave
Crèche / Day care / After care
Women’s month – more workshops
Sponsorships – women’s sport
Leave allocation – women’s health
Increase in paternity leave
Wellness / awareness
Office etiquette
Equality in salaries
Women supporting each other

Group’s interpretation of their collage:
This group’s theme was finding balance in life through flexibility and greater gender equality. They felt that flexibility in work hours, the ability to work from home and gestures that acknowledge women specific needs, such as convenient parking places for pregnant women, would engender greater loyalty. A critical aspect of the future was the need for gender equality in terms of equal pay and sponsorships directed at women. This dream also brought to the fore issues of leveraging the diversity in cultures, opportunity for furthering education, and wellness education for women. Women are seen as succeeding not by emulating men but rather remaining authentic and working in partnership with men.

*Figure 4.22 Group 8: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage*
THEMES

- Flexibility time / virtual
- Opportunity of taking "road travel time"
- Sharing business knowledge / succession
- Planning to hand over to next generation
- Mentorship
- Leadership style - participative
- Guarantee coming back from maternity
- Networking on golf days – women included
- Common ground for networking
- Meetings in management team not exclude women

Group’s interpretation of their collage:

In terms of their objective to grow women leaders at The Bank, the Dream for this group lay in developing the next generation of women leaders through mentoring, sharing knowledge, and adopting participative leadership styles. To support career growth, networking opportunities initiatives that cater for women’s interests were imagined. To assist women in their careers at the Bank, this group accentuated the need for flexibility in work hours and a review of the manner in which women’s career growth is prejudiced when returning to work after maternity leave. In the envisioned future women would be guaranteed to return to the positions they held prior to maternity leave and in terms of their performance review, they would not be penalised for taking maternity leave.

Figure 4.23 Group 9: Themes, collage and interpretation of collage
4.4.3 Findings - Design stage

The Design process involved the small groups crafting provocative propositions to explain what their future state should be. The provocative propositions are presented in Table 4.7. The provocative statements indicated that, as a collective, the participants sought to be part of decision-making structures (expressed as “seat at the table” and “claiming our space”) with a desire to be recognised for their efforts (expressed as “valued”, “respected” and “acknowledged”).

Table 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Provocative proposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank our authentic presence ignites opportunities to own our seat at the table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank, we need to be valued, respected and acknowledged for who we are, what we do and how we do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>We create wealth through collaborative networks while embracing humanity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank, we are dedicated, strongwilled individuals who are empowered, have brain power and play as equals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 5</td>
<td>Unapologetically claiming our space (Ignore us at your peril, or deal with it and prosper).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 6</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank we are empowered to achieve greatness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 7</td>
<td>Women should experience the joy of mentoring each other and being treated as individuals, acknowledged for who we are and the value that we provide within The Bank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 8</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank, we are empowered to be part of the building blocks that make The Bank world leaders in Finance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 9</td>
<td>As women in leadership at The Bank, the sky is the limit when we: leave a legacy, create growth opportunities, believe in our abilities, are intentional leaders, challenge the mind set through continuous learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To complete the Design stage, inspired by their provocative propositions, each group defined the social architecture required to achieve their Dreams. The principles and practices generated by each small group are presented in Table 4.8. Consistently, the groups identified a need for a women’s group in the form of a forum, mentoring, or support group. The collages and provocative propositions brought to the foreground the necessity to review policies that the participants considered discriminatory and hindered women’s career progression.

Table 4.8
Design stage: Social architecture per group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Authentic presence: Be prepared/responsible; participate; be who you are/unique; take ownership: Own your seat: Be relevant/prepared; lift others Delegate your seat if you are not right person for the meeting</td>
<td>Network groups: Leverage the people in this session to increase business acumen; get to know what each person does; bios that are easily accessible Sponsorships Blog / Forum that can accommodate support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Platform to acknowledge women’s achievements Women to support one another</td>
<td>Annual Women of the Year award Women’s forum Women mentoring Women programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Creating wealth (fiscal and intellectual) Reducing costs Women supporting women Diversity tolerance to value all people</td>
<td>Focus on invocation for higher productivity, lower cost Mentor/coaches Build business insight/savvy Focus on building one's brand and image Diversity appreciation group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Policy review of performance appraisals to include mentorship</td>
<td>Forum which invites men to share viewpoints Increasing the education level of women Including mentorship as part of performance reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Comfortable in our own skin. Celebrate and own diversity that we bring Be free to express emotions</td>
<td>Once a month “What’s-on-your-mind” group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 4.8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Women to support and accept each other</td>
<td>Women focus groups to share life experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need for women in higher leadership positions</td>
<td>Formalised policy for flexi-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enable women to take advantage of opportunities that demand extra time</td>
<td>Bursaries for women for tertiary education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance based on outputs not hours</td>
<td>Ring fence senior positions for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facilities at The Bank for childcare, holiday, pharmacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Living our shared values</td>
<td>Women-specific mentorship groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respecting every person for their individuality</td>
<td>Change in maternity policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value in knowledge, expertise and natural support</td>
<td>Flexible work hours policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reward and recognition for the value and experience</td>
<td>“We-connect” forum for women in leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Speak up</td>
<td>Create a discussion forum to provide knowledge, education and upskill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step up</td>
<td>Wellness awareness campaigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education: knowledge is power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Courage to challenge status quo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Create growth opportunities</td>
<td>Mentoring and sponsorships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continual learning within the larger group</td>
<td>Redesign current roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Redesigning job roles</td>
<td>Job exchange within the group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transparency in succession planning</td>
<td>Job fit and succession planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create environment for healthy communication channels</td>
<td>Tailor made skills development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reward and recognition for women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Creating incubation for potential leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.4 Findings for Destiny stage

The initiatives generated in the Design stage are presented in Table 4.9. The participants were provided with six stickers each to vote for the initiatives that they individually construed as most important to achieve their Dream of flourishing in their careers at The Bank. The stickers were totalled and the final count per initiative is presented, ranked in order in Table 4.9.
### Table 4.9

**Scattergram chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Social architecture: Practices</th>
<th>Number of votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“What's on your mind” space - once a month</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Networking group</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Annual Bank <em>Woman of the Year</em> award</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Women’s mentoring programme</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Policies to review</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Award and recognition programme</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Creating a Women’s Forum</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sponsorship for education and development</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Taking individual responsibility</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Taking hold of growth opportunities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Women’s support group</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ring fenced recruitment for women</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Diversity appreciation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Gear to women”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top six initiatives were presented to the group for actioning purposes. Participants committed themselves to one of the work groups. The group voted to collapse the “Monthly-what’s-on-you-mind”, “Networking”, and “Women’s Forum” into one group under the “Networking” group umbrella. These initiatives became the work groups through which women leaders may enact their career progression in The Bank. Taken together, career progression, as co-constructed by the participants, incorporated opportunities for networking and mentorships, review of organisational policies for flexibility and fairness, empowerment, and validation through rewards and recognition (Figure 4.24).
These initiatives, designed by the group as a collective, are consistent with recommendations advanced by studies related to career development for women (Beeson & Valerio, 2012; Tharenou, 2005; Santana & Pappa, 2015). For instance, Tharenou (2005) recommended that in order to increase the underrepresentation of women at senior levels, organisations may consider implementing initiatives geared towards developing women leaders’ human and social capital. Some of the suggestions included: “providing women with opportunities to develop managerial and leadership skills (p. 53), “provide career encouragement from senior staff” and “increase mentor support” (p. 54).

Literature has consistently indicated the need to review of organisational policies to support the work-life challenges experienced by women (Duxbury & Higgins, 2005). The policy initiative designed by the participants in this study sought to redress the work-life conflict with flexible and fair strategies and practices. In the same vein,
McKinsey’s (2016) reported companies that offer flexibility in work policies have better representation of women at the various ranks.

4.4.5 Participants’ valuation

At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were asked to provide feedback on their experience of the day. This may be referred to as a valuation as opposed to an evaluation (Preskill & Catsambas, 2006). Samples of the participants’ responses are recorded in Table 4.10. Beyond expressing their enjoyment of the day, the participants reported feeling surprised that they were not alone in their challenges and struggles as women in the workplace. There was a sense of validation and legitimacy to their stories. Overall, the participants expressed feeling energised and motivated by day’s end.

The workshop highlighted to the group the need for women to support each other. The participants felt that the workshop had offered an opportunity to network that had not hitherto been provided to them as a homogenous group. This view is support by studies of women-only leadership development programmes (Clarke, 2011; Ely et al., 2011, Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003) The consensus is that such an environment is validating, serves as a reference point and is emotionally supportive (Higgins & Kram, 2001).
Table 4.10

*Sample of participant responses*

**PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What are you overall impressions of the workshop?
   - Interactive and thought provoking
   - It was such a well organised, wholesome day and I have no regret coming
   - Enjoyable and an eye opener, and necessary of having these meetings where women can network together
   - Very participative
   - The vibe in the room was filled with excitement and anticipation. It was as if the ladies were waiting for this opportunity for a long time

2. What did you value about today?
   - The time to share and connect with other women in a structured and meaningful way
   - Career progression
   - That there are more like-minded people than I expected
   - Being part of this journey knowing I can make a difference
   - Opportunity to voice and to listen to others which you can elaborate on
   - Great to have met other leaders in The Bank that I normally would not have had interaction with

3. What is your one “stand-out” moment of today?
   - The provocative proposition
   - That there are more like-minded people than I expected
   - The Discovery part of the 5D’s. I have not realised my own discovery until now
   - Being part of a forum that I know will make a difference
   - How we all have the same ideas, issues, and yet we continue to act like islands
   - I love our collage which we did, it just bought out our collaborative efforts

4. Any other comments?
   - I can’t wait for the next phase- the interview
   - Thank-you for a well planned day. Great networking
   - I wish there can be more days like today
   - Love how women on different levels in The Bank were brought together to share their thoughts and vision
4.5 Discussion

The value of the workshop for this study was bringing together the participants as a collective to co-construct career progression in their particular work context. The outcomes generated by the participants as a result of the workshop resonated strongly with the point made by Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013, p. 66) “When they are grounded in candid assessment of the cultural, organisational, and individual factors shaping them, women can construct coherent narratives about who they are and who they want to become.”

The Appreciative Inquiry workshop was positioned as a research endeavour but it also represented an opportunity for the participants to reflect on their career progression as a collective within the context of The Bank. A broad consideration of the Appreciative Inquiry process, based on the feedback received from the participants and my observations on the day, was that the workshop opened a new channel of communication allowing the participants to share commonality, reflect on their careers, and to create initiatives for career progression as a collective. It was pointed out by the CEO in his opening address that the workshop was the first women-only initiative in the history of The Bank. Many of the participants recorded in their feedback their wish to continue with the initiative, as one participant expressed in her feedback form: “Pity that not all women were present. My dream for a continued conference of this nature at all levels to empower more un-tapped leaders outside of formal succession planning.”

The workshop afforded the participants a safe space within which to share stories, find support, and build on common aspirations. To this point, in their reflections, many of the participants recorded feeling both surprised and comforted that their path to career progression was not a unique and solitary experience. As was pointed out by Stead and Elliot (2009, p. 168) the value of using a workshop method for women’s leadership development lies in “allowing women the opportunity to story themselves, as leaders in the presence of others...provides a space in which they can present themselves and be seen by others as leaders.” The following statement made by a participant during the final phase interviews is illustrative of that notion: “…you
walked out with a sense of upliftment there, everybody is like, I've got a sister here and a sister there…”

The findings of the Appreciative Inquiry method represent the women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-construction of career progression.

The findings from the Dream stage indicated a desire to progress vertically, as illustrated in Figure 4.25 (reflected as “I am African queen, Boss-Lady, Girl next door” alongside the image of a women climbing the ladder) and similarly in Figure 4.26 (“Women in charge, The Princess of Africa”). However, in seeking to progress in their careers, these women leaders were seeking to shape the platform for the enactment of their career progression. This was aptly captured in the title of Group 1’s collage: “I did it my way” (Figure 4.27).

Figure 4.25 Extract from Group 3 collage
In general, the findings of this phase suggest a co-construction of career progression that is multistoried rather than a singular focus on either external or internal career orientation. In particular, the findings across the Appreciative Inquiry stages illustrate the dimensions or factors that were construed by these women leaders as essential for the collective’s enactment of career progression. In this regard, these women leaders’ career orientations are more complex than mere external career aspirations.

In this section the learnings common across all the groups are further explicated. Across the findings of this phase, two implicit themes emerged in the participants’ collective co-construction of career progression. Specifically, the theme of support
and the theme of gender equality emerged as essential components for the enactment of women leaders’ career progression.

**Supporting career progression**

The theme of support, in various forms, permeated the various stages of the Appreciative Inquiry. For instance, in the discovery of the positive core of women leaders’ career progression it seemed that a supportive and validating line manager, who provided a safe environment with opportunities to develop and learn, was identified as a cornerstone for career progression. Comments such as “she kept motivating me to learn more and throwing me in the deep end” and “my manager helped me get to this place – she believed in me, guided me but without making me feel dumb and inadequate” were common in the peak experience stories. This finding is consistent with that of the research study conducted by O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) who concluded that it is imperative that women work with line managers who are supportive, encourage the development of their skills and “are acknowledged for their unique talents and contributions (p. 186).”

The theme of support was also given expression in the Dream stage. Specifically, the desire for greater support from the organisation was closely interwoven with their commitment to and centrality of family and home. Extracts illustrating the centrality of family as a determinant factor when women co-construct career progression are presented in Figures 4.28 and 4.29 (extracted from collages presented in Figure 4.16 and 4.21, respectively).
This finding suggests an integration of personal and work life when women leaders consider career progression. For these women leaders, in order to progress in their careers, flexibility in work schedules is required to balance their multiple roles. In this regard, the current work policies were foregrounded as unfavourable for the career progression of women leaders in The Bank. Many research studies have highlighted the impact of personal factors such as multiple role commitments (Duxbury &
Higgins, 2005, Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003) and career interruptions on women’s career advancement (Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Kirchmeyer, 1998). These studies indicate that the ability of women leaders to take up challenging opportunities was constrained by their work schedules conflicting with family responsibilities. In this study, the findings indicated that women leaders sought (in the Design and Destiny stages) to craft alternative and supportive work arrangements in conjunction with the organisation. These initiatives included work-from-home policies, job sharing and structuring the workday around home responsibilities. In the words of a participant during a plenary session on the day of the workshop: “let’s empower the staff to get it done when they can, as long as it gets done.”

These initiatives are indicative of the concept protean career or protean career orientation (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). The concept of protean careers was first conceived by Hall (1976, p. 201) as:

A process, which the person, not the organisation, is managing. It consists of all the person’s varied experiences in education, training, work in several organisations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean person’s own personal career choices and search for self-fulfilment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. The criterion of success is internal (psychological success), not external.

Underlying the protean career model is self-directedness and a values-driven attitude (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Seemingly, in an attempt to balance their work/life commitments, these women leaders were drawing on a protean career orientation in designing the initiatives to facilitate the enactment of their career progression. This finding is congruent with the study conducted by Cabrera (2009) which indicated that the majority of the women in the study were pursuing protean careers to integrate work and family in an effort to manage their careers so as to better fit their life circumstances.

Further, the importance of support for each other was crafted into the social architecture during the Design stage and in the actions co-constructed for career progression generated during the Destiny stage. Specifically, the participants
mentioned the need for a women-only forum to share life experiences and support one another. This finding is supported by research that suggests women benefit from exploring women leaders’ networks (Stead & Elliot, 2009; Valerio, 2009).

Building gender equality
The second theme, gender equality, featured implicitly in the women leaders’ co-construction of career progression. For instance, breaking gender stereotypes, fair performance review policies and inclusive networking practices were co-constructed as factors essential for career progression. In the Dream stage, “Breaking the stereotypes” constituted a desire by the participants to be viewed as effective leaders. The stereotypes illustrated by the participants ranged from being viewed either as a “fragile flower that might break” (Figure 4.30 – extract from Group 1 collage presented in Figure 4.15) or “a sex object” (Figure 4.31 – extract from Group 2 collage presented in Figure 4.16).

Figure 4.30 Extract from Group 1 collage

Figure 4.31 Extract from Group 1 collage
This fragile flower versus sex object dichotomy was an intriguing finding. A review of psychoanalytic research revealed a *Madonna/Whore* complex. Implicit in this dichotomy is that men have greater power in the gender hierarchy (Penn State University World Campus, 2015) and thus, women are subservient (Feinmann, 1994). For these women leaders, the pervasiveness of gender stereotyping extended to the influence of the tacit norms surrounding the tradition of building social capital in The Bank. The participants questioned exclusionary networking activities (for example, golfing, hunting, deep sea fishing) and sought to reconstitute the narrative to incorporate gender-neutral activities (for example, wine tasting or spa days – see Figure 4.32). A recurrent theme in women’s career advancement and, for that matter, men’s progression, is the value of social capital and networks (Bilimoria, Godwin, & Zelechowski, 2007; Ng et al., 2005). Such social capital contributes to career advancement by providing access to information, resources, increasing visibility and importantly, career sponsorship (Seibert et al., 2001).

*Figure 4.32 Extract from Group 2 collage*
Added to the participants’ sense of gender inequality affecting the career progression of women at The Bank were the maternity leave policies. The policy stated that women should receive an automatic average rating at performance review stage should they be on maternity leave or have been on maternity leave in the review year. The impact of this was multi-faceted and exponential on career progression. The rating influenced their placement on The Bank’s Nine-Box Talent matrix (refer to section 2.5.4 in this study), which affected access to development courses, bursaries, and translated to an average salary increase. Paradoxically, the participants highlighted that in order to take up career opportunities, financial security to assist with child and home care was paramount. The initiative Reward and recognition crafted by the participants in the Destiny stage was closely aligned to fairer performance review policies. In line with this finding, Hopkins and O’Neil (2007) proposed that organisations design and implement reward structures to honour the different perspectives of career success in order to retain talented women.

Ultimately, it seemed that the themes support and gender equality were intertwined as the women leaders sought to enact career progression in the Destiny stage. For instance, organisational support was required to gain access to developmental opportunities, policy reviews, institution of gender-specific mentorships, gender-neutral networking, and for fairer reward and recognition.

Finally, as suggested by Hopkins and O’Neil (2007), career success as co-constructed by these women leaders did not show a clear demarcation between work life and personal life or external and internal measurement. Rather, in co-constructing career progression, they wove together the personal (for example, family commitments), the professional (for instance, breaking stereotypes), objective success (fair rewards and recognition), and internal success (protean career orientation).
4.6 Summary

In this chapter the sub-aim, “To explore women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-construction of career progression in a corporate environment” was addressed by applying the Appreciative Inquiry method and executed by means of a 5-D cycle.

Using the Appreciative Inquiry research approach, two accredited Appreciative Inquiry facilitators engaged 66 participants in a one-day workshop. Data collection methods included semi-structured paired interviews, small group discussions, shared written and creative activities, and plenary discussions. Data derived from the workshop were analysed by the participants themselves using a collaborative data analytic approach (mining the data) suggested by Watkins et al. (2011). The findings represented the women leaders’ collective co-construction of a generative and transformative career progression in their context.

In the next chapter, the final phase of this study explores the women leaders’ own constructions of career progression based on their subjective lived experience by means of a constructivist grounded theory approach.
CHAPTER FIVE

PHASE III: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY OF CAREER PROGRESSION

“I think it was part of life, if I didn't go through it, I wouldn't be the person I am today.”

- Interviewee

5.1 Introduction

In the final phase of the study the sub-aim, “To generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression of in a corporate environment based on their subjective lived experience” is addressed (informed by the research question illustrated in Figure 5.1). To this end, the sub-aim is approached from a constructivist tradition by applying Charmaz’s (2014) constructivist grounded theory method.

This chapter presents an overview of constructivist grounded theory and the justification for the use of this approach. The research method applied to address the aim of this phase is presented. The chapter concludes with the findings and a discussion of the findings.

![Figure 5.1 Diagram showing research questions per phase](image-url)
5.2 Theoretical framework: Constructivist grounded theory

In this section an overview of Charmaz’s (2006, 2014) constructivist grounded theory is provided, along with the nature and application of her theory to research.

5.2.1 Overview of constructivist grounded theory

Constructivist grounded theory developed by Kathy Charmaz evolved from traditional grounded theory established by sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss as formulated in their book titled “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2014) defined constructivist grounded theory as:

A contemporary version of grounded theory that adopts strategies such as coding, memo-writing, and theoretical sampling of the original statement of the method but shifts its epistemological foundations and takes into account methodological developments in qualitative inquiry occurring over the past fifty years. (p. 342)

Charmaz (2014) aligns her approach to the original method whilst explicitly acknowledging that the fundamental difference lies in the underlying worldview. Classical grounded theory assumed a realist ontology and objective epistemology positioning grounded theory in the positivist tradition (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). For traditional grounded theorists, “meaning inheres in the data and the grounded theorist discovers it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). In this form of grounded theory, the researcher stands apart from the participant and assumes that the data are representative of objective facts, from which a theory emerges. The approach is considered an inductive approach to the development of theory, through iterative and systematic processes involving coding, analysis, categorising, without a priori assumptions of a preconceived theory (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014).

Constructivist grounded theory stands in opposition to the classical grounded theory’s positivist epistemological view. Ontologically and epistemologically, constructivist grounded theory is located in the constructivism paradigm that assumes a relativist (acknowledging multiple realities) position and subjective interrelationship that
assumes that the interaction between researcher and participants shapes reality (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006a). The resulting theory is viewed as a construction or co-construction impacted upon by the researchers’ perspectives, interactions with people, values, assumptions, and research practices. As noted by Charmaz (2006, p. 131) grounded theorists in the constructivist tradition “assume that both data and analyses are social constructions that reflect what their production entail.” In this regard, the researcher is embedded in the research process and the resulting product (Charmaz, 2008).

In contrast to the traditional grounded theory approach, Charmaz (2006) places emphasis on the flexibility of grounded theory methods without subscribing to a theory of knowledge or imposing a theoretical framework on the analysis. The constructivist grounded theory approach allows for the study of “diverse analytic and substantive problems” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 180) rather than focusing on one main concern in a given context as proposed by traditional grounded theory. As such, constructivist grounded theory emphasises interrelationships, exploring multiple realities and developing theoretical explanations of underlying social processes (Gardner, McCutcheon, & Fedoruk, 2013).

The similarities between traditional grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory lie in the approach to data collection and analysis to generate theory from data. Constructivist grounded theory adopts the general process of analysis as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this method, a theory that responds to the research aim is generated through a systematic cyclical method of data collection, coding, categorisation, and theoretical sampling (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). A caveat to adopting the traditional grounded theory strategies from a constructivist standpoint is that researchers must also “entertain a range of theoretical possibilities and examine their own epistemological premises, research principles and practices” (Charmaz, 2008, p. 163).

The principles of constructivist grounded theory were summarised by Charmaz (2006, p. 178) thus:

- The grounded theory research process is fluid, interactive, and open-ended.
• The research problem informs initial methodological choices for data collection.
• Researchers are part of what they study, not separate from it.
• Grounded theory analysis shapes the conceptual content and direction of the study; the emergent analysis may lead to adopting multiple methods of data collection and to pursuing inquiry in several sites.
• Successive levels of abstraction through comparative analysis constitute the core of grounded theory analysis.
• Analytic directions arise from how researchers interact with and interpret their comparisons and emerging analyses rather than from external prescriptions.

A constructivist approach to grounded theory aims to explore and interpret implicit statements and addresses how people’s actions affect their worlds (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory encourages developing an understanding of multiple views proposing that the resulting theory is an interpretive understanding of participants’ meanings. Such an interpretation is informed by the data and is “contextually situated in time, place and situation” (Charmaz 2006, p. 131). The grounded theories generated from a constructivist approach tend to be “plausible accounts” as Charmaz (2014, p. 17) further explains: “my approach explicitly assumes that any theoretical rendering offers an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it.”

5.2.2 The nature of constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory provides a method to understand participants’ constructions of the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2008) and a flexible approach to the analytic process (Charmaz, 2014). In as much as grounded theory is a method to study processes it is also “a method in process” (Charmaz, 2012, p. 2). An advantage of this approach is the gathering of rich data, which enables the researcher to “reveal what lies beneath the surface” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 19). A further advantage of the grounded theory method is the systematic approach to data analysis in a manner which the researcher can “direct, manage and streamline” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2) data collection to generate an original analysis. This method is characterised by an iterative process of data collection, coding, memoing, categorisation, and theoretical sampling with the
objective to construct a theory that responds to the aim of the research (Charmaz, 2012). The comparative and interactive nature of grounded theory at every stage of analysis makes grounded theory explicitly an emergent method (Charmaz, 2014).

The key analytic strategies of grounded theory are:

- coding data from the start of data collection,
- using comparative methods at all levels of analysis,
- memo-writing as a form of interacting with the data and nascent analysis,
- conducting theoretical sampling to refine tentative categories, and
- concluding relevant analyses with relevant theoretical and research literatures

These strategies are visually represented in Figure 5.2. In practice, Charmaz (2006, 2014) notes that the process of constructing a grounded theory is not a linear one, rather, data analysis and theory construction is an evolving and iterative process. Constructivist grounded theory analysis involves coding the data to make analytic sense of data. To this end, Charmaz (personal communication, June 2016) encouraged researchers to be open to the emergent analysis. Coding is “the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain the data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). She recommends initiating coding with sensitising concepts, followed by line-by-line coding, and coding in gerunds to build action into the codes. Using a comparison approach, the researcher is constantly comparing data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, and codes with categories (Charmaz, 2012).

The link between coding and generating a theory is memo-writing, which Lempert (2007, p. 345) considered the methodological link “through which the researcher transforms data into theory”. Charmaz (personal communication, June 2016) encouraged memo-writing throughout the research process as a form of holding a conversation with oneself about the data, codes, categories, speculations, ideas, and reflections. Based on the strength of the emerging categories, theoretical sampling is essential in refining and developing the categories (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). In moving towards the integration of the analysis, Charmaz (2006) suggested the use of theoretical sorting of memos, diagramming, and integrating memos to build an analytical frame to inform the findings.
An important consideration in constructing grounded theory is the role of the researcher as an active participant. Within the constructivist tradition, researchers are encouraged to become aware of the impact their presuppositions may have on the analysis of data (Charmaz, 2006, 2008). Thus, the researcher engages in reflexivity in an effort to acknowledge the impact that biases and preconceptions may have on the emerging theory. To this end, Charmaz (2006, p. 131) recommends that the researcher maintain a journal to avoid preconceiving the data as “constructivism fosters researchers’ reflexivity about their own interpretations as well as those of their research participants”. In this regard, the research process is a dynamic interaction between the researcher and the participant with the resulting theory viewed as a co-construction based on an interpretation of shared reality.

Before concluding this section, the treatment of extant literature in constructing grounded theory warrants attention. Thornberg (2012) advocated the principle of
“empirical figure and literature background” where the focus is on the construction of theory from data and not on extant literature. In constructivist grounded theory, literature may assist in informing, guiding and sensitising researchers to patterns in data (Lempert, 2007) and is evaluated based on its utility, relevance, and fit (Thornberg, 2012). Charmaz (2008) concurs with this position proposing a flexible approach to literature where researchers recognise “prior knowledge and theoretical preconceptions and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny” (p. 402).

5.2.3 Applications of constructivist grounded theory for research

The choice of grounded theory or in particular, constructivist grounded theory, for research lies in the researchers’ worldview and the stated aims of the study. A constructivist view of research allows the researcher to recognise “diverse local worlds and realities, and addresses how people’s actions affect their local and larger worlds” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132). The latter is of particular interest in this phase of the study as the research imperative for this phase is to generate a theory of career progression that is grounded in the subjective experience of women leaders. Indeed, a key tenet of constructivist grounded theory is to give “voice” to the participant. As such, constructivist grounded theory is useful to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the experiences the participants shared during the research process.

In empirical research, constructivist grounded theory has been used extensively as a framework in many research fields including education (Baker, Kinsella, & Bosser, 2010; Whitburn, 2016), nursing (Brunero, Jeon, & Foster, 2015; Hoare, Mills, & Francis, 2012), leadership (Colker, 2008; Kempster & Parry, 2011), and in studies related to women/gender (Gamm, 2014; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Martinez-Marcos & De La Cuesta-Benjamea, 2015) to name but a few. Within the field of organisational research, Lansisalmi, Peiró, and Kivimäki (2004) recommended the application of grounded theory in the service of eliciting positive discussions to form a basis for organisational interventions. Taking into account the possible contribution of this study mentioned in Chapter 1, it is hoped that the results of this study will lead to such discussions in organisations related to strategies for initiating interventions for women to progress in their careers.
Adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory allows for an interpretive understanding of women leaders’ lived experience of career progression. Further, the flexibility of Charmaz’s (2006, 2014) version of grounded theory permits the interaction between researcher and participant in the research process towards a co-construction of a theory that is grounded in the data. The argument that the final product is an interpretation is mirrored by Merriam’s (1998, p. 22) statement that:

the researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people’s constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own.

In seeking a theoretical framework for this phase, I concluded that constructivist grounded theory was appropriate for this phase as it offers an interpretative understanding of participant’s meanings, a co-construction of data, and a relativist stance to reality.

5.3 Research method

In this section, the research method for this phase is presented. The constraints encountered at the research site are explained and the impact on data collection and analysis clarified.

5.3.1 Establishing researcher’s role

Consideration of the relationship between researcher and participant is key in a constructivist approach to grounded theory. In relation to building a partnership for mutual construction of meaning, Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006b) listed three implications for research, namely, establishing mutuality in the relationship between participant and researcher, establishing reciprocity to counteract the imbalances of
power, and the implicit role of reflection in constructivist grounded theory. I was
cognisant of these factors during the research process.

In keeping with a constructivist tradition, I was positioned as a partner in the process
of co-constructing meaning with the participant. In an effort to minimise the power
imbalance between the participant and me, I followed the suggestion of Mills et al.
(2006b) by: (a) scheduling interviews at a time of the participant’s choice; (b) using a
flexible and semi-structured approach to the interview thus encouraging the
participant to tell their story; (c) sharing my understanding of the issues; and (d)
assuming a non-judgemental and open stance towards the participant.

The role of reflection was particularly important not only in this phase but also for the
study as a whole. My interest and passion for growing women into senior leadership
positions might have constituted a filter through which I viewed the participants and
the data. I took heed of Charmaz’s (2014, p. 165) warning that grounded theorists
“who write about their own professions idealise them in remarkable uncritical ways
that suggest an entrenchment and unexamined value stance”. A further factor for
embracing reflexivity in this phase was the consideration of the influence associated
with a priori exposure as a result of my past experience as a senior woman leader and
current work coaching senior women. To this end, I was cognisant of Charmaz’s
(2014, p. 17) statement that grounded theories are shaped “through our past and
present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research
practices”. In particular, the process of writing reflective memos and free writing was
critical in making explicit my assumptions, challenges, and the value judgements I
experienced during the in-depth interviewing and analysis process.

5.3.2 Sampling

The aim of the initial sampling is the point of departure for the empirical inquiry
whereas the purpose of theoretical sampling is to obtain further data to explicate
tentative categories (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, the criterion for sampling was
established during the planning stage and reported in Chapter 2. Purposive sampling
The invitation to the participants to take part in Phase III of the study was extended at the conclusion of the Phase II workshop. Participants who were interested in participating in Phase III were invited to complete a form with preferred dates for the interviews.

Scheduling the interviews followed a two-step process. The day after the workshop I sent a bulk e-mail to all the participants of Phase II to advise them of the scheduling of interviews for the final phase of the study and that there was no preparation required on their part (Figure 5.3).

![General e-mail to participants regarding scheduling of interviews](image)

*Figure 5.3 General e-mail to participants regarding scheduling of interviews*

In the second step, I compiled an interview schedule based on the preferred timeslot indicated by each participant. I e-mailed a meeting request to each participant individually, with the date, time and venue for Phase III interviews (see Figure 5.4).
In section 2.4.4 the sample size per phase was presented in Table 2.5 and attrition discussed. For reading continuity the demographics of the sample group for this phase are presented in Table 5.1.

5.3.3 Data collection

Intensive interviewing facilitates an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study from the subjective view of the participants (Charmaz, 2014). It was therefore the data collection method of choice for this phase. For grounded theorists, intensive interviewing is a flexible process which permits the researcher to pursue ideas and issues as they emerge in the interviews. Intensive interviewing, says Charmaz (2014, p. 58) is a technique that:

- combines flexibility and control,
Table 5.1

Demographic profile for Phase III

Demographic Profile of the Purposive Sample Group  \( n=63 \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Total Range</th>
<th>27 to 58 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average participants age</td>
<td>40.1 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range:</td>
<td>20 – 29</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>30 – 39</td>
<td>42.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>40 – 49</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>50 – 59</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Grade:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ages are at time of selection. Race classification as per The Bank’s categories. B = Senior Management C = Middle Management D = Junior Management

- opens interactional space for ideas and issues to arise,
- allows possibilities for immediate follow-up on these ideas and issues, and
- results in interviewers’ and interview participants’ co-construction of the interview conversation.

A key consideration for data collection in grounded theory is its iterative process of data collection. This presented me with a challenge as data collection was constrained by the time period set by the Bank and the availability of the participants. Interviews were scheduled consecutively and conducted over a two-month period, four days a week with a maximum of four interviews a day. The timeframe constraint impacted
my ability to transcribe and analyse an interview before proceeding with the next interview. Thus, I applied a variation to the iterative process by writing notes in between and at the end of the day, I wrote memos to capture ideas, reflections, and questions that had occurred to me during the interviews. A further constraint was the inability to return to the participants to obtain additional data for the purposes of theoretical sampling. Charmaz (2014, p. 108) indicated that if the researcher is not able to return to key participants for secondary interviews then “you do the best you can with the materials you can construct or already have”.

5.3.3.1 Crafting the interview questions

Researchers begin a constructivist grounded theory with empirical interests that guide the study. From Charmaz’s (2012) viewpoint, grounded theorists begin with an area of interest and develop preliminary questions to explore it. In crafting the interview questions, I noted Charmaz’s (2014) suggestion of beginning the interview with some broad, open-ended questions. I began with an open question inviting the participant to share her background and then followed up with specific questions relating to her experience of career progression and hopes for the future of her career. During the interviews follow up questions were posed to participants when clarification, reflection or greater detail was required, for example, “That is interesting. Tell me more about that.” I was mindful of ending on a positive note following Charmaz’s (2012, p. 351) suggestion that “ending questions should elicit positive responses to bring the interview to a closure at a normal conversational level”. My interview guide is presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Semi-structured interview questions

1. Tell me about your family background, education, career and specifically your career progression.
2. What does progressing in your career mean to you?
3. Let’s look at your Dream and your wishes from the Appreciative Inquiry workshop - Please could you expand on your Dream.
4. What has been your experience of this interview?
In crafting the questions, I had set out to generate a theory of career progression that was grounded in the participants’ experiences. Congruent with Charmaz’s (2014, p. 72) observation that “people bring their situations into the interview, which can form an unstated backdrop for negotiating the content and conduct of the interview”, the participants provided intimate information about their personal and work life that I had not anticipated. The level of raw emotions expressed about their careers and the willingness to share their life experiences took me aback. My experience certainly mirrored Charmaz (2014, p. 91) comment that “your first question may suffice for the whole interview if stories tumble out”. Early in the data collection phase, I reflected on the data that was emerging and, after discussions with my supervisor, I followed the data to adjust my research focus to incorporate the wholeness of their lived experience of career progression. Charmaz (2012, p. 350) noted that participants tend to use the interview space to reflect anew on significant events and “to clarify meanings and actions – while providing rich data that spark analytic insights.” This statement accurately reflects my experience as evidenced by these examples of participants’ reflection:

Participant A01: It was actually an eye opener. It was like, um, as we got into it, you know, you, you see a little bit more and you see a little bit deeper and that, so and it helps to, to see.

Participant A06: I think it’s things that you don’t talk about and they came out and it’s freely and it’s not something that you have been thinking that is this person judging me or any type of thing and I think that’s what I appreciate definitely I think it that made me think a lot of things after the first session and all of a sudden when you are sparking something from this and the mind starts working over time.

5.3.3.2 Conducting the interview

Having conducted these intensive interviews I concur with Charmaz’s (2014, p. 70) statement that “learning about research participants’ experiences is a privilege”. Bearing this statement in mind, there are a variety of factors a researcher may be
cognisant of when conducting intensive interviewing. Factors such as status, appearance, demeanour and identity, professional and ethical conduct will impact how the participants react to the researcher. I had interacted with the participants during Phase I and II, during which time the participants had the opportunity to assess my conduct, demeanour, and to identify with me. My background as a psychologist greatly assisted in conducting effective interviews. During the interviews, I used counselling skills convention, for example, paraphrasing, probing, and reflection to develop the discussion in line with the research aims. Based on the level of disclosures, the intimacy created in the various interviews and the feedback received, participants displayed a high degree of trust and openness. To illustrate, I quote verbatim a senior leader’s comment during her interview:

**Participant A04:** In my presentation, I spoke about something that you said actually; sorry, I didn’t mention your name (I did mention a couple of people’s names), about the influence, and when you said about the “walk the walk and talk the talk”, and I was like, that’s the phrase I hate in my life, so… So that was kind of inspirational to me so, it’s like, okay, if anybody else would have said that, I wouldn’t listen to them, but because it you said it, I would listen to that.

At the beginning of each interview, after welcoming the participant, I explained the purpose and format of the interview, revisited informed consent, discussed confidentiality and encouraged any questions or concerns about the interview. To conserve the participant’s anonymity, I allocated a code to each participant and have maintained the master list in a secure location.

A final point on conducting interviews in organisations: Charmaz (2014) recommends that researchers be current about their area of interest, familiar with the organisation lexicon, and conversant about the complexities of the organisation. As a result of my five-year working relationship with the Bank, my knowledge of the Bank, the various leadership structures, the products, and the culture proved invaluable on three fronts: creating trust with the participants, guiding the research questions, and engaging in conversation.
5.3.3.3 Interview setting

Interviews were conducted at a venue in the Bank’s headquarters. This provided convenient access for the participants to facilitate attendance with minimal disruption to their workday. The venue selected was a meeting room secluded from the general meeting rooms, located at the end of a corridor, away from passing “people traffic”. This room was chosen with the intention of providing a private, quiet, and confidential environment, free from distractions. As can be seen in Figure 5.5, I endeavoured to create a comfortable environment by providing water, sweets, and tissues.

Figure 5.5 Interview room for Phase III

5.3.3.4 Recording of data

All interviews were recorded digitally, with permission from the participants, and substantiated with memos. Recording the interviews allowed me to give the participants my full attention. Participants were advised that the interview would be
transcribed by a professional transcribing service. To maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants all references to their names and The Bank were removed from the transcription. To ensure the integrity of the transcriptions, I checked the transcripts against live recordings.

5.3.4 Data analysis

In preparation for the analysis of the data, I was able to attend a grounded theory workshop facilitated by Professor Kathy Charmaz. This practical workshop was held as part of an International Summer School on Grounded Theory at the University of Pisa in June, 2016. The workshop was a five-day intensive course on grounded theory methods. The attendees were encouraged to bring their own data to analyse as Professor Charmaz presented the constructivist grounded theory analytical methods. During the workshop, I had the opportunity to clarify some of the dilemmas and concerns regarding the challenges I experienced with the data analysis due to the time constraints imposed by the Bank. In this section, I provide a detailed explanation of the data analysis process followed in this phase and the variations discussed with Professor Charmaz. The analysis followed the constructivist grounded theory process of coding data, using comparative methods, memo writing, theoretical sampling, and integrating the analysis (Charmaz, 2012). Due to the volumes of data, computer-assisted qualitative software, ATLAS.ti, was used to organise the data, conduct the initial coding, and manage the analysis process.

5.3.4.1 Initial coding

Coding in grounded theory begins the process of defining what the data are a study of (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In order to begin the coding process, Charmaz (2012) advocates using sensitising concepts. Sensitising concepts are the points of departure for the study used as tentative tools to “give the researcher initial ideas to pursue and questions to raise about their topics” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 30), but can be discarded if they prove to be irrelevant. To this point, as a psychologist, I am attuned to concepts such as early life experiences, socioeconomic conditions, career anchors, and personality traits.
Coding in constructivist grounded theory involves coding for processes, actions and meanings and assigning short gerund codes (using verbs as nouns) to those processes (Charmaz, 2006, 2012, 2014). Coding begins the process of linking data and developing a theory to explain the data (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory involves coding in two phases: initial coding followed by focused coding. Initial coding involves naming the segment of data. Initial coding can be word-by-word, line-by-line or incident-with-incident depending on the purpose of collecting the data. For this analysis, data were coded according to their relevance to my research aim. I coded line-by-line, endeavouring to follow Charmaz’s (2014, p. 120) suggestions:

- Remain open
- Stay close to the data
- Keep your codes simple and precise
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Compare date with data
- Move quickly through the data

In the data excerpt presented in Table 5.3, participant A52 talked about her early school life and the expectations of scholastic achievement. She is a 39 year-old, married African woman and a senior manager. She grew up in the era of apartheid in South Africa.
Table 5.3

*Sample of initial coding for participant A52*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial coding for participant A52</th>
<th>Extract from transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial codes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending good school</td>
<td>A52: It was one of the best— it was a catholic school. One of the only catholic schools that we had in that township, so you had to have very good marks to get into that school. And the teachers were nuns. I remember a lot of you know the discipline and everything from Catholics. So it was you know firstly getting into that school gave me the confidence that you know, you have done well and you know that school really pushed us to do well. I think this is you know, other schools that were at that time, were in the township and I am very grateful for you know my parents getting me into that school because for example there was no question that we are all going to a good university and everyone wanted to go to university we all expected to get a university entrance it was just you know how well you're going to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving good results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting herself apart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing school environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving early positive reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying expectation of achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving support from school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing apartheid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing gratitude for parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expecting good grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding others’ expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting implicit expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needing to achieve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.4.2 Focused coding

The second stage in constructivist grounded theory is focused coding. Charmaz (2014, p. 138) defines focused coding as the codes that are most significant or frequent codes to “synthesize, analyse, and conceptualize larger segments of data”. Focused coding groups the codes into meaningful themes. The following list suggested by Charmaz (2014, p. 140) helped guide the focused coding process:

- What do you find when you compare your initial codes with data?
- In which ways might your initial codes reveal patterns?
- Which of these codes best account for the data?
- Have you raised these codes to focused codes?
- What do your comparisons between codes indicate?
- Do your focused codes reveal gaps in the data?
An example of the focused codes that I defined for aforementioned participant A52 after assessing the initial codes presented above is presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Sample of focused coding for participant A52

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focused codes</th>
<th>Extract from transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving good results</td>
<td>A52: it was one of the best- it was a catholic school. One of the only catholic schools that we had in that township, so you had to have very good marks to get into that school. And the teachers were nuns. I remember a lot of you know the discipline and everything from Catholics. So it was you know firstly getting into that school gave me the confidence that you know, you have done well and you know that school really pushed us to do well. I think this is you know, other schools that were at that time, were in the township and I am very grateful for you know my parents getting me into that school because for example there was no question that we are all going to a good university and everyone wanted to go to university we all expected to get a university entrance it was just you know how well you're going to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving early positive reinforcement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving support from school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding others’ expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting implicit expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.4.3 Memo-writing

Memo-writing forms an integral part of grounded theory as the “core of the analysis” and a record of how that analysis was reached. Writing memos is a useful method for raising the focused codes to conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2006). These conceptual categories, writes Charmaz (2006) “may subsume common themes and patterns in several codes” (p. 91). Following her recommendation, I wrote memos whilst coding. I typed short memos during the initial coding within ATLAS.ti but preferred to handwrite reflective and analytical memos. For example, Figure 5.6 presents an excerpt from of an early memo I wrote in Pisa, Italy at summer school. I wrote the memo after I coded participant A52’s experience of school.
Following Lempert (2007) and Charmaz’s (2014) suggestions, my memos served to:

- Record my research process, including my thoughts, feelings about data and the direction of interviews
- Clarify my analytical process: distinguished codes, focused codes, defining categories, and the comparison method
- Record raw data in the form of in vivo codes (word or phrase taken directly from the data) to retain the participants’ voice and meaning
- Interrogate the data, code and categories
Facilitate the integration of the analysis. An advanced memo, wherein I compared data and began theorising about what factors may underlie a drive to achieve in the participants’ careers, is illustrated in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7 Example of a theoretical memo

5.3.4.4 Theoretical sampling and saturation

Theoretical sampling is described as “seeking pertinent data to develop your emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 193). Essentially, this requires the researcher to gather more data to refine the emerging categories. Typically, a researcher would return to the field to gather data from participants to develop theoretical categories. Due to the time limitations imposed by The Bank, I was unable to return to the research site to conduct further interviews. In a personal communication with Professor Charmaz (August, 2016) I queried the possibility of theoretically sampling the remaining interviews to illuminate the tentative categories. She indicated that under the circumstances, this would be the best solution (see Annexure F).
Data gathering should cease once the categories are saturated, or rather when the data do not “spark new theoretical insights nor reveal new properties of the core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). In order to assess if saturation had been reached I reflected on Charmaz’s (2014, p. 214) questions:

- Which comparisons do you make between data within and between categories?
- What sense do you make about of these comparisons?
- Where do they lead you?
- How do your comparisons illuminate your theoretical categories?
- In what other directions, if any, do they take you?
- What new conceptual relationships, if any, might you see?

Theoretical saturation was reached after the analysis of 16 interviews when no new properties or themes of the theoretical categories emerged.

5.3.4.5 Integrating the analysis

The volume of data was substantial and challenging to analyse. Initial coding revealed over a thousand codes, which required diligent sifting through the voluminous data to uncover tentative categories. This process brought to life Charmaz’s (2014) emphasis on the inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive nature of grounded theory analysis. In this analysis process, memoing became a central and pivotal role to “hold” ideas, insights, and analytical questions. In the grounded theory workshop I attended, Professor Charmaz reiterated the concept “Stop and write” during the coding process. It was indeed a valuable tool that assisted in conceptualising the data. There were moments in the listening, re-listening, coding, and focus coding when I would have appreciated the opportunity to speak with the interviewee to obtain clarity on certain statements. Nevertheless, the number of interviews I had conducted enabled me to engage with those emerging questions by comparing data with data.

To integrate the analysis, I followed Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton’s (2012) suggested organisation of data into first- and second- order categories. These authors describe the first-order analysis as the “informant-centric terms and codes” and the second-
order analysis as “researcher-centric concepts, themes and dimensions” (p. 18). In this manner, these authors argue that;

Taken together the tandem reporting of both voices—informant and researcher—allowed not only a qualitatively rigorous demonstration of the links between data and the induction of a new concept, sense-giving, but also allowed for the kind of insight that is the defining hallmark of high-quality qualitative research. (p. 18)

In this regard, the initial codes were grouped into conceptual categories (first order). The focused coding assisted in the identification of the themes (second order). Finally the second-order themes were integrated into dimensions that formed the basis for the constructivist grounded theory conceptual model of the women leaders’ constructions of their own career progression based on their subjective lived experience.

5.3.5 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness and rigour is based on the criteria for qualitative studies as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and for grounded theory studies laid out by Clooney (2011). The strategies to enhance trustworthiness in Phase III of this study are presented in Table 5.5.
Table 5.5

*Strategies to Enhance Trustworthiness of Phase III*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Application in Phase III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility:</td>
<td>Recognised research method</td>
<td>Constructivist grounded theory is recognised as valid theory and research methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prolonged engagement</td>
<td>Established a trusting relationship with The Bank. Remained immersed in The Bank for 10 months for research planning, organisation, and data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Triangulation of data</td>
<td>The three phase approach provides different perspectives to career progression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Credibility of findings</td>
<td>Excerpts from data provided to support findings. (Clooney, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability:</td>
<td>Thick description</td>
<td>Detailed description provided of contextual data: case study organisation, participants, research method, and time frames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purposeful sampling</td>
<td>Sampling was purposeful; women with most experience in career progression were selected; participants are subset of Phase II participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated</td>
<td>Explicit documentation of research process with detailed description of participant demographics and context is provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>My beliefs and assumptions interrogated through reflexive journaling in line with Charmaz’s (2006) recommendations to reduce biases and preconceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audit trial</td>
<td>An audit trail for data management was developed and maintained on ATLAS.ti. Interviews transcribed. Extensive memo-writing in which practical issues, field experiences, personal reflections, and various aspects of the research process were documented. Memos recorded methodological and analytical decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability of results</td>
<td>Integration of relevant literature with findings. Data analysis and findings reviewed and sound boarded with supervisor.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.6 Ethical considerations

Researchers must maintain awareness of ethical considerations throughout the entire research process (Creswell, 2014). In Chapter 2, the ethical considerations that were upheld for the study were discussed in detail. The key principal ethical considerations such as respecting participants’ dignity, protection from harm, deception or victimisation, protecting privacy and confidentiality of the participants and of the organisation, ensuring anonymity and fully informed written consent of all participants, were adhered to during the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Research findings were reported in an honest, transparent, and accurate manner.

5.4 Research findings

The sub-aim for this phase of the study was to generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment based on their subjective experiences. Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, attention was given to the actions and underlying social processes that may be occurring as these women leaders constructed their career progression based on their lived experience (Charmaz, 2006).

In this section I present the integrated analysis in the shape of a data structure as per the suggestion by Gioia et al. (2012, p. 20) that “the data structure not only allows us to configure our data into a sensible visual aid, it also provides a graphic representation of how we progressed from raw data to terms and themes in conducting the analyses”. The data structure is presented in Figure 5.8. The data were structured according to three dimensions: Personal journey, Path of progress and Organisational landscape and incorporates the second-order themes and first-order categories.
Below follows an explanation of the three main dimensions, themes, and categories with supporting verbatim quotes from the participants as exemplars to “show the reader data-to-theory connections” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 23).
5.4.1 Personal journey

The dimension, *Personal journey* incorporates the themes focusing on the most salient elements emerging from the participants’ personal journey that appeared to impact their career progression. This dimension consists of the following three themes and categories:

- Centrality of others
  - Identifying role models
  - Receiving practical support
  - Family first
  - Passion for people
- Building sense of self
  - Growing from life experiences
  - Receiving encouragement
  - Building knowledge

5.4.1.1 Centrality of others

A salient theme in all the participants’ stories was the centrality of “others” in their lives. The others referenced by the participants were people who were identified as role models, people who provided practical support, their families and the people in the organisation.

*Identifying role models*

Many of the participants described the presence of influential female figures in their personal background. For example, one participant, an Indian woman from a traditional Muslim family, described her mother:

A07: My mom was just one of those incredible women, she was way ahead of her time. She encouraged me to drive, she encouraged me to do everything that my dad was against, kind of stuff, and she said: No, girls need to fend for themselves, they need to look after themselves, they need to be able to support themselves, you just do it. I promise you I’ve got you, you do it. Whatever fights, I’m on your side.
Other participants described their mothers, grandmothers and sisters as role models:

E26: She did everything from production to HR to marketing to everything, she’s actually my role model, one of them. And she actually built her way up and was a director at a very, very young age so she was very ambitious…and she became the CEO of that company.

A20: …like my gran, so lots of strong women in my family or women role models.

A06: And I thought to myself my sister was my idol because she studied…she comes from a bad situation and she made it very interesting and she looked up like I’m not going to disappoint anybody or myself.

Receiving practical support

In order to pursue their careers, many women acknowledged the practical support they received from mothers, mothers-in-law, fathers, and spouses in taking care of home and children. In the words of these participants:

A20: I think for me because I had such an extremely good support structure having children was not an issue.

A15: …and with the second one, my sister helped me a lot, I also had a helper looking after them and then about by two/three they were already at little school, so is like they had a little team.

Most significant is that all the senior married women in the sample (Grade B) described their husbands as providing positive support by way of encouragement as well as sharing in the household responsibilities. For example, participant A51 described her husband as “a rock, that is fully behind me” and participant A10 described her husband thus, “he is our home exec, he does the cooking, the washing I mean I don't make a cup of tea because that's his role.”
Family first

Family was central to the lives of these women leaders, vividly captured by the following two extracts:

A51: I value, I’m at this age, and I value what I have, exceptionally. It’s the most important thing in my life. I love my job. I love what I do. I love The Bank. I love my family more than I love my job.
A08: And now that stage I tried to balance my life and my son was in matric I said he comes first in my life now because I need to make sure that he is prepared for life.

Important career decisions were made taking the husbands’ context into account. For instance, when a few of the participants had been given an opportunity to relocate to the Head Office in Johannesburg for career advancement, the timing of the relocation appeared to be an important factor. It appeared that at the time the opportunity had arisen, their husbands’ careers or businesses had stalled. This is vividly illustrated in the following:

A15: I was offered a position here from head office finance department but because my husband was finding his business I had to make a choice, so the first time I declined. And with his business and he was thinking of the partnership and how do we sort this out and I say okay - let’s just see what happens. So we left it and then a year later I was offered the position again then I said okay we seriously got to sit down this is not going to come forever. So then they closed the business eventually because he was livid with his partner they just didn't work out and they closed after that. And then we decide that we were going to take it.
A10: … he was now sixty two year old man and I saw this constant him going for interviews constantly not making it and I just had to call it a day …finally on my way to Johannesburg and poor ole hubby tootled along.

Passion for people

These women leaders spoke repeatedly of their passion for the people in the organisation and their focus on developing others as illustrated by these extracts:
A10: We turned that place around and we got those people and the first thing was to start treating people like people with hearts and problems and lives

A07: My end goal is just to be, first of all to be happy in what I’m doing, and also to help other people, to spread that happiness to give other people skills and opportunities.

This passion for people seemed to be incompatible with their view of the demands at executive levels of leadership. This is illustrated by two participants’ (both B grade senior managers) comments about the executive level:

A52: For me, I think of my big interest in people. I have always thought that people need to relate to me, people need to see me as their equal. When I looked at leaders, so my idea of leadership was looking at leaders, who walk into this building, like everyone needs to know I am an executive, I don't talk to just everyone. People can't talk to me. People need to know who I am, that was my idea of...what a senior leader looked like.

A26: I think like general manager is more involved in the business, he's more involved in the people and the business and the people are my passion. when you are an executive if you had a little bit more distance from that aspect then the distances you make are more higher level and less involved and I know I'm an analytical, am involved in detail and love people, so the executive position just seems too distant from the things that I love.

5.4.1.2 Building a sense of self

Embedded in the stories that the participant’s shared, was how these women leaders developed their sense of self. From the data three main categories emerged: growing from significant life experiences, the encouragement received from others, and developing knowledge.

Growing from life experiences
In the telling of their stories participants would loop between telling a story that punctuated their lives and how that experience helped shape their view of their capabilities. For instance, two participants who lived in foster care said:
A22: I think it was part of life, if I didn't go through it, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

A06: I told myself and I was preparing myself, I said I’m not going to be somebody who doesn’t do anything, that just sits at home and becomes a housewife, there’s no way I’m going to do that and I kept… I actually programmed my mind.

In a similar vein, participants seemed to extract meaning and derived a stronger sense of self from personal trauma. A striking example of this was that of participant A52 who shared how she made sense of the tragic and sudden death of her four-year-old daughter due to an anaesthetist’s error:

A52: But that one day has made us different people, me and my husband and my kids. I think I am a much stronger person. I always say, I have been sat in a box in court with all this... you know, the hospital had their own lawyers, the doctors had their own lawyers, this big huge law firms with lots of money and I really stood my ground and I think I really did well,….And I always said that this was nothing I can't handle, because I have been through that.

Receiving encouragement

For many of the participants, positive messages received from others influenced their view of their capabilities. Participants described this as “believing in me” and “identifying strengths in me I didn’t know I had”. Other participants noted that:

A52: I got a lot of positive feedback from people, saying you're in the class with all the people, but you know you are clever, I had a lot of positive feedback from people when I was growing up and it really gave me a lot of confidence when I was in school to do better to work hard. But it also gave me - I wanted to please and so I had a - I call it a disease to please that I’m still working on.

A51: I’m forever grateful to […] because he created the opportunity which I took in, so it’s right, that’s what I’d do, I embraced it. He’s made my career if I can put it that way. If there’s a person who made my career that I would give my due to, he’s that man.
These messages received from others assisted in mitigating their feelings of self-doubt, for example:

A26: …you know sometimes I feel like I'm very young in my position and the mandates make sometimes beyond me you know sometimes you worry, do I have enough experience behind me to make these kinds of decisions and they have enough faith in me to do it
A20: I think the other influences probably changed my view of that world, people like […] who would say “No, no, no, you can do more than that.” And just started challenging my thinking of how I look at myself, how I look at the world, what I could achieve.

Building knowledge

For some women, building their knowledge base was construed as a mechanism to increase their sense of self, as illustrated by the following extracts:

A22: I am knowledgeable now in what I know what I'm talking about, and I can add value.
A07: Whereas on the business side it’s like, I don’t know the stuff, you know, I feel inadequate.
A52: And being a numbers person I depend so much on numbers like the number should tell me what to say or a decision. If I don't have numbers I thought I had nothing substantial.

5.4.2 Path to progression

The dimension, Path to progression incorporates the themes focusing on the common patterns that emerged from the data regarding the nature of these women leaders’ career path. This dimension consists of the following three themes and respective categories:
• Starting a job
  o Beginning to work
  o Describing the job
• Building a career
  o “Now it’s my turn”
  o Moving laterally for growth
• Making meaning
  o Shifting focus to purpose
  o Commitment and loyalty

5.4.2.1 Starting a job

With very few exceptions, these women leaders viewed their first roles as a “job” and began at the very lowest positions in their respective organisations.

Beginning to work

With the exception of one participant, all participants entered the workplace to earn a living. Some participants entered the workplace as school leavers (no tertiary education) and a few participants indicated that they were the main breadwinner of their families, for example participant A22 and A28 shared:

A22: …since then my mom and my younger siblings have been my responsibility, so like I said my brother was four, and my sister that's now 26, and the other one that’s now 30 were still all in school, so yeah, I made sure they get through school and paid for everything.
A28: …because I made the mistake by falling pregnant and getting involved so I that I made a mistake I was prepared to take accountability and prepared to sacrifice things so that I can get something out of like…I am actually looking for a job.

No one reported commencing her work-life with a career plan as the following two extracts demonstrate:

A31: When my assignment ended, the agency called me to say there was something available at The Bank, and it was like a stationery clerk kind of
job...my career wasn’t a priority, it wasn’t something I really road mapped when I just started.
A10: I didn't really know what else I could or would do because well…So as it happened when I went home after the matric holiday I was working at [...]...temping as a receptionist.

Describing the job
Almost all participants began at the lowest ranks of the organisation as illustrated by the following extracts:

A20: I got, through a friend in the church, got a secretarial role at a bank.
A10: The Bank manager was actually staying at the hotel, he just moved in and I had you know booked him in or said good morning or whatever and he just liked my style and he said do you want to come and work for The Bank I said yes and I started the next day...as a cashier.
A15: …so when I joined that company I became a, I started off also very junior as a clerk.

The pattern of entering the organisation at a junior level extended to the three women who were qualified lawyers. Two began as legal officers and the admitted attorney began in a training position in The Bank’s credit department.

5.4.2.2 Building a career
As these women leaders became more successful in their roles and received recognition, their jobs took on the nature of a career rather than “just a job”. These women proactively looked for promotions and for lateral opportunities for career growth.

Now it’s my turn
This in vivo code encapsulated the desire these women leaders had to progress in the organisation’s hierarchy:

A51: I’ll tell you what changed and I shared this with you the last time, the AHA-moment I had was when I moved. I don’t know if that was the critical point that said this is not just a job, let’s make something more of it.
A06: Because I say to my advisor, I said it’s my turn now to shine - I’ve given everybody the opportunity - now I want it...senior manager role.
A02: …people in that space make a lot of money, that's one thing I have to tell you so if money becomes the driving factor it's easy for me to move into that space

The data showed evidence of women leaders choosing to progress for more senior roles:

A31: When we came here, team leader position was opened in the creditor’s area, I applied for that and was successful.
A22: I just decided I feel like I need to do it, and the very first I was supposed to start in Finance, I was sitting in the UK - fabulous, fabulous opportunity, because what happened was, when I applied for the position and I was successful.

*Moving laterally for growth*

In order to grow in their careers, many of these women leaders were willing to make lateral moves to take on new challenges and opportunities:

A10: A side step - it was a managerial position but into operations rather than motor sales… because I've just got to solve this load out
A22: I should go to Legal, it’s the same level, I don't know that space, and at least there's something new to learn.
A08: I got an opportunity to apply for a lateral move and I got the position.

5.4.2.3 *Making meaning*

This theme emerged as the raison d’etre of their career progression. Two significant categories were conceptualised as salient within this theme: “Shifting focus to purpose” and “Passion for work”
Shifting focus to purpose

Consistently, when asked what career progression meant to them, these women leaders mentioned criteria that were less tangible than promotions or rank. Apart from three participants, progression was not to the top echelons of The Bank but rather part of a larger purpose, for example: to “make a difference” (A52), “be the best” (A22), “have greater responsibility” (A31), “be better than yourself” (A06), “if it's challenging I will make something out of it” (A15). Four participants who expressed a desire to be an executive shared their motivation for the top job similarly:

A04: I can be so much more influential up higher, you know that, now that I am thinking about it. Where I am now, I can’t, I can only influence up to a point, now that I think about it.

A20: Career progression for me is, I think my next step is definitely an exec role… my way to leaving whichever organisation in a better space. So having made a change, having made a difference.

E26: I think for me it was just being a voice that people could actually listen to, I don’t see corporate steps up as career progression for me, I think for me it’s not about title, I don’t know why it’s not about title, I think it’s about respect and actually making a difference, and actually starting to be able to… I want to be in an executive place where I-- an executive level, so where I’m making a difference in companies.

Passion for work

The participants were undeniably passionate about their work and loyal to The Bank. Many of the participants described their role in the business with words such as love, pride, live to work, for example:

A04: We would discuss things. We were passionate about things. We were passionate about The Bank. We were that kind of thing. We were loyal about The Bank

A22: For me, some people work so that they can live, for me I live so that I can work.

A10: it's really where I wanted to be I knew which job I wanted and that's this position am in now… hard work dedication, passion, personality….I have a
great sense of pride in watching all things going you know all dreams going in the right direction.

5.4.3 Organisational landscape

The dimension, Organisational landscape incorporates the themes focusing on the context in which these women leaders enacted their career progression. This dimension consists of the following two themes and their respective categories:

- Male-dominated culture
  - “Old Boys’ Club”
  - “Know your place”
  - Experiencing the glass ceiling
- Pervasive stereotyping
  - Mother-not-leader
  - Work role

5.4.3.1 Male-dominated culture

The male-dominated culture of The Bank emerged as a strong theme and was perceived as a barrier to women’s advancement in The Bank. Within this theme three categories were considered salient: Old Boys’ Club, Know your place, and Experiencing the glass ceiling.

Old Boys’ Club

In the findings, the prevalence of an exclusionary network of males was evident:

A15: …this is just a little club all over again, it’s jobs for pals who you know, who you socialising with and what do you do? And then you'd say no it's not right here but then again you say no it is rife here

A26: …they speak to each other is a lot more frank than they speak to you, so as a woman in the work place I do feel there's some Boys’ Club the higher up you go and I think the way men interact as peers is different to the way we interact with them
The Old Boys’ Club served to exclude women from networking activities which were exclusively male-orientated activities as explained by the following participant:

A10: I was a branch manager in the KZN motor marketing team and they were all boys and so the activities were deep sea fishing and hunting and rugby, you know.

Such exclusion carried a price for women leaders. When decisions were made during those informal sessions, the women were not only expected to comply but to accept that these decision making processes were standard business practices. As participant E23 explained:

E23: Golf is a huge issue for the ladies in this Bank. The men get an uphand because they go onto the golf course with your customers, that is, on that golf course. You get to your customers and they have made promises on you for you. The worse thing they haven’t even involved you or come back with feedback to say – Listen, I have discussed this, do this and this. And I was told – this is the way The Bank does it and this is the way The Bank will always do it, in terms of our golf days.

Know your place

In the context of a male-dominated environment and industry, there appeared to be norms to which women were expected to conform. For instance, participant A26 shared that at a mentoring session for young graduates a female graduate asked the male executive what advice he had for women in the workplace. His response: “know your place”. This participant further explained:

A26: And I knew exactly what he meant, if you are woman and you going away or you ask to stay behind for drinks and stuff, there's always a time that you should all must leave, and I agree with that because you are not one of the men and you shouldn't be swearing like a trooper - it’s just what these men do when they you know, but there is a clear space for men and there is a clear space for woman and it wasn't that I disagreed but for me it was just that it will always be this difference.
The expectation that women must know their place extended to knowing their place in the context of building social capital, as participants A06 and A10 explained:

A26: Mr […] said to us – he was promoted into motor now and he said most of these dealers love the women. The ladies are being (sic) loved by the dealers. And they are doing exactly the same that the men are doing but the ladies can entertain, it’s like the only thing they told us to get over at our meeting is don’t be a man, don’t be a rude, vulgar… become cheap when you’re drunk, he said, you can do anything like the men, but don’t be - if they want to sit and drink and have the booze off, go home or go to your hotel or whatever but don’t be involved because you don’t know what things they are talking about.

A10: I could host the parties, we could have a couple of toots together but obviously you have to be very careful to keep the dignity.

Experiencing the glass ceiling
All the senior women (Grade B) in this sample had worked through the various grades to reach senior management. The challenge appeared to be the next step to the executive level for some or “getting stuck’ under the glass ceiling. In this instance, the participants implied a lack of transparency around the selection criteria. This was evident in the comments made by the few senior women (A20 and A15) who aspired to executive level but had been unsuccessful:

A02: You know that's the strange part about this, yet I don't have control over the bigger picture if you hear where I'm coming from, somebody else has the bigger picture if they could only share that picture I think it would make life easy enough.

A15: I want to accomplish much more than what I have today […] took over so and I asked why I couldn’t take over- they said that they didn't feel that I was ready to do that job…. Off you go and then no explanation. You feel like you banging your head sometimes against a brick wall, some people don't understand.
5.4.3.2 Pervasive stereotyping

There was evidence in the data of pervasive stereotyping in the organisation. Such stereotyping was experienced in two ways: the role of mother was perceived as a barrier to certain roles and the work role these women leaders fulfilled in The Bank.

Mother-not-leader

Many participants reported experiencing gender discrimination in the form of stereotyping. This experience was most prevalent when they wanted to take up opportunities that required travel or relocation but their home responsibilities were foregrounded as a barrier, for example:

A51: No, you can’t have the job.” And I said, “Why can’t I?”, “You know, you’re a new mom and your child needs you.

A10: At one time Mr […] needed a COO but he was GM of Motor and they actually nudged me said would I be interested? It was like my dream job, I had the experience I knew I had the knowledge, I had the drive so he actually came down and interviewed me and I actually said to him I would commute, but my husband won't move and he said - I won't do that to you it's not the right thing as much as I want you here.

Where vertical career progression had been impacted upon solely by the fact that they were mothers, these women felt betrayed by the organisation. Participant E23 shared that prior to becoming a mother she would “eat, sleep and drink” The Bank. Upon returning to work from maternity-leave, her male line manager advised her that she would not be returning to her branch due to her family responsibilities. She was devastated and had not recovered to the extent that she was, at the time of the interview, planning to leave The Bank. In her words:

E23: I took that branch to hundred million turn-over. I still get so emotional about it (becomes tearful) because I worked so hard. And when I got back, the reasons that were given were I could not go out drinking with the customers. It’s men who liked to be entertained. You have got a new baby now. I was given a smaller branch. The reasons were so unfair. And the ratings that I was given, was a flat average rating which meant no bonuses or increases.
Work role

The role women undertook in The Bank emerged as an important theme across the participants’ work stories. This was acutely illustrated in the words of a senior manager:

A04: The women in this bank have been successful at the operations level. Men have used us to be their pillars. To run the bank, basically, kind of, so, they using us.

It emerged from the data that the job roles these women were fulfilling were in the support areas of The Bank. By way of example, the role titles ranged from Client Operations Team Leader, Operations Manager, Bad Debt Collection Manager and Human Resources Account Executive in the junior and mid-level range to Head of Operations at the senior management level. Within their functional areas, many of the participants spoke of being moved with The Bank to fix a particular portfolio. Said two participants:

A20: The Bank acknowledges that they have are that they have a gap in HR, and I seem to be the gap closer.

A26: I’m called “Miss fix it” that's my nickname you know that there is some kind of expectation that when you deliver it's going to be above my norm... they (executives) needed me and they moved me into this next position because they had this gap that nobody could fill.

5.4.4 Participants’ reflections

To complete the findings section, exemplars of the participants’ reflections at the conclusion of the interview are shared. For many of the participants, the interviews represented the first time they had been afforded a safe space to share their life and work stories, including early life experiences, old wounds, and suppressed emotions. The fact that someone was listening had a profound affect on many of the participants, as the following two extracts illustrate:
A08: It is good to cry it is good to let that out especially if you got some emotions personal stuff that you are holding in

A20: Enormous value, because it gives me an opportunity to reflect again, and a safe space for me to understand that the emotion is, necessary. [crying]

For these participants it was the first time they verbalised a desired goal or reflected upon their purpose as illustrated by the following:

A31: It’s almost been like a reality check. Because at the back of my mind I know that I have to do certain things to get to where I want to, but I haven’t realistically taken any action, or you know? Yeah, it’s kind of an eye-opener.

A04: I think… I think I’m just seeing the bigger picture right now. So I think I’ve gained that kind of… I don’t know if I’m there yet, ja, but I think, um, I have to, I have to go up higher.

Within the participants’ reflections about their careers emerged a lack of self-acknowledgement. Most participants recognised that they had failed to acknowledge their successes, irrespective of the job grade achieved. This realisation came as a direct result of the interview, as these two statements illustrate:

A07: So I never acknowledge myself for what I have accomplished through the years. I don’t kind of see it, I just kind of see yeah, so what kind of thing. And written like that, in a progression from what it is it has been incredible, it has been incredible, so I just think that I also need to acknowledge that for myself.

A10: But we don't stop and tell our stories and think about things, so it's lovely just to have the time and, it's reinforced for me again of telling the story, helps me to see that again - I did it on my own and I was resilient and I was, put in lots of hard work, so this all good for me in the sense of getting, finding my self-belief.

Overall, the participants reported experiencing significant insights into their careers and themselves as a result of the interview.
5.5 Discussion

In this section the findings are discussed and, consistent with Charmaz’s (2006) suggestion, extant relevant literature is incorporated to compare and contrast my findings. The final phase of the study resulted in an emergent theory for the understanding of women leaders’ construction of their own career progression based on their subjective lived experience. A conceptual model was constructed, grounded by the data structure, to represent the way in which these women leaders construed their career progression. This is consistent with the assertion by Gioia et al. (2012) that “the section describing the grounded theory shows the transformation of the static data structure into the dynamic inductive model” (p. 24). The model portrays factors influencing the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

As shown in Figure 5.9, the conceptual model is conceived as a pyramidal cone with an internal cone resting on a base. I deliberately chose a pyramid structure to represent the hierarchical organisation in which these women leaders were embedded and a circle as the base to represent the wholeness of the participants’ lives. The conceptual model postulates that the woman leader’s Personal journey interacts and affects her Path to progression, which is enacted in and shaped by the Organisational landscape.

The women leaders who participated in this study were diverse in terms of demographics. Despite this diversity, common threads emerged from their personal backgrounds that subsumed the demographical differences. Most of the participants described their family of origin as being lower or middle income. Many reported coming from a close-knit community but having had a driving desire to be independent upon reaching adulthood. Most of the participants entered the workplace out of financial necessity. Approximately a third of the women had the opportunity to further their tertiary education prior to entering the workplace. The length of service with The Bank for those participants over the age of 40 was no less than a minimum of 10 years and reached a maximum of 40 years of service.
Figure 5.9 Conceptual model of women leaders’ construction of own career progression
Reaching into the experiences of the participants revealed a complex and dynamic relationship with the construction of their career progression and their whole selves. By complex, I refer to the layered construction of career progression, which incorporated these women leaders’ personal lives, professional lives and the context in which they were embedded. By dynamic, I refer to the interaction between the dimensions and the emerging themes in the construction of their career progression. This is congruent with the assertion by Las Heras and Hall (2007) that because human life is complex system, various domains interact with one another and should be studied in an integrated manner. According to Hall (2002, p. 71) “integration is the person’s sense that his or her identity is a coherent whole, made up of various sub-identities related to specific life and career roles”.

In the dimension Personal journey, the participants highlighted the centrality of others in shaping their career progression. Specifically, the women leaders drew inspiration from strong women within their families. Previous literature (cf. Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, & Prosser, 1997) found a similar theme in the career development of high achieving women in the United States, that is, the presence of other women as role models and personal networks in support of their career development. Stead and Elliot (2009) argue for female role models as they show what is possible for women in terms of leadership.

Featuring prominently in the women leaders’ stories of their career progression was the role others played in enabling their career progression by providing practical support with family responsibilities. Studies that focus on the factors that influence women’s career advancement have consistently reported the critical role of support with work-life conflict as fundamental to women’s progression (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005; Mayrhofer, Meyer, Schiffinger, & Schmidt, 2008).

Additionally, and most importantly, central to the lives of these women was family. Over and above the day-to-day support offered by various family members, career decisions that had major impact on the family, such as relocations, were contingent on the husbands’ careers and the lives of children. This is consistent with the assertion by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) that women make career decisions with others in mind:
“their career decisions were a natural outgrowth of the opportunities that were presented to them and the choices they made to fulfill their dreams within the context of the relationships around them” (p.109).

Further evidence of the theme of the centrality of others was the fact that the women leaders displayed a strong relational value through their passion for developing others in the organisation. Similarly, the sense that being an executive was too far removed from this relational value speaks to the centrality of others in the professional lives of these women leaders. Comparing this finding to extant research revealed a similarity to studies that suggest a relational orientation is a career driver for women (Bilimoria et al., 2007; O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Consideration was given to how these women developed their sense of self in relation to their career development. Their sense of self, in this case, appeared tied to their self-efficacy in the manner defined by Bandura (1995) which "refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p. 2). The positive feedback and encouragement received from others in relation to their capabilities helped foster a belief that they were capable of succeeding in their jobs, thus contributing to a sense of self-efficacy in their careers. In addition, by observing others, in this case their role models, and by building their own knowledge base these women leaders seemed to draw upon personal mastery and vicarious mastery strategies for increasing self-efficacy Bandura’s (1977). Developing a sense of self and increasing self-efficacy is associated with assisting women overcome barriers in their careers (Powell, 2009) and leadership development (O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2015).

In the dimension Path to progress the women leaders’ orientation towards an internal and subjective definition of career progression emerged. This is based on the participants’ own appraisal of their career progression. The path to progression appeared to evolve over time to follow a “job-career-meaning” inclination to career progression. Almost all the women in this study indicated that they had started working for financial reasons with little or no thought to entering the workplace to build a career. At the time of joining The Bank no consideration had been given to the organisation’s reputation nor was The Bank identified as their employer of choice for
a particular career path. Once these women had excelled in their jobs and been presented with opportunities to progress to positions of leadership and greater responsibilities, they began to construe their job as a career. When probed for the meaning of their career, these women leaders associated their careers with fulfilling a purpose, for example, “making a difference” or “paying it forward”. In this way, the women leaders progressed from working at a job to constructing a career underpinned by a purpose and commitment to the Bank and its people. This construction of job-career-meaning progression appears similar in nature to the three work orientations proposed by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997): job, career, and calling. This “tripartite model” (Wrzesniewski, 2003, p. 300) explains the manner in which people frame their relationship to their work. A job orientation is focused solely on the material benefits of their work, a career orientation is associated to “increased pay, prestige, and status that comes with promotion” (p. 301) and the fulfilment of a higher purpose is the focus of a calling orientation. For the women leaders in this study, the job-career-meaning approach to their career progression appeared to be aligned with attaining psychological accomplishment or, rather, an internal sense of career success.

Featuring prominently in the findings is the dynamic interaction between career progression for women and the context in which their career progression was embedded. The women leaders emphasised the male-dominated environment at The Bank and the challenges this culture posed on their career progression. An interesting metaphor from literature is the concept of women as the “other” in a male-centric environment. This issue was identified by Beatty (2007, p. 52) in relation to the “pervasive gender stereotype” which, if women were to accept, then it would fall to them to blend into the organisational environment. An examination of the positions the participants occupied and the roles they performed in The Bank pointed to gender stereotyping of women. All these women leaders performed functional roles in the organisation. This was evidenced by descriptions provided by the participants, “I am known as Miss Fix-it,” “I am the gap-closer” and “we are pillars of The Bank”. It seems that for these women leaders, the career and lateral moves offered were based on their ability to perform well in those roles, resulting in what literature refers to as a glass wall (Wellington, Kropf, & Gerkovich, 2003). Glass walls are the lateral moves that are barriers to women’s career advancement. This may certainly be the case at
The Bank, for example, the only female executive held the Human Resources position. Certain studies have suggested that the work roles women fulfil may be a block to progress to the most senior levels of the organisation (Vinnicombe & Bank, 2003). In addition to this “glass wall”, it would appear that the metaphorical “glass ceiling” remains. Even though a small percentage of these women leaders indicated a desire to attain executive positions, their attempts to reach executive positions had not been successful. The senior executive leadership remained 90% male.

The pervasive gender stereotyping extended to decisions made by senior males as to the roles they perceived women, who were also mothers and wives, could fulfil. This was strongly evidenced in comments such as: “You can’t drink with the dealers – you have a baby,” “you can’t do that job, you have a family”, and “I won't do that to you and your husband, no it's not the right thing as much as I want you here”. This may imply that the men in The Bank “make the decisions” and the woman “take care of business and family”. On the one hand the women were central to the effective running of the business and, as a result, were redeployed to operational areas of the Bank that required their expertise. On the other hand, despite the success achieved in the operational areas, women remained excluded from decision-making positions and potentially challenging opportunities to reach more senior levels of the organisation. The participants repeatedly highlighted this exclusion. These findings are consistent with studies examining the impact of persistent gender stereotypes and situational factors such as male-dominated cultures on women’s careers and career progression. (cf. Eagly, 2005; Martin & Barnard, 2013; O’Connor, 2012; Powell, 2011; Watts, 2009). A view of the interconnectedness between the various issues affecting women’s career advancement is that of the implicit role women might play in male-dominated organisations (Beatty, 2007). To this point, in their research of gender specific predictors of career success, Ng et al. (2005) suggested that women tend to have lower career expectations than men and are thus satisfied with their career opportunities and progression.

A meta-observation of the findings of this phase suggests that the construction of career progression is defined by an internal and subjective sense of accomplishment. Comparing this finding to other studies indicates that subjective career success is positively related to women’s measure of career success (Ng et al., 2005; Powell &
Mainiero, 1992; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006; Valcour & Ladge, 2008). Whereas objective success is measured in terms of observable criteria (pay, promotion, and status), subjective career success is measured by less tangible indicators (Heslin, 2005). The definition of subjective career success proposed by Greenhaus and Callanan (2006) emphasises the individual’s global assessment of their careers; “the individual’s personal feelings of satisfaction with his or her career path, career progress or career outcomes” (p. 140). The finding of this phase of the study—that women leaders tend to apply multifaceted criteria of subjective career success in the assessment of their career progression as evidenced by the indicators offered by the participants (for instance, relational orientation, family first and “making a difference”)—would support this view.

Ultimately, the findings of the final phase of this study indicate a construction of career progression based on lived experience leaning towards subjective career success where career progression:

- is enabled by the support and encouragement from others,
- is approached by developing a sense of self-efficacy,
- is driven by a relational orientation,
- follows a job-career-meaning orientation,
- is enacted in a male dominated culture, and
- is constrained by gender stereotyping.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter the sub-aim, “To generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment” was addressed using the constructivist grounded theory as developed by Charmaz (2014).

An overview of constructivist grounded theory and the application of constructivist grounded theory as a research method was presented. The data collection process was described, as well as the data analysis process, which followed Charmaz’s (2006, 2014) analytic method of coding, comparative method, writing memos and theoretical
sampling. The analysis was integrated following Gioia et al. (2012) two-order approach. The trustworthiness of the study and ethics considered for this phase concluded the explanation of the research design.

The findings representing the women leaders’ construction of their own career progression based on their subjective lived experience and a discussion of the findings concluded this chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

“I say life is about choices, and to be the best you don’t have to be better than anybody else, you have to be better than yourself”

- Interviewee

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the thesis. An overview of the study is presented with a reiteration of the research questions, aims and objectives. This is followed by a revisit of the research design and the findings for each phase. In the second section, I discuss my reflections on the findings of the research. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of the contributions of the study, key implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Overview of the study

In the changing global economy, the meanings of careers and, consequently, what constitutes career success form the subject of much research (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007). In this research, the conceptualisation of career success has predominantly been a theoretical distinction between objective and subjective career success (Heslin, 2005). In career advancement studies the vertical career (objective career success) is traditionally associated with male definitions of success (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2012) and does not fully incorporate broader variables that reflect women’s life experiences (Heslin, 2005). A call has been made for expanding the definition of what constitutes career success to include the experiences of women (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2012; Heslin, 2005; Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007; O’Neil et al., 2008).
6.2.1 Overview of the problem statement, research questions, aims and objectives

A construction of career progression from women’s perspective is critical in enhancing career development theory and to provide the context for women to succeed in their careers. To this end the research problem, “What are women leaders’ constructions of career progression in a corporate environment?” was addressed through a constructionist tradition which accepts multiple realities are constructed, personally and socially.

The study aimed to offer a holistic and in-depth account of the constructions of career progression by women leaders in a corporate environment. To understand career progression holistically, women’s career progression was explored from three traditions/approaches within the constructionist tradition: personal constructivism, social constructionism, and constructivism grounded in subjective lived experience. To this end the problem statement was sub-divided into three sub-questions:

- What are women leaders’ constructions about the career progression of others in a corporate environment?
- What are women leaders’ collective co-constructions of a generative and transformative career progression (“ours”) in a corporate environment?
- What are women leaders’ constructions of their own career progression in a corporate environment?

The aim of the study was therefore also sub-divided into three sub-aims:

- Sub-aim 1: To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of the career progress of others in a corporate environment.
- Sub-aim 2: To explore women leaders’ collective (“ours”) co-constructions of a generative and transformative career progression in a corporate environment.
- Sub-aim 3: To generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment, based on their subjective experiences.
In order to address these sub-aims, the objectives formulated were:

- Objective 1: To approach sub-aim 1 from Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory by applying the repertory grid technique.
- Objective 2: To approach sub-aim 2 from a social constructionist approach by applying the Appreciative Inquiry method.
- Objective 3: To approach sub-aim 3 from a constructivistic approach by applying constructivist grounded theory method as described by Charmaz (2014).

6.2.2 Overview of the research design

This was an exploratory qualitative study conducted within a constructionist approach. The research design was formulated and conducted in three sequential research phases to address each sub-research question (Figure 6.1).

![Figure 6.1 Overview of research approach, paradigm and design](image-url)
The three-phase approach to this study enabled the exploration of the participants’ constructions of career progression from three different perspectives:

- personal constructivism as proposed by Kelly (1955),
- social constructionism as proposed by Gergen (1978, 2009), and
- constructivism as proposed by Charmaz (2006, 2014).

Given the three-phased nature of the study, more than one data collection technique was applied. Data were analysed using qualitative methods. In Table 6.1 a summary of the research method employed for each phase is presented.

Table 6.1

*Overview of research method*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research strategy</th>
<th>Case study</th>
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<td>Sampling</td>
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<th>Sequential design</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
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<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Structured interviews utilising the repertory grid based on personal construct theory</td>
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<td>Semi-structured intensive interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Recording of Data | a. Repertory grid questionnaire  
                     b. Research journal | a. Interview guides  
                       b. Shared written activities  
                       c. Share creative activities | a. Transcribed interviews  
                       b. Memos |
| Data Analysis     | a. Qualitative content analysis  
                     b. Core-categorising procedure | Collaborative data analysis  
                       | Constructivist grounded theory coding |

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6.2.3 Reflections on and evaluation of the research methods applied

6.2.3.1 Phase I

In Phase 1 the first sub-aim “To explore women leaders’ shared (constructed) mental models of career progression of others in a corporate environment” was addressed using Kelly’s (1955) personal construct theory—which is embedded in a constructivist tradition—as the theoretical framework. The following key conclusions on the method and technique applied were reached:

- The application of Personal Construct Theory to this study is congruent with Burr et al. (2014) assertion that the technique allows researchers to research how participants perceive events.
- The repertory grid was a useful technique to elicit the tacit personal constructs of career progression from the participants in a structured manner.
- Participants found the repertory grid to be a valuable thinking tool prompting new insights and self-awareness of their own career progression.
- A limitation of the method is the potential intervention by the researcher in generating data.
- A further limitation of the repertory grid is that the administration of the repertory grid in this study proved to be time consuming given the number of participants (82) and the data collection technique (individual personal interviews).
- The use of ATLAS.ti facilitated the management of the data during the analysis process.
- The principles of content data analysis technique and core-categorising were useful in interpreting and making sense of the personal constructs elicited.
- The qualitative application of the repertory grid provides an in-depth view of the participants’ personal experience.
- The findings using this method were similar to the results of a quantitative review of certain studies of career success undertaken by Ng et al. (2005).
6.2.3.2 Phase II

The second sub-aim “To explore how women leaders, as a collective, co-construct career progression in a corporate environment” was addressed through the implementation of a one-day workshop based on the Appreciative Inquiry method (Cooperrider et al., 2003) which is embedded in social constructionism. The following key conclusions on the method and technique applied were reached:

- The use of the Appreciative Inquiry method proved to be successful in examining how the women leaders as a collective, through social interaction, co-constructed career progression.
- The Appreciative Inquiry method enabled the participants to collaborate on designing practical knowledge for career progression.
- Participants’ feedback indicated that the one-day workshop was perceived as invigorating, engaging, and a highly participative process.
- A critique of the data analysis approach is that the mining of the data is undertaken by the participants rather than the researcher. Watkins et al. (2011) state that the mining of the data by the participants is consistent with the Appreciative Inquiry process.
- The common concern of the Appreciative Inquiry method is the focus on the positive at the expense of negative organisational experience. In answer, Bushe (2011) points out that Appreciative Inquiry is a method for change but that “transformational change will not occur from AI unless it addresses problems of real concern to organizational members” (p.97).
- The Appreciative Inquiry method offers post-modern approach to research which views truth as relative. The common critique of postmodernism is the lack of objectivity and rejection of scientific methods (Spiro, 1996).

6.2.3.3 Phase III

The sub-aim of the third phase “To generate a constructivist grounded theory of women leaders’ own career progression in a corporate environment” was successfully addressed using the constructivist grounded theory as developed by Charmaz (2014). The following key conclusions on the method and technique applied were reached:
• The use of a constructivist grounded theory was shown to be an effective approach in the discovery of the underlying social processes of career progression occurring in the context of The Bank.

• The flexibility of the constructivist grounded theory approach allows emerging theory to be led by the data and recognises that meaning is created in the interaction between researcher and participants.

• This method allowed the participants’ voices to remain intact in the analysis.

• The use of ATLAS.ti was central in managing the voluminous data for coding purposes and identifying emerging themes in the data.

• Participants experienced the grounded theory intensive interviewing as a valuable and safe space to reflect upon their career progression.

6.2.4 Overview of the findings per phase

6.2.4.1 Phase I: Personal constructions of career progression

The repertory grids generated 1089 data items (responses) from 40 repertory grids. The initial coding of data items to personal construct codes generated 115 constructs and contrasts. Following the core-categorising procedural steps constructs and contrast were allocated to 12 categories. Closely related categories were clustered together into four themes. The final themes and categories of what constitutes career progression were consolidated to construct the women leaders’ shared mental model of career progression of others at The Bank (Figure 6.2). Four themes were identified as factors that the participants construed as contributing to successful career progression: Individual characteristics and skills, Work and career behaviours, Social capital, and Socio-political factors. Within these categories, at a personal construct level, the participants placed high importance on the constructs, Career ambition, Intrapreneurial drive, and Social relationships and networks in the context of career progression.

In constructing a shared mental model of the career progression of others, the women leaders leaned towards identifying constructs that are considered antecedents of
vertical career progression (Ng et al., 2005; Sok et al., 2011; Sools et al., 2007; Tharenou, 2001). These findings suggest that—using the lens of personal constructivism—the women leaders constructed the career progression of others as objective career success.

![Shared mental model of career progression](image)

**Figure 6.2** Shared mental model of career progression

### 6.2.4.2 Phase II: Social construction of career progression

The findings represent the collective’s co-construction of career progression. The participants undertook the collaborative analysis throughout the implementation of the Appreciative Inquiry method. During the Discovery stage, the themes representing the positive core of career progression were selected. The five themes selected by the participants to represent the positive core of women’s career progression were: Supportive manager, Receiving validation, Continue to learn and study, Space to grow, and Challenging role. The themes representing the positive core inspired a collective of dreams from which the provocative propositions and social architecture were constructed to give expression to the ideal future. Four actions were generated.
for women leaders’ career progression. The initiatives co-constructed by the participants were the actions through which women leaders hoped to be able to enact their career progression at The Bank. The actions (reproduced in Figure 6.3) were:

- Networking opportunities that are gender neutral and the establishment of a women’s forum to share knowledge and support
- Mentorship of women to increase business acumen
- Policy reviews for flexible working conditions and review of performance ratings for women on maternity leave
- Recognition to feel valued and respected and rewards by way of developmental programmes

Figure 6.3 Co-construction of women leaders’ actions for career progression
In co-constructing career progression these women leaders did not have a clear demarcation between work life and personal life or external and internal measurement as suggested by Hopkins and O’Neil (2007). Rather, in co-constructing career progression, they wove together the personal (for example, family commitments), the professional (for instance, breaking stereotypes), objective success (fair rewards and recognition), and internal success (protean career orientation).

6.2.4.3 Phase III: Constructivist grounded theory of career progression

The findings represent the women leaders’ construction of their own career progression based on their subjective lived experience. A conceptual model was constructed, grounded by the data structure, to represent the way in which these women leaders construed their career progression (Figure 6.4) The conceptual model postulates that the women leader’s Personal journey (consisting of the themes centrality of others and building a sense of self) interacts and affects her Path to progression (consisting of the themes starting a job, building a career, and making meaning), which is enacted and shaped by the Organisational landscape (consisting of the themes male-dominated culture and pervasive stereotyping).

The findings of the final phase of this study indicate a construction of career progression based on their lived experience leaning towards subjective career success where career progression:

- is enabled by the support and encouragement from others,
- is approached by a sense of self,
- is driven by a relational orientation,
- follows a job-career-meaning orientation,
- is enacted in a male dominated culture, and
- is constrained by gender stereotyping.
6.3 Concluding reflections of the findings of the study

The findings indicated that the lens through which one views women leaders’ construction of career progression determines the nature of the construction in terms of internal and/or external career. By linking the emergent themes to literature, conclusions were drawn about women’s construction of career progression. Using the lens of personal constructivism, women construed the career progression of others as predominantly that of objective career success, whereas using a social constructionist lens, the collective co-construction of career progression incorporated a rich, complex, and deeply intertwined relationship between the objective (external) career progression and the subjective career (internal) progression. However, the
construction of career progression based on the women leaders’ lived experience leaned towards that of subjective (internal) career progression. External career is measured by visible and quantifiable criteria, such as status level, salary and promotions whereas an internal or subjective career success is defined by the individual’s defined outcomes.

In examining the constructions of career progression, these women leaders viewed the hierarchical experience as the norm for career progression in their context. However, in agreement with the research conducted by Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), it appears that these women leaders have defined their own career progression differently. These authors stated “many women examined the opportunities, the road blocks, and possibilities, then forged their own approach…they rejected the concept of linear career progression, preferring instead to create non-traditional, self-crafted careers that suited their objectives, needs and life criteria” (p.108). It may be that in the way the women leaders in this study conceptualised their own career progression may be a closer fit to the definition of career success offered by Arthur et al. (2005) outlined earlier in this thesis: “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes in any point in a person’s work experiences over time” (p. 179). The notion of personally defined criteria, such as making a difference, is what defined success for these women leaders alongside the traditional model of objective career success.

Irrespective of the theoretical lens applied, the importance of the context in which women are embedded permeated these women leaders’ construction of career progression. For the purposes of examining this relationship to context, consideration is given to Schein’s (1984) organisational culture model with specific focus on the “deep culture” of an organisation. This model of organisational culture contains three levels of culture: artifacts (visible manifestation of culture, for example, dress code), values (espoused values, for example, emphasis of innovation), and basic assumptions (invisible, taken for granted perceptions and beliefs). The concept of the maintenance of deep culture in the basic assumptions of an organisation is particular salient in this study as consideration is given to the context in which these women leaders were embedded and were enacting their career progression.
At the foundational level, the constructions of career progression are built upon enabling support systems. For example, in the personal construction, social capital was construed as one of the most important contributors to successful progression. In this lens, women were construed to be at a disadvantage when considering relocation or taking up challenging opportunities for lack of the appropriate support at home. These women leaders called for support in the shape of policy reviews, mentorships and fairer performance review practices. Within the constructivist grounded theory approach, the theme of support, receiving or lacking, was a salient feature in the women leaders’ narratives of their career progression. Such support ranged from early school messages of positive encouragement to concrete support from line managers who afforded challenging opportunities that elevated the status of these women leaders. A common feature was the prevalence of influential female role models who storied new possibilities for achievement for their daughters, sisters, and nieces, beyond the parameters of the existing generation of women. Most certainly, concrete and emotional support received from spouses and extended family members was credited as an enabling factor to pursue more challenging work roles. In the workplace, support from line managers, peers and work colleagues were construed as a critical component in their career success.

An overlap in the construction of career progression emerged between the Personal Construct Theory lens and that of an Appreciative Inquiry approach. In the application of Personal Construct Theory, the predominance of constructs elicited in this phase of the study that are correlated to objective career success in empirical literature suggests that the participants’ shared mental model of career progression leans towards that of vertical career progression. In part, the finding of the Phase II, using the Appreciative Inquiry method also indicated a dimension of objective career success in the co-construction of career progression. In the appreciative accounts, the participants dreamed of ‘taking their seat at the table’ suggesting an orientation towards objective career success.

In the findings of the Appreciative Inquiry approach, vertical progression was enacted through flexible work policies allowing women to respond to work-life conflicts. Underlying this co-construction of career progression is the need to take care of family first before pursuing challenging opportunities in the organisation. This
approach to career progression is consistent with the concept of protean careers, where careers are characterised by self-directedness and personal values (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Success in a protean orientation according to Hall (1976) is driven by a psychological criterion pointing to subjective career success. Similarly, the constructivist grounded theory construction of career progression, pointed to an overwhelming construction of career progression as subjective career success. The value of career progression for these women leaders was constructed as the ability to make a meaningful difference to others, their families and the business. These findings suggested that subjective career success lay at the intersection between the Appreciative Inquiry and Constructivist grounded theory lens to career progression.

As recorded in Chapter 2, the Bank was historically a male-dominated environment within a male-dominated industry. In the construction of the career progression of others, these women leaders perceived men having an advantage due to their membership of Old Boys’ Club whereas women had to work harder than their male counterparts to achieve vertical career success. Using the social construction lens, the impact of the tacit norms, beliefs, and assumptions manifested in the collective dream for the removal of gender stereotypes and inclusionary networks. The male-dominant culture of The Bank was acutely foregrounded in the constructivist grounded theory approach. The lived experience of the women leaders indicated the basic assumptions of career progression were embedded and being maintained by the male-dominated organisational narrative that limited access to seniority through exclusionary networks and tacit norms that tended to discriminate against women. In accordance with these findings, there is evidence in literature that—at a macro-level—the organisational context has an influence on the career advancement of women (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Male-dominated organisations impact the career progression of women to senior level positions because, in such cultures, the norms of career progression are associated with traditional male model of career progression. The underrepresentation of women at the senior levels of management at The Bank corroborates O’Neil and Bilimoria (2005) contention that in male dominated environments women have a minority status at the highest levels of organisations.
6.4 Value and contribution of the study

The study contributed to literature on a methodological, theoretical and practical level.

The exploration of the constructions of career progression by women leaders from three methodological perspectives added new dimensions to the development of a more pluralistic view of the phenomenon. Further, this study has contributed on a methodological level by demonstrating how to apply three distinct research approaches in one study based on establishing scientific congruence. The study further demonstrated that the research foci determine the methodological choice.

Theoretically, the study moved away from universal theories towards three conceptual models grounded in emergent data underpinned by personal constructivism, social constructionism, and subjective constructivist approaches.

Practically, the methodical manner of reporting this research method may be of practical value to other researchers for research grounded in the foundations of constructivism and social constructionism. Further, the study offers organisations an opportunity to construct a dedicated path of career progression for women through policy making that takes into account the complexity of women leaders’ lives and multiple roles. The findings of this study suggest that women leaders may approach career progression from a relational perspective that takes others into consideration. In capturing women’s subjective experience of career progression the centrality of others was also illustrated as the women viewed themselves as embedded in broad social context. This view may assist in broadening the understanding of the practice of women’s career progression.

In the section that follows practical recommendations are made for organisations and women to proactively engage in the development of career progression.
6.5 Implications, recommendations and limitations

6.5.1 Implications for women

At the individual level, based on the findings, a number of strategies are proposed for women to actively engage in career advancement:

**Phase I:**
The findings of Phase I indicated that building of social capital emerged as a key contributor for career progression. Women are encouraged to adopt a proactive stance towards building networks and strategic relationships through various mechanisms: joining professional bodies, volunteering for strategic projects, and attending social events. Authors, Holton and Dent (2012) further suggest developing a visual representation or a network map to understand one’s existing network and creating a plan to develop relationships identified as key to achieve career aspirations.

**Phase II:**
Building on the participants’ feedback on the value of the Appreciative Inquiry workshop, I propose that women work together to create platforms in their context whereby gender stereotyping and challenge to discriminatory organisational policies form the subject of open discourse. Flowing from the participants’ experience of the workshop, the importance of women developing a forum in which women leaders can connect, share experiences and receive support was illustrated.

**Phase III:**
In their reflections during the Phase III intensive interviews, many participants highlighted in hindsight that they had not actively created a career plan. To this point, and the findings of the personal constructions of career progression, it is proposed that women actively engage in career planning by seeking coaching and identifying mentors to assist with career development.
6.5.2 Implications for organisations

The findings of this study have implications for performance management, leadership development, career development and coaching of women leaders. At the organisational level, a number of strategies are proposed whereby organisations can work towards breaking down structural barriers and assist women to progress to more senior positions. In an effort to retain the commitment of women leaders, it is suggested that human resource practitioners consider the ways in which women construe career progression. Largely, a need exists to incorporate a sense of subjective career success into the management of career progression for women. The findings of Phase II indicated that women leaders seek career opportunities, be they vertical or any other challenging opportunities that fit their lives. This means that organisations seeking to advance women should implement policies that embrace women’s whole lives. For instance, traditional reward-based systems based on position do not take into account women’s lived experience. In this regard, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) advocate against a one-size fit all reward system. Rather, these authors suggest that organisations offer an allowance for family benefits allowing the individual to choose which benefit suits them best. When considering the socially co-constructed actions generated during Phase III, these women leaders were seeking an alternative and fair reward system that did not penalise them for being mothers.

Other suggestions for practice arising from the findings of the three phases are:

**Phase I:**
- Provide gender neutral networking to assist women to build social capital.
- Encourage women to develop their ambitions towards senior leadership by providing coaching and mentor support.

**Phase II:**
- Review current work policies to assist in the balancing of women’s multiple roles.
- Review unfair performance rating procedures whilst on, or due to, maternity leave taken during a review period.
In view of the success of the workshop it is proposed that organisations offer leadership development interventions that incorporate in the methodology the lived experience of women leaders.

**Phase III:**

- The participants’ experience of the face-to-face interviews suggests that women have a need to discuss their experiences, views and career development. To support women’s career advancement organisations may benefit from providing coaching and mentoring as social factors were highlighted as central to the career progression of women leaders.

- Culture and context matters. Whilst changing discriminatory policies are an important step, it is also necessary to review the norms deeply embedded in the culture that maintain gender-based inequality. In an effort to challenge these norms, it is recommended that a series of focus groups or workshops incorporating both genders be conducted to address gender discrimination. Similar to recommendations for open dialogue of gender dynamics offered by O’Neil, Hopkins and Sullivan (2011), the purpose of these sessions would be to (a) discuss the impact of the pervasive stereotypes, (b) highlight the exclusionary networks, and (c) to create an awareness of how gender practically “plays out” in the organisation.

**6.5.3 Recommendations for research**

Future research can broaden the understanding of women’s career progression. Whilst the focus of this study was the construction of career progression by women leaders, the findings indicated gender stereotyping as a barrier to career advancement. One area that may be useful is a study of men’s constructions of women’s career progression to understand their underlying beliefs and assumptions regarding women’s career advancement. Such research findings could be utilised as a basis for discussion on the differences or similarities between the genders with respect to stereotypes, assumptions, beliefs, and impacts on women’s career advancement.
In this study, the Appreciative Inquiry workshop produced practical initiatives co-constructed by participants for career progression. Additional research may build on this knowledge, using a longitudinal research design to examine the impact of sustained participatory action taken by women as a collective in addressing the challenges they face in their career progression.

The constructivist grounded theory indicated that the women of this study appeared to be assigned the role of taking care of business. In their research of gender specific predictors of career success, Ng et al. (2005) suggested that women tend to have lower career expectations than men and are thus satisfied with their career opportunities and progress. One further direction for future research is to examine how women could be empowered to challenge the status quo in male dominated environments so as to allow women to determine their own agenda for career progression.

My research did not differentiate between the different races or cultures of the women leaders in their construction of career progression. Given the transformation of the corporate landscape in South Africa, there is a strong need for a specific focus on African women and their career progression.

6.5.4 Limitations of this research

The administration of the repertory grid by means of face-to-face interviews for 82 participants was not only a logistical challenge to implement but also time consuming. Data were collected over a period of six weeks. A recommendation for future research is the application of the repertory grid in a group format (Jankowicz, 2004), most especially for a large number of participants.

The Appreciative Inquiry method was favourably experienced by the women leaders. The method had a high immediate impact at a motivational and participatory level resulting in the generation of five actionable initiatives. To ensure implementation, a champion is required to inculcate the initiatives. The limitation of the research process is that as a researcher, it was not my role to be that champion. It is
recommended that research utilising the Appreciative Inquiry method include a
process whereby the momentum of the process can be maintained and to see the
initiatives actioned.

Within the constructivistic grounded theory method Charmaz (2014) recommended a
comparative, iterative, and interactive approach to data collection and analysis. A
limitation of this study was the time constraints placed on the collection of data by
The Bank, thus limiting the possibility of returning to The Bank to engage in
theoretical sampling.

Foster (2015) argues against a so-called “corporate feminism” approach which
focuses only on the women who are in senior leadership and excluding the working-
class women. Such corporate feminism does not give voice to the majority. As such,
hers criticism speaks to a limitation of this study as the focus was on women in
leadership and excluded the majority of women in the lowest echelons of The Bank.

6.6 Personal reflection

Coming to the end of this research journey, I have three overarching reflections to
share with the reader. The first reflection relates to the research journey. Since the
completion of my masters in 2005, I had the intrinsic desire to complete a doctoral
degree for a personal sense of accomplishment. In 2014, I took a breath and
commenced the process. My proposal was accepted in August 2014 and the research
site confirmed their participation a week after proposal acceptance. The interest from
the site and the participants was overwhelming. My initial expectation was that I
would be fortunate to have 15 participants, at best. Bearing in mind that this is a
qualitative study, the number of volunteers posed a challenge. The leadership at The
Bank had left the final selection of the participants to me. In the end, I included all
those that volunteered and were eligible according to The Bank’s criteria. The true
challenge of the numbers and of the sequential research design only became apparent
when it came to writing up the research. Despite the volume and complexity of the
research design, my reflection is that I have learnt to trust the unfolding process. As I
exhale, I realise there is truth in the cliché, “Everything works out in the end, if it hasn’t worked out, it’s not the end.”

The second reflection relates to the participants of this study who generously gave, not only of their time, but gave freely their precious life stories. It is a privilege to be allowed a window into someone’s life. I was trusted with the most intimate of thoughts, desires, and beliefs. Due to the research design, in three phases, I became a part of the lives of these participants, most especially during the interviews for the final phase of this study. I shared in their joys, frustration, hopes, dreams, pain, tears, and laughter. At times, the experiences of these women leaders reflected my own lived experience as a senior women leader. I found myself so immersed in their frustrations that I had difficulty separating my role as researcher from that of champion of women. My reflection is that I hope I have done “right by them.” I hope I have honoured their stories and experiences in a manner befitting their lived reality.

The third reflection relates to the question most people ask doctorate students, which is: “Why are you doing this?” In my experience, the more I was asked the question, the more I was required to attend to the root reason. My passion to see more women leaders at the top echelons of the corporate sector was a driving force. My underlying reason for this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how women constructed the idea of career progression and how that construction may impact progression. However, the root reason lies in the life of my beloved mother, Maria Eugenia Carvalho. She was born in 1937 to very poor parents in rural Portugal. The extent of her formal education was a 1940s grade 6. Despite the lack of formal studies, my mother pursued learning through alternative means. She taught herself to speak broken English. In the age of television, she filled many books with knowledge she had gained from various television shows. Figure 6.5 is a sample from one such book.
My mother had cancer but she did not let that stop her from taking up an opportunity the Portuguese government offered to all citizens in 2009, regardless of age, to complete a Grade 10. And so, at age 72, riddled with cancer, she attended night school. She inspired women in the village, younger than her (some of whom are my cousins) to join her. She died without completing her certificate. This doctorate is for her.

6.7 Concluding reflection

A concluding note: The journey to complete this thesis was in parallel with the American presidential elections. In July 2016, Hillary Clinton’s nomination as the Democratic Party’s first female presidential candidate made history in the United States of America and the world. In the end, she did not win the presidential election. Currently, political analysts and mainstream media are still analysing the reasons for her defeat. One narrative that has emerged is that, seemingly, patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and sexual discrimination remain entrenched. Perhaps the male-dominated culture trumps all. It is fitting, therefore, that I conclude with a pertinent phrase from Hillary Clinton’s concession speech (Clinton, November 2016) “I know we have not shattered that highest and hardest ceiling but some day someone will and hopefully sooner than we might think right now.”


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doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.03.007


doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2003.11.003


ANNEXURES
CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I, the undersigned, hereby give written consent to be a research participant in a qualitative research project regarding the constructions of power and authority by women leaders in corporate environment.

I undertake to provide the researcher, Ms Ann Carvalho, to the best of my ability with the most knowledgeable and informative perspectives pertaining to the research topic.

It has been explained to me, and I accept what the research entails, that I engage in voluntary participation and that I can withdraw from the research project at any time should I wish.

I do understand that the researcher will not disclose my identity at any time and that a pseudonym will be used throughout the research project.

I do agree to the tape recording of the interview(s) as well as any written notes which the researcher deem necessary and was given the assurance that the recorded data will be stored under adequate security. After all the data has been used for the purpose stated herein, the researcher has undertaken that the data will be destroyed.

I further agree that the data collected may be used by the researcher in fulfilment of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, Industrial Psychology.

I, Ann Carvalho, in my capacity as researcher, agree not to exercise any power relationship over the research participant but instead wish to maintain a mutually respected and co-operative, non-manipulative relationship with the research participant throughout the research project.
We, (researcher and research participant) agree to meet at mutually agreeable times and communicate (via e-mail, telephone or short message sending) should it be deemed necessary.

**SIGNED**

Name of the research participant: __________________________

Contact details:  
(cell) __________________________
(tel. w) __________________________
(e-mail) __________________________

This agreement was signed on this day ________________ of ___________ 2014 at __________________________

Signature: __________________________  __________________________
Research Participant  Researcher

Contact details of Promoter/Supervisor Professor Freddie Crous:
Tel: 011 559 3447
E-mail: fcrous@uj.ac.za

Contact details of researcher Ms Ann Carvalho:
Tel: 082 854 4582
E-mail: anncarvalho@global.co.za
Dear Women in The Bank,

In line with our four pillars of Transformation which are recruitment, development, promotion and retention, I am pleased to advise you that The Bank’s Exco have approved a “Women in Leadership” Research Project. Ann Carvalho in registered student with the University of Johannesburg will be conducting this Research Project.

This is a first for The Bank, and we look forward to gaining insight from this survey, helping us understand and support Women in Leadership in The Bank.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research project is to gain an understanding of the “lived experience of women in leadership” and to empower women in our organisation to seek greater opportunities in leadership positions.

How will participants be selected?

In order to be considered for this Women-Only leadership experience we invite you to complete a questionnaire [link below] that asks about your leadership experience to date. The questionnaire should take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Deadline date for completion of this survey: Friday 10 October 2014

Once the survey is completed the Researcher (Ann Carvalho) will select and invite 60 Women in The Bank to participate in this project.

What is the process and how much time will it take?

The three-phase Women-Only leadership experience will entail the following:

Phase 1: An individual face-to-face confidential interview with the researcher. Approx. 1½ hr. Scheduled for October/November 2014.

Phase 2: Attend a one-day leadership development workshop facilitated by Professor Crous from University of Johannesburg. The workshop will Focus on developing your efficacy as a business leader. Scheduled for Jan/Feb 2015.

Phase 3: A follow-up individual face-to-face interview to track individual progress and development as a leader. Approx. 1½hr. Scheduled for March/April 2015.
Are my answers confidential?

Only the researcher from the University of Johannesburg has access to your responses. Your confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

What are the benefits to me?

There is a direct benefit to you personally for participating in this study. You will be offered the opportunity to reflect on your leadership experience, increase self-awareness and discuss issues that are unique to women leaders in the business arena.

The information you provide will enrich current knowledge regarding women in leadership and enable The Bank to better support the career advancement of women in the organisation.

What if I do not want to participate?

Your participation in this study and program is completely voluntary and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty.

Attend the Women in Leadership Orientation Session

Should you be selected to participate by the researcher from the University of Johannesburg, you will be invited to attend an Orientation session on the 24th October from 08h30 – 10h00. This session will provide you with further information regarding this three-phase leadership experience for women.

Link to Survey

Please click on the link below to be directed to the short questionnaire:
http://surveys.ommenicor.co.za/cgi-bin/survey.pl?survey=AnnCBankRsch

We look forward to your participation.

Kind and warm regards

HR Executive
DECLARATION OF INTENT: ETHICS IN RESEARCH

Researcher: Ana Corvalho

Department/centre/institute: Faculty of Management / Dept of Ind Psych / UJ

Title of research project/field/degree: Constructions of Power and Authority by Women in a Corporate Environment / Doctor of Philosophy in Industrial Psychology

Type of project:
- Doctoral degree: X
- Masters degree: 
- Contract research: 
- Other (please specify): Client: 

I intend to familiarise myself and comply with the specifics of the following ethical obligations as contained in the faculty’s or department’s guidelines for ethics in research:

1. Conducting value-adding research
2. Applying relevant research and reporting methodologies
3. Where applicable, ensuring that those under my supervision also adhere to these obligations.

I intend to familiarise myself and comply with the specifics of the following ethical research principles as contained in the faculty’s guidelines for ethics in research:

1. Achieve objectivity and maintain integrity in my research
2. Record and disclose my own data
3. Follow ethical publishing practices
4. Be accountable to society
5. Be sensitive to and respect my ‘subjects’ right to privacy
6. Be sensitive to and respect my subjects’ right to anonymity and confidentiality
7. Be sensitive to and respect my subjects’ right to full disclosure about the research (informed consent)
8. Protect my subjects from harm (physical, psychological, emotional)
9. Protect the integrity of the environment.

* Subjects = individuals, groups of individuals or organisations.

SIGNATURE

04th August 2014

DATE
CONSTRUCTIONS OF PROGRESSION TO SENIOR LEADERSHIP
BY WOMEN IN A CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

CASE STUDY

THE REPERTORY GRID QUESTIONNAIRE

2014

Administered by: Ann Carvalho
STEP 1: Demographics

- Respondent number: ___________________
- Date: ___________________
- Time: ___________________
- Grade: ___________________

STEP 2: Confidentiality and Positioning

- Background and Academic purposes positioning
- Ethics, declarations and confirmations

STEP 3: Identification of the Repertory Grid Elements

- In the corporate context, please name 3 people that have progressed in their careers?

  1. ____________________________
  2. ____________________________
  3. ____________________________

  (What are their titles & tenure at the bank or at that position)

- In the corporate context, please name 2 people that have not progressed in their careers?

  4. ____________________________
  5. ____________________________

  (What are their titles & tenure at the bank or at that position)

STEP 4: Repertory Grid Interview Exercise

- Please look at the three names and tell me something that two of them have in common that differs from the third in terms of progressing in their careers?
  
  o What do they have in common?
  o What is the difference of the 3rd?

Can you see any other combinations of two that differs from the 3rd?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combination</th>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Singleton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annexure E: Participant workbook

GROWING WOMEN LEADERS
AT THE BANK

Please complete:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCOVERY

1. Tell me about a time when you flourished/grew in your career?
   
   For this example: describe in detail who was involved; what did you do to grow in your career; who had a positive impact on your career; what were the conditions and environment that enabled you to thrive.
   
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
2. a. What do you value about:

   i. Our organisation, The Bank?

   ii. Your colleagues?

   iii. Your customers?

   iv. The senior leadership at The Bank?

   v. Yourself?
b. What is the single most important thing that “gives life” to The Bank without which this company would not be the same?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Imagine you had three wishes that would enable you to reach your full career potential. What would those wishes be?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
DREAM

1. On your own:
   Imagine that it is five years from now. And you are flourishing/growing professionally. Describe your career progression. (Keep the themes presented in mind)
2. In your group, discuss:

It is still five years from now. And women in The Bank are flourishing in all areas of work life including leadership. What opportunities did women seize upon in order to thrive?

(Keep the themes presented in mind).

Use the flipchart paper provided to capture the key points of your groups' discussion.

3. Visual representation of the dream

Collaborate with your group to craft a creative collage about women flourishing in their careers at The Bank.
DESIGN

1. Provocative Proposition (Possibility Statement)
Your task is to create a provocative proposition about women growing in their careers by capitalising on the opportunities at The Bank.

A provocative proposition is a short statement that bridges the best of "what is" with "what might be".

Checklist for provocative proposition:

➢ Is it provocative? Does it stretch and challenge?
➢ Is it grounded? Are there examples/the
➢ Is it desired? Do we want it as a preferred future?
➢ Is it stated in affirmative bold terms? Perhaps a catchphrase?
➢ Is it stated in the present tense? As if it is already happening?

As women in leadership at The Bank,
4. Social Architecture:

Your task as a group is to create a list of what needs to be put into place to make your dream of women flourishing at The Bank becomes a reality? How can you collectively craft your work world in order to fulfill this dream?

Consider:

➢ Your context
➢ Collective strengths and interests
➢ How can you action opportunities optimally and authentically?

Use the flipchart paper provided to capture the key points of your groups' discussion.
DELIBERATION

1. Given the dream, complete:

I commit myself to:

I offer the following:

I require the following:
FEEDBACK TO RESEARCHER

I value your feedback and comments, please take a few moments to share your thoughts.

What are your overall impressions of the workshop?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What did you value about today?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What is your one “stand-out” moment of today?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank-you for your willingness to share your thoughts and feelings with me.
Subject: RE: Question with respect to Theoretical Sampling
Date: Tuesday 02 August 2016 at 7:38:46 PM South Africa Standard Time
From: Kathy Charmaz
To: Ann Carvalho

Dear Ann,

Your solution sounds like the best you can do under the circumstances.

Best,

Kathy

Kathy Charmaz
Director, Faculty Writing Program
Professor of Sociology
Sociology Department
Sonoma State University
1801 E. Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928
USA

From: Ann Carvalho [mailto:anncarvalho@global.co.za]
Sent: Tuesday, August 02, 2016 6:29 AM
To: Kathy Charmaz
Subject: Question with respect to Theoretical Sampling

Dear Prof Charmaz,

I am reaching out for some clarification, if you have the time, I would appreciate your assistance.

I had the privilege of attending your workshop in Pisa, Italy this year.
I am the student from South Africa, that approached you with some questions with regards to the interviews I had completed.
My research interest is the construction of career progression by women leaders in an organisation.

Please could you assist with respect to “Theoretical sampling”. I am aware that this refers to gathering more data to refine tentative categories.

The issue I have is: due to the timeframe afforded to me by the research site I conducted 66 interviews without being able to engage in the cyclical process of data collection and analysis.
In between interviews I wrote memo’s about thoughts, ideas and questions I was wondering about at the time of the interviews.
I am not able to return to the research site to collect further data. In this regard, as I code begin coding and meming would I be able to interrogate the remaining interviews to illuminate the categories?
Or am I “way off” in my understanding?

Thanking you in advance.
Ann Carvalho