Gordon Institute of Business Science
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The antecedents of career success in corporate South Africa: views of black African professionals

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A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

Date: 01 December 2020

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to establish the antecedents of career success for black Africans in corporate South Africa. Black Africans are underrepresented in top management positions but make up the majority of the economically active population. The purpose was, therefore, to study other black South Africans who have managed to achieve a certain level of success in order to understand the factors that contributed to that success.

There are four theories that are used to underpin the study namely i) the human capital theory ii) the social capital theory iii) the social cognitive career theory and iv) the equity theory.

This was an exploratory and qualitative study that used semi-structured interviews to glean valuable insights from the data. It was an inductive process that followed the interpretivist philosophy. Sixteen black Africans applying their trade in corporate South Africa at different occupational levels were interviewed.

The key findings that came out of the study were both endogenous and exogenous. The endogenous findings included having cognitive ability, having the right type of personality and possessing ambition. The exogenous findings included the importance of having a mentor, a sponsor and developing and nurturing the social and professional networks at one's disposal.

This research will make contributions to the vast body of knowledge that the Basic Education Department has, to assist in focusing on the development of crucial learner traits and qualities at an early age. Organisations in corporate South Africa can also tailor their graduate programs to incorporate some of the findings of the study. Lastly, the study will benefit black Africans already employed in corporate South Africa, to revise their career growth strategies to include some of the findings that will benefit them.

The limitations of the study are that the researcher is not trained and is a black African employed in corporate South Africa and therefore their unconscious biases might have been projected during the process.

Keywords

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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01 December 2020

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

This research seeks to investigate the antecedents of career success of black Africans in corporate South Africa. This is against the backdrop of the disproportionate representation of black Africans in top management positions when compared to their white counterparts, where black Africans represent most of the economically active population with no proportional representation in top management positions (Department of Labour, 2018-2019). Whereas the representation of white people in top management positions is disproportional to their economically active population (Department of Labour, 2018-2019). For this reason, the juxtaposition was between the black and white races only as they represent the most numbers in the economically active population and top management positions respectively.

The research will be used as a blueprint and guide to assist, mainly black Africans, to navigate the South African corporate ladder, learning from the experience of other black Africans, since the statistics point to this area as one for concern.

1.2 Definition of the problem

The route to leadership positions in business can be difficult for both men and women depending on a wide range of aspects such as organisational values and culture, historic perceptions of management positions and inherent prejudices within the organisation (Noback, Broersma, & van Dijk, 2016). Certain structural factors within organisations determine whether an individual will be success or not (Kameny, et al., 2014). Old practices are still used in organisations that declare to value diversity, to exclude groups that were previously discriminated against (Kameny, et al., 2014).

It is, therefore, incumbent upon all individuals entering the job market, to ensure that they have a plan for how they want their careers to unfold and ensure that they prepare and position themselves for all opportunities that may come their way. This will require investment in human capital, which is the skills and talents that employees possess (Wright & Andreea, 2020). Since a person will always require others to assist in their career growth, they will need to improve their social capital. Social capital theory speaks about how one can benefit from the building and nurturing of social relationships (Gelderblom, 2018). Lastly, for one to be successful in their career, they need to possess a certain level of self-belief. The social cognitive career theory speaks to how self-efficacy can lead to success in one's career.

The South African landscape presents a picture of corporate success along racial lines. Of the economically active population in South Africa, black Africans represent 78.8% while their white counterparts represent only 9% as shown in the table below.

Table 1: National EAP by population and gender groups

NATIONAL EAP BY POPULATION AND GENDER GROUP*						
MALE			FEMALE			TOTAL
AM	African Male	42.8%	AF	African Female	36.0%	78.8%
CM	Coloured Male	5.2%	CF	Coloured Female	4.4%	9.6%
IM	Indian Male	1.7%	IF	Indian Female	1.0%	2.6%
WM	White Male	5.1%	WF	White Female	3.9%	9.0%
TOTAL		54.7%	TOTAL		45.3%	100.0%

Source: (Commission for Employment Equity 2018-2019)

However, white people occupy 66.5% of top management positions, while black Africans only occupy 15.1% in corporate South Africa (Department of Labour, 2018-2019). This is depicted in the graph shown below.

Figure 1: Top management by population group (all employers)
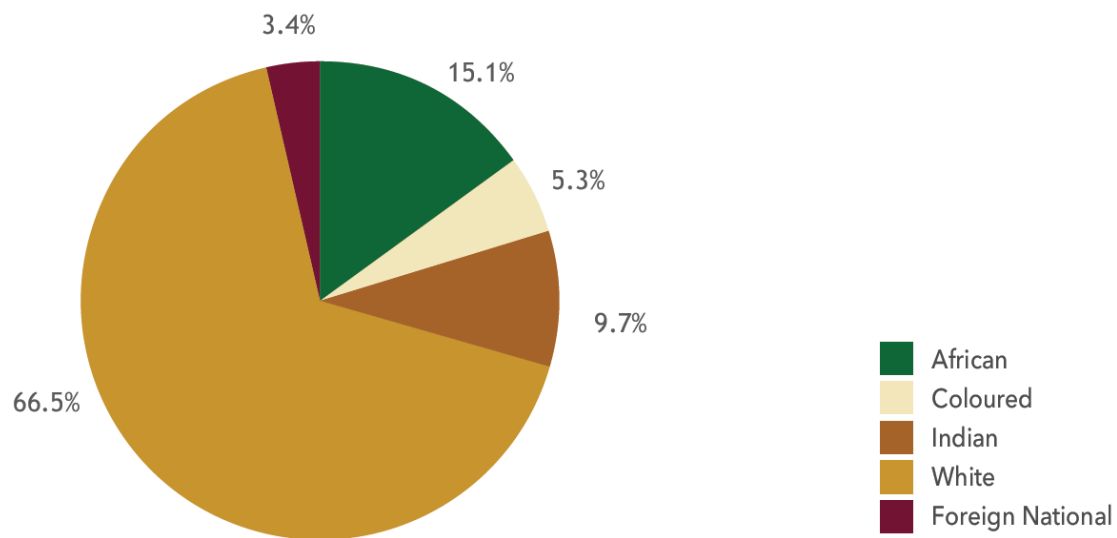
Source: (Commission for Employment Equity 2018-2019)

The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 (EEA) was enacted to redress the inequitable practices of the past and to ensure that unfair labour practices are eliminated in organisations. Systemic discrimination against black people kept them in menial jobs and hampered their progress and career success. The goal of the EEA is to ensure that, at all occupational levels, the economic active population is representative of the demographics of the country. When one compares the public and the private sector below, it evident that the white population group in management positions in the private sector is nearly eight times that of their economically active population, whereas in the public sector the ratio of black and white people is more proportional. Thus, a lot should be done in the private sector to absorb more black Africans into top management positions.

Figure 2: Top management – government and private sector by population
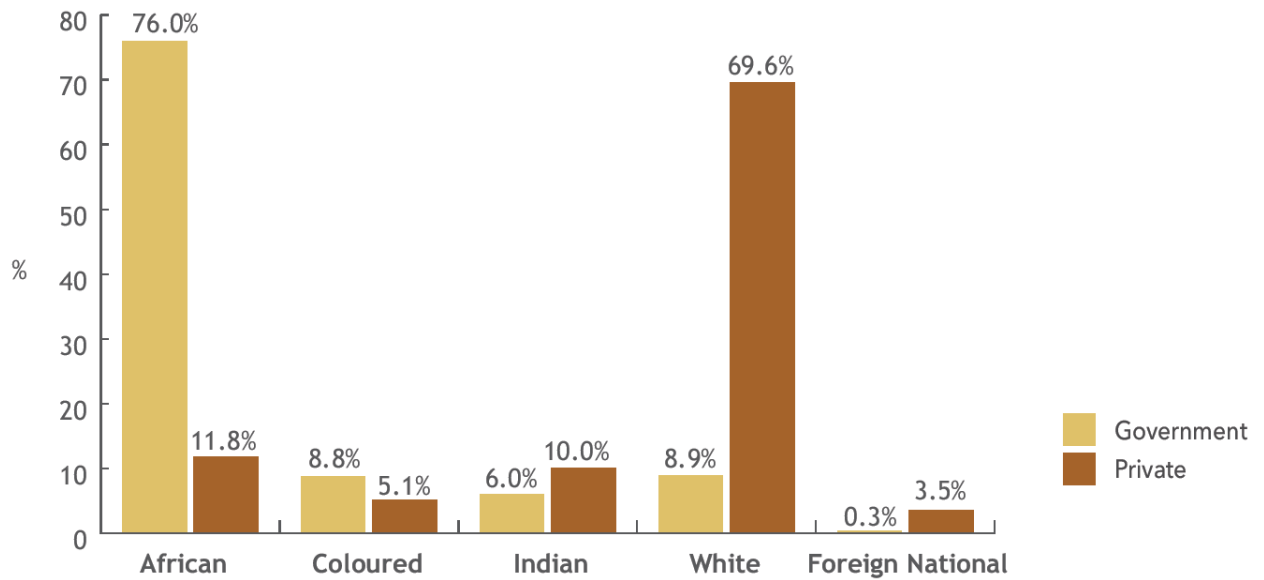
Source: (Commission for Employment Equity 2018-2019)

The disproportionate representation of black people in leadership positions in corporate South Africa suggests that attaining career success, for black Africans in particular, is more difficult compared to the white population. The focus on the black and white population is motivated by the fact that the black population contributes the most to the economically active population (78.8%), and the white population contributes the most to the number of people occupying top management positions (66.5%).

1.2 Purpose of research

The gap in the literature pertains to several factors that are listed as possible determinants of career success, however; the studies do not explicitly state the combination of factors for the respondents (Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, 2017). Individuals will not ascend to top management through the same channels or through the use of similar combinations of factors. It would have, therefore, been helpful to understand the common combination of factors that have been responsible for career success for some individuals.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to offer key insights and a possible framework of the endogenous and exogenous factors that determine career success. These factors can also be used by other black professionals to progress through corporate South Africa. Black professionals offered what, in their opinion, are the key antecedents that have led to their success, which may provide insights into why, so few black people have proportionally grown in their career journeys compared to white people. These insights can be used by others to also succeed.

1.3 Objectives

This research aimed to utilise semi-structured interviews to uncover insights from participants who have managed to attain a certain level of success in corporate South Africa. It was important to uncover and understand factors that have contributed to success, and once gleaned can be utilised by future generations.

However, it was not only important to understand the factors that have contributed to the success of black Africans in corporate South Africa, but equally important to understand the stumbling blocks that have led to the disproportionate representation at top management level. This research will contribute to the transformation of corporate South Africa at all occupational levels, addressing the business need for more inclusivity and a workforce that is demographically representative of the country. The research will also contribute valuable insights to academia in terms of antecedents of career success and barriers that black Africans face in corporate South Africa.

1.4 Scope of research

The scope of the research is limited black South Africans who currently or have in the past applied their trade in corporate South Africa and managed to achieve a certain level of success. This is because the disproportional representation in top management is within the South African context where black South Africans are the most affected. Whether the individual is still active or not, the experience they would have received

when they applied their trade will still be valuable. They will be able to offer valuable advice about how to navigate corporate South Africa in order to make it to the top.

1.5 Contribution of research

The main contribution that this research will make is to black Africans who are starting out in their careers in corporate South Africa, as a guide on how to navigate the journey to the top. Over time, the research can contribute in address the disproportionate representation of black Africans in top management positions.

The research will also contribute to organisations incorporate South Africa, should there be any structural barriers that black Africans face more of compared to their counterparts, to address and correct those.

Government will also benefit from understating if there are barriers related to current policy decisions or legislation that can be addressed to correct any barriers.

Lastly, the research will make valuable contributions to literature within the context of South Africa, given its unique history.

1.6 Conclusion

The chapter introduced and defined the problem that is being researched. The objectives and scope were also clearly outlined, which will make contributions to academia, business and government.

The rest of the research report is outlined as follows:

- Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the study. This section also introduces literature that has been written on the topic and gaps that need to be addressed.
- Chapter 3 outlines research questions, and the associated propositions put forward.

- Chapter 4 outlines the appropriate research methodology to address the all elements of the research.
- Chapter 5 presents the results emerging from the interviews conducted with all participants.
- Chapter 6 presents the results will be discussed, considering the literature and the implications thereof. Also discussed is whether the research questions are sufficiently addressed.
- Chapter 7 outlines the overall conclusions and makes recommendations for future research on similar topics. These findings will also have implications for business and government.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is conducted not only to demonstrate understanding of the topic but also to discuss theories related to the topic (Hart, 2018). In chapter 1, the context and the background of the research was introduced, and the benefits thereof explained. In this section of the literature review, the theoretical underpinnings and the lens through which the study will be viewed, will be outlined in detail.

The literature was sourced from peer reviewed journals from database such as Ebsco Host, Sage and Google scholar. The relevant constructs on the antecedents of career success were used to search for the applicable literature.

2.2 Context of the environment

2.2.1 South Africa background

South Africa went through an oppressive system of Apartheid that was legislated in 1948 and ended in 1994 when the first democratic elections took place (Ellis, 2019). It was a racial ideology that subjected non-Europeans to abject discrimination and denied the majority black population social, political and economic freedom (Dlamini, Tesfamichael, & Mokhele, 2020). This exhaustively discriminatory law ensured that education was restricted, and that segregation of the races was enforced (Glaser, 2015).

Segregation in South Africa was fuelled by concept known as sanitation syndrome, which describes the irrational panic of white people, associating black people with crime, filth and disease (Maylam, 1995). Residential racial segregation assisted the Apartheid government to control the labour used to build the country, but also to lay claim to industrial land on which the economy of the country would be built (Maylam, 1995). There was a destruction of mainly black and Indian communities when prime land was

expropriated for the purposes of business activities (Maylam, 1995). The segregation was made legal through the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which restricted the movement of black people to the cities, and then later the Group Areas Act of 1950, which allocated residential and business districts to different races (Maylam, 1995).

One of the key acts that were passed to cement the inequality for years to come, was the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Christie & Collins, 1982). Bantu education was a substandard education system that was developed by the apartheid government, as part of the separate development ideology, to entrench the social and political inequalities between the races (McKeever, 2017). The purpose of the act was to create and education system of subservience where black Africans would be trained to be servants and that they are racially inferior so as to accept cultural domination (Tomlin, 2016).

The remnants of the Apartheid system have transcended into democratic South Africa in the form of racial inequality, especially that of income distribution (Van der berg, 2010). South Africa is regarded as an upper-middle class country but when social indicators such as life expectancy, education and others are analysed, it is more comparable to lower-middle class countries (Van der berg, 2010). This means that opportunities and resources in South Africa are not equally distributed and while a small number of high income earners increase the average income in the country, this does not trickle down and impact the social indicators (Van der berg, 2010).

The inequality and poverty in South Africa can be attributed to the racial discrimination that was experienced during Apartheid (Van der berg, 2010). The foundation for the economic exclusion of the majority black people in South African, and the patterns of privilege created by racial discrimination, was laid during the Apartheid regime, and even further during British rule (Van der berg, 2010). The exclusion of black people from economic activity over the years, has led to a stark difference in the income levels of specifically black and white as demonstrated in the Kernel density curves of income distribution (Van der berg, 2010).

Figure 3: Kernel densities: Income distribution by race, 2005
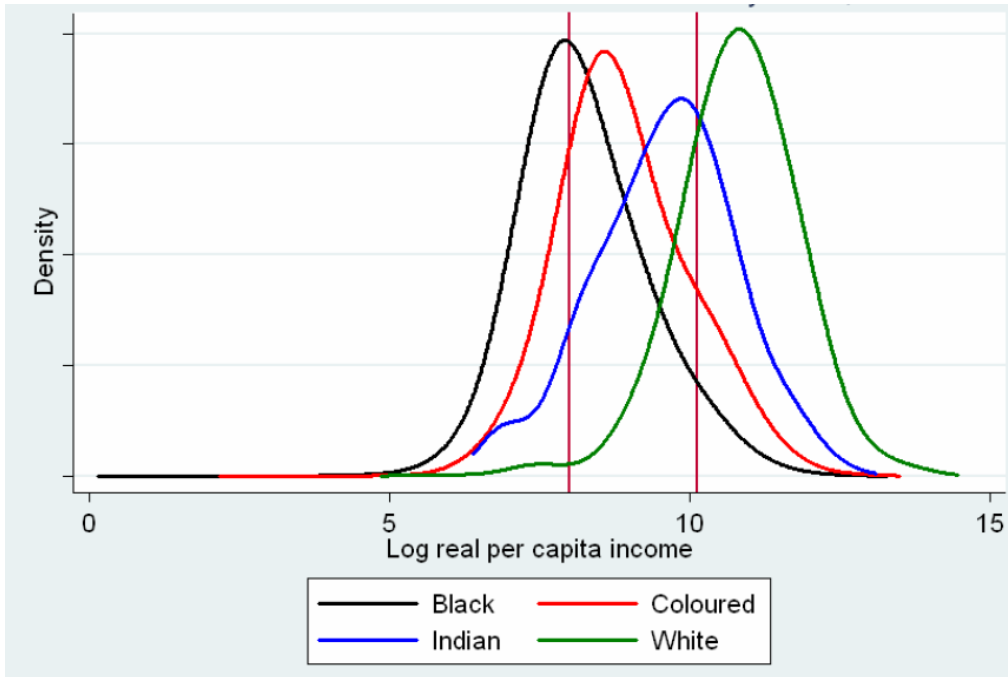
Source: (Van der berg, 2010)

With the abolition of the Apartheid system in early 1990s, the new democratic government introduced new programs aimed at reducing inequality and give equal access to opportunity (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007). There exists a large contingent of white South Africans who are still resistant to programs of wealth redistribution and equal access to opportunity as this represents the diminishing of the privileges they have enjoyed for an extended period of time (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007). Policies that address quotas on education, land restitution and as affirmative action are viewed in a negative light by some White South Africans (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2007).

2.2.2 Corporate South Africa

The environment of the research is corporate South Africa and therefore it is important to give context on the environment. South Africa is one of the engines of growth for the economic growth of Africa, but only contributing around 10% of the continent's population (Van Wyk & Dahmer, 2004). As one of the leading emerging markets, South Africa offers business environment that is modern in terms of technology, infrastructure, financial services and others (Van Wyk & Dahmer, 2004).

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, it embarked on a transformation project which sought to address the imbalances in the political and economic spheres (Van Wyk & Dahmer, 2004). The ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), looked to liberalise the economy to make it more competitive, attract investments and make international trade easier (Van Wyk & Dahmer, 2004).

Corporate South Africa employs many South Africans and to be able to form an opinion on how it operates, it is important to understand not only its structure but the history of the country within which it operates (Page & Shimeles, 2015).

2.2.3 Affirmative action

Affirmative is not a concept that is exclusive to South Africa, it has also been applied in other parts of the world such as the United States of America, as a social inclusion mechanism (Matambo & Ani, 2015). The purpose of affirmative action is to address the racial inequalities that were caused by the discriminatory policies of the past, through the positive discrimination of the previously advantaged individuals (Matambo & Ani, 2015).

For the South African context and the purposes of this research, affirmative action is defined as all the steps that are taken to ensure that people from designated groups are given the opportunity to be equitably represented at all occupational levels, granted that they are suitably qualified (Matambo & Ani, 2015). Designated groups include

disadvantaged and black (African, Indian, Coloured, women) individuals who were previously discriminated against (Matambo & Ani, 2015).

Social inclusion refers to the inclusion of previously disadvantaged individuals into the social, political and economic spheres (Gururaj, et al., 2020). The concept of social inclusion seeks to provide an answer to the question of why inequalities exist to begin with and to try and carve out a plan that will level the playing field (Gururaj, et al., 2020).

The implementation of affirmative action policies is a priority in South Africa. The training and development of black managers to occupy managerial positions in organisations, is key to the South African government (Jinabhai, 2004). There has been a lot of concern around the process of developing skilled black managers to fill managerial roles in corporate South Africa, as some black managers are used as tokens rather than skilled and qualified personnel with authority (Jinabhai, 2004). Although the training and development of black managers has become a strategic imperative for organisations to progress, the rate of implementation has been slow (Jinabhai, 2004).

A lot of companies are not forthcoming about information pertaining the implementation of affirmative action within their organisations (Jinabhai, 2004). Few organisations have taken steps to train and develop black managers for managerial positions since the Employment Equity Act has been enacted (Jinabhai, 2004). Examples of South African companies that benefited from the development of black managers and overall implementation of affirmative action are Eskom, the Development Bank of South Africa and African Life (Jinabhai, 2004).

2.3 Theoretical underpinnings

2.3.1 Human capital theory

This theory outlines that a person is likely to progress vocationally and in society when they are better educated (Lauder, 2015). It seeks to explain how the investment made in a human resource, through education and training, translates into an individual

becoming a form of capital capable of contributing to economic growth and development (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004).

The theory came into prominence in the 1950's when the residual growth in the United States' economic growth could not be explained through the four means of production namely, land, capital, human resources and entrepreneurship (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004). Therefore, education as a tool to contribute to economic growth, received a lot of attention in the field of economics (Becker & Woessmann, 2009).

The theory helps to explain the upward mobility of individuals and assumes that organisations hire employees on merit, that is mainly provided, among others, by education and training. Although the theory provides a framework from which to assess the human capital factor in black Africans, and although there is consensus amongst the writers on its definition and importance, it however, fails to explain the slow pace of ascendance into management positions for black Africans.

2.3.2 Social capital theory

The social capital theory relates to the benefits that accrue from social relationships that one possesses (Gelderblom, 2018). The theory states the possibility for people to work together in order to achieve a common and mutually beneficial goal, despite the fact that humans are inherently selfish beings (Gelderblom, 2018). Social networks put resources that belong to the associates within the network, at the disposal of one to have access to (Portes, 1998). Portes (1998) further posits that social networks do not germinate on their own, they need to be nurtured through carefully selected strategies, in order to bear fruit.

Human beings are drawn to each other on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, religion, social standing and other factors because similarity tends to breed association (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). This concept is known as homophily and results in a lot of social networks being largely homogenous, with very little differentiation (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

The social capital theory seeks to explain how black Africans in corporate South Africa navigate the social networks of those who will grant them access resources and career growth, who in this context are white South Africans. It assists in examining whether black Africans struggle to reach top management because of the lack of access to informal networks in the workplace.

2.3.4 Social cognitive career theory

The social cognitive career theory states that the success of a career can be predicted based on cognitive and other individual related factors such as self-efficacy (Tran & Von Korflesch, 2016). Self-efficacy refers to how individuals perceive their capabilities of performing certain tasks that will yield particular outcomes (Schunk, 1991). The stronger the self-efficacy an individual has, the better they are at dealing with seemingly threatening activities and controlling their fear, compared to individuals who avoid their fears and continue to suffer from the debilitating effects thereof (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

According to Raque-Bogdan & Lucas (2016), other factors that contribute to the prediction of how a career will unfold have to do with the social class of an individual, which will inform the opportunities and obstacles they would have come across.

The social cognitive career theory assists in assessing the degree to which the disenfranchisement of black Africans in South Africa, has had an effect on how black Africans perceive themselves and how that manifests in their career journeys in corporate South Africa.

2.3.5 Equity theory

Equity theory focuses on the equitable distribution of resources and the importance of fairness in the workplace and society (Ryan, 2016). The theory posits that individuals are motivated to the extent that they believe they are being compensated and treated equitably (Ryan, 2016).

The equity theory is captured by the following four propositions:

- People compare the outcomes of their inputs to the outcomes of others' inputs in order to judge equity
- If both the outcome and input ratios compared to others are not proportional, then there is inequity
- There is a direct and positive correlation between the perceived inequity and the level of distress that an individual experiences
- The greater the amount of inequity an individual experience, the harder it is to restore equity and thus minimise the distress (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987)

This theory addresses the disproportionate representation of black Africans in management positions in corporate South Africa compared to the white population. The theory addresses the perceived inequality which suggests that resources in the workplace, and by extension, in society are not being equitably distributed.

2.4 Framing career success

A career is defined as a series of occupational assignments that a person undertakes throughout their life with the intention of receiving remuneration and progressing in life (Poona, Briscoe, Abdul-Ghani, & Jones, 2015). The occupation does not have to be professional or stable for it to be regarded as a career, but the intended rewards and achievement that accrue from that occupation indicate a form of career success (Poona, Briscoe, Abdul-Ghani, & Jones, 2015).

Career success generally has two dimensions (Spurk & Hirschi, Antecedents and Outcomes of Objective Versus Subjective Career Success: Competing Perspectives and Future Directions, 2019). The first is objective career success, which is easily quantifiable, and that one can easily identify. The second one is subjective career success, which varies from individual to individual, as it is measured through more personal standards (Spurk & Hirschi, Antecedents and Outcomes of Objective Versus Subjective Career Success: Competing Perspectives and Future Directions, 2019). Studies conducted on career success show that 37% of them used both objective and

subjective factors as a measure career success, whereas only 32% and 31% focused only on objective and subjective career success respectively (Spurk & Hirschi, Antecedents and Outcomes of Objective Versus Subjective Career Success: Competing Perspectives and Future Directions, 2019). Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk (2017) confirm that career success includes both objective and subjective. In that context, objective factors refer to those that are visible and can be confirmed by others, whereas subjective factors are personal and internal to the individual. This research will therefore focus the antecedents of both objective and subjective career success of black African professionals.

2.5 Career success indicators

Objective career success indicators:

Objective career success is easily identifiable through factors such as compensation, status and level in the organisation (Beigi, Wang, & Arthur, 2017). According to Akkermans & Tims (2017), perceived employability, which is an individual's perception of how easily employees can get and maintain employment, resonates with many individuals. This employment is not only with external organisations, but internal to individuals as well.

Subjective career success indicators:

An indicator of career success, mainly in the Chinese context, is the balance between work and home life (Zhou, Guan, Xin, Mak, & Denga, 2016). Employees feel that being able to strike a healthy balance between their personal home lives as well as work lives is an important indicator of career success because it suggests that the amount of value the organisation sees in them allows them to bargain and reach a compromise. Work-life theories that outline this aspect of career success are listed below:

- Work-life conflict: this is a situation where the demands of work and family life put pressure on each other and are incompatible, resulting in conflict

- Work-life enrichment: this is when there are improvements that are observed in either sphere because the experiences in one can positively contribute in the other

- Work-life facilitation: this happens when each of the two spaces restore each other's energy and improve the performance of both due alignment and compatibility (Beigi, Wang, & Arthur, 2017)

Shockley et al. (2015) has shown other indicators of subjective career success that other researchers have identified in the past, in the table below.

Table 2: Commonly used measures of subjective career success

Study	Measures
Gattiker & Larwood (1986)	**Job success** 1. I am receiving positive feedback about my performance from all quarters. 2. I am offered opportunities for further education by my employer. 3. I have enough responsibility on my job. 4. I am fully backed my managers in my work. 5. I am in a job which offers me the chance to learn new skills. 6. I am most happy when I am at work. 7. I am dedicated to my work. 8. I am in a position to do mostly work which I really like. **Interpersonal success** 9. I am respected by my peers. 10. I am getting good performance evaluations. 11. I am accepted by my peers. 12. I have my superior's confidence **Financial success** 13. I am receiving fair compensation compared to my peers. 14. I am drawing a high income compared to my peers. 15. I am earning as much as I think my work is worth. **Hierarchical success** 16. I am pleased with the promotions I have received so far. 17. I am reaching my career goals within the time frame I set for myself. 18. I am in a job which offers promotional opportunities. **Life success** 19. I am happy with my private life. 20. I am enjoying my non-work activities. 21. I am satisfied with my life overall. 22. I am dedicated to my work.
Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley (1990)	I am satisfied with… 1.…the success I have achieved in my career. 2…the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals. 3…the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income. 4… the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement 5… the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.
Turban and Dougherty (1994)	1. How successful has your career been? 2. Compared to your coworkers, how successful is your career? 3. How successful do your significant others feel your career has been? 4. Given your age, do you think that your career is on schedule, or ahead or behind schedule?

Source: (Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2015)

2.6 Antecedents of career success

2.6.1 General antecedents

According to Hirschi et al. (2017), below is a list of some of the determinants of career success placed in categories:

- Sociodemographic which refers to age, gender, race, social standing and others
- Cognitive ability of an individual
- How ambitious and motivated a person is
- How an individual can navigate leader and follower dynamics
- Organisational support to further an individual's growth
- Human capital, which comprises of level of education and experience including international assignments

Another antecedent of career success is the personality of an individual (Turban, Moake, Wu, & Cheung, 2017). Although people are born with certain unique personalities, it is argued that being proactive is more likely to yield career success (Turban, Moake, Wu, & Cheung, 2017). This is because a person who is an extrovert while proactive is more likely to successfully solicit mentorship from others who are more experienced and knowledgeable. That type of individual is said to have social intelligence which is described as the ability to relate and interpret others' state of minds and to be able to empathise and make social connections (Baron-Cohen, et al., 1999).

Personality forms part of human capital which, among all predictors of career success, is the strongest and dominant (Heslin, Keating, & Minbashian, 2019). Human capital is enhanced greatly by social capital, which pertains to the networks that a person create and has access to, to receive sponsorship from their organisation to further their career (Heslin, Keating, & Minbashian, 2019). Individuals with low neuroticism, which is a psychological personality trait related to emotions, are less fearless and prone to anxiety and are more likely to cultivate and nurture progressive relationships and networks.

In the United States of America, Latino people account for 16% of the economically active population but are underrepresented in leadership positions and are less likely to

enjoy career success like other major races (Cruz & Blancero, 2017). The challenge for Latino people is that they must acculturate and assimilate to a different culture in order to fit in. This has resulted in the facing language barriers and perceived discrimination (Cruz & Blancero, 2017).

In the United Kingdom (UK), blacks and minority ethnic employees (BME) proportionally occupy less leadership positions and struggle to achieve career success when compared to their white counterparts (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). The number of BME employees in the UK economy is increasing, but the gap in proportion to those in management, and those not has worsened from 1.1% in 2006 to 4% in 2013 (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). BME employees are disadvantaged since there are few ethnically similar people in leadership positions for them to build a strong social capital. Therefore, such employees feel left out of social networks, which are crucial for career success (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). By contrast, white employees have reported that they have access to both formal (formal company processes) and informal (social and otherwise) networks to progress within the organisation, whereas BME employees generally only have access to the formal networks to grow in their jobs (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

2.6.2 Formal and informal networks

The ability to build networks is considered one of the antecedents of career success as it generally results in improved performance, rewards, receiving mentorship and other benefits (Spurk, Kauffeld, Barthauer, & Heinemann, 2015). People generally attribute career success to individual brilliance and overlook the impact that a great professional network can have in the growth and development of one's career (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015). Although the impact of these networks is largely undetectable, they improve social capital and present a lot of opportunities to the career of an individual (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015).

2.6.3 Mentorship

Mentorship is a process through which a future leader is developed by an established leader (Batara & Woolgar, 2017). It assists the mentee to understand organisational dynamics to be able to take advantage of opportunities (Batara & Woolgar, 2017). This process is able to not only transform the mentee, but it also has transformative benefits for the mentor as well (Ayyala, et al., 2019).

According to Simon (2015), there are three things to keep in mind when it comes to mentorship:

- Mentorship only works when both parties are committed
- An individual may require different mentors at different stages of their careers
- It is important to also become a mentor as this will make one to be a better mentee and the relationship can have unexpected but worthwhile benefits

2.6.4 Sponsorship

A sponsor is someone within an organisation who is influential and can assist a protégé to break through the glass ceiling from low into high level positions, generally in the middle of their careers (Perry & Parikh, 2019). A sponsor puts their own reputation on the line by agreeing to be a sponsor because should the protégé not perform, then the sponsor's credibility is also tainted (Ayyala, et al., 2019). For this reason, sponsorship should be earned (Perry & Parikh, 2019).

2.6.5 Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is defined as the type of leadership that produces change in an organisation through successfully soliciting trust and commitment from followers (Metz, Piro, Nitowski, & Cosentino, 2019).

Bass (1990) uses the following four elements to describe transformational leadership:

- Charisma: this characteristic of a leader is important to inspire, influence and build trust with followers
- Inspiration: the leader must inspire followers through communicating the vision and how it will be achieved such that the followers can resonate with the vision
- Intellectual stimulation: the followers are given assignment by the leader that challenge them and help the to develop and grow
- Individualised consideration: the leader takes special interest in the followers' lives and interests and offers advice and coaching for the achievement thereof

Transformational leadership results in job satisfaction for the followers which leads to self-confidence and high performance (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016). Job satisfaction in an organisation is an indicator of the development and commitment of an employee (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016).

2.7 Conclusion of literature

In terms of corporate South Africa, there is limited literature that addresses the determinants for career success of black South Africans, particularly because this population is disproportionately represented in leadership positions. Therefore, there is a greater need to not only understand the stumbling blocks, but also to understand how other black South Africans have managed to make it to top management.

This context presents vastly different exogenous dynamics given the exclusionary history of South Africa. Government has introduced policies to address the imbalances in the country, which organisations in corporate South Africa must adopt as well.

The literature review points out that career success can be measured using objective and subjective dimensions. Most studies use both dimensions, and this will also guide how this study is conducted.

There are many studies that have been conducted in other regions that outline the possible indicators and antecedents of career success. However, this study is meant to uncover insights particularly about the South African context.

Several antecedents for career success were outlined and presented as well. The next chapter looks at the propositions and research questions that must be answered to guide the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PROPOSITIONS

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the propositions and research questions that the research will attempt to address through the chosen methodology selected. The research is designed in order to adequately answer the research questions and thereby proving or disproving the propositions put forward.

3.2 Propositions

- **Proposition 1:** black South Africans struggle to proportionately reach leadership positions due to their inferior human capital (education, experience, cognitive ability)
- **Proposition 2:** black South Africans struggle to proportionately reach leadership positions due to lack of access to informal networks
- **Proposition 3:** black South Africans struggle to proportionately reach leadership positions because they lack the self-efficacy necessary to do so

3.3 Research questions

- **Research question 1:** Are there specific personality traits that are indispensable for black South Africans to be successful in corporate?
- **Research question 2:** Which extrinsic factors contribute to the success of black South Africans within the corporate environment?
- **Research question 3:** Do black South Africans lack the self-efficacy necessary to make it to top management within the corporate environment?

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter focused on outlining the three research questions and propositions that will guide the study.

The next chapter outlines the methodology chosen to adequately address the above questions.

CHAPTER 4: PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Choice of methodology

The interpretivism philosophy is at an individual level and it speaks to the intentions and the interactions that people have as a social order (Packard, 2017). Interpretivism states that people's realities are linked to their life experiences and that the two cannot be separated (Weber, 2004).

This research sought to understand the path followed by black Africans as they ascend to top management within their organisations, and therefore follows the interpretivism philosophy as it seeks to understand the perspectives of the participants in their different environments (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.2 Approach

The inductive approach follows a process of research questions which are modified and refined over time with the interactions that take place during data collection process (Johnson & Duberley, 2015). The approach to this research, therefore, was of the inductive type since a process of observation and investigation was followed in order to formulate propositions which can then later be put to the test (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). After collating all the relevant information and analysing it, this enabled the study to formulate conclusions on the matter.

4.3 Methodological choices

The methodological choice that was adopted for this research mono qualitative approach, which incorporated semi-structured interviews with black African professionals (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.4 Purpose of research design

The purpose of this research design was to uncover insights about how black African professionals navigate their way to top management. The study sought to generate insights into how black Africans define career success for themselves. This study was exploratory in nature as it sought to discover and understand new information that was not clearly understood yet (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.5 Strategy

The strategy adopted for this research was the narrative inquiry, wherein qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to allow the respondent to tell the story of their journey to the top (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The respondents were given ample opportunity to narrate the story of their journey to the top.

4.6 Time horizon

The time horizon for this research was cross-sectional since research data were collected at a point in time and was not observed over a long period (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This is because there were time constraints that were considered for the completion of the report. The respondents could also only offer a limited amount of time to discuss their journeys as they had other commitments.

4.7 Techniques and procedures

The technique and procedure employed pertains to semi-structured interviews to allow respondents to narrate the story of their journey (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The idea was to guide the conversation, but also to allow the respondent time and space to share insights of their experiences as much as possible.

4.8 Population

Population is a list of individuals with specific traits and characteristics, that the researcher has an interest in (Sauders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2018). The province of Gauteng contributes over a third to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The population for the research was therefore all black Africans in senior management position, working for companies situated in Gauteng.

4.9 Unit of analysis

Unit of analysis is what is used to frame the thing that the study intends to analyse (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The unit of analysis was the interviewed individuals, in order to glean insights from their corporate journeys. These are individual reflections as they address subjective career success, which is a personal construct.

4.10 Sampling method and size

Purposive sampling is about making use of the scarce resources to get to the most informative sources, which in this case meant finding participants who can give rich and informative feedback (Palinkas, et al., 2015). The sampling frame pertained to companies that are registered on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). Purposive non probability sampling was used since qualitative semi-structured interviews were used for the participants. The sample was accessed through a database of previous executive programs that were offered at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS).

These individuals are likely to be in leadership positions within their companies and therefore, offer valuable insights and contributions to the research. The aim was to have a sample size that is between twelve and twenty participants, wherein the minimum number of male and female participants was to be six per gender, for gender parity. The final sample size was ten black African males and six black African females. A sample

that is not too broadly defined helps with the quality of inferences and the generalisability issues that may occur (Palinkas, et al., 2015).

4.11 Measurement instrument

The measurement instrument for the research was face to face semi structured interviews in order to cover the relevant themes required for the research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). The research question focused on two groups of questions which address endogenous and exogenous elements that were present in the participant's rise to the top.

Examples of endogenous questions were as follows:

What characteristic do you believe you possess that helped your rise the corporate ladder in your career?

- Can you tell me about your values and belief system and how they played a role in your journey?

Examples of the exogenous questions will be:

- Do you have a mentor? If so, how long have you had one and how did the relationship begin?
- What do you believe are the biggest obstacles for black Africans ascending to management positions in corporate South Africa?

Validity was ensured through interviewing enough participants to reach saturation, where similar themes come out of the interviews (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). For reliability was to be achieved, interview questions were written down to ensure that the important themes are consistently addressed (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

4.12 Data gathering process

The data were gathered using semi-structured face to face interviews at a location that is most convenient for the participant. The duration of the interview was between forty-five minutes to an hour. Data saturation refers to the continuation of data collection until no new substantive information emerges from the interview (Palinkas, et al., 2015). The saturation point was reached at around interview eleven. The total number of participants that were interviewed was sixteen to ensure that data saturation is reached (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Before the interview process started, there was one pilot interview that was done and used to refine the interview guide. The iterations helped to structure the questions for a better flowing interview process.

The conversations will then be recorded and analysed at a later stage.

4.13 Analysis approach

After the interview was recorded, the voice recordings were transcribed using an online based software called Otter. The transcripts were then corrected as Otter was not able to pick up certain words and accents, since it is an American based software. Thereafter the transcripts were coded in order to be able to analyse the data coming from the interviews. Coding was done using the computer aided qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.

The codes were then grouped, and overarching themes were created to frame the presentation and discussion of the results. The themes were then used to answer the research questions posed in chapter 3 of the study.

4.14 Quality controls

After the data were collected it was sent to a third party for transcription, to ensure that a different person produces the transcripts to be analysed. The data were shared and discussed with the to ensure its integrity. This will ensure that there is no conscious or unconscious bias that can influence the results of the study.

4.15 Limitations

The limitations of this study are:
- The study is conducted only in the Gauteng region meaning that the results will be extrapolated to other provinces where the situation might not necessarily be the same
- The research will not try to distinguish between genders but rather makes a distinction along racial lines

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 outlined the methodology that was followed to undertake this study. This chapter presents the results that emerged from the semi-structured interviews. The chapter starts by providing a description of the participants, and thereafter the detailed outcome of the interviews conducted with them.

5.2 Description of the sample

The participants that were interviewed, their gender and occupational levels are shown in table 3 below. A final total number of sixteen participants were interviewed from different occupational levels across corporate South Africa. The female participants represented 37.5% of the sample, while the male participants constituted the remainder of the 62.5%.

Table 3: Number, gender and occupational levels of participants

Participants	Occupational level	Gender
1	Top Management	Male
2	Senior Management	Female
3	Top Management	Male
4	Middle Management	Male
5	Top Management	Female
6	Top Management	Male
7	Top Management	Male
8	Top Management	Male
9	Top Management	Female
10	Top Management	Male

11	Senior Management	Male
12	Top Management	Female
13	Top Management	Female
14	Top Management	Male
15	Top Management	Male
16	Senior Management	Female

5.3 Data saturation

Data saturation is a method used in qualitative research to conclude the data collection process, as the number of new codes generated become significantly reduced (Saunders, et al., 2018). This method was applied in the data collection process of this study. The graph below shows that around the eleventh interview, new codes start to reduce until there is minimal new information emerging from the interview process.

Figure 4: Data saturation
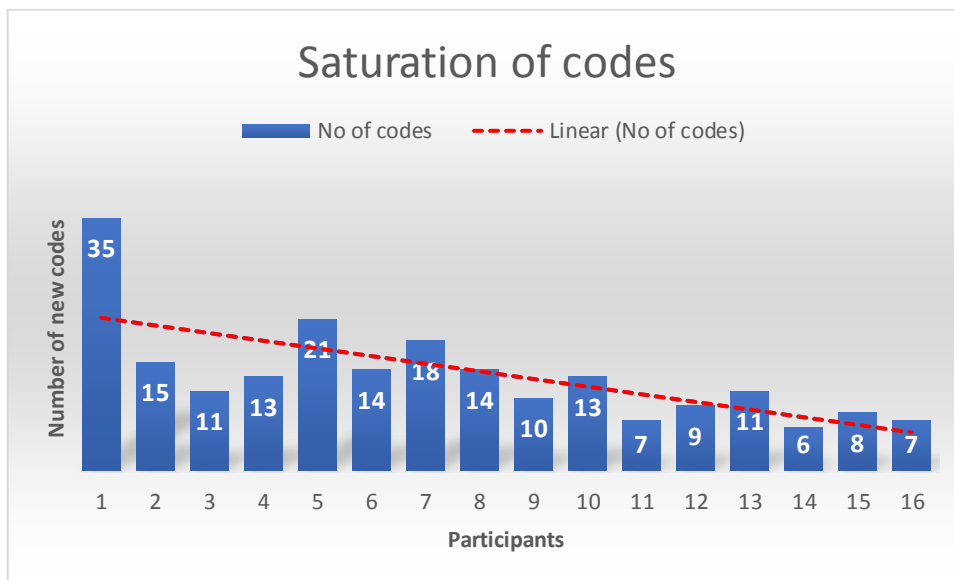
5.4 Presentation of results

The following sections presents the results as per the research questions that were posed and outlined in chapter 3.

5.4.1 Research question 1

RQ1: "Are there specific personality traits that are indispensable for black South Africans to be successful in corporate?"

Three themes emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants, namely, i) cognitive ability, ii) personality type, and iii) ambition. These are discussed below.

5.4.1.1 Cognitive ability

Cognitive ability is the ability of individuals to absorb and retain new information quickly (Revelle, Dworak, & Condon, 2020). The cognitive ability of participants, particularly in high school, was measured in an attempt to explain the success they had achieved in corporate South Africa. The codes, categories and frequencies are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Theme 1 – Cognitive ability

Themes	Code categories	Codes	Frequency
Cognitive ability	High school performance	Average student	23
		Below average student	
		Top student	
	Communication	Language challenges	14
		English accent	

Academic performance in high school sets a foundation from which participants can structurally make their transition into tertiary education and ultimately corporate South

Africa (Naidoo & McKay, 2018). Organisations identify students in high school, who are eligible to be sponsored to further their studies at tertiary or to be absorbed into their grooming processes. The main criteria for selecting these students has mainly been their academic performance in high school, which is informed by their cognitive ability.

Academically, the interesting result that emerges from table 4 above is that of the sixteen participants, 56% were average students, 38% were top students and only 6% were weak performers. As a result, only 31% of the participants were either sponsored to further their tertiary studies or were absorbed into organisations. The remainder of the 69% might have had to make other arrangements to fund their tertiary studies.

An interesting outcome emerged from the ability of participants to articulate themselves in English. Even more interesting was the fact that the English accent associated with South Africa's private school education system, seems to have been the difference for some participants as shown by participants' perspectives below.

- Participant 3 stated: "… the other thing we can never get away from is apparently I speak this private school English and, and I've got a feeling that a lot of clever black people are discounted, just because they speak English in a way a black person would in a way someone would speak a language that is foreign to them. And that's just a language rather than a measure of intelligence."
- Participant 7 stated: "He said to me, the only reason why I hired why we hired you was because your marks weren't necessarily the best. We've seen graduates who had distinctions. He said, the only thing that you brought here was that you could speak proper English. You know, that's the only reason why we took you in. Because you are able to articulate yourself to a point whereby we don't need to worry about grooming you."
- Participant 16 stated: "So the fact that I've always been fascinated by English is the weirdest thing and I'm sure it's like a black child thing. So, then I had a stronger command and my teachers just thought I was just so fantastic, so I became part of the debating team at a very young age and stuff like that."

Interestingly, some of the other participants had some form of language challenge due to the fact that they either grew up in different countries or they struggled to transition from learning in their native languages to learning in English.

5.4.1.2 Personality type

The second theme that is for the first research question is the type of personality the participants have. Personality refers to a person's structured thoughts, feelings and patterns of behaviour (Uher, 2017). This theme, together with the code groups and codes, is outlined in the table 5 below.

Table 5: Theme 2 – personality type

Themes	Code categories	Codes	Frequency
Personality type	Type of character	Extrovert	22
		Introvert	
		Introvert and extrovert	
	Personal value and brand	Not fitting in	15
		Accepting who you are	
		Being consistently myself	
		Reputation	
	Disposition	Taking accountability	10
		Expressing oneself	
		Humility	
		Having a good attitude	
		Being patient	
		Respect for others	
		Straight talker	
	Not working within boundaries	Ill disciplined	5
		Not conforming	
		Being independent	
	Level of resilience	Emotional stability	4
		Growing thick skin	
		Never give up	

On type of character, the interesting outcome from the interviews with the participants is that exactly 50% consider themselves introverts, the other 31% consider themselves extroverts and the remainder of the 19% do not consider themselves as either.

Participants were also asked questions around their brand and value, to try and figure out what guides and grounds them, and if corporate South Africa has led to them

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neglecting some of their values in order to get ahead. Four out of the sixteen participants said that they would not compromise who they are and what they believe in, while another four said that they have had to compromise some of their values in order to fit in corporate South Africa. Below are some of the quotes from participants who said they never compromised their values.

- Participant 1: "I really do not give a hoot about fitting into the whiteness of corporate, I show up as who I am."
- Participant 2: "Keep your integrity, keep your principles. Because for me, what you see is what you get."
- Participant 6: "But I can tell you that if there's one consistent feedback that I've been getting throughout even with 360 reviews, wether it's coaching feedback or anything like that, authenticity and integrity have been the key consistent feedback that I've been receiving."
- Paticipant 13: "I realized later on that maybe the time my career didn't take off quickly, it was because there were times I told myself that I'm not going to sleep my way up. I'm just going focus and work I have brains."

Below are the quotes of participants who felt that they needed to compromise some of their values in order to achieve a certain level of success in corporate South Africa.

- Participant 3: "Yes, definitely. Definitely. And I think, earlier in my career as well. When I was younger, I tended to to do what's necessary to avoid the conflict, I'd avoid that disagreement and do what it takes to just fit in."
- Participant 5: "…as I grew up in my career I had to really compromise and say it's okay…"
- Participant 10: "…there are things that I have had to do that were ultimately against my personal values to pursue growth in the corporate arena."
- Participant 16: '' Oh, yeah, 100%, I'm yet to find any young black leader that has never had to experience that. The culture of South African, how we indoctrinated is to assimilate to white culture, it's all about assimilation. You want to be invited to the table, you better be like the people at the table, you can't be anything different, right?

Participants also outlines some of the values that guide them, some of which have been instilled by family and these include being humble and having respect for others, regardless of their social standing. What was also mentioned was the importance of being conscious of one's reputation and ensuring that it is always in tact regardless of whether you are made to feel like an outsider or not.

5.4.1.3 Ambition

Ambition is the third theme that was used to answer the first research question. Similar to power and affiliation, ambition is considered a key driver of human behaviour (Gordon, 2015). This theme was created to understand the level of ambition that the participants needed to have to achieve success. The table below includes the code categories, codes and their frequency of mentions.

Table 6: Theme 3 – Ambition

Themes	Code categories	Codes	Frequency
Ambition	Emotional and psychological preparation	Dream of a better life	34
		Importance of dreaming	
		Self-motivation	
		Self determination	
		Driven by success	
		Hunger to learn	
		Being restless and hungry	
		Block out negativity	
		Personal philosophy	
	Taking action	Taking initiative	27
		Taking risks	
		Working towards a goal	
		Curious child	
		Personal development	
		Expertise in chosen field	
		Goal setting	
		Building your brand	

The codes that made up the emotional and psychological preparation came up thirty-four times during the interviews. The participants discussed some of the things that spurred them on during their upbringing, such as dreaming of a better life than what they had had up to that point, and others.

Below are some of the quotes from the participants.

- Participant 1: "You know, it was essentially a dream about the kind of life that I had, even back then I'm just thinking about it. I just knew the kind of life that I wanted, and I knew I was going to succeed, regardless of my circumstances, or the circumstances of the country."
- Participant 2: "It's very important to dream. Um, besides having a vision, just have a dream that you want to do something or achieve something."
- Participant 8: "Generally, I think I do have dreams. That's what I think keeps me going. I love a lover of things."

Taking risks in the corporate environment, according to some participants, is something that black Africans do not do enough of. This was mentioned eleven times by four different participants. Below are some of the interesting quotes from the participants.

- Participant 7: "I think… which is the other crux of what we fail as black people to do is just to ask, because it was the worst case that could have happened was just a no."
- Participant 7: "Taking risk, right. And I say taking risk, purely because that's what I said earlier that the black child is afraid of speaking of corporate South Africa.
- Participant 10: "So there's always two things - you can be brave, get out there, take the risks and do something really cool or miss out on stuff."
- Participant 13: "In 1999 then I decided to resign and I got a job I applied I got a job in Joburg in Pretoria it's a it was a contract position for one year. I just closed my eyes and I was like you know what, this is it."

5.4.2 Research question 2

RQ2: *"Which extrinsic factors contribute to the success of black South Africans within the corporate environment?"*

Four themes emerged from the discussions with the participants during the interviews. These are i) family and support structure; ii) career enablers; iii) corporate South Africa climate, and iv) interaction with different cultures. The first theme is discussed in more detail below.

5.4.2.1 Family and support structure

All respondents mentioned the importance of family and the support that they received throughout their lives. They also discussed the how their families shaped their values and have contributed to the characters that they have become.

Table 7: Theme 1 – Family and support structure

Themes	Code groups	Codes	Frequency
Family and support structure	Family influence	Support structure	70
		Christian family	
		Single parent	
		Parent's occupation	
		Loving family	
		Black tax	
		Family instilled values/respect	
		Parent influenced career path	
		Lack of support structure	
		Spousal competition	
		Motivation from kids	
	Upbringing	Place of birth	48
		Middle class upbringing	
		Place of upbringing	
		Upbringing	
		Enjoyed childhood	
		Affluent upbringing	
		Upper middle-class upbringing	
	Environment	Dangerous environment	4
		Unpleasant environment	

All participants mentioned the importance of having a strong supoort structure throuhgout their lives. Some drew inspiration from their parents, others from their children that they still have to raise and others from the healthy career competition they had with their equally successful spouses.

The sample of participants came from diverse backgrounds. Of the sixteen participants, 50% came from disadvantaged backgrounds, while the other 25% each came from middle class and upper middle to affluent backgrounds. This presented the participants with very different upbringing environments, where at least 75% of the participants had an experience of growing up in townships which were not safe.

Some of the views from the participants are listed below.

- Participant 5: "So for me it's just that support system and not the money that helped me through."

- Participant 7: "Even in high school, same thing, I mean, you know, you you make sure that you surround yourself with a support system that can help you, you know, family being a support system, friends being a support system."

- Participant 9: "I think I would just extend rather on the instilling of the values of education, it was not only coming from my as an individual, but from my Dads side of the family."

- Participant 11: ". Education was the most important thing you should focus on"

- Participant 16: "And one things my dad also encouraged was reading."

5.4.2.2 Career enablers

The participants shared enablers that have contributed to the growth in their careers. This section particularly outlines the role that other people have played and also the type of environments that have nurtured the careers of the participants. The codes groups, codes and frequency of mention are shown below.

Table 8: Theme 2 – Career enablers

Themes	Code groups	Codes	Frequency
Career enablers	Mentorship	Appointed mentor	50
		Unofficial mentors	
		Lack of mentorship	
		Importance of mentorship	
		Variation of mentors	
		Having mentees	
	Networks	Non exploitation of networks	29
		Importance of networks	
		Professional networks	
		Social networks	
	Enabling environment	Empowering environment	15
		Career grooming	
		Needing others	
		Confidence building	
		People believing in you	
		Motivation from boss	
		Career path appreciation	
		Accommodative and motivational leadership	
		Business coaching	
		Executive coaching	
	Sponsorships	Sponsors within company	11
		Importance of sponsorships	18

The participants mentioned the importance of having people who have assisted them navigate their growth in corporate South Africa. The assistance came in the form of sponsors, mentors and networks that were leveraged on. This was also accompanied by the importance of having an environment that is conducive to success. Cumulatively, these were mentioned a hundred and twenty-three times during the interviews. Below are some of the key views relating to these topics:

- Participant 7: "So that's why I say, it's a combination of having a person who's sponsoring you, making sure that you are also diligent, respectful, humble enough to also make sure that you are complementing and putting something on the table.

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- Participant 10: "Look I agree with you and I probably learnt this very late in my career, but it is so important to have a sponsor with an organization, who is higher up, who is going to support what you're trying to achieve, that person needs to be able to back you up in the boardroom."

- Participant 7: "So I've got a range and a wide array of mentors that helped me and I constantly check in with them, some maybe once a week, some once a month."

- Participant 1: "…one of the key things that I advise most young people to speak to for career advice is to find two mentors in your life, one that's industry specific and onte that's not."

- Participant 6: "So, those networks, then made it easier for me to have my way around."

- Participant 11: "so I certainly think networks, formal and informal, within the organization are key and make a big difference…"

Participants also shared on the importance of being within an environment that encourages growth and development. Reporting to a boss that has faith in one's abilities and gives one the platform to showcase one's talents was sighted by some of the participants as one of the reasons for achieving success. Participants also mentioned how other people can play a role in people's journey and the importance of having genuine relationships with others.

- Participant 8 said that "Unfortunately, as a human being, your success starts with you, but is going to be determined by those around you …"

In terms of confidence building, participant 13 said "I was also allowed to present to the board. That gave me confidence to say, you know what, I can do this corporate thing."

Other participants offered the following views below:

- Participant 8: ". You know, he used to say there's a lot of that he sees in me that I'm not maximizing."

- Participant 13: "but when I got to where I am, this guy saw something in me that I didn't see myself. He helped get back my confidence.

- Participant 14: "I think it comes up about because they recognize or see something in you and see potential in you that they want to help you achieve or realize…"

5.4.2.3 Corporate South African climate

This theme pertains to the sentiments that all the participants have towards the environment in which they had to build their careers. Corporate South Africa has provided different experiences for the participants, and this section outlines not only the obstacles but the enablers as well. These are shown in the table below.

Table 9: Theme 3 – Corporate South African climate

Themes	Code groups	Codes	Frequency
Corporate South Africa climate	Transformation	Window dressing	31
		Transform work level	
		Lack of transformation	
		White dominated industry	
		Impact of transformational policies	
	Inclusivity	Others doubting your capabilities	11
		Feeling of not belonging	
		Accommodative corporate culture	
		Twice effort half recognition	
		Male dominated	
	Fair environment for all	Corporate not always a meritocracy	7
		Opportunities denied	
		Inequality at work	
		Discrimination of blacks	

The participants shared their views around all the obstacles that they had to encounter in their different career journeys. These ranged from the lack of transformation in corporate South Africa, to an indvidual's abilities being doubted, and to the feeling of not belonging. Eight of the sixteen participants mentioned some or other challenges that

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corporate South African presented for them, that they had to rise above these challenges to be succesful. These are shown in some of the key views below.

- Participant 7: "Especially in banking, banking where the real money sits, where there's real power, there's real influence and real monetization. Its mainly white people. When I got onto the trading floor, at that point in time, there were only two black guys, one was African, the other one was an Indian guy. The rest and and when I mean the rest, I think the other maybe other 10 to 15 were white. And then you look at the back office role. So operations, admin, everything is more black people."

- Participant 10: "…there is a lot of skepticism and doubt around you, again, people are only prepared to almost look at you if there is an overall benefit to them."

- Participant 3: "…this continuous fear, this continuous feeling, you have as a non white person that you don't really belong. And therefore, you continue trying to prove yourself, and maybe I did then prove myself and ended up with the opportunities that I've received thus far."

Five participants of the sixteen mentioned that they felt that they had to work twice as hard as their white counterparts, but still only received half the recognition. Interestingly, the female participants felt that they had an even tougher time as they did not only have to compete on race but on gender as well. Three females expressed this key point below:

- Participant 5: "Because now you're being judged by people and compared to how men have been judged, I don't overlook that. Though I've been doing the work for quite a long time, but I don't overlook that because I know for me to really prove myself, I have to really work twice as hard."

- Participant 12: "Also working hard and not just working hard, but working twice or three times harder than the white folks and the male folks as a black female…"

- Participant 9: "I find that as a black person, let me not say a female but as a black person, you have to work 10 times extra harder than another person."

With regards to transformational policies such as the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 and BBEEE Act No. 55 of 2003, there was consensus among all the participants that, although these legislative elmeents did play a key role in their success, the primary role was attributed to their individual capabilities and work ethic.

5.4.2.4 Interaction with other cultures

Four of the sixteen participants grew up in different countries and encountered different cultures at an early age. In total, 8 participants spoke about having to adjust and understand different cultures at different stages of their lives. The code groups and codes are shown in the table below.

Table 10: Theme 4 – research question 2

Theme	Code group	Codes	Frequency
Interaction with different cultures	Eclectic influence	Competing with others	29
		Encountering diverse cultures	
		Culture shock	
		Living in different countries	
		Adjusting to discomfort	
		Not exposed to racism	
		Struggled with corporate culture	
		International travel	
		Importance of travelling	

Below are key views from some of the participants around the encounters they had with other cultures growing up:

- Participant 7: "So what I think the funny thing is I started off at a primary school that was Indian, in Benoni. And then standard three I moved to a predominantly white primary school in Springs, and then high school I went to an Afrikaans High School. So from standard six to matric and then University I went to RAU, then after two years, got changed to UJ."

- Participant 14: "So, some of my first memory of best friends growing up. One was Lebanese, the other one was an American and another one was an Indian From India, so I was always in a multinational school."
- Participant 16: "Little did I know that when I got there, I would meet children from different backgrounds and very few from where I come from."

5.4.3 Research question 3

RQ3: "Do black South Africans lack the self-efficacy necessary to make it to top management within the corporate environment?"

The various code groups and codes were summarised under one theme for this research question. The table below outlines these together with the frequency of mentions.

Table 11: Research question 3 theme

Themes	Code groups	Codes	Frequency
Strong willed	Striving for more	Disillusionment with job	
		Starting a business	
		Leadership qualities	4
	Self-belief	Self-motivation	
		Understanding yourself	
		Self-belief	
		Self-awareness	29
		Self-critical	
		Prayer	
		Meditation	
	Wavering confidence	Lack of confidence	
		Doubting yourself	2

The theme for this research question focuses on the ability and the extent to which the participants believe they can perform and compete in corporate South Africa.

Only two of the sixteen participants mentioned having a lack of confidence during and prior to entering corporate South Africa. These participants are quoted below:

- Participant 13: "But, there were these doubts that I have always had in the back of my mind, that I can't do this…"
- Participant 16: "So then, because of all those things that impacted my self confidence as well, you know, I just became average and because High School was also hard. In my first year of high school my mother passed on".

Five out of the sixteen participants spoke about the belief they have within themselves and their abilities. An additional three participants have also started their own businesses, some of which are still operational. Some of the key views regarding the amount of confidence the participants have in their abilities are shown below:

- Participant 1: ". I just knew the kind of life that I wanted, and I knew I was going to succeed, regardless of my circumstances, or the circumstances of the country."
- Participant 2: "It's like an inward and daily conversation of thoughts and motivation that you have to have you with yourself. Because if you don't have your own self belief, then don't think you're going to get it from someone else, getting it from someone else is going to be a bonus."
- Participant 8: ". So for me, your success is mainly determined by yourself, it starts there."
- Participant 13: "So just focus and keep walking and believing yourself."

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter gave a description of the participants and outlined the results that came out of the interviews conducted with them. The data were presented in the form of themes that were assembled through the codes generated from the interviews.

The next chapter will discuss the insights and implications of the reported data, in conjunction with the literature outlined in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presented the results of the interviews that were conducted with the participants. This chapter will discuss the results and make reference to the literature that was sighted in chapter 2 in order to establish if there is congruence. The purpose is to provide a deeper understanding of the outcomes of the interviews and the literature, to better understand the factors responsible for the success of the participants in corporate South Africa. The results will be discussed as per the themes presented in the previous chapter.

6.2 Discussion of research question 1

Research question 1 asked: "Are there specific personality traits that are indispensable for black South Africans to be successful in corporate?"

This research question sought to understand the endogenous factors that contribute to the success of black Africans in corporate South Africa. The data that was presented in the results chapter synthesised the information from the interviews into themes that south to answer the research questions. The research questions will be discussed as per the themes that were outlined in the previous chapter.

6.2.1 Cognitive ability

The cognitive ability of participants was examined through a discussion around their academic performance from high school to tertiary education. The amount of education that the participants were able to acquire, served as an indication of their cognitive ability. This can be linked to the human capital theory that was discussed in chapter 2

which states a person is likely to progress in their careers and in general when they are better educated (Lauder, 2015).

The data from chapter 5 stated that 6% of the sample considered themselves below average performers academically, while 56% believed they were average and 38% were above average. This resulted in all the participants being able to study further and acquire multiple qualifications, thus enhancing their human capital. The methodology that was used to select the participants specifically sought to interview participants that had successfully completed an executive program at GIBS, with the assumption that they would already be or transitioning into a leadership role. Based on these factors, it can then be said that black Africans do possess the cognitive ability and are able to acquire the necessary human capital to be successful and occupy leadership positions in corporate South Africa.

The other piece of information that emerged, albeit from only three participants, was that part of their success can be attributed to their English accent and their ability to articulate themselves. Unfortunately, academic literature is muted on the phenomenon of language articulation, specifically English, as a measure of intelligence especially in the South African context. For black South Africans, being able to express yourself in English is associated with high quality education which was previously the preserve of white people. Therefore, when a black African person can effortlessly express themselves in English, they are assumed to have received quality education and therefore a certain level of intelligence is accorded to them.

Differences in the various education systems have gradually reduced over the 20th century, since the dawn of democracy in South Africa (McKeever, 2017). There are still, however, major differences in the education between the different races and within the races (McKeever, 2017).

6.2.2 Personality type

The second theme emerging from the first research question is personality type. The theory that was stated in chapter 2 mentioned that individuals who are extroverts are more likely to solicit assistance from others in the form of mentorship for example, and this aids in their vocational progress (Turban, Moake, Wu, & Cheung, 2017).

As reported in the previous chapter, 50% of the respondents consider themselves introverts, while the 31% consider themselves extroverts and the remainder of the 19% consider themselves neither. The results of the sample suggest that, although being an extrovert has positive implications for one's social interactions, they are not a pre-requisite for career success. What also came out of the previous chapter was that black Africans are still afraid to take risks in corporate South Africa, when compared to their white counterparts. This behaviour can be linked to the history of the country, that subjected black Africans to decades of disenfranchisement through a system that attempted to make them believe they were of less value.

Participants also spoke about how their values were challenged throughout their careers. Four participants mentioned that they had to compromise the values that they grew up with in order to fit and progress in their careers. This is also a result of our history and the fact that black South Africans were only allowed into a previously white male dominated environment, as a result of legislation put in place by government after democracy (Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2017). For this reason, there are still pockets of inequity, where black South Africans feel they need to conform in order to be accepted and not purged.

6.2.3 Ambition

The third theme of research question 1 is ambition. Ambition refers to the participants' aspirations and the amount of drive they must have to achieve their dreams. The participants described the process they went through and structures they had to put in place to get to their goals. This includes self-motivation, being hungry and dreaming of

a life better than the one they have lived. In chapter 2, Hirschi et al. (2017) listed several factors that are considered antecedents of career success. One of them speaks to how ambitious and motivated an individual needs to be to succeed.

The investment in human capital that the participants made throughout their lives shows the determination they had to succeed in corporate South Africa. All the participants had multiple tertiary education qualifications, and some were planning to pursue more. The main criteria for selecting them as part of the sample is that they needed to have completed an executive program at the GIBS, as previously mentioned. In chapter 2, human capital was defined as the investment that is made in oneself, in the form of education and training (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004).

There is, therefore, alignment with the literature in that investment in human capital contributes positively to career success.

6.2.4 Model for research question 1

Based on the outcomes of the discussion of research question 1, a simple model was created which shows the interplay between cognitive ability, personality and ambition. The model suggests that for a black African to be successful in corporate South Africa, there needs to be a healthy balance of and type of the three factors that were mentioned.

Figure 5: Model for research question 1
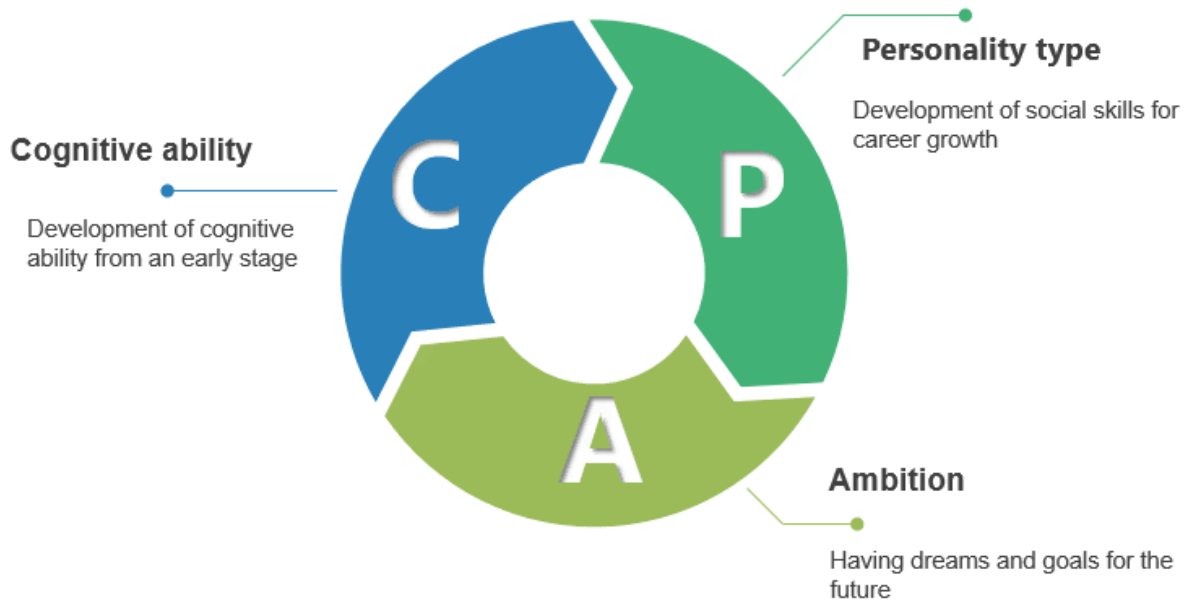
6.2.5 Conclusion of research question 1

The three themes that came out of research question 1. These are:

- cognitive ability
- personality type
- ambition

It was established that all participants possess cognitive ability since they each hold multiple qualifications. They have received education of different qualities but were all still able to build their careers and be successful. The outcome of this process suggests that cognitive ability is a requirement for a black African to be successful in corporate South Africa. The results on this theme, therefore, answer the first research question and are consistent with the literature.

Literature also mentioned that extroverts are more likely to be successful because they possess the social skills required. The results from the interviews are not consistent with literature. They suggest that black African can be successful in corporate South Africa

regardless of the type of personality they possess. However, the model is buil with the suggestions from literature in mind.

Ambition was mentioned as an antecedent of career success in chapter 2. Apart from mentioning it, ambition was demonstrated by the participants, through their relentless investment made in their human capital in order to be successful. Ambition can, therefore, also be regarded as a pre-requisite for the career success of black South Africans. The results agree with the literature in this regard.

A model was created to show the connection between the three variables, cognitive ability, personality and ambition. The model will be adapted to incorporate results from research question 2.

6.3 Discussion of research question 2

Research question 2 asked: "Which extrinsic factors contribute to the success of black South Africans within the corporate environment?"

The purpose of this research question is to uncover all the exogenous factors that contribute to black Africans being successful in corporate South Africa. These are all the external influences that black Africans must face in their different journeys. The data emerging from the interviews will be discussed as per the themes that came out of the interviews. The themes are outline below.

6.3.1 Family and support structure

The support that the participants received from their families came out as one of the important themes for the second research question. Participants sighted the importance of having a solid support structure and being raised in a family that instilled values that guided them through life.

This theme also incorporated a lot of codes that spoke to the socio-economic divide that is a legacy of the history of South Africa. Of the sixteen participants, 50% mentioned that they came from very poor backgrounds. Chapter 2 outlined the reasons for the disadvantaged backgrounds that most black Africans come from. These are as a direct result of the apartheid regime, more specifically the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953. These acts and others ensured that black South Africans would be subjected to years of poverty.

The Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 restricted black South Africans from owning land and residing in urban areas (Maylam, 1995). The Group Areas Act of 1950 allocated land to different racial groups, with black South Africans being allocated under developed land that also required them to commute long distances to the place of their employment (Maylam, 1995). The Bantu Education Act of 1950 restricted black South Africans to menial jobs and was enacted to turn them into servants and for cultural domination (Christie & Collins, 1982). Therefore, the participants from disadvantaged backgrounds were also spurred on to succeed by where they came from.

The other group of participants had come from families that managed to escape the poverty that apartheid created for the majority of black people in the country. The participants came from middle class and even affluent families, where they were able to receive quality education that served as a foundation for their success.

Literature speaks about all the inherent qualities in individuals and the external factors that contribute to a person being successful. Chapter two discussed the human capital, social capital and social cognitive career theory and some other endogenous factors for career success. Sponsorship, mentorship and networks were also mentioned as the exogenous factors contributing to career success. However, very little is said about family support as a possible antecedent or contributor to career success.

6.3.2 Career enablers

The second theme that emerged from research question two was career enablers. These are categorised into four groups, namely, mentorship, networks, sponsorships and an enabling environment.

6.3.2.1 Mentorship

As mentioned in chapter two, mentorship is a process through which a mentee is developed to become a leader by an experience mentor (Batara & Woolgar, 2017). If a relationship between a mentor and mentee is successful then it offers development to both the mentor and mentee, although the primary focus is the mentee (Ayyala, et al., 2019).

Although not all participants had mentors throughout their careers, they all acknowledge the importance of having a mentor for the growth of one's career. Eleven out of sixteen of the participants that were interviewed had mentors for their careers, some even had multiple mentors for different spheres and phases of the careers and lives. All participants mentioned that where they can, they try to mentor others because they realise the difference that mentorship can make in one's career.

Mentorship was mentioned around fifty times during the sixteen interviews. Some participants mentioned that the mentorship relationships they have had are not official but rather implicit. This demonstrates the importance of having other leaders around that can assist in exploring different ideas and strategies to implement in one's career, without necessarily being official mentors.

The outcomes of the interviews are aligned with literature in terms of the impact that mentorship can have in an individual's career. In this regard there is consensus between literature and data from interviews.

6.3.2.2 Networks

According to Spurk et al. (2015), networking is regarded as an antecedent of career success because it grants access to the social networks that are critical for growth. What makes networking so important is that there is a direct and positive correlation between networks and promotions, performance, receiving mentorship and other career related benefits (Spurk, Kauffeld, Barthauer, & Heinemann, 2015). Ultimately networks, whether formal or informal, enhance the social capital of an individual which is crucial for the development of a career (Niehaus & O'Meara, 2015).

There was consensus among all participants that networks can give an individual access to resources and opportunities present within those networks. Only five of the sixteen participants could give specific accounts of when networks, professional or social, yielded fruit and they were able to benefit from them. The reason for this is that the benefits of networks are largely invisible to those who are embedded in them and makes them unaware of that fact.

The data from the interviews agrees with the literature around the importance of networks, informal or formal, for the achievement of career goals and career success. Although some participants may not be consciously aware of the benefits, networks are crucial for career growth.

6.3.3.3 Sponsorship

Sponsorship is the support that an individual receives from someone in the organisation, who is in a position of power and has influence to actively fight for the career advancement and growth of the protégé (Ayyala, et al., 2019). Sponsorship requires the sponsor to put their reputation on the line in the sense that they vouch for a protégé whose performance might or might not live up to expectations (Scheepers, Douman, & Moodley, 2018). For this reason, finding a mentor is therefore easier than finding a sponsor (Scheepers, Douman, & Moodley, 2018).

All the participants agreed that having a sponsor within the organisation can propel an individual's career forward. Only three participants were able to explicitly talk about sponsors within their organisations that they are aware were fighting battles for them and pushing for their development. Other participants suspected that they had sponsors but because the relationship was not official, they could not conclusively claim that they had sponsors.

Although the participants all recognised the importance of sponsorships, it appears that most of them did not deliberately pursue and nurture those relationships. The data from the interviews is, however, consistent with the literature that was discussed in chapter 2. Having a sponsor within the organisation can precipitate the growth and development of an individual's career.

6.3.3.4 Enabling environment

Various participant spoke about the difference that an enabling environment can make in bringing out the potential in their performance. Some of the codes from this group are:

- Empowering environment
- People believing in you
- Motivation from boss
- Accommodative and motivational leadership

The participants were grateful about the fact that they were in environments that allowed them to utilise their talents and were given an opportunity to grow and develop. According to the participants, the environments were made conducive to learning and growth due to the leaders they reported to. This type of leadership is referred to a transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership has been described by Metz et al (2019) as the type of leadership that is able to convince followers about the necessary change in the organisation, by using trust and commitment to the cause. According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership has four elements:

- Charisma: the leader can communicate a vision to followers, gain their respect and trust with their influence
- Inspiration: the leader outlines expectations from the team and instils a sense of pride in them
- Intellectual stimulation: followers are given assignments that challenge their cognitive capacity for them to grow
- Individualised consideration: the leader tries to take personal interest in the lives and goals of the followers

Six participants spoke about the difference that a transformational leader has made in their lives and working environment. They described how, by the leader having faith in them, they have been able to realise their potential and grow at a faster rate that they would have. When employees are satisfied with their jobs, this tends to improve their confidence and improves their performance as well (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016).

The literature supports the findings of the data that emerged from the interviews. There is consensus on the positive impact that a leader and the right environment can have on the confidence, performance and growth of an individual.

6.3.4 Corporate South Africa climate

This theme speaks about how the participants view the environment in which black South African professionals must apply their trade. They give an account of the challenges they have had to experience and witness, mainly around transformation, inclusivity and the fairness of the environment. The sentiment is that there is still discrimination of black Africans in corporate South Africa, the only difference is that it has become very covert and difficult to identify.

Participants gave examples about how certain prestigious divisions, especially in the banking sector, are still reserved for white people, with only a few black Africans included. In other instances, black South Africans are given leadership roles only for the purposes of complying with legislation and positively impacting their broad-based economic empowerment (BBEEE) scorecard. BBEEE is an empowerment program of

the government that is meant reverse the injustices of the past through a range of socio-economic initiatives (Shai, Molefinyana, & Quinot, 2019).

Chapter two outlined the history of discrimination in South Africa and the effects that it has had on the inequality that is visible in the country today. Van der berg (2019) showed this in the Kernel density curves of income distribution, that was discussed in chapter two. The graph shows the income distribution per race and the difference between the black and white races. The slow rate of transformation is as a result of the history of the country and not enough change in attitude of the citizens to effect the timeous change required.

The other point that was raised by the participants is that the yardstick used to measure black and white South Africans in corporate is not the same. Five participants felt that they needed to put in twice the effort for only half the recognition. The situation was even more dire for black females because not only did they have to compete on race, but they had to compete on gender as well. When South Africa transitioned into democracy, white women were brought in as a response to legislation on gender parity (Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2017). Black women have always been at the bottom of the food chain.

The equity theory addresses the issues that were raised by the participants. Ryan (2016) speaks about the theory as one which is concerned about the distribution of resources and opportunities in the workplace, in an equitable manner. According to the participants, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done before corporate South Arica can be considered a place that treats all its employees fairly.

All participants agreed that the transformational policies that the government has put in place have played a role in their success, albeit a secondary one. They posit that the investment they have made in their human capital, resulting in their ability to perform, plus their work ethic, were the primary reasons for their success. However, they acknowledge the role that legislation has played to grant them the opportunity that would otherwise not have been available to them previously.

This has highlighted that corporate South Africa is not always a meritocracy and that it is important to understand all the elements that can work to one's advantage when trying to climb the ladder.

6.3.5 Interaction with other cultures

With the history of segregation and discrimination in South Africa, a lot of black people only experienced other cultures and races at a much later stage in their lives. Four of the participants grew up in different countries and only returned to South African at a much later stage. In total, eight participants spoke about having to adjust to a different culture at some point.

On some participants, encountering different cultures at an early stage in their lives gave them an edge because they felt that they were better able to relate to the different cultures in their working careers. While other who only encountered other cultures much later in life, typically in high school or tertiary, experienced a culture shock that had an adverse effect on their confidence and performance.

In chapter two, Cruz & Blancero (2017) talk about the assimilation and acculturation of Latino people to the American culture and how they have been discriminated against in the past. Although there is limited literature of the South African context, the situation is similar in South Africa, when it comes to black South Africa having to assimilate to white culture in corporate South African in order to get ahead.

6.3.5 Model for research question 2

In this section, sponsorships, mentorships and networks were outlined as very important factors for career. The model created for research question 1 will, therefore, be adapted to incorporate the outcomes of research question 2. The is overlaid with the three emerging factors, as exogenous factors that encapsulate the endogenous factors of cognitive ability, personality and ambition previously identified.

Figure 6: Model for research question 2
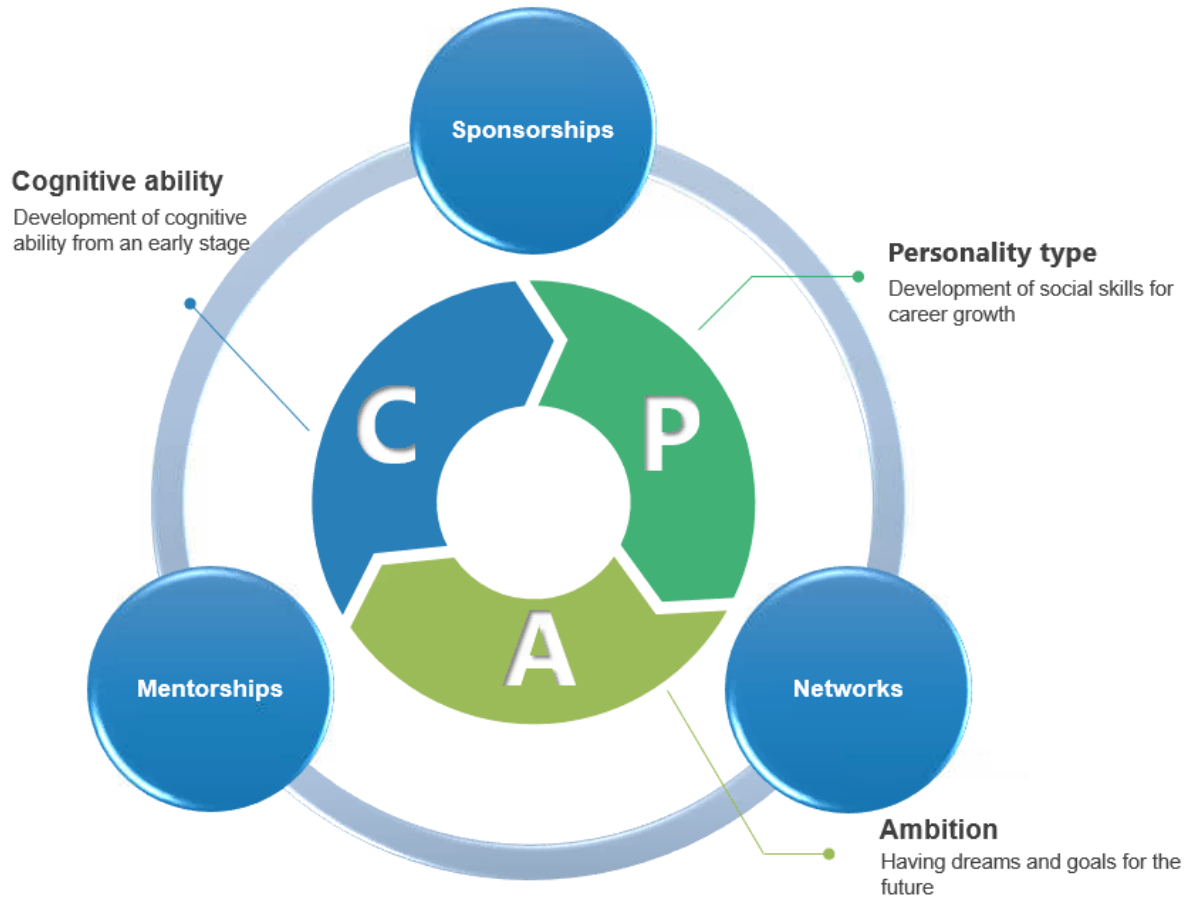
6.3.6 Conclusion of research question 2

Research question 2 had four themes emerging out of the interview discussions. These were:

- family and support structure
- career enablers
- corporate South Africa climate
- interaction with other cultures.

Participants mentioned that, regardless of their vast backgrounds, having a solid support structure was necessary for one to succeed in corporate South Africa. There is limited

research on the contribution of family support on the success of an individual. This is a gap in the literature that requires more research, especially in the South African context.

Career enablers were divided into four groups which are mentorship, networks, sponsorship and enabling environment. Mentorship was mentioned in chapter 2 as one of the tools that can precipitate the rise to the top in corporate South Africa. Around 68% of the participants that were interviewed had had a mentor in their careers and saw the importance of having so much that they ensured they mentor others. The results, therefore, agree with literature about the importance of mentorship for one's career and answer research question 2.

Participants agree that formal and informal networks are important in the growth and development of one's career. Literature outlined in chapter 2 also mentions how important networks are for career growth. There is, therefore, consistency between literature and the results of the interviews. This answers research question 2.

According to literature, sponsorships are important for career growth. Participants agree with this sentiment and some of them have had sponsors in their careers and have witnessed the positive impact that has had on their careers. The results of the interviews agree with literate and this also answers research question 2.

Participants mentioned that it is important to work in an enabling environment because this has a positive impact on the confidence and performance of an individual. This type of environment is generally created by leader who is transformational and therefore, a leader plays a critical role in creating that growth environment. This is consistent with the literature stated in chapter 2 and therefore this becomes part of the list of antecedents of career success.

The participants also spoke about their challenges in corporate South Africa. They realised that corporate South African requires one to understand how to navigate it as it is not always a meritocracy. The literature in chapter 2 gives context of the environment where corporate South Africa operates, given the history of the country.

The interaction with other cultures has been had positive and negative impacts on the participants depending on when they encountered other cultures. Literature agrees with

the data on the acculturation or assimilation of black South Africans in corporate South Africa.

6.4 Discussion of research question 3

Research question 3 asked: "Do black South Africans lack the self-efficacy necessary to make it to top management within the corporate environment?"

This research question asks whether black South Africans believe in themselves and their capabilities to occupy leadership positions in corporate South Africa. The question is posed to understand whether black South Africans have the right psychology to lead, assuming corporate South Africa is a meritocracy.

The theme that came out of the interview for this research question speaks to how strong-willed black South Africans are. It is discussed below, together with the code and code groups that emerged from the interviews.

Only 12% of the participants mentioned having a lack of confidence and this was a result of their background and experiences. The general feeling during the interviews was that the participants believe in the abilities although only five explicitly spoke about the confidence they have in themselves. Another three participants have had enough self-belief to start their own businesses.

In chapter two, the social cognitive career theory was discussed. The theory says that individuals are likely to succeed in their careers based on their cognitive skills and belief in themselves (Tran & Von Korflesch, 2016). There is, therefore, congruence between the literature and the data that emerged.

6.4.1 Model for research question 3

The model for research question 2 was further adapted to add the outcomes for research question 3. As discussed in chapter 2, self-efficacy is crucial for one to succeed.

It is therefore at the core of everything, it is what holds an individual's success together.

Figure 7: Model for research question 3
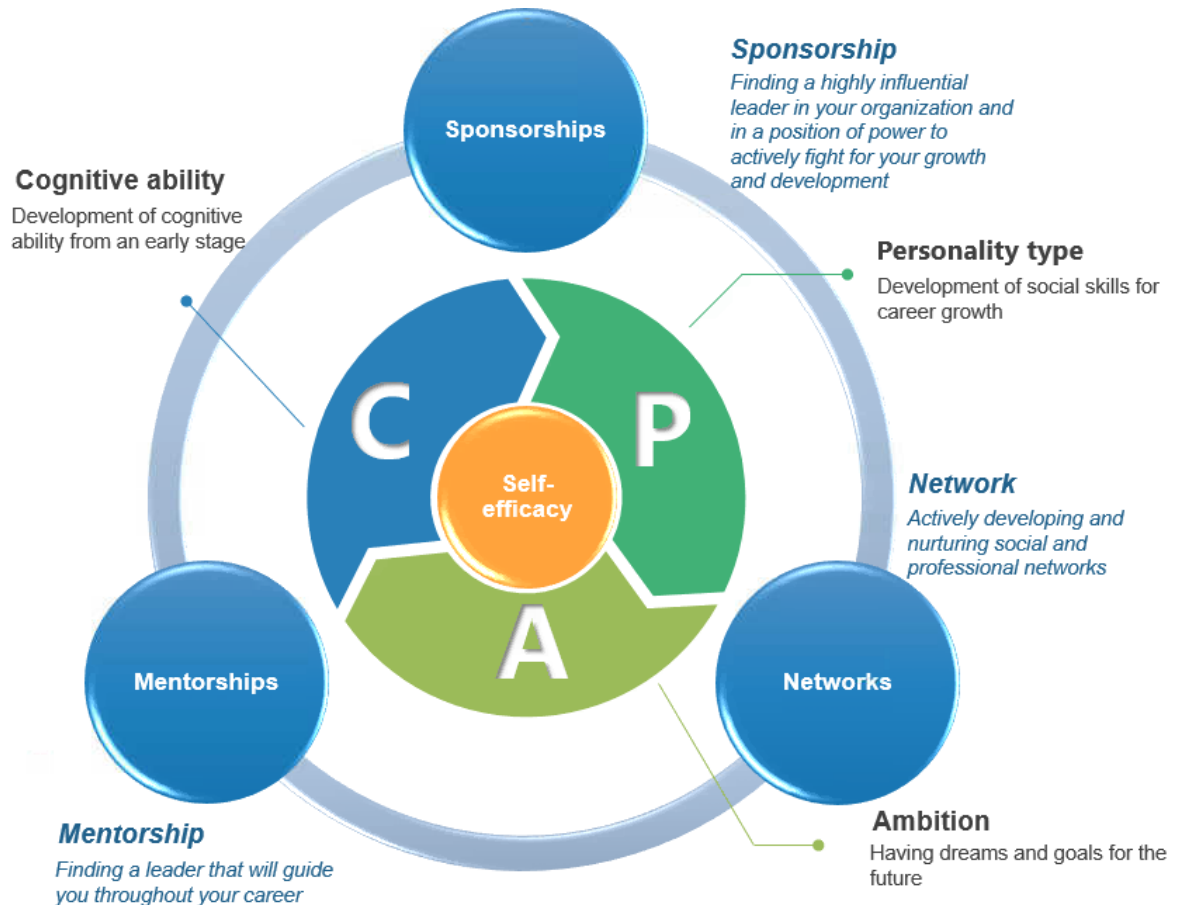
6.4.2 Conclusion of research question 3

The third research question sought to determine whether the reason why there are so few for black South Africans in top management positions, has to do with their self-belief or not. According to the data that emerged from the interviews, black South Africans do not lack the self-belief necessary to succeed.

The social cognitive career theory also states that career success is a result of human capital and self-efficacy, of which black South Africans have demonstrated to have. The

is congruence between the theory and the data from the interviews, in that career success can be determined by human capital and self-belief, both of which the participants demonstrated possession thereof.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings that came out of the results chapter. This chapter will cover the conclusions of the research into the antecedents of career success for black South Africans. The recommendations for the relevant stakeholders and the limitations to the research will also be discussed. Lastly, recommendations for future research will be offered.

7.2 Summary of conclusions

7.2.1 Research question 1 conclusions

The first research question was: "Are there specific personality traits that are indispensable for black South Africans to be successful in corporate?"

This question was posed in order to have a clear understanding of the type of personality that is likely to lead to a successful career. This was uncovered by attempting to decipher the qualities and traits of the participants that took part in the study. After the interviews were conducted, transcribed, code and analysed, three main themes came out of the data. These were:

- Cognitive ability – the participants' cognitive ability was measured through their academic performance in high school and tertiary
- Personality type – this was mainly trying to figure out if the participants regard themselves as introverts or extroverts
- Ambition – the amount of ambition one has is key to the success of an individual and this was also assessed in the participants

In terms of the participants cognitive abilities, the amount of qualifications each participant had, suggested that they all possessed cognitive abilities. The methodology that was employed to select the participants also specified that they had to have acquired an executive program through GIBS. Lauder (2015) mentions that a person has a better chance of succeeding in their career if they continuously enhance their human capital. Human capital is the investment that is made by an individual, through education and training, in order to enhance their knowledge and capabilities (Nafukho, Hairston, & Brooks, 2004).

In the case of research question 1, there was consistency between the literature cited and the data that came out of the interviews. A model was also developed to show the importance of the interplay between the three critical factors that are necessary for career success.

Therefore, the first research question was answered and the specific personality traits that emerged are cognitive ability, personality type and level of ambition.

7.2.2 Research question 2 conclusions

The second research question was: "Which extrinsic factors contribute to the success of black South Africans within the corporate environment?"

This question was posed to try and find out which exogenous factors are responsible for the career success of an individual. The first research question sought to understand the personal traits, the second one looks at what other factors, outside of the individual, are crucial for career success. Four themes emerged out of the data from research question 2. These were:

- Family and support structure – this looked at the role that family plays in supporting and contributing to an individual's career success
- Career enablers – these are factors such as sponsorships, mentorships, networks and an enabling environment within which one works
- Corporate South Africa climate – this refers to the dynamics within corporate South Africa, taking into consideration the discriminatory history of the country

- Interaction with other cultures – this investigates the importance of interacting with other cultures at an early stage of one's life and the rich learnings that one gets

7.2.2.1 Family and support structure

Although there was limited literature to support the findings from the data about the importance of family support, the participants mentioned this as an important aspect of the success they've achieved in their careers.

7.2.2.2 Career enablers

The three main career enablers that were mentioned are sponsorships, mentorships and networks. There was consensus among all participants about the importance of these three enablers.

A sponsor is someone in the organisation who is influential and in a high position, who will actively push for an individual's growth and development (Perry & Parikh, 2019). Not all the participants had sponsors, but they unanimously acknowledged the importance thereof.

A mentor is an established leader who guides an individual through their career into leadership roles (Batara & Woolgar, 2017). Around 68% of the participants had mentors and all tried to mentor others where they could because there are dual benefits according to Ayyala et al. (2019), that the participants recognised.

Networks are formal and informal relationships that are built with others, that can offer benefits to an individual and are considered antecedents of career success (Spurk & Hirschi, 2019). The participants all acknowledge networks as important avenues to career success.

The other important career enabler that was mentioned was the environment that an individual works in. A conducive working environment instils confidence and improves the performance of an individual (Choi, Goh, Adam, & Tan, 2016). Such an environment is generally brought about by a transformational leader, who is a charismatic leader that can influence and create trust and commitment in the organisation (Bass, 1990).

On these elements, literature is consistent with the results that emerged from the interviews about the importance of sponsorships, mentorships, networks and a transformational leader who will create an environment for success.

7.2.2.3 Corporate South Africa

This theme focused on the view that black South Africans have about corporate South Africa. Although a lot of progress has been made, the feeling from the participants is that there is still a lot of covert discrimination in corporate South Africa. Transformation efforts by some organisations are still only for legislative compliance rather than deliberate empowerment and strategic purposes. This discrimination that is still present, is also visible in the income distribution Kernel density curves that were shown by Van der berg (2019) and discussed in chapter 2.

The participants feel that as black people, they are not measured by the same yard stick. The situation becomes even worse for black African women, who must compete on race and gender. When South Africa moved into democracy, white women were hired as calls for gender parity became louder, meaning that black African women were only considered much later (Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2017).

Transformative policies such as AA and BBEEE have aided in the participants being successful but played a secondary role. The primary role was played by the participants' capabilities and work ethic.

7.2.2.4 Interaction with other cultures

The participants had very different upbringings and grew up in different parts of the world. Some participants had the pleasure of interaction with other cultures at an early stage in their lives and others only much later. Those who had earlier interaction mentioned that they benefited from those interactions as they laid the foundation of their business interactions later in life. They were able to relate more to different cultures. Whereas, those who only encountered other cultures at a later stage struggled to adjust and some were negatively impacted.

The second research question is therefore answered as the exogenous factors required for success are stated as family support; the career enablers mentioned and the early interaction with different cultures.

7.2.3 Research question 3 conclusions

The third research is: "Do black South Africans lack the self-efficacy necessary to make it to top management within the corporate environment?"

'Strong-willed' came out as the only theme from the interviews that were conducted. This theme speaks to the self-efficacy that the participants possess. Self-efficacy was described as the belief that one has in their capabilities (Schunk, 1991). The data that came out of the interview process indicate that black South Africans do not lack the self-efficacy to succeed in their careers and have proved that through their various achievements.

The social cognitive career theory discussed earlier states that career success can be predicted based on factors such as human capital and self-belief (Tran & Von Korflesch, 2016). In this case, the results support the literature in terms of the success that can be achieved through human capital and self-belief.

7.2.4 Model for research

Below is the model that was created of the importance factors to consider for career success.

Figure 8: Career success model
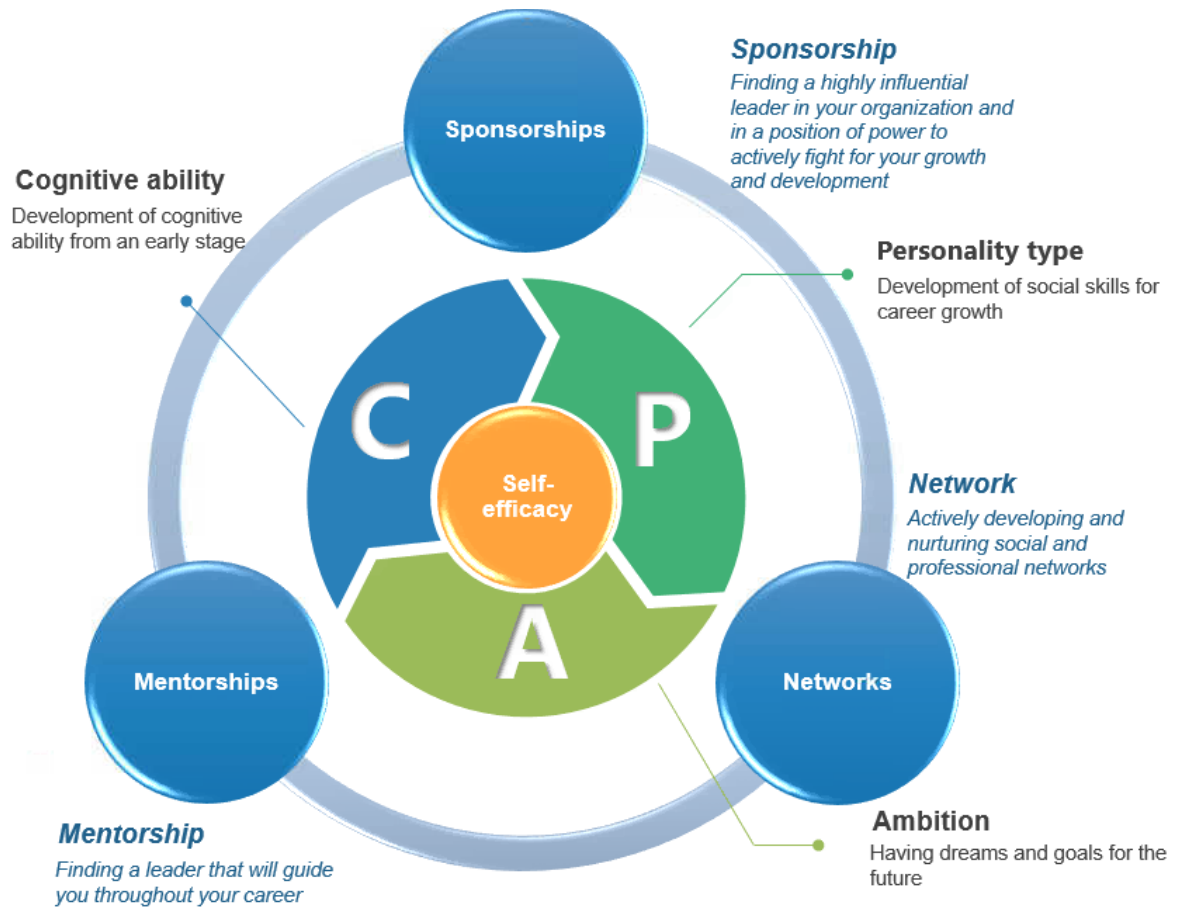
7.3 Contribution of the study

This research makes contributions to various stakeholders, and these are listed below.

- Government:
  - The basic education department can impact the lives learners, particularly in government school, by recognising and developing the elements depicted in the model at an early age. These are cognitive abilities, social skills, ambition and self-efficacy.
  - Although not prescriptive, this study gives the Department of Labour an indication of the failure of implementation of some of the transformation policies such as AA and BBEEE, for them to revise and improve the implementation thereof.

- Business: Business can use this to revise their graduate programs such that they incorporate elements from the model produced. This will ensure that graduates have a better chance of attaining success in their careers.

- Black African professionals: Professionals who are already employed and have been struggling to progress in their careers, can also use the presented model to identify which of the elements they are missing and incorporate them into their growth strategies.

7.4 Limitations of the research

The limitations of the research are stated below:

- Since there was minimal training and experience on the use of the Atlas.ti software for coding the transcripts, it may have not been the best attempt to understand and report on the data.
- The researcher is a black African employed in corporate South Africa and their unconscious biases might have caused them to project their thoughts on the participants and outcomes of the research.

7.5 Recommendations for future research

The recommendations for future research to build on the one that has been conducted are listed below.

- A study on antecedents on career success of white South Africans
- A comparative study to understand how other races compare in terms of utilising the elements of the career success model developed
- A study that will exclusively focus on the barriers to career success of black Africans in corporate South Africa that can be used in conjunction with this one

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consistency Matrix

Title: The antecedents of career success in corporate South Africa: views of black African professionals

Research questions	Literature review	Data collection	Analysis
Research question 1: Are there specific personality traits that are indespensable for black South Africans to be successful in corporate?	Heslin, Keating, & Minbashian (2019) Zhou, Guan, Xin, Mak, & Denga (2016)	Interview question 7, 9, 13	Analysis of open ended questions to determine full extent of options
Research question 2: Which extrinsic factors contribute to the succes of black South Africans in corporate?	Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, Spurk (2017) Noback, Broersma, & van Dijk (2016) Poona, Briscoe, Abdul-Ghani, & Jones (2015)	Interview question 1, 2, 6, 12, 15	Analysis of open ended questions to determine full extent of options
Research question 3: Do black South Africans lack the self-efficacy necessary to make it to top management in corporate?	Tran & Von Korflesch (2016)	Interview question 8,16	Analysis of open ended questions to determine full extent of possible reasons

Appendix 2: Draft Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about the environment you grew up in (area, safe, infrastructure, etc)
2. Tell me about the family you grew up in (parents, siblings).
3. What did your parents do for a living?
4. How did your immediate or extended family influence the type of person you are?
5. Did you model yourself around any of your parents or siblings? If so, who and why?
6. Can you describe your childhood in terms of how you were raised?
7. Tell me about your value and belief system and how these played a role in your journey.
8. How would you describe your personality? (extrovert/ introvert)
9. How do you think your background shaped your self-belief?
10. Describe to me your high school journey and how you fared.
11. How did you manage to remain focused as a young person in high school?

12. Describe to me how you came to the decision of studying what you did at tertiary and how the experience was.

13. Describe to me how your employment journey has been since you started working.

14. Do you have a mentor? If so, how long have you had one and how did the relationship begin? What is the value of that relationship?

15. What keeps you motivated?

16. How did you navigate the challenges of corporate South Africa?

17. At what point did you start believing that you were good enough to make it to the top?

18. What in your opinion has led to your success in corporate South Africa?

19. If there was anything that you could change about your rise to the top, what would it be and why?

20. What do you believe are the main obstacles for black South Africans ascending to top management positions in corporate South Africa?

21. What do you believe black South Africans can do for more for them to reach top management in their organisations?

22. What do you do in your spare time?

23. What would your advice be to all young (black) professionals wanting to climb the corporate ladder?

Appendix 3: Ethical clearance

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Ethical Clearance
Approved

Dear Siphiwe Mthembu,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.
We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Ethical Clearance Form

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS
Research Admin team.

Appendix 4: Consent letter

Gordon Institute of Business Science
University of Pretoria

Dear Mr/Mrs./Miss

For my final MBA research report at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science, I will be conducting a study on the career success of African professionals in corporate South Africa. This is against the backdrop of the disproportionate representation of black professionals in leadership positions. The study is meant to track the journey of successful black professionals and potentially serve as a blueprint for those who will follow. The title of the study is "The antecedents of career success in corporate South Africa: views of black African professionals".

The study will be qualitative in nature, where I will interview respondents for approximately 45 min. The interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for each respondent. Confidentiality will always be maintained during the process. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Siphiwe Mthembu
Email: 19384247@mygibs.co.za
Contact: 072 151 2066

Research Supervisor name: Ngwako Sefoko
Email: nsefoko@gmail.com
Contact: 072 368 4415

Name of participant: _____
Signature of participant: _____
Date: _____

Appendix 5: Code book

	Code	Grounded
○	Academic performance	18
○	Accomodative and motivational leadership	1
○	Accomodative corporate culture	1
○	Accomplishing goals	1
○	Adjusting to discomfort	6
○	Affluent upbringing	1
○	Appointed mentor	3
○	Being a good example	1
○	Being a specialist	2
○	Being fortunate	1
○	Being patient	1
○	Being restless and hungry	1
○	Black tax	2
○	Blacks not supporting each other	2
○	Block out negativity	1
○	Breaking new ground	6
○	Building legacy	3
○	Building your brand	1
○	Business coaching	1
○	Career ambitions	1
○	career choice	5
○	Career grooming	2
○	Career guidance	1
○	Career path	27
○	Career progression	13
○	Career switch	6
○	Christian family	4

○	Company stints	1
○	Competing with others	4
○	Compromising who you are	3
○	Confidence building	1
○	Content with career	1
○	Continuous learning and improvement	2
○	Corporate not always a meritocracy	1
○	Creating career roadmap	3
○	Creating negative perception	1
○	Culture shock	2
○	Dangerous environment	2
○	Dealing with disappointment	2
○	Dealing with industrila relations	1
○	Disadvantaged background	11
○	Discrimination of blacks	2
○	Disillusionment with job	1
○	Doing it right first time	1
○	Domestic worker during apartheid	1
○	Doubting yourself	4
○	Dream of a better life	7
○	Drive team performance	1
○	Driven by anger	1
○	Driven by poor circumstances	3
○	Driven by success	6
○	Education being sponsored	13
○	Education disruption	5
○	Education not sponsored	4

○	Emotional abuse	1
○	Emotional stability	1
○	Emotional turmoil	1
○	Empowering environment	1
○	Encountering diverse cultures	2
○	Encouragement from family	1
○	English accent	1
○	Enjoyed childhood	1
○	European education system	1
○	Execution of strategy	1
○	Executive coaching	3
○	Expertise in chosen field	5
○	Expressing oneself	2
○	Family instilled discipline	8
○	Family instilled values	6
○	Family structure	19
○	Feeling of not belonging	1
○	Fighting among blacks	3
○	Finding common ground	4
○	Finding forgiveness	2
○	Fixer at work	1
○	Forthright	3
○	Friends influenced career path	1
○	Frugal lifestyle	1
○	Genuine leadership	1
○	Growing thick skin	1
○	Having a good attitude	1

○	Having mentees	1
○	High levels of tolerance	1
○	High school culture	2
○	House chores	1
○	Humility	1
○	Hunger to learn	1
○	Immediate family	3
○	Impact of transformational policies	17
○	Impacting others' lives	7
○	Importance of dreaming	3
○	Importance of education	11
○	Importance of mentorship	18
○	Importance of networks	17
○	Importance of sponsorship	11
○	Importance of travelling	1
○	Inequality at work	1
○	Influential leadership	1
○	International qualification	1
○	International travel	1
○	Irrelevant qualification	1
○	Lack of mentorship	6
○	Lack of sponsor	4
○	Lack of support structure	2
○	Lack of transformation	3
○	Language challenges	10
○	Leadership qualities	1
○	Leadership style	3

○	Learning to unlearn	1
○	Life challenges	2
○	Living in different countries	2
○	Lobbying stakeholders	1
○	Looking up to someone	3
○	Loss of parent	1
○	Love for reading	6
○	Love for travel	1
○	Love helping others	1
○	Loving family	2
○	Making family proud	2
○	Male dominated	3
○	Middle class upbringing	3
○	Monetary benefits	1
○	Motivation from boss	1
○	Motivation from kids	1
○	Needing others	1
○	Never give up	2
○	New challenges	1
○	No career guidance	3
○	No opportunities	1
○	No social distractions	2
○	Non exploitation of networks	2
○	Not compromising who you are	4
○	On the job training	1
○	One's abilitites	1
○	Opening doors for others	11

○	Opportunities denied	2
○	Others doubting your capabilities	1
○	Own business	1
○	Parent influenced career path	1
○	Parent's occupation	16
○	People believing in you	2
○	Personal brand	2
○	Personal development	2
○	Personal philosophy	1
○	Personal values	8
○	Personality type	18
○	Place of birth	12
○	Place of upbringing	10
○	Planning and strategising	2
○	Political battle	2
○	Political climate	1
○	Pressure from society	3
○	Professional networks	1
○	Progressing on merit	2
○	Proving people wrong	5
○	Public speaking	1
○	Publicise your achievements	2
○	Quality education	1
○	Rapport with customers	1
○	Relatable	1
○	Relating to different cultures	5
○	Requesting for mentorship	1

○	Respect for others	1
○	Role of a mother	2
○	SA education system	1
○	Seeing other black people succeed	4
○	Self belief	9
○	Self determination	5
○	Self discipline	3
○	Self motivation	9
○	Setting the foundation	1
○	Single parent	6
○	Social networks	3
○	Soft skills	3
○	Speaking proper English	1
○	Sponsors within company	10
○	Spousal competition	1
○	State sponsored education	2
○	Straight talker	1
○	Support structure	6
○	Taking accountability	3
○	Taking initiative	2
○	Taking risks	11
○	Team work	1
○	Tertiary education	28
○	Time management	1
○	Top student	1
○	Transform work level	1
○	Twice effort half recognition	5

○	Understanding yourself	2
○	Unofficial mentors	8
○	Unpleasant environment	2
○	Upbringing	1
○	Variation of mentors	3
○	Volunteer work	1
○	White dominated industry	3
○	Window dressing	3
○	Work ethic	20
○	Work experience	4
○	Work life balance	1
○	Working efficiently	1
○	Working harder than men	2
○	Working towards a goal	1

Appendix 6: Career success model

Sponsorships

Sponsorship
Finding a highly influential leader in your organization and in a position of power to actively fight for your growth and development

Cognitive ability
Development of cognitive ability from an early stage

Personality type
Development of social skills for career growth

Network
Actively developing and nurturing social and professional networks

Self-efficacy

C P A

Mentorships

Networks

Mentorship
Finding a leader that will guide you throughout your career

Ambition
Having dreams and goals for the future