

We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,400

Open access books available

174,000

International authors and editors

190M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com



Chapter

When Spotting the Glass Cliff Matters for Women: A Qualitative Study Focusing on Gender Inequalities in Corporate South Africa

Winsome Mashele and Imhotep Paul Alagidede

Abstract

Trends of women accessing senior manager roles in corporate South Africa have made considerable gains, and although some women have managed to crack the glass ceiling which has hindered their full participation in economic life, true gender equality is yet to be achieved. Sometimes, what seems like a wonderful opportunity to climb up the corporate ladder is an ascent that leads you to the top and pushes you over the edge. But what happens when women do manage to get to the top? The study investigates the concept of the glass cliff by interrogating its existence and looking further into the implications of the phenomenon. A qualitative research methodology was employed, and data collected through semi-structured interviews from a total of 15 participants. The research suggests that for women managers it is important to understand when, why, and how glass cliff appointments are likely to occur and elaborates on strategies for eliminating the glass cliff. The study goes further to make suggestions to policy makers about the importance of understanding the impact of the choices made by women seeking management positions and provides insights regarding how women feel about taking these precarious manager roles. This chapter aims at contributing to this under-researched area from a South African perspective.

Keywords: social-role theory, corporate, gender, leadership, glass cliff

1. Introduction

Despite evidence that women are breaking through the “glass ceiling” which has hindered their full participation in economic life, true gender equality has not yet been achieved, and it is a puzzle why the entry of women into senior management positions remains restricted. Although the ‘glass ceiling’ is a metaphor describing an inequitable architectural feature of career paths, its potential impact on individuals is profound [1]. Women around the world who seek managerial positions continue to face systemic barriers and frustrations in the workplace that hinders

their progress [2]. Having more women entering the workforce, it has become clear that the social environment plays a crucial role in the degree to which they are obstructed in their management aspirations. Therefore, the consequences of the group and organizational contexts have increasingly attracted researchers' attention [2].

Though the gender gap remains wide, apparent advances have been made. The glass cliff phenomenon manifested itself in women being appointed to management positions "associated with the increased risk of failure and criticism because these positions are more likely to involve management of organisational units which are in crisis" [1–3]. Ncube [4] also observed similar findings in the analysis of corporates in South Africa in the last 5–7 years (at the time of the study). Glass cliff appointments in corporate South Africa is quite prevalent. Women were appointed as CEOs in various organisations that were in trouble, namely South African Airways, Prasa, Transnet, Telkom and South African Post Office, noteworthy is that government is a major shareholder in most of the organisations listed above. These women were highly qualified and at the time of their appointments were hailed as being significantly experienced and suitable for the task at hand [4]. Most did not make it in those roles thus potentially reinforcing the harmful idea that women cannot lead and adding to the statistics of women who failed in top positions.

This chapter argues, though, that when organizational decline is excessive, assuming management responsibility can be very risky. Evidence gathered from researchers clearly demonstrates that the contexts in which women and men tend to achieve senior manager roles differ markedly. As compared to men, female managers possess different skills and traits that may increase the probability of successful crisis management [5]. It demonstrates that in comparison to men, women who 'break through' the glass ceiling are often appointed to positions that are more precarious and associated with a higher risk of failure—a phenomenon captured by the metaphor of the glass cliff [6]. Therefore, there is a high probability supported by research that women bring innovative and productive practices to the boardroom [5]. Women's progress in management positions in the public sector have been associated with management positions with higher risks of failure in previous studies [3, 7] referred to as women facing a glass cliff [6, 8]. In such situations, women are perceived as better suited for senior management positions, which is attributed to the association between crisis management and stereotypical female management styles. One of the possible motives for organisations to make glass cliff appointments are based on the need to signal to the market that there is a commitment to innovative strategies, by selecting a woman as a top manager during a crisis [9]. More generally, the appointment of women may serve as a signal of change from the dominant stereotypically male model of management [8]. Mulcahy and Linehan [1] confirmed the glass cliff phenomenon in some studies, which are however rejected in other studies [10] and most studies are situated in private sector contexts [9]. If the organisation's crisis persists or worsens, the huge stakeholder awareness associated with poor performance or crisis status make a female manager highly visible [11]. "It is time for women to accept the challenge—to rightfully claim their space". Women who have challenged the system, and those whose efforts have been hindered. Women and men are encouraged to work together to break down the barriers of gender so that the next generation of female managers can rightfully claim their space [12].

The purpose of this study was to further explore this possibility. Specifically, the focus is on South African corporations.

2. Background

Despite women encountering many issues exacerbating gender inequalities in the workplace, the number of women in the work force has seen a steady increase. According to Statistics South Africa (2015), women make up 51% of the total population of South Africa and account for 45.1% of the working population [13]. However, from the sample reflecting South Africa's mainstream economy, the number of women CEOs in South Africa has doubled from seven in 2015 to fourteen in 2017, but only one state-owned enterprise (SOE) has a women CEO. The interest in doing this study is informed by the claim made [6] that women are overrepresented in senior management positions in organisations during crisis, as stated in the introduction. In joining a new organisation during challenging times for women in the corporate environment, can sometimes present opportunities to display your expertise and be part of the winning team. In other circumstances however, starting in a new management role in stormy times can turn even ordinary work duties into very daunting tasks.

3. Gender bias and management

Wittmann [14] argues that post-apartheid South Africa's transformation process has made significant strides in achieving gender equality through the introduction of legislation such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 that promotes the inclusion of black people, women and the disabled into the workplace. However, black women continue to be marginalised along racial and gender lines as business is an extension of society, mirroring the complex power relations in South African society that are reminiscent of the discriminatory practices of apartheid South Africa. Gender-responsive, transformative management is not only about achieving gender equality, but about equipping women and men with the tools to change the mindset of society in manner to achieve gender equity at all levels. The intellectual, economic, and social contributions of women are essential to organizations and to economic progress in general, as well as to our communities however gender bias is still rife across the workplace. Women and men, girls and boys are vulnerable in different ways in times of crisis and are often treated differently by perpetrators of violence and by state actors. Gender difference is one of the most significant determinants of an individual's capacity to cope safely during a crisis, and gender profoundly affects whether, how, and when individuals gain access to support in the aftermath [15]. While women and men collectively experience the insecurity of crisis situations and must contend with the economic and social consequences, women – globally the poorest of the poor – bear the additional insecurity of sexual and gender-based violence. Social role theory argues that stereotypes about men and women are based on observations of their behaviours in gender-typical social roles [15]. For example, for men and women to get appointed to senior managerial roles it is plainly based on the applicant's competence [16]. However, gender stereotypes regarding management ability may not uniformly lead to the perception of an individual woman being less competent than a comparable man. Heilman et al. [2] who investigated men's and women's success in a male gender-typed job in a US undergraduate student sample found that in situations of ambiguity about success, women were viewed as less competent and characterized as less achievement oriented than men, whereas in situations in which success was made explicit, there were no gender differences in characterizations. Bosak and Sczesny [15]

has suggested that evaluators rely less on gender stereotypical expectations when they can base decisions on actual observations of candidates' performance. Furthermore, in their study of dynamic stereotypes, Bosak and Sczesny [15] found that participants' stereotypes about women, men and managers were malleable.

4. Women and precarious leadership

The perceived proposition that women are suitable in senior manager roles when an organisation is in crisis is likely to increase. In times of crises, female employees are seen as sincerer, emotional and friendly; male employees are more competitive, authoritative and self-confident. Due to these stereotypes, female managers are considered more appropriate than male in the crisis situations in the firm. Since innovation is strategically necessary in organizational change, innovation is perceived as a risk, and in such cases, women employees are appointed as managers. In the women preferences factor, women can be willing to work in risky positions [17].

In a company where exist glass cliff, while male employees do not ascend beyond the glass ceiling, female employees take the tasks beyond the glass ceiling. These tasks are not preferred by male employees as they are perceived as a high risk of failure. On the other hand, female employees thinking that they will turn the crisis into an opportunity, may be more willing to take risky tasks compared to male employees. The reason for the realization of the glass cliff phenomenon is that the failure encountered is attributed to the woman manager appointed to that position [17]. However, if career advancement is available at a precarious organization, it may result in a conflicting state of mind (i.e., there is an opportunity for advancement, however, at a precarious company). Therefore, we believe that the risk status of the job influences the perception of the job as a promotional opportunity. If the job position is perceived as a risky career strategy rather than an opportunity for advancement, the job is less likely to be seen as a promotional opportunity. In turn, a risky job is less likely to be accepted by a job seeker [18].

This speculation is in line with research findings reported by ref. [19] which indicated that the difficulties that men face on their way to the highest echelons in their organisations, are more likely to serve a positive self-developmental purpose than their female counterparts, since they view their challenges more as obstacles to be surmounted. The research findings by Haslam and Ryan [19] suggest that men and women are selected differently for both rewarding and unrewarding jobs, but its correlational nature leaves questions of cause and effect largely unanswered. For example, it may be that in most cases women prefer to select those positions that have challenges or obstacles in the organisation, as compared to others choosing for them.

Clearly, the concept of the glass cliff is relevant when analysing the life of the organisation, as its impact extends beyond just a perception of the suitability of women for management positions that are precarious because they are associated with the coordination of organisational units that are in crisis. Particularly, as these perceptions form the basis for actual organisations, they should have an impact on the kind of duties assigned to women in organisations if they succeed in climbing the corporate ladder. Lyness and Thompson [20], analysed archival and survey data to compare the work experiences of men and women in senior management positions. The results revealed several important differences in male and female positions in the organisation. In particular, the positions women occupy tend to involve risk and less dignity. Women find their positions to be less satisfying or attractive than men, which led the researchers to reach the conclusion that if women are seen breaking into top

level positions, they are likely to be confronted with elements of gender discrimination such as glass cliff.

Ryan et al. [8] asked participants to read and respond to a news article summarizing Ryan and Haslam's [6] original archival study. Participants responded to several closed-ended questions assessing the degree to which, they viewed the glass cliff phenomenon as problematic for women, and to an open-ended question asking for comments about factors that prompt glass cliff effects. Several reasons were provided for the effect, ranging from more pernicious explanations that emphasized sexism and women's expendability to relatively more benign explanations that emphasized gender stereotypes and the desire to promote equality. However, without being biased, it is worth noting that women are not easily afforded the opportunity to attain senior roles as corporate executives, oftentimes when the opportunity arises, they do not do the prerequisite research or investigate the risks attached to the position being offered. Women immediately make themselves available to take up the offered position, which highlights the findings that females are over-represented in precarious management positions [6, 8].

Schein's [21] concept of "think manager-think male" demonstrated that mid-level male managers believed that men were more likely than women to possess the characteristics associated with managerial success. This was demonstrated by ref. [6] in their "think crisis-think female" concept, that indicated that women are elevated to positions of power within organisations when things are going poorly and thus face multiple challenges due being appointed in positions of power under these circumstances. Ryan and Haslam's [6] concept outweighs the typical "think manager-think male" viewpoint, in which it is generally assumed that successful managers possess masculine, agentic attributes [22, 23]. Ryan et al.'s [22] concept of "think crisis-think female" proposes that management abilities coincide with stereotypically feminine roles and traits therefore the "think crisis-think female" association may exist [22].

5. Methodology

The current research study employed an interpretivist-constructive paradigm with the focus of the study being the lived experiences of a sample of women managers from corporate South Africa that participated in the study. Based on this, a qualitative research approach was taken to investigate the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon in corporate South Africa. To date limited research has been conducted on the existence of glass cliff appointment and its consequences for women managers in corporate South Africa. Moreover, the qualitative research approach is helpful when investigating traits or trends and helps to understanding individuals' personal and management experiences to extract valuable insights about a specific phenomenon [24]. Phenomenology is effective in studying a small sample size—in this case, 17 participants—to identify the core of their experiences with the phenomenon [25] and to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. Semi structured, open, qualitative interviews were conducted with 17 women in senior management positions (C-suite) in corporate South Africa, who were purposively selected as participants using the snowball method. The interviews were conducted in English and tape-recorded, then transcribed and analysed using ATLAS-ti and thematic analysis was used to review the interviews. All interviews were documented using pseudonyms. This approach allowed the us to recruit the most appropriate sample to answer the research question [26]. For this study, 17 women leaders were purposively sampled, participants ranged from executives (10), senior (5) and Board and non-board members (2).

Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and their organizations. Each participant was identified by a pseudonym.

6. Results

Previous studies [6, 8] found that it was not that women were bad managers, but that they were appointed as leaders when companies were failing. The study participants were hesitant to confirm the existence of the glass cliff phenomenon in corporate South Africa. Several broad reasons to justify the existence of the glass cliff and why women find themselves in those roles were shared. For example, women regard glass cliff as an opportunity to be afforded to occupy the senior management positions. This study found that the reason for accepting these risky positions were based on (1) Challenging traditional views, (2) female career shortage, (3) career benefit and advancement, (4) eagerness to accept challenges. The study also made an interesting finding, that the reasons for women to accept glass cliff appointment were driven by the need for promotional opportunity. To elucidate this notion, we draw on social cognitive career theory and the theory of circumscription and compromise which offer a basis for examining why women must make compromises in career decision-making [18]. We focus on perceptions of the job as a promotional opportunity and individuals' career self-efficacy as key variables in the career decision-making process of men and women to better understand "the road to the glass cliff" [19].

7. Challenging traditional views

The participants in the study indicated that it is through accepting these risky situations that they become committed to proving a point, by dismantling the stereotypes they encounter. And going further to show that women in management have the potential to advance as much as if not better than their male counterparts. Most of the participants recounted numerous stories highlighting how traditional norms and ways of thinking, that have supported recurring behaviour or attributed to maintaining the status quo for decades, and promoting the entrenchment of repeated behaviour, were identified as reasons that the glass cliff exists in corporate South Africa. It is through this process that participants have learned to develop a sense of autonomy, self-respect and the drive that allowed them the opportunity to grow and develop the skills that have enabled them to advance to positions that have given them more power and authority.

Some of the participants noted that women are not expected to perform in senior roles as society has decided that they are incapable of taking on these roles successfully. Chrissie, one of the study participants, further noted that culturally, society does not encourage girls to have an education because they are perceived as an asset due to the dowry paid to their families when they marry. Malawe, another participant shared her view on how women are viewed saying that:

Because traditionally, women are perceived to be expert in doing office "housework" like organising office parties. And you just need to prove that you can do it. It is also about our legacy. You want to leave a legacy. You want to say, you know what, I have done it, other women can do it. But also, we are doing it to support other women so that you can bring other women to the level where we are. And even beyond.

The extract above is indicative that the gender gap as regards to housework seems to be narrowing but women still carry the load. There is no explanation for why women end up doing more housework, it must then be because of societal norms and standards. Several of the study participants acknowledged that the responsibilities for women outside of the office are often more demanding even though they hold senior level positions and are exposed to the same pressures as their male counterparts, they are still responsible for most of the household chores and childcare.

8. Female career shortage

The fact that there is such a shortage of women in management positions adheres to the fact that they are more than willing to accept these managerial positions that are risky. Although this is slowly starting to increase there is still a sense of traditional viewpoints related to women in the workforce as not being worthy of a “man’s job”. This in return, makes the woman leader more eager to accept these risky managerial positions due to this direct shortage. When Nicci was asked about the issue of women accepting risky managerial positions she responded:

I don't know. It is fewer; you know there are very few women in senior management positions. So, there must be an element of truth to the fact that there are very few positions and when you are offered, don't think twice as it might not present itself again.

Nicci's challenge reflects Mathipa and Tsoka's [27] finding that in South Africa, the problem of very few women in management positions came more to the foreground after the advent of the new political dispensation. It surfaced more and more as the country's political landscape became gradually normalised. As the problem grew and became more and more conspicuous, an attempt to deal with it in the form of a Commission for Gender Equality was undertaken.

9. Career benefit and advancement

Nicola, Vonani Mama and Nicci confirmed their lack of confidence earlier on in their careers. Their confidence was built through hard work and investing in themselves. However, the researcher does not agree that all the other attributes are gender specific, nor does she believe that leaders of whatever gender must be aggressive to succeed. Nicola said:

The one is quite aggressive, 'one of the boys' style, and it works quite well in financial services. If you are aggressive and you come across like one of the boys, you go out with them, you drink with them, you swear with them. They keep you in their circles and you end up getting to the top that way.

In the extract above, the participant is emphasizing that if you cannot beat them join them, it is a good strategy for infiltration so you can be seen to be one of “the boys.” The purpose is to learn their weaknesses through being part of the group and beat them at their own game, utilizing the option of joining the boys’ club to try and fit in. The potential result being that if women start joining these groups and shaking things up, the traditional boy’s club will flat-out not exist. Fitting in should not be about going to work and trying to be like a man, pretending to be someone you are not.

What if instead of trying to fit in, women used a different approach, something that works just for them, perhaps starting a 'girls' only club? The participants also found the workplace to be a "boys' club". Across race, they found that while they could work quite closely and get on well with their male colleagues, they were not quite part of the club. According to Fisher and Kinsey [28] collaboration another dimension that can differ between genders. As a result of old boys' networks and dynamics women face the additional challenge of securing access to key networks that men have access to from the start of their academic careers. This statement also stresses the need for women to turn negative constructions into positive ones by reinterpreting the negative constructions and embracing them as a basis from which they draw their strength. This kind of socializing for the participants was necessary to get ahead. For example, people who skip the pub after work miss out on "office gossip", opportunities for promotions, who has been promoted, etcetera. According to De Klerk [29] networking is not restricted to specific situations and people can network at any time and place, which makes every opportunity a networking opportunity. Networking relationships allow for successful business practices and the development of mutual respect trust and social capital, which contribute to the success of networking efforts in a business [29].

10. Eager to accept challenges

The participants indicated that besides taking risky jobs for career advancement, they agreed that they also accepted risky positions just for the sake of the challenge. The predetermined social mind set of women not being able to face certain challenges are being dismantled from these women's perspectives. Gender inequality is not positioned as a 'woman's problem' and women's management programs need to shift away from a "fix the women" framework, to developmentally examine what women want. Systemic change is required to address power and patriarchy barriers [12].

Rather than accepting stereotypically mediocre jobs or careers, they keep challenging the status quo to prove that they are worthy of greatness and can run a big corporate entity. These women are constantly eager to accept difficult and challenging positions that allow their minds and capabilities to be challenged and would not otherwise be able to function in a job that does not challenge their minds in any way. All the participants in the current study shared how they had become tougher. This had allowed them to deal with challenges without getting emotional. Not only is the struggle to assert power evident in their stories, but male oppression is also re-asserted by dismissing the hurtful impact of the experiences as recounted in the following extract by Iron Lady:

For me is that women always think about the bigger picture approach, they think about the joy of winning, they want to be part of creating the better future of the organisation. Even if the organisation is struggling and is made up of people who were appointed for a specific reason, there is a spark, there is something unique seen in them. Since women know that they can inspire and turn that spark into a flame and get the people there, taking the organization out of struggle they can do it.

11. Discussion

The discussion is based on the findings and is clustered according to themes that have been identified through the literature as well as emanating from the findings.

The study revealed the tools and resources that are critical if you take on a role that is high pressured and requires high performance to avoid falling off the cliff.

12. Adequate support structures

It is important to know what sort of support structures you will require to navigate the glass cliff and to deliver on your responsibilities successfully. Women have different circumstances that require different support systems therefore it is important to put forward the kind of support you will require. This aligns with existing research indicating that one of the ways women bolster belief in their management abilities is through strong support systems [18, 26, 30]. According to Appelbaum et al. [30], encouragement and support are predictors of those who will become leaders (both men and women). Turock [31] spoke of the great importance of support systems for women, stating that, “the advantages that social support structures can supply for mentees should not be minimized”. The role mentors can play for mentees in helping them see their potential is crucial. Internal and external structures can serve as buffers against the stress that is inherent in professional women’s careers. IronLady emphasised the importance of the board and executive team, stating the importance of their support and the pitfalls of not having it she said that:

Also, the board or your EXCO becomes extremely critical, if you don't get the support you quickly look like a lone ranger. You will not be able to handle the situation by yourself.

13. Importance of proactive research

The study revealed the importance of proactive research to broadening one’s knowledge with the purpose of staying relevant and retaining your management position. It also showed that in the process of empowering themselves through the means of knowledge formulation, participants were able to fulfil their job requirements and flourish within their field of expertise, thus highlighting the need for C-suite executives to do more research towards improvement and being innovative. Cheverton [32] noted that C-suite executives have little or no time for further development unless they are developmentally minded and are strongly committed to continuing their own personal development. Many C-suite executives do not feel they have the time for self-reflection, and such developmental activities as executive coaching or further education.

14. Importance of personal development

For women managers to continue growing both personally and professionally, personal development is vital. The study revealed that participants in the study recognise the importance of personal development as a significant survival tool for senior women leaders during crisis. Participants gave examples such as improving self-awareness, knowing, and building your own identity as well as discovering and developing your own talents and knowing your own strengths and weaknesses as part of building personal development.

15. Mentoring and strategic networking

External influences like mentoring and networking were perceived as important to participants, however, mentors are not overwhelmingly positioned as drivers of motivation in this study but were examples highlighted by participants and viewed as necessary to their success and in preventing them from falling off the cliff. Singh et al. [33] found that “individuals with mentors report more positive career outcomes than those lacking a mentor”. International women leaders in this study have acknowledged that they have received mentorship support from senior managers to better navigate their leadership skills [33].

A mentor plays the crucial role of a facilitator who encourages the development of the mentee’s skills through instructing, coaching, modelling and advising. There were several connections between findings in the current study and the literature reviewed with regards to mentorship and self-efficacy. All participants identified mentors and champions from multiple perspectives of their career progression. Mentors for these female leaders included former CEOs, professional colleagues, university professors, business leaders and their parents as well. This study is consistent with the literature that discusses the impact of mentors as support systems [29, 30]. Strategic networks are coalitions that women form in response to the isolation and social exclusion they face in the corporate world [34].

16. Conclusion

This study uses the glass-cliff phenomenon to investigate when, how and why women who shatter the glass ceiling find themselves into senior management roles that are risky. This study explores the “glass cliff” form of discrimination. From the perspective of the legions of women who have encountered women-specific challenges as they attempted to rise to higher positions, discrimination seemed to be the chief barrier to their leadership. Discrimination became the strongest narrative about the reasons for underrepresentation of women in managerial roles. Researchers, seeking to identify the processes underlying such discrimination, focused on gender stereotypes as the origin of the problem. Gender stereotypes are not easy to erase. Their stickiness is a result not only of the rigidity of people’s belief systems but also of the social position of women in society, which has changed, but only gradually [35].

Below we propose the overarching implications that emerge from the gender-based management with regards to main causes of glass cliff in the workplace. First, the lack of support that women receive is also explained by shadow structures, which suggest that women’s networks are less resourceful than men’s even when they are in similar positions, women also report feeling more excluded than men [36]. Second, of prominence are human capital barriers (lack of education, resources, and experience); differences in communication styles; exclusion from informal networks; lack of mentors and role-models; and organizational biases [37]. Third, the importance for women to feel connected to the goals and objectives of the larger organization and to envision a holistic picture of themselves as integral organisational partners must be of primary emphasis. As organizations structure effective management development systems for women and as women realize management development practices in their organizations, they will likely experience stronger organizational connections that may well lead to increased organizational commitment.

These findings align with existing research indicating that one of the ways women bolster belief in their management abilities is through strong support systems. Furthermore, attention needs to be given to the implications for policy and practice on gender issues, and the importance of understanding women's experiences in the workplace need to be highlighted, rather than treating gender diversity as merely "a numbers game".

Though policy may be in place, there seems to be no obligation, as demonstrated by the results of this study, to translate this into practice. Guided by the capability and involuntary immobility approaches, and applying a qualitative case study, this study found that women leaders in corporate South Africa devised strategies to navigate the challenges they encountered, to avoid falling off. The study has proved that with the necessary support, women leaders can build strong social structures and yield high financial rewards. Through observing high growth in women working in corporate South Africa and occupying high positions, this study is an appeal to women leaders to understand when, why, and how glass cliff appointments are likely to occur. Within this context, the well-being of women leaders' careers should not be taken for granted. The time is now for women to embrace this call and take a stance, and the researcher believes that this research will open more doors for both current and future research.

17. Limitations and future recommendations

This study is not without its limitations. Due to the interpretivist approach adopted in the study, the research purposely consists of a limited number of women leaders in corporate South Africa. What resulted from this was the depth and richness of the qualitative data in the study, which yielded ample fruit in terms of discussions with participants, who were women in C-suite positions within a corporate setting. Furthermore, one social identity category was investigated and that men were excluded from the study as the focus was on the life stories and narratives of the women who participated in the study. The results of the study can, therefore, not be generalised across the population. Future research could include larger samples and incorporate a variety of methods to improve data representativity. If the glass cliff exists, it is important to understand how it impacts the choices of women seeking management positions and explore how women feel about taking these precarious management positions. If advancement to more precarious or risky positions is the only option, women must understand the danger and the potential career impacts. Further in-depth research is recommended in this regard. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, there are multiple avenues future research could take regarding the ways in which the shape and direction of the organization and the precariousness of the management position is operationalized.

18. Theoretical and practical implications

This research is important in terms of its theoretical and practical implications to the existing body of research knowledge. It contributes to theory in that there is a substantial body of work that more generally focuses on the way in which males in comparison with female managers are selected [9, 38, 39] but none investigating important factors that help women leaders in leading an organisation during crisis

periods more importantly. The glass cliff theory offers a more ambiguous explanation and is considered incomplete without considering the perspective of female managers' attitudes and behaviours towards risk. This chapter contributes to the glass cliff theory by considering the perspective of women rather than focusing on organizational decision makers. In addition, this chapter examines the risk-taking perspective of the glass cliff phenomenon and is one of the first to describe the apparent situation in which women are at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining support for risk-taking. This chapter sheds new light on the glass cliff phenomenon by examining the factors that lead women to high-risk management positions in organizations.

This study has several theoretical implications. First, because the study is set in a strong diversity policy environment, there is intense pressure on organizations to appoint women to management positions. The pressure to fill managerial positions with women was great. In such circumstances, the term "Think Manager—Think Male" is slowly advancing, so the glass cliff phenomenon may not exist and may explain the inconclusive results. In other words, it can be argued that turbulence can have a positive rather than a negative impact in situations of high political pressure for gender equality and strong diversity policies. Organizations with a lower percentage of women in management positions supported this expectation.

Second, the proportion of women in top management positions is the lowest compared to other roles, so the importance of gender for these positions may be stronger than for lower management positions. Additionally, these positions can be a glass cliff as they ultimately place the blame for the organization's failures on top women managers.

The study has practical implications. From an organisational perspective, this study will advise organisations in adopting practices that foster "debiasing" of decisions regarding promotions to top management. If organizational decision-makers understand that female employees are primarily being appointed only under very specific (and perhaps not ideal) conditions, it is possible that they would make more of an effort to expand the opportunities offered to females. And for human capital departments in providing a series of trainings regarding decision-making that raise awareness about the possibility of biased judgments related to gender and leadership.

From the perspective of women managers, this study provides women aspiring to managerial positions within an organization with the insights behind the positions offered in order to make informed decisions about how to navigate that position. Women managers find themselves in a dangerous position because they are often not exposed to the same social resources as mentors and social networks when offered these risky positions as compared male counterparts.

Therefore, it is worth noting that after understanding how and when the glass cliff effect is likely to occur, it is equally important to discern why females are likely to be offered these positions. Without any insight into the reasons behind these appointments, it is impossible to rectify the issues that the glass cliff effect presents for women and leadership.

IntechOpen

Author details

Winsome Mashele^{1*} and Imhotep Paul Alagidede^{2,3,4}

1 Transnet Soc Ltd, Transnet Freight Rail, Wits Business School, Johannesburg, South Africa


2 Finance at Wits Business School, University of South Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa

3 African Finance and Economics Consult, South Africa

4 Nile Valley Group of Companies, South Africa

*Address all correspondence to: noma04@icloud.com

IntechOpen

© 2022 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

References

- [1] Mulcahy M, Linehan C. Females and precarious board positions. *British Journal of Management*. 2014;**25**(3):425-438
- [2] Heilman M, Wallen A, Fuchs D, Tamkins M. Penalties for success: Reactions to women who succeed at male tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2004;**89**:416-427
- [3] Sabharwal M. From glass ceiling to glass cliff: Women in senior executive service. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*. 2013;**25**(2):399-426
- [4] Ncube L. The Intersectionality of Gender, Race and Class: Implications for the Career Progression of Women Leaders in Southern Africa. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Pretoria: UNISA; 2018
- [5] Eagly A, Carli L. The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 2003;**14**:807-834
- [6] Ryan M, Haslam S. The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of Management*. 2005;**16**:81-90
- [7] Smith A, Monaghan K. Some ceilings have cracks: Representative bureaucracy in Federal Regulatory Agencies. *The American Review of Public Administration*. 2011;**43**(1):50-71
- [8] Ryan M, Haslam S. The glass cliff: Exploring the circumstances surrounding the appointment of women to perilous leadership positions. *Academy of Leadership Review*. 2007;**32**(2):549-572
- [9] Ryan M, Haslam S, Morgenroth T, Rink FF, Stoker J, Peters K. Getting on top of the glass cliff: Reviewing a decade of evidence, explanations and impact. *The Leadership Quarterly*. 2016;**27**(3):446-455
- [10] Bechtoldt M, Bannier C, Rock B. The Glass cliff myth? Evidence from Germany and the UK. *The Leadership Quarterly*, Advanced Online Publication. 2019
- [11] Boin A, Kuipers S, Overdijk W. Leadership in times of crisis: A framework for assessment. *International Review of Public Administration*. 2013;**18**(1):79-91
- [12] Butler-Henderson K, Carbone A, Devlin M, Bull R, Coldwell-Neilson J, Fenton A, et al. Women and leadership in higher education learning and teaching. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*. 2022;**19**(1):1-5
- [13] BWASA. Women in Leadership Census. South Africa. 2017. Available from: <https://bwasa.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2017-BWASA-CENSUS-report.pdf>
- [14] Wittmann V. Gender and empowerment in South Africa. *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal*. 2012;**6**(4)
- [15] Bosak J, Sczesny S. Gender bias in leader selection? Evidence from a hiring simulation study. *Sex Roles*. 2011;**65**:234-242
- [16] Eagly A, Wood W, Diekmann A. *Social Role Theory of Sex Differences and Similarities: A Current Appraisal*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum; 2000
- [17] Ece S. Youth's view on gender based Glass Ceiling & Glass Cliff Phenomenon. *Equinox, Journal of Economics, Business & Political Studies*. 2021;**8**(2):134-155
- [18] Darouei D, Pluut H. The paradox of being on the glass cliff: Why do women

accept risky leadership positions?
Career Development International.
2018;**23**(4):397-426

[19] Haslam S, Ryan M. The road to the glass cliff: Differences in the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in succeeding and failing organizations. *Leadership Quarterly*. 2008;**19**:530-546

[20] Lyness K, Thompson D. Above the glass ceiling? A comparison of matched samples of female and male leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 1997;**82**(3):359-375

[21] Schein E. How “career anchors” hold executives to their career paths. *Personnel*. 1975;**52**(3):1-24

[22] Powell G, Butterfield D, Parent J. Gender and managerial stereotypes: Have the times changed? *Journal of Management*. 2002;**28**(2):177-193

[23] Ryan M, Haslam S, Hersby M, Bongiorno R. Think crisis-think female: The glass cliff and contextual variation in the think manager-think male stereotype. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 2011;**96**:470-484

[24] Bluhm D, Harman W, Lee TW, Mitchell TR. Qualitative research in management: A decade of Progress. *Journal of Management Studies*. 2011;**48**(8):1866-1891

[25] Creswell JW. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed Methods Approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2003

[26] Tashakkori A, Teddlie C. *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage; 2003

[27] Mathipa E, Tsoka E. Possible barriers to the advancement of women

to leadership positions in the education profession. *South African Journal of Education*. 2001;**21**(4):324-331

[28] Fisher V, Kinsey S. Behind closed doors! Homosocial desire and the academic boys club. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*. 2014;**29**

[29] De Klerk S. The importance of networking as a management skill. *South African Journal of Business Management*. 2010;**14**(1):37-49

[30] Appelbaum S, Audet L, Miller J. Gender and leadership? Leadership and gender? A journey through the landscape of theories. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*. 2002;**24**(1):43-51

[31] Turock B. Women and leadership. *Journal of Library Administration*. 2001;**32**:3-4

[32] Cheverton R. A Leader’s guide to protecting mavericks. *The Journal for Quality & Participation*. 2001:7-9

[33] Nachatar S. Leadership challenges and opportunities experienced by international women academics: A case study in Australia. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*. 2022;**19**(1):140-159

[34] Tandrayen-Ragoobur V, Pydayya R. Glass ceiling and sticky floors: Hurdles for Mauritian working women. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, An International Journal*. 2015;**34**:452-466

[35] Eagly A, Heilman M. *Gender and Leadership: Introduction to the Special Issue*. 2016

[36] Hopkins M, O’Neil D, Passarelli AM, Bilimoria D. Women’s leadership development strategic practices for women and organizations. *Consulting*

Psychology Journal Practice and Research. 2008;**60**(4):348-365

[37] Riccucci NM. The pursuit of social equity in the federal government: A road less traveled? Public Administration Review. 2009;**69**(3):373-382

[38] Glass C, Cook A. Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. Leadership Quarterly. 2016;**27**:51-63

[39] Qian Y, Fan W. Men and women at work: Occupational gender composition and affective well-being in the United States. Journal of Happiness Studies. 2019:2077-2099