

An Assessment of the Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Tourism KwaZulu-Natal

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Abstract: *Even with the increased political and economic participation of South African women since the first democratic election in 1994, family life and responsibilities continue to curtail their participation in the economy. The present study has assessed the challenges facing women leaders; specifically highlighting how gender and leadership intersect. The research asserts that women become conscious of these 'invisible' barriers. This research is based on ten semi-structured interviews. The journeys of the ten women interviewed are explored within a context of a South African public entity, namely, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN). To advance the theoretical basis of the study, several theories are discussed. This helps to contextualise women's needs and give voice to their concerns in the work environment. The research reveals how leadership impacts women differently from men. This may help policymakers to develop programmes and policies that promote women leaders, enabling aspiring women to climb the corporate ladder. Using insights from theories acquired from feminism, and women empowerment, a conceptual framework is derived.*

Keywords: Women, leadership, Political, Economic and policymakers

1. Introduction

Since the leadership norm is now becoming more feminine, it is important to understand the challenges that women leaders face, and how they overcome them. A leader's behaviour is influenced by several determinants. Women have emerged as leaders, and yet they struggle to make changes. In management positions, women are faced with various challenges. Historically, women have suffered oppression and discrimination by the very virtue of being a woman. From the early stages of socialisation, certain traits are internalised into the psyche of women. Socialisation is an ongoing process through which values, norms, and behavioural patterns are internalised in humans. It is within this process that gender roles become established for the 'appropriate' gender behaviour.

At times organisations can shape and transform certain organisational behaviours and outcomes, which can particularly affect job performance. Organisational socialisation is seen as an assimilation of knowledge and learning onto employees. Training in organisations also challenges leaders, as leaders can strengthen the organisation and positively impact organisational outcomes. Hence, leadership is an important driver of change. Therefore, for leadership to be effective, the building blocks must be built into the organisational culture to achieve maximum impact. So, the foundation and the framework must be set in place so that leadership behaviour can be filtered through the entire organisation. Leadership theories have focused on traits, behaviourism, and even feminism. So, do women contribute differently than men? This is a fundamental question that will be answered in the course of this study.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To evaluate the current leadership styles of women leaders in TKZN.

- To determine what challenges are faced by women leaders in TKZN.
- To determine how women in TKZN overcome these challenges.
- To make recommendations on how women can realise their full potential as leaders in TKZN.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions were presented:

Question 1: What challenges are faced by women leaders?

Question 2: How do women at TKZN overcome these challenges?

Question 3: How can women realise their full potential as leaders?

2. Methodology

The choice of the research methodology was qualitative. This research began with a literature review of how women experience obstacles at senior levels. The researcher also pointed out the complexity of the relationship between their home and work life, as well as the leadership complexities. Qualitative methodology met the aims and objectives of this study.

The study was based on ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The respondents were all females who either held leadership positions at TKZN, or were board members at TKZN. The first five questions dealt with the demographic characteristics of the ten participants, this ranged from age to marital status, to a number of dependents, and educational qualifications; situating the demographic background of the participants.

To create a framework for the questions, the interviews opened with a general profile of some of the issues (the specific profession in which the respondents found themselves). This formed a convenient point of entry. They were asked about their career paths and influences that had been significant in their lives. Questions were designed to

explore how leadership practices and processes are affected by gender. Questions about their legitimacy as business leaders, and if their roles as caregivers and mothers intersect with their leadership roles were included. The researcher dealt with the micro details (like strengths and weaknesses).

3. Literature Review

Historically, most societies are embedded in patriarchy. Hartmann (2001) defined patriarchy as 'relations between men, which have a material base, and which, although hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women'. So, patriarchy gravitates to exaggerate differences between men and women, where men are more masculine and women more feminine in nature. The potential for any economy to thrive and survive is impeded by the exclusion and marginalisation of women. Leadership is an important factor in catalysing change. The role of women has changed dramatically in the last 50 years globally. The number of female leaders is still low at the management level, even though women have made great strides in their educational qualifications. Women often have to confront barriers or obstacles that men do not realise exist. Multiple barriers continue to form a marble barrier for women; these barriers are restrictive and impede the advancement of women leaders. This study will contribute to making sense of how women transpire beyond the socially constructed barriers.

Women now seek and acquire the highest leadership roles in various sectors. Yet, the societal response towards women is not accepting, some sectors are still male-dominated and this poses an immense challenge for women. There are still many obstacles that prevent women from obtaining their optimum leadership levels, this can be the 'glass ceiling', the 'glass cliff', the 'labyrinth', or the 'visibility-vulnerability spiral' (invisible processes in formal organisations). Sometimes, it is common situational barrier that women face as they excel in an organisation. There are also personal challenges such as familial responsibility. Stereotyping also affects the role of women. Very often, women have to conform to the acceptable norms of society. In South Africa, women face the burden of oppression due to their gender, race, and societal discrimination. Therefore, any conclusions or recommendations on how to advance women as leaders are conditional upon their specific set of circumstances and the organisational setting. TKZN poses an interesting scenario as a new female chief executive organiser (CEO) leads the entity.

Changes in women's political, social, and economic life began after 1994. The Constitution of South Africa guarantees the rights and freedoms of women. The Constitution has been an important tool, as well as a number of legislative Acts such as the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination (2000), the Employment Equity Act (1998), and the Domestic Violence Act (1998). From a gendered perspective, South Africa has legislation in place; however, the implementation has been slow. The Constitution provides a clear basis for the advancement of the right to gender equality, which reads as follows:

The Republic of South Africa is one, sovereign, democratic state founded on the following rules:

- 1) Human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- 2) Non racialism and non-sexism.
- 3) Supremacy of the constitution and the rule of the law.

The above realises the progressive realisation of the right to gender equality. The rights and the empowerment of women have stimulated debate at a global level. Women's lack of representation in positions of leadership is well-known. The stereotyping of gender roles illustrates that women are more likely to be in the service industry (like healthcare, teaching, etc.), and not in the male-dominated sectors, like the energy sector. Gender stereotypes also extend to leadership, with typical male characteristics of dominance. The leadership standard continues to be male orientated. Globalisation has changed how business is done; therefore, leadership requirements have also changed. In addition, the educational levels of women have increased substantially; despite this, women are still under represented in top-level positions. According to an International Labour Organisation (ILO) report, although women represent 40 per cent of the world's labour force, their share in management positions remains considerably low. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of women's leadership styles and derive suggestions and recommendations. Amartya Sen's notion of social justice demonstrates that rights are linked to survival. Women's participation in the workforce has been one of the most significant societal changes. As this awareness swells, women have made notable advances in management, which used to be the male domain. But women have not made major inroads into the higher levels of corporate power. Studies in various countries, especially Norway, monitor the presence of women in executive positions. Research, especially surveys, indicates that gender is still barrier to women's career advancement even in international contexts.

South Africa: Profile

There are 57.7 million people in South Africa, up from 56.5 million people in 2017, and more than half of the population (51 per cent) is female. Coupled with this, the Report states that women live, on average, six years longer than men, with a life expectancy of 67.3 years compared to 61.1 years for males. As can be seen in Figure 1, the Non-white African population is at 4,66,82,900 (80.9 per cent), of which 2,27,86,200 are male, and 2,38,96,700 are female. The Coloured population is at 50,74,300 (8.8 per cent), of which 24,59,500 are male and 26,14,800 are female. The Indian/Asian population is 14,48,300 (2.5 per cent), of which the males constitute 7,40,200, while females are at 7,08,100. The White population is at 45,20,100 (7.8 per cent), of which 21,94,200 are male and 23,25,900 are female. In terms of provinces, Gauteng has 14.69 million people, KwaZulu-Natal 11.40 million, the Western Cape 6.62 million, the Eastern Cape 6.53 million, Limpopo 5.80 million, Mpumalanga 4.52 million, North West 4 million, Free State 2.96 million, and Northern Cape 1.23 million.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of South Africa's population by the number and province.

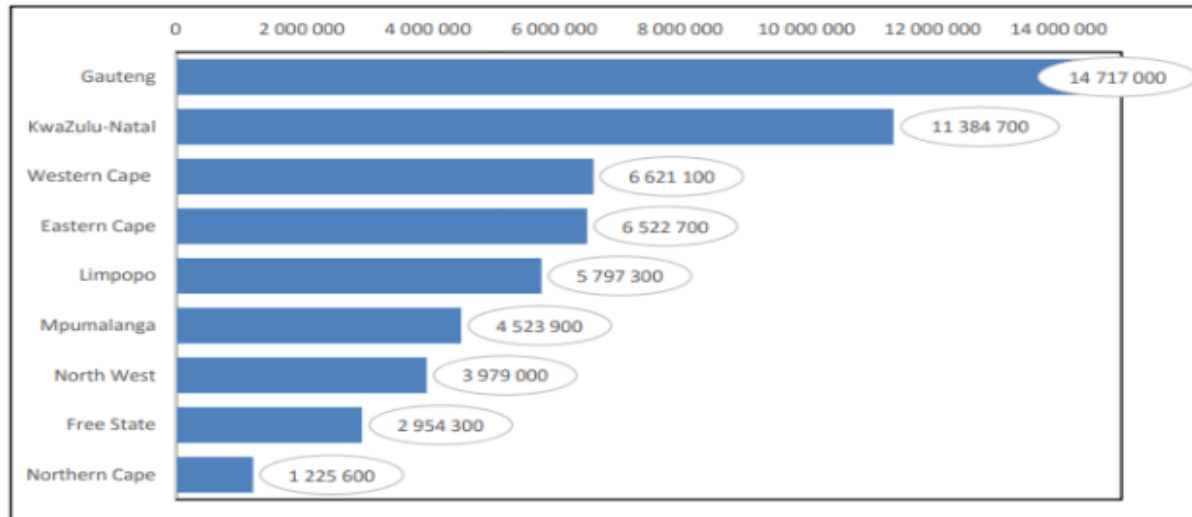


Figure 1: Mid-year population estimates for South Africa by province, 2018

Source: Graph: Stats SA

The Glass Ceiling

'Women have reached a certain point, ie the glass ceiling. They are at the top of middle management and are stopping and getting stuck. There isn't enough room for all those women at the top. Some are going into business for themselves. Others are going out and raising families' (Frenkiel, 1984). The term 'glass ceiling' was popularised and gained momentum. Sometimes women are blocked by the glass wall. This research is of scholarly interest in the lived experience of women in the public domain because it generates new knowledge about women's participation and the meanings they attach to it. Glass ceiling was a term used in the seventies to describe the artificial barriers which 'blocked' women from achieving their full potential. The glass ceiling is the hurdles. It will become clear in the course of this study that as women move up the hierarchical ladder, obstacles to their promotion also begin to intensify. This means that women's access to real power becomes obstructed, or in other words, power is monopolised by male leaders and creates an impenetrable wall. This barrier prevents the rightful progression of women; males can create an almost hegemonic structure.

The glass ceiling may not be obvious, but observation does show that fewer women have lower management positions. In essence, the glass ceiling can be defined as the 'brick wall', the 'stone wall', or the 'maternal wall'. The word 'ceiling' is metaphorical but it is real.

Women's Presence in Executive Leadership

Exploring the effects of leadership styles provides insight into how power is being shaped to address gender inequality in the South Africa, and it is not a simple task. The study also helps to identify the knowledge gaps in the field of study. The glass ceiling phenomenon still exists in South African corporate world. The scarcity of women at senior management levels shows that there could be a multiplicity of ceilings camouflaged to restrict women. Companies are starting to pay attention and interest in increasing women's participation. Often, companies offer flexible offers and a good work ethic. Women's political power is strongly correlated to their economic power. However, organisational culture also poses these barriers in a number of forms. These

'barriers' can be structural, cultural, organisational, and sometimes personal (like familial responsibilities). Consequently, the resilience of the ceiling has to be broken or infiltrated.

Women's minority presence at executive leadership and their effectiveness has been continually impacted by the male domain. Women's gendered socialisation has also influenced their style and focus of leadership. Substantial theories have theorised the influence and role of gender on leadership styles. Corporate finance and corporate policies can be measured in a number of ways, but for this study, we need to understand what the gender impact is and if it can be quantified by cumulative returns. Women have to convince the corporate world that they are capable, while men don't have to do this. Women were once considered an untapped resource with the potential to make an immense contribution to the labour force, and with the establishment of a mixed economy, women have begun to participate in the labour market on a comprehensive scale.

Statistical data shows that women have increasingly been participating in the labour market. Organisational strength around shared interests and taking collective action creates a strong presence. Equality is derived from the Latin word *aequalitas*, meaning similarity while equity is 'even and just'. This study examines the processes/procedures or protocols that contribute to or inhibit gender equality at the leadership level. In this study, gender and leadership are discussed at different levels, namely, the structural level, the political level, and the economic level. Companies and organisations are also social incubators where behaviours and activities are shaped. Compounding this issue, gender plays a pivotal role; the narrative begins to change towards a more social transformation.

Women continue to aspire to leadership positions in all spheres of governance both in the public and private sectors. Great strides have been made in the political realm, and women's participation in both the freedom struggles and democratic processes of many African countries have been notable. However, this participation has not always translated into equal representation in political leadership

positions. Once elections are conducted and positions are assigned, one realises that women are no longer visible (Kiamba, 2008).

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is usually a neglected area for employers, yet it is so pertinent to the lives of working women. In short, it is about the ability to juggle home life with work life and create a healthy balance. Many factors impact women's ability to succeed in the workplace. One of the biggest and overt challenges is work-life balance. It is strikingly clear that women are overburdened by the multiple roles they occupy at work and the home front. Women face significant challenges on a daily basis in managing their lives. Work-life imbalance also creates negative consequences. This can be seen in the following: family conflict, tensions, job stress, and sometimes depression and burnout.

Without a doubt, the corporate environment is highly volatile and competitive; this can have a huge strain on employees. Even though South Africa is ranked 15th out of 144 countries on the World Economic Forum (WEF)'s Report (2018), the reality is that huge inequality exist in the country's labour market. As the WEF's Till Leopold points out:

In South Africa women work, on average, 48 minutes more per day than men do and more than half of their work is still unpaid. That is a trend that is playing out in a similar way across the world. So, pretty much everywhere, if you combine paid and unpaid work, women are working longer hours than men but the burden of unpaid work in the household etcetera is still predominantly on women.

Globally, women still spend more time doing unpaid work. This means that women have to negotiate their positions—the division of household labour does not make it easy for women to negotiate their shifts and consequences. Other possible factors are the stability of their relationships; therefore, little recognition is given to women outside the formal economy. Embedded within the mindset, is that the male is always the breadwinner. According to the Commission for Gender Equality, which is currently investigating universities in terms of gender transformation, much more can be done to provide women with opportunities and then give them support.

African Women in Senior Leadership Roles

Although almost one-third (29 per cent) of senior roles in South Africa are now filled by women, one in five local businesses (20 per cent) still have no women at all in senior positions. These are among the findings of the Grant Thornton 2018 report which specifically focused on research regarding Women in Business. The report, drawn from 4,995 interviews conducted between July 2017 and December 2017, was published to coincide with International Women's Day (8 March 2018). The trend in South Africa is reassuring, although it can be better. The percentage of women in senior management teams has, on average, been rising slowly but steadily from 26 in 2014. There are still too many businesses without a single woman

in their senior management team; however, this needs to be addressed.

There is a wealth of research investigating the commercial impact of women in leadership. For example, Grant Thornton's Value of Diversity report published in 2015 suggests that the profit foregone by companies with male only boards in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States is the staggering US \$655 billion. Peter Bodin, Global Chief Executive Officer, Grant Thornton International Ltd, notes that gender-balanced businesses will be able to better handle the disruption facing every sector. More diverse teams make better decisions and tend to be more resilient. Globally, the percentage of businesses with no women in senior management has dropped from 34 in 2017 to 25 in 2018. The proportion of senior roles held by women, however, has marginally fallen from 25 per cent to 24 per cent over the same time period.

Women are, therefore, spread more thinly than before across the world. This suggests that businesses are concentrating on tokenism at the expense of meaningful progress and that means they will not gain from the benefits of true gender diversity. Globally, progress on the number of businesses with women in senior management has primarily been driven by emerging economies such as Africa (where 89 per cent of businesses have at least one woman in senior management) and Eastern Europe (87 per cent), while Latin America has seen the biggest increase (from 52 per cent to 65 per cent). But there has also been a significant increase in some developed regions such as North America (from 69 per cent to 81 per cent) and the European Union (from 64 per cent to 73 per cent). Emerging economies also continue to see the highest proportion of women in senior roles, including Eastern Europe (36 per cent), Latin America (30 per cent), and Africa (30 per cent).

Grant Thornton's report investigated the role of both business and government policy in bringing about change, findings show that important benefits include equal pay, paid parental leave, flexible hours, and other policies that are common around the world. But those countries in which businesses have the most policies in place are not necessarily those that demonstrate the most gender diversity. Policy alone, it seems, does not create real progress. It comes down to execution, implementation, and monitoring of the policies to ensure that tangible gains are made.

Most South African firms did not score favourably on a number of gender equality practices, including senior management pay linked to progress on gender diversity (14 per cent); part-time working (39 per cent); remote working (37 per cent); and subsidised childcare (5 per cent). This is not surprising as women are still heading households, and still bear the brunt of poverty. On the contrary, 93 per cent of local companies said they pay men and women equally for the same roles, 88 per cent had non-discrimination policies for recruitment, 71 per cent offered paid parental leave, and just over half (51 per cent) offered flexible working hours.

This frames an important question: if the policy is not driving more women to the top, despite widespread use, then

what will? What else needs to be done? The report is clear that the businesses that are succeeding are those whose policies and practices are rooted in a genuine conviction of the benefit of gender diversity. The emphasis here is on genuine conviction, not merely tokenism. According to Zimmer (1998) in an article titled 'Tokenism and women in the workplace: The limits of gender-neutral theory', Tokenism has been widely used to explain many of the difficulties women face as they enter traditionally male occupations. Tokenism explains women's occupational experiences and their behavioural responses to those experiences in terms of numerical proportion, suggesting that barriers to women's full occupational equality can be lowered by the hiring of more women in organisations that are highly-skewed males. Therefore, the concept of tokenism has been widely used and does exist. Tokenism fails to take into account that women cannot continue riding some glass escalator, but they have to be in positions on the basis of meritocracy and not simply adjusting a numerical imbalance.

Interviews conducted with business leaders around the world suggested that the businesses creating real change are those who truly believe in diversity. Their leaders recognise the advantages of gender diversity and create inclusive cultures in which a wide range of voices are listened to. This is about behavioural change rather than ticking the boxes. The real behavioural change will be transformation. This adds to the concept of transformational change. The deeply ingrained ideas and values in our society, that men make the corporate world need to be addressed. More women are getting empowered and educated than before. This means that more women are entering the workforce, so it cannot be business as usual.

Gender Diversity in Organisations

It was during the 1970s and the 1980s that the concept of equal opportunities was coined. In South Africa, it was after the first democratic elections in 1994, those female leaders were included in parliament and the cabinet. Gender diversity is important for making better business decisions and to help improve women's competitive advantage. Diversity means different things to different people, and can be difficult to understand. According to Cox (2001), diversity can be viewed as:

The voluntary organisational actions that are designed to create greater inclusion of employees from various backgrounds into the formal and informal organisational structures through deliberate policies and programs.

Organisational culture has its ideas, beliefs, and decisional power. Behaviours associated with female leaders are different from those associated with male leaders. Females continue to circumnavigate their presence in senior positions, which are dominated by men. It, therefore, implies that women's ways of being effective will be impacted by the 'maleness' of these structures and institutions. It is clear that women's lives are epitomised by a 'multi-dimensional narrative' (Tuval and Mashiah, 2006). So women's experiences are borne and shaped by their interactions,

communications, and interpretations of the political, social, economic, and cultural nuances.

4. Discussion

The study explored the challenges faced by women. By analysing the available literature and the interviews, researchers were able to identify a number of barriers and develop strategies to overcome these barriers. Gender leadership and the environment in TKZN shows that these concepts are interconnected. For most women, leadership was not power relations but grounded in the ability of the leader. In this fashion, women in TKZN provided advice for other women. The findings show that women want to challenge organisational structures.

The challenges faced by women in leadership revealed a number of factors. Despite the small sample size, the results have major implications, as the data collected was rich. Role models send out an important message, it's a message about what women can achieve. Women should not be defined by confined spaces. While the study is an amalgamation of different women's voices, there is a common pattern, they all share the same concerns.

Formal gender equality in South Africa is in the form of a number of legislations, yet we need to interrogate if organisations are engendered enough. Is there enough transformation to impact organisations? It is important to recognise that women cannot be tokens or a 'put and stir' approach which means that you place a woman in a position and automatically the organisation becomes engendered. Women's day-to-day experiences show that women don't need another feminist theory. Rather they need to be recognised and ensured that institutions are more engendered. This study was not about domination; rather it was about access, accountability, and gender rights. The boundaries between domination and feminism may be become blurred, but this study was embedded in the values of social justice. Rather than feminism, empowerment should inform all policies and programmes.

Literature suggests that there are interrelated themes since women must have a strong economic base. Thus, it is important to focus on the implementation. Gender policies are not enough. There must be training, leadership, and commitment from senior managers. The gap between policy and implementation must be fused. While the existing body of literature suggests that women need support from the government, this study found that women need support from each other.

5. Areas for Further Research

This research studied the challenges facing women in their positions of leadership. It is important that there is further research in other departments and entities. The frameworks, policies, and the constitutional mandate are in place but what matters is that we enable these instruments to become fully functional. The research findings show that women are strong and powerful. It is clear that time management and work-life balance are clear indicators that women grapple with this. Therefore, the research shows that there are a

number of topics that would necessitate further research. There are a few areas where information is lacking; for example, the differences between male and female employees in the form of a comparative study. Future studies can look for personality traits and certain characteristics that impact leadership. Another area would be a comparative study within the municipalities and districts. This would give an impression of how the municipalities and districts view gender and leadership; the comparison of results will allow for an inter-model comparison. Further, different researches allow for different research techniques, like triangulation.

6. Conclusion

It is important to link the theories of gender equality with workplace methodology. While we need the right managers and leaders, we also need women. The potential of women leaders is disregarded and ignored. Male leadership is still viewed as 'normal'. The forces of globalisation are moving in the direction of relieving the plight of women. Therefore, we need to see an increase of women in leadership and pave the way for more women to take up leadership positions. Masculine characteristics should not be the predictors of leadership status for women. A natural place to begin is the definition of a leader. Within the literature on leadership, personality characteristics also become important. It is generally perceived that working women face prejudices at the workplace and their capabilities are usually devalued and underestimated. Gender-specific constraints include lack of training, negative stereotyping, lack of support, and personal problems. This study asserts that women need to be encouraged to break through glass barriers and ceilings to realise their authentic space. Most of the respondents had challenges in the form of workload, parenting responsibilities, and guilt complex. An interesting fact is that women carry multiple loads, namely, interestingly enough, the advice given to other women is to endure and preserve in adverse situations, etc. This means that interventions must break through stereotypical thinking and create the necessary derivatives. Suffice to say, stakeholders, government policies, and extended learning programmes can positively lift women from their space by providing programmes for women. From this study, it is clear that women cannot be excluded from any institution or organisation. The women who participated in the study offer their insights into doing their best, as one respondent said, 'there are no quick fixes'. Yes, leadership is necessary, at ALL levels.

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