

**Possible barriers for the advancement of women in their development as academic leaders and managers in higher education: A case study of the Tshwane University of Technology in Gauteng, South Africa**

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<p>Leadership matters. Despite the gender issue, good leadership always matters. Good leaders and managers come from a recruitment pool of excellence where intentionally focused development is key to success. Good leaders and managers are not born but emerge and grow through exposure and good mentorship. However, gender equity affects all environments and positively impacts all stakeholders, thereby improving the overall health of any organisation. One of the seminal texts on women's leadership is <i>Through the Labyrinth</i> by Eagly and Carli (2007), who describe the multiple challenges women experience on their journey towards achieving leadership positions of authority and prestige through the critical metaphor of the labyrinth. On stereotyping women and their capabilities, the possibilities of women's greatness are undermined not only for the organisation and for the greater good of society, but indeed for humanity. Universities serve publics, and by reflecting gross gender imbalances, their publics are not recognised, thereby perpetuating the imbalances in society and stereotypical behaviour within communities. Role models are in short supply, particularly in South Africa, when only five out of the 26 public universities have a woman in the highest office in the position of vice chancellor. This impacts the confidence of women in the sector. The narratives built around confidence have far-reaching consequences, including the narrative that women cannot lead in complex organisations that require political acumen and intellectual prowess. The shifting standards applied to how men are expected to lead and how women lead are separate studies, and necessary for South Africa. Double standards in the evaluation of competencies are crucial for developmental opportunities for women's progress to the proverbial top. Concepts abound, from the 'sticky floor; and 'glass ceiling' to 'leaky pipeline' and 'concrete ceiling', which emerge from the realities on the ground. The barriers for women in higher education in South Africa are consistent with global trends, and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) is an example. Without intentional strategies for transformation, the greater good that universities must provide is a lost opportunity. The challenges for women in this country are overwhelming despite the various support systems, therefore as a key player in building a future transformed society, the university must recognise its responsibility to act as an agent of change in building such a society. This study investigates this issue towards achieving this reality by ensuring gender equity in a society that is in dire need of social transformation.</p>	
<b>Keywords:</b> Women; Leadership; Higher Education; South Africa.	

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## **Abbreviations**

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HELM	Higher Education and Leadership and Management
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HERS-SA	Higher Education Resource Services South Africa
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
USAf	Universities South Africa
WHEM	Women in Higher Education Management
WiL	Women in Leadership
WLF	Women in Leadership Forum

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and study overview**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The research is clear that no sector is free of gender imbalances and higher education is no different. Like all businesses, value is based on the delivery of results and the impact of the results. In other words, it is the outputs that ultimately count. In a recent publication in *Forbes Women*, Janjuha-Jivraj (2019) highlighted that it is evident that women take on a load of non-promotable tasks, often described as 'housekeeping' roles, such as organising social events to support teams, attending various meetings, acquiring membership on various committees, engaging in an array of external activities such as public speaking events and arranging conferences and events. All these housekeeping roles demonstrate great collegiality and competence but do not build the necessary credits when candidates appear before a promotional meeting. Female staff are also very effective in the roles of lecturers through their perceived nurturing abilities and drive the academic project with great care and vested passion. However, the data shows that the higher echelons of academic management reveal fewer female voices.

### **1.2 Background**

Higher education in South Africa comprises public and private universities, Tvet (technical, vocational education, and training) colleges, and a range of post-school private institutions. The focus of this project is on public universities, particularly the Tshwane University Technology (TUT). The higher education sector is very complex, highly regulated, and unionised. Further challenges are the numerous student protests, and most recently the #FeesMustFall movement that demands fee-free education.

While the status and representation of women in the workplace over the last 50 years appear to have improved, the primary factors constraining women's career development are still related to gender inequity (Obers, 2014:1107). The gender gap in this sector is noticeable, with many scholars offering perspectives and opinions on this challenge (Shackleton *et al.*, 2006). According to Moodly and Toni



(2017:138), despite progressive policies in the South African higher education system, women are still confronted with the challenge of not breaking the glass ceiling when it comes to accessing positions of leadership. The *Wall Street Journal* introduced the concept of the 'glass ceiling' to account for the invisible but powerful barriers that allow women to advance only to a certain level (Carli & Eagly, 2001:629). Evidently, women continue to be under-represented in higher education institutions' (HEIs) senior leadership, thereby negatively impacting gender equality in universities (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:378), which is considered a key driver for transformation in South Africa.

It is worth noting that the percentage of female students in higher education was 55.9% in 2000, and the percentage rose to 58% by 2016 (Maluleke, 2019:34–35). Maluleke's (2019) report on *Higher Education and Skills in South Africa* further shows that in 2000 females surpassed males for most undergraduate qualification types. However, males outnumbered females both at master's level (58.2%) and doctoral level (61.9%). Nevertheless, by 2016 shifts are noticeable with females at master's level increasing from 41.8% to 44.6% and at doctoral level females increase from 38.1% to 58.2% (Maluleke, 2019). These figures suggest that the pipeline for women with doctoral qualifications is richer and should lead to greater representation in leadership positions in higher education unless, of course, it is a leaky pipeline. One of the criteria for leadership positions in higher education in South Africa is a doctoral qualification.

The assertion that one of the most important factors for the under-representation of women in higher education leadership is notably the small recruitment pool available (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:378). This pool comes under scrutiny with a larger pool of women attaining doctoral qualifications in South Africa. However, the added burden of promotion linked to professorship is a further limiting factor. Thus, the 'pipeline problem' or the 'leaky pipeline' suggesting that 'women with appropriate education are not available,' is being eroded, thereby giving way to the glass ceiling in the popular imagination (Carli & Eagly, 2001). This concept will be discussed further in Chapter 2 and explored by analysing data in Chapter 4.

### **1.3 Overview of Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)**

The Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) was established at the beginning of 2004 due to the merger between three institutions, namely Technikon Pretoria, Technikon Northern Gauteng, and Technikon North West, as part of the restructuring of the higher education system in South Africa post-democracy (Times Higher Education, s.a.). Fifteen years later in 2019, TUT has an enrolment of just over 65 000 students, making it the largest university of technology (UoT) in South Africa with seven faculties and nine campuses throughout the country (The Conversation, s.a.; Times Higher Education, s.a.). In 2017, TUT approved a Transformation Framework (see Appendix 1) and since then has achieved milestones that will be discussed in Chapter 2.

### **1.4 Objective**

The objective of the study is to determine what the barriers are for women to advance towards senior leadership and management positions in higher education institutions.

### **1.5 Outcomes**

- This study will determine the possible barriers that prevent women from becoming academic leaders and managers.
- This study will establish the role mentorship plays for women to develop as academic leaders and managers at TUT.
- This study will reflect on the success of current developmental strategies for women as academic leaders and managers at TUT.

### **1.6 Research questions**

- RQ 1. What are the barriers for women to take up senior academic leadership positions in higher education and at TUT?
- RQ2. What role does mentorship play in the development of women as senior academic leaders and managers?
- RQ3. What are the factors that contribute to the shortage of women in higher education?

## **1.7 Scope**

This study will consider an overview of women as senior managers and leaders within the South African higher education landscape and then specifically consider the scenario at TUT. This study will also consider the structures in place for women's development in the higher education system in South Africa and those at TUT, and determine the efficacy.

## **1.8 Chapter outlines**

This section briefly outlines the chapters in this thesis.

Chapter 1 introduced the study by providing a background to the study, a statement of the problems, and the design of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing literature in the field of study under review.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research methodology and design of the study expatiating the data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4 provides a presentation and analysis of the data collected, indicating the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by reflecting on the findings and making further recommendations.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented an overview of the background to the research study, indicating the research problem and the strategy used to investigate this problem. The next chapter will present an overview of the literature reviewed on the barriers facing women in higher education in their advancement towards senior management and leadership positions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The complex South African history of colonialism and apartheid ensured that when the African National Congress was elected to govern in 1994, they succeeded in establishing a strong constitution; a powerful bill of human rights; the gender policy framework; the Employment Equity Act, the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities; and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill. This comprehensive support for issues pertinent to women highlights the dire need for equality in the country and the impactful measures that can be taken to ensure that the desired goals are reached.

The gender policy framework ([National Gender Policy Framework | Department of Environmental Affairs](#)), for example, establishes guidelines for South Africa as a nation to take action to remedy the historical legacy by defining new terms of reference for the genders to interact with each other in both the private and public spheres and proposes and recommends an institutional framework that facilitates equal access to goods and services. The gender policy framework proposes a process that moves away from treating gender issues as 'end-of-the-day' business. The framework attempts to ensure that the process of achieving gender equality is the very cornerstone of the transformation process in South Africa within all the structures, institutions, policies, procedures, practices, and programmes of the government, its agencies, and parastatals, civil society, and the private sector. Evidently, this transformation agenda is widespread and a significant part of the project of decolonisation and transformation in the higher education sector.

This chapter provides an overview of the literature regarding the issues of transformation underpinned by gender equality in senior management positions in higher education institutions.

### **2.2 Leaders, managers, and transformation**

This study investigates barriers to advancing women in leadership and management positions to senior positions at universities in South Africa. Leadership is generally considered a process for influencing decisions and guiding people. At universities,

leadership is usually based on personal expertise, discipline knowledge, experience, and recognition (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:376). At universities, leadership also embeds a dual role of academic and administrator (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:376). In contrast, management involves the implementation and administration of institutional mandates such as policies. The research conducted by Ngcobo (2016) on the empowerment of women at the Durban University of Technology provides insight through exhaustive discussion on the differentiation between the terms 'leadership' and 'management'. Ngcobo (2016:11) states that management is about controlling, while leadership is about coping with change. Further, leadership and management have their own function and characteristic activity, both being necessary for success in a volatile environment (Ngcobo, 2016:11).

Generally, leadership is considered a process for influencing decision and guiding people (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:376). However, leadership has traditionally been constructed and discussed as a masculine enterprise with particular challenges for women (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly, 2007:2). In addition to gender-based expectations, Hoyt (2010:490) explains that people generally have a conception of what it means to be a leader. Herein exists the potential for biases. The stereotypical concept of a leader is someone who has masculine traits. In line with gendered expectations, men are more likely to take on the official role and title of 'leader'. At the same time, women are relegated to titles such as 'facilitator' (Hoyt, 2010). In contemporary culture, Eagly (2007) asserts that on the one hand women are lauded as having the right combination of skills for leadership, yielding superior leadership styles and outstanding effectiveness. However, on the other hand there appears to be widespread recognition that women often come in second to men in competitions to attain leadership positions. Thus, women are still portrayed as suffering disadvantages in access to leadership positions and prejudice and resistance when they occupy these roles (Eagly, 2007).

Leadership in the university is complex as it is often bound up with a single person. The academic and administrator positions are a dual role vested in a single person, either the vice chancellor, dean, or rector (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014). The pressure for universities to become more self-sustainable adds additional pressure to the leadership. There is a need for an entrepreneurial slant

as universities also source a third stream of income, operating more like a business or corporate.

While management might be about coping with complexity (Ngcobo, 2016:11), leadership in the current climate of higher education in South Africa is about transformation. What is needed in the current climate is transformational leadership. This type of leadership involves establishing oneself as a role model who mentors and empowers subordinates to contribute effectively to their organisation (Eagly, 2007). Further transformational leadership is also part of the decolonial agenda and a catalyst for the decolonisation process (Moodly & Toni, 2017a:157). Since decolonisation is about justice advocated by scholars like Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, then the process of transforming and ensuring gender equity in the leadership and management of higher education, is critical.

In the TUT Transformation Framework (2017:3) adopted in 2017, the term transformation supports the decolonisation agenda as it refers to:

A profound and radical change. In South Africa as a whole, [transformation] refers to such change from the apartheid system to the type of democratic and equitable society that is envisaged in the Constitution. Transformation in South Africa refers to radical changes in all aspects of life, including the political system, the law, the economy, housing, international relations, health care, education, and so on.

According to an unpublished report by Badat (2010), and a position supported by the researcher, transformation should be:

... conceptualised as the movement from one set of social structural conditions to another set of fundamentally new social structural conditions through purposeful and deliberate social action on the part of social actors. In these terms, 'transformation' must be understood as a double process: a process of the dissolution of an existing set of social relations and social, economic, political, ideological and cultural institutions, policies and practices; and a process of the recreation and consolidation of an alternate set of social relations and social, economic, political, ideological and cultural institutions, policies and practices.

Thus, the transformation project must aspire and seek to realise the fundamental change it desires. In this study, the barriers to senior management and leadership

positions are investigated as women in higher education strive to achieve both management and leadership in the transformational paradigm.

## **2.3 Higher education landscape**

There is no dearth of research on the position of women leadership in higher education from across the globe. A quick Google search will reveal that this is an issue that has seized the interest of many. Unfortunately, while the data-rich literature is available, there is an apparent disjuncture when transferring this into material change and shifts in the sector. Clearly, the increasing number of women development programmes also indicates the shortcomings women are seen to have. The apparent shortcomings have to be addressed to ensure that women are ready for leadership positions. While navigating the male norms that define the academy or academia can be daunting, it is a challenge that many authors have taken on in an attempt at addressing this pervasive issue.

### **2.3.1 Higher education in South Africa**

South Africa has one of the highest rates of public investment in education across the globe (Ngcobo, 2016:41). In 2019, 6.5% of total GDP was spent on education, while in 2018, 15% of the total expenditure of education was spent on tertiary education (World Bank Open Data, 2000). South Africa has a dynamic and diverse higher education system with 26 public universities spread across nine provinces, with 12 traditional universities, six comprehensive universities, and eight universities of technology.

In South Africa, leadership has historically been the preserve of men, particularly due to the patriarchal structure of society, with women experiencing oppression through a racial and gendered perspective (Moodly & Toni, 2017a:156). As a means to address this and in recognition of these challenges, the following legislation was designed: Education White Paper 3 ([fim3f05.tmp \[justice.gov.za\]](#)), the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001) ([Implementation of the National Plan for Higher Education: Committees | South African Government \[www.gov.za\]](#)), and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2013) ([Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill | South](#)

[African Government \[www.gov.za\]](http://www.gov.za)) (Moodly & Toni, 2017a:156). Despite these structural shifts in attempting to level the playing fields in South Africa, scholars agree that women in higher education are stuck in middle management, and their visibility is far greater in the lower ranks of the academy (Toni & Moodly, 2019:177). This predicament is attributed to multifaceted roadblocks, including the glass ceiling, gendered power dynamics, misconceptions about women's leadership abilities, male patterns of networking, work-home life balance, prioritising family, and lower self-confidence than male counterparts, to name a few (Herbst, 2020; Moodly & Toni, 2017a; Shober, 2014). The notion of the glass ceiling is succinctly explained by Carli and Eagly (2001) as a metaphor for prejudice and discrimination in that people are prejudiced against women as leaders and potential leaders.

Carli and Eagly (2001) further explain that:

Prejudice can take subtle or blatant forms and can be held by employers, customers, voters and even by the targets of prejudice themselves. Prejudice against women as leaders and potential leaders would interfere with women's ability to gain authority and exercise influence and would produce discrimination when it is translated into personnel decisions within organisation and political structures.

Thus, while the country has put in place policies to ensure that gender equity and redress is possible, there are fewer monitoring mechanisms to manage the rollout of gender equity in institutions of higher learning.

Dlamini and Adams (2014:122) opine that such gender disparities are due to the pervasive patriarchal attitudes in higher education. The researchers suggest that the attitudes manifest in various forms, such as blocking women from climbing the academic ladder, and exclusion from research supervision and production of knowledge, among others.

## **2.4 Support systems for the development of women in higher education in South Africa**

### **2.4.1 Higher Education Resource Services South Africa (HERS-SA)**

An organisation that is working towards promoting women's advancement in higher education is Higher Education Resource Services South Africa (HERS-SA), a non-



profit organisation launched in South Africa in 2003 that seeks to provide mentorship, networking, and training for women to achieve their career goals (Shober, 2014:4). HERS-SA is a twelve-day, carefully crafted academy designed to contribute to the career and leadership development of women employed in higher education (HERS-SA, s.a.).

HERS-SA objectives are to:

- Develop and offer accessible education, training, and development programmes for women working in this sector
- Empower women to take leadership positions in higher education institutions in South Africa, thereby providing much-needed leadership role models for women
- Provide programmes that develop strong leadership qualities and practices in women leaders in higher education
- Encourage networking among women
- Challenge institutional culture and facilitate workplace change, thereby addressing gender inequity and enabling women to participate fully in the workforce

This academy approach is based on a few principles, including mentoring, role models, and networking that are crucial for women's advancement and development.

#### **2.4.2 Higher Education and Leadership and Management (HELM)**

The Higher Education and Leadership and Management (HELM) is a programme of Universities South Africa (USAf<sup>1</sup>) and has a strategic partnership with the

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<sup>1</sup> Universities South Africa (USAf) is an association of South Africa's 26 public universities. The organisation's primary mandate is to support its 26 members in the achievement of their core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, and to create an

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) that offers senior management strategic insight into the specific challenges that exist within the ever-shifting terrain of the South African higher education landscape.

In addition to offering support to develop managers at universities, HELM recently developed a six-month programme aimed at women, namely Women in Leadership (WiL). This programme recognises that gender equity and women's access to executive and management positions in universities is a major challenge in South Africa, and therefore intended to promote the rights of women and afford them opportunities to reach their full potential (HELM/USAF, 2020).



Figure 1. Women in Leadership (WiL) programme (HELM/USAF, 2020)

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environment where universities can thrive and prosper, and contribute effectively to South Africa's development.

According to HELM's Director, Dr Oliver Seale, the Women in Leadership programme is a direct response to needs identified over the past two years from heads of schools (HoSs), heads of academic departments (HoDs) and deans who underwent the Foundations of Leadership and Management training between 2018 and 2019. The Women in Leadership programme builds on this solid foundation and provides an opportunity for more focused learning and deeper reflection on the challenges faced by women in university leadership at an individual and institutional level (HELM/USAF, 2020).

According to the website, there is also a need for generic gender empowerment programmes and networking and mentorship opportunities to enable women to overcome obstacles and thrive in their work. According to USAf Chair, Professor Sibongile Muthwa, the Women in Leadership programme seeks to "address leadership issues focussing on women's professional development and advancement in the system, while addressing issues of transformation".

Echoing this view, USAf's CEO, Professor Ahmed Bawa, says that Women in Leadership enables South Africa's universities to re-imagine the transformation of their leadership and much higher levels of diversity, and in particular helps to address "the issue of the dominance of men at all levels of higher education leadership" (HELM/USAF, 2020).

### **2.4.3 LEAD**

Transformational leadership was the initial stimulus towards the development of the TUT LEAD programme. This programme is hosted through the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Teaching and Learning with Technology. The LEAD programme was initially designed to align individual leadership skills with the university imperatives. The primary goal is to "improve the way the university functions as a whole by involving all managers... in the LEAD programme" (LEAD flyer).

According to the LEAD Project Leader, Dr Tessie Herbst, the programme was designed initially around psychometric data that showed a lack of transformational leadership potential at TUT. The LEAD project emanated out of exhaustive research, project planning and was phased in since 2015. This project was announced in the Vice Chancellor's communiqué of 4 May 2015, as he recognised

the rollout of this project as one of the priorities of TUT designed to address the “leadership style and culture and to equip our leadership team with specific competencies” (van Staden, 2015).

Five years later in 2020, the TUT Women in Leadership programme was rolled out. This was a targeted programme designed to equip women to increase their impact and create lasting personal and professional change by instilling the desire to lead with purpose and become outstanding leaders. This programme aims to be a catalyst for women’s agency and is endorsed by the TUT Women in Leadership Forum.

#### **2.4.4 Women in Leadership Forum (WLF)**

The development of women is regarded as a strategic priority within TUT. As part of TUT’s responsibility for management and leadership within TUT, Human Resources and Development (HRD) initiated the establishment of the TUT Women in Leadership Forum in 2015. After many years of working steadily, the forum had its official launch in 2017 and subsequent election of a steering committee. The researcher was nominated for the chairperson and was elected as such.

The vision that drives the Women in Leadership Forum is:

- To create a strategic platform where matters relating to women in leadership can be identified, prioritised, and addressed
- To create an enabling work environment for all women at TUT
- To serve as a pressure group for the advancement of gender equity at TUT
- To empower women with developing and internalising their unique leadership identity

Thus far, the Women in Leadership Forum hosted two forums to discuss matters pertaining to women’s advancement at TUT. In 2019, the Women in Leadership Forum hosted a symposium titled ‘Women in leadership symposium, self-mastery: Towards empowering women’, and in 2020 hosted a virtual webinar titled ‘The shadow pandemic: Are women leaders resilient under threat’.



Figure 2. Attendees at the first Women in Leadership Forum symposium

The Women in Leadership Forum also engages in advocacy work to create awareness around gender issues while also ensuring that there is support in this regard from male champions.

## 2.5 Gendered institutions

In 2008, the Council for Higher Education audit reports stated that TUT was encouraged “to give attention to issues of gender equity in senior positions” (Council for Higher Education, 2008:7). Further, the audit panel was of the view that “efforts are needed to support the equity through staff development” (Council for Higher Education, 2008:8). Recommendation 2 clearly states that:

Tshwane University of Technology strengthens its plans to attain its employment equity targets at all level within the institution and ensure that these plans have clear timeframes and allocation of responsibilities.

In March of 2008, a conference was held at the University of Cape Town titled ‘Institutional cultures and higher education leadership: Where are the women?’ Speakers, vice chancellors, and deputy vice chancellors presented a range of responses to the question. Worth noting was that former vice chancellor of University of Cape Town, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, declared that the dearth of leadership in higher education in South Africa – and the world – can be attributed to gendered institutional cultures that “prevent us from seeing the leadership potential that exists in half the population, our women” (MacGregor, 2008).

At this conference, discussions revolved around the issues of crucial intellectual leadership at universities to transform society and achieve gender equity. Ramphela also stated that there are biases among academic leaders, including professors and associate professors.

She went on to suggest four pillars of transformation that are valuable for this study:

- That South African society acknowledges its strong authoritarian racist and sexist culture.
- That the reconciliation process in democracy had excluded violations of social-economic rights for sexist and racist motives.
- That power should be redefined away from a control model towards an enabling model
- That good leadership should be empowering to all

A declaration of the conference was a call to the education department to promote the importance of gender equity at senior leadership levels with set timeframes and targets (MacGregor, 2008). Evidently, many scholars concur with Ramphela's assertion that universities are indeed gendered organisations (Acker, 2010; Moodly & Toni, 2017a; Morley, 2013). As such, it is recognised as a global phenomenon that women academics stagnate and remain disadvantaged when it comes to leadership positions due to the gendered organisational (or institutional) cultures that act as systemic barriers to women's success (Chanana, 2020:142).

These gendered divisions exist at universities with the "positions of executive deans of disciplines of natural and physical sciences, as well as deans of information technology being occupied by mostly men. These realities affirm the need to encourage women to broaden their roles in areas that strengthen access to the hierarchy within higher education leadership" (Moodly & Toni, 2017b:139).

### **2.5.1 Institutional culture**

Institutional culture at higher education institutions goes beyond the structural elements. An understanding of how individuals interpret their place within that institution is vital. Further, combined with established organisational norms, the institutional culture constitutes a complex web of relationships and routines (Tierney

& Lanford, 2018:2). This study will use the terms institutional and organisational culture interchangeably.

Particular focus will be placed on the gendered nature of institutional culture constructed through the colonialist ideology valorising patriarchy (Toni & Moodly, 2019:183). Patriarchy is a system of gender domination by males over females and has been institutionalised to emphasise the preservation of roles within various sites in society (Dlamini & Adams, 2014:134). For the benefit of this study, patriarchy is included to recognise the unknown gender biases at play, with males elevated to positions of leadership and status superior to women.

In his opening address at the Higher Education and Leadership Summit of December 2020, the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande (2020:3), stated that universities must:

... promote the goals of an equal, inclusive society, [the universities] themselves must be equal and inclusive, and key to this is the challenge of transforming the dominant relations of knowledge production within our universities – which are still largely patriarchal, racialised and reproduce the dominant class inequalities in societies.

Such recognition by the highest office of higher education is indicative of the dire state of transformation in the sector in South Africa. The minister's recognition of the pervasive patriarchal culture of higher education signals an urgency towards action.

Further, the minister's allusion to the inequalities of institutional culture is expanded by Moodly and Toni (2015), who cite that among the various factors that contribute to few women in senior leadership positions are attitudinal and organisational biases against women. In the process and practice of perpetuating the status quo in organisational cultures, there is a tendency for institutions to attract and employ people similar to their predecessors. O'Connor (Toni & Moodly, 2019:177) explains that this dominance of males in the institutions can be attributed to an institutional culture that is homosocial and conformist. Here homosociability can be understood as selecting people just like oneself (Toni & Moodly, 2019:177).

According to King (2020:37), the 'affinity bias' is another form of homosociability. For King, it is not just the structural elements that enable the masculine ideal to

succeed but also the social aspects. She says that the most crucial question that a leader is seized with is that of trust. The research indicates that leaders trust those with whom they share the same age, gender, interests, and values. She says that trust among cohorts builds likability and rapport (King, 2020:37).

Since men were the first leaders of universities, they were able to set the standard for leadership. Men were able to set their rules of engagement to network, socialise, groom, and mentor, using their status and influence to build and maintain their team of like-minded people. These social systems allow male leaders to advance their collective power, while this type of privilege is often detrimental to women who do not have access to the same solidarity groups, networks, and circles of influence (King, 2020:38). Thus, this system leaves the women absent from positions of influence as they lack the knowledge of the rules of engagement.

Various scholars (Herbst, 2020; Moodly & Toni, 2017a; Zulu, 2003) cite the entrenched masculine practices of universities that alienate women academics while favouring masculine behaviours towards what De la Rey (1999:42) refers to as masculinist. These include inequality and uneven distribution of social and economic resources, racial discrimination, separate development, male domination, subjugation and relegation of women to the back pews, invisible boundaries and identity formations, 'gentlemen's clubs', and party politics within higher education institutions (Monnapula-Mapesela, 2017). However, Moodly and Toni (2019:141) assert that notwithstanding masculine culture, skills for effective leadership in higher education are not gendered. These effective leadership skills include hard work, strategic vision, strong research reputation, strong interpersonal skills, transparency, resilience, collaboration consultation, emotional intelligence, and courage (Özkanli *et al.*, 2009:254).

Women face a 'chilly climate' at universities and their challenges to ascend to various positions of leadership and management include navigating the 'greasy pole', the 'slippery floor', the 'glass ceiling' and the 'man-centred masculinist' university (Chanana, 2020). Thus, it can be deduced that women's poor representation in senior positions of leadership and management is not due to a lack of ability (Chanana, 2020).



## **2.6 Mentoring and role-models**

Finding a singular decisive definition for mentoring is a challenge. However, mentoring can be defined as a process that is nurturing, supportive, orchestrated and structured to ensure and facilitate growth (Obers, 2014:1111). Hearn (Özkanli *et al.*, 2009:253) asserts that universities remain incredibly hierarchically gendered institutions where men are much more likely to be mentored and groomed by rectors, vice chancellors, presidents, and other senior managers. Whereas, for women, the support generally comes from further down the organisation and from family. Thus, in the higher education landscape in South Africa, there is certainly a need for support systems and networks that will become enabling factors towards ensuring women are prepared for senior management positions when they become available.

Mazibuko (Shober, 2014:5) argues that endogenous factors such as perception of the changing processes in higher education, self-perception, mentorship, and networking can act as transformative agencies for women succeeding in higher education. In their research on female deputy vice chancellors, Moodly and Toni (2017a) establish that mentoring by senior leaders who support women and networking advanced career-pathing into leadership and management. The researchers also determine that personal factors such as being self-motivated, independent, confident, and hardworking facilitated women's advancement to senior management positions. Dlamini and Adams (2014:123) also believe that female students and women employees in tertiary education require female role models in terms of professors and senior managers.

Mentorship and multiple mentoring relationships are invaluable in advancing women to senior leadership positions in higher education. The transformative nature of career mentoring cannot be ignored in higher education (Geber & Nyanjom, 2009:896).

## **2.7 Women in senior management in higher education**

In 2008, at the University of Cape Town conference titled 'Institutional cultures and higher education leadership: Where are the Women?', only three universities had

female vice chancellors. In 2021, only five universities of the 26 public universities had female vice chancellors (19%). Moodly and Toni (2019:177) explain that even in 2019, lower academic levels and middle management positions are congested with women, while their male counterparts dominate senior management positions, including the professoriate. Thus, it seems very few women have broken the glass ceiling and attained the highest office in university management. Despite the progressive policies in the country and higher education such as the White Paper 3 (1997), Higher Education Act (1997) and the Employment Equity Act (1998), mentioned earlier, the under-representation of women in senior management positions persists.

According to a report on a cross-cultural (Australia, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom) project undertaken by the Women in Higher Education Management (WHEM) (a network of women in senior higher education management), women in leadership in higher education provide a different leadership style that is seemingly valued according to the numerous interviewees who contributed to the project (Özkanli *et al.*, 2009). According to the interviewees, women brought creativity, communication and interpersonal skills, authenticity, consistency, and focus. Respondents argued that these strong skills generally strengthened university management and produced improved outcomes, and would therefore be a strong argument for gender balance in senior management (Özkanli *et al.*, 2009:254).

## **2.8 Tshwane University of Technology overview**

In 2017, TUT approved a Transformation Framework (see Appendix 1) with a vision to move ultimately towards a transformed TUT. Among the eight vision points listed, “prioritises gender redress and tackling discrimination in its various forms” is the seventh (Tshwane University of Technology, 2017:8) and indicates that TUT recognises the urgent matter of gender equity at the institution. TUT took great strides during the past 15 years. The university changed the gender profile composition of the Executive Management Committee (EMC) from 90% male to 40% female; deans changed from 100% male to 29% female executive deans (see [Executive Deans \[tut.ac.za\]](https://www.tut.ac.za)); council members to 30% female (see [Council](#)

[\[tut.ac.za\]](http://tut.ac.za); and campus rectors to 50% female (see [Tshwane University of Technology \[tut.ac.za\]](http://Tshwane_University_of_Technology))

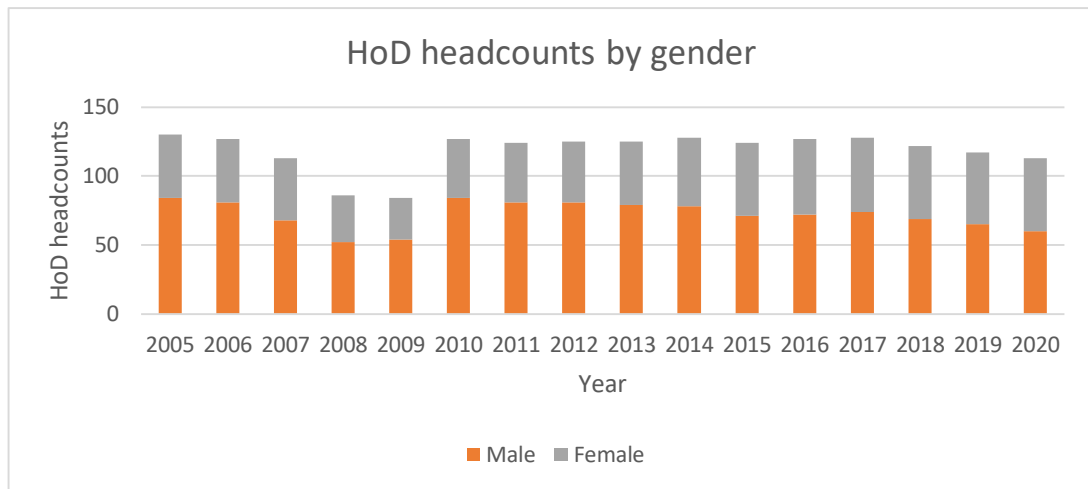


Figure 3. Heads of departments by gender

Heads of departments is a designate that has various permutations. Figure 3 is an inclusive representation of the trends evident in this category since 2005, with approximately 50% being achieved in 2021. In academic departments in 2021 (see Figure 4), the picture is slightly different, with 62% males and 38% females.

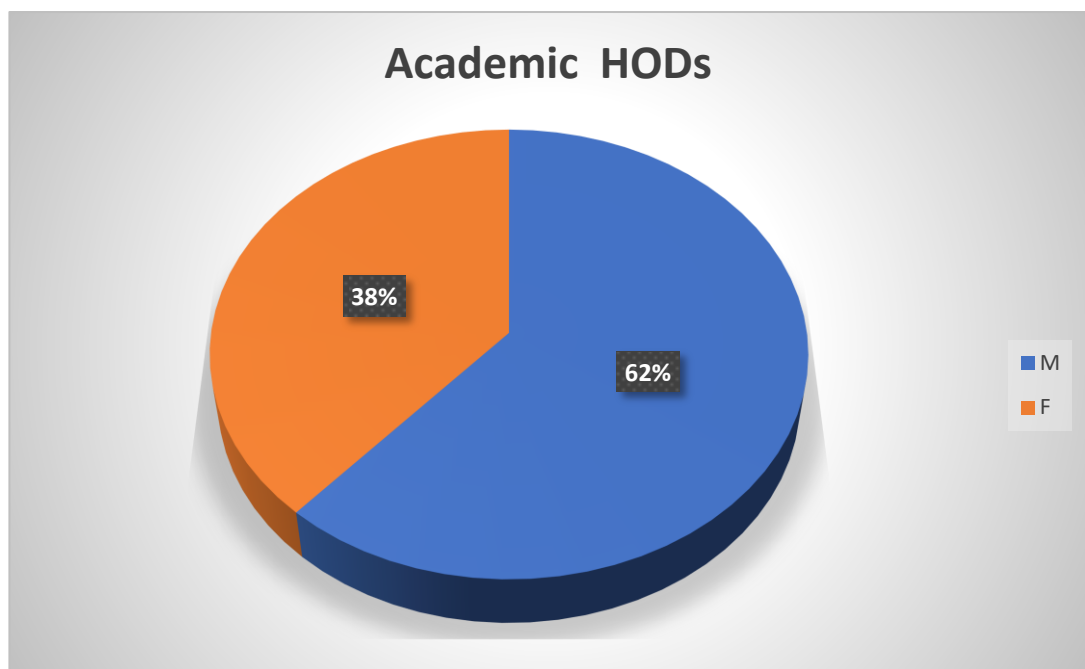


Figure 4. Academic heads of departments 2021

TUT was one of the few universities that appointed a female vice chancellor in August 2012 (Drum Digital, 2012; SAPA, 2012), but she resigned in November 2014 (eNCA, 2014; Nkosi, 2014). This appointment was a radical shift towards addressing the transformation question in higher education and was a coup for the university. Unfortunately, as the only woman in the Executive Management Committee (EMC) she resigned approximately two years later. Nonetheless, during her short stay, she did make substantial shifts towards transforming TUT.

Firstly, the female vice chancellor played a part in the appointment of a female deputy vice chancellor (research), who unfortunately also exited after two years at the university (Venter, 2019). Secondly, she strategically positioned women at TUT by encouraging succession planning for women through the approval of a new post for the appointment of assistant deans. This position was a clear indicator to the university that gender equity was taken seriously by the executive management (see Figure 5). Of all the graphical representations in this study, this graph is the only one that represents a consistent advancement of women in their representation. Subsequently, a third female deputy vice chancellor who took office in January 2018 resigned in 2019 after serving two years of her five-year contract at TUT (Nelson Mandela University, 2020; Ruyter, 2017).

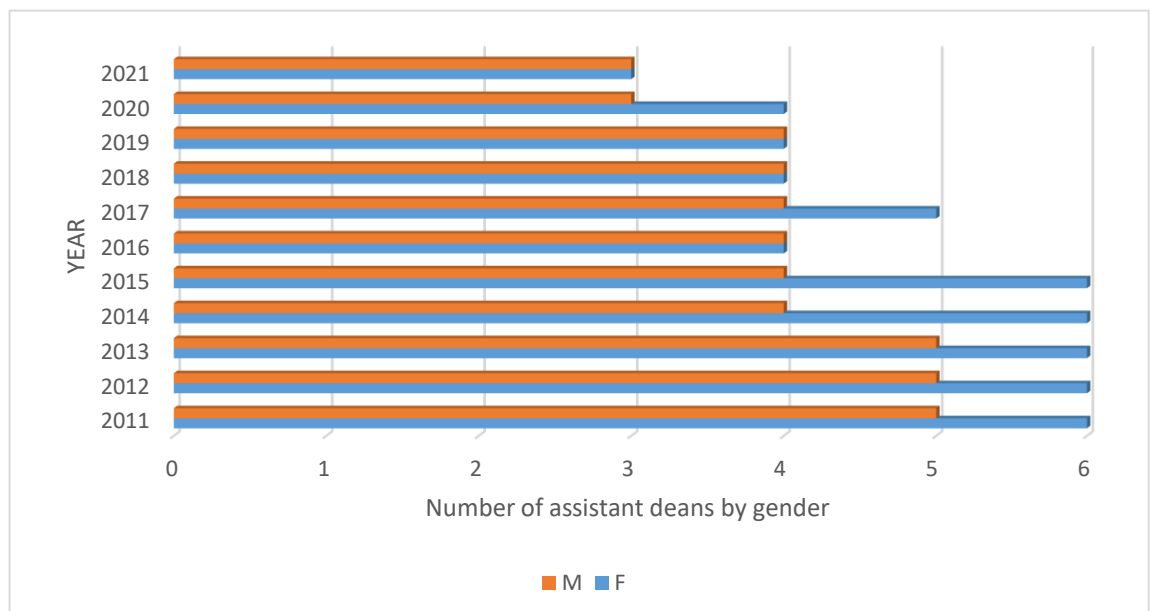


Figure 5. Assistant deans by gender

For a study such as this, it is worth recognising the consequences and impact of the exit of these three women on the confidence of women at TUT. This issue of women's disempowerment will be explored later in Chapter 4. Currently, it is evident that a cohort of women is being developed towards possibly creating a recruitment pool of women who might be eligible to apply for senior management positions as they become available. This group of women had doctorates and were willing to be developed. The researcher was one of these women.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter presented a literature review of the vast scholarship in the fields related to this study. The chapter broadly focused on the higher education landscape and in South Africa and presented the various strategies for the development of women towards empowering them to take senior management and leadership positions.

The next chapter will describe the research methodologies used in this study.

## **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, a literature survey was explored to investigate women empowerment in institutions of higher learning, focusing on TUT. This research project explores the barriers to women appointed as senior leaders and managers at higher education institutions. To some degree, the methodology for the thesis has been invoked in the previous chapters. Locating the study within an interpretive slant has thus already been signalled. As mentioned before, the interpretivist method is one of the characteristic features of qualitative research methodology. This thesis is undoubtedly a qualitative study using a case study as a research design in line with the theoretical review and the study's aims and objectives.

In the introductory chapter of the study, the research objectives were threefold. Firstly, the study begins the investigation into the barriers that prevent women from taking up senior academic leadership positions at higher education institutions and at TUT. Secondly, the study investigates the role that mentorship plays in the development of women as senior academic managers and leaders. Finally, the study reflects on the success of current developmental strategies for women as leaders and managers at TUT.

Chapter 3 expatiates the research method used in guiding this research project.

### **3.2 Research design**

According to Picardi and Masisck (2014:9), the research process requires a sequence of seven steps that are provided as a graphic representation in Figure 6. This cyclical research methodology is an interactive process in which these steps blend into each other rather than a linear process.

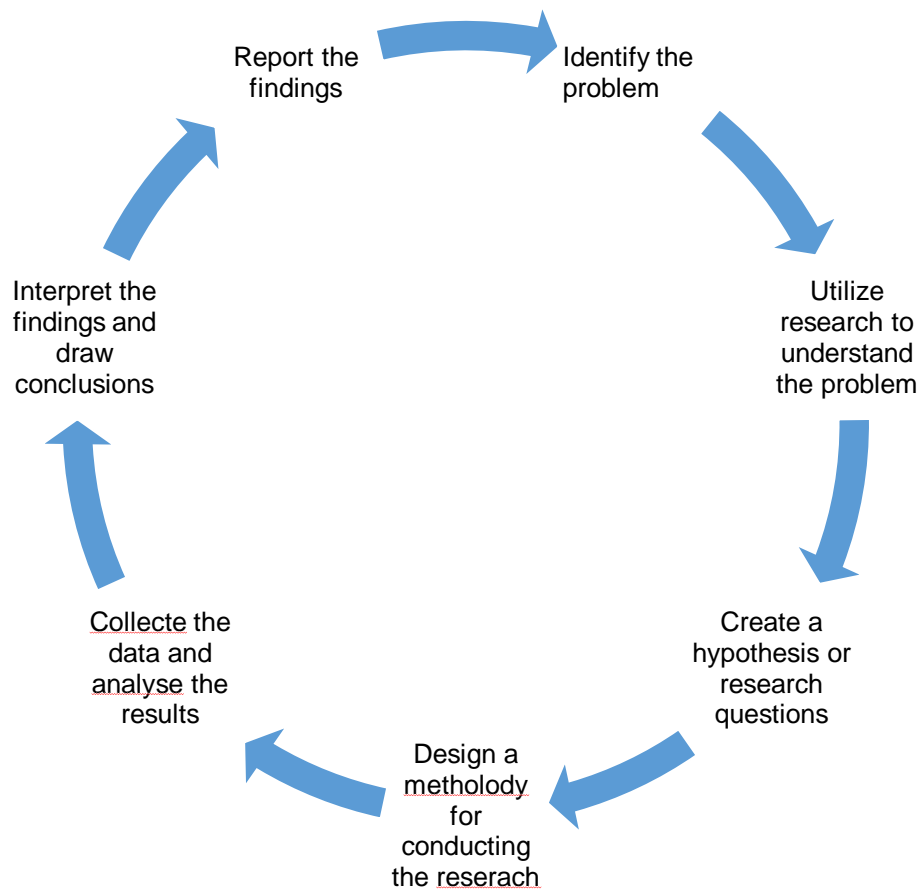


Figure 6. Steps in the research process (Picardi & Masick, 2014)

Qualitative research encompasses several methodologies that have two things in common. Firstly, the methodologies focus on occurring phenomenon, and secondly, they involve studying the complexity of those phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:269).

### 3.3 The sample

A sample is a subset of a population and comprises only selected population members (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013:241). In this study, the subset is a small sample from the population of female academic staff at TUT. Through a study of the subset, a researcher draws conclusions that are generalisable to the rest of that population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). The sample size is dependent on the heterogeneity of the population to determine a broad base of responses (Bernard, 2013:142–143).

For this study, purposive sampling is used systematically to select cases for inclusion in the research project. As suggested by the name, the sample is selected for a particular purpose (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:183; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). In this study, female members of staff who have doctorates and who hold positions of management and leadership will constitute the sample. This sample is not located in only one sector of the university and includes both the academic and support environments, thereby ensuring heterogeneity in the responses. An electronic questionnaire was sent to this sample population, and their responses captured anonymously to provide the data to be analysed. This sampling allows the measurement of variables of a small set of cases to allow for the accurate generalisation of results (Neuman, 1997:202).

### **3.4 Case study**

There is a vast body of research projects on women in higher education nationally and internationally. The publication of research results contributes to understanding barriers for women in the higher education sector and at TUT. Many such studies were conducted through a survey research design, which is a common approach that yields a large amount of data (Picardi & Masick, 2014). In this case, the constraints were the safety protocols of the COVID-19 pandemic that limit direct close contact between the researcher and the respondents.

A case study approach to qualitative research allows the researcher to be immersed in the research. This immersion gives the researcher an intimate familiarity with the area of research and identifies patterns that contribute towards a deeper understanding of the subjects of the research (Neuman, 1997:331; Picardi & Masick, 2014). As a research method, a case study is used in many situations to contribute to the knowledge of an organisation or individual, group, among others (Yin, 2009:3), through a process of systemic critical inquiry into a phenomenon and generating an understanding to contribute to public knowledge on the topic (Simons, 2009:18). What defines a case study is the singularity of its focus (Simons, 2009). Findings obtained from a case study are often more descriptive, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Picardi & Masick, 2014)



It is crucial to recognise that in the research process, the researcher self-reflexively thinks about values, beliefs, and biases that might influence the outcome (Simons, 2009). The investigation is negated if the researcher only seeks to use the case study to substantiate a preconceived position (Yin, 2009). As the chairperson of the Women in Leadership Forum, this aspect was key for me as the researcher. It was an active process of constructing, interpreting, and concluding the outcomes of this research project with objectivity. Therefore, all information presented was collected anonymously and at no point was the study used to advocate for particular issues. All findings were presented based on the barriers that emerged from the survey and interpreted through the literature review.

### **3.5 Data collection**

Sources of evidence for the study were collected widely. For case study research, sources are common:

- Documentation and archival records that can be retrieved and reviewed repeatedly and contain exact details with dates, for example electronic newspaper websites
- Interviews and questionnaires with anonymity maintained through Microsoft Forms

Data for this research project was collected through questionnaires as a measuring device sent to the sample population via Microsoft Forms. The procedure for collecting the data was as follows:

- An introductory email was sent to the sample informing them of the project. The email included the information leaflet and ethical clearance documents (see Appendix 2 and 3).
- The email was followed by another email that provided the link to the questionnaire.
- Each week a follow-up reminder email was sent to all respondents. It was not possible to determine who had responded and who had not.
- After four weeks, the survey was brought to a conclusion with a 61.3% response rate.

These responses were received anonymously to protect the staff member as an employee of TUT. There were no opportunities for follow-up interviews for the researcher.

### **3.6 The questionnaire**

A questionnaire is an efficient data collecting mechanism, and a preformulated written set of questions is distributed to respondents, who then record their answers (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). A strong advantage of using questionnaires is that they offer anonymity and avoid bias (Neuman, 1997:251). Questionnaires can be administered personally, mailed, or electronically distributed. As mentioned already, the questionnaire in this study was an anonymous electronic type.

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), electronic questionnaires can be completed at the convenience of the respondents and at their own pace. However, they do recognise that the return rates of such questionnaires are generally low. A 30% response rate considered acceptable. Bernard (2013) concurs, indicating that the standard response rate for busy executives in sub-Saharan Africa is around 36%. The main disadvantage of the electronic questionnaire is that there is no opportunity for the respondents to seek clarity on questions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

The questionnaire (see Appendix 4) was divided into three sections and included two types of questions. Section A focused on the biographical and factual data to determine in which environments the sample operated at TUT. Section B was a matrix question format that is a compact design type used to determine response to the same categories. This type of closed-ended questions gives a respondent a limited number of options from which to choose a response, thereby making data collection and analysis around a targeted phenomenon simpler to process (Picardi & Masick, 2014). The closed-ended questions were also a device used to ensure that the questionnaire is quick to complete, recognising the current burdens the respondents are experiencing and avoiding any additional pressure. In this case, this section was used to determine how the respondents experienced women's empowerment at TUT. Section C presented open-ended questions, which gave the respondents an unlimited opportunity to provide a personal reflection in their

response and allowed them to answer freely (Picardi & Masick, 2014). The open-ended questions also gave the respondents a space to share as much detail as possible, which is an advantage of this type of question (Neuman, 1997:241).

### **3.7 Data analysis**

In general, data analysis refers to a search for patterns, behaviours or a body of knowledge (Neuman, 1997:426). A researcher begins with research questions and a framework of assumptions and concepts, and once the data is collected, the researcher probes further into the data to reveal the 'features of the data' (Neuman, 1997:427).

The research will have an interpretivist approach to this study. According to Neuman (1997:68), the interpretive research approach is to discover how people construct meaning and what is relevant to a group being studied. According to Lee (1999:33), when a study's data is taken interpretively it is the researcher that must induce meaning. Lee (1999:33) further indicates that the researcher already knows what the issues at hand might be. With interpreted data, the researcher makes judgments about the veracity of the data and embeds this in the emergent ideas about the data revealed.

### **3.8 Ethics**

This study was awarded permission by the TUT's Research Ethics Committee. Each participant was sent a consent form and information leaflet. Participation in the study was considered to be consent, in which case no consent forms were collected.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

In view of the research aim, to determine the possible barriers for women to become academic leaders and managers, the above methodology was applied. In all the studies used in this thesis, the sample populations remain the same, namely female academics with PhDs working in higher education. The researcher had access to all data from surveys and interviews conducted in higher education in South Africa, the statistics that emerged through the case studies of previous studies, and the sample population. It is not the intention of the study to determine statistics but rather

to interpret this data towards making a contribution to what the barriers are for women who aspire to senior leadership and management positions in TUT, thereby avoiding a sticky floor analogy.

This chapter presented the research methodologies to be used in this study. The sample was explained, as were the techniques used to identify the participants and collate the anonymous data. Ethical considerations were also explained.

The next chapter will present the findings, analysis, and a discussion of the analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis of data**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This research project investigates what the barriers are for female academics to advance towards senior leadership and management positions in higher education institutions. TUT was used as a case study in an attempt to identify these barriers.

This chapter will present the findings from the empirical data collected from a sample of female academics employed at TUT. The data was collected and interpreted as explained in Chapter 3. As in the case of research studies such as this, the literature review of Chapter 2 provided the theoretical framework for interpreting the data.

This chapter will present the results and provide a reflection on the findings.

### **4.2. The sample**

This research project was carried out at TUT. The university has seven faculties and is spread across nine campuses in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo, with two learning sites in Durban and Cape Town. TUT has a staff complement of 3334 permanent staff, with 1805 female and 1529 males. It also has a temporary or part-time cohort of 3335, of which 1600 are female and 1735 are male. In Figure 7, this staffing distribution indicates the shift since 2015 with a more concerted effort towards ensuring that in the permanent cohort of staff, the issue of gender equity is realised.

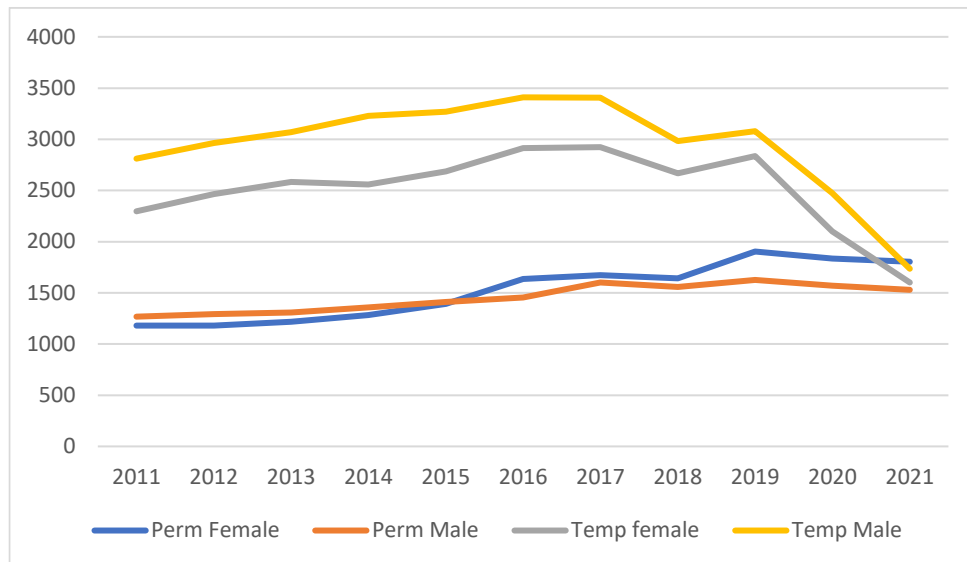


Figure 7: Staffing gender distribution

The university also has a disproportionate professoriate (see Figure 8). In Figure 9, the graph includes associate professors, which still indicate a significant gender disparity in the professoriate. The disparity also becomes an indicator of the dire need for promotions to be considered a crucial factor towards gender equity at the university. This figure has been included to reflect the small pool of senior academics from which the university can recruit. It is generally accepted that the usual path into senior management is through academic promotion and that being a full professor is a pre-condition for promotion (De Lourdes Machado-Taylor & White, 2014:378). The corollary to this is that without more senior women in the professoriate, the less gender equity there will be in senior leadership and management at TUT and across the higher education sector.

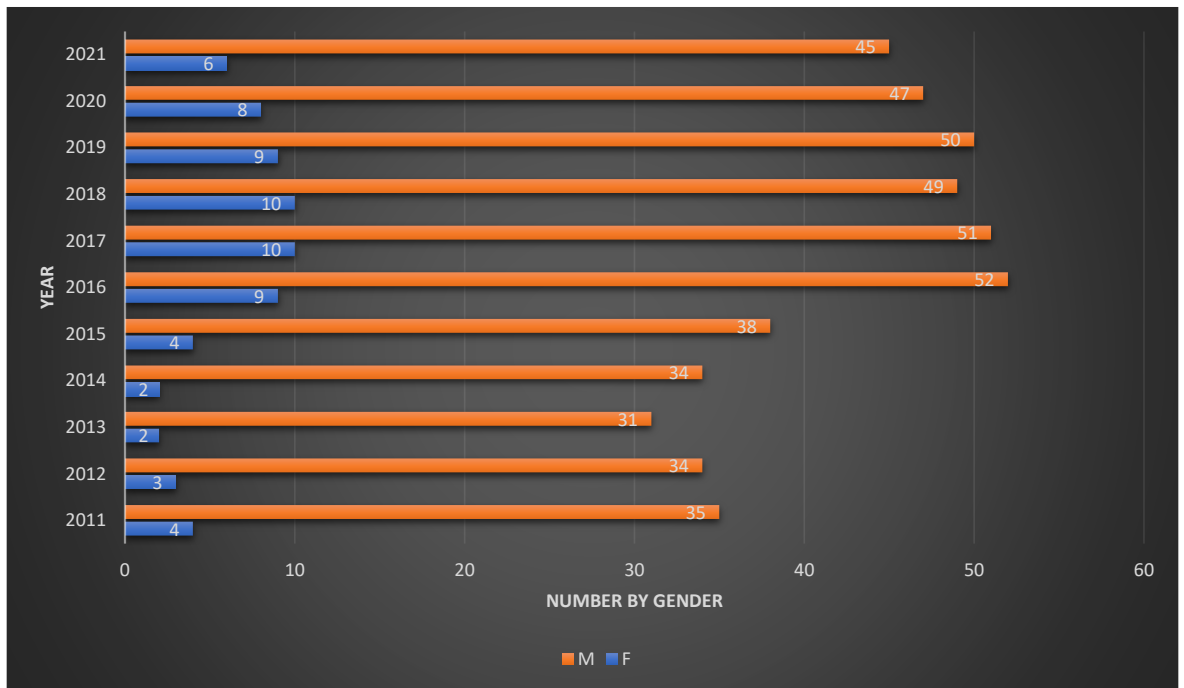


Figure 8. Gender distribution of full professors

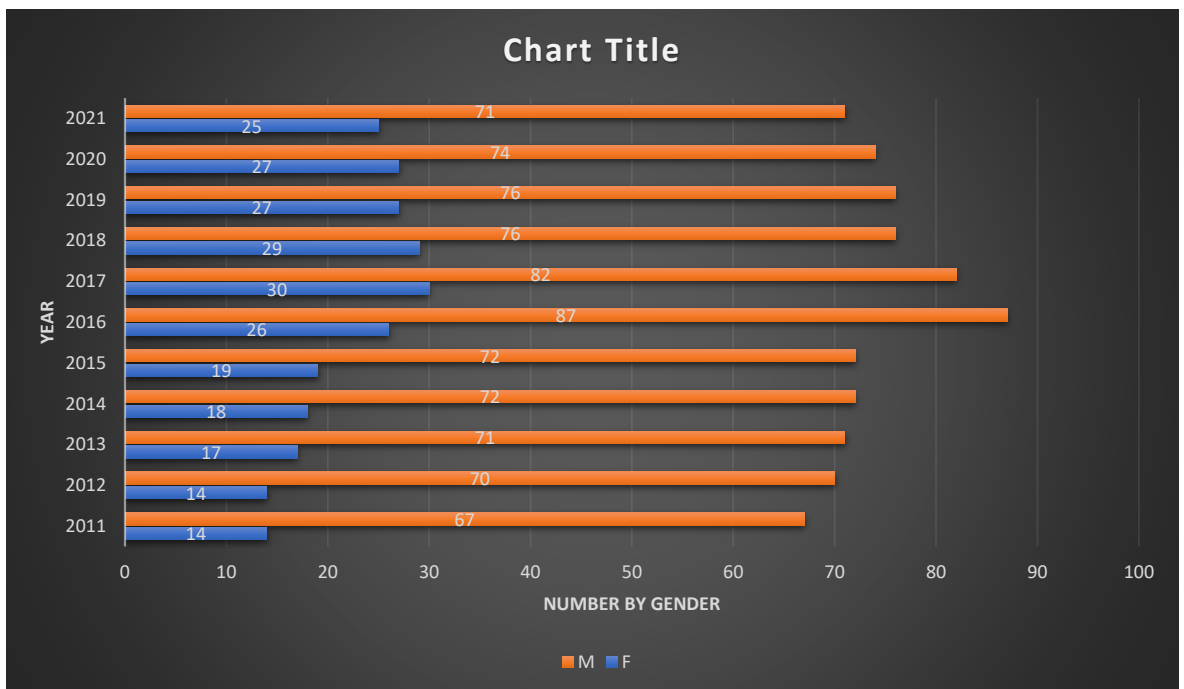


Figure 9. Gender distribution of full professors and associate professors

#### 4.2.1. The respondents

The questionnaire was circulated to all the female staff with doctoral degrees and in a management and leadership position at TUT. The response rate was 57% which is considered common for a questionnaire survey (Neuman, 1997:247).

From the biographical information in Figure 10, it is evident that the majority of the women in these positions have been in higher education for more than 20 years.

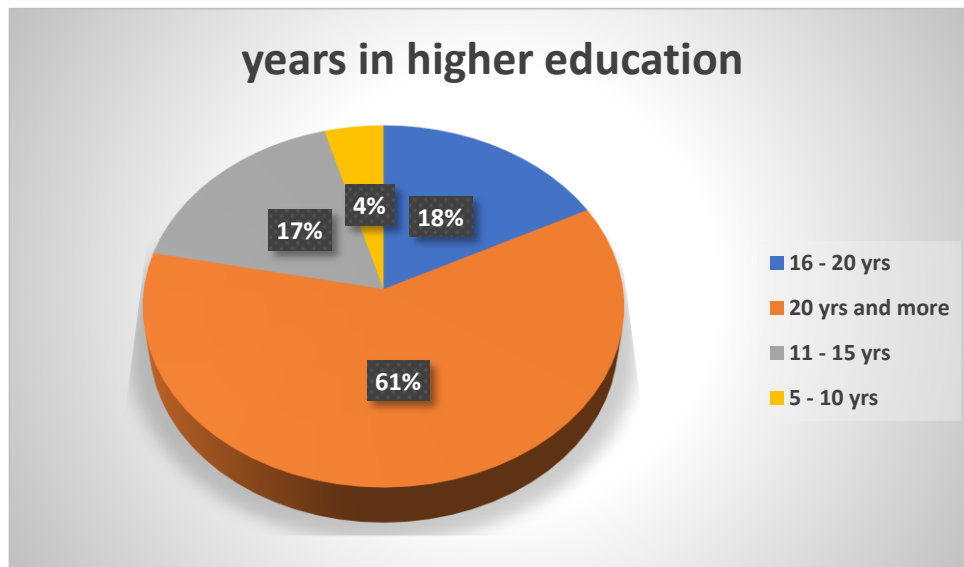


Figure 10. Number of years in higher education

In Figure 11, it is evident that the respondents were a reflection of the inclusive and broad spectrum of position levels at the university. This finding indicates heterogeneity of the data as the sample was not limited to one sector of the university (such as academic staff) and covered a much broader range to maintain the integrity of the study. Since the survey included support staff, some of these respondents are in environments with a slightly different designate structure that fell within the parameter of 'Other'. This might include director or assistant director.

Figure 11 also indicates that 37% of the respondents were entry-level management, and 25% of the leadership at TUT were associate professors. This finding is indicative of Eagly and Carli's (2007:4) discussion around the method of exclusion for women at senior positions only, where women in lower levels of management



eventually crash into an invisible barrier (the glass ceiling) and remain excluded from senior or high-level leadership or management roles.

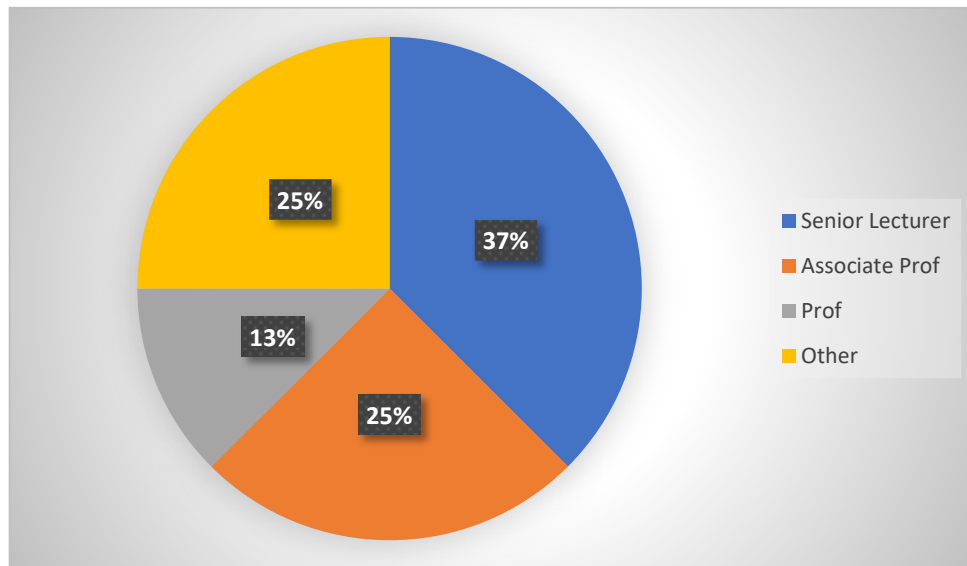


Figure 11. Current position

The respondents were mainly from the position of heads of departments, which is expected due to the limited number of women in more senior positions.

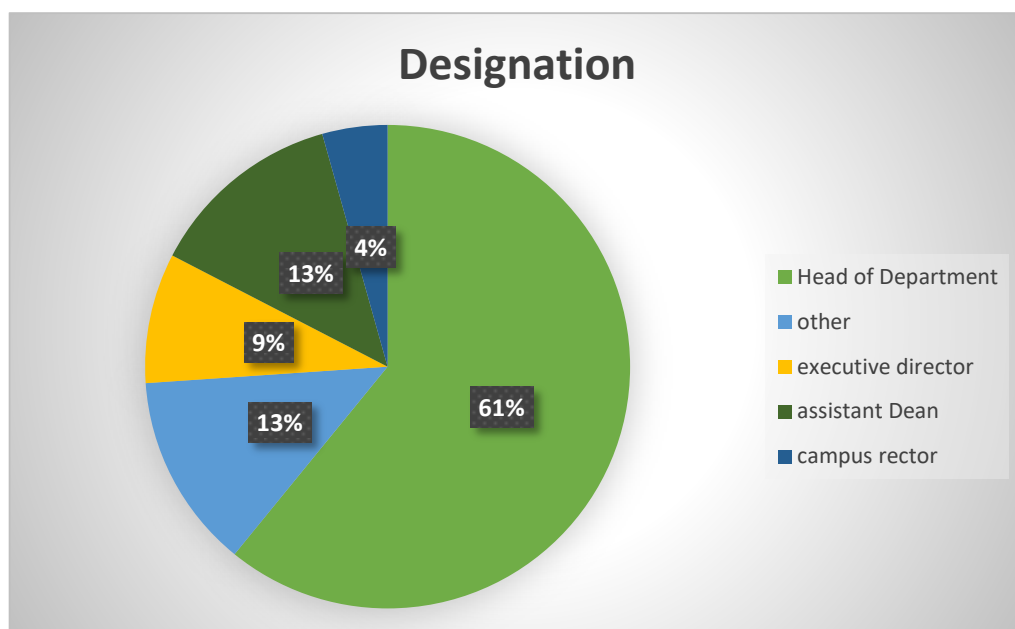


Figure 12. Current designation

Figure 12 indicates the spread of the sample across current designations with 'Other' (13%), reflecting those that could be categorised as former heads of

departments, section heads, or academic heads, and those in the support environment with various nomenclature still evident in the TUT structure. From the 61% heads of departments, 42% are senior lecturers and 35% associate professors. This finding indicates that the majority of these women still have to work towards promotion to associate professorship and professorship, which is a challenging journey while employed as an administrator with a substantial workload. In addition, of the 61% heads of departments, 64% have worked in higher education for more than 16 years and 28% for more than ten years. This finding indicates that 92% of the heads of departments have been in higher education for more than 16 years, which is a significant amount of time to be exposed to various developmental opportunities and have acquired a deep understanding of the business of the sector. It is thus concerning to recognise that most women are stuck in middle management.

While the respondents are currently managers and leaders at TUT, many have had prior experience in similar capacities, reflecting their extensive and diverse management and/or leadership experience in higher education institutions. Some were appointed as section heads for more than six years before being appointed heads of departments. One respondent indicated that she has had more than 13 years of experience in her environment, including director and deputy director, while another has been a head of department for over 18 years. Others have indicated that they have been in acting capacities for many years, which is common practice in the sector in general, but limiting. These positions have limited long-term financial benefits. Women in the acting capacity are rarely appointed after due process.

Finally, the respondents were requested to indicate what their aspirational trajectory in higher education would be. If they are working towards a particular position in TUT, and what specific position would that be? This would indicate the developmental needs and understanding if indeed women do aspire to more senior leadership and management positions at TUT. In Figure 13, there is a clear indication that while some would like to attain full professorship, they also aspire to be senior managers and leaders. With 64% of professors aspiring for senior positions, it is crucial to understand strategies to achieve this and recognise the barriers that exist for them in their career advancement, considering that 92% of these women have been in higher education for more than 16 years.

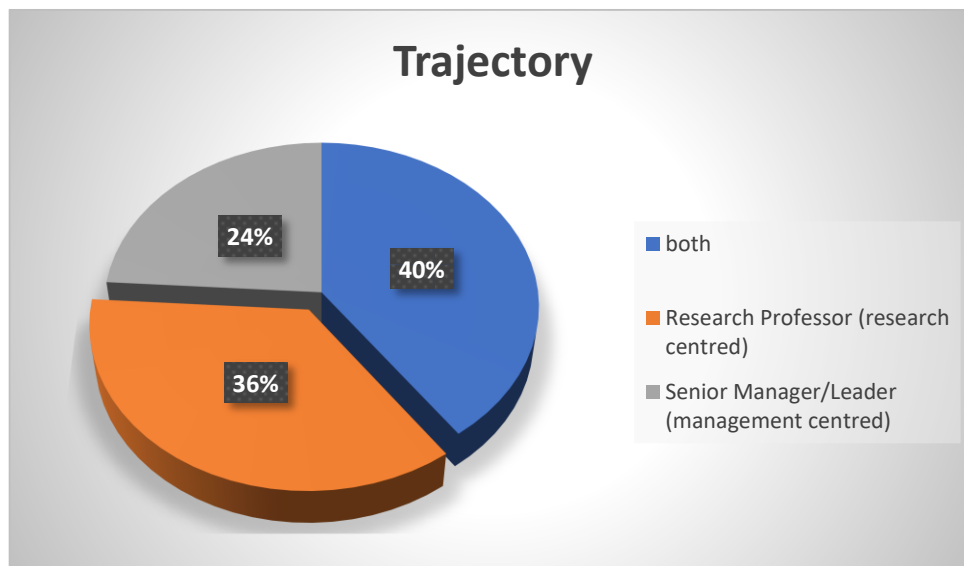


Figure 13. Career trajectory

In Figure 14, it is clear that of those respondents who aspire to management and leadership positions, 54% aspire for positions at the very senior management in universities, at executive management level that includes positions such as deputy vice chancellor and vice chancellor.

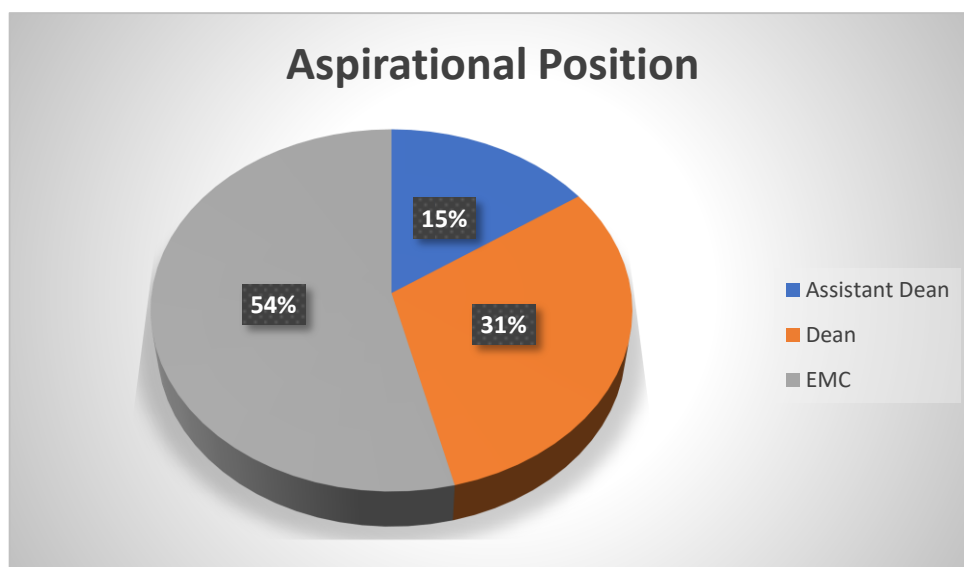


Figure 14. Aspiration position

#### 4.3. Strategies: Getting ready to lead

Various strategies have been used for women to get 'ready' for leadership and management. In some cases, these have come to the respondents via their line

managers, while others have intentionally devised strategies to ensure their own capacity development.

Many women indicated that they actively work on increasing their research and postgraduate outputs. This focus on active outputs means they have to focus on more research and postgraduate student supervision to ensure they have more students and outputs that are recognised as necessary requirements for promotion. Some try to complete their contractual terms as heads of departments while also publishing. According to one respondent, the bifocal effort is recognised as “the door to a number of opportunities in the academy including being recognised by my peers in other institutions”. In this area of recognition, many want to be rated as researchers or research chairs. They believe research positions will position them well for the next promotional opportunity. Others want to improve their management knowledge and skills in various aspects of management. In so doing, the women will familiarise themselves with the necessary requirements for promotional positions.

Some respondents shared their long-term goals to occupy a deputy vice chancellor teaching and learning position. In one such instance, a respondent indicated the following short-term goals included in her plan:

- To research and excel in teaching and learning
- To excel in multimodal teaching
- To grasp the concept of student success to create lifelong learners
- To produce graduates who are able to translate knowledge into societal solutions
- To be able to contribute to a resilient university
- To empower myself in leading a new generation of academics
- To participate in research attempting to address sustainable development goals

#### **4.3.1. Impactful developmental strategies**

Developmental programmes at institutions are common. However, Burke (2007:109) recognises that these programmes are generally the same for both men and women without appreciating that career development for women is significantly different. These differences include women’s attitudes towards leadership, their high demand of self-efficacy, and their desire to succeed are situational factors that drive them (Burke, 2007). All the respondents indicated that they had attended

developmental programmes, and in some cases, multiple programmes for exactly the same reasons that Burke suggests.

In Figure 15, it is evident that all except for one woman attended the TUT LEAD programme. Of the 24 respondents that attended LEAD, eight also attended HERS-SA, and four attended HERS-SA, LEAD, and HELM. This exposure foregrounds that women have multiple development opportunities through TUT.

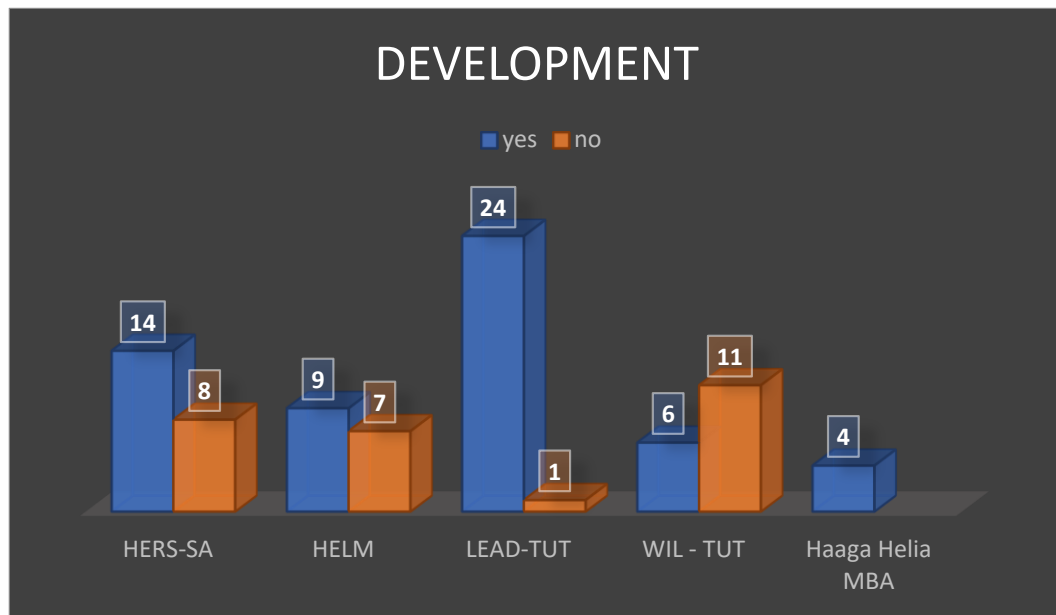


Figure 15. Development strategies

The qualitative data revealed that while TUT LEAD seemingly was mandatory, and the women attended when the teaching and administrative workload allowed. One respondent indicated that LEAD was based on personal development and was not helpful in the advancement towards senior leadership and management positions at TUT.

Many respondents have done extensive leadership development training such as:

- A programme at the University of Stellenbosch over three years
- Attendance of the African Training for Advanced Skills in Leadership Scholarship over two years in the United States of America
- Leadership training through professional bodies
- International collaborative leadership projects where leadership skills transfer is one of the outcomes

- Women's Leadership Programme at Yale University
- Numerous programmes at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS) and
- Master's in Business Leadership degree at University of South Africa (Unisa).

Many of the respondents are engaged in a self-directed informal approach to their leadership development through various other strategies such as by coaching and shadowing other leaders in higher education both nationally and abroad.

It is clear from the data indicated in Figure 16 that all types of developmental programmes the respondents have engaged in were found to be overwhelmingly valuable in their personal leadership development journeys.

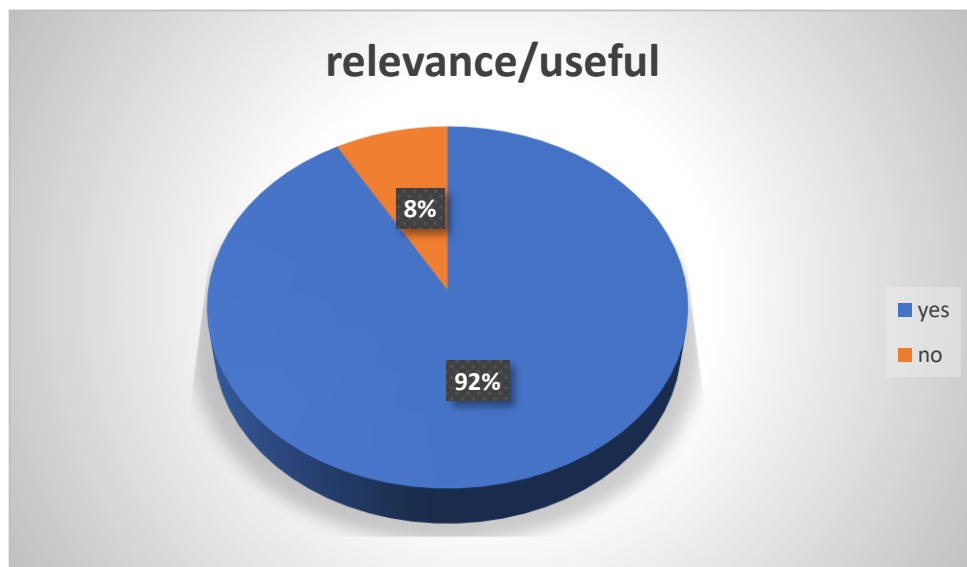


Figure 16. Valuable programmes

While 48% of the respondents were instructed to attend some of these programmes by their line managers, especially the TUT LEAD programme, 52% attended because of careful career planning and setting themselves aspirational goals. Irrespective of how they came to attend, there is a remarkable consensus that it was valuable. All programmes were found to be insightful, practical, relevant, and empowering.

The respondents found it particularly valuable as the programmes helped with:

- Understanding their own self-motivation and strengths as a leader
- Learning how to lead effectively to elicit the best out of people
- Improving self-confidence and building maturity as a leader

- Self-reflecting, which is invaluable for improving management and leadership skills
- Exposing each respondent to other leaders and managers, which leads to peer learning and role modelling that is valuable for building a strong and supportive network of resources
- Providing an overall understanding and appreciation of management
- Growing and maturing as a leader
- Gaining skills and competencies in human resources and talent management, financial management of a university, strategic planning, digitisation of education, and managing education

To conclude the strategies mentioned, it became evident that international collaboration is necessary for progress. Some respondents indicated that they would like opportunities to grow collaboration with international partners, as research is a crucial component of the promotion criteria. Unfortunately, as heads of departments, their workload is exhausting, making publication challenging.

Thus, while these women are seized with ongoing and valuable developmental work, this does not translate into promotional opportunities, thus reinforcing the impenetrability of the glass ceiling.

#### **4.3.2. Mentorship and role-models**

The importance and impact of good professional and personal mentoring are well established (Kotsenas, 2017:1436) in the advancement of women's careers in higher education. The importance of mentoring was also expanded upon in the literature review of Chapter 2. However, while mentorship is perceived as a winning formula, it can be seen as contentious. Mentorship does not easily translate into promotions for women (Morley, 2013). Much of the contention is with regard to the masculinist formulation of the mentorship and the suggestion that this is how to 'fix' women and get them leadership ready (Morley, 2013). Currently, TUT does not have a formal mentorship programme. However, there are pockets of mentoring happening informally, either through peer mentoring or senior-junior mentor relations being forged in various ways.

Yoder (2001:819) indicates that to expect women to rely on themselves when there are structural inadequacies in the system is inherently unfair, thereby making women more open to self-blame and blame from others when things fall apart. Another contentious issue raised as a warning by Morley (2013) is the possible competitiveness that may emerge with destructive force in a process by which the mentee extracts knowledge, intellectual capital, and networks from the mentor and the proceeds to eliminate the mentor. As a result, it is worth recognising the necessity of a structured mentorship programme that will support leadership development and career planning as indicated by 47% of the respondents.



Figure 17. Mentors

However, it is evident from the data that only 28% of the respondents have a mentor (see Figure 17), while 80% do have role models in higher education (see Figure 18). It is worth noting how some of these women have come to enlist their mentors.

One indicated that she came to meet her mentor through the Women in Leadership Forum and works with her through that space. However, she does indicate that there is no official mentoring programme at TUT. Another respondent has a mentor with whom she supervises postgraduate students. Through this relationship, she has learned a great deal from him and his research skills. Others have mentors who are former colleagues, line managers and other colleagues and peers in national and international higher education networks.



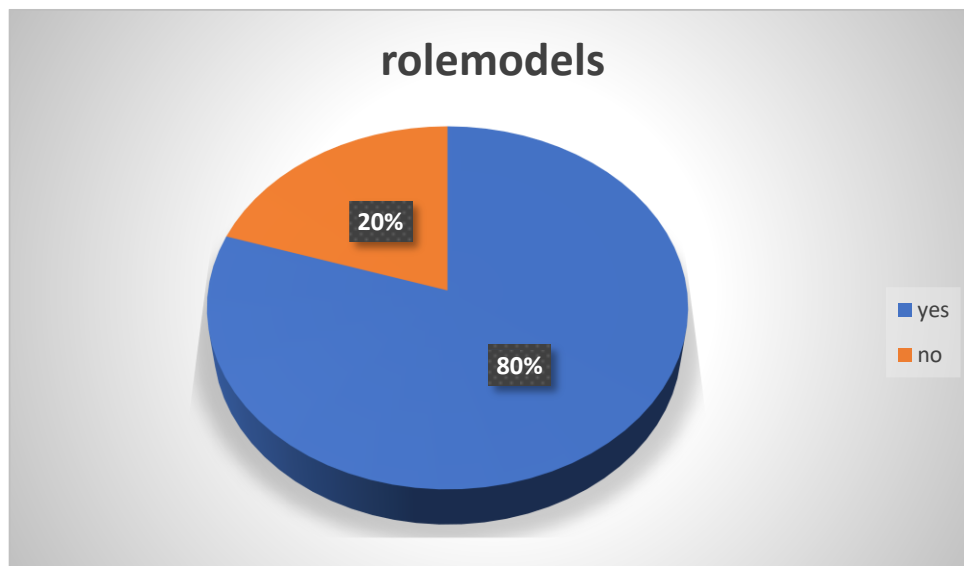


Figure 18. Role models

Of the 80% who have role models, 45% of these have role models at TUT, thus indicating a deficit in this regard at TUT. While role models may not necessarily be gender-specific, the survey indicates that gender-specific role models must be built through conscious efforts in the system. Of the many responses in the survey, I have once again included a respondent's comment on historical patterns to reflect upon the need for role models at TUT:

TUT has very few women in influential leadership positions... Women in senior leadership positions do not last at TUT. The previous vice chancellor and two women deputy vice chancellors left before their terms ended. So, there is no success story to tell about senior women leaders at TUT.

It is slowly improving, but there is a need to increase the number of women in leadership positions... more women require extrinsic and intrinsic support to aspire and to apply for senior positions. I find support and mentoring lacking or inadequate for those women who are already in leadership positions.

TUT needs more women to occupy leadership positions. Women can bring about positive attitudinal change. Enough training has been done, now it is time for them to practice what they have learned. Leadership positions must be reserved for capable women.

... My primary aim is to mentor/coach and grow... women at TUT.

One of the unintended consequences of having a patriarchal culture is a lack of support that benefits women (Moodly & Toni, 2017b). Support in the form of mentorship and role modelling becomes a crucial tool for breaking the glass ceiling.

#### **4.4. Barriers**

Barriers to women's management and leadership development are a global phenomenon. This section has some indicators for what the current perceptions are regarding women leadership and management at TUT. One of the most resounding responses in the survey found that women managers and leaders were not treated equally as their male counterparts. While there were excellent strong platforms for leadership development for women and an enabling environment to empower women towards senior management and leadership positions, it was evident that there are hidden challenges for women aspiring to senior leadership and management positions at TUT.

Most (92%) respondents recognised that they benefit holistically from the numerous developmental programmes offered at TUT. Almost all (89%) the respondents are of the opinion that women managers and leaders at TUT are able to cope with the demands of their position.

In this section, I have analysed the qualitative responses thematically and three barriers emerge. These have been categorised as:

- Organisational culture
- Work-home life balance
- Biases

I will analyse these barriers to explore mechanisms to address the emergent patterns.

#### 4.4.1. Organisational culture

The culture of an organisation such as a university is rarely static and is an intricate web<sup>2</sup> of relationships and routines that are socially constructed (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). Individuals within an organisation rely on a wealth of organisational data, such as information gleaned from various practices and events, peer advice, campus traditions, and so on, that assist in constructing identities and meaning within a university (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). All organisations, including universities, have gendered cultures that hold various subject positions such as 'women' and 'manager', which complicate the culture of the institution and make leadership a 'tricky business' (Acker, 2010). Any sense of compliance culture renders leadership and management devoid of self-legitimacy, which perpetuates the established culture. Organisational culture will also refer to institutional culture, and the survey lifts two sub-barriers that are embedded herein. These are patriarchy and the 'boys club' or 'old boys club', and a toxic political environment and disempowerment.

##### 4.4.1.1. Patriarchy and politics

Universities as social constructions have a responsibility to ensure that some degree of social justice is applied to their students and their staff. The literature supports the assertion that there is generally gendered inequality in university hierarchies with low representations of women in senior management and leadership positions. However, it is without a doubt that male-dominated environments can be difficult for women as women appear to be disadvantaged in environments where there are

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<sup>2</sup> See Tierney and Lanford (2018:3) for an understanding of how 'the web' in higher education institutions is established.

strong male networks and where men are a strong majority (Eagly & Carli, 2003:821).

However, as social constructs, universities are gender blind rather than gender-neutral with a masculinised understanding of academic excellence (Chanana, 2020). As mentioned earlier, De la Rey (1999) describes the institutional culture at universities as 'masculinist' with Moodly and Toni (2017b) clarifying that higher education institutions are organised in ways that privilege masculinities and which can be equated to gatekeeping. There is an idea that a good leader is tied to a fundamental sense of masculinity, with maleness seen as a resource and femaleness as negative equity. Morley (2013) allows the realisation that there exists a cognitive blur where leader and male become synonyms. 'Think manager – think male' has become a psychological barrier to the advancement of women in management and leadership selection, placement, and promotional decisions (Schein, 2001:676).

The following sample of quotations shed light on the qualitative data of the survey revealing a particular perception with regard to the patriarchal culture at TUT. I have extracted these for inclusion here to support an authentic reading of the responses.

The male leaders seem to have a 'club' and a plan and play the leadership game strategically – women have been perceived as emotional and... do not fit the 'manly' nature of the academe.

Women are not completely clued up about the 'boys club' politics at play in the background.

Women are not part of the 'boys club', so they are excluded from decision-making positions.

Women who speak their minds and are not afraid of confrontation are overlooked from leadership positions because they are perceived as 'too much!'

Women constantly have to prove their worth and competence as leaders, while men enjoy the luxury of automatically being perceived as competent just because of their gender... Unfortunately, men are much better at playing politics than women because of the 'boys club', defining leadership in terms of masculine characteristics and power politics.

The 'boys club' supporting one another despite unethical behaviour towards women. Not making an example of men who treat women disrespectfully.

The data indicates that women at TUT perceive that there is a patriarchal organisational culture that is not conducive to women's voices being heard. The pervasive patriarchal attitudes are not imagined and are a real barrier to women academics (Dlamini & Adams, 2014:122) who aspire to senior leadership and management positions. With 43% of heads of departments at TUT being women, the reality is evident. The patriarchal culture is one of the crises manifested through various strained relationships with line managers, conflict, and what Tierney and Lanford (2018) refer to as 'general confusion about shared values and goals'. For some, the very physical existence of universities is an embodiment of patriarchal structures (Cannella, Gaile & Perez, 2012:281) together with a culture that demands 24/7 availability for management and leadership roles, thereby negating the reality of the work-home life divide (Morley, 2013).

What is worth noting is that in recent years, a few female vice chancellors have been appointed, and with such shifts in the sector, female leadership has come to reflect new types of leadership. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that these shifts in the sector perhaps signal a departure from past masculinist practices and will lead TUT to realise that there are significant benefits to having a more diverse leadership. Should the culture of the institution shift towards becoming more inclusive and progressive, it will encourage mentoring, more effective networking, and more effective and efficient leadership. Understanding the culture of an institution is crucial for women in higher education for progressing towards senior positions of management and leadership without being damaged and impeded by patriarchal practices and norms (Morley, 2013).

Yoder's (2001) suggested strategy that women be exceptionally competent to achieve greater success in a masculinised environment – is an unfair requirement that certainly works while putting greater pressure on women to be superhuman to achieve the success.

#### 4.4.1.2. Disempowerment and the support culture

The survey responses reveal that there are various mechanisms used to prevent women from achieving their goals. This emerges from the desire for a more supportive culture that empowers women through recognition of the complexity of their work experiences and needs for empowerment. This section identifies three inter-related themes, namely lack of time, respect, and confidence.

Disempowerment is experienced by excluding women from responsibility and tasks that could lead to their empowerment or by destabilising women in their pursuit of further study. In this regard, one respondent indicated “that women in the sector have generally been struggling with their voices, while those of their male counterparts are amplified through gendered roles and practices”. Another stated that there is “no support from some male managers and counterparts. It is competitive, and I don’t blame men who are fighting for their own advancement”.

- Lack of time

Most participants indicated that they lack support and agree that disempowerment is experienced in various ways. Some of these ways were described as a lack of flexibility in terms of working hours, making time a crucial barrier to the development and empowerment of women. Other time-related barriers include:

Lack of flexibility to give time to let women do what they need to do to balance home/family and work life.

Time available for research is negatively impacted upon. Tendency to take on a disproportionate share of duties or tasks that are important or necessary for institutions but don’t contribute significantly to progress in academic (or management/leadership) journey.

Time. No time is given for non-academic women to do research for their own development and growth.

... Need more time to commit to their career plans.

From the sample of responses, it can be deduced that women at TUT experience the work-home life balance as disempowering as there is little if any time left for them to conduct desperately needed research required for promotional purposes or

time to balance work and home life. This culture must shift towards one that offers more flexibility, and as a result, becomes more supportive.

- Lack of respect

From the results, it is evident that one of the hidden challenges for women at TUT is the lack of respect as leaders and managers.

Nurturing qualities of women leaders being perceived as 'soft' or weak – expected to think like men... stereotyping women as 'emotional' as if it's a bad thing to be fully human, which includes emotions... Subtle and often unconscious biases and microaggression towards women. The 'boys club' supporting one another despite unethical behaviour towards women. Not making an example of men who treat women disrespectfully.

I experience the promotion process as very slow... it is embarrassing when meeting with my peers, and they are promoted, e.g. professors, and I am not – it looks as though I have not been publishing, etc., which is not the case.

Men do not respect woman leadership at home and at work.

Respect works in tandem with ethical behaviour. Women are less accepting of unethical practices such as unscrupulous negotiation tactics, including feigning friendships to gain information, misrepresenting facts, and making promises that are not honoured (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In these behavioural ways, morality is fundamentality tied to respect, and women recognise when they are not respected.

- Lack of confidence

The lack of confidence or the feeling of being an imposter is commonplace for women in management and leadership.

Not fitting in (lack of self-confidence and feeling of inferiority).

TUT does not allow women to voice their concerns, and if they do, the concerns are not taken seriously.

The patterns evident in the culture of the university are diverse ways of affecting the confidence of women in the institution. The lack of communication to the staff about decisions directly impacts the self-perceptions of women. The comments below indicate the impact the lack of communication has on women aspiring to leadership and management positions.

TUT ignores internal talent and rather appoints external candidates who don't match up to the internal people.

Leadership in TUT is a lonely journey because in the first place, according to TUT, women cannot be trusted as good leaders even though they are committed to their work... women normally don't engage in corruption, which alienates them.

A woman must continually 'prove' herself – and I stopped doing that a long time ago.

In conclusion, women are found to be in a cycle that suggests that without time to conduct research, they will not be respected as managers, leaders, and academics, which has a serious knock-on effect on their confidence. Should women be given a little more flexibility and time, they will be more productive in line with the expectations of TUT. The productivity will result in the women feeling respected. With respect comes confidence that will support the university in its greater goal of focusing on its core business in collaboration with staff who are committed and deeply invested in their organisation.

#### 4.4.1.3. Supporting each other

The literature abounds with evidence of the difficulties experienced by women in leadership and management, with female authorities less accepted than their male counterparts (Vial *et al.*, 2016:403). In this complexity, the same amount of power may be seen as 'too much power' in the hands of a woman than in the hands of a male counterpart, thereby delegitimising the power of the female leader (Vial *et al.*, 2016). Dominant behaviour such as being more controlling or forceful is tolerated by subordinates of male leaders, but less so by subordinates of female leaders. Women are always expected to show greater warmth and nurturance than men (Carli, 2001:731–732).

In the survey, some respondents indicated that female leaders and managers were part of their barriers. Some of these are:

I think women do not support each other and pull other women up enough...

Other female managers (are barriers).



Deliberately trying to destroy another woman leader's reputation – jealousy and gossip among women about other women. Women are constantly having to prove their worth and competence as leaders...

Women in power positions are selfish and do not support the growth of other women or celebrate their victories.

Thus, while a small percentage of women enjoy a leadership advantage, they still suffer from disadvantage as they experience prejudice and resistance (Eagly, 2007) from diverse directions.

The disadvantages of prejudice and resistance to women leaders can shift if the culture changes and there is a gender balance in leadership. Of course, as mentioned earlier, leadership should be constructed as gender-neutral and gender-blind. However, without the requisite role models at TUT, the women-not-supporting-other-women challenge will continue. With fewer opportunities becoming available to women waiting in the wings, the competition is great, making the dynamics among women themselves precarious.

#### **4.4.2. Work-home life balance**

Leadership does not take place in a genderless vacuum (Yoder, 2001). Leadership can be a punishment and a reward (Morley, 2013). Perhaps it is a sense of morality that captures women in terms of the duties of domestic labour. The feminisation of the higher education sector, with increasing undergraduate student ratios reflecting the number of women entering higher education, indicates the benefits of the legislation discussed in Chapter 1. Various shifts in the socio-political fields with platforms such as the Commission for Gender Equality pressurising universities towards ensuring gender equity is high on higher education's strategic priorities. While the higher education sector attempts gender reform in management and leadership positions, women are often found in 'velvet ghettos' of marketing, communications and human resources, languishing in 'ivory basements', or offered challenging or precarious roles that are 'glass cliffs' (Eveline & Booth, 2004:243; Morley, 2013).

Notwithstanding that leadership is gendered, how women enact their role as a leader is inextricably intertwined with the realisation that they bring to their leadership all the stereotypic baggage that comes with gender roles (Yoder, 2001).

Women typically have a moral imperative for care work with far more obligations at home in caretaking activities such as food preparation, housework, childcare, and elderly care (Pratto & Espinoza, 2001:764). Women find themselves caught between family responsibilities and the demands of the university leadership that is described as 'greedy work' because of its nature and demand (Morley, 2013).

Some of the responses of the survey indicate the challenge of the work-home life balance.

One size fits all rules cannot work... as we have more duties than men do at work and at home. Sometimes being a woman is a barrier.

Having a household to manage.

My own guilt when I take time from my family to do academic work.

The organisational culture is gender-biased... balancing family life with my career development... the rigid work policies.

We are primary caregivers to the kids, (balancing) family commitments, and a career path plus work is demanding.

Women still have greater family commitments, which take up a lot of time. So, women have to work harder and longer.

Always difficult to balance a career journey and family expectations.

Single parenting; pregnancies; lack of support at home and at work; financial constraints; house chores. Not being able to make use of opportunities for development due to other commitments (household in most cases), divorce, and gender violence.

Males do not respect female leadership at home and at work.

Lack of flexibility in terms of working hours – making women feel ashamed that they have children to take care of... Nurturing qualities of women leaders being perceived as 'soft' or weak – expected to think and lead like men.

Lack of flexibility to let women do what they have to do to balance home/family and work life.

Unfortunately, failure to strike that work-home life balance makes women unpopular choices for senior leadership and management positions. While male counterparts spend hours on their research, women focus on families when not busy with teaching and the administration that follows (Moodly & Toni, 2017b).

#### 4.4.3. Biases

Any female advantage in leadership style might be offset by a disadvantage as a result of discrimination or prejudice against women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003). This disadvantage is a type of stereotyping that the respondents cited as being considered 'too much', indicating what Eagly and Carli (2003) refer to as the incongruity between expectations about women (as a gender) and expectations about leaders. This incongruity reinforces a belief that women, with their warmth, caring, and selflessness, are not as agentic as men who are seen to be more assertive and therefore perceived to be more successful leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Gender bias has also been realised as the dominant group 'cloning' themselves to avoid any risk, with men being able to practice 'care-less' masculinity without any moral disapproval (Morley, 2013). Unfortunately, when women display masculine leadership styles, they are judged as competent but also as not particularly nice. Therefore, women remain in a double bind (Rudman & Glick, 2001:745). 'Niceness' directly affects women's subordination, and therefore traps women in masculinist behaviours regarded as communal rather than agentic. In order to shift the existing biases, both conscious and unconscious, it is imperative to ensure that women recognise their agentic power.

At TUT, a sample of responses indicates what women see are the biases that inhibit their advancement:

Women are appointed to leadership roles which are perceived as 'soft'... women are perceived as emotional and thus prejudiced for positions that require 'toughness'. Women who speak their mind are overlooked for leadership positions because they are perceived as 'too much'.

Not being given enough opportunities at the highest positions available.

Women are perceived as 'soft' or 'weak'.

Deemed weak and emotional.

Women are seen as the 'weaker sex', especially for typical operational jobs... Women are seen as being too emotional.

A slow rate of promotion is also seen as a bias towards women's advancement. For example, one respondent explained how slow advancement impacted her career prospects and her longer-term planning.

Non-recognition of outputs delivered... Stagnating in their academic journey due to no opportunities for vertical and horizontal movement. Not being a professor, one does not get invited as keynote speakers and not recognised by other institutions for your research skills. Not being a professor, one cannot examine a doctorate for other institutions, this limits growth in their academic journey.

Another area that emerged as a space for unconscious bias to occur was interview panels. One respondent explained how this has serious implications for the maintenance of the cycle of under-representation.

Women leaders at TUT consistently exert competence, confidence, preparedness, productivity, understanding of their environments and exceptional communication, presentation, interpersonal and motivational skills. Having relatively few women in senior leadership positions at TUT translates to under presentation of women in interview panels for senior leadership positions and may present a bias in interview panels regarding the preferred demographics (e.g. gender) and characteristics for a position.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of the data collected during the anonymous survey completed by 27 women managers and leaders at TUT. The chapter found that many of the respondents were in the higher education sector for many years and are highly experienced women. Strong development programmes were considered excellent for their journeys with more than 50% of the women aspiring to senior leadership positions. Three main barriers to the advancement of women were extracted in the chapter and explored in detail. These were organisational culture, work-home life balance, and biases. It is evident that women at TUT experience a multiplicity of challenges to managing the gendered expectations around them when working within a patriarchal and non-supportive institution.

The next chapter will present recommendations based on these findings, suggest options for further study, and offer some concluding thoughts.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This study presented the possible barriers to the advancement of academic women in their development as academic leaders and managers in higher education. TUT was used as a case study. This chapter provides recommendations from the study, and the conclusions drawn. Finally, this chapter makes suggestions for possible future areas of research.

As outlined in the research questions, the objective of the study was:

- To determine what the barriers are for women to take up senior academic leadership positions in higher education and at TUT
- To determine what role mentorship plays in the development of women as academic leaders and managers
- To determine the factors that contribute to the shortage of women in senior positions of academic leadership and management in higher education and at TUT

### **5.2. Summary of findings**

Numerous studies were conducted into the dearth of senior women leaders and managers in higher education institutions in South Africa and globally. However, this study focused exclusively on the scenario at TUT where women are underrepresented despite the many strategies in place for their development. This study found that there are barriers for women to advancing their careers, although these might not be exclusively attributable to TUT. It is anticipated that this research project will contribute to the growing body of literature and make recommendations for further areas of research.

#### **5.2.1. Key findings**

This research project was conducted at TUT with a sample of 27 women leaders and managers from a population of 44, thus rendering an acceptable response rate of 61%. This study was a qualitative one with a questionnaire designed with open-ended and closed-ended types of questions. The questionnaire also provided basic

biographical information, such as determining the years and type of experience in higher education and the diverse work environments women are employed in at TUT. This questionnaire was sent to all women leaders and managers at TUT who had completed their doctoral qualification as this was seen as a minimum requirement for the appointment for such management and leadership positions. The questionnaire was sent via Microsoft Forms, which ensures anonymity.

The findings from the research are:

- That TUT has more permanent female staff than male staff
- That TUT has more male professors (both associate professors and full professors) than female professors
- That women are under-represented at TUT in the Executive Management Committee, at the Council, among the executive deans, and as heads of departments
- That most of the women leaders at TUT have more than 16 years of experience in higher education
- That TUT provides numerous, valuable developmental opportunities for women academic leaders and managers
- That many women at TUT do not have mentors, yet they do have role models within the higher education sector

Through the Microsoft Forms survey, women respondents were requested to elaborate on the barriers for women in higher education and barriers at TUT. The following emerged from their responses:

This study found that while there are numerous developmental and empowerment programmes for women, and as managers and leaders, women were not treated equally as their male counterparts.

The patriarchal, institutional culture of TUT was found to be inhibiting for women as there is seen to be a 'boys club' that is exclusionary in practice. This results in the stifling of women's voices.

The poor support culture was disempowering for women and was experienced in various ways. One respondent indicated that there is "no support from some male managers". This culture was also reflected in the lack of flexibility in terms of working

hours. While mindful of their work demands, the constant challenge was the work-home life balance. This study also revealed that women's research outputs suffer due to the lack of flexibility in the system, thereby negatively impacting their promotional aspirations.

Lack of respect was a hidden challenge as women were stereotyped as weak and unable to find resolution when disrespected.

The survey indicated that the lack of confidence created a feeling of being unworthy, particularly when ignored, and preference given to external candidates with little (if any) experience in the higher education sector.

The survey revealed that there were difficulties when women who are in positions of authority are not seen to be supportive and encouraging of other women. Such women were seen as selfish, which is recognised as a leadership disadvantage of women who are always expected to be nurturing and warm. This selfishness was compounded by the competition among women for the few available senior positions.

The work-home life balance was cited as a barrier as women suffer from their own guilt when working on the careers instead of spending time with their families. The balancing act was difficult for some who were seized with single parenting, family commitments, financial constraints, gender-based violence, and divorce.

Another barrier emerging from the survey was the various conscious and unconscious biases that women experience, such as being stereotyped as weak and emotional, thereby causing them to be overlooked for leadership positions. This study revealed that unconscious bias occurs at selection and appointment committees. These crucial committees should be gender-balanced to ensure that there is no bias during the process while also ensuring that female candidates are comfortable during the interview process.

The slow rate of promotions was also recognised as a barrier. This slow promotion rate has a significant impact on their academic careers. Without being a professor, the respondents felt that recognition among their peers was minimal. Consequently, the slow promotion rate limited women's growth, as universities will only invite a



professor to examine a doctorate, and conferences are more likely to invite recognised professors to present their keynote addresses. These are highly regarded aspects of the professoriate, and without the title, growth is limiting. When an expected promotion does not materialise at TUT, the women stagnate, are demotivated, or alternatively look for greener pastures.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

This section will make recommendations based on the findings:

#### **5.3.1. Managing patriarchy**

Intentional gender balance should be considered in organisational structures such as the Executive Management Committee, Council, and Senate to address the patriarchal culture. All selection and appointment committees should be gender-balanced in their composition.

#### **5.3.2. Organisational support – mentorship**

Mentorship should be considered a practical support strategy to help women navigate the complex journey to senior management and leadership positions in higher education. Financial and human resources should be made available to support women in becoming more effective and successful leaders and managers.

#### **5.3.3. Managing promotions**

As an imperative, TUT should look towards expediting the promotions of deserving female staff who are in short supply across the sector in South Africa. This promotion of qualified women will build their confidence and contribute to increasing the university's research capacity. Promotions will also expand the TUT footprint with these new academic ambassadors.

#### **5.3.4. Self-empowerment and agency**

Women must take ownership of their development and realise their agency as equal and valuable employees of the university.

To engage their agency, women should:

- Communicate their need for flexibility to ensure that it can be accommodated without a sense of judgment. This will give women a sense of recognition in terms of the demands of work and home life.
- Although very valuable, the leadership programmes must address the time-management challenge to support women in achieving their diverse range of goals and aspirations.

### **5.3.5. Establishment of a gender office**

The establishment of a gender office will be crucial to managing the range of challenges experienced by women at TUT. Currently, the Women in Leadership Forum is located deep within the structures of TUT, and this makes it very difficult to address the women question at TUT. An elevated gender office located within the span of control of the vice chancellor would give this office the gravitas it requires to drive the transformation agenda with the imperative of gender equity.

## **5.4. Limitations**

There are three limitations to this study. Firstly, this study was conducted only at TUT, which is one of 26 other public universities in South Africa. Although the research indicated very similar trends across the higher education sector, there might be different narratives that emerge that might affect the results of such a study conducted at other institutions. Secondly, due to the instrument being an anonymous questionnaire, it was not possible to explore the rich data that might have emerged through follow-up questions. Thirdly, because the respondents were employees of TUT, they might have been more conservative in their responses to the questions.

## **5.5. Further research**

The following is suggested for further research:

- It is recommended that this research be expanded to include all women staff at TUT in academic and support environments to determine barriers to their advancement. This will add considerable value to the larger body of research in higher education in South Africa.

- It is recommended that a gender dialogue be hosted at a national level from which data could inform policy shifts in the DHET, thereby impacting universities.

This section presented the findings and recommendations of the study while also making suggestions for future research.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

This study found that research implicated a glass ceiling or glass cliff for women aspiring to leadership. The impact of the organisational culture on a woman leader or manager's ability to move vertically into senior positions was significant and cannot be underestimated. Due to universities having long histories and traditions of male leadership and leadership styles, women face a fundamental disadvantage. Notwithstanding that universities are gendered institutions, it is timely that transformation becomes an imperative towards realising gender equity at strategic levels. The fact that university structures are not equally permeable to all employees is a barrier experienced by women who lack the agency to advocate for change.

This study found that women at TUT experience a range of barriers that limit their advancement to senior positions of leadership and management. With reference to the directive from the Minister of Higher Education recognising the dearth of women leaders in universities, TUT has a moral imperative to consider this matter seriously.

It is then concluded that women at TUT have the capacity to lead and manage because they currently do so in their environments. However, given a supportive and conducive environment, they will achieve their career goals. The women will dramatically shift the current scenario for women in higher education leadership and management within TUT and across the sector through a mentorship programme.

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## Appendix 1: Transformation framework



Transformation  
Framework.pdf

## Appendix 2: Information leaflet



REC /2021/02/012

19 February 2021

### INFORMATION LEAFLET

**PROJECT TITLE: Possible barriers for the advancement of women in their development as academic leaders and managers in higher education. A case study of the Tshwane University of Technology.**

Primary investigator: Nalini Moodley-Diar (Education)

**Dear potential research participant,**

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of my formal Master's of Education Management at Haaga Helia University of Applied Science. This information leaflet will help you to decide if you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what is involved. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the study.

**What is the study all about?**

While the status and representation of women in higher education appears to have improved, the primary factors constraining women's career development are still related to embedded issues of gender inequity. The gender gap in this sector is noticeable with various perspectives and opinions on this challenge. Despite progressive policies in the South African higher education system women are still confronted with the challenge of not breaking the glass ceiling when it comes to accessing positions of leadership in higher education institutions in South Africa. Women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions in higher education thereby impacting negatively on gender equality in universities, which is considered a key driver for transformation in South Africa.

The objective of the study is to investigate the barriers for the advancement of women to positions of senior management in higher education.

This study will aim to determine what challenges face women in advancement towards position of senior leadership in higher education. It will also identify and evaluate the various initiatives in South Africa designed to empower women in the higher education sector. This study will further underpin barriers faced by women in leadership and determine how these barriers can be addressed. The research will lead to a framework or matrix that can be used towards the development of women as future leaders in higher education.

**What will you be required to do in the study?**

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

- To sign this informed consent form
- Take approximately 10–15 minutes to ask a few questions on an anonymous digital platform.

**Are there any conditions that may exclude you from the study?**

This study is directed only at female participants and therefore male participants will be excluded.

You will not be eligible to participate in this study if you do not hold a current management position in higher education.

**Can any of the study procedures result in personal risk, discomfort or inconvenience?**

Questionnaires: This study and procedures involve no foreseeable physical discomfort or inconvenience to you or your family. Due to the personal nature of the questions, you may experience some emotional discomfort.

**What are the potential benefits that may come from the study?**

There is no benefit in participating in this study other than contributing towards a deeper understanding of the limitations women in higher education management experience

**Will you receive any financial compensation or incentive for participating in the study?**

Please note that you **will not** be paid to participate in the study.

**What are your rights as a participant in this study?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever. You don't even have to provide the reason/s for your decision.

**How will confidentiality and anonymity be ensured in the study?**

Only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to the filled-out questionnaires. Your answers will be totally anonymous and your identity will not be revealed under any circumstance. Also, nobody outside the study panel and/or research ethics committee will be able to connect any answer to you in any recognisable way. The results of this study might be published in a scientific journal and/or presented at scientific meetings, but again without revealing the identity of any research participant. The original questionnaires will be stored in a safe place for three years, after which they will be destroyed.

**Is the researcher qualified to carry out the study?**

The researcher is an adequately trained and qualified researcher in the study fields covered by this research project.

**Has the study received ethical approval?**

Ethics approval has been sought from the Research Ethics Committee of the Tshwane University of Technology.

**Who can you contact for additional information regarding the study?**

The primary investigator, Nalini Moodley-Diar, can be contacted during office hours at Tel xxx. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, you can contact the chairperson of the TUT Research Ethics Committee.

**DECLARATION: CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

This research study was funded by the Tshwane University of Technology. No publication prohibitions, conditions, or limitations were placed on the researcher.

**A FINAL WORD**

Your co-operation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Due to the survey being electronic, participation will be an indication of consent.

### Appendix 3: Questionnaire

Possible barriers for the advancement of women in their development as academic leaders and managers in higher education: A case study of the Tshwane University of Technology

Nalini Moodley-Diar

#### Questionnaire

Please mark with an X in the appropriate box and explain where necessary.

#### Section A: Personal Data

1. Age

25–29	
30–39	
40–49	
50 and above	

2. Please indicate your years of experience in higher education

0–5 years	
5–10 years	
11–15 years	
16–20 years	
20 years and more	

3. What position do you currently hold?

Head of department	
Assistant dean	
Executive dean	
Director	
Executive director	
Campus rector	
Other	

4. What is your designation?

Senior lecturer	
Associate professor	
Professor	
Other	

5. How long have you been in this position?

Less than 5 years	
5 years	
6–10 years	
More than 10 years	

6. What other leadership positions did you hold in higher education institutions?  
Please provide position and term of office.

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7. In what direction do you wish to advance your career?

Research professor (research centred)	
Senior manager/Leader (management centred)	
Both	

8. What is the position in the structure of the university that you are working towards? For example, vice chancellor.

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9. Do you have a career plan to achieve the response to the above? If so, briefly outline your strategy.

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## Section B: Career Planning

10. What developmental programmes have you attended towards preparing yourself for leadership?

Programme type	Yes	No	Duration
HERS -SA			
HELM			
LEAD – TUT			
WiL – TUT			
GIBS (please indicate which programme)			
Other (please indicate which programme)			

11. Did you find those you attended in Q10 valuable?

Yes	
No	
Neutral	

12. Briefly explain your answer in Q11.

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13. How did you choose the programmes in Q10 above?

By instruction	
By recommendation by your line manager	
By your careful career advancement plan	
Aspirational goal	

14. Do you have a mentor to assist in your academic journey?

Yes	
No	

15. If yes, briefly explain how you came to find a mentor.

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16. If no, would you like to have a mentor to assist you in your academic career planning?

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17. Do you have a role model in higher education?

Yes	
No	

18. Is your role model at the Tshwane University of Technology?

Yes	
No	

## Section B

In the following questions please indicate with an X which column best suits your answer in response to women empowerment at TUT.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Women leaders and managers at TUT are treated equally as male leaders and managers					
Women leaders and managers are respected					

equally as male leaders and managers					
In my opinion TUT provides a strong platform for leadership development for women					
TUT provides an enabling environment to empower women towards senior managers/leaders					
In my opinion leadership is gender neutral					
Women leadership at TUT are more productive than male counterparts					
In my opinion TUT is committed to gender equity in all management and leadership positions					
I benefit holistically from the developmental programmes on offer at TUT					
In my opinion women managers and leaders at TUT are able to cope with the demands of their positions					

At TUT women are given numerous opportunities to develop leadership and management experience					
There are hidden challenges for women leaders and managers at TUT					
In my opinion women leaders and managers are generally more emotional					
In my opinion there are sufficient women in leadership positions in higher education					

## Section C

1. What barriers to do you think women experience in their academic journey in higher education?

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2. What barriers do you think women experience in their academic journey at TUT?

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3. What are your thoughts about women leadership at TUT?

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