Critical Factors Influencing Women Advancement To Managerial Positions In Corporate Business Industry At Standard Bank Khomas Region Namibia

Geoffrey Nambira and Angela Dina Engelbrecht

Department of Management, Namibia University of Science and Technology

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to determine the critical factors influencing women advancement into a managerial position. The researcher used a combination of quantitative as well as qualitative methods. This approach provided a more in-depth insight and understanding of factors influencing women advancement to a managerial position in the corporate business industry. The population of the study was 30 women employees at Standard Bank. This study applied a purposive sampling procedure to select the 15 women employees from Standard Bank, Head office in Windhoek. Questionnaires, as well as interviews, were used to collect primary data from the participants. The research used content analysis as well as a logical framework to analyse primary qualitative data. The methods used allowed for the identification of themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. The SPSS software analysed quantitative data. The findings show that attitude, professional skill, self-development and education plays are vital role for women advancement to the top position in the corporate world. This study concludes that men's status needs to be studied to get a broader view of factors influencing women's' advancement to managerial positions in the organisations.

Keywords: women advancement, managerial position, women empowerment, management experience, self-development, professional skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to changes in the socio-cultural set-up, the trend that is notable in the previous decade is that parents realised the importance of education, especially for the girl child. Relevant statistics supporting this fact show that 53% of girls and 49% of boys completed secondary school education (HHES 2009/2010). Thus, women level of education is comparatively the same to men. Women advancement to a managerial position in the business industry has not been significant. The customary image of women in rural Namibia portraying them as nurturing the fields, gathering wood and water, doing the cooking and looking after children have changed. According to Travel News Namibia (2012) "that image" has changed to women being important user-managers of natural resources in rural Namibia".

Lately, women are speedily climbing the corporate ladder by taking up managerial positions at the executive, senior and middle management levels. Highlighting this trend, Standard Bank Namibia's Head of Human Resources, Isidor Angula (Confidente,2013) states that "In Standard Bank, Namibian women are the majority across all levels of work including managerial levels." According to Angula above 60 per cent of Standard Bank Namibia's workforce is comprised of women". He emphases that, has contributed to confidence in women to thrive in their careers, while at the same time living up to their values of growing the bank's customers, said Angula. He further stated that the Standard Bank Group introduced an initiative to increase its 60 per cent of women workforce in executive, senior and middle management levels. The Human Capital Manager indicated that the Global Standard Bank Group Women in Leadership Programme is specifically aimed at women with potential at the management level to accelerate their development and equip them to advancement. He further indicated that women are the majority across all levels of work at their institution. The Namibia Employment Equity affirms the critical objective of the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act, 29 of 1998, which is to realise equity and equality in the workplace. It also seeks to disregard employment barriers in the workplace so that no single person denied employment opportunities. Additionally, the Act intends to confirm progress towards a more representative workforce that is profound of the demographics of Namibians at all stages of employment.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The trends regarding women in managerial position show that fewer women than men occupy the managerial ranks. Lahti (2013) explains the existence of a glass ceiling in many organisations that prevents women from scaling the heights to fill in the top positions. Lahti (2013), state that researchers argue that the glass ceiling shattered while others argue otherwise. While there is progress regarding women holding managerial positions, at Standard Bank Namibia, the change is not substantial. This state of

affair regarding critical hindrance to women advancement to a level of authority is puzzled and require an in-depth study to divulge the fundamental causes. Henceforth, this study explored the vital factors that influencing women advancement to a managerial position in the corporate business industry at Standard Bank in Namibia.

3.   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The main objective of the research was to explore the critical factors that influence women advancement to a managerial position at Standard Bank Namibia. The sub-objective of the study reads to identify the factors that influence the success of women in a critical role. Following the main objective and sub-objective of the study, the main research question was "What are the critical factors that influence women's advancement to top positions at Standard Bank Namibia?" And the sub research question was "What are the factors that influence women to advance to managerial positions at Standard Bank, Head Office, in Windhoek, Namibia"?

4.   LITERATURE
4.1 Women in Managerial Position

According to Hayfaa (2011), suggest that researchers failed to meet a consensus of the conventional definition of career advancement. Looking into the trend of scholarly work on women studies and career advancement, they are two trends of literature. The most used pattern of studies defines career success in terms of income or individual progress within the managerial hierarchy. On the contrary, the second trend of scholarly literature defines it in terms of personal satisfaction. A clear difference between the two academic definitions is that the former is more objective, while the latter is subjective. Thus, while the first definition is objectively measured, the latter depends relatively on personal satisfaction.

Posholi (2013), argues that biographical characteristics influenced career advancement. The young the person is the keener, and aggressive they tend to achieve a status career. The opposite is apparent. Doubell and Struwig (2014), postulate that career success does not happen in a vacuum and that there are internal factors influencing women career advancements. Factors such as education have an impact on employability and career success. Education plays a role in personal career development; women advancement regardless of education level influence the transformation of organisational culture (Raphaella Prugsamatz, 2010). Thus, women position in corporate world depends on the gendered identity (Gauntlett,2002) and roles viewed from the men's perspective which as assigned by traditions. Furthermore, "Principle jobs in business and organisation are protected by a culture of men at the top" (Gauntlett, 2002 p.8). To date, feminism has changed this viewpoint and men are to face the consequences of this current course of development (Hise, 2004).

Men perspective tend to regard women as weak in leadership and management of the corporate business. Strengthening, henceforth, the idea that transformational or participative style is more likely to support diversity than an autocratic or transactional style (Eagly & Carli, 2007). They further state that many people embrace the perception that an effective leader is a male. This conception evolved the believe that masculine personalities depicted by aggression, ambition, domination, self-confidence, and force, are thought to be indicative of an effective leader. The corporate business industry that is men dominant place less emphasis in promoting competency development, build confidence, serve as a gateway to senior staff, contribute to eradicating structural and social barriers. The structural barriers hinder the development of women and trim their chances to occupy managerial vacancies in the corporate business industry (Eagly & Carli (2007).

Although women have managed to find or reinvent themselves and find a niche in the market place either as administrators or as entrepreneurs, positioned them to managerialism regimes (Thompson, (2015). Aycan (2004, p. 453) account that the main factors influencing women's advancement as "Decisiveness; knowing what you want, and making conscious choices, love for the job, integrity, and trustworthiness, high self-confidence, always working with a plan, good time management, self-sacrifice and self-discipline, taking work seriously; devotion and concentration, good fit for the job, sensitivity and harmony in interpersonal relations, openness to learning and development and determination, pursuit, and precision".

4.3 Reasons for women rising to the top

In the interpretation of changes in leadership roles and organisational practices, female leaders have come to symbolise new types of leadership that means greater effectiveness and synergy (Eaglya & Carli, 2003). Selections of women signal an organisation's departure from past practices and help it to capture the signs of innovation and progressive change. Also of significance to women's rise, change in the organisational practices, brought about in part by civil rights legislation, especially The Affirmative Action (Employment) Act, 29 of 1998, which sidestep sex discrimination in employment. Inceptions of such laws, some organisations were then required to give women access to leadership roles (Miranda, 2005). Therefore, gradual change in

stereotypes of leaders is not inconsistent with a change in leadership roles to emphasise qualities that are more consistent with the female gender role than traditional characterisations of leadership in the corporate business industry (Jorgensen, 2018). As leadership roles change, a more significant proportion of the corporates provide environments that welcome women's managerial competence and that, their presence improves corporate business financial performances (Mckinsey & Company 2008; Adjorlolo et al., 2010). The belief that women are accepting and continue to approve the agentic characteristics that are traditionally associated with masculine leaders may increase women's opportunities to undertake leadership roles (Mckinsey & Company 2008).

4.4 Leadership and Gender Relationship

Leadership is customarily binding and changes over time, so it is hard to give one definition of it, which applies to all. However, to understand female leadership, and what is meant by it, the fundamental nature of leadership explained. Eagly and Carli (2003) argue that situational theories of leadership satisfied the effectiveness of leader behaviours and depends on precise variables, such as the nature of the task and the characteristics of the followers. In history, leadership interpreted as a masculine enterprise. Thus, many theories of leadership focused on the desirability of stereotype masculine qualities in leaders. However, it is plausible that stereotype feminine qualities of cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration is essential to leadership and specific in some contexts in influencing change or gender orientation in contemporary organisations. Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that in representing people's beliefs about gender roles, our theory invokes the construct of balanced but differential orientations. "Because social roles are socially shared expectations that apply to persons who occupy a certain social position or are members of a social category, gender roles are consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men". They further noted in their initial presentation of social role theory, "these beliefs are more than beliefs about the attributes of women and men. Many of these expectations are normative in the sense that they describe qualities or behavioural tendencies believed to be desirable for each sex". This conception corresponds to Milgram's agency theory (1963) which state, reduction of authority consequently reduces the obedience. It is, therefore, not a surprise that men tend to protect their ego by maintaining a high level of influence that make women submissive. This characteristic diminishes their leadership abilities, and so the opportunity to grab a senior position in the corporate world.

4.5 Theoretical orientation

To understand this study and be able to give a platform of knowledge for the specific objective of the research, the idea of advancement under the theories of social evolutions and development discussed. The concept of women progression is vast, while the centred of interest is on the theory of women leadership.

4.5.1 Women and Leadership

Leadership is a concept that continues to change. It is fascinating, however, to note that women have made such great strides in leadership roles today. The barrier in women carrier advancements speedily reduced, allowing women to enter leadership positions on an equal basis as men (Porterfield& Kleiner,(2005). Based on past literature, women and management research has focused on a wide variety of issues and topics. However, many publications focused on barriers to women advancement. Porterfield and Kleiner (2005) emphasise on the hindrances to women's leadership progression ranging from structural to attitudinal factors. They further discussed the career paths that quickly begin to deviate after women with similar identifications and expectations enter the workplace at levels like men.

There is a limited theoretical orientation on women and management and leadership. This shortcoming restricts research practices on cross-cultural management. Porterfield and Kleiner, (2005), argue that although there are many leadership frameworks, models, and theories, most of them are developed and based on male-normed assumptions. The changes in methods and practices of leadership influenced the increase in female participation in management roles. Whereas, in the past, leaders based their authority on their access to political, economic, or military power. While, in post-industrial societies, leaders share strength and establish many collaborative relationships (Eagly and Carli, 2003). Therefore, contemporary views of good leadership encourage teamwork and collaboration and emphasise the ability to empower, support, and engage workers.

4.6 Conceptual Framework

The research framework in figure one used to investigate the factors which influence women career advancement. The advancement differentiates women who have progressed highly in the hierarchy and those that have not yet done so. It is thus logical assuming that policies, empowerment programmes, mainstreamed representation and education are critical in advancing personal development. Intermediately, the attainment of personal growth depends on the understanding of the concept and so the consequences of social dynamics such as glass ceiling, gender stereotype, the type of support that individuals and groups receive from the systems and culture and traditions that maintain or change the special status in society. The integrations of common factors dynamics in the community lead to the personal achievement of which, according to this study, women advancement.
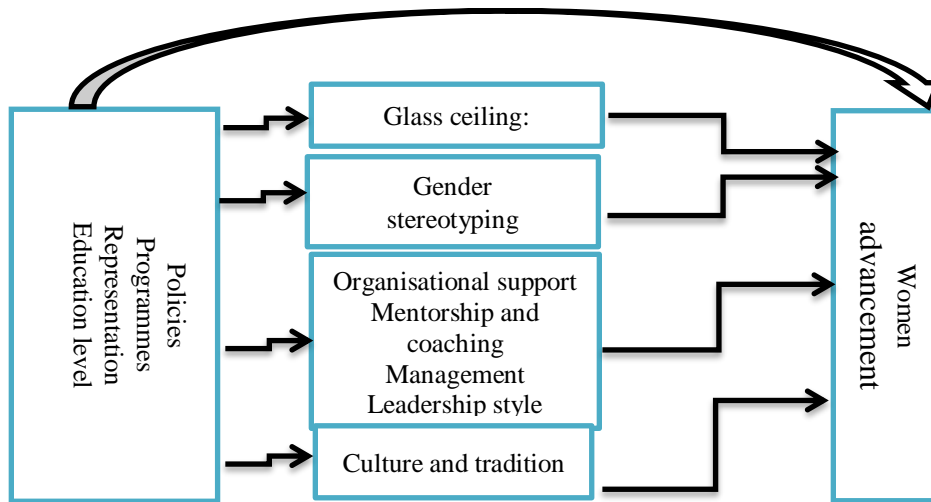
4.6.1 Conceptual Framework

Figure: 1. The conceptual model of critical factors influencing women advancement (Source: Authors)

5. METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect primary data. The population of the study comprises of the women in all management positions at Standard Bank, Head office, Windhoek, Namibia. The study population consisted of 30 women employees. The purposive sample procedure used to draw a sample of 15 women participants. The primary data collection for the quantitative research used the survey questionnaire. The aim of collecting primary data was to establish the participants' views on the effects of factors influencing women advancement to managerial positions in the corporate business industry, particularly Standard Bank head office in Windhoek. The in-depth interview collected the qualitative data. The open-ended face to face interviews allowed participants to express their opinions and experiences regarding women advancement in high positions in the corporate world. The data gathered determined patterns and ultimately concluded the factors influencing women advancement to managerial positions. The SPSS programme computed the quantitative data, while data reduction method analysed qualitative data.

5. FINDINGS

This study focuses on the analysis of critical factors influencing women advancement to managerial positions in the corporate business industry, with shreds of evidence derived from Standard Bank head office in Windhoek, Khomas Region Namibia.

5.1 Participants demographic

The following constitutes the findings of participants demographic data.
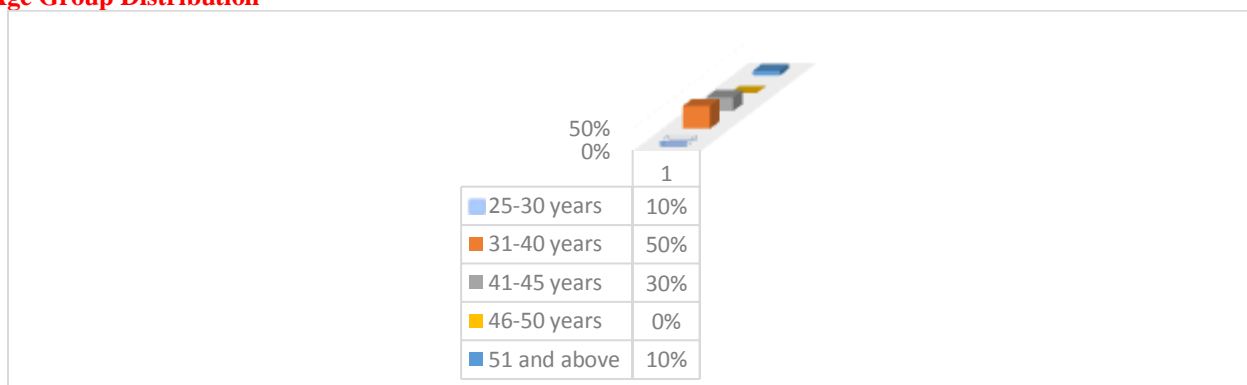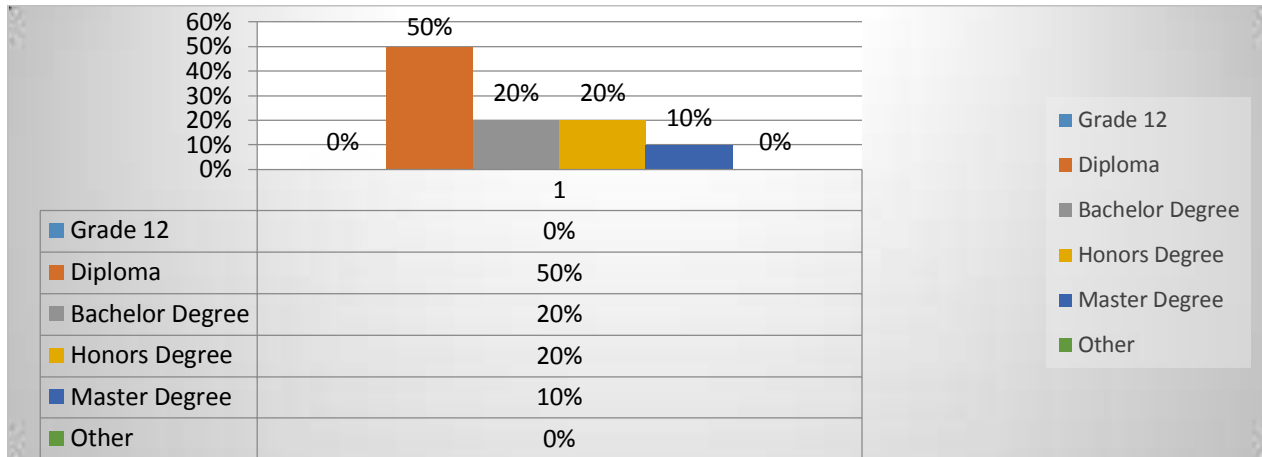
5.1.1 Age Group Distribution

Figure 2:   Age Group Distribution

Source: Survey Data

Figure 2 presents the age distribution of the participants. The findings show that 10% of the participants fall under the age group of 25-30 years; 50 % of the participants represent the age group of between 31-40 years while 30% of the participants were between 41-45 years. The remaining 10% of the participants were 51 years and above of age.

5.1.2 Education Level

	1
■ Grade 12	0%
■ Diploma	50%
■ Bachelor Degree	20%
■ Honors Degree	20%
■ Master Degree	10%
■ Other	0%

Figure 3: Educational Level
Source: Survey Data

The result in figure 3 portrays a relatively high number of participants have a Diploma (50%), compared to the 20% participants who had an Honours degree. Only 10% of the participants had grade 12 qualifications, while 10% hold a Master or higher degree.
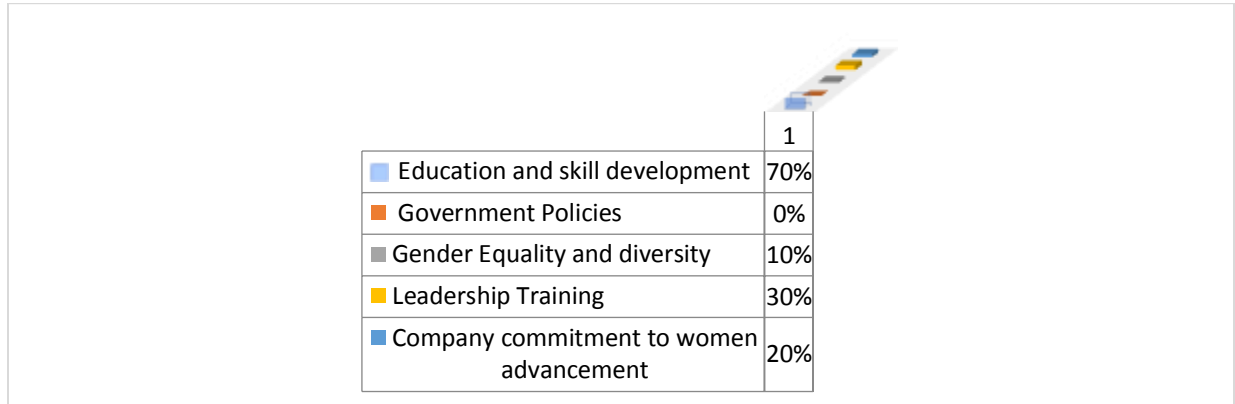
5.1.3 Working Experience in Years

	1
■ 1-3 years	40%
■ 3-5 years	30%
■ 5-1 years	10%
■ 10 and more years	20%
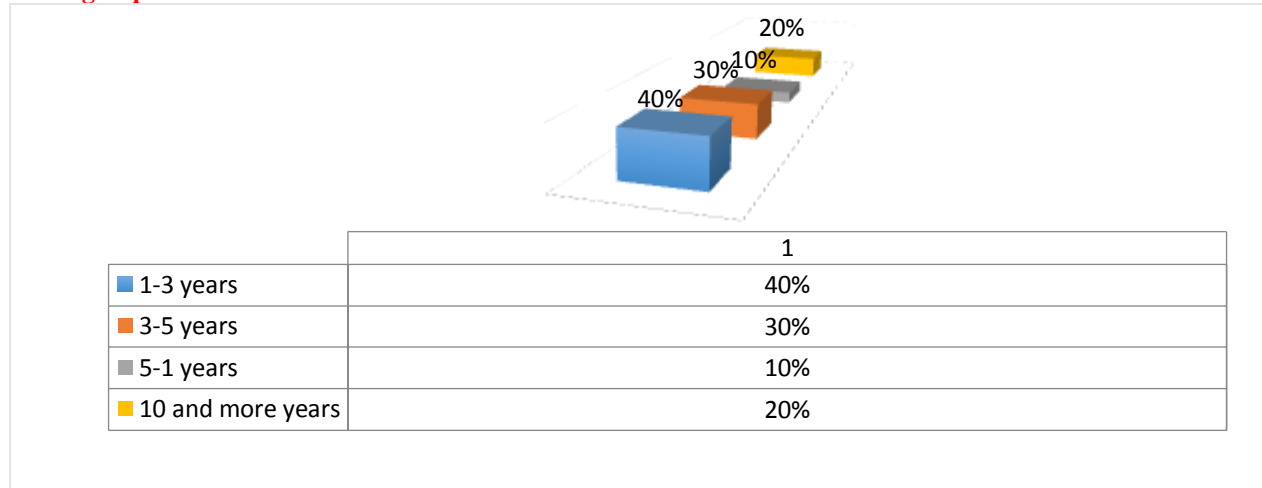
Figure 4: Working Experience in Years
Source: Survey Data

Figure 4 shows that 40% of the participants have less than three years in managerial positions. One third (30%) of the participants hold in a higher rank for more than three years. A notable result shows that 20% of the participants have experience in managerial positions and more than ten years' of work experience.

5.2 Factors enhancing women advancement

|	1
☐ Education and skill development	70%
☐ Government Policies	0%
☐ Gender Equality and diversity	10%
☐ Leadership Training	30%
☐ Company commitment to women advancement	20%

Figure 6: Factors Enhancing Women Advancement
Source: Survey Data

They are several factors enhancing women advancing to the top of the hierarchy. The results reflected in figure 6 above shows that 54% of the participants highlighted the need for education and skill development as the key factors that would drive women advancement in the corporate world in Namibia and elsewhere. Thought-provoking, none of the participants, indicated government policies as factors that contributed to the advancement of women in managerial positions. The Namibian Government through, its strategic plan, advocate closing the gaps of inequality between women and men. These policies intend to break the 'glass ceiling' which were created by past socioeconomic, political, and cultural disparities, that existed in the Namibian society before independence. Furthermore, 30% of the participants indicated that leadership and training are some of the major factors that enhance women advancement in the corporate world. About 20 % of the participants noted that company commitment to women advancement is one of the significant factors for women advancement.

5.2   Avoiding the prefix female

The findings portrayed in figure 7 show that 40% of the participants agree to prevent the 'prefix female' compared to 40% who disagreed agree. Interestingly, 20% of strongly agree that prefixing female should not be an indicator factor to women advancement but merely merit.

	1
☐ Strongly disagree	0
☐ Disagree	40
☐ Neutral	0
☐ Agree	40
☐ Strongly agree	20
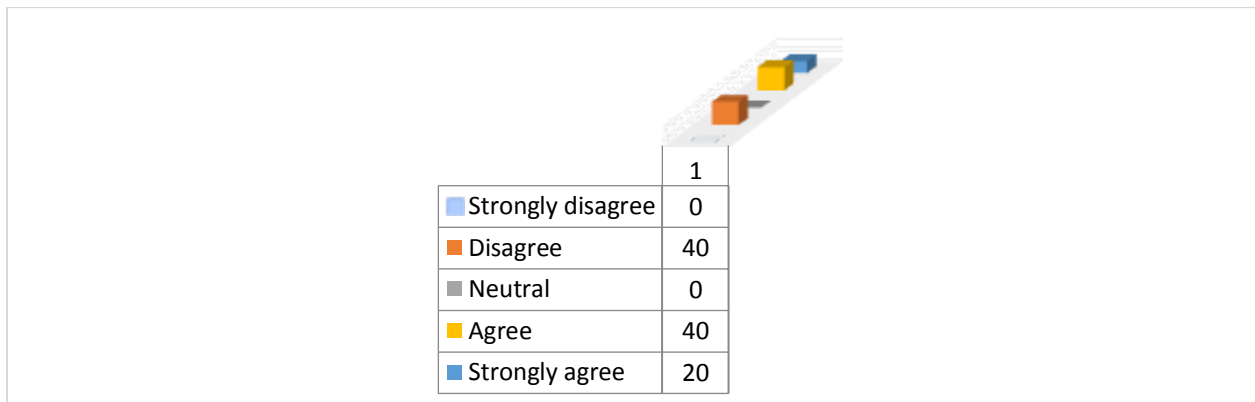
Figure 7: Should the Prefix 'female' be voided
Source: Survey Data

5.4 Consideration of professional skills or gender

	1
■ Disagree	10
■ Neutral	10
■ Agree	70
■ Strongly agree	10
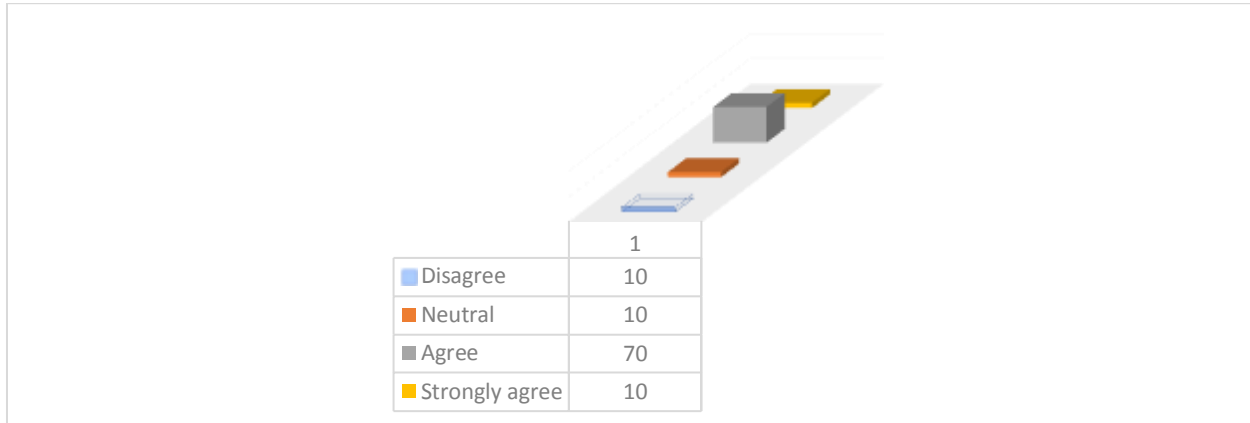
Figure 8: Professional Skills rather than gender
Source: Survey Data

Based on the above figure 8 findings, 70% of the participants prefer the emphasis of professional skills, to avoid reverse discrimination at the workplace, while, 10% disagree, neutral and strongly agree respectively. This response infers that participants wish to see fairness in employees, recruitment and promotion processes despite the gender orientation.

5.5 Qualitative analysis

During the interview, the participants stated the events that they consider advancing their career opportunities. The participants' views in responding to this question varied. While some participants indicated that education, training, and self-development influenced their carrier development, some reported that coaching and mentoring helped them to advance to a managerial position. One of the participating managers stated that *"I have appreciated my mentor for his professional acuity and care. It has sustained me in the middle of change. I have always felt stronger, having spoken to him. I have known that while showing me kindness, he retains objective and keen eye is ever vigilant. His generosity of spirit and action has kept me afloat".* Besides, the participants indicated that attitude and hard work are the two factors that have advanced their careers: *"hard work, dedication, and commitment pay off".* The participants mentioned that lack of knowledge, attitude and gender stereotyping are some of the critical obstacles to female advancement in the corporate world, by responding *that "succeeding in a job and even advancing in your career. A positive and enthusiastic attitude is a critical component of workplace success".*

Regarding on whether they experienced gender femininity to be a hindrance to career development or has it helped women to elevate to a higher position, the finding indicated that participant expected to *"act like a man",* without recognising the specific female attributes that enhance leadership and management skills. Some participants reported that being a woman has advanced the concept of "*women empowerment*". While some of them expressed that "*being a woman should not be a weakness or obstacle and that the existence of successful Namibian businesswomen stands as a testimony to this gesture. Specifically, the likes of "Ms Martha Namudjebo, Ndapewa Kadhikwa, and Monica Geingos".*

On what participants perceive are the best tools to increase the number of women in managerial positions. The result indicated that participants considered coaching and leadership training as critical variables that can accelerate women advancement in the corporate world. Education and skills development were tools that participants mention; "*Education is the key to success*". Furthermore, the participants said about the benefits of unique advantages that women bring to management and organisations. The results show several reasons supporting the notion or essentiality of promoting women to managerial positions in the corporate world. The reasons given were that women were emotional maturity and are better motivators compared to men's organisational initiatives.

Regarding the views on gender versus professional skills as criteria for advancing or filling managerial positions corporate business industry, the responses indicated that professional skills being important than gender in filling the managerial positions in the corporate world. "*one needs to have the certain skill set*". This finding corresponds to quantitative data analysis findings in this study.

Regarding additional critical factors on women advancement to a management position in the corporate business industry, participants indicated that women are leaders due to the nature of women role at home. Although there are considerable differences in their management style between men and women, some respondent pointed out that they do not differentiate people based on gender. Although, following their responses, women are more hardworking, more disciplined than men and deserve space in the hierarchy of the corporate world.

6. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Factors such as age, education background, work experience are crucial for personal development. Thus, women demographic stance exert influence on the position they hold in the corporate business industry. Backed with the cultural significance, and more strongly on attitude toward women leaders, demographic credential influence women development and empowerment (Raphaella Prugsamatz, 2010; Gauntlett, 2000). However, these observed views pronounce or speak loudly of equal opportunities in tertiary education. Thus, younger women are likely to take up managerial positions; giving the women fair chances to compete with men in the corporate business industry if they have competitive credentials despite the gender orientation. James, Pounder, Marianne Coleman, (2002) argue that women are better leaders than men. Women are also willing and able to handle difficult conversations when crisis emerge among employees. Furthermore, women are more intuitive than men and understand the human side of the business better than men. This subjective or rather scholarly argument emphasises the notion that women are natural caregivers.

Strong professionalism builds the core of the organisation rather than gender—the professional skills emphasis for avoiding reverse discrimination at the workplace. Fairness in promotions is what the corporate business wishes to happen. Kovalainen and Österberg- Högstedt, (2013) postulate the differences in lucidities identity-building work among the gender and professional groups. Despite the differences and the separateness of these identities, the common juncture is that all characters are fluid, changing, layered and overlapping.

It finding reveal that the most significant barrier is knowledge and gender stereotyping while another reported stumbling block was the glass ceiling. Bierema and Opengart (2002), equally argue that the glass ceiling remains a significant problem, which deters women advancement to higher positions in the corporate world. According to the findings, women are worried that despite the numerous established government policies and programmes to ensure that women's talents and skills are recognised, their progress in climbing the corporate ladder and grabbing the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon limit higher opportunities. Literature suggests that the evaluation of women both in the private and public sector has often been highly subjective and in many cases, led to inequalities in promotion opportunities between female and male workers (Heilman, 2001). Luhti (2013) account that women who choose careers over family or want to be leaders and still have a family labelled as somehow different, greedy or even strange. Stereotypes and prejudice still affect women's career development strongly.

The presence of company strategies contributes immensely to the advancement of women into managerial positions. Thus women are rapidly advancing to higher positions, through many corporate development initiatives such as women in the leadership development programme, management essential, foundation leadership, and team leader programmes. These programmes are about empowering and creating opportunities for female staff to grow and develop themselves as leaders. Michlidis et al. (2012), contends that "to create an inclusive environment, companies must recognise the differences in how women perceive the workplace. Women "nurture a culture that leverages the talents and traits of multicultural women leaders, then continue the encouragement of "covering", which finds multicultural women feeling pressure to hide certain aspects of their lives, and feeling uncomfortable being their authentic selves at work".

7. RECOMMENDATION, POLICY IMPLICATION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The most significant barrier as per the study is the lack of knowledge and gender stereotyping. Another stumbling block that emerges from the findings was the glass ceiling. Bierema and Opengart (2002), report that the glass ceiling remains a significant problem, which hampers women from pursuing their careers. They were further worried that despite the numerous established government policies and programmes all over the world to ensure that women's talents and skills are recognised, indeed their progress up the corporate ladder and opportunities to advance are limited by the glass ceiling phenomenon (Pour & Tafaghodi, 2017). Thus, the status of women with higher qualifications in managerial positions require a thorough examination, and women need encouragement to pursue higher education. Furthermore, gender issues at work are to be addressed vigorously and robustly with a viewpoint of empowering prospective women to more senior positions and favourites for promotions. Although cooperate world pronounce gender equality, management should be cautious not to promote reverse discrimination against men, when it comes to career advancement.

There is preliminary information regarding factors influencing women advancing into managerial positions. Given the abovementioned findings, this study suggests further research that focuses on factors that influence men's career advancement since not much has so far documented. Secondly, it is essential to study women successes as entrepreneurs and factors that affect them to become entrepreneurs. Lastly, it is eminent to understanding issues related to women managers career advancement from the male manager perceptions.

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