

Academic Paper

The influence of coaching on the career trajectories of African female CEOs in South Africa

 Angela C. Russell  (University of Johannesburg)
 L.M.M. Hewitt (University of Johannesburg)

Abstract

African women^[1], South Africa's largest demographic, remain underrepresented in executive management, facing compounded challenges as black females. This study examines the role of coaching in influencing the career trajectories of African female CEOs. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven participants, analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research highlights the pervasive gender and racial biases impeding their leadership journeys. Coaching emerged as an important tool, fostering self-awareness, enhancing leadership skills, and facilitating career transitions. These findings underscore coaching's potential to help African female leaders traverse systemic barriers, supporting their advancement and success within corporate environments.

Keywords

Coaching, female CEOs, African leaders, leadership development, executive coaching

Article history

Accepted for publication: 01 July 2025

Published online: 01 August 2025



© the Author(s)

Published by Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

Women are still marginalised within the corporate world (Mattar, van Nieuwerburgh, Barr, & Jacob, 2018), and a rife patriarchal culture still propagates biases that stereotype women (Bierema, 2017). It is not just a South African phenomenon but a global one (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021; PWC, 2021; SNG Grant Thornton, 2023). According to Bierema (2017), women are side-lined by an organisational playbook that has stayed the same for decades, with less access to experiential opportunities and a lack of prospects for development and advancement.

Ngunjiri and Gardiner (2017) argue that leadership skills development occurs within a relational context that encompasses interactions with peers, subordinates, and supervisors. This development is facilitated by relational growth and the assignment of progressively challenging

work tasks. Although coaching has been identified as an effective method for leadership development by multiple studies (Burke, 2017; Ngunjiri & Gardiner, 2017; Mattar et al., 2018), it remains an underutilised tool in this area, as noted by Bierema (2017). To build and augment leadership capabilities, organisations often employ executive or leadership coaches as developmental mechanisms, aimed at supporting employees across various career stages (Bachkirova, Cox, & Clutterbuck, 2018; Bonneywell, 2017). The coaching process is characterised by structured and focused interactions, employing pertinent strategies, tools, and techniques. These interactions are designed to bring about sustainable and beneficial changes for both the individual and the organisation (Bachkirova et al., 2018).

This study explored the influence of coaching on the career trajectories of African female CEOs in South Africa. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to delve into the participants' lived experiences, specifically focusing on the challenges in their leadership roles and how coaching aided them throughout their often turbulent leadership journeys.

The South African Context

Despite women constituting 51.1% of South Africa's population, with black women being the largest demographic group at 47.1% (Statistics South Africa, 2021), they remain underrepresented in the workforce, making up just 43.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2021a). Women hold approximately 52.3% of the country's university degrees (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2021). In the realm of corporate leadership, women in South Africa make up a mere 5% of CEOs, according to Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) (2021), a figure slightly increased to 7.2% by Deloitte Global (2022). Despite these statistics, empirical research is scarce, specifically focusing on black female leadership in South Africa, and the precise number of black women serving as CEOs in the South African private sector remains undetermined.

Gender and racial inequality have deep roots in South Africa, resulting from its colonial, political, economic, and social history (Zietsman & April, 2021). Patriarchy and sexism still exist in post-apartheid South Africa, and the absence of engendering is intricately linked to the patriarchal nature of the country (Plaatjies Van Huffel, 2011). "Boys are socialised to know and believe that they are superior; they are the decision-makers, protectors, brave, heads of households, independent and assertive" (Ngomane, 2017, p. 390). In contrast, girls are "taught to be submissive, to always strive to please men" (Ngomane, 2017, p. 391). Black women are still socialised into traditional passive, dependent and obedient female roles, with homeware and childcare responsibilities taking precedence over educational achievement (Bimrose, McMahon, & Watson, 2017; Ngomane, 2017). Women are seen as subservient to men and assigned a lower social status (Bimrose et al., 2017), often making career choices based on conservative and gendered ideologies promoted at school and within society at large (van der Merwe, 2018). It is taboo for women to lead in most cultures in South Africa, especially leading men, as the perception is that they are weak and inferior (Ngomane, 2017).

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a need to redress the past imbalances, resulting in fast-tracking and rectifying policies in the workplace (Terblanche, Albertyn, & Van Coller-Peter, 2018). While it is evident that there is an increase in the participation of women in the workforce, inequalities and gender power dynamics that keep women subordinate persist (Rao, 2016). Legislation such as affirmative action and the *Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998* (EEA) (Government Gazette No 19370, 1998) have been critical instruments for workplace transformation (Terblanche et al., 2018). They aim to shift the South African work demographic to reflect the population, ensuring that the previously disadvantaged groups are represented at all organisational levels (Matotoka & Odeku, 2021).

Workplace gender equity, emphasising the boardroom, has been a focal point of economic empowerment, although female board representation has not been legislated (Businesswomen's

Association of South Africa, 2017). In addition, the King IV Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa (Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2016) emphasises the need for board diversity for effective governance and the objectivity that a mix of skills, expertise and experience brings. However, twenty-three years into the enactment of the EEA, Matotoka and Odeku (2021) held the opinion that black African women are still poorly represented at managerial levels within the South African private sector, with an overrepresentation of white males.

Apartheid laws might have changed, but Myeza and April (2021) elucidate that the apartheid belief system and the resultant assumptions that black people are inferior continue. They reveal that black South African professionals are still subjected to overt and covert racism in the workplace, despite the evolution of democracy more than two-and-a-half decades ago (Myeza & April, 2021).

Leadership Barriers

The phenomenon of the "glass ceiling" is a critical and recurrent theme in literature addressing the barriers to women's advancement in leadership roles. This metaphorical barrier represents the subtle yet significant impediments women and minorities face in ascending organisational hierarchies. Originally coined to describe the obstacles hindering women from reaching top management positions, the term has since evolved into a cornerstone of discourse concerning women's status in management (Powell & Butterfield, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2019).

However, the challenges are not uniform across all demographics. For black women, the metaphor transforms into a "concrete ceiling," a term introduced by Barnes (2017) to denote an even more formidable barrier. This concept suggests that black women face obstacles that are more difficult to overcome than those represented by the glass ceiling, resulting in significantly fewer opportunities for career advancement (Barnes, 2017).

The scholarly discussion on these barriers is multifaceted, reflecting the complexity and diversity of women's challenges in attaining leadership roles. It encompasses various dimensions, underlining the intricate nature of the journey toward leadership positions for women. This discourse is essential in understanding the nuanced and layered experiences of women, especially black women, in the pursuit of leadership roles within organisations.

The evolution of gender bias in the context of leadership and organisational roles demonstrates a shift from overt discrimination to more subtle and systemic forms of bias. This transition is articulated through the concepts of first-generation and second-generation gender biases. First-generation gender bias, as Grover (2015) and Kubu (2018) note, is characterised by explicit and visible discrimination, actively excluding women from leadership roles. In contrast, second-generation gender bias, as identified by Hoyt and Simon (2017), is less overt, involving covert and often unconscious biases embedded in organisational cultures and structures. These biases manifest in unspoken norms and expectations about gender roles and behaviours, as explained by Devnew, Berghout Austin, Janzen Le Ber and Shapiro (2017), and are reinforced by cultural assumptions that inherently favour men, as Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb (2019) argue.

Historical perspectives reveal that organisational practices, traditionally designed by and for men (Opoku & Williams, 2019), continue to perpetuate gendered roles and expectations. This legacy, as Bligh and Ito (2017) assert, embeds historical gender biases within organisations, hindering women's progression into leadership positions. Adding to this complexity is the intersectionality of race and gender, particularly impacting black women in leadership roles. Davis & Maldonado (2015) highlight how the confluence of race and gender creates unique challenges for black women, who face "intersectional invisibility" (Hoyt & Simon, 2017, p. 90), a concept describing the marginalisation of individuals who do not fit the prototypical standards of their racial or gender group.

Gender stereotyping further compounds these challenges. Oldridge (2019, p. 12) notes the persistence of binary gender stereotypes, such as the notion that "women take care, and men take charge," which skews perceptions of women in leadership roles. Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann and Josephine (2017) and Rhode (2017) discuss how leadership is often associated with masculine traits, disadvantaging women who are judged against these male-centric standards. In the South African context, Ngomane (2017) observes that leadership roles are framed within patriarchal societal norms, reinforcing a gendered view of leadership.

For black women, the intersection of gender and race stereotypes leads to perceptions of intellectual inferiority and reduced competency and influence (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015; Rhode, 2017; van der Merwe, 2018). They may also confront stereotypes related to hostility and aggression, undermining their authority and effectiveness in leadership (Holder et al., 2015; Rhode, 2017).

Additionally, women's self-limiting beliefs, including imposter syndrome and a lack of self-confidence, present significant barriers to career advancement (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Oldridge, 2019). These beliefs are often rooted in societal pressures and the fear of negative judgment or failure (Sandburg, 2014). McKinsey Global Institute (2019) identifies a lack of self-confidence as a major impediment to women's career progression. While Guillen (2018) challenges the notion that women inherently lack self-confidence, the impact of external perceptions and double standards on women's confidence is acknowledged.

Leadership Coaching

Ngunjiri and Gardiner (2017) purport that leadership development occurs within a relational context, emphasising the significance of interactions with peers, subordinates, supervisors, and other stakeholders. Clerkin & Wilson (2017) and Gibson (2008) reinforce this perspective, positing that relationships are fundamental to a leader's development and identity, extending beyond organisational boundaries. Learning in leadership is a relational process, occurring through interactions with bosses, mentors, challenging colleagues, and through feedback and coaching (Clerkin & Wilson, 2017). Gibson (2008) further suggests that developmental relationships are particularly crucial for women, who often have limited access to traditional information networks within organisations.

The role of external organisational relationships is underscored for women leaders, who may find fewer potential executive mentors within their organisations and face exclusion from informal male-dominated networks (Gibson, 2008). To address this, Murphy, Roberts Gibson, and Kram (2017) identify five key relationships in women's developmental networks critical for leadership growth: mentors, sponsors, peers, learning partners, and executive coaches.

Executive and leadership coaching are highlighted as effective tools for individual, team, and organisational development (Knowles, 2018). The goal of coaching is to enhance self-awareness, personal insights, performance, career advancement, leadership capability, and to facilitate change management (Knowles, 2018). Leadership coaching, as defined by Bonneywell and Gannon (2021), Kuntz and Livingston (2020), and Stokes and Jolly (2018), is a targeted and tailored one-on-one developmental intervention. Kuntz and Livingston (2020) describe coaching as comprising adaptive, reflective, and goal-focused elements that benefit the individual leader and the organisation.

The increasing use of leadership and executive coaching in organisations is due to its flexibility and individual tailoring, supporting leaders with varying styles and needs (Bonneywell, 2017). Coaching is particularly effective for women's leadership growth, focusing on learning, development, and self-reflection to enhance strengths (Bonneywell, 2017; Bonneywell & Gannon, 2021; Mattar et al., 2018; O'Neil, Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2015). Ludeman (2013) and Kuntz and Livingston (2020) stress

the importance of coaching in considering gender-based differences and the multiple life roles and changing careers of female executives.

The benefits of coaching for female leaders include enhanced self-awareness, self-confidence, self-regard, self-reliance (Leimon et al., 2011), and self-management (Spaten & Green, 2019), alongside building leadership identity (Skinner, 2014). Coaching conversations improve leadership efficacy perceptions (Bozer & Jones, 2018) and promote self-reflection, confidence, and focus (Gray, De Haan, & Bonneywell, 2019). Skinner's (2014) research highlights the role of executive coaching in exploring leadership authenticity among senior women, supporting their psychological needs and sustaining leadership positions over time. Gray et al. (2019) note that executive coaching significantly influences job satisfaction, job performance, and behaviours of female executives, enhancing effectiveness and work-life balance. Spaten and Green (2019) further detail coaching benefits like improved well-being, coping, work attitudes, and goal-directed self-regulation.

In South Africa, African women face discrimination shaped by gendered dynamics, which positions them at a disadvantage within organisational contexts that perpetuate patriarchal cultures and reinforce traditional gender roles (Jaga, Arabandi, & Bagraim, 2017; Seale, Fish, & Schreiber, 2021). Consequently, these women must navigate and compete within these patriarchal and prejudiced systems. Leadership coaching serves as a transformative intervention (Bonneywell, 2017), equipping women with the tools and strategies necessary to cope with (Spaten & Green, 2019) or overcome these barriers and advance in their leadership trajectories.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was adopted for this study. Phenomenology, a contemporary qualitative methodology (Noon, 2018), has gained prominence as a research tool in psychology and human, social, and healthcare sciences (Tuffour, 2017). IPA was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of the participants, who are regarded as experiential experts on the research topic, enabling a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their perspectives (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Sampling

Phenomenological research seeks out homogenous individuals who share everyday experiences to identify detailed patterns and relationships on a particular phenomenon (Noon, 2018). This IPA research employed a non-probability, purposive sampling of relatively homogenous participants. The sample criteria included African female CEOs who had experienced leadership coaching in the course of their careers. These participants shared a particular contextual perspective on the given experience (Larkin, Shaw, & Flowers, 2019) to allow for the examination of convergence and divergence (Alase, 2017).

Of the sample of seven participants, who were allocated pseudonyms, five were CEOs of multinationals, one led a prominent non-profit, and one was an entrepreneur managing a holding company. Six participants received formal coaching during their careers, while the entrepreneurial CEO experienced informal coaching. Although not a criterion, all participants had mentoring at various stages in their careers.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Participant	Pseudonym	Race	Age	Organisation Type
P1	Anele	Coloured	45-49	Multinational
P2	Betty	Black	60-65	Entrepreneurial owner of multiple companies
P3	Colleen	Black	45-49	Non-Profit Organisation
P4	Dawn	Black	55-59	Multinational
P5	Eleanor	Black	45-49	Multinational
P6	Faith	Black	45-49	Multinational
P7	Gugu	Coloured	50-54	Multinational

Six participants were recruited via the researcher's professional network, and one was referred via a colleague.

Data Collection

After the CEOs were invited to participate, informed consent was obtained before conducting the in-depth, semi-structured interviews. An interview guide formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews, which lasted approximately 50 to 60 minutes.

The questions posed asked the participants to 1) describe their career journey as an African female CEO in South Africa; 2) describe the role that coaching played on their journey towards becoming a CEO; 3) describe the areas where they felt that coaching made the most significant contribution to their careers, and 4) determine which coaches impacted their career journeys and why.

Four interviews were conducted in person at the CEOs' offices, with the other three being virtual via MS Teams. Semi-structured interviews allow conversations to unfold, which can lead one away from the interview guide at times.

However, Smith and Nizza (2022) state that this allows the researcher to focus on what was said, following the unexpected avenues whilst keeping track of what needs to be asked. The flexibility of this approach allowed the participants to be comfortable and at ease, talking through important aspects, thereby deepening their disclosure and making the data-rich and more substantive. The interviews were conducted in English, either the participants' second or third language. However, sufficient time was allocated to allow the participants to express themselves adequately. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

Saldaña (2009, p. 1) expresses that the excellence of the research predominately lies in the quality of the coding. IPA studies share an analytical focus on patterns and themes and are deemed thematic (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). However, IPA is also idiographic and utilises double hermeneutics (Miller, Chan, & Farmer, 2018). Double hermeneutics is where the participant tries to make sense of their experience while the researcher tries to understand the participants' sense-making of their experiences (Noon, 2018; Smith & Nizza, 2022). Consequently, IPA is an interpretative, iterative, and multidirectional fluid process (Noon, 2018).

As transcripts are pivotal to research analysis, each transcript was individually analysed. As time passed between the interviews and the analysis process, reading and rereading the transcripts and relistening to the interviews was essential. This aided the researcher in reviewing the conversations and making interpretative notes in the transcripts related to the key phrases, tonality, pauses and language emphasis. The interpretative notes helped formulate experiential statements, which go beyond a descriptive account to allow the participant's experiences and the researcher's understanding of the experiences to become apparent (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Connections and clusters were then formed from the experiential statements and integrated into themes true to IPA's idiographic nature. Each participant's transcript was holistically reviewed in the

context of their experiences before the next participant's data was analysed, coded, and annotated. Using a list of emerging themes per participant, cross-case analysis was employed to identify synthesis within and between samples, looking at topics, issues, similarities, and differences in the participants' narratives.

Findings

Four key thematic elements were identified in this research, namely 1) The experience of the journey, 2) the Intersectionality of the journey, 3) The impact of the experience of the journey, and 4) Factors mitigating the impact of the journey. A journey is an act of travelling from one place to another, and hence, this analogy arose from the information garnered from the CEOs' experiences along their career pathways.

Theme 1: The experience of the journey

What became apparent is that this group of African female CEOs were part of a cohort of trailblazing women who achieved senior leadership positions for the first time. Six of the seven participants highlighted that they were the first women and black women in certain senior organisational roles.

All the participants indicated that their career ascensions were not smooth.

"I struggled" (Coleen)

"You learn to fight every battle that comes your way." (Faith)

"So, that made me survive." (Dawn)

The use of descriptors such as "suffered", "struggle", "battle", "challenges", and "survived" denoted experiences of hostility, hardship, and obstacles.

Four participants felt isolated and lonely, citing a lack of role models.

"I think the word is isolated." (Anele)

"I don't see people who look like me in executive positions." (Colleen)

"There are few of us across colour" (Betty)

Theme 2: Intersectionality on the journey

The intersectionality of the journey revealed two subthemes: its engendered and racialised nature. Participants highlighted compounded prejudice; while all experienced gender discrimination, four explicitly mentioned racial discrimination, reflecting its sensitivity and ongoing impact within South Africa's socio-cultural and organisational context.

The engendered nature of the journey

Several sub-themes emerged related to the engendered nature of the journey, namely, gender bias, gender stereotyping, patriarchy, and gender-specific roles. Gender bias is considered the primary reason for women's continued underrepresentation in leadership roles (Ibarra et al., 2019), and six of the seven participants highlighted it as a challenge.

"[...] he said to me [...] 'women are never going to fit into this business'." (Anele)

"[...] 'accept that this is the glass ceiling. This is all you'll ever be' [...]." (Colleen)

"[...] it's just a culture in here [...]" (Faith)

Leadership is typecast to men and it has masculine traits (Eagly & Carli, 2019), leading to preconceived notions of what leadership should look like. This stereotype was seen as a limiting factor, with the feeling that the participants' authentic selves were not perceived as assertive or fitting the leadership mould.

"[...] and who I am is not seen as not assertive, and how I come across, and how I show up is not seen as leadership material." (Colleen)

"[...] all these labels men give us, and we buy into them, and sometimes to try to belong, we try and behave like men." (Betty)

Three participants described the pervasive patriarchal culture in South Africa, which posed significant challenges within the workplace. Patriarchal attitudes were demonstrated by clients and colleagues, both black and white.

"It's very much hierarchy driven. It's very much army style." (Faith)

"[...] this patriarchal style of leadership [...]has led us to believe that there is only one way of doing leadership." (Colleen)

"[...] having a black male engineer because they expected you to be submissive because you are a woman." (Faith)

Two participants spoke about the expectations of women's roles hindering career advancement. One participant attributed her success to not having young children or being married, implying that these responsibilities would have impeded her progress. Another turned down a large promotion due to her husband's refusal to relocate, and she missed out on another role while on maternity leave.

The racialised nature of the journey

Four participants spontaneously mentioned racial discrimination, while two others implied it. South Africa's history of apartheid has left a legacy of prejudice, particularly against African individuals.

"Now, if you are African [...] the assumption is that you know less. You are not worthy." (Betty).

"[...] being a black African woman, which is the opposite of what acceptable leadership should look like, which is white and male. Not a black African female. It means that you are not only starting at zero, but you are also starting at a negative, and you have to do so much swimming against the tide, literally, to even get to zero." (Colleen)

"So, when you tackle one of your colleagues in terms of having a debate, a normal business debate, you still get people that think 'How can you speak to a white person like that?'" (Faith)

Theme 3: The impact of the experience of the journey

The theme concerning the impact of the journey's experience revealed that these leaders internalised negative experiences, resulting in self-limiting beliefs and restrictive behaviours for three participants.

"My inner critic dominates, and it also disables me." (Anele)

"[...] Just shows you how intense, how deep, and how ingrained that self-limiting belief goes." (Colleen)

"It's like we could not even articulate, this is what I am good at." (Gugu).

Imposter syndrome is associated with women's self-doubt about their work abilities (Devnew et al., 2017), which three participants acknowledged by admitting feeling like imposters in their leadership roles.

"[...] so, I went very prepared into meetings. But you feel like an imposter." (Anele)

"The reason you start questioning yourself [...] we suffer from the imposter syndrome." (Colleen)

Theme 4: Factors mitigating the impact of the journey

Three broad coaching roles emerged as significant through the discussion with the seven participants - coaching for career transitions, coaching for leader development, and coaching for self-awareness.

Firstly, four participants highlighted the importance of coaching for career transition. *"[...] a critical point for me was when I transitioned from traditional support roles into management." (Anele).*

"I took the position of MD, and my chairman said, 'I think you need an executive coach', and honestly, that made all the difference." [Colleen]

Secondly, five participants underscored the importance of coaching for leader development.

"[...] helped me understanding the culture of the organisation [...], if you do not understand the culture, you will not succeed." (Faith)

"[...] it's great to help you begin to succeed and be effective in your role." (Gugu)

"[...] sharing what you are struggling with in your mind and have someone play it back at you [...]." (Colleen)

Thirdly, five of the participants noted coaching for self-awareness. Coaching was experienced as an introspective process of self-reflection and self-learning to create self-awareness.

"I had a mirror held up to my life and I could analyse my behaviour." (Anele)

"[...] for the first time I now have a safe space to confront my biases, to confront what I held as truths, to confront my self-limiting beliefs [...]." (Colleen)

"So, the coach drives the process for you to be aware of something that you were not aware of." (Dawn)

"Coaching helps to find yourself." (Faith).

Discussion

This interpretative phenomenological study contributes to current knowledge of African women's leadership journeys and the impact of coaching. It notes that minimal literature expresses the experiences of South African Black women's career journeys to the top ranks.

The Experience and Impact of the Journey

This study aimed to understand the participants' experiences as they journeyed towards their CEO positions. The literature suggests that the paucity of women in leadership positions is related to unconscious biases, archaic beliefs of women's competence, societal and cultural expectations of women, men's behaviour, and perceptions in the workplace (Kuntz & Livingston, 2020; O'Neil et al., 2015; Longman & Lamm Bray, 2018) and the self-limiting mindset that women have of themselves (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019; van der Merwe, 2018). It is noted that minimal literature expresses the experiences of South African Black women's career journeys to the top ranks.

As explored through primary research, it was evident from this study that the cohort of participants were trailblazing women who were the first to occupy leadership positions in their organisations by being either the first woman, a woman of colour, or a combination of both. Their journeys were lonely without the support of black female role models from whom to emulate. The literature observes that role models form a strong capability set, providing women leaders with support and social capital that buffers them from the challenges they face in the workplace (Chizema, Kamuirwo, & Shinozawa, 2015). The participants described hardship as they ascended the leadership ranks using words such as suffering, isolation, struggle, battle, and frustration. This is aligned with Mattar et al. (2018, p. 81), in their study of Arab female leaders, similarly describing their journeys as "exhausting, draining, and difficult."

Despite social progress, evolving laws and practices, and the improved attitude towards women in leadership, females still face barriers to career advancement (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Mattar et al., 2018). The participants discussed the challenges related to intrinsic and extrinsic factors on their journeys.

The negative experience of intersectionality on the participants' journeys was raised. The literature posits that black women are seen as intellectually inferior, less competent, capable, and influential, undermining their credibility (Holder et al., 2015; Rhode, 2017; van der Merwe, 2018). Culturally, it is taboo for women to lead in most cultures in South Africa, as Ngomane (2017) states, they are perceived to be weak. It is known that intersectionality hampers the leadership development of African women (Dlamini, 2013). In the past, black women in South Africa were deemed second-class citizens and "still carry the triple burden of sexism, racism and the disadvantages of (lower) social class, post-apartheid" (Mayer, Surtee, & Mahadevan, 2018, p. 879).

From a gendered point of view, the participants raised issues around gender bias in the workplace, gender stereotyping, the patriarchal leadership style that still permeates the South African corporate world, and the gender-specific roles of which women bear the brunt. Seale et al. (2021) posit that the ongoing gender bias towards female South African leaders is disturbing, and the perceived lack of support and isolation is disconcerting.

The racialised nature of the participants' journey was raised, and although not always explicit in their descriptors, there was an undercurrent of racism that followed the participants. While it was evident that the participants experienced racial bias from white men, they were surprised by the negative way some black males treated them in the workplace. In the current post-democratic environment, there was a sense of frustration and anger that these intersectionality issues persist. The Seale et al. (2021) study of 74 female leader participants from South African universities stated

that explicit racism and sexism pose insurmountable barriers to the career advancement of black female leaders.

The intrinsic experiences of self-limiting beliefs and imposter syndrome were highlighted in the research. The literature discusses self-limiting behaviours, a lack of confidence and self-belief as barriers women face (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Oldridge, 2019). Confidence is built from past experience, feedback, and role modelling (Peterson & Bartels, 2017), and due to a lack of role modelling and less positive feedback noted in the research, some participants felt this was a detractor on their leadership journeys and a challenge to overcome, which aligns with existing literature.

Coaching as a Mitigating Factor

Coaching is a development tool which occurs within a relational context (Murphy et al., 2017; Ngunjiri & Gardiner, 2017). What is evident from the research is that coaching creates learning experiences for personal and professional development.

The participants identified three coaching roles as they traversed their career pathways – coaching for role transitions, coaching for leader development, and coaching for self-awareness.

Four of the participants highlighted the role of coaching in career transitions. Transitions into senior leadership positions come with uncertainty due to the complexity and challenges of the role (Terblanche et al., 2018) and revolve around change (Yates, 2016). The participants highlighted the importance of coaching when moving into managerial roles as the competencies required differed from managing oneself.

The changes required when moving into senior leadership are multiple and include: (i) cognitive changes – developing new thinking patterns, new cognitive models, strategic thinking, and dealing with ambiguity; (ii) behavioural changes – effective communication, active listening, and driving for results; (iii) interpersonal changes – building networks, influencing others, building trust, developing people, and driving consensus; (iv) psychological changes – managing anxiety and stress, fostering self-awareness, and enhancing emotional intelligence; and (v) systemic level changes – understanding the new role within the organisational and global context and organisational culture (Terblanche, Albertyn, & Van Coller-Peter, 2018a). As the participants moved into managerial roles, coaching was required on some of these elements.

Coaching for role transitions guides a leader through uncertainty and change, helps them understand where they are in the change process, and provides hope for the future (Yates, 2016). The coach also provides support and motivation for the leader to navigate the challenges of the dramatic shift that role transitions bring (Knowles, 2018). Coaching for career transition was highlighted as important to the participants.

Five of the participants raised the role of coaching for leader development. Leader development covers a broad ambit, as the role of the leader is to influence others to achieve the organisational goals (Mukherjee, 2014). Leader development includes developing individual skills, capabilities, competencies, and knowledge (Athanasopoulou, Moss-Cowan, Smets, & Morris, 2018). It also aids them to cope with situations and challenges such as those faced during the course of their careers.

The word “develop” suggests growth or change into something more advanced. In this instance, developmental coaching aims to support the changes required for the participants' growth and maturity as leaders. Areas of development highlighted by the participants included managing teams, improved leadership performance, overcoming business challenges, navigating the organisational environment, and increasing role effectiveness. The literature proposes that leadership coaching aims to help the individual gain self-awareness and personal insights to

change their behaviour and grow personally and professionally, improve performance, enhance business outcomes, advance careers, progress leadership capability and effectiveness, and effect change management (Knowles, 2018). Expanding on this are Taylor, Passarelli, and Van Oosten (2019), who add that coaching facilitates performance improvement, maximises potential, develops, maintains a positive change, and assists leaders with goal attainment. These areas are broad areas of development mentioned by the participants.

Coaching for self-awareness was cited by five of the participants. Self-awareness is critical to effective leadership and it provides leaders with the opportunity to craft authentic personal responses that show that they understand others, their needs, and the situational context (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016). Coaching provided the participants with an opportunity to gain a broad self-view, which Bower (2015) states offers insights and opportunities for new behaviours and actions. The literature suggests that self-awareness is a construct that defines a person's self-identity, promotes self-development, and enables leaders to build trust-based relationships (Caldwell & Hayes, 2016). As postulated by Osborne (2021), successful coaching enhances self-appreciation, self-management, and self-awareness, which the participants validated.

Conclusion

The experiences of seven South African Black women CEOs highlighted their navigation of systemic barriers, including gender bias, racial discrimination, and self-limiting beliefs, within a patriarchal and racialised corporate landscape. Despite challenges like isolation and imposter syndrome, coaching proved transformative for career transitions, leadership development, and self-awareness. This study suggests that leadership coaching is a critical investment in supporting African women leaders. Their narratives underscore the pressing need for systemic change while demonstrating resilience and the importance of support in reshaping leadership paradigms for future generations

Limitations of the research

This qualitative study, employing IPA methodology, examined the impact of leadership coaching on African female CEOs in South Africa, representing a novel contribution to the field. Despite its significance, the study has limitations. A small sample size of seven participants limits the generalisability of findings (Noon, 2018). Its provincial focus may neglect regional cultural differences. Conducted by a white female researcher, the study deeply explores gender bias but offers a limited analysis of racial bias, possibly due to mutual discomfort. Interviews in English, often a secondary language for participants, may have constrained expression, while reliance on retrospective accounts introduces potential hindsight bias (Mattar et al., 2018).

Future research

This study highlights gaps in research on leadership coaching for African female leaders, proposing directions for future inquiry. Limited attention had been given to the coach's role and its adaptation across career stages. Further research could explore developmental relationships such as mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching, focusing on their benefits for African women. The study underscored the importance of coaching in role transitions, advocating for a more detailed investigation into its impact and experiences across diverse career stages. Additionally, expanding research to include a broader participant base and employing methods beyond qualitative retrospectives of female CEOs is recommended to enrich understanding.

Endnotes

[1] ↩

The terms 'African female', 'African women', 'black female', or 'black women' refer to females of African, Coloured, and Indian descent as defined by the *South African Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act no 53 of 2003* and as such are used interchangeably.

References

- Alase, A. (2017). The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): A Guide to a Good Qualitative Research Approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9-19. DOI: [10.7575/aiac.ijels.v5n2p.9](https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v5n2p.9).
- Athanasopoulou, A., Moss-Cowan, A., Smets, M., & Morris, T. (2018). Claiming the corner office: Female CEO careers and implications for leadership. *Human Resource Management*, 57, 617-639. DOI: [10.1002/hrm.21887](https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21887).
- Bachkirova, T., Cox, E., & Clutterbuck, D. (2018). Introduction. In T. Bachkirova, E. Cox, & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (3rd ed., pp. xxiv-xivii). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE.
- Barnes, J. (2017). Climbing the Stairs to Leadership: Reflections on Moving Beyond the Stained-Glass Ceiling. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 10(4), 47-53. DOI: [10.1002/jls.21503](https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21503).
- Bierema, L. L. (2017). No woman left behind: critical leadership development to build gender consciousness and transform organizations. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 145-162). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bimrose, J., McMahon, M., & Watson, M. (2017). Women and career development. In G. B. Stead, & M. B. Watson (Eds.), *Career Psychology in the South African Context* (3rd ed., pp. 173-183). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Bligh, M., & Ito, A. (2017). Organisational processes and systems that affect women in leadership. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 287-303). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Bonneywell, S. (2017). How a coaching intervention supports the development of female leaders in global organisations. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* (S11), 57-69. Available at: <https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/2d76c41c-6628-4eed-8a8a-4d0a5c4f5540/1/>.
- Bonneywell, S., & Gannon, J. (2021). Maximising female leader development through simultaneous individual and group coaching. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 1-17. DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2021.1938621](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2021.1938621).
- Bower, K. M. (2015). Coaching with the Myers Briggs Type Indicator: A Valuable Tool for Client Self-Awareness. *Journal of Practical Consulting*, 5(2), 11-19. Available at: <https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jpc/vol5iss2/Bower.pdf>.
- Bozer, G., & Jones, R. J. (2018). Understanding the factors that determine workplace coaching effectiveness: a systematic literature review. *European Journal of Work and Organisational Psychology*, 27(3), 342-361. DOI: [10.1080/1359432X.2018.1446946](https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1446946).
- Burke, R. J. (2017). Supporting women's career development. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 409-422). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Businesswomen's Association of South Africa. (2017). *BWASA South African Women in Leadership Census*. Census, Businesswomen's Association of South Africa, Parktown. Available at: <https://bwasa.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/2017-BWASA-CENSUS-report.pdf>.
- Caldwell, C., & Hayes, L. A. (2016). Self-efficacy and self awareness: moral insights to increased leader effectiveness. *Journal of Management*, 35(9), 1163-1173. DOI: [10.1108/JMD-01-2016-0011](https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-01-2016-0011).
- Callary, B., Rathwell, S., & Young, B. W. (2015). Insights on the Process of Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis in a Sports Coaching Research Project. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 63-75. Retrieved October 20, 2021. Available at: <https://insuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/6/>.
- Chisholm-Burns, M. A., Spivey, C. A., Hagemann, T., & Josephson, M. A. (2017). Women in leadership and the bewildering glass ceiling. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacists*, 4, 312-324. DOI: [10.2146/ajhp160930](https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp160930).
- Chizema, A., Kamuirwo, D. S., & Shinozawa, Y. (2015). Women on corporate boards around the world: Triggers and barriers. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 26, 1051-1065. DOI: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.07.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.07.005).
- Clerkin, C., & Wilson, M. S. (2017). Gender differences in developmental experiences. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 378-394). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Davis, D. R., & Maldonado, C. (2015). Shattering the Glass Ceiling: The Leadership Development of African American Women in Higher Education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 35, 48-64. Available at: <https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/index.php/awl/article/view/125>.

- Deloitte Global. (2022). *Progress at a snail's pace. Women in the boardrooms, a global perspective*. Deloitte, Deloitte Global Boardroom Program. Available at: <https://30percentclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/gx-women-in-the-boardroom-seventh-edition.pdf>.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2021). *Post-School Education and Training Monitor: Macro Indicator Trends*. Department of Higher Education and Training. Available at: www.dhet.gov.za/Research%20Coordination%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation/Statistics%20on%20Post-School%20Education%20and%20Training%20in%20South%20Africa%2c%202021%20%281%29.pdf.
- Devnew, L. E., Berghout Austin, A. M., Janzen Le Ber, M., & Shapiro, M. (2017). Women's leadership aspirations. In *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership*. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Dlamini, N. J. (2013). *The Impact of the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class on Women CEOs' Lived Experiences and Career Progression*. Thesis for Doctor of Business Leadership, University of South Africa, Graduate School of Business Leadership, Pretoria.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2019). Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership. In *HBR's 10 Must Reads: On Women and Leadership* (pp. 1-20). Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Employment Equity Act of 55 of 1998*. (1998, October 19). Retrieved from Department of Employment and Labour. Available at: <http://www.labour.gov.za/DocumentCenter/Acts/Employment%20Equity/Act%20-%20Employment%20Equity%201998.pdf>.
- Gibson, S. K. (2008). The Developmental Relationships of Women Leaders in Career Transition: Implication for Leader Development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 651-670. DOI: 10.1177/1523422308323935.
- Gray, D., De Haan, D., & Bonneywell, S. (2019). Coaching the 'ideal worker': female leaders and the gendered self in global corporations. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 43(7/8), 661-681. DOI: 10.1108/EJTD-01-2019-0011.
- Grover, V. K. (2015). Second generation gender bias: Invisible barriers holding women back in organisations. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 1(4), 1-4. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282107666_Second_generation_gender_bias_Invisible_barriers_holding_women_back_in_organizations.
- Guillen, L. (2018). Is the Confidence Gap Between Men and Women a Myth? *Harvard Business Review*, 1-5. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2018/03/is-the-confidence-gap-between-men-and-women-a-myth>.
- Holder, A. M., Jackson, M. A., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2015). Racial Microaggression Experiences and Coping Strategies of Black Women in Corporate Leadership. *Qualitative Psychology*, 2, 164-180. DOI: 10.1037/qup0000024.
- Hoyt, C. L., & Simon, S. (2017). Social psychological approaches to women and leadership theory. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 85-99). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar.
- Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2019). Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers. In *HBR's 10 Must Reads: On Women and Leadership* (pp. 1-8). Boston: Harvard Business Review Press. DOI: <https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers>.
- Institute of Directors in South Africa. (2016). *The King IV Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa*. Johannesburg. Available at: <https://www.adams.africa/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/King-IV-Report.pdf>.
- Jaga, A., Arabandi, B., & Bagraim, J. (2017). Doing the 'gender dance': Black women professionals negotiating gender, race, work and family in post-apartheid South Africa. *Community Work and Family*, 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/13668803.2017.1311840.
- Kay, K., & Shipman, C. (2014, May). The Confidence Gap. *The Atlantic* Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/the-confidence-gap/359815/>.
- Knowles, S. (2018). *Positive Psychology Coaching. Introducing the AIPC approach to finding solutions and achieving goals*. Australia: Xlibris.
- Kubu, C. S. (2018). Who does she think she is? Women, leadership and the 'B'(ias) word. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, 32(2), 235-251. DOI: 10.1080/135854046.2017.1418022.
- Kuntz, J. C., & Livingston, H. (2020). Surveying women leaders' career trajectories: Implications for leadership development in New Zealand organisations. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 49(2), 34-45. Available at: https://www.psychology.org.nz/application/files/8816/0520/7695/Kuntz_24-33.pdf.
- Larkin, M., Shaw, R., & Flowers, P. (2019). Multiperspectival designs and processes in interpretative phenomenological analysis research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 16(2), 182-198. DOI: 10.1080/14780887.2018.1540655.
- Leimon, A., Moscovici, F., & Goodier, H. (2011). *Coaching Women to Lead*. East Sussex: Routledge.
- Longman, K. A., & Lamm Bray, D. (2017). The role of purpose and calling in women's leadership experience. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 207-222). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Ludeman, K. (2013). Coaching with Women. In J. Passmore (Ed.), *Diversity in Coaching: Working with Gender, Culture, Race and Age* (2nd ed., pp. 199-215). London: Kogan Page.

- Matotoka, M. D., & Odeku, K. O. (2021). Untangling discrimination in the private sector workplace in South Africa: paving the way for Black African Women progression to managerial positions. *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, 47-71. DOI: 10.1177/1358229121990569.
- Mattar, M., van Nieuwerburgh, C., Barr, M., & Jacob, Y. (2018). A role for coaching to support leadership development? The experiences of female Arab leaders: An interpretive phenomenological analysis. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 77-85. Retrieved September 17, 2021. Available at: <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/item/88770>.
- Mayer, C.-H., Surtee, S., & Mahadevan, J. (2018). South African women leaders, transformation and diversity conflict intersections. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 31(4), 877-894. DOI: 10.1108/JOCM-10-2016-0196.
- McKinsey Global Institute. (2019). *The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in Africa*. McKinsey Global Institute. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-africa>.
- Miller, R. M., Chan, C. D., & Farmer, L. B. (2018). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Qualitative Approach. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 57, 240-254. DOI: 10.1002/ceas.12114.
- Mukherjee, S. (2014). *Corporate Coaching. The Essential Guide*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Murphy, W. M., Roberts Gibson, K., & Kram, K. E. (2017). Advancing women through developmental relationships. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook on Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 361-377). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Myeza, A., & April, K. (2021). Atypical Black Leader Emergence: South African Self-Perceptions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1-21. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.626473.
- Ngomane, T. S. (2017). Women and Leadership Within the Public Sector: Is the Glass-Ceiling Effect Real or Imagined? A Case Study of Mpumalanga Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. *The 2nd Annula International Conference on Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, (pp. 389-398). Gabarone. Available at: <http://ulspace.ul.ac.za/handle/10386/1864>.
- Ngunjiri, F. W., & Gardiner, R. A. (2017). Future strategies for developing women as leaders. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 423- 437). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: An Appropriate Methodology for Educational Research? *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(1), 75-83. DOI: 10.14297/jpaap.v6i1.304.
- Oldridge, K. (2019). A grounded theory study exploring the contributions of coaching to rebalancing organisational power for female leaders. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 15(1), 11-23. DOI: 10.53841/bpstcp.2019.15.1.11.
- O'Neil, D. A., Hopkins, M. M., & Bilimoria, D. (2015). A Framework for Developing Women Leaders. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 51(2), 253-276. DOI: 10.1177/0021886315575550.
- Opoku, A., & Williams, N. (2019). Second-generation gender bias. An exploratory study of women's leadership gap in a UK construction organisation. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*, 35(1), 2-23. DOI: 10.1108/IJOES-05-2018-0079.
- Osborne, C. (2021). *Essential Managers. Leadership*. Southernay East, Exeter: Penguin Random House.
- Peterson, S. J., & Bartels, A. L. (2017). Using neuroscience methods to explore gender differences in leadership. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 238-253). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Plaatjies Van Huffel, M.-A. (2011). Patriarchy as empire: a theological reflection. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* (37), 259-270. Retrieved October 19, 2021. Available at: <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/she/v37n3/03.pdf>.
- Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (2015). The glass ceiling: what have we learned 20 years on? *Journal of Organisational Effectiveness People and Performance*, 2(4), 306-326. DOI: 10.1108/JOEPP-09-2015-0032.
- PWC. (2021). *Practices and remuneration trends report. Executive Directors*. 13th edition - South Africa. Retrieved September 6, 2021. Available at: www.pwc.co.za/executive-directors-report.
- Rao, A. (2016). *Editorial: Challenging Patriarchy to Build Workplace Gender Equality*. Retrieved October 18, 2021, from Gender at Work. Available at: https://genderatwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Challenging-Patriarchy-Workplace-Gender-Equality_IUS-Labour_Rao_A_BOOK.pdf.
- Rhode, D. L. (2017). Gender stereotypes and unconscious bias. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Gender and Leadership* (pp. 316-327). Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Sandburg, S. (2014). *Lean In For Graduates*. New York: WH Allen.
- Saunders, M. N., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th ed.). Harlow: Pearson.
- Seale, O., Fish, P., & Schreiber, B. (2021). Enabling and empowering women in leadership in South Africa - Assessing needs and designing a response. *Management in Education*, 35(3), 136-145. DOI: 10.1177/0892020620981951.

- Skinner, S. (2014). Understanding the importance of gender and leader identity formation in executive coaching for senior women. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice*, 7(2), 102-113. DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2014.915864](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2014.915864).
- Smith, J. A., & Nizza, I. E. (2022). *Essentials of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*. Washington: American Psychological Association. DOI: [10.1037/0000259-000](https://doi.org/10.1037/0000259-000).
- SNG Grant Thornton. (2023). *Women in Business 2023 - Push for Parity*.
- Spaten, O. M., & Green, S. (2019). Delivering value in coaching through exploring meaning, purpose, values, and strengths. In J. Passmore, B. O. Underhill, & M. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Mastering Executive Coaching* (pp. 90-109). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Statistics South Africa. (2021). *Statistical Release P0302_ Mid-year population estimates 2021*. Statistical Release P0302, Department of Statistics South Africa, Pretoria. Retrieved September 17, 2021. Available at: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022021.pdf>.
- Statistics South Africa. (2021a, August 24). *South Africa Labour Market is more favourable to men than women*. Retrieved September 18, 2021, from Stats SA. Department: Statistics South Africa. Available at: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=14606>.
- Stokes, J., & Jolly, R. (2018). Executive and Leadership Coaching. In E. Cox, T. Bachkirova, & D. Clutterbuck (Eds.), *The Complete Handbook of Coaching* (pp. 247-261). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Taylor, S. N., Passarelli, A. M., & Van Oosten, E. B. (2019). Leadership coach effectiveness as fostering self-determined, sustained change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 30(6). DOI: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101313](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101313).
- Terblanche, N. H., Albertyn, R. M., & Van Coller-Peter, S. (2018). Developing leaders by supporting their transition into senior positions. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 49(1), 1-9. DOI: [10.4102/sajbm.v49i.12](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v49i.12).
- Terblanche, N., Albertyn, R., & Van Coller-Peter, S. (2018a). Using transformative transition coaching to support leaders during career transitions. *African Journal of Business Ethics*, 12(1), 60-77. DOI: [10.15249/12-1-166](https://doi.org/10.15249/12-1-166).
- Tuffour, I. (2017). A Critical Overview of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: A Contemporary Qualitative Research Approach. *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, 2(4), 1-5. DOI: [10.4172/2472-1654.100093](https://doi.org/10.4172/2472-1654.100093).
- van der Merwe, S. (2018). *How Women Gain and Retain Management Positions: A Study of South African Female MBA Graduates*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Johannesburg. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10210/294529>.
- Yates, J. (2016). Coaching for Career and Professional Development. In C. van Nieuwerburgh (Ed.), *Coaching in Professional Contexts* (pp. 41-53). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications
- Zietsman, D., & April, K. (2021). Experiences That Cause Diverse Millennial Women to Resign from Organizations- Part I. *Effective Executive*, 24(3), 40-64.

About the authors

Angela Russell is the CEO of an industry association in South Africa with 20 years of commercial experience in senior management and executive roles. She is keenly interested in women in leadership.

Lia Hewitt is an Associate Professor in Industrial Psychology and People Management. She leverages her interdisciplinary expertise to coach and guide leaders in personal and professional growth within organisations.