

Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university

LG Molale-Tom



orcid.org/0000-0002-0057-7171

Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree [Master of Business Administration](#) at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof Y du Plessis

DECLARATION

I, Lesego Gertrude Molale-Tom, declare that this mini dissertation is my own work in design and execution. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Business Administration in the Faculty of Economics and Management Science at the North-West University; it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university. All material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.



Lesego Molale-Tom

“Unabantu baKho, Thixo,
Ngamaxesha onke;
Ubagcina ubancede,
Eendaweni zonke.

Bakuwela imilambo,
Uba nabo Wena;
Bakuchiswa ngemililo
Uba nabo Wena.

Apho batshutshiwa khona,
Bomelezwa nguWe;
Nasemaramncweni Thixo
Bagciniwe nguWe.

Bakhangela kuWe, Nkosi,
Abo bantu baKho;
Babulela, bakuthembe,
Aabo bantu baKho.”

Amen.

Hymn 244 Xhosa.

DEDICATION

To my mother, late grandmothers, sister, and all the women who came before me

"Long before my heart started beating in this lifetime, the earth bore witness to your remarkable presence. Unfortunately, too many of your stories have been overlooked in the pages of history. While some of your faces and names remain largely unfamiliar to me, your legacy is a weight I carry. Thanks to you, a path has been laid out for women of my time as we find ourselves walking on it. Our lives might have unfolded in different times, on roads marked by unfairness and inequality, with divisions that seemed insurmountable. However, your past has become an investment in my future. Your strength has become the driving force behind my tenacity, and your triumphs have created opportunities for me. The existence of your generation has paved the way for mine. This body of work is dedicated to you - the courageous women who dared to defy what they were told they couldn't do. Women who rose every time they were knocked down. Over the past two years, your resilience has lifted me up when my own strength wavered. I honour your greatness and express my gratitude for granting me a beautiful existence and a deeper awareness to move forward with intention and integrity. In moments when surrendering seemed inevitable, I was reminded of your courage and unwavering spirits. – Camagu maMpinga, Camagu Gcina, Pula Tholo, Pula Morolong"

To my dad and husband – mighty and wonderfully made girl dads

"I see you. I salute you. Thank you for believing in the power of girl children. I feel your triumphs in a multitude of ways that I cannot always comprehend nor articulate; and I do not fully know the battles you have braved, but I recognize and respect that you have indeed braved many stereotyped cultural views and conversations. – women and girl children have a place in society because of men of your calibre, ke lebogile Morolong wa ga sehuba - Enkosi Mtakwende, Ngwe'Mabala bala"

My daughters Mikhulu and Zibele

"..as well as all the women who will come after me, women who will tread the trail that is yet unexplored - please respect your history but do not be bound by it. Please take the torch and use it to light your own chosen path. Please know the beautiful brave hearts that you truly are, make your mark with fierce femininity and love and do great things – the world is your oyster. Makwande Mantakwende"

My Nephew Reagoikanya

"his mane's own spirit twin – whenever I grow tired I'm always reminded of why my journey matters, I'm always reminded of your generation that will forge forward and make an immense difference and contributions in this world – Pula Morolong"

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Psalm 118:1a

ABSTRACT

Women in leadership positions within higher education often face unique challenges related to work-life balance, career advancement, and gender biases. The primary aim of this study was to explore mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university. Thus, it sought to gain insights into the perceptions and experiences of women in leadership positions in a South African university regarding mentorship. The research employed an interpretive research paradigm, combining both deductive and inductive approaches. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eleven women in senior management roles at the selected South African university as the study population. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and derive key themes, subthemes, and where applicable a supertheme. The findings of the study illustrated that mentorship in higher education is perceived as a deliberate process aimed at guiding individuals in their career development. Participants viewed mentorship as a transformative journey that fosters both personal and professional growth. Additionally, mentorship was characterized as stewardship, with mentors prioritizing the long-term wellbeing of their mentees. Participants also shared their lived experiences with regards to mentorship in their higher education career and shared insights into qualities of a good mentor. For those lacking mentorship experiences, participants shared the repercussions of this absence on their career trajectories. This research study also identified the need to address perceptions related to racial and gender biases in mentorship programmes and provided recommendations for best practices that can be implemented to create a more inclusive and supportive mentorship environment in higher education. This study contributes to the understanding of mentorship practices in higher education and highlights the importance of supporting women in leadership roles through effective mentorship programmes at South African universities.

Key terms: women in leadership, higher education, mentorship, career advancement

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study and introduces the research that was undertaken by outlining the background and context of the research area. It begins by highlighting the increasing global interest in women's leadership and empowerment in higher education and the persisting gender disparities in leadership roles. Furthermore, it outlines the problem statement, emphasizing the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles in South African universities, particularly in historically advantaged institutions. The importance of mentorship and its limited research in this context are highlighted. The research questions and objectives are presented, along with the scope and limitations of the study. Thus, this chapter sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, providing a foundation for understanding the significance, objectives, and context of the current study.

1.2. Introduction to the study

Research focusing on women in leadership and empowerment in the higher education sector has gained increased interest (Maheshwari 2023:1068; Rosa & Clavero, 2022:1). This is due to various global studies having reported the under-representation of women in leadership roles (Burkinshaw *et al.*, 2018:82; Xiang *et al.*, 2017:96). According to Maheshwari *et al.* (2021:640) and Ramos *et al.* (2022:45), various countries and organizations have not made significant progress regarding gender equality at the top leadership and management levels. The latter is no exception for the South African higher education sector (Moodley, 2021:184). However, it has been noted that South Africa has a significantly higher number of female graduates as opposed to male graduates (Moodley, 2021:185). Also, global studies have illustrated that regardless of the higher percentages of women progressing in academia and aspiring for promotions, very few end up occupying senior leadership positions (Frkal & Criscione-Naylor, 2020:2; Moodly, 2022:3; Tran & Nguyen, 2020:16).

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as an essential component of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly, 2015:1). Furthermore, Goal 5 advocates for the achievement of gender equality and the eradication of discriminatory gender practices (United Nations General Assembly, 2015:14). According to McTavish and Miller (2009:360), gender equality alludes to the equal provision of rights, opportunities, and responsibilities across all genders

within an organization. Furthermore, the Rawls' social justice framework (Rawls, 1999:109) highlights the importance of distributive justice while Moodly (2021:198) provides a compelling argument for the consideration of gender parity within the South African higher education sector. Yet, Burkinshaw *et al.* (2018:81) note that processes and practices aimed at accelerating gender equality and equity are interlocked by gendered regimes and hierarchies. Also, although there is a steady increase in women occupying middle management leadership positions, literature reports that women either i) come across institutional hurdles they have to overcome or ii) encounter several cultural barriers that prevent them from reaching higher levels of organizational leadership (Haslam & Ryan, 2008:530; Mayya *et al.*, 2021:6). Consequently, the latter results in a paucity of women-centred support such as mentorship networks, which inevitably has an influence on the aspirations and exposure of upcoming female leaders in the pipeline (Moodley, 2021:187; Mayya *et al.*, 2021:2). This is despite studies highlighting the importance of mentorship in providing women in the pipeline advice on various aspects such as - but not limited to - career development and pathing, maintaining a successful work-life balance as well as strategies for career advancement amidst existing gendered career progression barriers (Hill & Wheat, 2017:2090).

The aim of this study was to explore the practice and importance of mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university. Furthermore, it focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of women occupying senior leadership positions within the selected university in South Africa. This study aimed to contribute to the discourse and understanding of the practice and importance of mentorship in promoting diversity through gender leadership and inclusion in higher education, and will present implications for practice, and future research in this area.

1.3. Rationale and significance of the study

The subject of higher education leadership has received much attention globally (Tran & Nguyen, 2020:1). This results from numerous studies reporting the scarcity of women in senior leadership positions within the higher education sector (Barnes *et al.*, 2020: 6685; Seale *et al.*, 2021:136). Also, studies have reported that women in middle management tend to opt out of their leadership roles and revert to their academic and administrative positions resulting in a phenomenon termed a "*leaky pipeline*" (Omotoso, 2020:80; Ramohai, 2019:224). This, however, is usually not the case for men in leadership (Moodley, 2017:185). It is with reference to scenarios such as the latter that gender parity is considered a critical aspect of the sustainable development agenda (Rosa, 2017:301). Furthermore, the UN 2030 sustainable development goals communicate the various needs and opportunities for a sustainable and interconnected world (Costanza *et al.*, 2016:59). Thus, this study aimed to explore the practice

and perceived importance of mentorship in advancing the leadership career pathing of women in a South African university. It also aimed at providing insights into the role that mentorship plays in the career progression of women in leadership positions. Additionally, the study sought to contribute to the understanding of the mentorship experiences of women in leadership positions within a South African context, where discrepancies in gender diversity exist particularly in senior/executive level of the higher education landscape. Lastly, the study will provide insight into the importance of mentorship by addressing challenges women leaders are exposed to in their leadership journey, and how mentorship helped address these challenges as well as highlight opportunities brought to the fore through mentorship programmes. Therefore, this study will have practical implications for the higher education sector and the university of interest. It will provide recommendations on factors to consider when designing and implementing mentorship programmes that are effective in advancing the career pathing of women in leadership positions. The study will also highlight the role that organizations can play in creating a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes the advancement of women in leadership positions.

1.4. Problem statement

South Africa's history has had a significant impact on the country's current socially uneven and asymmetrical education system (Badat, 2004:3; Menon & Motala, 2022:49). Resultantly, post 1994, the nation's higher education transformation agenda has been at the driving seat of ensuring equity, equality, and restitution are achieved to eliminate all inherited inequalities (Badat, 2004:3; Badat, 2020:26). Nonetheless, while much progress has been made in various facets of the country's higher education institutions (HEIs), relatively slow progress has been made for the progression of women into executive management positions (Hlatswayo *et al.*, 2022:9). This is illustrated by the current depiction of women being well represented in the middle management layer and a decrease in the representation at the executive management level (Moodley, 2021:185; Moodley, 2022:1). Thus, although some may find the latter representation comforting, it highlights slow progress and skewed patterns of leadership representation that still exist in the South African higher education landscape. The latter argument is in alignment with the concerns raised by the Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, who noted that “under-representation is more pronounced at senior levels and is more pronounced at specific typically advantaged universities and especially previously Afrikaans universities” (Ngatane, 2020). Also, Minister Blade Nzimande placed much emphasis on the exclusion of black women in senior management and called for an acceleration of efforts to address the existing parities (Ngatane, 2020). Similarly, Dr Oliver Seale, the director of the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme

at Universities South Africa (USAf), was quoted saying “Institutions are still a man’s world when it comes to opportunities — with less than 30 percent of women in executive management roles in universities” (USAf, 2022). Seale attributes the latter statistics to insufficient succession planning, mentorship, and coaching programmes provided for women in the pipeline whilst placing much emphasis on mentorship and coaching neglect at middle management level (USAf, 2022).

Alcalde and Subramaniam (2020), assert that women occupying middle management positions in HEIs often struggle to secure senior and executive leadership positions due to various factors that influence their prospects and progression in the leadership trajectory. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the representation of women at all management levels is critical as women have different experiences to men and are prone to perceive organizational matters differently, and inevitably respond differently than men (Madsen, 2011:123). Various international, continental, and national studies have identified barriers to entry as well as challenges once in leadership positions in the higher education sector; while some have suggested strategies aimed at empowering women in the pipeline on how to tackle career progression barriers (Hlatshwayo *et al.*, 2022:7; Moodley, 2017:155; Odhiambo, 2011:667; Tran & Nguyen, 2020:7-10). Amongst others, mentorship has been identified as a strategy to support the career development of women in leadership, yet there is limited research on its impact and effectiveness (Hill and Wheat, 2017:2090).

Mentorship has been recognized as a potential solution to addressing the existing gender gap in executive leadership roles in higher education (Ballenger, 2010:7). However, there is limited research on the actual practice and importance of mentorship in advancing the leadership career pathing of women in a South African university setting. Given that HEIs are at the helm of addressing a country's socio-economic development and enabling *inter alia* uncomfortable political and cultural discourses, strategies addressing the leadership gender gap and challenges enabling it should not be neglected. It is in this regard that understanding the experiences of women occupying senior management positions in terms of the role of mentorship as an enabler to support the career development of women in the leadership pipeline might offer insight into the much-needed social, cultural, and structural procedures and practices that can be implemented to ensure an enhanced and smoother advancement as well as the success of the female leadership pipeline in higher education.

The problem this study aims to address is the lack of knowledge regarding the practice and importance of mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership roles at a South African university.

1.5. Research questions

The primary research question of this study is: What is the practice and importance of mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership roles at a South African university? Furthermore, the secondary research questions are:

- I. What are the mentorship factors described in the literature on mentorship in higher education?
- II. What is mentorship, and how is it perceived in higher education?
- III. What are the mentorship experiences of women in leadership positions in a South African University?
- IV. What practices can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education?

1.6. Research objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the practice and importance of mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university. Furthermore, this study focussed on the lived experiences of female leaders occupying senior management positions.

1.6.1 Primary objective

The primary research objective of this study was to explore the practice and importance of mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership roles at a South African university.

1.6.2 Secondary objectives

The secondary research objectives of this study were:

- I. To identify the common mentorship factors described in the literature on mentorship in higher education.
- II. To explore the views of women in senior leadership positions about their understanding of mentorship, and how it is perceived in higher education.

- III. To explore and describe the mentorship experiences of women in leadership positions in a South African university.
- IV. To identify and describe potential practices that can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education.

1.7. Demarcation/delimitation of study/scope

1.7.1 Field of study

The current study falls within the People Management/Human resources research field and has a specific focus on leadership development and gender equity within a selected higher education institution (university) in South Africa.

1.7.2 Sector and industry

The sector within which this study occurred is higher education. Higher education in South Africa is a dynamic and critical component of the country's education system and broader society. It encompasses universities, colleges, and various tertiary institutions, all of which play pivotal roles in shaping the academic, professional, and research landscape of the nation.

South African higher education is marked by diversity, with institutions ranging from historically disadvantaged universities to prestigious research-intensive institutions. The sector is influenced by a complex history of apartheid, which has left a lasting impact on access, equity, and representation within higher education (Badat, 2004:3). As a result, there are ongoing efforts to address historical inequalities and to promote greater inclusivity, especially regarding gender and race (Toni and Moodly, 2019:178). Research in this sector is critical for informing policy and practice aimed at enhancing higher education's quality, relevance, and equity.

The study's focus on mentorship within South African higher education underscores its significance as a means to address gender disparities and empower women in leadership roles. By exploring mentorship within the South African higher education landscape, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen and transform the sector, ensuring that it reflects the diversity and aspirations of the nation as a whole.

1.7.3 Geographical demarcation

The geographical demarcation of this study is a public higher education institution (HEI) (university) located in South Africa. Furthermore, the HEI spans two provinces in South Africa and has three sites of delivery.

1.8. Research methodology outline

The research methodology employed in this study was underpinned by an interpretive approach, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of women's experiences in higher education leadership. Furthermore, a combination of deductive and inductive approaches was used, and the study followed a cross-sectional time horizon. The study specifically focused on women occupying senior management positions within a South African university, with participants selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was used to scrutinize both the literature review data and data collected from the semi-structured interview data, while ethical considerations were carefully considered and addressed.

1.9. Definition of key terms

Career pathing: Career pathing refers to the process through which individuals receive supervised or coached career development, planning and mapping of their career trajectory in their organization, including the identification of career goals and the development of strategies to achieve them (Hasting, 2011).

Higher education landscape: Higher education landscape is descriptive of the higher education ecosystem which comprises a variety of HEIs (universities, universities of technologies, TVET colleges and colleges) as well as their cultural environments (Staley & Trinkle, 2011:15).

Leadership pipeline: Leadership pipeline is a pipeline concept where organizations focus on their top talent's leadership development and management (Kaiser, 2011:71).

Mentorship: Mentorship refers to a relationship between an experienced and knowledgeable mentor and a mentee, where the mentor provides guidance, support, and advice to the mentee in their career development (Woods & West, 2010:402).

1.10. Delimitation of the research

This study primarily focused on women who occupied senior management positions within a single South African university. Thus, since the current study did not account for the full spectrum of women in senior management within South African higher education, the interpretation of all results was within this delimited context. Nonetheless, while the findings are specific to the context of the single South African university, the findings and recommendations can benefit other South African universities due to the similarities in women's leadership dynamics. The gender parity and challenges faced by women in

leadership roles transcend institutional boundaries, making the insights gained from this study relevant and valuable for addressing gender disparities and fostering inclusive mentorship practices in the broader South African higher education sector. Lastly, the recommended practices for a supportive and inclusive mentorship environment identified in this study hold the potential for wider adoption in national universities, contributing to the overarching goal of promoting diversity and gender-inclusive leadership in the South African higher education landscape.

1.11. Chapter outline

Chapter 1 – Overview of the study: This chapter will set the tone for the study by placing the study in context using an introduction that provides background information and context to the research problem. Furthermore, the motivation for the study will be contextualized and a problem statement highlighting the identified research gap will be included herein. Additionally, the research questions and objectives will be provided while a brief overview of the methodology will be presented.

Chapter 2 – Literature review: This chapter provides a critical and comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the research topic. An overview of the current state of knowledge in the field will be presented, research gaps will be identified, and highlight areas for future research. The latter was produced using information from various sources such as published academic articles, books, reports, and other relevant sources.

Chapter 3 – Research methodology: This chapter describes the methodology used to fulfil the objectives and research questions of the study. It also provides detailed explanations of why the chosen method was applied. Briefly, the chosen sample size and the study population will be described whilst the exclusion criteria pertaining the study population will be clearly described. The questionnaire and research instrument to be used and their production will be described. Lastly, a detailed explanation of how the results will be analysed will be provided while the ethical considerations to the study and research limitations will also be mentioned.

Chapter 4 – Data analysis and results interpretation: In the data analysis and results chapter, the data/results obtained will be logically presented using descriptive paragraphs, quotes from the data, graphs, figures, or tables.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of findings: This chapter will provide a discussion of the results and refer to notable similarities or differences presented in the literature review as well as similar studies found in literature.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions, managerial implications, and recommendations: The final chapter will present a summary of the study's main findings. Additionally, the various ways in which the results of the study can be used by managers, executives, or other stakeholders to make informed decisions will be presented. Thereafter, recommendations for future studies will be presented.

1.12. Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive overview of the research undertaken, introducing the background and context of women's leadership in South African higher education. It commenced by highlighting the global interest in women's leadership and the persistent gender disparities. The problem statement emphasized the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles in South African universities, particularly in historically advantaged institutions. The chapter then presented an argument for the importance of mentorship, highlighted the research gap and identified the limited research in this context. Furthermore, the study's research questions and objectives were presented. Also, the study's significance and rationale were elucidated, pointing to the critical role of mentorship in addressing gender disparities and empowering women in leadership roles. The problem statement was presented and it highlighted the historical context of South African higher education and the slow progress in achieving gender equity in executive positions. The chapter concluded by presenting the primary and secondary research questions and objectives, as well as the mini-dissertations chapter outline.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature encompassing a wide range of topics related to women in higher education leadership and the practice of mentorship within the academic sphere. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the first research question focusing on identifying common mentorship factors described in the literature regarding mentorship in higher education.

2.2 Leadership defined

Since the 1990s, leadership has progressively gained recognition as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon (King, 1990:43). Furthermore, it has become an even more critical element in the fast-paced and interconnected global landscape in recent years (Benmira & Agboola, 2021:3). Northouse (2019:43) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. Furthermore, an analysis of the literature demonstrates the historical evolution of leadership theories across different eras presented in Figure 2.1 below (Higgs, 2002:197; Hunt & Fedynich, 2019:22; Benmira & Agboola, 2021:4).

The current leadership theories classified under the modern era suggest that leaders should be identified through an assessment of their talents and capabilities (Offerman & Foley, 2020:807). Furthermore, studies focused on theories in this modern era have highlighted the benefits of diverse leadership teams and human capital (Offerman & Foley, 2020:807; Moreno-Gómez *et al.*, 2018:105). Nonetheless, Priola (2007:29) notes that women in leadership are often judged because of their gender and perceived to be soft, emotional, and weak. Bonzet and Frick (2019:6) suggest that the latter judgment denotes gender as a measure of dominance which allows for marginalization, hierarchy oppression, and gender ideologies as well as practices. According to Rao (2022:26), feminine qualities such as empathy and kindness are regarded as incompatible with leadership, whereas masculine characteristics such as aggression and dominance are deemed more suited. Consequently, the latter perceptions suggest that women leaders are often viewed from a standing of non-compliance for senior leadership roles thus highlighting their struggles to fit in (Ramohai, 2019:221).

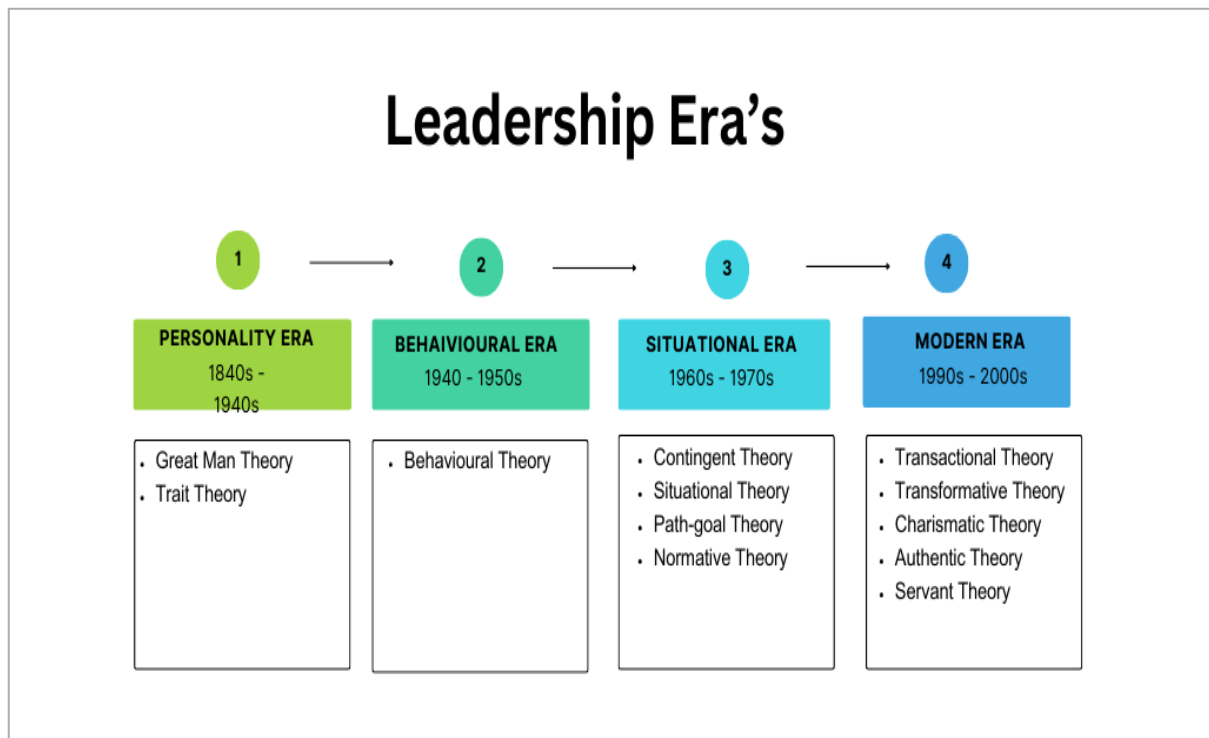


Figure 2.1: Graphical representation of the different leadership era's (Researcher's own compilation).

2.3 Leadership milieu of the higher education landscape

According to Moodley and Toni (2017:156), the historical background of South Africa's apartheid era resulted in the societal oppression of women. Nonetheless, with the dawn of democracy, several legislative frameworks were developed to address these gender inequalities (Republic of South Africa, 1997:4; Republic of South Africa, 2001:5; Republic of South Africa, 2013:5). However, despite efforts of the latter legislative requirements and policies as well as calls for transformational changes in the leadership of South African universities, the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions is still a reality (Kele & Pietersen, 2015:11; Mankayi & Cheteni, 2021:2; Seale *et al.*, 2021:136).

Traditionally HEIs have bureaucratic and hierarchical leadership comprised mostly of men (Moodley & Toni, 2017:157). Consequently, the culture of HEIs is favourable for the easy advancement of males into senior leadership roles (Moodley, 2021:185). This is depicted by the vast available support structures such as the 'old-boy network' which indirectly contribute to a male leader's ability to succeed during their leadership tenure, inevitably increasing their appetite to advance to more senior positions (Moosa & Coetzee, 2020:399; Moodly, 2021:188).

Clavero and Galligan (2021:117) provide a propelling argument regarding the importance of understanding the role of gender in structuring power relations in HEIs. According to Moodley

and Toni (2017:155), the successful leadership reconstruction of South Africa's universities requires decolonization and transformation of current patriarchal systems. Clavero and Galligan (2021:1116) suggest that HEIs could be instrumental drivers for long-overdue societal and structural change. Furthermore, Rosa and Clavero (2022:1) suggest that HEIs - by conducting pivotal research - are well-positioned to drive the promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion of women in notable leadership positions. According to Hannum *et al.* (2014:70), the inclusion of women in senior leadership positions allows for the integration of the dispossessed voice of women within the higher education sector. While Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016:309) note that the inclusion of women in senior management roles increases the "like me" perception of role modelling which inevitably increases the number of women aspiring to occupy these leadership positions.

2.4 Factors contributing to the paucity of women in senior leadership positions

According to Ramohai (2019:217), several factors influence the entry and retention of women in senior leadership positions. Furthermore, the literature indicates that most of these factors are attributed to gender-based challenges inclusive of cultural, political, and organizational cultural barriers (Akanji *et al.*, 2019:712; Moodley, 2021:188). Moreso, Ramohai (2019:218) ascribes that all these factors contribute to the unique experiences of women in leadership which result in them experiencing difficult tenures as opposed to their male counterparts. Also, Longman *et al.* (2018:8) note that the experiences of women in leadership result in a push or pull effect where they either want to opt out from their leadership roles or have an increased desire to continue and advance to more senior leadership roles.

According to Northouse (2019:578), the barriers faced by women in leadership can be categorised under three clusters: i) human capital, ii) prejudice, and iii) gender differences. Furthermore, various metaphors have been derived to explain the invisible barriers resulting in women persistently remaining in lower power positions (Clavero & Galligan, 2021:117). The first set of metaphors "sticky floors", "glass ceiling" and "glass wall" are noted numerous in literature and represent barriers that hinder women from advancing to executive positions (Xiang *et al.*, 2017:94; da Rocha *et al.*, 2021:1158). However, with developments in literature and an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by women in leadership, the suitability of a "glass ceiling" to explain these challenges has been argued (Eagly & Carli, 2018:148). These authors suggest a more applicable metaphor the "labyrinth" which explains the female path to leadership to be long and complex as a result of numerous obstacles such as, *inter alia*, stereotyped gender roles, resistance to being led by a woman, and work-family balance (Eagly & Carli, 2018:148-151).

2.5 Challenges post-breaking the glass ceiling

It can be assumed that leaders in senior positions are ideally positioned to challenge the current status quo and bring much-needed societal changes (Cortis *et al.*, 2021:205). However, a plethora of challenges have been identified in the literature for women who have broken the proverbial glass ceiling (Baumgartner & Schneider, 2010:571; Morgenroth *et al.*, 2020:797; Amakye *et al.*, 2022:873). Morgenroth *et al.* (2020:797) notably observed that women who break this barrier frequently find themselves on what is termed a “glass cliff”, a metaphor representing unstable leadership positions. Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010:433) substantiate this observation, emphasizing that women are frequently appointed to prominent leadership positions during times of crisis. This phenomenon has given rise to the “think crisis-think female” stereotype that highlights the role women play in the effective management of organizations under challenging crisis situations (Gartiza *et al.*, 2011:625).

Also, studies have reported that women in senior executive positions frequently experience feelings of isolation, stemming from a culture of exclusion rooted in patriarchal norms (Toni & Moodly, 2019:179; Kapoor *et al.*, 2021:573). Consequently, such circumstances have given rise to unfavourable outcomes, including the manifestation of the “Queen Bee” syndrome. This syndrome characterizes the behaviours and attitudes of women in prominent leadership roles who exhibit reluctance to empower emerging female colleagues, while also distancing themselves from fellow women peers (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011:53; Netshitangani, 2019:203). Derks *et al.* (2011:522) provide valuable insights into the origins of this phenomenon, attributing it to the context in which female executives operate, within patriarchal organizational cultures. This perspective is further illuminated by the concept of social identity threat (Derks *et al.*, 2011:521).

Lastly, recent research underscores the growing prominence of toxic leadership traits among women occupying leadership positions within the higher education sector (Herbst & Roux, 2023:1). Several studies have proposed using mentorship as a valuable tool to address the issue of “loneliness” experienced by female executives in top positions (Driscoll *et al.*, 2009:7; Barnes, 2017:48). This approach actions to establish a supportive framework while concurrently nurturing leadership development, using women as role models to create a lasting impact and mitigate the challenges posed by the leaky pipeline phenomenon (Surawicz, 2016:1436; Toni & Moodly, 2019:180).

2.6 Mentorship defined

Mentorship as a praxis refers to a relationship between two individuals wherein a more experienced or knowledgeable person, often referred to as a mentor, guides and supports the development of a less experienced individual, known as a protégé or mentee (Woods & West, 2010:402). Furthermore, Kram (1983:609) defines mentoring as a process that involves supporting, counselling, or guiding the mentee throughout their professional journey. Several studies have approached the definition of mentorship from the perspective of social constructivism (Murphy *et al.*, 2005:343; Lucey & White, 2017:12). This perspective places a strong emphasis on the collaborative development of knowledge and comprehension that emerges among individuals in a mentorship relationship (Murphy *et al.*, 2005:343; Lucey & White, 2017:12). This view aligns well with the body of research illustrating how leader-member exchanges and shape the nature of mentorship interactions and incorporate elements of both transformational and transactional outcomes (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994:1593; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999:691). Lastly, Healy and Welchert (1990:17) emphasize that mentorship is a dynamic and mutually beneficial partnership that facilitates the career advancement of both individuals.

2.7 Mentorship within the African context

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where the need to rectify historical inequalities remains paramount, the country's higher education transformation agenda is focused on achieving equity, equality, and redress (Badat, 2004:3). In response to this, mentorship strategies and programmes have taken on a crucial role in driving transformative policies and practices (Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1134). However, a vital consideration in the discourse of mentorship within the African context is its historical grounding in Western ideologies (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14215). Traditionally, mentorship in academic institutions across African countries has predominantly been influenced by Western values and practices (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14216). This influence can resultingly cast a shadow over the rich nature of African cultural values, and philosophies that have the potential to significantly enrich the mentorship process.

In the evolving landscape of leadership philosophies in Africa, there is a growing recognition of the necessity for innovative, indigenous, leadership approaches that are values-based (Manasoe, 2017:14). These approaches, firmly rooted in African cultural values and philosophies, not only have the potential to unite diverse participants around common goals but also act as a powerful force for uplifting societies across the African continent (Bekker, 2007:1). One African perspective that holds immense significance, especially in higher

education, is Ubuntu (Geber & Keane, 2013:9). Ubuntu, as a guiding principle, centres on the interconnectedness and interdependency of individuals within a community (Geber & Keane, 2013:9; Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14216). It underscores that no one exists in isolation and emphasizes the importance of building trust and relationships (Ncube, 2010:80). This philosophy fosters collaboration and reciprocity, creating an environment where empowerment naturally thrives (Ncube, 2010:80). Leaders who operate within the framework of Ubuntu recognize the value of strengthening and empowering others, enabling them to take initiative and believe in themselves (Ncube, 2010:80; Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1142).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that when mentorship is conducted within a Western framework, unintended imbalances can persist in the mentor-mentee relationship, particularly in the presence of racial and gender tensions (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14215; Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1134). These imbalances often arise due to mentorship programmes overlooking the cultural and social nuances of the mentees, resulting in the establishment of a hierarchical structure (Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1134). Within this structure, the mentor typically assumes a position of authority and expertise, consigning the mentee to a subordinate role (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14215). This hierarchical dynamic becomes particularly pronounced when racial and gender tensions are at play, further exacerbating existing issues related to race and gender by reinforcing power imbalances (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14215). Additionally, it may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and biases, as mentors frequently come from different racial or gender groups than the mentees (Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1134). Consequently, the latter can lead to a lack of mutual respect and understanding, ultimately hindering the growth and development of the mentee. To address these complex issues, mentorship programmes grounded in African values become indispensable (Geber & Keane, 2017:502; Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14215). Such programmes encompass critical areas like patriotism, citizenship, local skill acquisition, and ethical work practices (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2019:14217). By so doing, these programmes aim to adapt to the specific needs of their participants, taking into consideration the intricacies of racial and gender dynamics (Booyesen, 2021:7). In this way, they can cultivate more equitable and inclusive mentor-mentee relationships, empowering individuals from diverse backgrounds to thrive and succeed (Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1142).

2.8 Emergence and types of mentorship relationships

Healy and Welchert (1990:17,18) suggest that mentorship relationships can emerge spontaneously or from formalised programmes, often shaped by a complex interplay of variables. The latter variables include mentor-mentee personalities, their histories, and the distinct or shared contexts they operate within. Nonetheless, the practice of mentorship in

higher education is a multifaceted phenomenon, with mentorship relationships taking on various forms and structures (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2020:76). Understanding the different types of mentorship relationships is essential for appreciating the diversity and flexibility of mentorship within the academic sphere (National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine, 2020:77).

2.8.1 Traditional mentorship

Traditional mentoring describes a one-on-one relationship between a more experienced person (mentor) and a less experienced person (mentee), with the aim of providing guidance and support to the mentee in their personal and professional development (Bryant *et al.*, 2015:259). One of the most well-known models of traditional mentoring is the four-phase model proposed by Kram (1983:614). This model describes the stages that mentors and mentees typically go through in their relationship:

- Initiation: In this phase, the mentor and mentee get to know each other and establish rapport. They clarify their expectations and goals for the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1983:614).
- Cultivation: In this phase, the mentor and mentee engage in activities to build the mentee's skills and knowledge. The mentor provides guidance, feedback, and support to the mentee as they work toward their goals (Kram, 1983:616).
- Separation: In this phase, the mentoring relationship comes to an end, either because the mentee has achieved their goals or because the relationship is no longer useful or sustainable (Kram, 1983:617).
- Redefinition: In this phase, the mentor and mentee reflect on their experience and evaluate the outcomes of the mentoring relationship. They may choose to continue the relationship in a different form, or they may part ways and seek out new mentoring relationships (Kram, 1983:620).

2.8.2 Peer mentorship

Peer mentoring is a form of mentoring that involves individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences providing support and guidance to each other (Colvin & Ashman, 2010:122). Unlike traditional mentoring, which involves a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee, peer mentoring involves individuals at the same career level or with similar experiences (Boillat & Elizow, 2014:160). It has been reported that the benefits of peer mentorship include the provision of a sense of community and shared experience for the mentors and mentees (Lim *et al.*, 2017:408). Lastly, a study by Dickson *et al.* (2021:4) has

indicated the effectiveness of peer mentoring in promoting professional development and career advancement.

2.8.3 Group mentorship

Group mentoring is a form of mentoring that involves a mentor working with a group of mentees (Mitchell, 1999:114). Unlike traditional one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring allows for multiple mentees to learn from the same mentor and from each other (Mitchell, 1999:118). Studies have highlighted the significance of group mentoring in enhancing leadership skills and career advancement. Studies have indicated that group mentoring can provide mentees with a sense of community and belonging, which can enhance motivation and engagement (Pryce *et al.*, 2019:889).

2.8.4 Reverse mentoring

The practice of reverse mentoring has gained recognition in various professional settings, particularly in organizations striving to bridge generational gaps and adapt to the rapidly evolving technological landscape (Chen, 2013:200). This mentorship strategy is employed by organizations to enhance collaboration and innovation by fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange (Satterly, 2018:675). Moreover, research studies also indicate that reverse mentoring can yield several positive outcomes, including increased digital literacy among senior employees, improved communication across generational lines, and a more dynamic organizational culture (Breck *et al.*, 2018:515; Leedahl *et al.*, 2019:74). Reverse mentoring also contributes to leadership development and diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations (Chen, 2013:200). Younger mentors provide valuable perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues (Chen, 2013:200). Their insights help senior leaders gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by underrepresented groups, thereby fostering a more inclusive work environment (Breck *et al.*, 2018:516). However, it's important to note that the success of reverse mentoring depends on factors such as mutual respect, open-mindedness, and effective communication between mentors and mentees, regardless of their hierarchical positions (Augustiniene & Ciuciulkiene, 2013:75). Additionally, organizations need to create a supportive environment for reverse mentoring to thrive (Chen, 2013:207).

2.9 Benefits of mentorship and mentorship relationships

Mentorship is a multifaceted tool offering a myriad of advantages to both mentors and mentees. Among these benefits is the enhancement of job satisfaction within mentorship relationships (Chung & Kowalski, 2012:383). This increased job satisfaction can be attributed

to the guidance, support, and encouragement mentors provide to their mentees, ultimately leading to greater career contentment and overall wellbeing. As Figure 2.2 illustrates, this relationship between mentorship, job stress, psychosocial empowerment, and job satisfaction is complex, interlinked, and significant (Chung & Kowalski, 2012:383). However, the benefits of mentorship extend well beyond these parameters.

A critical advantage of mentorship relates to its capacity to enhance a mentee's professional development. Numerous studies have consistently shown that mentorship accelerates skill development and knowledge acquisition, contributing to career advancement (Eby *et al.*, 2013:447; Allen *et al.*, 2015:127). Furthermore, mentees gain valuable insights into industry-specific practices, leadership strategies, and effective problem-solving techniques. The latter not only improves their skills attainment but also enhances their competitiveness in the job market (Chao *et al.*, 1992:619; Ragins & Cotton, 1999:529).

Secondly, mentorship has a profound impact on shaping individuals' career trajectories. Research has indicated that mentees are more likely to receive promotions and salary increases during or post their mentorship relationship (Ragins *et al.*, 2000:758; Noe, 1988:457). This is because mentorship relationships provide mentees an increased visibility within their organizations, expanding their professional networks and opening doors to new opportunities (Higgins & Thomas, 2001:264; Kram, 1983:616).

Notably, mentorship fosters higher job satisfaction and increased work engagement. Mentees who benefit from the guidance and support of mentors frequently report elevated levels of job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to their organizations (Scandura, 1992:169; Ensher *et al.*, 2001:424). The boost in satisfaction can be attributed to the mentorship's role in stress reduction, provision of a support system, and cultivation of a sense of belonging (Underhill & McAnally, 2011:477; Fagenson-Eland *et al.*, 2006:220). Furthermore, mentorship is recognized as a powerful tool for leadership development. Mentees have the opportunity to learn from experienced mentors, gaining essential leadership competencies such as self-confidence, effective decision-making, and leadership skills (Chao *et al.*, 1992:619; Eby *et al.*, 2013:441).

Lastly, studies have also suggested that mentorship has a positive impact that extends beyond the professional space, by also influencing personal growth and self-confidence. Mentees frequently experience increased self-esteem and a greater sense of self-efficacy due to the skills attained during mentorship (Chao *et al.*, 1992:619; Eby *et al.*, 2008:258). Also, studies have reported that the personal growth that occurs during mentorship is known to improve or enhance the resilience and adaptability of mentees in the face of challenges, both personally

and professionally (Higgins & Kram, 2001:264; Allen *et al.*, 2015:441). In addition to personal and professional development, mentorship programmes have also proven to be effective tools for promoting diversity and inclusion within organizations. These programmes offer underrepresented individual's opportunities for advancement and play a pivotal role in bridging the diversity gap (Ragins & Scandura, 1999:529). Furthermore, mentorship can help combat unconscious biases by fostering an inclusive organizational culture.



Figure 2.2: Graphical representation of three factors that are positively affected by mentorship (Chung & Kowalski, 2012:383).

2.10 The dark side of mentorship

While mentorship is often celebrated for its numerous benefits and positive outcomes, studies have also reported that it possesses a darker and more complex side that warrants attention and exploration (Eby & Allen, 2002:459; Hu *et al.*, 2022:39). Furthermore, while mentors can be instrumental in advancing the careers of their mentees, there are instances where mentorship can hinder rather than help. Research has revealed that some mentors may intentionally or unintentionally impede the career growth of their mentees, perhaps out of competitiveness or fear of being surpassed (Hicks, 2011:70). These detrimental effects can

stall a mentee's professional development, leaving them with turnover intentions, stress, and job dissatisfactions (Eby & Allen, 2002:461-463).

Furthermore, McClelland (2009:80) suggests that negative mentorship relationships can result in significant emotional and psychological stress for both mentors and mentees. Also, these negative mentorship relationships can result from power imbalances, unmet expectations, and interpersonal conflicts all of which have been illustrated to be associated with feelings of anxiety, frustration, and burnout (Hurst & Eby, 2015:84). This emotional toll can have long-lasting effects on the mental wellbeing of mentees and mentors. Furthermore, Gerk *et al.* (2022:703) highlight that mentorship relationships are not immune to issues of exclusion and discrimination. Also, research has shown that some mentorship opportunities may be limited to a select few, potentially excluding individuals from underrepresented groups, including women and minority populations (Ragins & Kram, 2007:668). This can perpetuate inequality within organizations. In some cases, mentorship relationships may break down due to a lack of compatibility, shifting priorities, or personal conflicts. The dissolution of mentorship can leave both parties feeling disappointed and potentially impact their professional trajectories (Spencer *et al.*, 2017:440). The resulting disappointment can erode trust and create barriers to future mentorship experiences. Mentoring relationships can give rise to ethical dilemmas, particularly when mentors exploit their positions of authority or take credit for their mentees' work (Holmes *et al.*, 2010:337). Such behaviour can damage trust and tarnish the mentorship experience (Holmes *et al.*, 2010:339).

2.11 Mentorship of women in higher education

According to Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016:308), the worldwide underrepresentation of women leaders in higher education has over the years contributed to the scarcity of female mentors. Janes *et al.* (2020:38) highlight that historical efforts aimed at addressing the gender leadership gap often involved placing women in leadership programmes designed to address or "fix" aspects that were wrong with women leaders. It is, however, important to note that programmes designed to "fix" aspects that are wrong with women leaders have been questioned as they may reinforce gender stereotypes and limit women's opportunities for advancement (Ely *et al.*, 2011:475; Rogus-Pulia *et al.*, 2018:1600). Consequently, since the 1990s, various studies are addressing the dispossessed voice of women in higher education and one of the strategies is mentorship through a feminist perspective (Cullen & Luna, 1993:126; Searby *et al.*, 2015:98). Swan-Dagen *et al.* (2022:194) support with the latter perspective and motivate its relevance in empowering women in leadership through the emphasis of "you cannot be what you cannot see". Also, addressing the dispossessed voice of women provides a feminist perspective on mentorship which involves creating opportunities

for women to connect with female mentors who can provide guidance and support in navigating the challenges of academic leadership (Swan-Dagen *et al.*, 2022:202). This approach acknowledges the unique experiences and perspectives of women in higher education and seeks to address the structural barriers that limit their advancement. Swan-Dagen *et al.* (2022:201) align with the latter approach as they highlight that mentorship programmes can help to address the leadership ambition gap by providing women role models and opportunities to network with other women in leadership positions.

2.12 The role of mentorship in career progression

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions across various industries and sectors, including higher education (Burkinshaw *et al.*, 2018:82; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2021:643). Several factors contribute to this underrepresentation, including cultural biases, systemic barriers, and lack of access to mentoring and leadership development opportunities (Ramohai, 2019:221; Moodley, 2021:188). Thus, the role of mentorship in supporting the career advancement of women in leadership has received attention in the literature (Helms *et al.*, 2016:4; Hezlett & Gibson, 2007:402). Mentorship can be particularly important for women seeking leadership roles, as these positions often require skills and experiences that may be less accessible to women due to systemic barriers (Burke *et al.*, 2021:256; Janes *et al.*, 2020:39). A study by Noe (1988:67) found that women who had a mentor were more likely to be visible to organizational decision-makers thus making them favourable of promotions and more successful careers than women without a mentor. While Ragins and Cotton (1999) found that women with mentors reported greater career satisfaction and advancement compared to women without mentors. According to Ragins and Cotton (1999:529), mentorship relationships are beneficial for the development of mentees since they obtain two main benefits from their mentors: career development and psychosocial support. Furthermore, mentorship relationships have been suggested to aid mentees in their personal and professional development (Wright and Wright 1987:204). However, apart from the promotion of individual career progression, studies have also illustrated that mentorship not only focuses on the individuals but has a positive impact on organizations as well. Several studies have noted that organizations with strong mentorship programmes are more likely to retain and promote female employees, resulting in greater diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace and leadership structures (Hewlett *et al.*, 2010:55; Ragins *et al.*, 2000:1190; Randel *et al.*, 2018:199).

2.13 Differentiating Mentorship from Coaching and Sponsorship

Mentorship, coaching, and sponsorship are three distinct approaches used in personal and professional development, particularly in the context of career growth and skill enhancement (Seehusen *et al.*, 2021:175). While they all involve a form of guidance and support, they differ in terms of their goals, time frames, methodologies, and the roles played by the individuals involved.

Mentorship is frequently defined as a relationship wherein a mentor, an individual with more experience, offers guidance, counsel, and assistance to a mentee or a less experienced person. According to Koopman *et al.* (2021:138), mentors play various roles, acting as protectors, advisors, and companions, providing comprehensive support as mentees engage in projects or tasks. Schutte and de Waal (2021:1141) suggest that the purpose of mentoring has evolved to emphasize enhancing the mentee's self-efficacy, signifying a shift from purely skill development to a more all-encompassing approach encompassing personal growth. Seehusen *et al.* (2021:176) explain that coaching, in contrast, is centred on supplying periodic, specific feedback to enhance performance in discrete professional activities. Mentoring, on the other hand, is a long-term association designed to offer guidance and counsel for the sake of professional growth (Seehusen *et al.*, 2021:176). This distinction underscores the importance of clarity in the context of particular programmes or relationships to ensure shared commitment to the chosen developmental path.

Conversely, coaching is commonly described as an ongoing, on-the-job training process administered by a coach to enhance an individual's specific skills or performance (Schutte & de Waal, 2021:1140). According to Feldman and Lankau (2005:830), coaching is about facilitating the learning process rather than providing direct instruction. The evolution of coaching definitions over time indicates a shift in the role of coaching, transitioning from a focus on giving explicit instructions to facilitating an individual's development (Orr & Sonnadara, 2019:235). Clutterbuck (2008:9) highlights that coaching primarily addresses the performance aspects of an individual's work or life, while mentoring is often linked with more comprehensive development and career advancement.

According to Ayyala *et al.* (2019:95), sponsorship involves influential individuals within an organization actively endorsing the career progression of high-potential mentees. Sponsors utilize their influence, access to networks, and resources to nominate proteges for leadership opportunities and introduce them to crucial career networks. Unlike mentorship and coaching, sponsorship is sporadic and focused on specific opportunities. Helms *et al.* (2016:5) emphasize that sponsors go beyond providing feedback and advice; they leverage their

influence to advocate for the protege in ways that directly lead to career advancement, often by connecting them with senior executives. Figure X below, provides a visual display differentiating mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching.

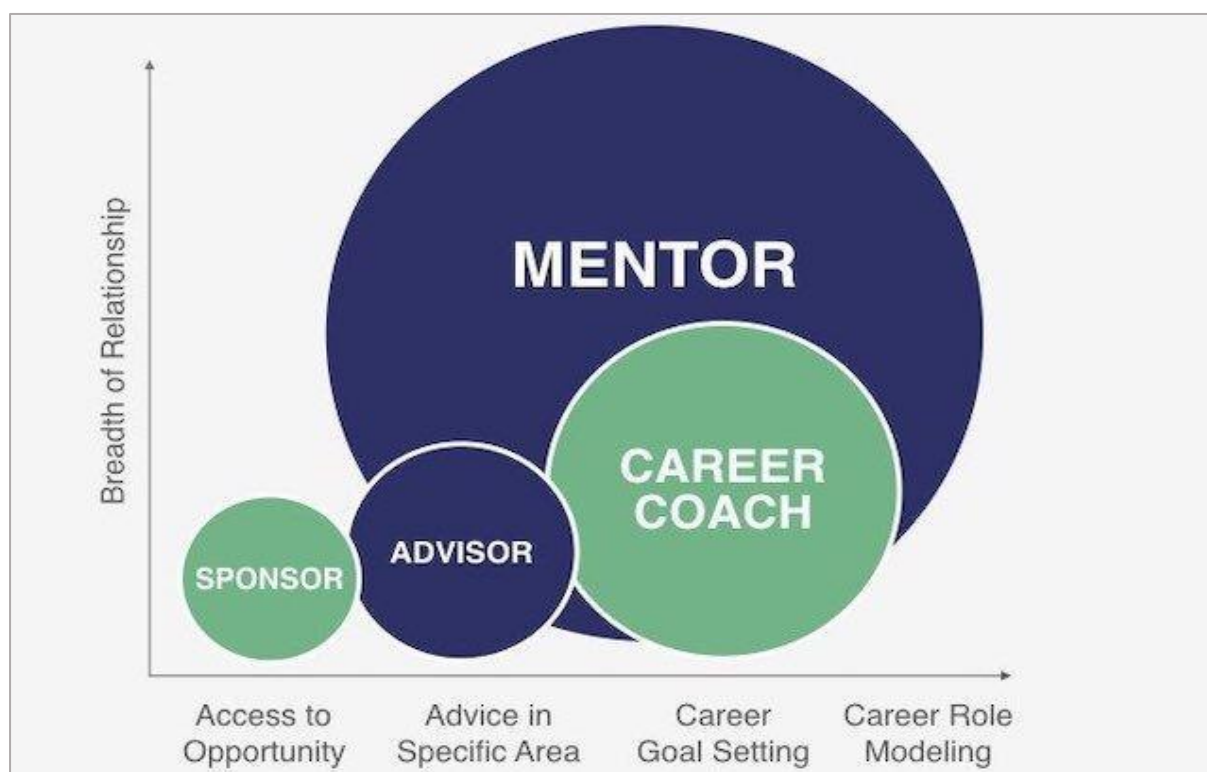


Figure 2.3: Graphical illustration of the relationship between mentorship, coaching and sponsorship.

<https://equity-at-work.com/theequityatworkblog/do-i-need-a-sponsor-advisor-coach-or-mentor-yes>

2.14 Research question 1

2.14.1 Common mentorship factors described in the literature on mentorship in higher education

2.14.1.1 Literature search study

A systematic and rigorous search was conducted in July 2023 using the EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) to identify suitable manuscripts for compilation of this partial integrative review. Furthermore, the following search terms were used to identify relevant manuscripts with the Boolean connector 'AND' between each of them:

- mentorship or mentor or mentoring;
- women or female or woman or females;
- leadership or management or leading or managing or manager or leader;
- higher education or college or university or post-secondary or postsecondary;

- career progression or promotion or career advancement or career development or career trajectories.

2.14.1.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The search criteria employed in this study included original English peer-reviewed manuscripts published in academic journals between the years 2003-2023 with regard to female leadership and mentorship in higher education. Additionally, specific search terms were used to identify suitable manuscripts to identify common mentorship factors described in literature on mentorship in higher education. Manuscripts that were excluded were review papers, theses, and studies where mentorship was provided to students or sports females in higher education.

2.14.1.3 Data collection

Figure 2.4 is a flow chart illustrating the decision trail used to identify suitable manuscripts for the identification of common mentorship factors in the literature. A total of 69 records were generated by the database search. Post removal of duplicate manuscripts and manuscripts published in non-academic journals, 40 potential studies were identified. The titles and abstracts of the prospective manuscripts were screened and through this systematic process, 12 manuscripts were identified. Furthermore, three manuscripts were excluded from the 12 owing to not meeting the inclusion criteria yielding a total of 9 manuscripts for inclusion in this study.

2.14.1.4 Data extraction and synthesis

Data extracted from the nine manuscripts were scrutinized and thematically analysed to identify recurring themes. Thereafter a concept matrix was created to map the thematic content related to common mentorship factors identified in the nine identified manuscripts as prescribed by Torraco (2005).

2.14.1.5 Key themes

A total of four key themes were identified from the data and presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2: Mentorship benefits, Mentorship challenges, Mentorship networks, and associated factors. Furthermore, one supertheme (Mentorship Relationship Type) with four themes was identified from the data presented in Table 2.3: peer mentorship, same-gender mentorship, cross-gender mentorship, and cross-race mentorship.

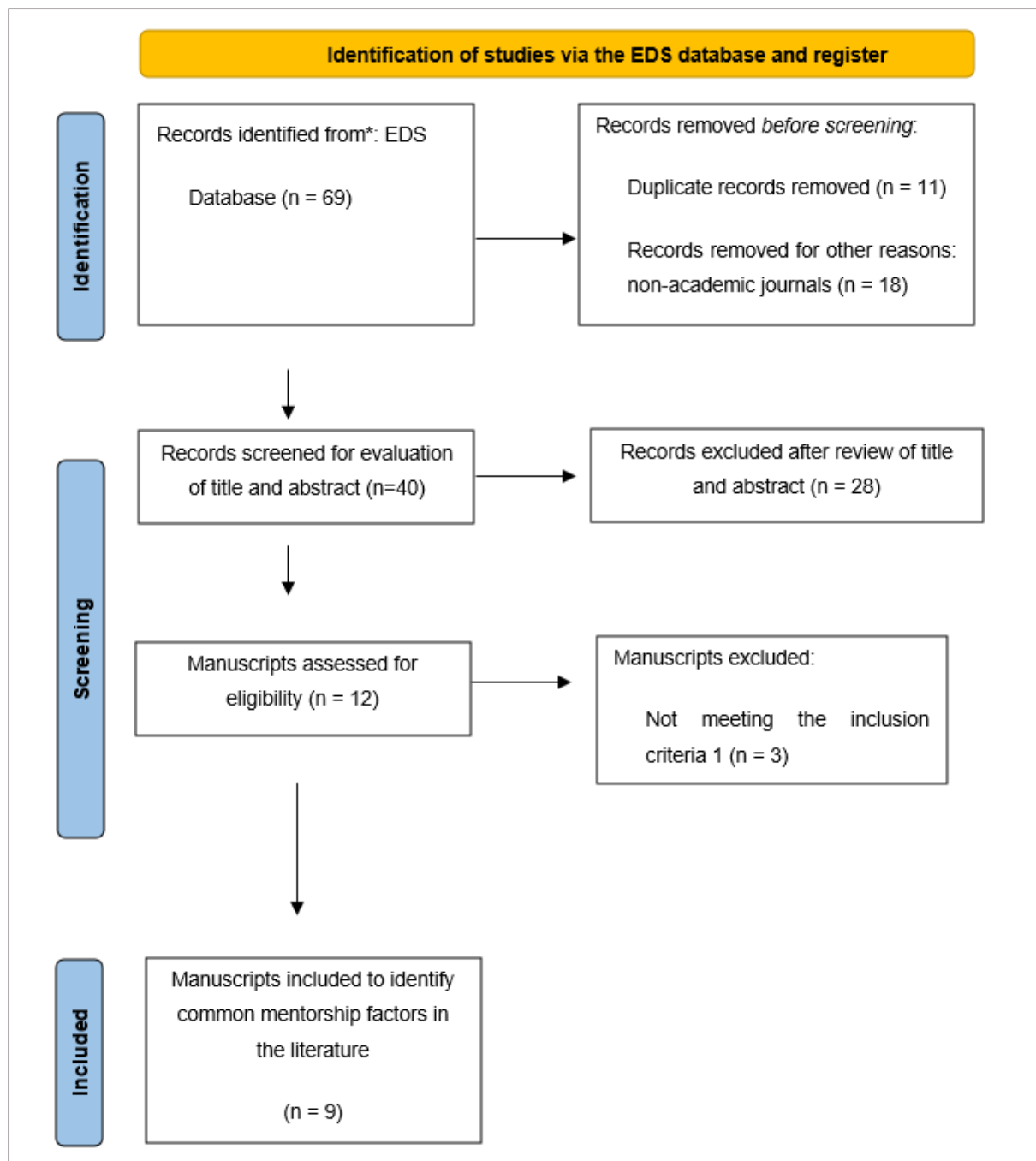


Figure 2.4: Flow chart depicting the decision trail used to select manuscripts suitable for the identification of mentorship factors described in the literature on mentorship in higher education. (Researchers own compilation.)

Table 2.1: Concept matrix one mapping the themes and subthemes of common mentorship factors in the literature.

Theme	Subtheme	Bhatti & Ali, 2021	Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011	Gaikwad & Pandey, 2022	Hill & Wheat 2017	Kleihauer <i>et al.</i> 2012	Longman <i>et al.</i> 2019	Oikelome, 2017	Tolar, 2012	Tran, 2014
Mentorship Benefits	Affirmation	•		•	•	•	•		•	
	Career development		•		•					
	Empowering	•					•		•	
	Encouragement	•			•	•	•	•	•	•
	Expands professional network							•		•
	Growth opportunities	•		•	•		•			
	Guidance	•			•		•	•	•	
	Influence			•				•		•
	Motivation	•					•		•	
	Psychosocial support						•		•	
	Reciprocal benefits									•
	Role model			•	•				•	
	Skills development	•		•	•					

(Researchers own compilation.)

Table 2.2: Concept matrix two mapping the themes and subthemes of common mentorship factors in the literature.

Themes	Subthemes	Bhatti & Ali, 2021	Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011	Gaikwad & Pandey, 2022	Hill & Wheat 2017	Kleihauer <i>et al.</i> 2012	Longman <i>et al.</i> 2019	Oikelome, 2017	Tolar, 2012	Tran, 2014
Mentorship Challenges	Gender relation tensions	•							•	
	Hidden mentorship opportunities									•
	Ineffective communication								•	
	Lack of mentors			•					•	
	Mentorship Asymmetry and Disparities								•	
	Time constraints								•	
Mentorship Networks	Informal network: family	•			•	•		•		•
	Informal network: professional	•	•							
	Multi-dimensional						•			•
Associated factors	Sponsorship				•			•		
	Organizational culture						•	•		
	On-going process									•

(Researchers own compilation.)

Table 2.3: Concept matrix three mapping the themes and subthemes of common mentorship factors in the literature.

Supertheme	Theme	Subtheme	Bhatti & Ali, 2021	Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011	Gaikwad & Pandey, 2022	Hill & Wheat 2017	Kleihauer et al. 2012	Longman et al. 2019	Oikelome, 2017	Tolar, 2012	Tran, 2014
Mentorship relationship type	Peer mentorship	Early career stage	●								●
		Same-race mentorship									●
	Same gender mentorship	Inclusive			●						
	Cross gender mentorship	Diverse learning environment	●							●	
	Cross-race mentorship	Diverse perspectives									●
		Highly effective		●							

(Researchers own compilation.)

2.15 Summary

This chapter presented a review of existing literature on mentorship and leadership within the higher education sector. Briefly, it presented an overview of leadership in higher education and highlighted the challenges women face during their leadership career trajectories. Thereafter it defined mentorship in both the Western and African context and described the distinct types of mentorship relationships. The chapter further discussed the positive outcomes and advantages linked to mentorship, as well as potential challenges and negative aspects. The literature review presented in this chapter demonstrated the crucial role of mentorship in supporting women and how it contributes to their career advancement in higher education. Lastly, this chapter addressed the first research question and identified the common mentorship factors in literature. Thus, this chapter provided a comprehensive introduction to the mentorship and leadership within higher education in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in this study. It outlines the research paradigm, approach, design, time horizon, ethical considerations, data collection as well as analysis procedures. Furthermore, it provides a clear framework for understanding how data was gathered and analysed while maintaining rigorous ethical standards. It also presents the strategies that were used to ensure the quality and reliability of the research findings.

3.2 Research paradigm

The research paradigm employed in this study was interpretivism. According to Bryman *et al.* (2018:19), a research paradigm is a philosophical framework that is dictated by a set of beliefs that inform how researchers in a specific field should conduct their research. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:41), further note that interpretivism enables researchers a deep understanding of the participants' reality and behaviour by considering their experiences. While Goldkul (2012:139) states that the interpretative approach requires the researcher to acknowledge the information being provided to them to understand it without distorting it in any way. Bryman *et al.* (2018:14) highlight that this paradigm is a scientific model used to study the social world and requires the researcher to be cognitive of the distinctiveness of humans. Thus, the latter paradigm was best suited for this study as this study sought to obtain an in-depth understanding of the participants' subjective reality relating to their lived experiences and perspectives of women in higher education leadership with regard to mentorship and career pathing. Furthermore, the phenomenological design was used to understand the lived experiences of the participants (Alase, 2017:9). The latter enabled the carrying out of an exploratory inquiry aimed at comprehending phenomena directly from all participants' answers (Turner *et al.*, 2021:3).

3.3 Research approach

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:152), the degree to which a research study aims to develop or test a theory is informed by the study's research approach which can either be inductive, deductive, or abductive. This study followed both a deductive and inductive approach and Table 3.1 below depicts where these approaches were implemented.

Table 3.1: Presentation of the approach that was followed for each of the research questions.

Research question		Approach
I.	What are the mentorship factors described in the literature on mentorship in higher education?	Deductive
II.	What is mentorship, and how is it perceived in higher education?	Inductive
III.	What are the mentorship experiences of women in leadership positions in a South African university?	Inductive
IV.	What practices can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education?	Inductive

(Researchers own compilation.)

A deductive approach was used to determine themes in the literature associated with the concept of mentoring. This informed the literature review as well as the data analysis. According to du Plessis and Blom (2020:44), a deductive approach is not commonly used in qualitative research, however, it can be applicable. Pearse (2019:145) supports the latter view by substantiating that a deductive approach can be used to inform themes in literature that can be matched to patterns in the collected data. Furthermore, an inductive approach was used to understand the large complex data collected from the participants. According to Azungah (2018:384), an inductive approach entails the sole use of participants' experiences during data analysis. Briefly, the researcher employed rigorous and systematic reading which was to be followed by coding of the transcripts to extract and obtain themes, subthemes and where necessary superthemes directly from the transcribed text. Saunders *et al.* (2019:152) and Thomas (2003:2) explain that an inductive approach allows for condensing large raw data by scrutinizing it and subsequently deriving themes or categories to explore phenomena for the development of a conceptual framework. This approach assisted the researcher to scrutinise, interpret, and make sense of the participants' experiences regarding the phenomena under investigation.

3.4 Research design

This study followed an exploratory, descriptive qualitative research design to gain insight into the perceptions of each participant on the subject matter using in-depth interviews. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017:22), qualitative research is employed when a researcher wants to explore and gain an understanding of specific social or human problems using questions for data collection and thereafter interpreting the data to derive meaning from it. Additionally, Bryman (2018:41) explains that qualitative research allows for the contextual understanding of human behaviour by means of the researcher inquiring and seeking to understand

phenomena from the participants' perspective. Vogt (1999:105) further defines exploratory research as "a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social life". Thus, qualitative research was implemented in this study as it was best suited to provide a contextual understating by addressing all research questions about the perceived and lived mentorship experiences in advancing the leadership career pathing of women in a chosen higher education institution. Saunders *et al.* (2019:179) state that the data collection for qualitative research can either be through single or multiple techniques. For this study, a single data collection technique was used; thus, classifying it as a mono-method qualitative study.

3.5 Time horizon

According to Melnikovas (2018:34), a time horizon describes the time frame within which data will be collected during a study. Saunders and Tosey (2013:59) further classify studies where data collection occurs within a single time frame as cross-sectional; and those where data collection occurs over an extended time frame as longitudinal. However, Saunders *et al.* (2019:212) note that qualitative case studies that collect data using interviews over a short period are also classified as cross-sectional. Thus, this study was cross-sectional since data was collected over a short period.

3.6 Study population and sampling

According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:294), a study population refers to the complete set of cases from which a sample is retrieved. These authors further elucidated that the sample must be representative of the population from which it was extracted in such a way, that the data collected from it is meaningful and successfully answers the research questions; thus, fulfilling the objectives of the study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:294). The population for this study included women occupying senior management positions (director to executive level) for a minimum of 1 year from both academic and support staff positions at any of the three campuses of the chosen South African university. Also, this study excluded women leaders who have a close working relationship with the researcher or are within the researcher's immediate reporting line. Lastly, the population of this study comprised only the individuals who satisfied the latter criteria, provided consent as well and voluntarily availed themselves to participate in the study.

Furthermore, this study employed a purposive non-probability sampling regime. This is because all participants were women occupying senior management positions (director to executive level) for a minimum of 1 year at any of the three campuses within the selected

South African university. Thus, the latter ascribes to purposive sampling which allows for the choice of participants to follow a specific selection criterion although with natural randomization (Vehovar *et al.*, 2016:328, 332). Furthermore, the sample size was determined by the data saturation point and only confirmed upon completion of the study. According to Guest *et al.* (2006:59), data saturation refers to the point in a research study where the data collected has reached a point where no new information is gathered or where no new coding themes can be extracted from the data. Furthermore, Fusch and Ness (2015:1409) highlight that saturated data is rich, intricate, detailed, layered, nuanced, and of good quantity. Thus, data analysis occurred after each interview took place in order to enable the researcher the ability to discern when data saturation was reached.

3.7 Execution of the research study

3.7.1 The measuring instrument/Interview guide

An interview guide with semi-structured interview questions was used to guide the interview process of ethical data collection. According to Bryman *et al.* (2018:228), interview guides ensure that critical themes that emerge in the literature review are addressed by the measuring instrument such that the research objectives of the study are met. Saunders *et al.* (2019:437) note that themes predetermined from existing literature, as well as crucial questions, can be used to guide the flow of the interview questions. The interview questions deemed suitable for this study were open-ended so that participants were provided the liberty to fully express themselves when answering the questions. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:1) state that semi-structured interviews are characterized by a dialogue between the researcher and participants which follows a flexible protocol of follow-up questions and probing. Furthermore, Azungah (2018:387) notes that semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow researchers the ability to approach different participants in varying ways whilst covering the same set of questions. The interview guide used in this study followed the following protocol: All participants were informed that the interview would be voice-recorded so that the researcher could transcribe the participants' answers to produce written data.

Also, prior to the first interview session, the researcher and supervisor of this study had a mock-interview on 8 August 2023 at 12:00pm to ensure that the interview process was meticulously planned and aligned with the study's objectives. This practice session allowed for a comprehensive review of the interview guide's effectiveness, ensuring that the questions were clear, relevant, and capable of prompting valuable insights from participants. During the mock-interview, the researcher and supervisor engaged in a simulated dialogue, testing the flow of the questions and addressing any potential challenges or ambiguities. This proactive

approach aimed to identify and rectify any issues that could arise during the actual interviews, promoting a smooth and productive interaction with participants. Furthermore, the mock-interview provided an opportunity to refine the probing techniques and follow-up questions, ensuring that the researcher could navigate the conversation effectively and gather in-depth responses. The supervisor's input and feedback were invaluable in enhancing the overall quality of the interview process. Lastly, by conducting a mock-interview, the researcher could fine-tune their approach, which enhanced their confidence and competence in executing the actual interviews. This preparatory step was essential to uphold ethical standards, maximize the reliability of data collection, and ultimately contribute to the robustness of the study's findings.

3.7.2 Collection of data

According to Melnikovas (2018:34), a time horizon describes the timeframe within which data will be collected during a study. Saunders and Tosey (2013:59) further classify studies where data collection occurs within a single time frame as cross-sectional; and those where data collection occurs over an extended time frame as longitudinal. However, Saunders *et al.* (2019:212) also confirm that qualitative case studies that collect data using interviews over a short period are also classified as cross-sectional. Thus, this study was cross-sectional and data was collected over a two-month period.

3.7.3 Data analysis

Data analysis in this study was meticulously conducted to ensure accuracy and transparency. After each interview, the researcher employed headphones to maintain privacy and prevent unauthorized access to voice recordings. The transcribed data, generated by MS Teams, underwent manual editing by the researcher. This involved listening to the interviews again to verify the accuracy of the transcribed text. Briefly, the transcribed data produced by MS Teams was edited manually by the researcher through a process of listening to the interview again and ensuring the correctness of the text. Thereafter, the researcher used the transcribed written data to carry out a detailed analysis of the raw data (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:472). Then, all data analysis followed thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006:83). Briefly, the transcriptions of the participants' responses were scrutinized, patterns identified, and coded. Thereafter themes, as well as sub-themes, were extracted as they emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006:80). Thereafter, the themes and subthemes were compared to the already existing literature to determine the link between the objectives of the study and the findings that were drawn from the themed data transparently. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:652), thematic analysis can be used for both inductive and deductive research approaches and may be used to explore various interpretations of a specific phenomenon.

Thus, thematic analysis was used to answer all research questions in this study (both inductive and deductive). Furthermore, all thematic analyses were conducted using Atlas.ti 23.0 to enable the computation of graphs and figures in support of answering the research questions. Additionally, Canva 1.75.0 and Microsoft Office Excel 365 were utilized to compute key figures that could not be generated using Atlas.ti 23.0, ensuring a comprehensive and visually supported presentation of the research findings.

3.7.4 Ethical considerations

According to Arifin (2018:30), the execution of qualitative studies needs to ensure the protection of all participants through the adherence to - and application of - appropriate ethical principles. Thus, in this study, ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and protecting the privacy of the participants' information. The study was also reviewed and approved by the people management scientific committee as well as the university's gatekeepers to ensure that ethical standards were met. Lastly, this study aligned with and adhered to the ethical principles suggested by Arifin (2018:30-32). The latter will be addressed briefly.

3.7.4.1 *Voluntary participation and informed consent*

It was communicated both verbally and in writing that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any time – including post-providing informed consent.

3.7.4.2 *Maintain anonymity and confidentiality*

This study ensured compliance to maintaining the anonymity of all participants by allocating participants' codes using numbers (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc). Also, only the researcher, research supervisor, and respective participant had access to the interview transcripts to ensure the confidentiality of the participants as well as the proceedings of the interviews was maintained.

3.7.4.3 *Interview sessions and data storage*

Interview dates were scheduled in the participant's calendar schedules post obtaining informed consent. The sessions comprised only the researcher and respective participants in a private and quiet setting where no disturbances could be encountered. Also, depending on the geographical location of the researcher and respective participants, interviews took place in person or virtually. In both scenarios (contact or virtually), the interviews were recorded and saved on an MS Teams channel created by the researcher. MS Teams was deemed best

suitable for the storage of the data as it is an encrypted platform. After five years, this data will be destroyed. Additionally, only the researcher had access to all voice recordings and was able to match the voice recordings to the respective participants. Lastly, where possible, all data (voice recordings and transcripts) were password protected.

3.7.5 Qualitative research rigor and trustworthiness

According to Johnson *et al.* (2020:138) research rigor and trustworthiness are critical components of any qualitative research study. Furthermore Nowell (2017:1, 3), notes that research rigor refers to the degree to which a study is conducted in a systematic and methodical manner, while trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. This study aligned to the latter factors which will be defined briefly:

3.7.5.1 Credibility

Credibility, according to Nowell *et al.* (2017:3), is the extent to which research findings accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of participants. To ensure credibility, this study engaged in prolonged data engagement, dedicating sufficient time to analyze data and identify patterns and themes.

3.7.5.2 Transferability

Transferability ensures that research methods are reproducible in different contexts with different sample groups. Nowell *et al.* (2017:3) define transferability as the extent to which study findings can be applied to other contexts. This study achieved transferability by providing a detailed description of the study context, participant information, and clear documentation of data collection methods.

3.7.5.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). To meet the criteria for dependability, an audit trail was employed, involving the documentation of the data collection and analysis process (Bowen, 2009:306). This practice was diligently followed in this study. This documentation serves as a transparent and detailed record of the procedures followed, helping to establish the dependability of the study.

3.7.5.4 Confirmability

Confirmability describes to the extent to which the research findings are obtained from the data and thus free from bias or personal interpretation. LaBanca (2011:1161) suggests that

confirmability can be achieved through reflexivity, where researchers reflect on their biases and assumptions. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, reflexivity was applied to ensure objectivity aligned with participants' contributions and lived experiences. This comprehensive approach enhanced the overall rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative research conducted in this study.

3.7.6 Limitations

A total of three limitations were identified for this study. These, as well as the way they were circumvented is briefly addressed:

3.7.6.1 *Availability of participants*

The targeted study population comprised women in senior leadership positions who had very busy schedules. This required the researcher to timeously set interview appointments once permitted to do so and constantly engage with the participant's personal assistants regarding the set date.

3.7.6.2 *Respondent burden and confidentiality*

Prior to the commencement of data collection, it was envisaged that the participants had been concerned about the confidentiality of their responses, which could have led to potential reluctance to participate or to share sensitive information. The latter is specific for questions requiring the sharing of lived experiences. Thus, the researcher explained what the collected data would be used for (solely for academic research purposes) and assured the participants that their anonymity would be of utmost importance and that their shared data would be handled discreetly.

3.7.6.3 *Contextual factors*

The study was conducted in a South African university context; therefore, it was assumed during data analysis that the results of this study might not have been suitable for generalization to other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the country, on the continent, or internationally. Consequently, where possible, the researcher drew on findings from similar studies in the literature to highlight similarities or differences.

3.8 Summary

This chapter served as a comprehensive guide to the research methodology employed in the current study. It presented essential aspects such as the research paradigm, approach,

design, time horizon, ethical considerations, data collection, and analysis procedures. It presented the methodology used for the systematic gathering and analysis of data, emphasizing the maintenance of trustworthy and rigorous ethical standards throughout the research process. The chapter also highlighted the strategies implemented to ensure quality and reliable research findings. Thus, it has provided clear methodological underpinnings of the current study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings derived from qualitative data analysis of eleven participants. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data, and all graphs were created using Atlas.ti 23.0, Canva 1.75.0 and Microsoft Office Excel 365. Adequate data was gathered to facilitate a comprehensive and in-depth data analysis. Saturation was observed during Participant 10's interview, while an additional interview was conducted to validate this observation. The data saturation is reflected in the consistent emergence of common themes and sub-themes from the data. To enhance clarity, this chapter follows a structured presentation, organizing the findings according to the research questions that guided the study.

4.2 Sample description

Table 4.1 below presents the demographic profile of the research participants while Figure 4.1 provides a specification of the participant's leadership level. As presented in Table 4.1, this study had a total of 11 female participants all occupying senior management positions. Furthermore, in terms of their qualifications, three participants had an honours degree, two had a master's degree, and six held doctoral degrees. A total of eight participants held director positions, two were at the deputy dean level, and one participant was at the executive level. Also, of the eight participants in a director leadership role, five were leading support divisions while three were leading academic divisions. The average number of years for all participants was 5,4 years ranging from 1 to 17 years.

Overall, the varying demographic characteristics of the research participants is illustrative that the study's sampled population comprised female leaders with a diverse range of experience and expertise. Furthermore, the research population was a mixture of experienced female leaders with substantial tenures as well as emerging female leaders. Thus, the study population contributed to a rich experiential spectrum within the research study.

Table 4.1: Demographic information of research participants.

Participant	Pseudonym	Highest qualification	Managerial level	Years in current role
1	P1	Master's degree	Director	17
2	P2	Honours degree	Director	6
3	P3	Honours degree	Director	13
4	P4	Doctoral degree	Director	4
5	P5	Honours degree	Director	1,5
6	P6	Doctoral degree	Deputy Dean	1
7	P7	Doctoral degree	Deputy Dean	4,5
8	P8	Doctoral degree	Executive level	5
9	P9	Doctoral degree	Director	5
10	P10	Doctoral degree	Director	1
11	P11	Doctoral degree	Director	3,5

(Researcher's own compilation.)

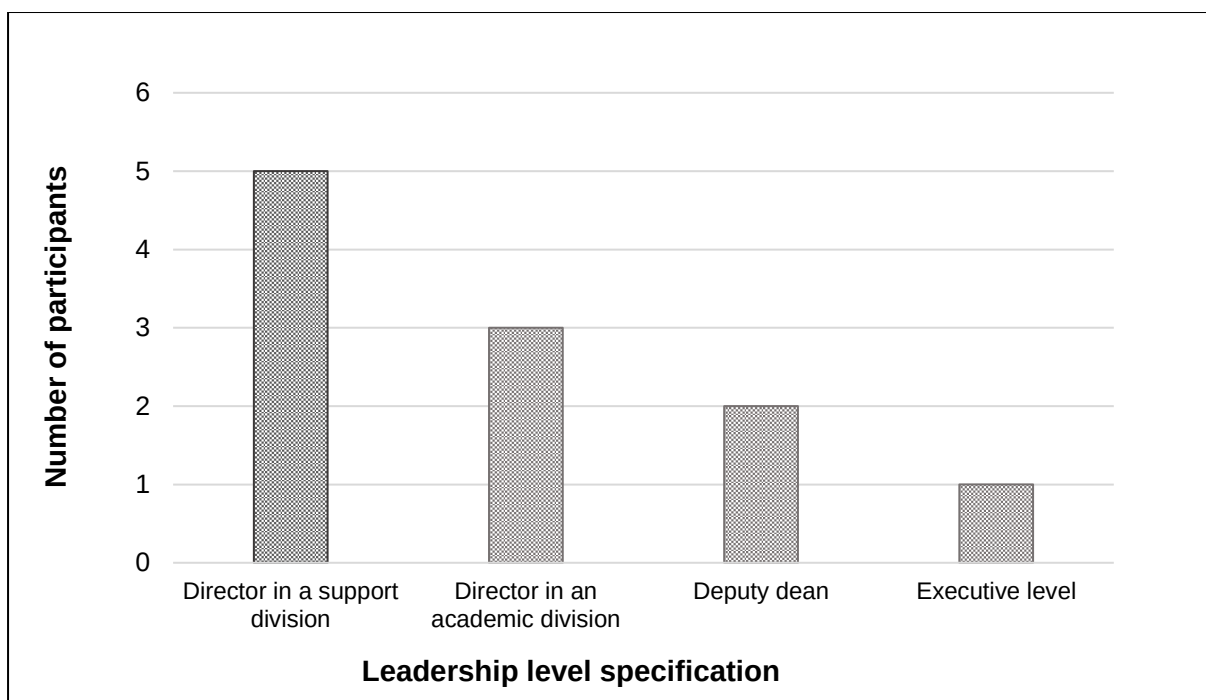


Figure 4.1: Delineation of the research participants' leadership level specification. (Researcher's own compilation.)

The following section will present an analysis of the collected research data, and the resultant structure will be in accordance with the specific research questions.

4.3 Research question 2

4.3.1 Participants' understanding of mentorship

Figure 4.2 below is a bubble graph depicting the participants' description of mentorship according to their understanding. Briefly, the general understanding of mentorship was unanimous among nine participants (Participants 3 - 11), who collectively defined it as a process of guiding an individual in their career path. Furthermore, participants described mentorship as a relationship (Participants 9 and 2), that is mentee-oriented (Participants 1 and 6), usually with a more senior, experienced, and knowledgeable individual (Participants 3, 8, and 10) for a specified timeframe (Participant 9). However, Participant 1, defined mentorship as leading an individual to self-discovery. Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 11 further described mentorship as a transformative professional or personal journey. Furthermore, Participant 6 emphasized that mentorship is a deliberate and purposeful process, whereas Participant 9 framed it as a strategic intervention. Lastly, Participant 2 also noted that mentorship could occur amongst peers.

Participant 1: "Well, I think mentorship is leading an individual to discover their best abilities and approach without trying to stamp your personality on the individual."

Participant 2: "It can be on the same level or a different level that you, um, that you take responsibility."

Participant 3: "From my understanding, it's someone that's higher than you are in the organization or in another organization that is able to guide you on your career path and your career goals."

Participant 4: "Mentorship is guidance."

Participant 5: "Mentorship is about guiding someone through their professional or personal journey."

Participant 6: "My understanding of mentorship is a journey, a guiding journey... I think mentorship is a guiding mechanism to ensure that a person reaches the top within the space where he sees himself in the future. It's also a process with intent, that is very important. I don't think mentorship is just for the sake of mentorship."

Participant 7: "I see mentorship as guiding somebody, walking along them..."

Participant 8: "Mentorship is a direct intervention where somebody who's knowledgeable about a particular field is providing guidance."

Participant 9: "Mentorship for me is a relationship between two people - I think at - a more senior level compared to the mentee; preferably somebody who's had the experience in the position that the mentee is in currently and that is then to guide and advise the mentee as the relation and process unfolds for which the mentorship has been assigned for the duration of that time."

Participant 10: "I mentorship I think is just to guide, guide according to levels, the one lower your level. In terms of your career or and academic development or maybe the aspects that touch on your space at the institution."

Participant 11: "Mentorship is when you are guided by someone who has kind of walked a similar path to you in what you're doing."

Furthermore, Participant 8 described mentorship as stewardship, a concept echoed by nine other participants (Participants 1 to 7, 10, and 11). Thus, the collective perspective of participants in this study suggests that mentorship involves the mentor taking up the role and responsibility of a steward. Participants also note that although this role may pose challenges, including the necessity for engaging in difficult conversations, it comprises overseeing the wellbeing of another individual, providing intentional advice, engaging in open discussions, active listening, nurturing, and sharing expertise to foster the growth and development of that individual within a relationship of trust. Additionally, Participant 7 highlighted that mentors must consistently embody the behaviour they are guiding and advising the mentee on thus serving as role models. While Participant 9 emphasized that a mentorship relationship should be founded on mutual respect, with the mentee being open to guidance resulting from trusting the mentor.

Participant 1: "So, mentorship is gently taking somebody by the hand and inquiring through questioning and discussion how they can move forward."

Participant 2: "To take care emotionally as well as on the technical level: technical, like in our environment, it'll be the technical knowledge that you've got from the field that you are working in. Emotionally I think that sometimes we lack when it's coming to mentorship, and that is to take care emotionally. To make sure that that when there are emotional days for that person, that you are also there and that you work on a trust relationship with the, the person that you are mentoring. Mm-hmm. Because, um, they need to trust you to come to you. So it's not an easy task."

Participant 3: "kind of to stir you into the right direction and also somebody just to, to talk to when things get tough to say, I'm in this situation, have you experienced this before? How should I handle this? That's my understanding."

Participant 4: "...if you give mentorship, then you share with, with a person that you mentor or supervise your experience, the best practices, um, you know, those, those operational things, but also on a

leadership level... that guidance of am I on the right path" you know, just to get that clarity on where to go in order to reach your vision."

Participant 5: *"The thing is in, in a work environment, sometimes you get to an environment where you don't understand the dynamics. You need somebody that is there for you to explain, what is going on in that specific environment."*

Participant 6: *"Also, you know, looking at that person holistically and just guiding that person to reach the top of their potential. I think that is what mentorship for me entails."*

Participant 7: *"....but also being there as their support, you know, just knowing that they have somebody that they can chat to or come and ask a question and so forth. Also somebody, as a mentor, I believe your conduct should show them, what the expected conduct is, how you deal with matters and so on. Um, open and frank discussions between a mentor and a mentee is necessary because that's part of the guiding process. So to me, a mentor is really a guide."*

Participant 8: *"providing guidance, direction, stewardship, advice to somebody that is in need."*

Participant 9: *"There must be a relationship of mutual respect as well as trust. I think the mentee must trust the mentor, and also be receptive, to being mentored. So yeah, it is for me, in terms of assisting the mentee to develop into a role position."*

Participant 10: *"A mentor who is more experienced than yourself will take you through the rail in a smoother way than if you did not have one."*

Participant 11: *"So they get to share their experiences with you and help you navigate your area of whether it's research or your career or whatever the case may be. So it's normally somebody who's walked a similar path to you and they guide you along the way."*

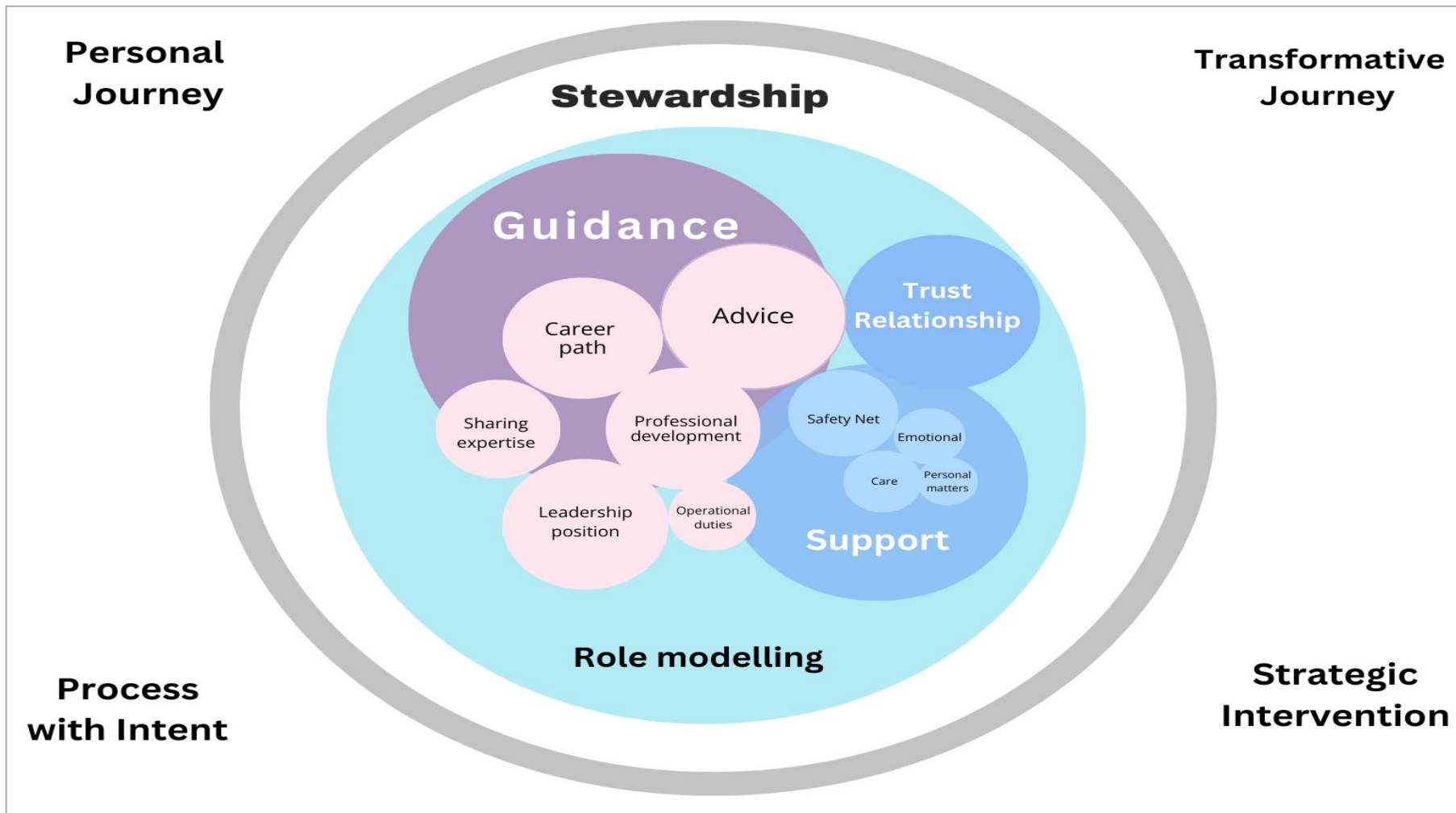


Figure 4.2: Bubble diagram depicting the participants' general understanding of mentorship. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.3.2 Participants' insights of mentorship perceptions in the higher education sector

Figure 4.3 below depicts a network graph illustrating the participants' perception of how mentorship is generally viewed in higher education. Table 4.2 provides a summarized overview of the primary supertheme, themes, and their respective subthemes derived from the thematic analysis of participants' perspectives on mentorship perception in higher education. Such a table (Table 4.2) was only computed for this section for clarity purposes due to the identification of an overarching supertheme, the emergent themes and subthemes. Briefly, three contrasting themes emerged from the overarching supertheme and these include: Ambivalent perceptions, Positively perceived and Negatively perceived. Within the Ambivalent perception theme, four subthemes emerged: Formal and informal, Varies: support and academic staff, Non-existent, and Social inequity biases. Furthermore, two subthemes emerged from the Positively perceived theme: Grow talent and Early career academic development. Lastly, three subthemes emerged from the Negatively perceived theme: Misconceptions, Added responsibility, and Non-existent.

Table 4.2: Overview of the primary supertheme, themes, and their respective subthemes for the thematic analysis of participants' perspectives on mentorship perception in higher education.

Supertheme	Themes	Subthemes
Double-sided	Ambivalent perceptions	Formal and informal Varies: support and academic staff Non-existent Social inequity biases
	Positively perceived	Grow talent Early career development
	Negatively perceived	Misconceptions Added responsibility Non-existent

(Researchers own compilation.)

Theme 1: Ambivalent perceptions

Participant 1 expressed an ambivalent perception of mentorship within the context of higher education, portraying it as a double-sided coin that encompasses both positive and negative perspectives. Additionally, contributing to this dual characteristic of the identified supertheme (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3), Participant 3 suggested that there is a perceived disparity in the existence and implementation of mentorship between the support and academic staff within higher education. This suggests that mentorship programmes may not be uniformly structured or accessible across different professional roles within the academic setting. On the other hand, Participant 7 highlighted the coexistence of an official and unofficial perception of mentorship, implying that the unofficial aspect might be more effective in certain contexts.

Participant 1: *"I think there's two sides to the coin.... So, there's the view that mentorship is underestimated and not used. That's the one side of the coin. And the other side of the point is that it is there to take somebody forward that actually needs help or, um, advancement and it's slightly negatively perceived. So, you know, I don't want to be mentored because then somebody's telling me what to do. I think, there is two tensions that happens, and it doesn't need to be that way."*

Participant 3: *"I suppose it differs between support and academic. I don't really, in my opinion, think there's mentorship on the support side. I can't speak to academic side. But personally. I haven't really seen mentorship in the support site in higher education."*

Participant 7: *"So there's this official picture and then there's this unofficial picture, which I think is sometimes more successful."*

Theme 2: Positive perceptions

Participants 8 and 11 expressed a generally positive perception of mentorship in higher education, emphasizing its beneficial outcomes (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3). Participant 11 highlighted that mentorship programmes primarily aim to support and develop early-career or less experienced academics. On the other hand, Participant 8 portrayed mentorship as an active and vibrant aspect within HEIs, stressing its crucial role in nurturing and growing talent within organizations. The metaphor employed by Participant 8, *"planting seeds on fertile grounds for talent to grow,"* signifies that mentorship is seen as a purposeful and strategic approach for developing talent within organizations. The viewpoints of these participants collectively underscore mentorship as a deliberate and proactive effort to nurture and guide newer members in the higher education community.

Participant 8: *"Well, if we look at what higher education stands for, you know, and I'm talking now specifically about the academic environment, by the very nature of being a professor, implicit in that is*

that you have to take others under your wing and guide and direct them, help them co-publish, provide stewardship to them. So, if we look at higher education, which the core business is teaching & learning, Research and community engagement; Mentorship is very, very active. In fact, in all the institutions that I worked with, mentorship is a very, very vibrant aspect by which we, we grow talent in organizations, we nurture talent in organizations, we ensure that we plant the seeds on fertile grounds for talent to grow.”

Participant 11: *“I think it's perceived well. There's a huge drive towards mentorship. But I think what I would say is it's geared a lot towards junior staff members.”*

Theme 3: Negative perceptions

On the contrary, Participants 4, 5, 7, and 10 highlighted negative aspects and challenges associated with mentorship in the higher education context (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3). Participant 4 highlighted that mentorship in higher education largely focuses on operational matters often neglecting the emotional wellbeing of the individuals involved. This suggests a lack of emotional support and emphasizes the necessity to consider personal wellbeing within the mentorship process. It also hints at potential limitations that may arise when mentorship relationships prioritize operational matters while neglecting the broader wellbeing of the individuals involved. Additionally, Participant 5 highlighted a critical problem of racial and gender bias within higher education mentorship. The latter participant emphasized that individuals from certain racial or gender backgrounds are often seen as needing mentorship, implying that their qualifications and industry knowledge are deemed insufficient. This points to biases in mentorship within higher education. Participant 7 offers a valuable perspective on how mentorship is perceived within the higher education realm by bringing attention to the perception that mentorship can sometimes be seen as an additional duty, carrying its own set of responsibilities and pressures. This perspective sheds light on the challenges mentors may be facing in academic environments. Furthermore, the idea that mentorship is viewed as an "added responsibility and pressure" suggests that individuals who are mentors may perceive this role as an extra burden on top of their existing duties. This perception can be influenced by various factors, including workload, expectations, or the lack of clear boundaries between mentorship responsibilities and other professional tasks. This is a cause for concern as it may potentially impact the willingness and enthusiasm of potential mentors. If individuals in academic settings view mentorship in this light, they may be less inclined to take on mentoring roles. Additionally, even if they do engage as mentors, this perception could influence the quality and effectiveness of the mentorship provided. Participant 5 echoes a similar observation that mentorship in higher education can at times feel forced and is then

implemented as a "tick off, tick box exercise". Consequently, the latter creates reluctance as well as a sense of obligation rather than a genuine desire to support and guide others.

Similarly, Participant 1 highlights that mentees in higher education sometimes perceive mentorship negatively (Table 4.2 and Figure 4.3). This participant further adds that the latter perception results in reluctance towards being mentored since they feel the process is instructional causing a sense of being controlled or directed in a way they may not desire. Participant 10 highlighted a prevalent misconception in higher education—only those with prestigious titles like professors or doctoral qualifications are seen as eligible mentors. This participant argued that this overlooks the experience and insights of individuals without such titles, who might have a deep understanding of grassroots-level challenges. This perception creates a disconnect between mentors and mentees, making it harder for mentees to access mentors with these formal titles. Participant 10 advocated for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to mentorship, emphasizing the need to recognize and utilize the expertise of individuals at various career stages for effective guidance and mentorship.

Participant 4: *"I think in higher education it's more like, give the right and wrong to a person. I perceive it as it's not like it's a personal process that I think it, it must be, you know, to not only guide a person in a sense of operational matters, but also keep that, that personal leadership, that emotional part of this person also into account."*

Participant 5: *"In higher education, for me, with the experience that I have, it's more like, and I'm going to be very frank when I'm looking at the dynamics, we come here with the qualifications. It seems to me that there are other races or If you are a certain type of race or gender, you always require mentoring. So it's like your qualifications don't suffice, it's not a full door that is open for you to enter into a certain job environment. It's like you always short of something. So, it's good and it's also sometimes bad because of how we use it..... Because if I'm forced to mentor you, I'm doing it because it's a, it's a tick off, tick box exercise and mentoring should not be that."*

Participant 7: *"I think there are various ways - Often, we have this concept that a mentor is ascribed to somebody because it is a requirement, and then the expectations of the mentor or the mentee are not always clear....There are people who sometimes think this whole concept of mentorship is just an extra role that puts extra pressure on them, because this person actually does not want to think for themselves - the mentee, you know - that kind of thing. Other times from mentees, I get the idea they feel, but what is the mentor actually doing because they want the mentor to be more of a, can I call it a teacher, you know, that kind of thing. This is how things must be done. Therefore, if you fully understand mentorship as a collaborative, working together, guiding, but not being a teacher - teacher is also not really the right word, instructor maybe."*

Participant 10: *"I think in higher education they take it that it should be those who are at professor level or doctor's level, who should be mentors simply because of their higher qualifications. So those who have who had many, many years' experience but do not have those two titles are perceived not to qualify for mentorship. And that is wrong because they do have experience, you know; from grassroots, they know exactly the issues at ground level. And can easily relate with those who come after them. They can mentor those who come after them. So, you find that there is sometimes a misalignment between the mentor and the mentee, because the mentor is high, high up there than the mentee. The mentor is the professor who sits in the office, who writes articles and research and this poor one below is actually not even able to access the mentor. So, it's perceived as if the label "mentor" suggests "you know all, you know better." and therefore you can guide anybody at any level at any level at anytime".*

4.3.3 Participants description of the level of mentorship in the South African university of interest

The thematic descriptions of the eleven participants regarding the level of mentorship in the South African university of interest are presented in Figures 4.4a and 4.4b below. As seen in Figure 4.4a, four primary themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding the level of mentorship in the South African university of interest: Significant, Non-existent, Informal, and Not There Yet. Within the Significant theme, two subthemes emerged: Promoted and Academic mentorship. Under the non-existent theme, three subthemes were identified: Time constraints, Self-navigated, and Absence at the leadership level. A total of two subthemes emerged from the Informal theme: Unstructured, and Peer mentorship. Lastly, four subthemes emerged from the Not There Yet theme: Not fully established, Negatively stigmatized, Unshared success stories, and New Women in Leadership (WIL) mentorship initiative. Overall, the latter themes and subthemes indicate differing viewpoints among participants regarding the level of mentorship at the university of interest. These themes and viewpoints will be discussed below.

Theme 1: Significant

Participants 8 and 10 described the level of mentorship within the South African university of interest positively. Participant 8 described it as *"quite significant"*, emphasizing the presence of mentorship across multiple organizational units, specifically highlighting the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) for its active role in nurturing mentorship. This suggests that the participant perceives the level of mentorship to be structured and organized within the university. Similarly, Participant 10 described the mentorship level within the university of interest as actively promoted and well regarded within the university. This participant underscored that mentor allocation initiatives were implemented at the beginning of each semester, highlighting a structured systematic and institution-wide effort to facilitate mentoring

relationships. Also, Participant 9 noted having received a mentorship opportunity thus reiterating Participant's 8 and 10 positive remarks.

Both participants' responses collectively affirm a positive and supportive mentoring culture within the university community. Furthermore, Participants 11 and Participant 7 highlighted that mentorship is actively practiced within academic departments. Participant 11 specifically emphasized the importance of academic mentorship for junior staff members, underlining the role it plays in helping them navigate and define their career paths. Their personal involvement as a mentor in the university's academic mentorship programme demonstrates a hands-on approach to fostering growth within the academic community. On the other hand, Participant 7, while speaking from their faculty's perspective, confirmed the existence of a well-structured academic mentorship system. They outlined the specific roles designated to research and academic mentors for new staff members, showcasing a formalized mentorship approach tailored to support and facilitate the development of academic staff. These insights collectively underscore the active and purposeful nature of academic mentorship, illustrating its role in guiding and advancing individuals within the academic sphere.

Participant 8: *"You know, uh, quite significant because we have it in several of our environments. If we think about CTL. They do a fair amount in in nurturing mentorship. If we look at what's happening in OD and talent management space, a fair amount of managing mentorship is done in the organization. So I think they the organization does invest significantly in its people."*

Participant 10: *"It is promoted because we are reminded every beginning of the year, actually beginning of each semester, we are reminded that a those who do not have mentors Should please come forth so that they can be allocated mentors. So it is taken serious and from colleagues from other faculties I sometimes hear them talking about their mentors and that they have to identify mentors for themselves. So it means it's not just a faculty thing, it's a university thing."*

Participant 11: *"There is for junior staff members who are trying to figure out their career path, the academic mentorship; so I myself am a mentor on the university academic mentorship programme."*

Participant 7: *"In general. Mm-hmm. I really can't speak to the whole institution. I can speak to the faculty I am from - in the sense of the programmes that we have. We have a research mentor for each of our new staff members, and we have an academic mentor; and these have very specific roles, so a formal structure of mentorship is available to new staff members."*

Participant 9: *"When I came here, I was appointed a mentor - and I like that.... The mentorship was an arrangement between myself and my mentor as well as my line manager."*

Theme 2: Non-existent

On the contrary, the descriptions shared by Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 11 collectively portrayed a bleak picture of mentorship at the leadership level within the university of interest (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b). Participant 1 expressed their perception of a non-existent mentorship structure in the university of interest. However, Participants 5 and 7 noted that mentorship lacked greatly in the leadership level of the university of interest. Similarly, Participant 11 underscored that although mentorship is active in academic positions, this is not the case for the leadership level. Participant 3 highlighted the lack of accessible mentorship opportunities for women in leadership within the university of interest, a concern also acknowledged by Participant 5. This absence of mentorship avenues for women in leadership was perceived, by Participant 3, as a constraint when seeking guidance. The participant emphasized their reliance on their line manager and pointed out that if the line manager was unhelpful, they had no alternatives within the existing framework. Participant 5 suggested that this can result in individuals often feeling lonely in their work environment owing to a lack of support from those who have walked the path ahead of them. Nonetheless, Participant 2 added a nuance to these perceptions, expressing that while mentorship is acknowledged within the development plans, its practical application is hindered by overwhelming time constraints and compliance issues, rendering it more of a theoretical notion than a tangible reality (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b).

Participant 1: *"Well, it's actually not existing from my viewpoint. I had to find my own way."*

Participant 5: *"It's not great. I must say that again.....There is no established programme where you can know that - okay, I can go to this person to receive mentorship."*

Participant 7: *"Within leadership, as far as I'm aware, there's nothing formal. I've never been assigned a mentor. So I'm not aware of any formal mentorship in our institution."*

Participant 11: *"There's no active mentorship programme for people in leadership."*

Participant 3: *"Currently, I don't see it. We have a lot of issues with staff as, as managerial females. We don't actually have anyone to turn to. You can turn to your line manager, but if you get shut down there, there's nowhere for you to go. There's nobody else that you can speak to, to say, listen, try a different approach. Yes, you can speak to your peers and your colleagues, but that's as far as it goes."*

Participant 5: *"But I think it becomes very lonely. So for me, it's a lonely environment because it also feels like people want to be pushed to mentor others."*

Participant 2: *"I think when it's coming to focusing on development, We say you need to focus on it and it's part of our development plans and we can monitor it there, but sometimes I feel it's only words, because we are so busy trying to survive and to comply with all the compliance issues at the institution"*

that we meet. Like in really engage and making time for mentoring. so I think it's, it's not on the level that I think it's supposed to be."

Theme 3: Informal

Participants 7 and 8 both shared the perception that the level of mentorship within the university of interest lacks formal structuring classifying it as informal (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b). Participant 7 further indicated that despite the informal nature of mentoring within the university, it remains effective in systematically developing mentees to fulfil specific roles. Also, Participants 5 and 7 highlighted that the absence of a formal mentorship programme for women in leadership positions has prompted female leaders within the university to partake in peer mentoring through camaraderie. Participant 9 also acknowledged participating in a peer mentorship relationship within the university of interest. Overall, these participants underscored the prevalent informality in the mentorship processes within the university, calling attention to the need for a more structured and defined mentorship approach for women in leadership.

Participant 7: *"So I'm not aware of any formal mentorship in our institution. However, I think that we have a number of female leaders who are very open to act informally as a mentor who I can go to so I will consider myself the mentee and to go and ask what would you do in this situation or how would you have dealt with this and so forth. If this is mentorship or more a case of camaraderie amongst managers, I cannot tell you. But the university, as I said, have certain structures in place, and then in terms of leadership, I'm not aware of anything really that specifically falls under the umbrella that says, this is your mentor, this is mentorship."*

Participant 8: *"I think mentorship in higher education currently happens, but not in a very formalized manner. I think mentorship has been going on in this space for many years already, but not like in a formalized manner to say that you have a mentee and you ensure that you develop that person to fulfil a particular role and get the best out of that person. I mean that is not a very structured way in which we're currently doing it. I think it's something that if you're in a leadership position, you either take ownership of that or you don't take ownership of that. And also how you see yourself in your leadership role."*

Participant 4: *"It's not great. I must say that again, if I think about our institution, the only mentorship that I've got is from colleagues that I have a good relationship with, but there's no established programme where you can know that, okay, I can go to this person to, receive mentorship."*

Participant 9: *".....- but in this case it was more peer like."*

Theme 4: Not there yet

Participant 5 strongly conveyed that the mentorship level within the university of interest has not yet met the desired standard (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b). The latter participant raised valid concerns by questioning why some academics remain stagnant at lower levels despite the existence of mentors. This discrepancy prompts a critical examination of whether the mentorship provided within the academic sphere of the university of interest is effective in all departments. Moreover, the participant pointed out a notable absence of mentorship, particularly for support staff within the academic setting. This implies that the mentorship framework may not be inclusive enough, potentially hindering career growth and progression for various segments of the university community. The participant firmly stressed the necessity for improvement, suggesting that there is still a long journey ahead to align mentorship with career paths effectively. Furthermore, Participant 9 noted a lack of openness and transparency in the university's mentorship system, emphasizing the need for improvements in its accessibility and clarity. The latter participant also expressed uncertainty about their comprehensive understanding of the mentorship landscape within the university, recognizing the institution's vastness and complexity. This aligns with Participant 5's perspective on mentorship visibility, suggesting that sharing experiences and creating platforms for mentorship storytelling could shed light on the existing mentorship dynamics. Encouraging such openness can potentially bridge the identified gap and lead to a more inclusive and effective mentorship framework within the university. Furthermore, these observations underscore the critical need for enhanced communication and transparency in the mentorship framework, ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to valuable mentorship opportunities. Secondly, Participant 9 further alluded to their perception of secrecy surrounding mentorship relationships within the university. The secrecy, described as being "under wraps" and "low profile", implies a reluctance to openly acknowledge mentor-mentee dynamics. This concealed approach to mentorship might stem from the perceived negative association, where individuals may not want to publicly disclose their mentorship involvement due to potential concerns about how it may be interpreted by colleagues and superiors. This could suggest that there could be a perception within the university that seeking mentorship is a signal of being unprepared or inadequate for one's current role. This negative perception might contribute to the secrecy and underrepresentation of mentorship relationships. Addressing and challenging this perception is essential to foster a culture where mentorship is seen as a valuable tool for growth and development rather than a sign of inadequacy. Open and transparent mentorship programmes can help reduce this stigma and encourage more individuals to seek and benefit from mentorship opportunities.

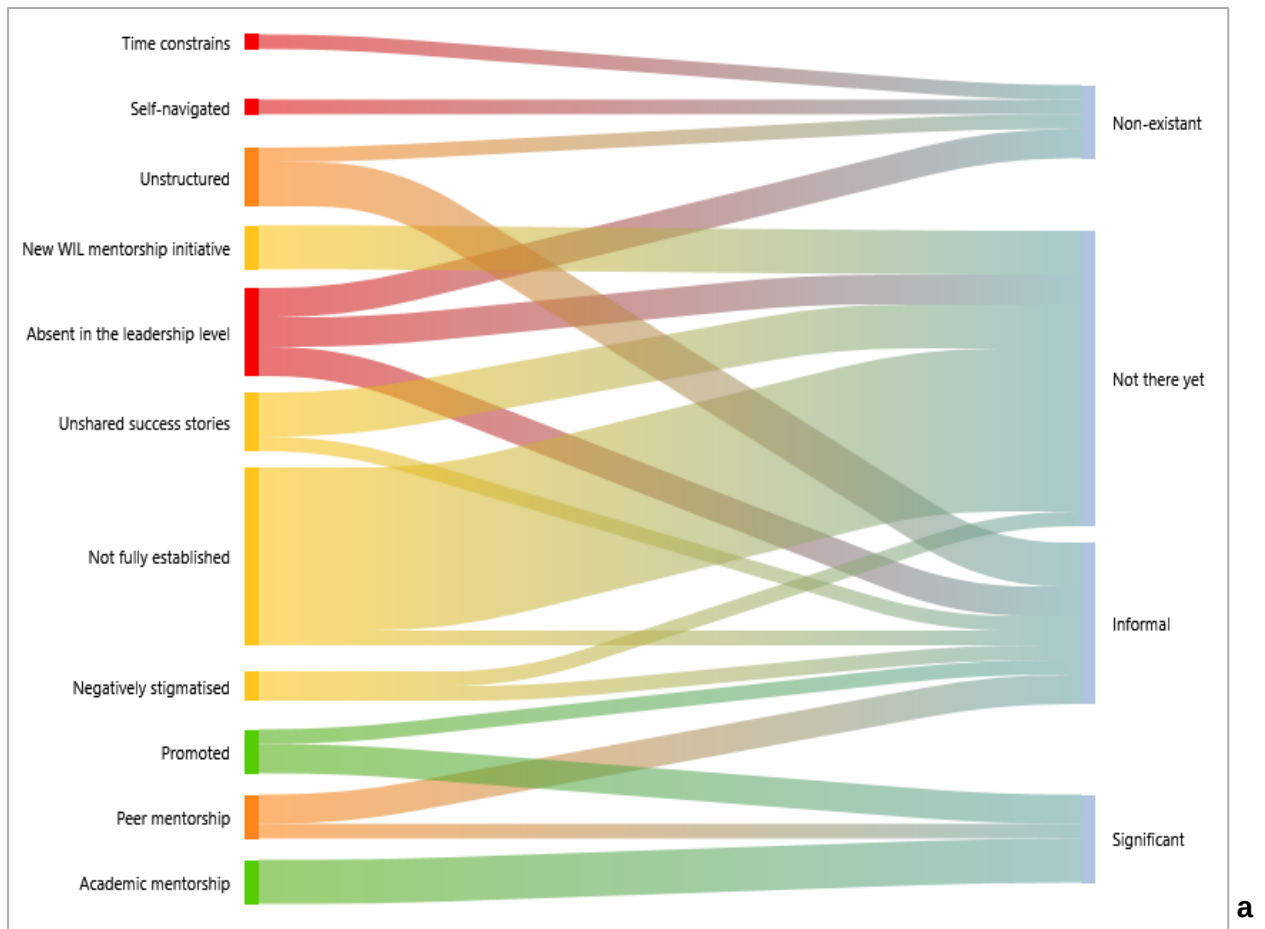
Participant 5: *"Uhm, we're not there yet, we are not there yet, we can improve because currently, we're told in the academic environment each and every senior academic has an element of mentoring within their KPAs they need to mentor someone. But you find that we have people that were on lower levels for a very long time. So that doesn't gel. So you wonder - if we've got mentors, but we have people that are being stagnant and especially in the academic space - within support It's something else - but in an academic, space there is a progression, you know, there's that career path; you know that if you come as a junior, you come with this qualification, but if you do A, B, C, D, E, then you are able to move. So if we say we have mentors, but, and there's prescribed rules, and we still have people who are stagnant for a long period in on lower levels, is it the people that are not interested or is it the type of mentorship that we have? Or is it work overload or what, what is it? So I think we still have a long way to go, we can do it... Maybe people are not telling stories. Perhaps maybe what we need to do as one of the things, or, um, that can maybe give us a, a better idea of, uh, What kind of mentorship is available in our environment to say, let's have a blog about a shout out to my mentor. I think in that way, we will be able to know the impact that other people are making on, their team members or on a personal level, being a student, they are looking up to you, you know? So, I'm thinking we are not there yet, but, on the contrary, it might be happening. It's just that we are not telling our stories, we are not sharing. So, somebody might be proud, but they're not telling you. So perhaps maybe, we need to start sharing our journeys and experience."*

Participant 9: *"I don't think it's as open and transparent as it could be. But, of course, I don't know what goes on in the entire university. There's so much happening, and there may be that I'm just not aware of..... Acknowledging that you, somebody's assisting you and so on and so on. I do think, you know, there's some kind of a negative stigmatization to that by the mentee. So it's kind of secretive, under wraps, or low profile, that kind of thing. So a person won't know you're a mentee, you're a mentor, and so on, unless it's an open mentorship programme."*

Nonetheless, Participants 1, and 3 acknowledged the university's efforts towards establishing a formal mentorship programme for women in leadership (Figures 4.4a and 4.4b).

Participant 1: *"I know that they are trying to promote a new mentorship programme that's supposed to be launched at the end of this month."*

Participant 3: *"Now, they did launch something now, but again, it's one person in an entire department, in an entire, uh, directorate or unit. That's not enough."*



		2: Informal 26	4: Not there yet 38	5: Significant 33	6: Non-existent 7
● Absent in the leadership level 6		2	2		2
● Academic mentorship 3				3	
● Negatively stigmatised 2		1	1		
● New WIL mentorship initiati... 3			3		
● Not fully established 12		1	11		
● Peer mentorship 3		2		1	
● Promoted 3		1		2	
● Self-navigated 1					1
● Time constrains 1					1
● Unshared success stories 4		1	3		
● Unstructured 4		3			1
Totals		11	20	6	5

b

Figures 4.4: **a.** Sankey graph depicting the emergent themes and subthemes from the participants' varying descriptions of the level of mentorship in the university of interest. **b.** Supporting theme – subtheme analysis. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.3.4 Participants perceptions regarding the importance of mentorship in advancing the career pathing of women in leadership

The thematic descriptions of the eleven participants perceptions regarding the importance of mentorship in advancing the career pathing of women in leadership are presented in Figures 4.5a and 4.5b below. A total of two themes emerged from the participant's responses regarding the importance of mentorship for women in leadership: Importance of mentorship for women in leadership as well as Challenges of women in leadership. A total of six subthemes emerged from the Importance of mentorship for women in leadership theme: Career advancement, Career pathing, Providing support, Succession planning, Work-life balance guidance, and Affirmation. While four subthemes emerged from the Challenges of women in leadership theme: Strong male networks, Legacy of patriarchy, Multifaceted roles of women and a lack of female networks.

Themes 1 and 2: Importance of mentorship for women in leadership as well as Challenges of women in leadership

As seen in Figures 4.5a and 4.5b, the various sub-themes within the two themes overlapped and thus suggesting the challenges of women in leadership also reiterate the importance of mentorship for these women through. Also, participants in this study all indicated that mentorship is important for women in leadership. Briefly, Participant 11 pointed out that historical biases continue to impact how society views women's leadership abilities. This participant emphasized that mentorship is crucial for dismissing doubts and reinforcing women's confidence in their inherent leadership potential through affirmation. Participant 7 echoed the latter sentiments by stressing the significance of mentorship as a support system during moments of self-doubt. Additionally, Participant 2 shared her personal experience, highlighting how mentorship guided her career path, especially during periods of uncertainty. Participant 11 also noted that mentorship remains essential as women progress in their careers and take on evolving roles and responsibilities. This, underscores the importance of mentors who understand the unique challenges women face, offering guidance and emotional support.

Participant 11: *"I think it's very important because leadership doesn't come with a manual and It's something you kind of learn by doing and it really helps if you have the A mentor to speak to.... And I think historically still there's still biases that either women are not good at what they're doing or they don't know how to lead. So in that instance, I think the mentorship can also just help from for women leader to realise that she is she's doing it, she's capable of doing it. So, it's almost just a reminder to say. Not to say that you're not good at what you're doing, but you are good enough. So, if you have a mentor that someone can, that can also help to affirm you, you know, and just cheer you along".*

Participant 7: *"Sometimes it's necessary and when one enters a leadership position, you are often second guessing yourself and so forth. So, if you have somebody to chat to, to go check in with, it can be very helpful".*

Furthermore, Participants 3, 4, and 6 all emphasized the strategic importance of mentorship in building a pipeline of leaders through succession planning (Figures 4.5a and 4.5b). Participant 3 highlighted the need for identifying and mentoring individuals with leadership potential to empower existing staff and plan for succession. In contrast, Participant 6 further underscored the importance of structured mentorship plans for nurturing leadership qualities within institutions. On the other hand, Participants 1, 2, and 11 reinforced the unique situation of women (multi-faceted roles of women) in leadership and reiterated the critical role of mentorship for women in achieving work-life balance, given the specific challenges they face. Participant 2 explained how mentorship provides guidance in balancing various roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, Participant 1 highlighted the complexities of work-life balance for women in leadership, pointing out the added stress and societal expectations they must contend with. This participant stressed the role of mentorship in helping women navigate these challenges and counter societal perceptions.

Participant 3: *"I think it's important if you want to focus on, succession planning where you want to build up your own people and you don't necessarily want to bring someone from outside, when somebody leaves. So, if you want to empower your own staff who have the intellectual knowledge, you have to at least identify some people that, let's be honest, not everybody has the potential to move up in the ranks, especially in a managerial position. So, you do have to identify people and kind of mentor them and coach them and give them additional support to say, listen, um, this is how you would have to handle this situation."*

Participant 4: *"So it is, it is crucial that there must be, um, sufficient supervision to upcoming women, and a holistic supervision, because I think they bring a new color, a new, dynamic into this whole leadership thing in our institution. Because if you think of, um, women in a peromnes 7, I think there's not even, um, 300 women in the whole institution there, which is, it's unthinkable."*

Participant 6: *"Because if you have young academics coming in, I think the first thing that we need to do is if you see the potential in somebody, there must be already a plan, you know, sit down, you know, and have a plan to actually develop that person into a leader because leadership is not something that happens overnight. You can't take a person and just put a person in a leadership position without, um, scaffolding that leadership qualities and developing that leadership qualities in a scaffolding way. So it's, it's actually something that must be done. In a plan structured with intent, and I think we shortfall currently in terms of, as an institution, we don't do enough in terms of growing our, our leadership, in our faculties."*

Participant 2: *"I think when it's coming to women, it is very important because I think there's so many roles that we play. Um, as I said to you, we've got more than one function or role to play. In our personal lives as well as in our careers. So and to, um, to have somebody that understands and that can lead you, um, when you are doubting yourself. Okay, but now I focus on my career. Um, and I do not have enough time for my children, especially, um, when you are younger. Now you need to grow in your career. You can't leave it up until you are 50 years old, but you also need to raise your children, and to spend some time with them. Then it's very important to have somebody that can be there for you. Mm-hmm, um, especially when it's coming to yes. Guidance. When it's coming to the, you know, studies, but also guidance when it's coming to your personal life. And that's what I believe there's an interaction between be there emotionally for somebody as well as being there for them because of the fact that you are a specialist in the knowledge of the field that you're in."*

Participant 1: *"I would say that it is necessary to have a mentorship, especially for female, because we've got a complex work-life balance that we have to maintain. And to become successful in addition to breaking through the glass ceiling, you have to actually also find a way of coping with the everyday stress of being a wife, having to take care of a family and excelling in your career. And those additional stresses do come at a price. And it's normally the women that push through, that are seen to be either too career, oriented or too pushy or to something. While if you were a male and did that, you were pursuing your career. And I think that is very challenging. And understanding how women have to find a balance is really hard."*

Interestingly, participants in this study also provided valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by women in leadership positions that reiterate the importance of mentorship for women in leadership. Participants 5 and 10 highlighted the challenges and disparities faced by women in leadership positions such as striving to strike a balance in their roles and dealing with facing belittlement and difficulties in asserting themselves. Similarly, Participant 4 highlighted the essential role of mentorship in environments historically dominated by men, advocating for comprehensive programmes to counter gender disparities and support emerging female leaders. Participant 10 emphasized the importance of experienced women sharing knowledge and experiences with mentees to combat prevailing workplace stereotypes and biases. Participants 5 and 8 highlighted a challenge where some women may resist the idea of supporting each other, as they fear it might make the challenging path they have traversed easier for others. Resultantly, Participant 8 introduced the concept of *"paying it forward,"* encouraging women to collaborate and foster career advancement pathways in order to address the resistance from some women who question the need to ease the path for others. Interestingly, Participant 8 further acknowledged the gratification that comes with making a meaningful contribution to another's career development.

Participant 10: *"You know, It is important in a sense that those who will mentor you as a woman, surely will be more experienced and more knowledgeable than you as a mentee. And sharing experiences of*

what women went through or are going through those experiences may be helpful, maybe used as resources to ground the mentee You know, to make the mentee even more stronger and understanding the settings that the mentee finds himself herself, he herself in. because, of course, women are going through stuff..... not being recognised as a woman just because they there are three men you are the only woman. The three men will be listened to. The importance, I mean is that the woman in the workplace - though the perception is changing and must really say and the institution is working hard In making sure that women are recognised as much as men are recognised But that is not yet at 0%. - So women are belittled, women are not taken. You know, as you know, who can people who can perform better than men. You know those perceptions. It's only perceptions about women. It's not that. That's how they are. It's only perceptions."

Participant 5: "So, it's challenging. You always have to balance, because to us it's also a work in progress, because we need to work on ourselves as, as women because sometimes we are being challenged and we are being belittled, we always become bossy you know and that also creates, a lot of conflict Because most of the time people will not listen to you if you, you are angry all the time.... The other thing about women in leadership, there's also women to women conflicts, and those are the, the ones that are actually killing the progression. So, in most cases, we as women, we've got self-esteem issues."

Participant 8: "Absolutely crucial. I think just not, not just in women and leadership, but somehow men get these mentors more readily and, you know, more naturally, women don't think about it as normally as having this as part of the their tool set to advance themselves. So, it's very, very crucial that we conscientize women that we make them aware of opportunities what they can gain from it so that they can actively benefit and advance their careers. Important in that is this whole pay it forward concept that women somehow don't adopt very readily, you know, lots of women think that once they've advanced, they've had to struggle and they've had to fight a lot of prejudices and overcome stereotypes and all that, they're belief is, why should they make it easier for somebody else? But by adopting a pay it forward attitude, everyone of us has somebody that has played a significant role in getting us where we are today and in acknowledging and celebrating those people, we need to say how can we be that person in someone else's life, opening up career paths, you know, opening gateways, helping others. Because when you sit and you reflect on the landscape of the impact that you've had, I'm sure knowing that you made a meaningful contribution in somebody's career growth would be very rewarding to anyone."

Additionally, Participants 1 to 6 as well as 8 shed light on the lack of female networks, resulting in limited mentorship opportunities for women in career development and leadership. Participants 1 and 8 noted that men developed networks easily as opposed to women. Participants 1 to 6 including Participant 8 pointed out the historical absence of established networks for women in contrast to already existing male-dominated networks. Participant 3 further highlighted the scarcity of male mentors actively engaging in the mentorship of women, noting that only a select few provided substantial guidance and support. While Participant 4

highlighted the unique perspectives women bring to leadership roles and advocated for comprehensive mentorship to fully harness their potential. Thus, the participants in this study recognized the distinct dynamic that women bring to leadership, underscoring the need for enhanced supervision and support. Participant 5 proposed cultivating a unique leadership style tailored to the specific needs of women, emphasizing care, and understanding of the challenges encountered by women in leadership roles. This participant also advocated for women supporting each other to maintain a cohesive sisterhood. These findings collectively emphasise the participants' strong belief in the significance of female support networks and mentorship opportunities for women in leadership positions.

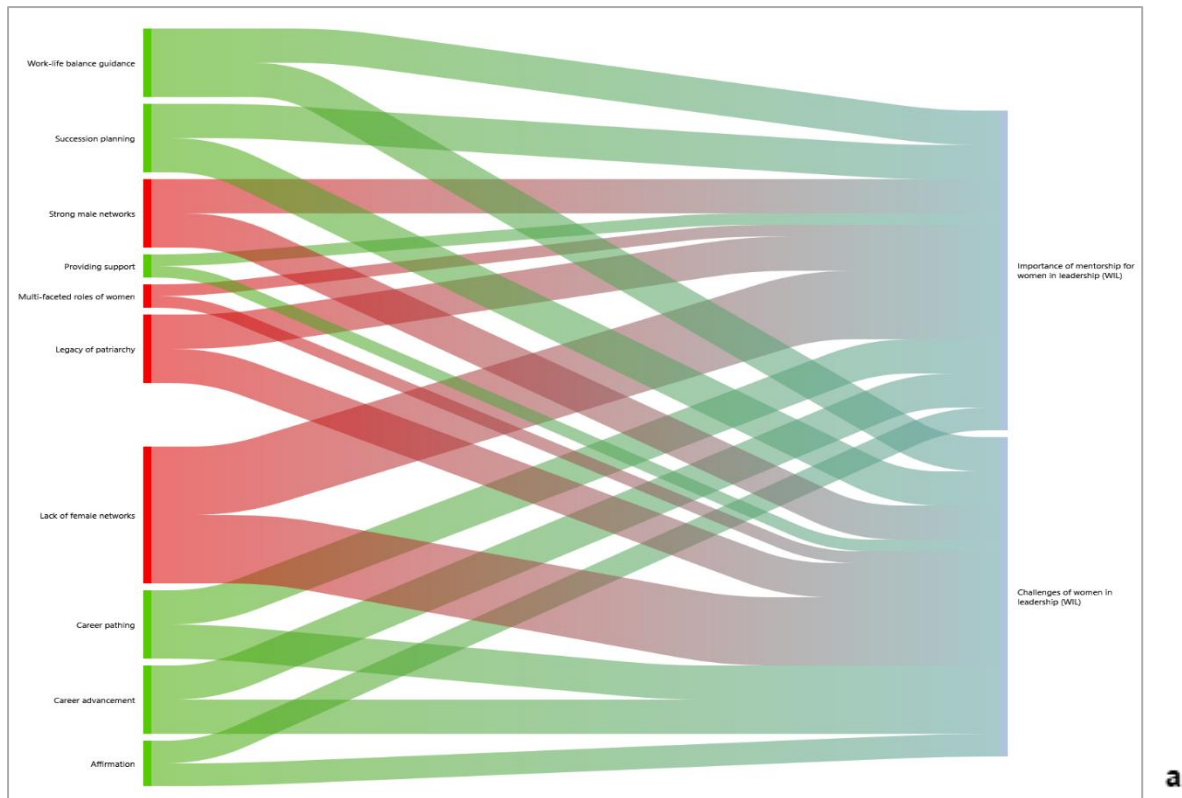
Participant 1: *"One of the things that I did ask for two ladies I approached to mentor me was why don't women work and support each other more in terms of career development and advancement than men do. Because men, for example, in the old apartheid, they had these, these, these, what is it called the Broderbond and those kinds of societies and even now, you know, there are males and I know they are females as well that are in what is they call it, the guys with the rings. And there's special ways that people support one another in terms that's been an historical thing if you look across the history of the world. That's especially amongst men. It's been very easy to do, but not amongst women. And I'm not sure what the cause is of that, but those structures will never be but dismantled. They will be in place beyond anything that is put in place in my opinion."*

Participant 2: *"When I started at the university - and I think we are lucky now - it was like you as a female in a leadership role were not really acknowledged on the same level as the men and we always spoke as my mentor and because of the fact that it feels to me that they are the ones that I could relate easier with because they allow me to have the chance to be a leader. And mentor me into a leader which that group of men did not give you a chance. It was like "because of the fact that you are woman. You cannot be as good as us." Um, that was my experience. Nowadays it's not so."*

Participant 3: *"I don't really see a lot of men assisting women in terms of mentorship. You do get people that are really good with it, but in, in most cases you won't get it."*

Participant 4: *"It's crucial. It is really crucial, especially for women in leadership positions to have mentorship because predominantly on our campus for instance, there was a lot of male dominance in the past. And that was also where that operational things and this is how we as men are going to do it. And with the upcoming women, they neglect that part of giving us that space and do a overall holistic mentorship. It was just about, this is how it's going to work, and these people are going to take the decisions, which usually was, probably, predominantly male."*

Participant 5: *"So we need to have our own leadership style as women."*



		3: Importance of mentorship for women in leadership (WIL) 34	4: Challenges of women in leadership (WIL) 34
● ◆ Affirmation	4	2	2
● ◆ Career advancement	6	3	3
● ◆ Career pathing	6	3	3
● ◆ Lack of female networks	12	6	6
● ◆ Legacy of patriarchy	6	3	3
● ◆ Multi-faceted roles of women	2	1	1
● ◆ Providing support	2	1	1
● ◆ Strong male networks	6	3	3
● ◆ Succession planning	6	3	3
● ◆ Work-life balance guidance	6	3	3
Totals		28	28

Figure 4.5: a. Sankey graph depicting the emergent themes and subthemes from the participants varying descriptions of the importance of mentorship for women in leadership. **b.** Supporting theme – subtheme analysis. (Researcher’s own compilation.)

4.4 Research question 3

4.4.1 Participants mentorship experiences

Figure 4.6 below is a bar graph presenting an overview of the participant's mentorship experiences throughout their higher education career. Of the eleven participants, nine reported having received mentorship in their respective higher education careers, while two did not have a mentor in any stage of their higher education career. Thus, Figure 4.7 is a network graph depicting the emergent themes derived from the descriptions provided by the nine participants regarding what they gained from their mentorship experiences. Among those who received mentorship, six had female mentors, one had a male mentor and two had mentors of both genders.

As seen in Figure 4.7, a total of five themes emerged from the data regarding the participant's description of what they gained from their mentorship experience: Support, Empowerment, Enhanced soft skills, Affirmation, and Nothing. Furthermore, four subthemes emerged from the Enhanced soft skills theme: Constructive feedback, Conflict resolution, Promoting a positive workplace and Interpersonal skills. Overall, eight out of the nine participants who reported having mentorship experiences emphasized that their experiences were positive.

Theme 1: Support

Participants 1, 2, 4 and 8 expressed how their mentorship relationships played a crucial role in providing essential support during the early stages of their roles. The latter participants emphasized the value of mentorship in enhancing their understanding of organizational dynamics and operational aspects within their current (Participants 1, 2, 4) and previous positions (Participant 8) (Figure 4.7). They highlighted the mentor's support in knowledge transfer, including practical demonstrations, hands-on technical guidance, and insights into decision-making processes. The mentorship significantly aided in their smooth transition into their roles and boosted their confidence, showcasing the importance of mentorship in providing essential support and guidance.

Participant 1: *"I think the first thing I acquired was a better understanding of the hierarchy of the university and how it functions."*

Participant 2: *"I learned a lot how to handle the technical stuff....to see somebody, doing that and really doing it practical, all the time, that was adding a lot of value; and then things like teaching you the skills that you don't learn in textbooks. being there for me when I've got questions on 'OK, the team members in my team, why are they acting like they are?' there and I can know I'm in a safe environment knowing that they will not go and speak to somebody else about that."*

Participant 4: *"I had a female, that assisted me, you know, with the operational things, to say, 'but this is how you make, you know, that type of decisions,' and 'this is who you need to consult with,' and 'this is how you execute that operational plan', which is totally a different field than that I was used to. So that made it, that gave me a lot of clarity with regard to that."*

Participant 8: *"So there was a male who was a level higher than me, that almost took me under his wing and, you know, schooled me about that specific industry's practices, about the way things are done, how the culture operates, you know, lots of things."*

Themes 2, 3 and 4: Empowerment, Affirmation, and Enhanced soft skills

Participant 6 highlighted the empowering nature of her mentorship journey, emphasizing her mentor's role as a sponsor who not only developed her skills but also provided opportunities. Participant 5, on the other hand, shared how her mentorship relationship supported her and improved her self-belief thus helping her to confront her fears. Similarly, Participant 11 expressed how her mentor provided affirmation, helping her overcome her fears. Furthermore, Participant 9 discussed how her mentorship relationship improved her interpersonal skills and emphasized the importance of a positive workplace culture. This participant also learned the significance of treating people with respect. Participants 2 and 5 shared similar experiences, focusing on the emotional intelligence they gained from their mentors during meetings and how this helped them better navigate conflicts and understand their colleagues' perspectives. The mentorship provided them with a fresh outlook on problem-solving, focusing on the process rather than the individuals involved (Figure 4.7).

Participant 2: *"What I've learned is spending time with them in meetings was also good name because sometimes You are getting emotional involved in a meeting. And to to see them in a meeting acting Not only consistent, but also emotional intelligent by saying, Okay, I understand my emotions and I put myself sometimes in somebody else's shoes so that I can understand that Why? Where are they coming from? And assist me a lot and I think internally also I've got like. In my own environment, that mean to but also outside of my own environment, I mentor Which is also good because it's not. We are all thinking the same when it's coming to finances to get to you have somebody else there and tell you okay in my shoes this is how I experienced this. This is how I do some stuff and both sides of my brain working not only my outside as the financial people is also assisting a lot job okay."*

Participant 5: *"So, when I started I had this, mentor, the director of that specific environment. I had to attend training in Joburg. And then I'm like, I'm scared to drive. She asked me, don't you have a driver's license? I said, I do, but I'm scared to go to Joburg by myself, and she was like: 'You've got options: I can get a driver for you to take you there and there, or, You do it yourself, by facing your fears, your demons, and then you go, because you're gonna go there more often, you're the only one in this role. So, most of the training is in Jozi. So, the sooner you get used to it, the better'; And then she gave me*

a weekend to think about and I'm like, okay, I wanna do this, so I'm gonna do it. Mm-hmm, then they gave me a navigator, then I went to, I drove to Joburg and it was actually very nice. My mentor helped me to get out of my comfort zone.....So, you know, in most cases, when things go wrong, It's, it becomes an agony, agony, but what I've learned was through her mentoring was that whenever you are at the workspace and there's a conflict, don't look at the circle, that the circle wrote this email and whatsoever, what you need to do, you need to go back to the process and check where in the process did you go wrong that you ended up. Having to have this conflict. So, I learned, you know, in football, they say, don't go for the man, you go for the ball. So, that has taught me that whenever there's screaming and shouting or emails that, you know, those career limiting moves emails, what you need to do is you need to go back to the drawing table and say what transpired because when you resolve that process conflict, then you will prevent others from happening. So, I have learned that through a conflict situation, you need to go back and check what went wrong because that's where the problem is”.

Participant 6: *“I think she developed those attributes with, besides developing my Expertise in research, she also, you know, developed, not, not just developed, she exposed me to opportunities, and I think that is what she did. She positioned me at the right place and exposed me to the right opportunities when it was necessary, and I think, as I said, you need that guidance, you know, and that is what she done very well, you know, at the, at the stage when she, so, okay, I was now ready to go the next step...And I think that is what she done very well, just to, to put my, me into that space. And I think that is what the mentor needs to do. She, she have to put you in that space. What you make of it. It all depends on you. You know, you can do it for somebody.”*

Participant 9: *“What I've gained from that, first of all, I think, um, the personality of the person was for me, what struck me, the most, you know, having fun while you are working. I was the total opposite, you know, a lot of laughing, a lot of, um, yeah, fun while you are working and enjoying and that doesn't mean that we were playing no, you know, we were working. But it was fun, it was enjoyable. There were a lot of laughs. Uh, also from the person, I learned how to treat people with respect, um, always, you know, even if you are going to be critical or not approve of something, the way you translate this to a person and this was not always to me, you know, the way she did it with other people and I thought, yo, I would have been mad if somebody did that or say that in this forum or in this space or on this platform, you know, how she dealt with that kind of thing was for me, very, very important.”*

Participant 11: *“What I've gained is that person has allowed me to first of all understand - because I had a lot of fears - So understand that first of all my fears. I have. I shouldn't be so scared. So there was a lot of that. That happened.”*

Theme 5: Nothing

Nonetheless, Participant 10 expressed a highly negative mentorship experience characterized by a complete lack of engagement and support from their assigned mentor, leaving them feeling neglected and unsupported throughout the mentoring period (Figure 4.7).

Participant 10: *“Absolutely nothing. Absolutely nothing because we I don't remember having a meeting even. With the mentor just to say ‘how are you doing? What are you doing now? What are you busy with this whole quarter? Or what are you busy with today? Are you coping? There's a conference. Are you going there? There's something on the learning management system, don't you want to try it?’ I have never. The beginning of the year I sign this will be my mentor and that will be it. I will send again next year.”*

Overall, these findings suggest that mentorship plays a critical role in supporting and enhancing the professional development, personal growth, and workplace culture of individuals. However, there are instances where mentorship falls short and does not fulfil its intended role. These shortcomings in mentorship can lead to negative experiences marked by neglect and unsupportive mentorship interactions, which can have a detrimental impact on both the mentor-mentee relationship and the overall work environment.

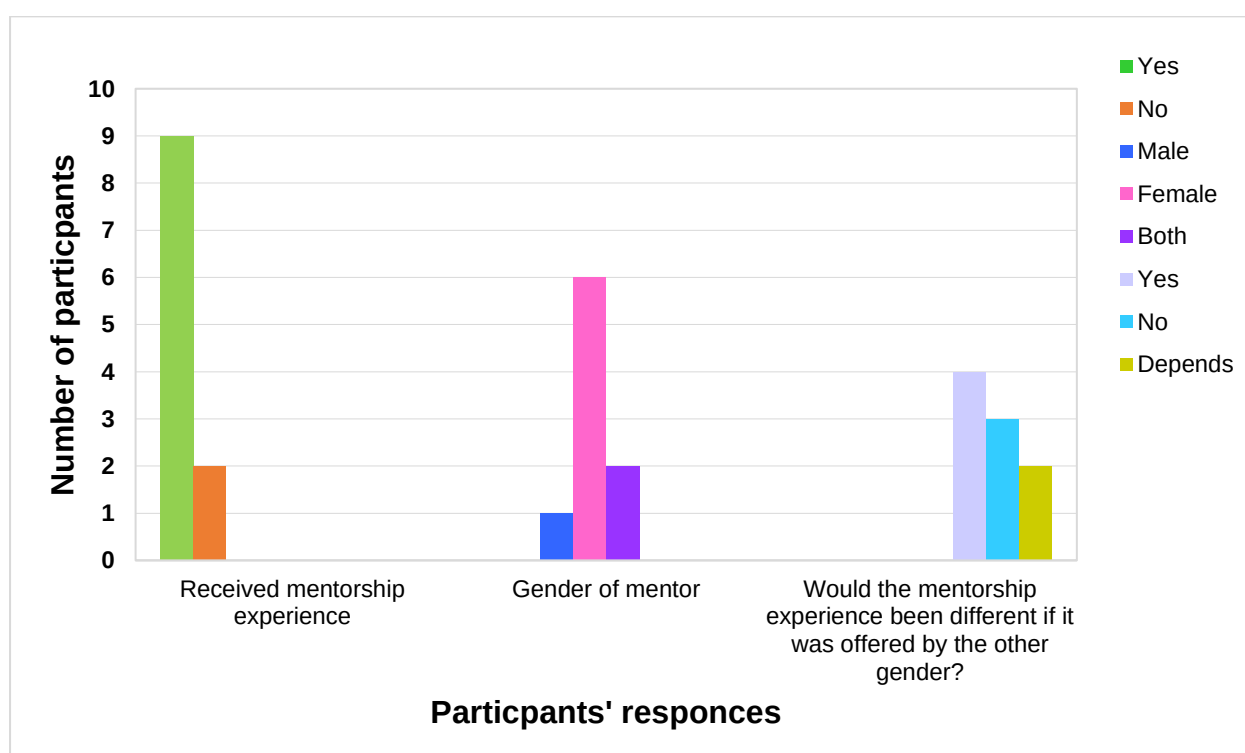


Figure 4.6: Bar graph presenting an overview of the participants' mentorship experiences. (Researcher's own compilation.)

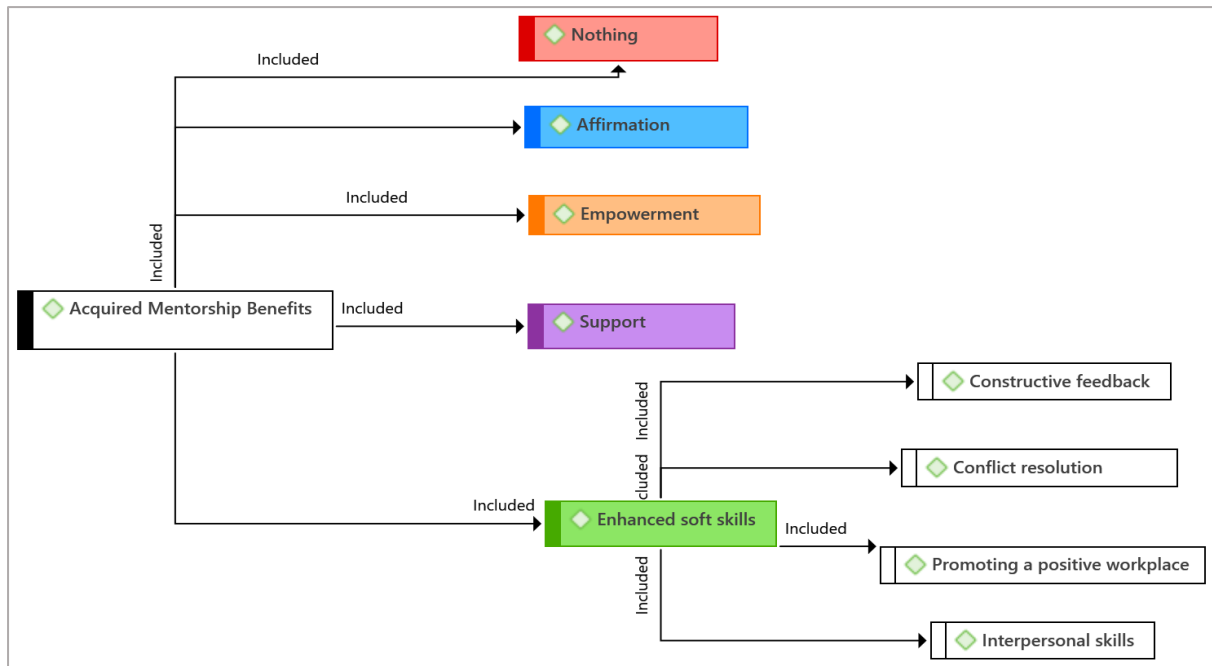


Figure 4.7: Network diagram illustrating the themes and subthemes that emerged from the participants' insights on what they acquired from their mentorship experiences and relationships. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.4.2 The impact of the presence or absence of mentorship on the participants' leadership and career trajectory

A total of eight participants (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11) shared positive insights on how their mentorship experience positively impacted their leadership and career journey through provision of support, guidance, receiving advice, resisting organizational stereotyping of female leaders, people management and knowledge acquisition. Only a few of the participants responses are shared below:

Participant 1: *"So, we could call him leader C, and he was sometimes a little bit offensive in that space.... this mentor of mine gave me some pointers on how to get around certain things and how to word my rebuttals or responses in certain cases and run things by saying 'if I say this do you think it will fly the university management committee or not? She said Say no, you know, type the personal pronouns out of this or something like that."*

Participant 2: *"Yeah, I think definitely, especially when it was coming to be a leader in a bigger group. When I started, I needed to lead a team of five. Now we are all like 62, so it's a much bigger team and then the fact that I've got mentors which I learned so much from I could see how they function in a meeting where we are the team members and they the leaders."*

Participant 4: *"Definitely. I think with that mentorship, it prepared me on a psychological level and on an operational level to see the bigger picture always, you know; and how to deal with challenges on the*

different levels. What it also prepared me for is to be a sufficient mentor for the people that's reporting to me. To make sure that I've also got that elements in that, you know to give them guidance."

Participant 8: "Absolutely. I mean, you know. Breaking new ground in any organization is difficult and I don't know whether it's an advantage or disadvantage, but I joined several organizations at the executive level where you are expected to know everything you know. You expected to provide advice. Just take this University for example, when I came in at this executive position, it was just presumed excellence, you know, nobody said, OK, she has time to learn about the organization and the culture or whatever. I just had to hit the ground running. And I was in deep gratitude for all those people that either were my mentors, where my sponsors, or that where my coaches that helped shape who I became as I took my seat in the executive role. And sometimes environments are unforgiving."

Participant 11: "As I said, I'm probably better equipped now because I've had a lot of that reflection and I've had somebody walking with me and I can see easily see, Whereas before I would have not been able to deal with something I would have run to him to say, I don't know what to do or there's the situation or to stress me out so bad and based on the conversations we've had, I'll Give you an example. There was one situation where there were people. It was such a 2 two people who were really, like making my life. The way I saw it, very difficult to the point whereby e-mail comes from this person and then my whole days I'm stressed. So, and we had a conversation about that he did tell me something to say. They're gonna be a lot of distractions as a leader and you need to learn what is a distraction and what is not and how to deal with distractions. So, that is something Which I've taken with me to say okay when something happens. Now somebody does something I can step back and say to myself, is this just a distraction and I can step away from it? I don't have to do anything. So, I think in terms of because as a leader, you're going to have a lot of things that your day will have so many different things happening, situations, people bringing their problems. So, I think just that understanding of as a leader, you're gonna have distractions. Learn what is a distraction. Oh what how to handle the distractions when they come along. So that's something I'm applying as well. And also, to look after yourself. So, the reminder that he gave me to say you must remember that you need to look after yourself in this whole situation. So, I think those are now things which are applying and trying to be more conscious of in applying."

Nonetheless, Participants 7 and 10 confirmed their career progression having been slowed down significantly due to absent mentorship experiences.

Participant 7: "... and that actually has to do with my academic career, because I'm not a professor, it was not planned to go into a leadership role for me at all. My trajectory into this was completely unintentional. It just happened most probably because I have natural leadership tendencies. If I had a very good mentor or an ethical manager, she may have guided me better to ensure that that the leadership aspect of my role did not completely overwhelm me to such an extent that my academic career took a knock."

Participant 10: "So, if I had a mentor, who understands what is mentoring, maybe they would have said to me 'you must say no'. You must say no, otherwise you are going to get no way'.. I always tell my

younger colleagues Is that they must plan Within the timeframes and to be clear, what they want to achieve. Most importantly. know in your head. Where are you heading to? Where do you want to see yourself? If you want to see yourself being a doctor or a professor? you cannot be involved in anything and everything.' ... So, I think on my side, if I had a mentor who would sit on my neck, not that I don't understand, but from her experience to say that 'you know what, make sure that by the end of the semester you have a project with a community. Or maybe try just try something that is based on the community, and let's see if we can get an article out of it by the end of the year or by next year' So I never had such a such discussions, you know."

4.4.3 Does the mentor's gender matter in a mentorship relationship?

As depicted in Figure 4.6, when asked whether their mentorship experience would have differed if they had been mentored by someone of a different gender; four participants who had either a female or male mentor responded 'yes,' while three responded 'no.' The remaining two participants, who had mentors from both genders suggested that 'it depends'. Figure 4.8 is a network graph depicting the thematic analysis of the participants' insights regarding the importance of a mentor's gender within a mentorship relationship. Three primary themes emerged from the nine participant's responses: Yes, No, and Depends (Figure 4.8). Notably, the nine participants provided varying reasons to support their responses. As a result, two subthemes emerged from all themes. the Yes theme: Female relatability and Male balancing priorities; the No theme: Male objectivity, and empowering upbringing; and lastly, the Depends theme: differing perspectives and sexual orientation. A further subtheme emerged from the No theme (Personality traits), when Participants' 3 and 7s responses were analysed.

Theme 1: Yes

Of the four participants (Participants 1, 4, 9 and 10) who agreed that their mentorship experiences would have been different if offered by a mentor of a different gender, two ambivalent views emerged. Participants 1, 4 and 9 highlighted the positive relatability of same gender mentorship relationships on various facets of a female's life as well as the superiority-inferiority feeling that can occur in a male-female mentorship relationship.

Participant 1: *"Yes, it will be different because a male cannot necessarily put himself in the distribution of a female. We have got physiological things that we have to deal with. For example, the monthly cycle, which does affect you from your hormones, although some males use that as an excuse for women not being functional. And I was lucky I didn't have a problem with that physiologically, but it is something that has played a role in terms of your awareness, in terms of your way of coping with stress and such things, it plays a role. So, we have to acknowledge that.... having a child to take care of..."*

Participant 4: *"Yes, I also received mentorship from a male in a very senior position. The feedback that I've got was totally different, you know. I don't know if that person tried to, to mentor me, or to give me plain feedback on that. That was very instructional. It was not like giving guidance how to do it different in future. For a male, it's about: why didn't it work, and make sure it works in the future, not the guidance with regard on, okay, I think we must do it this way. Where with female, I had the, the feeling that, we were a team, you know, she's, she's advising me. But with him it was like, it didn't work, so make sure that it never happens again and do it differently. But it was not like, it was more a critique than a tip."*

Participant 9: *"I have to say yes. I think patriarchy is still so much embedded in South Africa, ..., the world. I think it's something that, unfortunately, will take a while to change."*

Nonetheless, Participant 10 argued that perhaps male mentors were most suitable as some may have less work-life priorities to balance.

Participant 10: *"Maybe because, the male has got - not all of them - some luxury of time. In the sense that they sometimes have very little percentage of commitments of a home responsibility, unlike their wives. So, with a female one, it has to be the institution, wife, mother, cooking, collecting kids from school, those responsibilities. So maybe with the male, if the male could be the mentor, maybe he would do it different. Just looking at the fact that the pressure from outside the university is not much on him."*

Theme 2: No

Contrastingly, Participants 5, 6 and 11, noted that their mentorship relationship would not have been different if it was offered by a different gender (Figure 4.6). All three participants alluded to their upbringing suggesting that it empowered them to never feel inferior to men. Participant 6 argued that the mentor-mentee pairing and compatibility was the rather crucial factor over gender (Figure 4.8). Nonetheless, Participants 5 and 11 acknowledged that women do have their own challenges which could be factors that affect mentorship relationships.

Participant 6: *"Not necessarily no. I don't necessarily think so. It also depends on you as a person. I, I think your mentee needs to fit you also. I mean, I've got male mentees also, you know. But then if we think about, if I think about it, if you take the African woman, for example, African woman will be way more comfortable maybe to have, that journey with a other woman, you know, because of the, the, uh, you know, the patriarchal traditional role that a man plays in the African society. So that can play, come into play, but because I come from a household that's female-dominated and my mom was a very strong woman. It was not for me, you know, that male-female, demographics because it can, it can be overwhelming and dominate if you don't come from that strong position. But because I come from a generation of strong women. I think it's different."*

Participant 5: *"I don't think so because I actually prefer men than ladies, and I think it's because I grew up a lot with men. Men are honest in. their opinions. It's just that they, we always don't like the way they are, just like, they, they, they call a spade a spade. So, but, uh, there's always an element, there's some,*

there's some uniqueness in how women will do things versus how men will do things. So, in most cases, women They, they, they, they tend to be like they are harsh, but it's because of the level of caring, you know, they don't want you to slag, they don't want to, they, they're pushing you, so I think that's the other thing, but with guys, sometimes they are very, they are laid back, you know, they, they do things, but they won't force you, it's like at your own pace, but with women, You know, it's like you need to, it's more like when they, when we're growing up, they tell you, you don't have enough time, you need to have your kids up to this. Yeah, so I, I prefer guys, but women, their mentorship is different. You just need to be brave enough to learn to, to listen because we are impatient sometimes as women."

Participant 11: "I don't think so, no. I think the reason why I don't think it would have made a difference if it was a female is because I as a female also I do not come with that I'm a woman. Therefore, for me personally, I just think I can do whatever man can do. So, I really don't have those - I want to say issues, but the perceptions, you know, some women have gone through certain things that make them feel like as a woman you're not capable. Luckily my upbringing does not have that. So, I never think of myself as I'm a woman. Therefore, I can't do this, so I don't think like that. So, I don't have that block. So, whether I'm being mentored by a man or woman, for me it makes no difference."

Lastly, Participants 2 and 8 highlighted that mentees can benefit from both male and female mentors. Nonetheless, both participants echoed the sentiments of Participant 1 by acknowledging the relatability of female-female mentorship relationships.

Participant 2: "I think it's always good to have a combination of that, and when it's coming to your female mentors, I think we can relate more to each other. And we've got sometimes the same struggling. When I started at the university - and I think we are lucky now - it was like you as a female in a leadership role was not really acknowledged on the same level as the men and we always spoke as my mentor and because of the fact that it feels to me that they are the ones that I could relate easier with because they allow me to have the chance to be a leader. And mentor me into a leader which that group of men did not give you a chance. It was like 'because of the fact that you are a woman. You cannot be as good as us.' Um, that was my experience. Nowadays it's not, so I don't think it is wrong to have like males."

Participant 8: I benefited from both of them. It's a mindset. I don't think there's, you know, there's anything different about how you benefit from it, obviously there's a difference in how you interact. You know with the women mentor, they have a more understanding of the dilemmas you face, balancing priorities. You know, the dilemmas you face fighting stereotypes in the workplace. So, their more adept in giving you a mentorship on the soft issues, which are important because if you don't succeed with that, no matter how good you are, you'll always be self-doubting.

Theme 3: Depends

Despite Participant 9 having acknowledged the potential differences in mentorship experiences based on gender (above), the latter participant provided an interesting perspective by focusing and highlighting the intricacies of sexual orientation within mentorship

dynamics. This participant shed light on the influence of a mentor's sexual orientation on the mentorship experience, illustrating a broader understanding of diversity and its impact on mentorship relationships. Thus, this participant's viewpoint challenges the notion that gender is the sole factor influencing mentorship experiences. Instead, it suggests that other dimensions of diversity, such as sexual orientation, can also significantly shape how individuals perceive mentorship relationships. The participant's positive experience with a male mentor of a homosexual orientation emphasizes the importance of understanding diverse perspectives and how they can enrich the mentor-mentee dynamic. Furthermore, the participant finds value in their manager's understanding of what it's like to be marginalized and dominated. Resultantly, the latter participant believes that this understanding enables the manager to empathize with the struggles, obstacles, perceptions, and biases faced by individuals who don't conform to the dominant norms. This underscores the importance of empathy and awareness not only in leadership but also in mentorship.

Participant 9: *"And if I have to go and look perhaps at a single male out of all, that I didn't experience this patriarchy, that is perhaps my current line manager. And I think it's got a lot to do with the fact that he's homosexual and therefore understands a heteronormative world in terms of male dominance...Uh, heterosexuality, that is the norm....the male that is superior, the norm, superiority of the white, that race, the norm, that kind of thing. Um, and it's the first time I'm having, uh, a homosexual line manager, a male. And that for me brings a lot of other values to the relationship, like this understanding of being marginalized, this understanding of being dominated, this understanding of the struggle that you need struggles that you need to overcome and obstacles, because before you can even start doing your work, the perceptions of you, the biases against you, and so on and so on. So, if my mentor was like him and, and a male, it would've worked, but not a heterosexual male. I, thought now, you know, in my work history, in my career and, um, I don't think I would've changed so much if it."*

On the other hand, when asked if they thought they would prefer a male or female mentor, Participants 3 and 7 noted that gender would not matter (Figure 4.6). Participant 3 underscored that the important factor was the mentor's personality traits while Participant 7 echoed Participants 5, 6 and 11's sentiments (above) on her upbringing playing a crucial role in how she viewed her male-female relationships.

Participant 3: *I don't think, I wouldn't think about it. No, I, I don't think I would prefer one above the other. It's more the personality, not the gender. I don't think gender defines whether you have empathy or not, or you have emotional intelligence or not, I don't think, um, one is more than the other. I know of females that have a lot less empathy than males. So, the gender is not important. It's the experience of the person, the emotional intelligence, and whether they are able to grasp a personal situation or a psychological situation or not.*

Participant 7: “Gender won't matter to me because I have never been, this is going to sound very strange, very much the traditional female, in the sense that I've never been uncertain in my role as a female. I've never felt inferior as a female.... I have to tell you that I had very strange parents, shall I call them that? In the sense that, that they brought us up in a very, very different way from anybody else that I know. My father... always had this attitude that, and he taught us that we are nothing less than a male. So, I grew up with that confidence.”

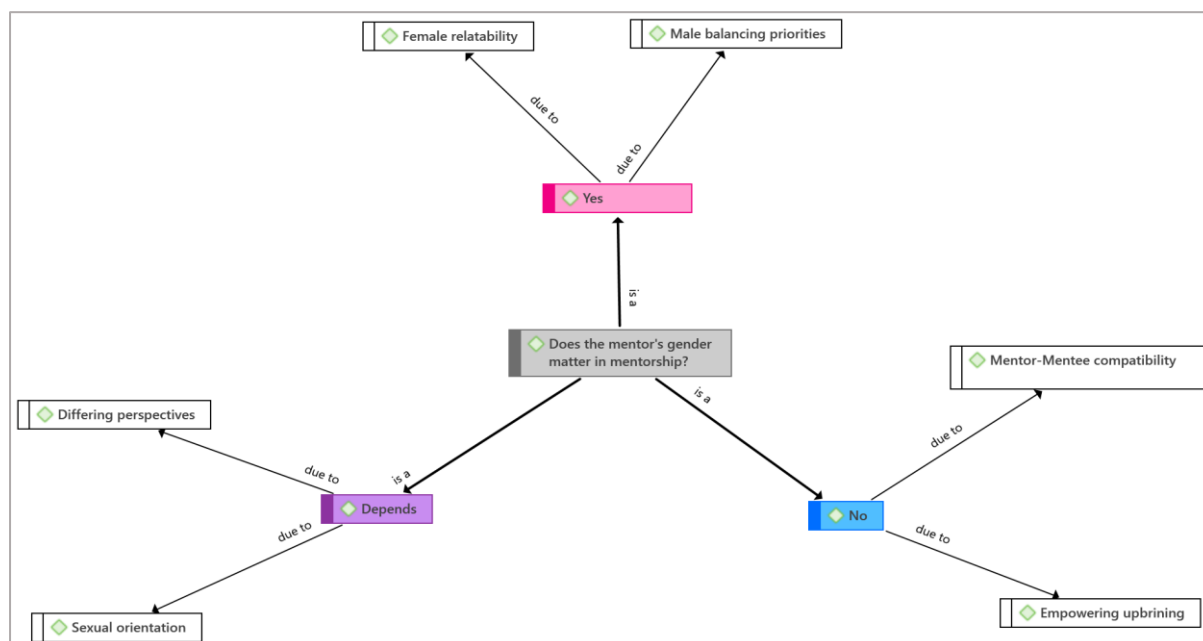


Figure 4.8: Network diagram illustrating the themes and subthemes from participants' responses regarding whether the gender of mentors is important in mentorship relationships. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.5 Research Question 4

4.5.1 Qualities of a good mentor

Figure 4.9 below is a graphical representation depicting the characteristics of a good mentor as described by the eleven participants. Two themes emerged from the latter descriptions: Mentor foundational qualities as well as Mentor supporting characteristics. A total of ten subthemes emerged from the 'Mentor foundational qualities' theme: Open-minded and objective, Good listener and honest, Emotional intelligence, Effective communication skills, Ethical and admirable, Facilitate courageous conversations, Knowledgeable and mature, Well networked and experienced, Consistent and focused as well as Trustworthy and responsible. Whereas five subthemes emerged from the Mentor supporting characteristics: Time and availability, Motivational and patient, Commitment to development, Passion for nurturing talent, and Knowing when to let go (Figure 4.9).

Overall, the participants collectively shared valuable perspectives on the essential qualities and characteristics that define a proficient mentor. Central to these insights was the concept of openness, consistency, and transparency in mentorship. Participant 2 stressed the significance of mentors being open-minded, straightforward, and delivering consistent messages to avoid confusion and ensure clarity. Additionally, the latter participant highlighted the importance of mentors admitting their mistakes which demonstrates a willingness to take ownership of errors, while assuring mentees of their unwavering support - a characteristic fundamental to building trust and fostering a positive mentor-mentee relationship. Secondly, empathy, emotional intelligence, being a good listener, and a friendly demeanour emerged as critical traits for mentors. Participants 3, 4, and 11 highlighted the need for mentors to have the ability to listen to understand their mentees and also have the ability to give honest feedback. Also, Participants 3 and 4 added that mentees must be able to navigate the emotional aspects of the mentee's journey, providing a safe space for mentees to express their frustrations and concerns openly. Participants 4 and 10 also highlighted a mentor's expertise, knowledge, and relatability as vital components of effective mentorship. It was emphasized that mentors should be proficient in their respective fields and able to relate to the mentees' experiences, by leveraging their own past experiences to guide and support the mentees.

Furthermore, motivation, patience, and a willingness to make sacrifices were identified as significant attributes of a good mentor. Participants 5 and 6 recognized the importance of mentors being motivators and exercising patience, allowing mentees to develop at their own pace. Participant 5 also emphasized the mentor's role in sacrificing time and resources, demonstrating a genuine dedication to the mentees' success and development. Participant 6 suggested that taking responsibility and ownership of the process as well as trustworthiness were core principles of mentorship. Thus, a mentor should embrace the responsibility of guiding mentees and take ownership of their role in the mentee's career growth while maintaining trustworthiness to cultivate a strong, trust-based mentor-mentee relationship.

Lastly, honesty, the ability to engage in courageous conversations, and upholding ethical conduct were outlined as essential qualities of a mentor. Participants 1, 7, and 8 emphasized the importance of mentors being honest and willing to have difficult and honest conversations when necessary. Leadership qualities and approachability were also noted, with effective leadership characterized by being admired and respected by others, and approachability seen as key to creating an open and comfortable mentoring environment. Lastly, being well networked was listed as a key attribute as it enables mentors the ability to be their mentees' sponsors, thus contributing to their overall growth and development.

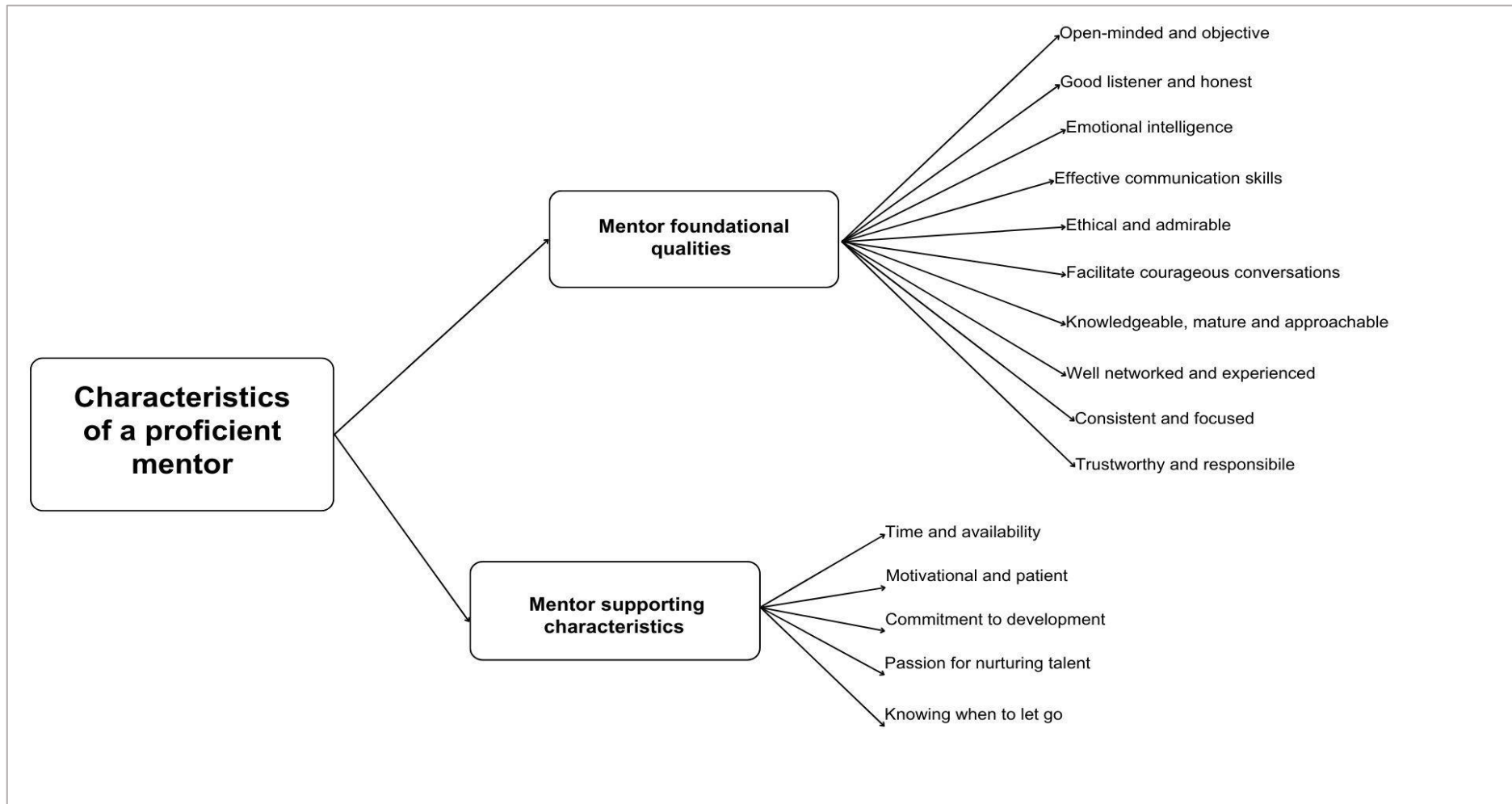


Figure 4.9: Graphical representation depicting characteristics of a good mentor as described by the participants. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.5.2 Practices that can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education

Figure 4.10 presents a graphical representation of the participants' contributions regarding practices that could be implemented to establish a supportive mentorship environment in higher education. These contributions collectively formed several distinct themes, each offering unique insights into effective mentorship programmes.

The first prominent theme that emerged from the data was the formalization of structured mentorship programs. Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10 all advocated for a systematic and inclusive approach to mentorship. Participant 1 proposed the establishment of a mentorship academy, emphasizing the importance of structuring mentorship programmes. Similarly, Participant 3 highlighted the integration of mentorship into human resource processes and onboarding procedures for new staff members or individuals starting leadership roles. Furthermore, Participant 4 suggested creating tailored mentorship programmes, customized to meet the specific needs of mentors and mentees, with the aim of providing clarity on mentorship principles and expectations. Additionally, Participant 5 highlighted the need to create a welcoming and inclusive environment in higher education. While Participant 3 echoed the shared concern for inclusivity by highlighting the importance of integrating newcomers into the academic ecosystem, emphasizing the collective aspiration to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion. Participant 10 on the other hand, called for the development of a framework for engagement to support mentorship programmes. Secondly, Participant 6 underscored the need for a highly structured process and the inclusion of mentorship in Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Participant 7 called for structured mentorship programmes, especially for individuals in leadership positions. The latter participant suggested formalizing mentor-mentee appointments upon entering these roles to counteract the overwhelming nature of university environments where personal development can be easily overshadowed by daily tasks. Lastly, Participants 5 and 7 introduced the concept of mentor-mentee pairing or matching, which allowed individuals to have some agency in selecting their mentors, fostering more productive and compatible mentor-mentee relationships.

The second notable theme centred around the need to balance academic and practical skills within mentorship programmes. Participant 2 emphasized the significance of practical skills alongside academic knowledge, suggesting that mentorship programmes should extend beyond the academic scope of HEIs to benefit both students and academic and support staff. The third theme was the development of an engagement framework for mentorship relationships, as proposed by Participant 10. Similarly, Participant 7 recommended enforcing structured interactions between mentors and mentees, ensuring that these interactions were

prioritized. This concept aligned with the emphasis on structured mentorship, emphasizing the need for consistent and purposeful interactions between mentors and mentees. The fourth emergent theme was the need for feedback in order to harness mentorship programmes that continuously improve. Participant 11 highlighted the need for feedback to reinforce the benefits of mentorship, while Participant 9 recommended constant reflection and improvement in mentorship practices, indicating a commitment to ongoing enhancement.

The fifth theme pertained to training and development. Participant 6 suggested mentor training and the integration of personal development plans with KPIs, while Participant 11 recommended offering formal training for academics serving as mentors. These suggestions underscored the importance of equipping mentors with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective mentorship programmes. The final theme focused on empowerment and networks, as discussed by Participant 8. The latter participant stressed the need for visible support for mentorship from top leadership, along with the provision of essential resources and infrastructure for mentors. Additionally, the latter participant emphasized the importance of securing committed participation from mentees, necessitating an appropriate budget to incentivize mentors. Furthermore, they suggested the creation of stimulating and inspiring meeting environments, along with provisions for mentor-mentee interactions that went beyond the academic realm, nurturing long-lasting relationships. Participant 8 also suggested the idea of identifying women network champions who would drive mentorship in institutions and faculties.

Thus, the emergent themes all collectively outline the participant's contribution toward a comprehensive framework that could be used to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education depicted in Figure 4.10. Also, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of structured, inclusive, and well-supported mentorship programmes in higher education that extend beyond academia.

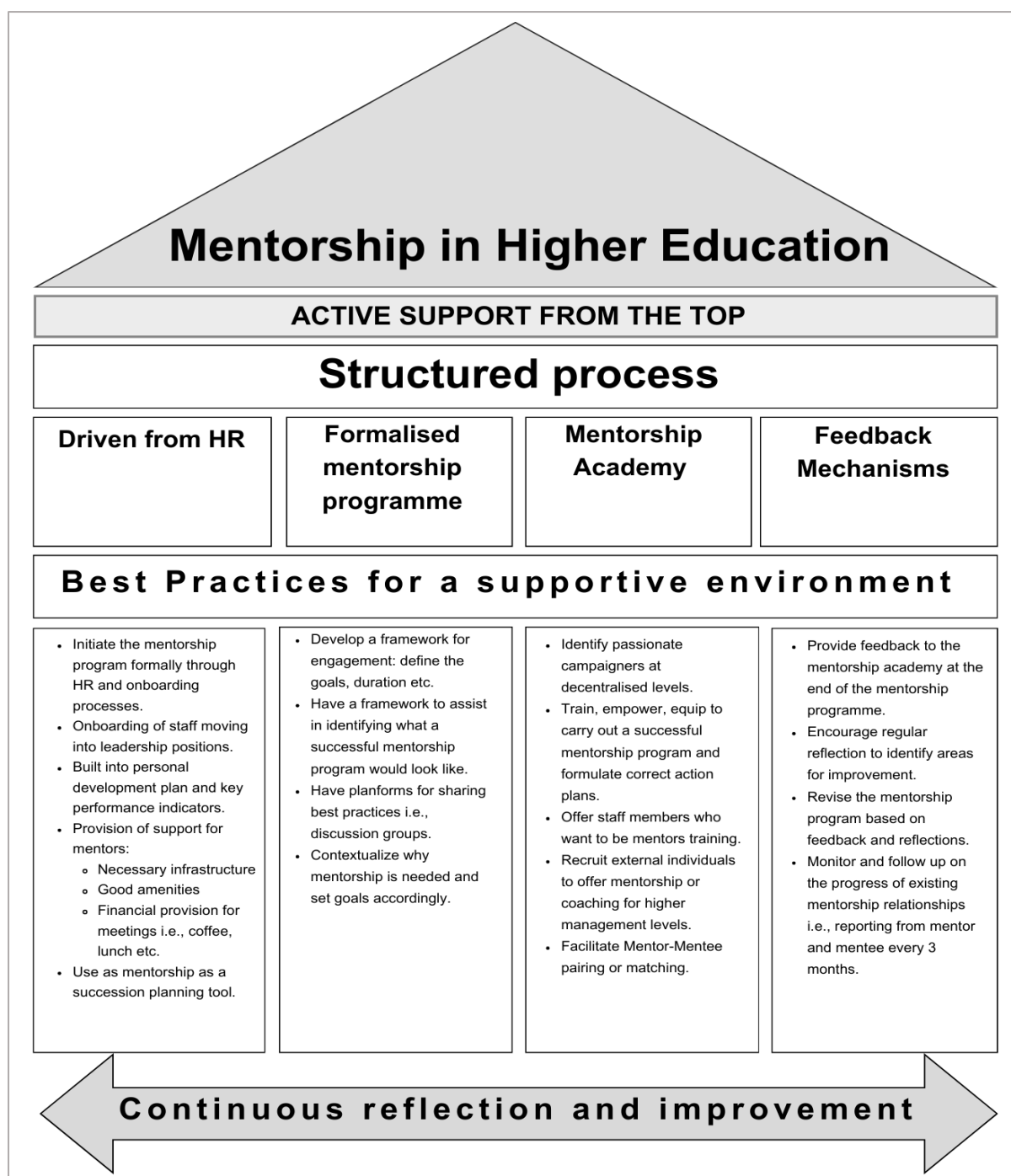


Figure 4.10: Graphical representation of the participant's recommendations of practices that could be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education. (Researcher's own compilation.)

4.6 Summary

In this chapter, a comprehensive analysis of the research findings derived from collected qualitative data was presented. Emergent themes and patterns were systematically identified and supported through thematic analysis. The chapter included excerpts from the interviews, featuring quotations and narratives from the study's participants, to illustrate and reinforce the

findings. The results of the study were thoughtfully organized into logical sections in accordance with the research questions, ensuring a well-structured presentation of the outcomes. Finally, the chapter established a clear connection between the identified themes and the research questions, effectively linking the data to the overarching research questions 2, 3 and 4.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a thorough and well-organized discussion of the research findings and maintains a logical structure that aligns with the research questions. Furthermore, it critically examines the data and results interpreted in Chapter 4 and draws comparisons of findings in this study with similar studies found in the existing literature. The latter was crucial as it enables a deeper understanding and relevance of the current research.

5.2 Research Question 2

5.2.1 What is mentorship, and how is it perceived in higher education?

The findings of the current study highlight a coherent and nuanced understanding of mentorship shared by all participants. Nine participants perceived mentorship as an intentional process designed to guide individuals in their career development, most frequently taking the form of a mentor-mentee relationship between a more experienced and less experienced individual. This perception is closely aligned with established definitions of mentorship found in the existing literature (Colley, 2001:177; Race & Skees, 2010:164; Woods & West, 2010:402). Furthermore, guidance was identified as one of the subthemes within the identified mentorship benefits theme in the literature in Section 2.14.1.5 (Table 2.1). Additionally, five participants emphasized the transformative aspect of mentorship, recognising it as a journey that encompasses both professional and personal growth. The latter is aligned with the findings of Nyanjom (2020:245), which indicate that mentorship fosters transformative learning characterised by critical self-reflection. Nevertheless, while the findings of the current study suggest that mentorship focuses largely on the mentee and mentee mentorship outcomes, various studies have reported that mentors also experience personal growth throughout the process, making it a reciprocal, mutually beneficial process for both the mentor and mentee (Healy & Welchert, 1990:17; Lipscomb & An: 2010:1008; Fonts, 2018:89; Tran, 2014:304).

Furthermore, the prevalent consensus among the nine participants, who perceived mentorship as stewardship, emphasizes the mentor's crucial role in ensuring the wellbeing of the mentee. The latter includes providing deliberate guidance, fostering open dialogues, active listening, nurturing, and knowledge sharing. This perspective closely aligns with the definition of stewardship, which entails a sustained commitment to upholding a relationship grounded in deep commitment, trust, and mutual obligation (Hernandez, 2012:173). Therefore, the findings

of the current study suggest that mentorship characteristically entails mentors adopting a stewardship role, where they prioritize their mentees' long-term wellbeing over their own interests. Furthermore, one participant framed mentorship as a strategic intervention, aligning with the findings of Mullen and Klimaitis (2021:32), who noted that mentoring can be strategically implemented to promote equity, inclusion, and social justice within organizations. Thus, mentorship can also be regarded as a pro-social and intentional intervention that encapsulates the essence of stewardship.

5.2.2 Participants insights of mentorship perceptions in the higher education sector

The current study's findings suggest that mentorship in higher education is subject to ambivalent, positive and negative perceptions, depending on the lens from which its implementation and the provision of opportunities are considered. The ambivalent perceptions theme primarily stemmed from two participants acknowledging that mentorship does occur within higher education but only within the academic sphere. This suggests that mentorship initiatives in higher education largely exclude support staff from higher education mentorship initiatives. The latter observation aligns with the broader context of existing literature, which predominantly emphasizes mentorship for early-career academic staff and postgraduate students (Darwin & Palmer, 2009:128; Thomas *et al.*, 2015:322; Owusu-Agyeman, 2022:67). Briody *et al.* (2022:298) emphasise the persistence of this mentorship gap between support and academic staff, despite the active involvement of support staff in day-to-day operations related to academic staff and students. Sebalj *et al.* (2012:463) further argue that the classification of support staff as 'non-academic staff' has led to their perception as 'invisible workers' as well as the predominant focus of HEIs on driving research productivity, efficiency, and the commercialization of innovative products or services stemming from research. Nonetheless, studies have also noted that some support staff positions are more specialized and occupied by staff with higher academic credentials that will inevitably ascend to positions with more managerial responsibilities (Whitchurch *et al.*, 2008:378; Croucher & Woelert, 2021:163). These individuals are classified in the literature as 'third space professionals' (Croucher & Woelert, 2021:163; Smith *et al.*, 2021:506). However, to date, no studies have been identified that advocate for mentorship programmes within this space, establishing the findings of this study as the first significant step in addressing this void.

Secondly, the identified notion of mentorship being perceived positively and used as a talent development tool in the current study is aligned with findings in literature (Cismaru & Iunius, 2019:267; Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2022:469; Saxena, 2023:1). The latter studies suggest that mentorship can play a crucial role in addressing the knowledge generational gaps and

mitigating brain drain by facilitating knowledge transfer, skill development, career progression, expanding professional networks, reducing inequity tensions, and enhancing workplace satisfaction. These aforementioned benefits align with the subthemes identified under the mentorship benefits theme in Section 2.14.1.5 (Table 2.1), where skills development, career progression, and expanding professional networks were recognized as common subthemes in the literature. This recognition suggests that these aspects are integral components or benefits of the overall mentorship experience.

Lastly, the negatively perceived theme emerged from four participants who notably pointed out that mentorship in higher education is often perceived negatively due to a range of factors including:

- Mentorship primarily focusing on operational development;
- The existence of racial and gender biases within higher education mentorship programmes;
- The use of mentorship for highlighting individuals' mistakes; and
- The perception that mentors are restricted to those with higher qualifications.

Furthermore, the perceptions shared by two participants suggesting that mentorship relationships in higher education predominantly focus on operational development highlights the potential limitations of existing mentorship programmes in higher education. According to Kram (1983:613), holistic mentoring should encompass both career development and psychosocial support. These two factors were identified as subthemes within the common mentorship benefits theme in the literature, as outlined in Section 2.14.1.5 (Table 2.1). However, Noe *et al.* (2002:129) argue that mentorship is a complex and multifaceted process that may at times overlook elements such as social and emotional wellbeing. Darling *et al.* (2006:765) support the latter and assert that mentorship relationships differ in nature because of the unique characteristics different mentors and mentees bring to their respective relationships. Thus, this suggests that mentees should communicate their needs and expectations regarding mentorship, encouraging a more personalized and holistic approach to the mentorship process. Also, this brings to the fore, the importance of aligning mentorship programmes with the diverse and evolving needs of both mentors and mentees in the ever-changing landscape of higher education. The latter consideration could ultimately lead to more effective and supportive mentorship experiences for all involved parties.

Undeniably, it is vital to recognize that mentorship extends beyond operational and psychosocial development; and that it can also serve as a tool to address historical disparities by promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, and retaining specific racial groups and genders

(Booyesen, 2007:52; Davis *et al.*, 2021:7). However, it's noteworthy that biases related to race, gender, and academic credentials in mentorship, as raised by two participants offer a unique perspective that diverges from the common themes found in the literature. Also, while a significant portion of existing literature primarily focuses on removing access barriers for specific racial groups (Davis *et al.*, 2021:7; Thompson & Taylor, 2023:47), the findings of this study suggest that the implementation of mentorship within organizations can lead to negative perceptions. Booyesen (2021:7) emphasizes that when mentorship is perceived as a requirement for certain racial groups and is provided by individuals from different racial backgrounds, it can generate unfavourable perceptions unless managed effectively. Schutte and de Waal (2022:1134) reaffirm the complexity of cross-racial mentoring relationships in South Africa, largely due to the nation's historical segregation. Furthermore, Thomas (2001:7-8) identifies four significant barriers, including the persistence of negative stereotypes, challenges in relating to individuals from diverse racial backgrounds, a protective hesitance to engage, and concerns or reservations regarding intimacy. Contrastingly, the theme of cross-race mentorship relationships in an international study was identified to be associated with diverse perspectives as a subtheme in Section 2.14.1.5 (Table 2.3). Thus, all of these factors underscore the multifaceted nature of mentorship dynamics in addressing diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, the findings of the current study suggest that the complexity of cross-racial mentoring relationships in South Africa, reinforced by historical factors, underscore the need for nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches. Also, they highlight the importance of cultural intelligence and the necessity of addressing distinct management and leadership challenges specific to South Africa, particularly in inter-racial contexts (Schutte & de Waal, 2022:1149).

Therefore, the findings of this study underscore the critical importance of implementing mentor training programmes that cater for individuals with diverse academic credentials and varying racial backgrounds. Simultaneously, the findings highlight the necessity of selecting mentees from a wide spectrum of racial and gender groups. This approach is indispensable for ensuring that higher education mentorship programmes can successfully achieve their intended outcomes without unintentionally giving rise to negative perceptions. By focusing on training and diversity in mentee selection, these programmes can better navigate the complexities of mentorship dynamics and promote equity, inclusion, and the overall success of participants.

5.2.3 Participants' description of the level of mentorship in the South African university of interest

Although four themes emerged from the participants' descriptions of the level of mentorship within the South African university of interest, three were closely related and alluded to by nine

participants (non-existent, informal and not there yet) while one was contrary to the latter three (significant). Thus, the overall findings of this study suggest a distinct absence of formal mentorship opportunities and programmes for women in leadership roles within the university of interest. Consequently, many of the participants reported that they resort to informal peer mentorship relationships, which is similar to the findings of Dunbar and Kinnersley (2001:21) and Bhatti and Ali (2021) identified in the professional subtheme (Section 2.14.1.5, Table 2.2) of mentorship network themes within the informal network. Furthermore, among various factors contributing to this lack of mentorship at the leadership level, one notable reason stems from competing priorities that are caused by time constraints. This finding is consistent with the findings of Barret *et al.* (2017:159). Notably, time constraints were recognized as a subtheme within the broader theme of common challenges in mentorship (Section 2.14.1.5, Table 2.2). Nevertheless, two participants highlighted that mentorship might be occurring within the university of interest, but it could go unnoticed or undisclosed because of unshared experiences. This observation aligns with the conclusions drawn by Tran (2014:306), who affirms that mentorship is not always readily visible.

Interestingly, the insights provided by one participant regarding the negative perceptions surrounding women in leadership receiving mentorship point to a potential cultural or organizational issue or stigma. This suggests that there may be resistance or reluctance among women in leadership to acknowledge themselves as recipients of mentorship, possibly due to the perception of not yet being ready for their roles. To date, no studies could be identified in literature that specifically address or refer to the potential stigmas that could be associated with mentorship for women occupying leadership positions in the higher education leadership sphere. Nonetheless, this aspect warrants attention and should be addressed to foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment that encourages women in leadership to seek and benefit from mentorship opportunities. It underscores the need for promoting a culture where mentorship is accessible and beneficial to all, regardless of gender or leadership level, and highlights the importance of challenging and dismantling existing biases or stereotypes that may hinder women's professional growth and development. Benefits of the latter have been noted in various studies in literature and include, *inter alia*, addressing the gender gap in leadership, fixing the leaky pipeline, and providing support for the development of leadership competencies (Cullen *et al.*, 1993:127; Brabazon & Schulz, 2020:886).

5.2.4 Participants' perceptions regarding the importance of mentorship in advancing the career pathing of women in leadership

Two central themes emerged from the perceptions of the eleven participants regarding the significance of mentorship in advancing the career paths of women in leadership. The findings of this study also illustrated that the two eminent themes were intricately interdependent. This suggests that women in leadership roles encounter unique challenges that underscore the critical need for effective mentorship in their career development. The various challenges identified in this study, encompassing organizational, personal, and professional factors that impact women's experiences in higher education, have received substantial attention in both national and international literature (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004:406; Airini *et al.*, 2011:46; Abalkhail, 2017:179; Mankayi & Cheteni, 2021:7; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2022:4). The notable distinction between the current study and previous literature lies in the way research in the past emphasized that women's career progression was predominantly impeded by patriarchal systems (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004:406; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2022:4). Contrastingly, the present study highlights how the enduring legacies of patriarchy within the university of interest pose challenges to the authoritative role of women in leadership. This implies that although there have been positive changes, further improvements are needed to fully empower women in leadership and remove the enduring barriers they face, particularly in terms of their managerial authority and voice within the system. Furthermore, the findings of this study and the interconnected nature of the two themes highlight the crucial role of mentorship in addressing the challenges faced by women in leadership at the university of interest.

Thus, the findings of this study underscore that mentorship is not merely a beneficial tool but an essential one for women to excel in academic and professional domains, particularly within the realm of higher education leadership. Similar to the findings of this current study, the study by Barkhuizen *et al.* (2022:10) also identified the absence of robust female networks in contrast to the well-established 'old boy networks,' which play a significant role in sponsoring career advancement, facilitating leadership progression and providing women in leadership much-needed support systems. Also, similar to the recommendations of Moodley and Toni, (2019:190) and Barkhuizen *et al.* (2022:10) the findings of the current study suggest that a dedicated mentorship programme for women in leadership and support networks within South African HEIs can serve as a powerful means to empower and support women in their journey towards leadership and success in these fields. Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasize the critical need for dedicated mentorship programmes tailored specifically for women in leadership roles in the university of interest, as well as those who aspire to attain leadership positions. It's evident that the historical legacies of patriarchal systems have

created barriers and disparities that necessitate targeted efforts to support and empower women on their leadership journeys.

5.3 Research Question 3

5.3.1 Participants' mentorship experiences

Four positive themes emerged from the descriptions of eight participants of their mentorship experiences while one more negatively associated emerged from one participant's contributions. Although these themes (support, affirmation, empowerment and development of enhanced soft skills) have not been extensively discussed in literature focused on women in higher education leadership mentorship programmes, they have been reported in studies that focused on mentorship of students within higher education institutions (Crisp & Alvarado-Young, 2018:41; Hagler, 2018:151; Sarabipour *et al.*, 2022:1379). The overall findings of the current study emphasise the pivotal role of mentorship in the early stages of leadership roles. The latter is evident from four participants who reported having derived benefits such as support, affirmation, empowerment and development of enhanced soft skills from the mentorship they received. These were all identified as common mentorship factor subthemes within the mentorship benefits theme (Section 2.14.1.5, Table 2.1). The latter went beyond the transfer of theoretical knowledge but also provided hands-on guidance, insights into decision-making processes, and practical learning experiences. This comprehensive approach to mentorship significantly contributed to the participant's understanding of organizational dynamics and operational aspects, ultimately improving their confidence, and enabling successful adaptation to their leadership positions. According to Crisp and Alvarado-Young (2018:38), various types of mentoring provide unique forms of support which could range from psycho-social, career pathing, knowledge transfer support and role modelling. Furthermore, Newsome *et al.* (2021:2273) suggest that affirmation is a crucial factor in mentorship, as mentors not only empower individuals to surpass their self-imposed limitations but also foster a growth mindset. The latter was observed in the current study as two participants explicitly referenced the significant impact of the affirmation they received on their development. Furthermore, the enhancement of soft skills also known as interpersonal skills through mentorship described in the current study is aligned with Hagler (2018:152) who noted that mentors can serve as role models for crucial interpersonal competencies, such as effective communication and emotional intelligence, which—in turn—assists mentees in building more supportive relationships.

5.3.2 The impact of the presence or absence of mentorship on the participants' leadership and career trajectory

Among the nine participants who had experienced mentorship relationships at various stages in their careers, eight reported notable positive impacts. This is consistent to the findings of similar studies in literature (Meschitti & Smith 2017:183; Alvarado-Wing *et al.*, 2021:1525). Furthermore, the guidance, support, and advice of their mentors not only aided them in navigating challenges but also enriched their leadership skills. Also, the participants highlighted that their mentorship experiences proved instrumental in challenging and dismissing organizational stereotypes. Thus, the findings of this study not only affirm the positive influence of mentorship but also highlight its effectiveness when implemented correctly. According to Devadoss (2020:6), mentorship is known to improve women's self-efficacy and confidence within their work and leadership roles. Thus, the positive mentorship experiences of the current study's participants underscore the potential of mentorship to enable career growth, development, and success. This suggests that when mentorship programmes are thoughtfully designed, well-structured, and effectively executed, they can be instrumental in fostering the advancement and wellbeing of individuals within their respective fields. Nonetheless, the two participants who had not received mentorship in their career and leadership trajectory as well as the participant with an unengaged mentor all reported facing challenges in their professional journey. They noted that the absence of guidance and mentorship had a detrimental impact on the rate of their academic and professional development, leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed by their leadership responsibilities. They emphasized believing that a mentor could have offered them invaluable insights into making informed decisions about their career paths. This suggests that the absence of mentorship in the career and leadership trajectories of women in leadership has the potential to have adverse consequences for those not benefitting from the mentorship.

5.3.3 Does the mentor's gender matter in a mentorship relationship?

The findings of this study align with existing literature that emphasizes variations in interactions between same-gender and cross-gender mentorship relationships (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000:119). Notably, the majority of participants who had same-gender mentors reported a strong sense of relatability with their female mentors. This suggests that they felt a deeper connection and shared experiences with their mentors, likely contributing to more meaningful and effective mentorship relationships. According to Kao *et al.* (2014:193), same-gender mentor relationships, owing to the high similarity between the mentor and mentee, enable more social and emotional support compared to cross-gender mentorship. However, it's

important to note that the negative same-gender mentorship experience reported by Participant 10 underscores the common critique that suggests incorrectly implemented mentorship can have adverse effects on recipient mentees (Harris, 2020:6). Furthermore, the study by Sosik and Godshalk (2000:119) reported that mentees receive more psychosocial support in cross-gender mentorship relationships as opposed to same-gender mentorship relationships. Thus, these findings emphasise the complexity of mentorship as a process that is influenced by various factors, including the gender dynamics between mentors and mentees. The findings of this study also emphasize that effective mentorship involves not only gender-related considerations but also the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship and how mentorship is structured and implemented.

The insights provided by Participant 9 carry significant implications for the field of mentorship in higher education. First, they highlight the potential advantages of mentorship that are firmly rooted in diversity. They suggest that mentors from various backgrounds can bring unique perspectives, empathy, and invaluable support to aid in a mentee's personal and professional development. This perspective challenges the conventional belief that same-gender mentorship is inherently more effective or relatable compared to cross-gender mentorship relationships. Instead, these findings highlight that a mentor's sexual orientation can play an equally, if not more, crucial role in nurturing understanding, empathy, and support within mentorship connections. In this context, the shared experience of being male takes a backseat to the shared experience of being homosexual, signifying its pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of the mentorship relationship. Furthermore, Participant 9's viewpoint challenges the misconception that gender diversity is an obstacle to effective mentorship. It asserts that what is more significant than matching the gender of the mentor and mentee is the mentor's ability to comprehend, empathize with, and connect to the unique challenges and perspectives of the mentee. The participant's preference for a homosexual male mentor over a heterosexual male mentor signifies a belief that sexual orientation is a critical factor in understanding the struggles and biases faced by individuals in the workplace. Lastly, similar findings have not been identified in the existing body of literature, making Participant 9's perspective noteworthy. The absence of comparable literature in previous studies highlights the novelty and importance of this perspective in the context of mentorship. Thus, this unique viewpoint not only challenges prevailing assumptions but also paves the way for new avenues of research and understanding in the field.

5.4 Research Question 4

5.4.1 Qualities of a good mentor

The current study has identified and classified essential qualities and characteristics that define proficient mentors in the context of mentorship within higher education. Furthermore, the latter identified characteristics could significantly assist in the development and implementation of practices aimed at creating supportive mentorship environments in higher education. While some of these characteristics, such as mentors being good listeners, having protected time for mentorship and possessing extensive knowledge in their field as well as networks, have been previously identified and reported in the literature (Ramani *et al.*, 2006:405-406; Straus *et al.*, 2013:85-87), the findings of the current study contribute additional characteristics to the existing body of knowledge. Some of the latter characteristics include: mentors should demonstrate the ability to engage in courageous conversations with mentees to support their growth; mentors should exemplify ethical behaviour and be individuals esteemed in their society. Moreover, they should maintain consistency in their approach, possess an open-minded and objective perspective. Participants also emphasized that mentors need to discern when to gracefully step back, particularly when mentees have reached a point where further knowledge transfer is not feasible. Thus, the identified qualities of a good mentor in this study provide a comprehensive guide for higher education institutions aiming to establish effective and successful mentorship programmes including programmes for women in the leadership pipeline. The latter programmes can benefit from recruiting, training, and developing mentors who possess the necessary attributes to cultivate positive mentor-mentee relationships. Additionally, mentors themselves can utilize these insights for self-reflection, continually enhancing their mentorship practices to better align with the evolving needs of their mentees.

5.4.2 Recommended practices that can be used to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that establishing a supportive mentorship environment in the higher education sector is not a one-dimensional or simplistic task. Rather, it is a multifaceted and complex process that encompasses various crucial elements. The participants in this study provided valuable insights and recommendations regarding the practices that can be implemented to create such an environment:

- The participants' suggestions emphasized the need for well-structured mentorship programmes. This involves the formalization of mentorship through initiatives such as

mentorship academies and integrating mentorship into essential university processes, including human resources and onboarding. The goal is to provide clear guidelines and create an inclusive environment for both mentors and mentees.

- Secondly, the participants' contributions highlighted the importance of striking a balance between academic knowledge and practical skills within mentorship programmes. Participants stressed that mentorship should extend beyond the traditional academic scope to encompass practical skills relevant to real-world needs. This holistic approach benefits students, academic staff, and support staff.
- Participants recommend the development of a structured engagement framework for mentorship relationships. This framework is envisaged to ensure that interactions between mentors and mentees are purposeful, consistent, and prioritized. Furthermore, feedback mechanisms were noted to be essential to continually improve and refine mentorship programmes in higher education.
- The findings of this study underscored the importance of mentor training and the integration of personal development plans with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Furthermore, the findings of this study suggested that equipping mentors with the necessary skills and knowledge is essential to ensuring that mentorship programmes are effective and valuable.
- Lastly, the findings of this study call for visible support for mentorship from top leadership within educational institutions. This support includes the provision of essential resources and infrastructure for mentors. Incentives for mentors and the creation of stimulating meeting environments are suggested. These elements aim to nurture enduring relationships between mentors and mentees.

Similar studies in literature have provided mentor development frameworks and practices that could be implemented to strengthen mentorship such as mentor-mentee pairing, achieving balance in life and teaching networking skills (Nick *et al.*, 2012:7; Blake-Beard *et al.*, 2021:6471). The latter, however, do not focus on inclusive mentorship factors geared towards higher education institutions. Thus, the current study contributes to the body of literature on mentorship in higher education.

5.5 Summary

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the research findings and made comparisons to existing literature. This process elucidated the research's position within the larger academic body of knowledge, thus highlighting the current study's contributions and findings within the broader scholarly context.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the primary conclusions drawn from the study's findings. It also discusses the managerial implications of mentorship for women in leadership positions in higher education and provides recommendations for future research.

6.2 Conclusions

Mentorship, in this current study's context, is not just a desirable option but a crucial tool that can be used to address the challenges of women in leadership positions. The emergence of themes from participants' responses to the various research questions emphasized the pivotal role of mentorship in navigating the unique obstacles women face in leadership and underscored the importance of tailored mentorship programmes to support their career progression. This section will address the study's overall conclusions, provide implications for managers and leaders in higher education, as well as offer recommendations for future research.

Understanding of mentorship and how it is perceived in higher education

The findings of this study illustrated the multifaceted perceptions of mentorship in higher education. Overall, mentorship is widely understood as an intentional process guiding individuals in their career development within academic institutions. It is perceived as a transformative journey, fostering both professional and personal growth, and as an act of stewardship, with mentors prioritizing the long-term wellbeing of their mentees. Lastly, mentorship is regarded as a strategic intervention that can promote equity, inclusion, and social justice within higher education organizations. However, the study also highlighted ambivalent perceptions that emerged particularly regarding support staff, who often feel excluded from mentorship initiatives. Similarly, the findings of this study suggested that negative perceptions of mentorship also tend to arise when mentorship programmes are seen as primarily focused on operational development or when they highlight racial and gender differences among mentors and mentees.

Mentorship experiences of women in leadership positions within the chosen South African university

The findings of this study revealed that mentorship experiences for women in leadership roles were generally positive, with mentors providing support, affirmation, empowerment, and enhancing the mentee's soft skills. Such mentorship experiences were found to have a positive impact on leadership and career trajectories, enabling the latter women to navigate challenges and enrich their leadership skills. However, those who lacked mentorship opportunities or had negative mentorship experiences reported facing professional challenges such as career progression delays as well as feeling overwhelmed by their leadership responsibilities. Lastly, the mentor's gender was recognised as a notable factor with same-gender mentorship relationships often fostering relatability and more meaningful connections. Nonetheless, the findings of this study also suggested that factors such as the sexual orientation of mentors can significantly influence how mentees perceive their mentorship experiences.

Practises that can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education

Lastly, this study identified the qualities of a good mentor and recommended practical practices that can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment. The latter included the development of well-structured mentorship programmes, maintaining a balance between academic and practical skills, providing structured engagement frameworks, mentor training, and visible support from top leadership. These findings contributed to the development of a proposed model that could be implemented to harness effective mentorship programmes, including those aimed at advancing women in the leadership pipeline.

6.3 Managerial Implications

Women in leadership positions within higher education institutions have made substantial progress in recent years, yet they continue to face unique challenges that warrant attention and action. These challenges encompass gender disparities, stereotypes, and other biases that hinder their career advancement and professional development. Additionally, the significance of mentorship in the development and success of women in leadership roles cannot be overstated. Recognizing the pressing need to address these issues, this section provides practical strategies that managers and leaders in higher education can adopt to create a more equitable and supportive leadership environment. These implications offer guidance on how to enhance mentorship programmes, bridge gender disparities, and foster

professional growth. Furthermore, consideration of these managerial implications, can enable HEIs to reach greater inclusivity and a more diverse and empowered higher education landscape.

- Develop inclusive mentorship programmes that extend beyond early-career academic staff and postgraduate students. Thus, these programmes should include support staff and allow individuals with diverse academic credentials and backgrounds to participate as mentors and mentees. By selecting mentees from a wide spectrum of racial, gender, and pragmatic knowledge groups, HEIs can actively promote equity and inclusion. This not only broadens the pool of potential mentors and mentees but also ensures that mentorship is accessible to individuals at all levels of the academic and professional hierarchy.
- Encourage a holistic approach to mentorship by addressing both career development and psychosocial support. Also, open communication between mentors and mentees should be promoted to ensure mentorship relationships are tailored to the evolving needs of the mentee as well as career requirements. This approach recognizes that mentorship is not solely about academic guidance but also encompasses personal and professional growth.
- Address historical disparities by implementing mentor training programmes that cater to individuals with diverse academic credentials and varying racial backgrounds. These programmes should address the unique challenges and opportunities that women in leadership encounter, aiming to foster their professional growth, confidence, and success. By acknowledging and rectifying historical gender biases and disparities, as well as negative perceptions of mentorship HEIs can work towards a more equitable and inclusive leadership landscape.
- Develop cultural intelligence among mentors and mentees, particularly in diverse and inter-racial contexts. This will ensure that the mentorship programmes enable the effective engagement of participants from different backgrounds. It is imperative to foster an inclusive and supportive work environment where women in leadership are encouraged to seek and benefit from mentorship opportunities.
- Develop mentorship programmes that aim to support and empower women in leadership roles within higher education. These programmes should also acknowledge the distinct challenges these women face, including the impact of enduring patriarchal systems, work-life balance, and support the development of unique differentiated female leadership styles.
- Ensure that the mentorship programmes within HEIs encompass not only academic knowledge transfer and empowerment but also practical skills empowerment and

transfer. This comprehensive approach ensures that individuals gain hands-on experience and insights into decision-making processes. Mentorship should not be limited to theoretical guidance but should also allow for practical application, which stands to contribute to the effective career development of individuals participating in the mentorship programme.

- Address the challenge of absent mentorship particularly women in leadership positions. The latter is crucial as the absence of mentorship can have adverse consequences for career and personal development. Mentorship programmes should help individuals make informed decisions about their career paths and provide the support necessary to excel in their leadership roles as well as their respective fields of specialisation.
- Consider gender dynamics and mentor-mentee pairing. It is crucial for mentorship programmes in HEIs to be flexible and accommodate diverse mentor-mentee pairings, while recognizing the value of cross-gender and same-gender mentor relationships.

6.4 Recommendations for future studies

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the mentorship programme underway: participants in this study noted that the university of interest was in the process of launching a mentorship programme during the data collection period of the current study. Thus, future studies should determine how well the programme is achieving its intended goals and objectives. This evaluation could involve collecting data on key performance indicators, such as the number of successful mentorship pairings, participant satisfaction, and mentee career advancements. The research can also focus on the specific practices and components that contribute to the programme's effectiveness. It may seek to identify what aspects of the programme are working well and which ones may require improvement. This type of study can provide valuable insights to the university's administration and programme coordinators, allowing them to refine and enhance the mentorship initiative to better support women in senior leadership positions.
- Mentor training programmes: A key finding of this study was the need to train mentors to prepare them for their role and responsibilities in mentorship. Future studies should examine the impact of mentorship training programmes for mentors in higher education. Furthermore, future research in this area could assess the effectiveness of such training programmes in preparing mentors for their roles. The studies could investigate the outcomes of mentor training, such as improved communication, goal setting, and conflict resolution skills. It may also assess how mentor training influences the overall quality of mentorship relationships and the career development of mentees.

Understanding the impact of mentor training can inform the design and implementation of effective training programmes for mentors and mentees in higher education.

- **Mentor-mentee matching:** Participants in this study advocated for mentor-mentee matching, future studies should investigate the effectiveness of mentor-mentee matching strategies and if they do enhance mentorship relationships. Future studies should investigate whether these matching strategies contribute to increased satisfaction and positive outcomes for both mentors and mentees. By analysing the impact of mentor-mentee matching, research can help institutions refine their matching processes to create more beneficial and productive mentorship relationships, particularly for women aspiring to senior leadership roles in higher education.

6.5 Conclusion

Insights into the implications of mentorship for women in leadership roles is pivotal for equity and development practices within higher education. Additionally, research in mentorship of women in leaderships offers the opportunity to transfer knowledge and skills that are vital in harnessing talent which drives excellence in higher education, as well as guiding future research endeavours in leadership development.

Food for thought: The real voices of women that tell the story of mentorship to leaders

Participant 1: *"my boss said to me - you catch more bees with honey than with doom. And that stuck with me."*

Participant 2: *"I think what's important when it's coming to mentorship, sometimes you also need to have a coach because its two different things. A mentor gives you the recipe to climb the ladder, a coach allows you to come up with the solutions of how to climb that ladder as well".*

Participant 3: *"Mentorship is a culture, and it must be a culture, not a tick pocket exercise."*

Participant 4: *"When you're in this mentorship role, you must first map the person before you can lead this person. You must first be able to hear this person from what they're saying, but you must also hear before you can give them guidance, to be able to reflect on certain issues."*

Participant 5: *"Leadership is about storytelling. You never know how your story is going to touch someone, because how do you explain to people where you are? You need to share a story to say this is what happened. This is how I was. I was also scared - so that people do not think that life is perfect. We are perfect in our imperfections. So you need to know that if you were scared to do something it's OK. That's why mentorship is so important because you get someone who makes you to believe in yourself to say you can do it. It's possible. You just need to believe in yourself. So I think the mentoring is about making people believe in themselves, because sometimes we doubt ourselves that we can't. But when you are a mentor, you make someone realise that they actually have much more potential that than they, think they have."*

Participant 6: *"I always say to the young people, woman, take up your space. That is one of my slogans. Woman, take up your space. Remember in the workplace we are all equal and you must take up your space. If you are leader, you put on that leadership hat. You don't put on that woman hat, you put on leadership hat with confidence."*

Participant 7: *"I think that mentorship is important. I believe it's important for everybody, not just females. I believe we all have the same needs when it comes to these kinds of things. I do know being a female in a leadership position is often a lot more difficult because, you know, we have ways of saying and doing things."*

Participant 8: *Mentorship is an absolutely useful tool and women need it. We need to embrace it. We need to accept it, and we need to see that It's going to help and benefit us. The second thing is that it must be directed at addressing all the self-doubt that we have as women. You know, often when we arrive at positions in leadership and we look around in the boardroom and people around us. The first thing is we say. Am I worthy of being here? And that's the one thing all US women do, irrespective of*

where we find ourselves. The first thing is our own barrier is self-doubt. So we really need to feel comfortable in our skins that when we land in a particular position, it's not because you're a woman, it's because you're capable and you are the best person for the job... One of your recommendations should be every woman that's in a management position in higher education should pay it forward and take on at least one- or two-mentees. Can you imagine if every woman in leadership does that? What a phenomenal impact we will be making towards women empowerment in higher education?"

Participant 9: *"It's easy for a woman to be appointed into a position than to stay there. Remaining there is the difficult part. So, mentorship can go a long way, to fix this."*

Participant 10: *"Mentoring, is showing them that here you are and then they should be able to map them their roads within the institution. It should fulfil the purpose of saying here are the roads that lead you to this and this and that. Which one do you want? So if you want this one then you must know A,B,C."*

Participant 11: *"I think there's a lot of buzz about mentorship. But that conversation should be had also with coaching, because sometimes what we need is coaching and not mentorship, and there's not always clarity about what is the difference between coaching and mentorship. I might need a coach and I'm thinking I need mentorship and I get a mentor and I should be getting a coach. So I think those two need to be looked at hand in hand and figure out what is the difference. First of all and then make sure if somebody needs coaching, they get coaching and not mentorship and vice versa."*



<https://www.adweek.com/creativity/why-mccann-dropped-a-statue-of-a-fearless-girl-next-to-wall-streets-charging-bull-overnight/>

Fearless girl

Fearless Girl stands as a testament to the unyielding strength within every woman – a symbol of courage, resilience, and the unwavering pursuit of equality in the face of challenges. She embodies the power to break barriers, inspire change, and illuminate a path toward a future where every girl can fearlessly chase her dreams.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics approval letter



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-484
Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

31 March 2023

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC)** on, 31/03/2023 the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African University

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher): Prof Yvonne Du Plessis-MBA

Student: Molale-Tom L

N	W	U	-	0	0	6	1	5	-	2	3	-	A	4
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Institution Study Number Year Status
Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type:
Commencement date: 1/6/2023
Expiry date: 1/6/2024

Risk: Low

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

•

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principle investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to

implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.

- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
 - The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- n the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:
- request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

**Mark
Rathbone**

Digitally signed by Mark Rathbone
DN: cn=Mark Rathbone, o=North-
West University, ou=Business
management,
email=mark.rathbone@nwu.ac.za,
c=ZA
Date: 2023.05.17 12:45:17 +02'00'

Prof Mark Rathbone
Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Research data gate keepers approval letter



Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: +2718 299-1111/2222

Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

NWU RDGC PERMISSION GRANTED LETTER

Based on the documentation provided by the researcher specified below, on **30-June-2023** the North-West University (NWU) Research Data Gatekeeper Committee (NWU-RDGC) hereby **grants permission** for the specific project (as indicated below) to be conducted at the NWU:

Project title: Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African University.

Project leader: Prof Yvonne Du Plessis

Researcher/Project Team: Dr Lesego Molale-Tom

Ethics reference no: NWU-00 61 5-23-A4

NWU RDGC reference no: NWU-GK-23-150

Specific Conditions:

1. Please elaborate on the procedures for data collection and obtaining informed consent in this study.
2. The researcher's recruitment approach involves utilizing email addresses that are accessible through the NWU's intranet. It is important to note that these email addresses are not publicly available, and the researcher has access to them as a staff member, not specifically for research purposes. It is recommended that the researcher explicitly mention this in the application form. Additionally, the researcher is encouraged to utilize media platforms like the NWU daily communication to distribute the recruitment call.

Approval date: 30-June- 2023

Expiry date: 30-June- 2024

General Conditions of Approval:

- The NWU-RDGC will not take the responsibility to recruit research participants or to gather data on behalf of the researcher. This committee can therefore not guarantee the participation of our relevant stakeholders.

- Any changes to the research protocol within the permission period (for a maximum of 1 year) must be communicated to the NWU-RDGC. Failure to do so will lead to withdrawal of the permission.
- The NWU-RDGC should be provided with a report or document in which the results of said project are disseminated.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemics the Committee would like to advise the researcher to practice the necessary caution and adhere to the National Covid-19 Guidelines when conducting research with participants.

Please note that under no circumstances will any personal information of possible research subjects be provided to the researcher by the NWU RDGC. The NWU complies with the Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA) as well as the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPI). For an application to access such information please contact Ms Annamarie De Kock (018 285 2771) for the relevant enquiry form or more information on how the NWU complies with PAIA and POPI.

The NWU RDGC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU RDGC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Prof Jeffrey Mphahlele



Chairperson NWU Research Data Gatekeeper Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\test 2.docm
13 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Applications RDGC\Updated RDGC Permission Letter.docm
15 November 2018

File reference: 1.1.4.3

Appendix C: Participation letter and informed consent form



Participation Letter and Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

Date:

Dear Participant

My name is Lesego Molale-Tom and I am a second-year MBA student registered at the North-West University under the supervision of Professor Yvonne Du Plessis. I am currently conducting a qualitative study titled: *Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African University*.

As a woman in a leadership position at North-West University, your insights and experiences would be invaluable in informing our understanding of this topic. I would be honoured if you could volunteer and participate in this study by sharing your perceptions, views, and experiences through a one-on-one interview to be arranged at a convenient time, which will take approximately 60 minutes.

The following information is provided to inform you of the research to be conducted:

1. This study was approved by the EMS-Rec Ethical committee: [NWU-00615-23-A4].
2. The research study is a mini-dissertation that will be submitted as part of the Master of Business Administration degree requirements at the North-West University.

3. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any form of coercion.
4. The confidentiality, anonymity and privacy of respondents are guaranteed. All soft data and digital documentation such as the transcriptions from the verbal interviews will be saved on a private Microsoft Team Channel – which is an encrypted platform.
5. The Interview time will not exceed 60 minutes.
6. The interview will comprise three sections: A. Introduction; B. Demographics and C. The interview process. There will only be three demographic questions to describe the sample group: Highest qualification, Managerial level and Number of years in current role. The demographic information will be used to describe the study population. Thus, you grant consent to the processing of certain personal information provided by you in terms of section 18 of the POPI Act.
7. Only the researcher will have access to the voice-recorded data which will be kept safe. The data will also be password protected and stored on Microsoft Teams, an encrypted platform. After five years, this data will be destroyed.
8. The transcription data obtained through the interview will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor; and will solely be used for this MBA research study and academic publications. The transcript from your interview may be provided to you upon request if you wish to read it. Also, the findings of the study will be made available once the mini dissertation has gone through the examination process and published on the North-West University's library page.
9. Your interview will be allocated a code e.g.: Participant 1, Participant 2 etc. Thus, no personal information to identify you will be available.

If you have any questions you can contact the research supervisor, Prof Yvonne du Plessis at yvonne.duplessis@nwu.ac.za or the researcher Lesego Molale-Tom 076 940 9413 or lesego.molaletom@nwu.ac.za

Consent to participate in study

If you wish to participate - Please complete the Informed Consent below, return it to me and also save a copy for your record keeping:

*Please tick
each box*

- | | | |
|----|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | I confirm that I have read and understand the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily. | ☐ |
| 2 | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty. | ☐ |
| 3 | I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, EMS-REC (Ethics Committee). | ☐ |
| 4 | I understand who will have access to the data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. | ☐ |
| 5 | I understand how this research will be reported and published. | ☐ |
| 6 | I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint. | ☐ |
| 10 | I agree to take part in the study. | ☐ |

Name of participant

dd / mm / yyyy
Date

Signature

_____ dd / mm / yyyy _____

Name of person taking consent Date Signature

Consent to process personal information

With this, I consent to the use of my personal information contained hereir *Please tick*
(as well as demographic information provided during the interview) and *each box*
confirm that:

1 the information is supplied voluntarily, without undue influence ☐
from any party and not under any duress.

I acknowledge I am aware that I have the following rights regarding
personal information, which is collected. I have the right to:

2 access the information at any reasonable time to rectify the ☐
information.

4 object to the processing of the information in which case this ☐
agreement will terminate.

5 access the information at any reasonable time to rectify the ☐
information.

Participant code:

(Below is voluntary and only needed to give you feedback if requested)

email address: _____

cell phone number: _____

We Thank you.



Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African University

LG Molale-Tom

Student nr: 20318634

 **orcid.org/0000-0002-0057-7171**

PROPOSAL Masters in Business Administration at the North-West University

Interview Guide

Supervisor: Prof Yvonne Du Plessis

Interview guide

Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African University.

Participant code/number: _____

I. Introduction

- Welcome and introduction:

- Good afternoon NAME, thank you for agreeing to participate in my study and providing me time for the interview.
- The primary purpose of this study is to explore mentorship and its contribution to the career advancement of women in leadership in this institution.
- Before we start with the interview, I would like to talk you through the standard protocol for all interviews and there are few declarations that I have to communicate:
 1. This interview is meant for my academic research project – it was approved by the faculty's ethics committee as well as the institutions gatekeepers committee.
 2. What will be discussed here is confidential (between myself and yourself), the data that to be collected will remain between myself and the supervisor and it will be solely utilised for this study and academic manuscripts.
 3. Your anonymity will be maintained throughout the process, you will be assigned a pseudo name and you will be referred to as **Participant #**
 4. Please feel free to talk as this will be a conversation – there are no wrong or right answers. I will at some instances take notes. Also, I will where necessary ask follow-up questions because either I require clarity to ensure I am not biased or that I require a deeper understanding of whatever we will be discussing.
 5. Where I ask a question you are not comfortable to answer, please indicate it to me and I will continue to the next question.
 6. Should you at any stage require to withdraw from the study, please let me know.
 7. I hereby request to record the session solely for the production of the verbatim transcripts and also to refer back to our proceedings during the data analysis period.
 8. I would like consent to continue with the interview.

- Explain the purpose of the study, the interview process and ethical conduct.

- Obtain informed consent to carry out the interview process as well as consent for voluntary participation.
- Ask the participant for recording consent.

II. Background Information:

Demographics for sample description purposes only:

- Highest Qualification:
- Managerial Level:
- Number of years in current role:

III. Interview questions

Linked to answer Research question 2

1.1 In your understanding, what is mentorship?

1.2 Can you please describe how you think mentorship is generally perceived in higher education?

1.2.1 follow - up question: how important do you think mentorship is in advancing one's career pathing, especially for women in leadership positions?

1.3 How would you describe the level of mentorship in this institution (Probe by asking why)

Research question 1

1.4 Which factors do you think can contribute to the success of mentorship programmes in higher education? Briefly explain why your choices will facilitate mentorship for women in HEI? (*growth opportunities, encouragement, skills development etc..*)

Research question 3

1.5 Have you had any mentorship experiences throughout your higher education career?

If 'yes',	If 'no',

1.6A can you mention the gender of your mentor and describe what you gained from the mentorship experience? • <i>Follow-question:</i> do you think your mentorship experience would have been different If it was offered by a male/female (depending on answer in 15A)? and why? 1.6B Can you think of any challenges or barriers in your leadership trajectory where you were better prepared to handle because of the support received from your mentorship experience? Please share.	1.6a have you considered seeking out a mentor? Or have you felt that it was not necessary for your career growth? (Probe by asking why) • <i>Follow up question:</i> If you were offered participation in a <i>mentorship</i> programme, would you want to be mentored by a male or female or the gender doesn't matter? and why? 1.6b Can you think of any challenges or barriers in your leadership trajectory that could have been better prepared to handle because of the support received from a mentorship experience? Please share.
--	---

Research question 4

1.7 In your opinion, what are the key qualities or characteristics that make a good mentor?

1.7.1 Personal experience if you had a mentor now, what qualities would be critical?

1.8 In your experience, what practices can be implemented to create a supportive mentorship environment in higher education?

1.8.1 If you have to give advice to the university regarding mentorship and its implementation, what would it be?

Conclusion Question:

1.9 Is there anything else that you would like to add or share regarding your experiences with mentorship and its role in advancing the leadership career pathing of women in HEI?

1.10 Is there anything else I need to know, that I did not ask, that we need to know regarding mentorship in HE and WIL?

IV. Closure:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, your insights and experiences are greatly appreciated and will contribute to a deeper understanding of the practice and significance of mentorship in advancing the leadership career pathing of women.

Ask: If they would want to follow up if they will be willing to participate in member checking. (Would you like to see the transcript, can I come check with you?)

Appendix E: Language editor certificate

Olivier Language Practitioner
Editing and Translation Service

Date: 18 November 2023

Letter of confirmation of professional proofreading

Title: Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university

Author: L.G. Molale-Tom

Student number: 20318634

Editor: Willemien Olivier

*This paper was proofread
by
a proofreader*

LETTER OF CONFIRMATION OF ENGLISH EDITING

This is to confirm that the paper with the provisional title, Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university, to be submitted by L.G. Molale-Tom of North-West University, has been edited for language by Olivier Language Practitioner, Willemien Olivier. The document needed only a few amendments. Neither the research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process.

The editor guarantees the quality of the English language in this paper, provided the editor's changes are accepted and further changes made to the paper are checked by the editor.

Willemien Olivier

Honours Degree Translation Studies (2017) UNISA
Editing and Translation Service: Olivier Language Practitioner since 2008

Willemien Olivier
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E-mail address: willemienoli4@gmail.com

Appendix F: Turnitin summary report



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that **Turnitin** received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

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File size:	4.07M
Page count:	147
Word count:	42,596
Character count:	245,888
Submission date:	23-Nov-2023 02:01 PM (UTC-0800)
Submission ID:	2237097061



The thumbnail shows the first page of the submission, which is a document from North-West University (NWU). The title is 'Exploring mentorship in the career advancement of women in leadership at a South African university'. The author is 'LG Molale-Tom' with a contact email 'aroid.org/0006-0003-0657-7171'. The document is a mini-dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree 'Bachelor of Business Administration' at the North-West University. The supervisor is 'Prof Y du Plessis'. The examination is 'November 2023' and the student number is '20318634'.

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