

**THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT SENIOR
LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF
CAREER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ON WOMEN'S CAREER
PROGRESSION IN THE BANKING SECTOR AT THE
SULTANATE OF OMAN**

JUHAINA AL MULLAHI

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

THE DEPARTMENT OF WORK, EMPLOYMENT AND
ORGANISATION

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

GLASGOW, UK

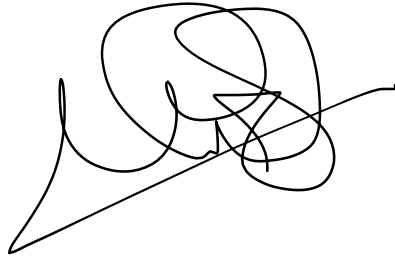
October 2022

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

The copyright of this thesis belongs to the author under the terms of the United Kingdom Copyright Acts as qualified by the University of Strathclyde Regulation 3.50. Due acknowledgment must always be made of the use of any material contained in, or derived from, this thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Date: October 2022

ABSTRACT

The scarcity of women holding senior leadership positions is a well-documented phenomenon in the literature that exists globally to date. The opportunities for women's career progression still lag significantly compared to those for men, despite the equality legislations that were established to ensure that equal opportunities are offered to men and women. The underrepresentation of women at senior leadership positions implies that women are treated differently, and they continue to face challenges that hinder their career progression. This research aims to investigate the reasons behind the scarcity of women in leadership positions focusing on three main areas. First, through the lens of career management systems. Second, through examining the different barriers women face throughout their career journey, and also explains the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging gender inequalities that affect the career progression of women. Finally, it provides insights on the interventions offered to women to help them climb the leadership ladder and assesses the efficacy of these interventional strategies in the context of the continuing scarcity of women in senior leadership positions.

This thesis adopted a qualitative dual case study design to explore, in depth, how different organisational processes and practices play a major role in affecting women's career progression. To show different perspectives on the subject, a comparative study between an international bank and a local bank in the Sultanate of Oman was carried out. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with employees from different occupational levels including HR managers, senior managers, and other occupational levels. The data collected were analysed by applying a thematic analysis on the career trajectories of participants. These career trajectories revealed the different career experiences that have been shaped by different decisions and factors, which shows various steps towards progression or challenges that are encountered throughout the career journey of the Participants. Investigating the career trajectory of both

genders also highlighted the inequality issues between them, and the role played by the organisations in addressing and overcoming these issues.

This research contributes to the discourse on gender inequality in career management systems applied to women and proposes a conceptual framework to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the different factors and barriers that impact the career progression of women in the banking sector through career management practices. The framework presents an overview of the contributors that will support women's progression in the banking sector, in addition to the barriers that could hinder their career progression. Moreover, it provides insights for various sectors beyond banking in forming policies that will improve the position of women and help them progress to senior leadership positions.

CONTENTS

FIGURES	xi
TABLES.....	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research background	1
1.2 Omani context	5
1.2.1 Background on Oman	5
1.2.2 The banking sector	6
1.2.3 Women's status in Oman	9
1.3 Statement of the problem	10
1.4 Research aims and questions.....	11
1.5 Research significance and importance	11
1.6 Research objectives	12
1.7 The study's conceptual framework	13
1.8 Research outline	15
CHAPTER 2: CAREER MANAGEMENT AND GENDER.....	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 The traditional perspectives on careers	17
2.3 Contemporary perspectives on careers: the boundaryless and protean themes	20
2.3.1 The boundaryless approach.....	20
2.3.2 The protean approach.....	21
2.4 Differences in career pathways between men and women	22

2.5 The impact of gendered organisations on women's career progression	23
2.6 Organisational career management	27
2.7 Career management system.....	30
2.7.1 Organisational career planning	31
2.7.2 Organisational career practices	34
2.7.3 Career success (Objective vs. Subjective)	35
2.8 Impact of organisational career management on career success.....	37
2.8.1 Training	38
2.8.2 External seminars	38
2.8.3 Development assignment	38
2.8.4 Lateral moves	39
2.8.5 Job rotation.....	39
2.8.6 International assignment	39
2.8.7 Job enrichment	40
2.8.8 Mentoring	40
2.8.9 Networking.....	41
2.8.10 Assessment and development centres	41
2.8.11 Performance appraisal.....	41
2.8.12 Career paths.....	42
2.8.13 Job posting	42
2.8.14 Succession planning	42
2.8.15 Career counselling.....	43
2.8.16 Career workshops.....	43

2.9 Underpinning theories	43
2.9.1 The developmental mechanism (OCM practices that improve competencies)	44
2.9.2 The informational mechanism (OCM practices that offer information)	46
2.9.3 The relational mechanism (OCM practices that impact relationships)	48
2.10 Chapter conclusion.....	51
CHAPTER 3: BARRIERS TO WOMEN’S CAREER PROGRESSION	52
3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 Organisational barriers to women’s career progression – meso level.....	53
3.2.1 Gender discrimination.....	56
3.2.2 Structure of the organisation	57
3.2.3 Culture of the organisation.....	59
3.2.4 Bias and discrimination in organisational practices.....	60
3.3 Individual and societal barriers to women’s career progression	67
3.3.1 Individual barriers – micro-level.....	67
3.3.2 Societal barriers – macro level	70
3.4 Chapter conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER 4: INTERVENTIONAL STRATEGIES	73
4.1 Introduction	73
4.2 Gender equality legislation and models: framing the organisational context	73
4.2.1 The formal equality model	73
4.2.2 The substantive equality model.....	74
4.3 Organisational interventions	76

4.3.1 Family-friendly policies	77
4.3.2 Leadership programmes	78
4.3.3 Succession planning and career development.....	79
4.3.4 Mentoring.....	81
4.3.5 Networking.....	82
4.3.6 Structural and cultural change.....	83
4.3.7 Role models.....	84
4.4 Chapter conclusion.....	86
4.5 Conclusion of the literature review	86
CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	90
5.1 Introduction	90
5.2 Research philosophy	91
5.3 Research design/qualitative approach	93
5.3.1 Case study research design/choice of cases	96
5.4 Research method	100
5.4.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	103
5.4.2 Secondary data	105
5.4.3 Sampling strategy.....	107
5.4.4 Piloting	110
5.4.5 Interview guide.....	111
5.4.6 Interview process	112
5.5 Data analysis	114
5.6 Validity and reliability of the research.....	119

5.7 Ethical considerations	122
5.8 Reflections and limitations.....	123
5.9 Chapter conclusion.....	127
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BANK.....	128
6.1 Introduction	128
6.2 Profile of the bank.....	129
6.3 Demographic data	129
6.4 Factors affecting women’s career progression.....	131
6.4.1 Individual factors/contributors	132
6.4.2 Organisational factors/approach.....	139
6.5 Organisational career planning	147
6.6 Organisational career practices and their impact on women’s career progression	154
6.7 Organisational barriers to women’s career progression.....	165
6.8 Other barriers that affect women’s career progression	171
6.9 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality	174
6.9.1 Gender difference in career management practices	175
6.9.2 Gender differences in taking senior managerial positions	177
6.10 Organisational interventions and their impact on women’s career progression	180
6.11 Chapter conclusion.....	188
CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS FROM THE LOCAL BANK.....	190
7.1 Introduction	190

7.2 Profile of the bank	190
7.3 Demographic data	190
7.4 Factors affecting women's career progression.....	194
7.4.1 Individual factors/contributors	195
7.4.2 Organisational factors/approach.....	207
7.5 Organisational career planning	215
7.6 Organisational career practices	222
7.7 Organisational barriers to women's career progression.....	231
7.8 Other barriers that affect women's career progression	234
7.9 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality	237
7.9.1 Gender difference in taking management career practices	238
7.9.2 Gender differences in taking senior managerial positions	239
7.10 Organisational interventions and their impact on women's career progression	241
7.11 Chapter conclusion.....	243
CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF THE TWO CASES' FINDINGS	245
8.1 Introduction	245
8.2 Demographic data	246
8.2.1 Age.....	246
8.2.3 <i>Qualifications</i>	249
8.2.3 <i>Marital/family status</i>	250
8.3 The organisational role on women career progression through career management practices	251

8.4 Factors affecting women’s career progression.....	257
8.5 The main organisational barriers to women career progression	258
8.6 Other barriers to women’s career progression	264
8.7 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality	267
8.7.1 Gender differences in taking career practice opportunities	267
8.7.2 Gender differences in opportunities provided to hold senior positions	268
8.8 Organisational interventions and their impact on women’s career progression ..	270
8.9 Conceptual framework of the study	273
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION.....	278
9.1 Introduction	278
9.2 Overview of the thesis.....	278
9.3 Contributions of the research	280
9.3.1 Gaps in the literature	280
9.3.2 New findings on the Omani banking sector	282
9.3.3 Methodological contributions	283
9.3.4 Recommendations to policy and decision-makers	283
9.4 Limitations and future research.....	287
9.5 Chapter conclusion.....	289
REFERENCES.....	290
APPENDICES	328
Appendix A: Research matrix.....	328
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	338

Appendix B.1: Interview Questions for HRD Managers	338
Appendix B.2: Interview Questions for Senior Managers.....	341
Appendix B.3: Interview Questions for employees from other occupational levels	345
Appendix C: Data analysis 1	351
Appendix D: Data analysis 2	356

FIGURES

Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the study	14
Figure 4.1 Study aims and research questions	89
Figure 5.1 Methodological framework	90
Figure 5.2 Themes and sub-themes.....	118
Figure 6.1 Individual factors affecting women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	132
Figure 6.2 Organisational factors affecting women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	139
Figure 6.3 Investigation of career planning at different levels (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	147
Figure 6.4 HR perspective on organisational approach for employees’ career planning; the line manager provides support to the employee (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>).	153
Figure 6.5 The international bank’s management career practices	161
Figure 6.6 Impact of career practices on women’s career success and progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	164
Figure 6.7 Organisational barriers to women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	171
Figure 6.8 Other barriers that affect women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	174
Figure 6.9 The increasing share of women in leadership positions (from the bank’s website)	178
Figure 6.10 Organisational interventions to support women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	186
Figure 7.1 Individual factors affecting women’s career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	195
Figure 7.2 Organisational factors affecting women’s career progression.....	207

Figure 7.3 Investigation of career planning at different levels (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	216
Figure 7.4 Career planning at senior level (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	217
Figure 7.5 Career planning at other occupational levels (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	218
Figure 7.6 HR perspective on organisational approach for employees' career planning (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	219
Figure 7.7 Impact of career practices on women's career progression in the banking sector (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	229
Figure 7.8 Organisational barriers to women's career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	234
Figure 7.9 Other barriers that affect women's career progression (<i>Source: The Researcher</i>)	237
Figure 8.1 A conceptual framework of this study	277

TABLES

Table 1.1 Banks in Oman.....	8
Table 5.1 Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach	93
Table 6.1: Participants' demographics and codes (International bank)	130
Table 7.1: Participants' demographics and codes (Local bank)	193

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am first and foremost grateful to Allah Almighty for giving me the strength and will for starting and completing my PhD journey.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Patricia Findlay, for her continuous support, guidance, and feedback throughout the different stages of this research. I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Professor Tom Baum for his guidance and support during this journey.

I am thankful to my father for his strong belief in continuing education and his encouragement against all odds for me to complete this feat. My gratitude extends to my mother for her support and prayers that guided and helped me to overcome the challenges during my study.

I would also like to thank my husband Naif and children Dana, Ahmed and Adam for believing in me during this time. Special thanks go to my lovely autistic child, Ahmed, who is a positive challenge in my life. It is because of him and for him, my son, I learned how to accept challenges knowing that each challenge is a step forward in my journey, which I will accomplish by God's will.

My sisters and friends, thank you all for supporting me and lifting my spirits when I needed them the most. Your encouragement and belief in me gave me the strength to go on.

Finally, I am grateful to the College of Banking and Financial Studies for being my sponsor to complete my higher education and supporting me throughout the years to this date.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and an essential foundation for a successful and sustainable world. Women represent half of the world's population, hence half of its potential for economic growth. It is essential to acknowledge that when gender inequalities exist, women are disadvantaged and discriminated against in many and various aspects. However, numerous initiatives have been established to elevate gender equality. For example, it is one of the top five goals of the United Nations (UN): 'to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. The UN adopted the first equality legislation in 1957, providing equal pay for equal work between men and women (Walby, 2004). The UN also declared 1976–1985 as the 'UN Decade for Women' and formed the Commission on the Status of Women, which is wholly devoted to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, which assists economies to grow and thrive through challenges, encouraging development and productivity. According to the UN, as of 2014, 143 out of 195 countries were committed to equality between women and men in their constitutions. Moreover, individual states have also played a critical role in establishing legislation to promote gender equality. For example, in Britain, establishing the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, which are now consolidated in the Equality Act 2010, represents a commitment towards gender equality.

Accordingly, women have made leaps in progressing in the workplace, reaching managerial positions, particularly in Western countries. There remains, however, significant underrepresentation of women leadership in organisations (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009; Glass and Cook, 2016). The opportunities for women's career progression still lag significantly compared to those for men. The challenges women face in progressing throughout their careers, in comparison to their male counterparts, are highlighted in the literature (Powell and Mainiero, 1992; Lyness and Thompson, 2000).

Research conducted by Catalyst (2020) indicates that globally, as of 2019, women's participation in the labour force stands at 47.7 per cent; they hold 29 per cent of senior management roles, and only 6.6 per cent are chief executive officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge that these figures present the worrying picture that, while there seem to be almost equal participation of women at entry-level positions, the path for women towards the most senior levels is unfortunately filled with obstacles. These obstacles play a significant role in hindering women's career progression compared to that of their male counterparts. This fact is the main drive for conducting this research, to reveal the multifaceted dynamics behind the failure of organisations collectively to assist women in succeeding and progressing in their careers, despite all the efforts and policies they are adopting.

This study spans the careers and gender literature. It highlights how careers are gendered in organisations through patriarchal structures that lower women's status in organisations despite the presence of management practices aimed at developing competencies and, hence, employees' performance, resulting in career success and progression. Several scholars have identified various management practices depending on the scope of their studies, as there is no one set of organisational career management practices (De Vos et al., 2008). However, the most frequently used practices in Bagdadli and Gianecchini's (2019) framework, adopted for this study, investigate the impact of organisational career management practices on employees' career progression.

A considerable amount of the literature focuses on the metaphor of the 'glass ceiling' as the prominent phenomenon that explains women's advancement throughout their career up to a certain point where they start facing difficulties and barriers in progressing to senior levels (Cotter et al., 2001; Davis and Maldonado, 2015; Folke and Rickne, 2016; Glass and Cook, 2016; Newman, 2016). However, this phenomenon falls short in explaining the various barriers that women encounter along their career journeys, highlighted later by another phenomenon called the 'labyrinth'. The 'labyrinth' indicates that women's progression to leadership positions is possible but that, compared to the path of men, their path to success is paved with many challenges (Carli and Eagly, 2016). This

phenomenon relates to this study in terms of considering that women face barriers throughout their career journeys from the beginning, with twists and turns at various points in their careers.

For decades, a wide range of research uncovered factors that act as barriers to women's career progression (Melamed, 1995; Linehan, 2001; Wentling, 2003; Ismail and Ibrahim, 2008; Sanderson and Whitehead, 2016; Cross et al., 2017). Some studies have considered certain factors placed at the individual level, such as a relative lack of confidence and lack of management aspiration in women (Guillén et al., 2018; Watts et al., 2015). Other studies have looked at factors at the organisational level, such as discrimination and bias in organisational practices (Acker, 2012; Ibarra et al., 2013), whereas other studies have also recognised factors at the societal level that affect women's progression, such as culture and gender stereotyping (Heilman, 2001; Poggio, 2010).

Understanding the barriers stemming from these different levels, as stated above, is very important in acknowledging the challenges women face that impact negatively on their career journeys. However, it is significant to note here that, although societal and individual barriers to women's career progression will be acknowledged and highlighted, organisations are the focus of this analysis. They are the main domain in which gender equality is either maintained or challenged, and they frame the opportunity structure for career progression.

Furthermore, conducting research at the level of organisations is critical due to the continuous creation of inequalities throughout daily organisational processes and practices. A large number of studies have investigated organisational policies and practices to understand the reasons for the existence of disparities between men and women despite all attempts to eliminate these (Acker, 1990, 2006; Barreto et al., 2009; Benschop and Verloo, 2011; Sayce et al., 2012). Organisations are also the focus of several efforts to change forms of inequality (Acker, 2006). Hence, many factors contribute to the persistence and perpetuation of gender inequality. This research explores the influence of various factors on women's career progression in organisations and

investigates organisational interventions adopted to enhance equality between the genders and improve women's status in organisations.

However, the literature on career development provides different views on the pathways taken by men and women which lack unity in perception, due to various barriers women face that do not reflect men's work experience, resulting in the underrepresentation of women in the upper echelons. This thesis adds to the literature by explaining the imbalance in women's position in the workplace, even where they are provided with the same developmental opportunities as their male counterparts, as the literature indicates. The studies on barriers and interventions, on the other hand, provide an understanding of how organisations challenge or perpetuate the gender inequality that hinders women's career progression. This study investigates these issues and explains the role of organisations in either challenging or perpetuating these inequalities to date.

Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that the literature is based on studies in the Western context due to its dominance in the subjects of careers and gender. Hence, it does not necessarily reflect the career experiences of women who are living outside of this context (Omair, 2010). This research is conducted in a different context (i.e., the Middle East). Related research in the Middle East Arab world, particularly the Sultanate of Oman (henceforth referred to as Oman), falls behind theoretical and empirical research. Therefore, this study sets out to reveal the differences between the two contexts and, accordingly, add to the existing literature from a broader perspective. This research focuses on organisations' policies and practices in the Middle Eastern context, where limited research has been conducted at this level (Metcalf, 2007). Subsequently, it establishes information that policy-makers could employ in formulating plans of action to promote and encourage women who aspire to achieve senior managerial positions.

Furthermore, empirically, most of the previous studies were conducted with men and women in management positions to investigate the challenges that women face in their careers (Jackson, 2001; Linehan and Scullion, 2001; Ackah and Heaton, 2004; Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010). In comparison, this study targets employees at other occupational levels to

explore the experiences, judgements and factors contributing to these decisions at various points and twists in women's and men's career paths, and how organisational practices influence them differently. In addition, this research is the first on this subject to be conducted based on a comparison of two case studies – international versus local – in the banking sector in Oman.

1.2 Omani context

This section sheds light on the country context aspects and the sector selected for conducting the research, and highlights women's career positions to give an understanding of the need to conduct this study.

1.2.1 Background on Oman

Oman is an Arab Middle Eastern country, officially known as the Sultanate of Oman. The main cities in Oman are Al Buraimi, Ibri, Muscat, Nizwa, Salalah, Sohar, and Sur. Muscat is the capital and headquarters of the state's administration. Oman is located on the south-eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia. Its total land area is 309,500 square kilometres with a total population of 4,617,927, of which 2.66 million are Omani (57 per cent of the total population) and 1.96 million are expatriate. The Omani population consists of 50.4 per cent men and 49.6 per cent women (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2019). Oman shares a marine border with Iran, and also is bordered to the west by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. To the east, it is bordered by the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, and to the south-west by Yemen.

Oman had lagged behind in many important aspects, such as education, health and infrastructure, in addition to being unstable politically, until 1970, when His Majesty the late Sultan Qaboos Bin Said started to rule the country. Oman's economy depends heavily on oil revenues (Al-Rahbi, 2008), and these have been the major contributor to GDP at 87 per cent (Khan, 2010). The country's infrastructure and economic position have developed

significantly, dependent mainly on income generated from oil production (Carmody, 2013).

Oman's labour force participation stood at 2.3 million in 2017, of which 59.4 per cent of the total workforce were males and 40.5 per cent were women Sector-wise, 76.8 per cent of the total employment is in the private sector, compared to 10.2 per cent in the government sector and 12.9 per cent in family businesses (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2018). Hence, the private sector is considered significant in terms of employment (Al-Lamki, 2005) and is a targeted sector in the Oman Vision 2040, which plays a partnership role with the state to create wealth through economic diversification, consequently decreasing the dependence on oil as the top economic contributor in Oman (Oman Vision 2040, 2020). For these two main reasons, the private sector has been selected for this study.

Moreover, the financial sector is considered an essential element in the country's economic development and growth. Oman's financial sector consists mainly of conventional and Islamic banks, finance and leasing companies, money exchange establishments, investment/brokerage companies, insurance companies, and pension funds (Central Bank of Oman, 2020). Banks dominate Oman's financial system, with more than 90 per cent of total assets and liabilities of the financial sector (Sangeetha and Pria, 2012). Accordingly, it was selected as a unit of analysis for this study.

1.2.2 The banking sector

The banking industry in Oman is one of the oldest private industries. It started in 1948 when a branch of the British Bank of the Middle East was established in Muscat. The industry was fragmented significantly until the Central Bank of Oman was established in 1975 to oversee and regulate the banking sector (Al-Lamki, 2005; Riffai et al., 2012). As of 2016, the banking sector includes seven local commercial banks and nine foreign banks (with 470 local branches and five overseas branches and representative offices). There are

also two specialised banks (23 domestic branches) (Table 4.1) (Central Bank of Oman, 2020).

Table 1.1 Banks in Oman

Foreign banks (commercial banks)	Local banks	Specialised banks	Islamic banks
Bank Melli Iran	Bank Dhofar SAOG	Oman Housing Bank SAOG	Bank Nizwa
Bank of Baroda	Bank Muscat SAOG	Oman Development Bank SAOG	Al Izz Islamic Bank SAOG
Bank Saderat Iran	National Bank of Oman SAOG		
Habib Bank Limited	Oman Arab Bank SAOG		
National Bank of Abu Dhabi	Sohar International		
Standard Chartered Bank	Ahli Bank SAOG		
State Bank of India	HSBC Bank Oman SAOG		
Bank of Beirut			
Qatar National Bank			

Source: Central Bank of Oman (2020)

Banks from the commercial banking sector were selected for the following reasons:

1. The banking industry in Oman, particularly the commercial sector, is considered one of the most important and developed industries. The banks are characterised by their solid and competent policies and procedures for employees' management and development (Al-Lamki, 2005), making the sector an appropriate and challenging field for investigating the subtle forms of gender inequality that subsequently influence women's career progression to senior managerial levels.

2. The existence of various sub-sectors or divisions within the banking sector, such as local banks, international banks and Islamic banks, provides the researcher with different options and opportunities to select appropriate case studies for the research.
3. The banking industry is the most desirable field of work for women in the private sector as almost 59 per cent of all female employees are hired by the private sector (Al-Lamki, 2005). Yet, their career progression in the banking industry is limited.
4. There is no previous research conducted on the impact of management career's systems on women's career progression, which also highlights the barriers and different interventional strategies in such contexts in Oman.

1.2.3 Women's status in Oman

Oman has been a pioneer when it comes to women's rights. The government has established the empowerment of women as one of the essential and permanent pillars of the country's and society's development. Hence, women's status in the public sector has been firmly secured by positioning them in various leadership positions such as ambassadors, cabinet ministers, undersecretaries, ministers, and members of the Consultative Council. However, similarly to other countries, once economic needs have been met, women are discouraged from some occupations thought not to be appropriate for them (Kemp and Madsen, 2014). Women contribute significantly to many sectors, such as education, health, media, banking and other business sectors (Belwal and Belwal, 2014), but their participation in the labour force is restricted by various unwritten social norms in a patriarchal society dominated by men (McElwee and Al-Riyami, 2003). According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2020), as of 2017, Omani women occupy only 20.9 per cent of top, middle and direct management positions in the public sector, whereas in the private sector they occupy just three per cent of top management positions (Al Shaibany, 2018; Shabiba, 2019).

Despite the growing importance of career management, there is still a dearth of research in this field from a cross-national perspective, particularly involving developing and

developed countries (Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). Hence, Oman was selected as the research country, especially since research on women occupying managerial positions is limited. Studies on this issue that form a solid baseline for future development are particularly valuable (Kemp and Madsen, 2014).

1.3 Statement of the problem

Although women have made remarkable progress in their careers worldwide, their scarcity at senior managerial levels is a fact that emphasises gender inequality in organisations despite the existence of gender equality legislation. Organisations offer multiple opportunities for career progression through providing several career development practices, such as training, promotions, succession planning, assessment centres, and many more. Nevertheless, they do not achieve the required outcomes for females' workers, in line with their male counterparts. Many scholars have explained this unequal position of women as caused by the barriers they face throughout their careers, which hinder their progression compared to men who do not encounter these barriers due to the patriarchal structures of societies and organisations supporting their progress. However, what remains unclear is the role of organisations in supporting women to overcome these barriers. Moreover, in an attempt to further support women's career progression, organisations offer interventional strategies, such as providing mentoring, networking and family-friendly policies. Nevertheless, unfortunately, these interventions do not achieve their aims as women are still underrepresented in the upper echelons.

Accordingly, this study investigates the reasons behind organisations' failure in advancing women in their careers to senior levels, despite their espoused compliance with gender equality legislation and all the efforts and interventions adopted. By investigating this, comprehensive reasons are given for why women are in disadvantaged positions in organisations even where they are formally provided with the same developmental opportunities as men, thus painting a clear picture of how and why the issue must be tackled.

1.4 Research aims and questions

The main aims of this study are:

1. Examining the impact of career management practices on women's career progression to senior managerial levels
2. Exploring the organisational barriers that hinder women's career progression and investigating the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities
3. Evaluating how various organisational interventions are considered critical success factors to enhance and improve women's representation at senior managerial levels.

The aims of this study are accomplished by examining employees' career experiences that influenced their career pathways at different occupational levels, in addition to investigating the role of the organisations in employees' career management. Accordingly, the questions of this research can be stated as follows:

1. How can organisations manage the career development of female employees through career management practices, allowing them to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?
2. What are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career journeys that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities?
3. To what extent are organisational interventions considered critical success factors in women's career progression?

1.5 Research significance and importance

This study is significant in light of the following considerations. First, it is a blend of career management and gender studies that highlights the role of gendered organisations in women's career progression. Second, it aims to fill the gaps in the literature with regards

to (1) identifying the reasons behind the failure of organisational career practices regarding women's career progression to senior managerial levels; (2) providing an explanation of the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging gender inequalities that affect the career progression of women; and (3) investigating the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of the interventional strategies that organisations implement to improve the representation of women in senior positions.

Third, methodologically, this study is different from other studies in the field of women's career progression in that it targets employees, both women and men, from different occupational levels to investigate the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women at senior leadership positions. This approach (1) reveals the differences in the career trajectories of men and women at different points; (2) explores the obstacles encountered along the journey and the different impacts they have on employees' career progression; and (3) investigates the role of organisations in supporting employees' progression and the different impacts this has on men and women. Fourth, this research is considered the first on this subject to be conducted based on a comparison study between an international bank and a local bank in Oman. Finally, this research makes recommendations to policy-makers on improving Omani women's career management, to increase their representation in senior management positions.

1.6 Research objectives

To fulfil the purpose of this study, the main objectives are:

1. To examine employees' career trajectories at different occupational levels and identify: (a) the organisational career practices that are provided for employees' career progression; (b) the barriers that hinder their career progression; (c) the interventions that are offered to support employees' career progression; and (d) the role of the organisation in gender equality-related issues.
2. To investigate senior managers' career experience to explore the pathways to success, and to highlight the challenges and contributors to success for each gender

3. To explore the impact of career management practices on women's career success and progression
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of the organisations' interventions in improving the representation of women in senior positions
5. To compare two case studies in the banking sector (local and international) to identify the variations and influences of the policies and practices applied to women's career progression within two different contexts.

1.7 The study's conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.1 is developed in accordance with the research aims, objectives, and questions. It builds upon the framework proposed by Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) on the relationship between organisation career practices and career success. However, this study extends the framework to include the diverse challenges that women face throughout their career journey, such as organisational, societal, and individual challenges. Moreover, the framework includes the organisational interventions provided to women to facilitate their career progression to higher positions.

External Factors

Organisational Factors

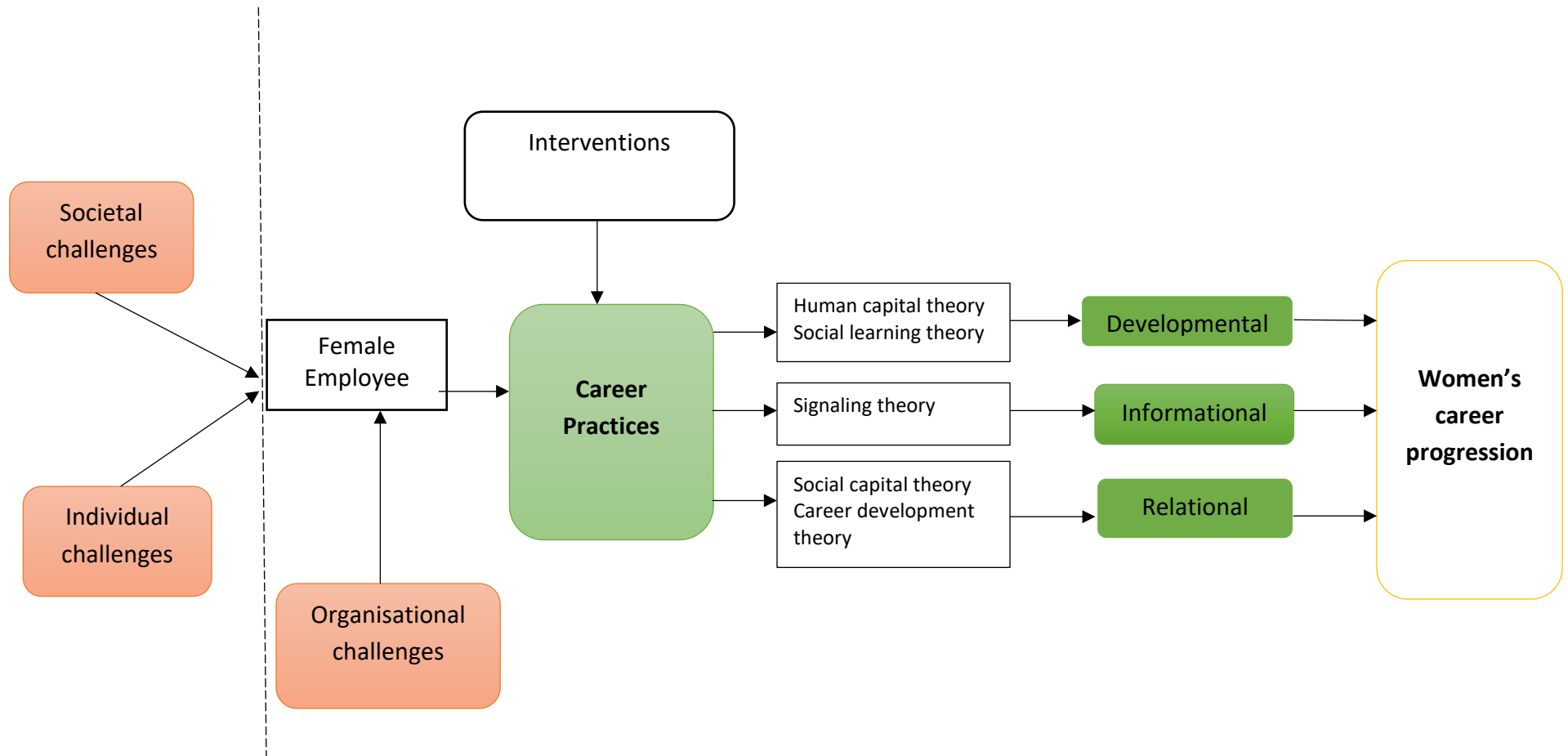


Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework of the study

1.8 Research outline

The thesis consists of nine chapters and is structured as follows:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Chapter 1 | Presents the background of this study and highlights the Omani context. The chapter then presents the problem and research aims and questions. Next, it sheds light on the significance and importance of the study, followed by the objectives of the study. The structure of the thesis is addressed at the end of the chapter. |
| Chapter 2 | Explains the career concept and the changing nature of career perspectives through the decades. The chapter also examines the differences between men and women's career pathways. It focuses on the organisational role in gendering the career pathways of employees and highlights the framework adapted for this study. |
| Chapter 3 | Discusses the different barriers that women face in their career journey. The study focuses on the organisational barriers, but it also sheds light on societal and individual barriers. |
| Chapter 4 | Reviews some of the equality legislation issues that organisational choices are framed by and operate within. The chapter then highlights different organisational strategies offered to help women progress in their careers. |
| Chapter 5 | Elaborates on the research methodology. First, it presents the philosophical underpinnings of this research and justifies the adoption of a critical realism paradigm. Second, the chapter explains the consideration of a qualitative approach and clarifies the research design. It also illuminates the method used in analysing the data, validity of data and ethical consideration. |

Chapter 6	Presents the findings from the international bank.
Chapter 7	Presents the findings from the local bank.
Chapter 8	Discussion and comparison of the findings from the two banks.
Chapter 9	Sets out the conclusion of the thesis by providing an overview of the thesis, followed by the contributions. Finally, it outlines the limitations and suggests directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: CAREER MANAGEMENT AND GENDER

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the literature on the first aim of this study ‘examining the impact of career management practices on women’s career progression to senior managerial levels.

The chapter begins by explaining the career concept and its changing nature throughout the decades by outlining the different perspectives on careers (i.e. traditional and contemporary). Next, the differences between men and women’s career pathways and different routes towards successful careers are examined. Also, the role of organisations in gendering career pathways is discussed. The literature review explores some of the critical mechanisms considered by organisations to manage employees’ careers successfully. Moreover, the characteristics of gendered organisations are outlined to set a perspective on reasons for gender inequalities practised in organisations.

The chapter then discusses the foundational framework adopted to examine the relationship between career practices and progression, highlighting the theories that explain the rationale behind the mechanisms that relate organisational career management practices to career success. Finally, the chapter represent the framework of this study which highlights its primary aims and objectives.

2.2 The traditional perspectives on careers

One definition of the term ‘career’ referred to repeatedly in the existing careers literature is ‘the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time’ (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8). The interpretation of this definition links individual career development to the work experience gained continuously over time. However, this definition is relatively narrow and does not explicitly include factors that shape work experience over time. Some of these factors could stem from organisations, such as the organisational culture and structure, opportunities, and policies and practices (Schreuder and Coetzee, 2011; Akhtar

et al., 2014). Other factors could be stemming from society, such as stereotyping and patriarchal structures (Lent et al., 2000; Thomas and Inkson, 2007). Individuals also shape their career experiences through such aspects as personal traits, motivation and aspiration, and family circumstances (Feldman and Bolino, 2000; Hall, 2002). Hence, some scholars (e.g., Schein, 1996) have evaluated the term ‘career’ to include the subjective aspect centred mainly on the individual. Schein (1996) explained this with the term ‘career anchor’, which reflects the individual’s self-concept in perceived talents, values and motivation to obtain a career. Unfortunately, this elaboration lacks clarity on two more core influences on the individual’s career – organisations and societies and their role in this issue.

However, the definition of the term ‘career’ was improved later by Hall (2002) to include more views on the objective aspects that involve organisational policies and roles assigned to various occupations, hence providing clarity on the individual’s expectation when making a choice (Schein, 1996). Hall (2002, p. 12) stated that ‘the career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities throughout the person’s life’. Although Hall aimed to provide a broader prospect of the term ‘career’, he failed to acknowledge the influence of societies on individuals’ careers, which is regarded as an essential factor that impacts careers’ nature (Melamed, 1995). Therefore, Gunz and Peiperl (2007) argued that career studies require an integrated approach that examines individuals, organisations and societies. Nevertheless, as highlighted previously, this study focuses on the organisational aspect because organisations are the main actor in planning and managing career pathways for employees. Organisational studies examine many aspects of behaviour within organisational settings, such as decision-making on various issues, implementation of policies and procedures, and innovation and change when required (Ferlie, 2001).

However, the meaning and scope of careers have developed over the decades within the academic literature. For example, during the 1970s, the research on careers proposed that organisations have control in managing individuals’ careers through the hierarchical structures of occupations, which provide job security through long-term employment and

linear career ladders (Schein, 1971). The same proposition continued in the 1980s, and contemporary aspects of women's career advancement and challenges in the workplace were examined (Hackett and Betz, 1981; Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987). However, from the 1990s, the restructuring of organisations and downsizing have changed the nature of work, leading to new directions within the career literature. Some scholars argue that organisations' new structures have affected the nature of careers, which have become more unpredictable and vulnerable when it comes to long-term employment and job security (Schein, 1996; Sullivan, 1999; Baruch, 2006).

In sum, the concept of traditional careers is associated with a linear bureaucratic system based on rigid hierarchical structures, where career advancement is the organisation's responsibility. It is represented by a linear path towards the top levels of the organisation's hierarchy, involving clear formal roles and job ladders (Buzzanell et al., 1991), formal promotion policies, and salary scales (Baruch, 2004). However, although traditional careers are considered old and outdated due to the emergence of new career approaches, they are discussed in the next section, as some organisations nowadays still function in this way. Baruch (2004, p. 67) stated that 'many organisations still have a core structure based on bureaucracy and climbing frames to enable relatively clear hierarchical mobility, mostly for a core group of staff'. Bureaucratic structures in many organisations oppress women and offer them subordinate positions compared to their male counterparts, who dominate the work structure in terms of authority, career and position (Ramsay and Parker, 1991). This argument indicates organisations' preference to support their male employees in their career progression due to their patriarchal structures and dominance.

Evidence from the literature reveals that traditional career development has taken a different perspective due to the emergence of two contemporary approaches to careers management, which are discussed in the next section.

2.3 Contemporary perspectives on careers: the boundaryless and protean themes

Many factors have contributed to transforming the nature of the traditional career to more contemporary perspectives, such as globalisation, the competitiveness of the labour market, probabilities of job loss at every level, and lower opportunities for vertical mobility (Nagy et al., 2019). Accordingly, new concepts have developed to capture the changing nature of careers, such as the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994) and the protean career (Hall, 1996). These two concepts received special consideration among scholars and became popular in the career literature in explaining different approaches to career progression (Hall, 1996; Arthur and Rousseau, 2001; Briscoe et al., 2006).

2.3.1 The boundaryless approach

The boundaryless career was defined by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994, p. 307) as ‘sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings. This boundaryless career concept provides an extension of work experience that does not only emphasise a single organisation but provides a passage across boundaries to other organisations. Boundaryless careers are characterised by employees’ ability to move within the organisation and outside it as well.

Greenhaus et al. (2010) proposed three perspectives to explain and distinguish the boundaryless career from other forms of careers. First, it is characterised by mobility patterns that offer the employee some form of boundary-crossing and inter-organisational mobility whenever career opportunities arise. Second, it requires the use of career competencies and strategies that demand knowing why the individual needs to move, knowing how to market oneself, and establishing connections with people possessing power and influence. The third perspective is recognising that individuals are fully responsible for decision-making and managing their career choices.

Hence, this approach provides for gaining experiences from various organisations and adding to the individual’s credentials in the forms of more skills, income and exposure; accordingly, it increases the value of and demand for the individual in the labour market,

which assists in their career progression. Since mobility is the focus of the boundaryless approach either within or outside the organisation, the literature shows that mobility is advantageous for men on men, whereas for women it represents an obstacle that prevents them from progressing in their careers (Valcour and Tolbert, 2003; Tomlinson and Durbin, 2010).

2.3.2 The protean approach

The protean career is ‘a career that is driven by the person, not the organisation, and that will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and the environment change’ (Hall, 1996, p. 8). As per Hall’s definition, the responsibility for career accomplishments is placed with the individual only and could change depending on the individual’s circumstances or the surrounding society.

Individuals with protean career attitudes use their own values in approaching and guiding their careers independently without organisational interference (Briscoe et al., 2006). Protean careers are characterised by being self-directed and focus on personal values to achieve psychological success, which could fall into two categories: subjective (career and job satisfaction, wellbeing and work engagement) and objective career success (salary, promotion and position) (Hall et al., 2018).

The career literature proposes a significant shift from the traditional approach to the contemporary approach (Hall, 2004; Briscoe et al., 2006). However, some scholars suggest that organisations differ in their approach and developmental practices depending on their objectives and values (Baruch, 2006). For example, an organisation that holds a traditional career approach may apply certain practices, such as traditional career paths and traditional development practices. In contrast, an organisation with a contemporary approach may help employees gain employability, and may outsource employees and offer secondments (Baruch, 2006).

However, a balanced perspective on managing careers is more justifiable, as it blends the traditional approach with the contemporary approach, which involves matching the needs

of organisations and individuals. It highlights organisations' roles as primary and crucial to employees' career development and progression since organisations frame the opportunity structure for career progression. The proposition on the organisational role in managing employees' careers was highlighted by Baruch (2006). In this proposition, organisations play the roles of 'supporter, enabler and developer' of their employees instead of the traditional 'command and control' approach, which is implemented by either providing a clear career path or providing support and diverse opportunities to develop different career strengths and roles.

Nonetheless, the literature did not highlight any gender specification in how organisations offer and implement their career approaches. It is presumed that male and female employees are treated equally, which neglects the fact that women face more barriers to their career progression. Hence, this thesis recognises the existence of the differences that lead to careers being gendered, which affects how organisations should consider this issue and act upon it accordingly. The following section sheds light on the differences in career pathways between men and women.

2.4 Differences in career pathways between men and women

The career literature has explained the underrepresentation of women at managerial levels by the differences in the career progress and trajectories that are followed by men and women, taking into consideration the barriers that women encounter in their careers, which are more numerous than those faced by men (Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Eddleston et al., 2004; O'Neil et al., 2008). Some career scholars argue that an explanation for this is that success is perceived differently among men and women, consequently affecting their career choices and paths (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Orser and Leck, 2010). Women's career trajectories are considered to take a more holistic approach towards success, interconnecting aspects of work and life (O'Neil et al., 2008). Some scholars describe these as 'kaleidoscope careers', where women change their career patterns depending on their life circumstances and arrange their roles and responsibilities accordingly in new and different ways (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005).

Other researchers explain the difference in men and women's career paths by the barriers imposed by various factors that affect women's career progression, such as career preference, gender bias, and work–family issues (Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Kossek et al., 2017). Some studies observe that work structure and career success are defined by males' values and experiences continuing to dominate organisational research and practice (O'Neil et al., 2008).

On the other hand, males' career trajectories are described by some scholars to take a traditional, linear route that the organisation defines. These patterns are characterised by vertical success based on seniority and length of service (McDonald et al., 2005; Sools et al., 2007). In contrast, other scholars argue that males' career trajectories are far from being straightforward and linear, as they mainly focus on the self (O'Neil et al., 2008; Reitman and Schneer, 2008). Hence, this argument affirms that career management combines the traditional and contemporary approaches, as discussed above in Section 2.3.2, but is identified to represent males' experiences, which confirms that careers are gendered. Males' values and models are followed.

In sum, the career literature did not provide an analytical framework to fully understand how women's careers are managed and supported by organisations; instead, it provided one concept that applies to men and women with no differences. Gender differences should be acknowledged in organisations as a fundamental element of structure, culture and practice (Britton, 2000) that should be tackled and managed if neutral outcomes are sought between men and women. Hence, career is a gendered concept that does not fit or support women's career progression. The next section outlines the role of organisations in this aspect.

2.5 The impact of gendered organisations on women's career progression

This thesis focuses on the organisational context as a critical factor influencing women's careers and experiences, given that organisations shape the opportunity structure for career progression. The gendered nature of organisations represents a significant challenge and

obstacle to women's career progression. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how organisations are gendered, and why men are the dominant element in organisations, leading to women's underrepresentation at senior leadership positions and the difficulties they face in advancing their careers.

Numerous scholars have examined the gendered nature of organisations, with Acker (1990) providing the foundation for subsequent research in this area. Acker argues that organisations tend to place men in the most powerful positions, leading to gendered procedures and practices that can impact women's career paths differently from those of men. For example, organisational hierarchies often comprise gendered jobs and positions, with women typically occupying lower-level roles. This secondary position of women is partly due to the unintentional effects of daily working practices that appear to be gender-neutral but are based on a male work model, which portrays the ideal worker as someone without other responsibilities, such as social or caring duties, as highlighted by other scholars (e.g. Lewis, 2001; Kugelberg, 2006).

Acker (1990) further contends that hierarchies are constructed based on two assumptions: firstly, top positions that offer responsibility and authority for those committed to paid full employment (i.e. men); and secondly, lower positions for those who have other commitments, such as family and caring responsibilities (i.e., women). Williams et al. (2012) have similarly suggested that organisations prefer to recruit individuals who can devote themselves fully to their work with minimal distractions elsewhere, thereby excluding women with primary care responsibilities.

Therefore, care responsibilities are often perceived negatively by organisations, which adversely affects women's career progression. This also highlights the challenge of achieving work-life balance, where women struggle to balance their work and family responsibilities, impeding their career progression.

Furthermore, to understand how gender is embedded within the structure of organisations, Acker (1992) described gendered organisations and the reproduction of inequality based on four sets or processes:

1. The production of gendered divisions. Organisational practices, including the gender patterning of jobs, salaries, hierarchies, power and subordination, are all based on male dominance in high positions. Accordingly, these perceptions shape employment decisions by re-organisation and not the elimination of male dominance.
2. The creation of symbols, images and forms of consciousness that justify gender divisions. The gendered image of top managers or leaders is always related to strong and pervasive masculinity. Organisations now, as described by Acker (1992, p. 422), are 'lean, mean, aggressive, goal-oriented, efficient, and competitive but rarely empathetic, supportive, kind, and caring'. Hence, employees usually form these images to construct organisational cultures that are competitive and successful.
3. The interactions between individuals, women and women, men and men, and women and men. These interactions are formed in different ways and at different hierarchical levels that endorse dominance and subordination and develop alliances and exclusions. These results inform policies that create divisions and images of gender.
4. Individuals' internal mental work constructs their understanding of the organisation's gendered structure of work and expected behaviours and attitudes. This could include creating the accepted gendered personality and hiding other aspects of it.

These four processes were later narrowed down to three by Britton (2003).

1. Organisational structure. Policies and procedures are formed based on the gendered division of labour. The structure of the organisation provides a definition of occupations, whether they are feminine or masculine.
2. Worker agency. Workers exercise their actions based on gender characteristics, which are self-reproductive and lead to gender inequality.
3. Cultural assumptions. Culture in gendered organisations represents how images and symbols are constructed to give legitimacy to occupations and organisations.

The role of organisations in the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership roles is primarily dependent on the gendered structure of organisations, as outlined by Acker (1992) and later by Britton (2003). Other studies based their study on gendered organisations on similar processes as well. Hanasono et al. (2019), for example, discovered that women encounter a glass ceiling in academia as a result of gendered organisational practises such as gendered evaluation criteria and promotion processes. Similarly, Williams et al. (2012) suggested that firms prefer to hire employees who can commit their whole attention to their task while being distracted by other things. This suggests that women are excluded because of their major caregiving responsibilities, which has a negative influence on their job advancement. These processes provide a knowledge of the issues of inequality that women encounter, which are embedded in the structure and culture of organisations and, as a result, influence women's career advancement.

Nevertheless, many studies have also shed light on the characteristics of gendered organisations that function in putting women at a disadvantage by manipulating individual behaviours. For example, the assumption that women do not progress to high managerial levels due to lack of confidence (Michailidis et al., 2012) ignores organisational structures and systems that exaggerate the lack of balance between work and life. This results in more pressure on women in questioning their ability to handle the responsibilities of both work and family without impacting their career positions and paths. The known traditional organisational route to top positions demands separation of career and life (Williams et al., 2012). Therefore, it does not support and consider the suitability of women, with their family responsibilities, for leadership positions (O'Neil and Hopkins, 2015). Besides, top leadership positions in these organisations are dominated by males, which consequently supports the status quo in organisations by keeping the power in their hands (O'Neil et al., 2008).

Another characteristic of the gendered organisational system that affects women's career progression is subtle gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013), also called 'second-generation' gender bias, which is distinguished from first-generation gender bias in terms of its

visibility (Grover, 2015). While first-generation gender bias focuses on intentional and visible forms of discrimination against women in the workplace, second-generation bias is unseen and invisible, organised and represented in a more neutral manner (Grover, 2015). However, organisational practices and values are based on patriarchal beliefs about male superiority (Ely et al., 2011). Second-generation gender bias is related to the scarcity of women in the upper echelons (Grover, 2015; Özdemir and Albayrak, 2015; Opoku and Williams, 2019), which could be represented as maintaining the status quo or as a dynamic approach to reinforce the existing patriarchal structures of traditions, customs and values (Grover, 2015).

In sum, some recent research indicates that organisations now appear to be more gender-neutral on the surface by implementing new practices relating to careers, teams and networking (Eikhof, 2012; Chang and Milkman, 2020; Olgiati et al., 2002). Yet, inequalities still exist, and organisations are still gendered (Williams et al., 2012). Practices in gendered organisations are based on a male model. Nevertheless, the following section presents the research framework for this study, based on the above discussion.

2.6 Organisational career management

Figure 2.1 illustrates the foundation of the conceptual framework that is followed (see Figure 1.1), which outlines organisational career management (OCM) and its relation to objective career success, which translates as employees' career progression. The framework helps examine the impact of organisational career practices on women's career progression, as OCM practices are considered facilitators in career success. It also explains why and how these career practices impact employees' career progression through three mechanisms that work as mediators: developmental, informational, and relational (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). The framework also shows some factors that affect how OCM practices strengthen or hinder career success. These factors are divided into two categories: the first affects the initial part of how OCM practices create competencies, information and relationships; and the second category affects the direct

and indirect relationships between the outcomes of OCM practices and career success (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). However, since this thesis is gender-related, it focuses on gender-related barriers, specifically at the organisational level. It also represents an overall picture of the barriers affecting women's career progression throughout their career journey with no specification on phases or stages, as stated by the framework. This thesis establishes that a career is a continuous life journey that faces many challenges at each turn and twist along the way. Hence, the framework adopted by Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) will be developed to suit and target women's career progression specifically.

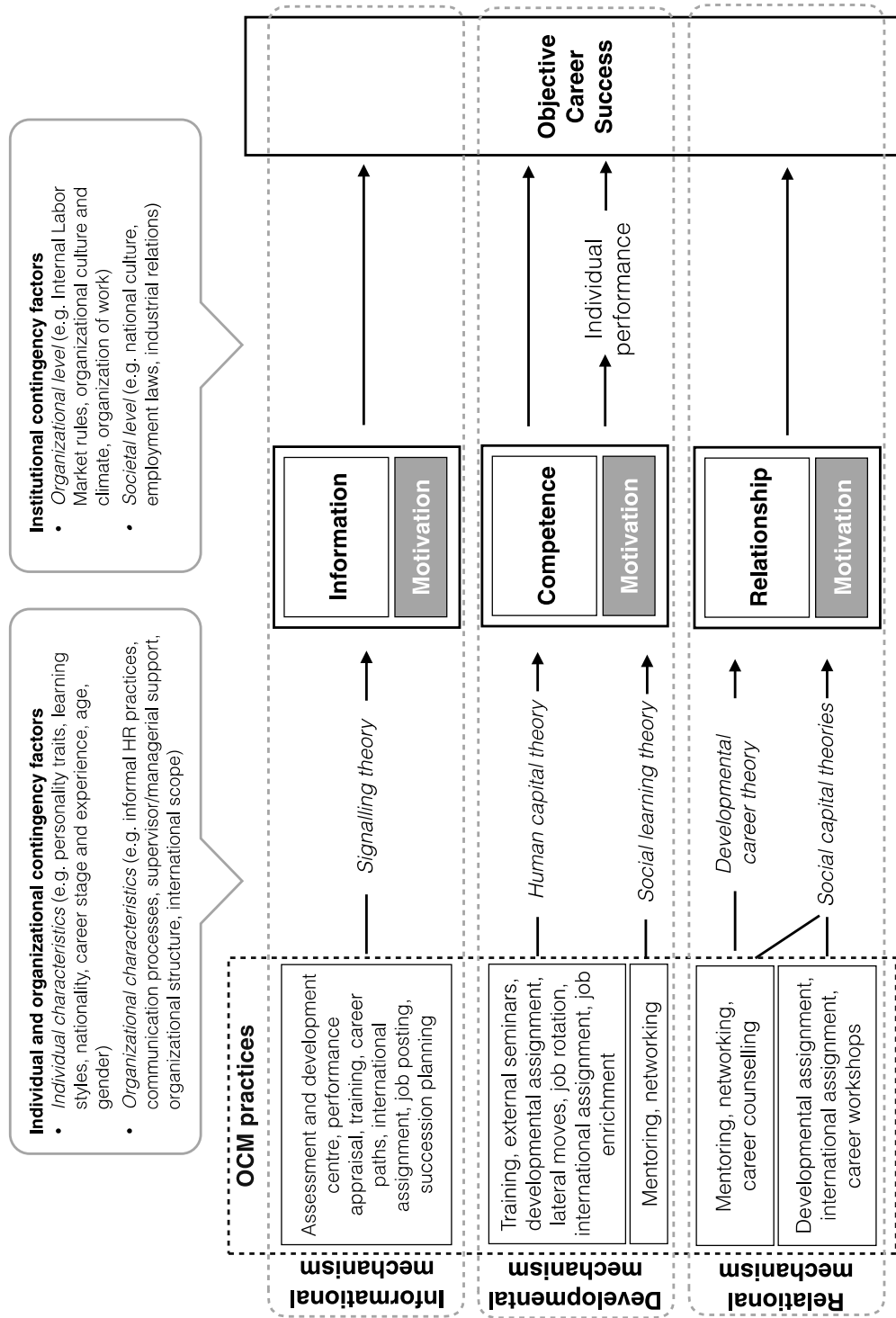


Figure 2.1 The organisational career management –objective career success framework

Source: Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019)

In sum, this thesis aims to investigate the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women at senior leadership positions through the lens of career management systems and its impact on women's career development and progression. Also, it aims to examine the organisational barriers that hinder women's career progression (discussed in Chapter 3), and consequently the interventions in place to support women's career progression to senior management levels, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

The following section sheds light on the organisational career management to examine the practices that are adopted to plan and manage employees' careers success and progression.

2.7 Career management system

Career management system includes many practices that organisations offer to develop employees' careers, and they differ from one organisation to another depending on the objectives and structures of organisations. Several scholars (e.g., Orpen, 1994; Baruch, 1996) agree on incorporating two aspects in employees' career management: i) the planning, which means preparing for the future, and ii) the management that reflects operating and activating those plans. Baruch (1996, pg. 40) defined career management as "a comprehensive approach to all the activities and techniques facilitated by the organisation which are concerned with the career development of its employees". Baruch's definition of management offers a traditional prospect on careers that are fully dependant on the organisation.

In the same vein, Orpen (1994, pg. 28) defined organisational career management as "practices deliberately established by organisations, to improve the career effectiveness of their employees, establishing what employees want from their careers, providing appropriate career opportunities for employees, identifying which employees deserve these opportunities and then providing them". Orpen's definitions provide a wider view on career approach that involves a collaboration between the organisation and the

employees in identifying career needs and accordingly providing suitable opportunities to improve the effectiveness of employees' careers.

2.7.1 Organisational career planning

Many career studies emphasise the individual viewpoint on career planning, such as abilities, skills, and aspiration, by emphasising the importance of employee involvement in this process (Lips-Wiersma and Hall, 2007; Antoniu, 2010; Clarke, 2013). However, this study focuses on organisational perspectives and roles in career planning and management, which necessitates understanding employees' career needs and aiding them in effective career planning and management. As a result, the connection between the two parties cannot be neglected and must be planned and handled by the organisation.

Several studies have stressed the need of incorporating staff career planning into organisational strategies in order to support people growth and progression (Greenhaus et al., 2010). For example, providing professional chances for employee advancement through internal recruitment. These chances create a competitive and motivating atmosphere for individuals to grow and advance. Internal recruitment, on the other hand, may be detrimental to the company because it stops it from employing new blood with diverse experiences and exposure. Internal recruiting can also be unfair and discriminatory because it reinforces existing workforce imbalances in practises and procedures (Newell, 2005).

Furthermore, some positions lack vertical progression, which has an impact on employee career growth and performance (Greenhaus et al., 2010). As a result, some studies have stressed the need of controlling the career plateau in order to provide continual development and advancement chances for employees and avoid low job satisfaction, low productivity, and resignation (Ongori and Agolla, 2009).

Moreover, some scholars link career plateau to other concerns based on how an employee perceives their career and success, which draws on both objective (hierarchical growth) and subjective (work satisfaction) career success (Smith-Ruig, 2009). While some people

are unsatisfied with their jobs and consider reaching a career plateau to be the end of their careers, others consider the position suitable as long as it delivers other benefits, such as a good work-life balance (Heslin, 2005). Regardless of the individual's opinion on professional success, firms should plan employees' careers to ensure that there is continuity of development and progression, either horizontal or vertical, in place to retain competent personnel.

Another critical area that some scholars have highlighted is the importance of having equitable career development opportunities for all employees, especially since career development approaches have been criticised for their inapplicability to employees from culturally diverse backgrounds (Brown et al., 2005). Many challenges affect these individuals' professional choices and growth, such as socialisation, access to guidance and assessment, isolation from networks, promotion prejudice, and less training possibilities (Kerka, 2003).

Another key issue in employees' career planning is the difficulty they confront in managing work and family duties. Flexible work schedules, part-time employment, job sharing, telecommuting, and childcare arrangements are some of the practises offered by family-responsive organisations to help employees with this issue.

However, as evidenced by several studies, women are frequently assigned major responsibilities for the household and children. As a result, women take advantage of organisational benefits such as flexible working hours or remote working, putting them at a disadvantage (Gupta et al., 2008; Baker, 2010; McIntosh et al., 2012), despite the organisations' claims about family-friendly policies that support women's career advancement (Feeney et al., 2014). As a result, when planning employees' careers, it is critical to consider their responsibilities outside of the workplace.

Talent management is another significant area that firms explore in order to find talented and competent personnel and prepare them for higher-level positions. Career planning and management practises are commonly used in organisations to identify and improve employee development and engagement, as well as to support organisational succession

planning (Heinen and O'Neill, 2004). Furthermore, talent management fosters a learning culture and supports employee development initiatives by identifying employees' strengths and shortcomings in order to provide them with appropriate growth opportunities (Waheed and Zaim, 2015). Talent management improves employees' skills and career possibilities by allowing them to grow successfully inside organisations, resulting in improved performance and production (Anwar et al., 2014).

It is particularly critical to emphasise the relevance of assessment systems in not just measuring employees' performance, but also as a foundation for performance improvement and development (Knibbs and Swailes, 1992). Appraisal systems can detect gaps in employees' skills and other developmental needs to improve their performance, assisting the organisation in developing an appropriate career plan that targets and manages their career growth (Abdulkadir et al., 2012). According to Van Veldhoven et al. (2017), performance appraisal can either help or hinder employees' career advancement. Focusing on performance appraisal as a learning and development tool can help employees with career planning and management, whereas focusing on it as a result measurement will limit career planning, especially for underperformers.

It is critical to underline that most elements of HR practises should take into account employees' career planning and management. It is a continual development process that begins when a person is chosen to join the business and ends when they leave. Furthermore, research shows that people management duties, such as career planning and management, are frequently delegated to line managers, who are typically men (Crawshaw and Game, 2015). This is troubling because it has the potential to aggravate gender disparities in job prospects and decision-making. Gendered beliefs and stereotypes may impact line managers, leading to bias and discrimination against women (Powell and Butterfield, 2013). Women, for example, may be perceived as lacking desire or less engaged to their employment as a result of their caregiving duties (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2019). As a result, it is critical to improve gender bias awareness among line managers and take strategies to mitigate its influence on career advancement and prospects.

2.7.2 Organisational career practices

Career development practices are very important in strengthening the human capital factor of an organisation, as these are used to empower the talented employees, attract and retain a competent workforce (Khan et al., 2015), and also improve the skills of current employees. Career practices allow all employees to progress in their workplace from the beginning of their tenure. Also, they help in clarifying the career paths and could be a mechanism to removing the obstacles against employees' progression (Kaya and Ceylan, 2014). Furthermore, Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) proposed that career practices are aimed to increase employees' motivation and performance, and hence achieve career success from an objective perspective (i.e. promotion, position and salary increase). Nevertheless, Khan et al. (2015) claimed that there are several ways to approach employees' career development; thus, managers and decision-makers should determine the most suitable and effective methods that incorporate the strategic needs of the organisation with employees' career requirements. However, researchers in the career management field have not found a scientific guide to make accurate decisions related to the types of techniques that are most successful to apply (Wexley and Latham, 2002). Hence, designing a career development system relies on the organisational needs, in addition to the competencies and aspirations of their employees (Khan et al., 2015).

Various career scholars adopt different practices depending on their study's scope, as there are multiple possible combinations of OCM practices (De Vos et al., 2008). For instance, Baruch and Peiperl (2000, p. 350) investigated many development practices in their study of career development practices for managers, such as:

performance appraisal as a basis for career planning, assessment centres, peer appraisal, upward (subordinate) appraisal, career counselling by direct supervisor, career counselling by HR department, formal mentoring, career workshops, common career paths, dual ladder (parallel hierarchy for professional staff), written personal career planning, retirement preparation programmes, succession planning, books or

pamphlets on career issues, postings regarding internal job openings, formal education as part of career development, and lateral moves.

Furthermore, Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) emphasised the need for successful careers' outcomes when applying career management practices. The following section elaborates on different perspectives of career success.

2.7.3 Career success (Objective vs. Subjective)

In the career literature, career success has been defined as “the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). This definition incorporates personal desire to succeed and visible work-related outcomes. Additionally, Ng et al.’s (2005) views on career success draw links between individual and organisational success, as the individual’s success contributes to the success of the organisation. Hence, there should be a collaboration between employees and the organisation to identify the organisational factors that facilitate employees’ career success. Furthermore, several scholars suggested that there are two different approaches to viewing career success: subjective career success and objective career success (Arthur et al., 2005; Gunz and Heslin, 2005; Heslin, 2005).

Career success associated with the contemporary approach to career is described as subjective (see also Section 2.3), as it is judged and determined by the individual with less dependence on the functions of the organisation (Arthur et al., 2005; Volmer and Spurk, 2011). Accordingly, it is defined as the individual’s understanding and evaluation of their career throughout any perspective that is important to the individual (Arthur et al., 2005). Many studies have considered job satisfaction as a main attribute to subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005). In the same vein, McDonald and Hite (2008) considered career enjoyment, career satisfaction, and career fulfilment as important criteria for subjective career success. Furthermore, work-life balance is implied by Heslin (2005) as an essential key of subjective career success. However, Hall et al. (2012) suggested that the

mechanism of how individuals adapt to changing demands of their career and lives to produce successful lives is not well established in the literature.

In contrast, objective career success is based on the traditional perspective of career (see also Section 2.2) that is measured by tangible indicators such as job position, salary, and rewards. This proposition is well supported in the literature, with many studies indicating observable, material factors as essential criteria for success (Heslin, 2005; Ng et al., 2005; Abele and Spurk, 2009). The objective career is publicly visible and related to social role and official position (Arthur et al., 2005). Thus, objective success is easy to measure, as achievements can be noted and reported throughout the individuals' career. Accordingly, employees who earn higher salaries and are promoted more often are traditionally considered successful in their career journey. This notion also allows organisations to make comparisons and easily identify those with higher or lower levels of career success. However, placing emphasis on the objective criteria for career success also presents limitations on the number of employees who can actually achieve a higher level of career success either by being promoted or earning a high salary, as these criteria could be influenced by other factors that are out of the individual's control. In the same line, Heslin (2005) proposed that organisations in recent times, particularly with the economic downturn, have limited the opportunities for promotions and high positions, which consequently altered the organisational structure and their management levels. These changes have affected the aims and desire of individuals to pursue hierarchical progression (Hall, 2002), and opened other doors for advancement through horizontal movements. Likewise, Clarke (2013) argued that, in recent times, career success is less observed as climbing the organisational ladder and more as a series of lateral moves that offer opportunities for learning new skills, adding more knowledge, and increasing the individual's satisfaction.

Subjective and objective career success have been compared and discussed in many studies (Arthur et al., 2005; Heslin, 2005; Ng et al., 2005; Abele and Spurk, 2009; Volmer and Spurk, 2011; Stumpf and Tymon, 2012). Arthur et al (2005) suggested that subjective and objective views of career success cannot be seen separately to indicate that work

only involves the objective career, and non-work only relates to the subjective career, as this view provides a limited picture to reality. They propose that career success should be seen from both subjective and objective lenses. Similarly, Gunz and Heslin (2005) indicated that objective and subjective career success should be viewed as two sides of success. However, through trying to establish the relationship between the subjective and objective career success, Abele and Spurk (2009) found that objective and subjective career success are interrelated over time, and that subjective success contributes to the individual's confidence and positive experience, which results in the development of individuals' status and salary, which was also supported by other scholars (e.g., Hall, 2002; Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008). It also could be argued that objective success offers the individual increased salary and status that would result in job and career satisfaction. This emphasises and supports the interrelation of subjective and objective career success. The following section, however, elaborates on how organisational career management affects women's career success objectively.

2.8 Impact of organisational career management on career success

Organisational career management has been discussed elaborately in Section (2.7); this current section, however, discusses the implications of career practices as a developmental tool in helping women obtain promotions and status that will lead them into senior managerial levels, hence, embracing the objective concept of career success.

Organisations differ in their types, size, nature, and objectives; hence, different organisations will need different career systems to match the needs of employees and their organisations (Baruch, 2004). Accordingly, career practices could not be studied as a specific set of practices that are applicable to all organisations. However, the career practices that have been outlined by Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) (listed in Figure 2.1) are discussed next to highlight the impact of each practice on employees' career success and progression.

2.8.1 Training

Training is one of the developmental activities that organisations offer to their employees to provide them with information and knowledge that helps them to compete and excel to improve their services and attain the organisation's goals. Organisations should make appropriate decisions on what to train, how to train and how to evaluate the effectiveness of training in employees (Salas et al., 2012), to achieve its objectives for its own benefit and that of the employees as well (Latham, 2011). Training needs to show how it adds to the organisation's competitive advantage by focusing on improving employees' performance. From the organisation's point of view, what employees learn in training contributes to human capital development, which refers to the knowledge, skills, creativity and motivation they gain to deliver good-quality products and services (Noe and Kodwani, 2018). It also provides employers with information on employees to assess the learning outcomes (Imran and Tanveer, 2015).

2.8.2 External seminars

External seminars are similar to employee training yet are conducted outside the organisation and involve more participation and discussion. External seminars allow employees to accomplish career aims through a structured learning experience and allow for networking and knowledge sharing among participants. The main goal of these practices is to add to employees' knowledge, skills or behaviour on the job, which consequently boosts the organisation's ability to increase its human capital (Eby et al., 2005).

2.8.3 Development assignment

Developing employees' skills by engaging them in new assignments plays an essential role in providing them with novel experiences and knowledge. It shows the organisation's confidence and trust in the employee, which consequently increases the employee's performance and growth (Patrick and Kumar, 2011). In addition, it provides the

organisation with information about the employee, which could be used for decision-making about promotions or other rewards (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). Furthermore, engaging employees in developmental assignments also offers to build relationships and visibility with other colleagues and seniors from different departments, which increases the social capital of the employee. Consequently, it increases the availability of resources related to career progression (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019).

2.8.4 Lateral moves

Organisations use lateral moves to develop their employees' specific skills to gain the human capital required before promoting them (Jin, 2013). Some studies show that employees who experience lateral moves are more likely to be promoted and provided with more considerable salary increases than employees who are not moved laterally (Jin and Waldman, 2020).

2.8.5 Job rotation

Job rotations are horizontal transfers of employees between jobs in an organisation. Employees on rotation usually do not remain on jobs permanently and do not return to former jobs. Job rotation refers to any kind of change in tasks that is indicated by a change of job title or department but does not involve a change in salary level. Job rotations are important in employees' career development and progression because they offer increased work experience, abilities and knowledge, and human capital accumulation and motivation (Campion et al., 1994; Nurul et al., 2018).

2.8.6 International assignment

Some organisations have now become more geographically diverse, spreading from one place to another. Hence, many organisations are concerned about the need to provide their leadership pipelines with culturally diverse experience that will add to their skills. Employees could also be given an international assignment with another organisation as part of an agreement between the two organisations on employees' developmental

practices. However, in addition to the valuable skills and knowledge the employee gains, the experience will also motivate the employee and, consequently, increase their job performance, commitment and loyalty to the organisation (Caligiuri et al., 2009). Besides, international assignments help employees build social networks internationally that could provide future development opportunities (Kraimer et al., 2009). On the other hand, these assignments also provide employers with information on employees' capabilities of handling international assignment taking into consideration different competencies added to the individual assigned, such as language, openness, cooperation, and culture. Employees' success in these assignments offers the organisation important information on promotion decisions for employees' career progression (Caligiuri et al., 2009).

2.8.7 Job enrichment

Job enrichment is a form of job redesign offered to employees to change repetitive responsibilities that need less autonomy. It aims to provide a broader role responsibility by offering more autonomy to employees in the organisation to improve their knowledge and skills, which consequently enhances the performance of employees and the efficiency of the organisations' operations (Parker, 1998; Alias et al., 2018).

2.8.8 Mentoring

Mentoring is a relationship between a senior employee and a junior employee. The purpose of this relationship is to provide the junior employee with support concerning socialisation, work responsibilities, career opportunities and progression, and any advice regarding work issues (Murphy and Ensher, 2001). Scholars propose that mentoring could result in favourable decisions related to promotions, compensations, job involvement and career success (Dougherty and Dreher, 2007). Mentoring also exposes employees' competencies and knowledge to their mentors and employers based on decision making for rewards and career progression. Besides, it is a way of socialising and building relationships with senior colleagues (Singh et al., 2002).

2.8.9 Networking

Networking is a critical factor in employees' career development, which is based on building relationships. It is considered a valuable resource for accumulating social capital related to many career variables, such as performance, motivation, career goals, salary and promotions (Spurk et al., 2015). Networking depends on interacting with many people, including those who influence decision-making. Hence, employees who excel at networking are more successful than others (Wang, 2009). Networking is essential in sharing information about the organisation's strategic goals and operations, allowing employees to be within the loop of knowledge (Gibson et al., 2014). Through networking, several significant benefits provided to employees, such as exchanging information, collaboration, alliance development, knowledge, visibility, and support (Linehan and Scullion, 2008). Furthermore, networking can occur inside the organisation and outside, resulting in increased visibility of individuals. The visibility and relationships built out of networking increases individuals career success (Gibson et al., 2014).

2.8.10 Assessment and development centres

Organisations use assessment and development centres to evaluate and train their employees. They are commonly used for employees' career development. They apply different techniques, such as interviews, psychometric tests, and observed scenarios, to provide the assessors and decision-makers with much information to evaluate employees' capabilities and performance (Sartori and Ceschi, 2013). They also positively impact employees, which results in improved performance and future growth (Turner and Nichol, 2016).

2.8.11 Performance appraisal

Performance appraisals are used to measure and improve employees' performance and support organisational success. It is considered a source of feedback for employees and employers on employees' performance and career development requirements (Ismail and

Rishani, 2018). However, some scholars argue that performance appraisal could be biased, and employees' feedback does not support their career development (Henkel and Endres, 2019).

2.8.12 Career paths

Career paths that are managed by organisations offer a clear and structured road map to employees' career progression. In this practice, employees can view available career paths and know the requirements, expectations, and opportunities needed for movement with each path in a series of jobs progression (Hedge and Carter, 2019). Career paths also provide the organisation with information on competent employees interested in their careers and who want to take up different opportunities for their career progression. This information helps the organisation provide the required career planning for employees to help them in their career progression (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019).

2.8.13 Job posting

Job posting refers to internal recruitment or announcement of job vacancies. This is considered an opportunity for employees to change their current career status either horizontally or vertically (Kim, 2005). This will also bring awareness to employees looking for career development and progression achieved by organisational support (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019).

2.8.14 Succession planning

Succession planning focuses on identifying and developing high potential employees for specific key positions (Kim, 2005). The data collected concerning employees from this practice provides the organisation with important information on specific developmental practices that would motivate employees and increase their performance to prepare them to hold key positions (Ballaro and Polk, 2017).

2.8.15 Career counselling

Career counselling offers the employees chances to identify their careers' needs and goals, clarifying the path towards what they want to achieve. Career counselling is usually conducted by professionals from human resources or direct supervisors who know their abilities, experiences, and skills. The counselling outcomes should be realistic and measurable to allow both the employee and the organisation to evaluate and assess their progress (Merchant and Robert, 2010).

2.8.16 Career workshops

Career workshops provide opportunities for discussions and exchange of information on career opportunities and paths. It also offers networking to help employees build social capital that provides future progression opportunities (MmaB, 2016).

2.9 Underpinning theories

This section will provide a comprehensive review of the theoretical foundations that underpin OCM practices and their relationship with objective career success. Bagdadli and Gianecchini (2019) suggest that OCM practices are linked to objective career success through three distinct mechanisms – developmental, informational, and relational – which influence three key outcomes – competencies, information, and relationships, respectively. These outcomes, in turn, impact career success directly or indirectly through mediating factors such as employee performance.

The next sections will highlight on several theories that provide a basis for understanding the link between employee career development and progression with the different practices adopted by organisations. These theories are essential to this study as they help to elucidate how developmental practices facilitate women career progression.

2.9.1 The developmental mechanism (OCM practices that improve competencies)

This section provides a critical examination of the literature on the link between human capital theory and women's career progression. The OCM practices that increase employees' competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills and abilities) are categorised under the developmental mechanism. These competencies improve employees' job performance, which is considered a measure for organisational decisions regarding promotions and other rewards.

Human capital refers to the knowledge and skills that people gain during their career journey either through developmental practices or experience gained, resulting in increased motivation and improved performance (Nafukho et al., 2004), which is a significant consideration when deciding on promotions and rewards.

The OCM practices, such as training, external seminars, developmental assignment, lateral moves, job rotation, international assignment, and job enrichment are underpinned by human capital theory (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). The mechanism behind these practices is that they increase employees' knowledge, experience and skills via different experiences in their field and provide them with exposure to new contexts and work environments. This results in increased performance; hence, it increases the opportunities for employees' progression and success (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019).

According to Mumford et al. (2007), individuals in positions of leadership must have education, experience, skills, and competence. As a result, firms must provide appropriate growth chances on a continuous basis to promote employee career advancement. However, the concept of human capital is an important aspect in employee recruitment and development because it affects individual competency. Unfortunately, multiple studies show that men and women's educational choices differ, which affects their job growth in businesses. Organisations, for example, favour applicants with good quantitative skills for leadership positions. Nonetheless, evidence indicates that women are underrepresented in the domains of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

(STEM) (Kahn and Ginther, 2017; Beede et al., 2011), resulting in fewer possibilities for women to advance to positions of leadership.

Furthermore, research has identified a number of characteristics that influence women's access to developmental chances. Gender bias, a lack of female role models, and exclusion from informal networks and mentoring opportunities, for example, have been recognised as obstacles to women's job advancement (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Thomas and Gabarro, 1999). These impediments can limit women's capacity to obtain the human capital required to progress their careers. Some experts, however, think that individual circumstances also play a role in women's job advancement. Family duties and work-life balance issues, for example, have been suggested as reasons why women may not invest as much in human capital as males (Budig and England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007). As a result, women may have poorer human capital than men and, as a result, fewer prospects for career growth.

To summarise, human capital is a vital component of career success. Organisations, on the other hand, must remove the hurdles that prevent women from obtaining the human capital required to develop their careers. Individual circumstances, such as family responsibilities, also have a role in women's career advancement, emphasising the importance of firms providing flexible work arrangements to help women's career growth.

Other career practices like mentoring and networking are underpinned by social learning theory, which proposes that employees learn by observing others (Manz and Sims, 1980; Bandura, 1971). The OCM practices of mentoring and networking are based on gaining developmental skills by observing the model and establishing relationships with mentors who are more experienced, and networking with other colleagues such as senior employees (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). The gendered traits of social networks, as well as the involvement of women in such networks, have, however, been thoroughly researched. Women are frequently underrepresented in social networks, and those that do exist may not provide the same benefits as men (Eddleston et al., 2019).

Furthermore, research have found that women are less likely than men to get mentorship (Ragins and Cotton, 1999), and when they do, the mentoring relationship may be less effective. This is due to male mentors having different expectations and assumptions about women's career paths, as well as being less invested in their development (Ragins and Kram, 2007). Furthermore, because informal networks are often male-dominated, women may have difficulty forming relationships with senior employees and accessing them (Dobbins and Platz-Vieno, 2012). This may restrict their access to critical information and tools that could help them grow in their jobs.

However, other research suggests that using online platforms for mentoring and networking can be a useful method to overcome some of the gendered obstacles that present in face-to-face encounters (Wang and Hsu, 2015). Online mentoring can give women access to mentors they might not have had otherwise, as well as providing a more comfortable setting for communication and learning (Eby et al., 2016). While many studies have supported online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when online platforms were the only solutions for work and interaction, others have expressed concerns about the lack of physical interaction and its impact on learning (Bali and Liu, 2018; Widodo et al., 2020).

As a result, tackling the gender gap in mentorship and networking practises is critical for women's career advancement. Giving women equal opportunities to participate in these practises could help them develop their skills and abilities, adding to the overall success of enterprises.

2.9.2 The informational mechanism (OCM practices that offer information)

The OCM practices that offer information related to employees' careers are categorised under the informational mechanism. The organisation uses this information for making decisions regarding promotion and rewards for competent employees. Also, feedback can be used by employees to enhance their performance for their professional career development.

The theory underpinning this mechanism (i.e. the informational mechanism) is signalling theory (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). Signalling theory is useful for observing behaviour when two parties (individuals or organisations) have access to different information, and decisions can be made accordingly (Connelly et al., 2011). Employers use the information on employees as signals of potential and competence. OCM practices within this mechanism are assessment and development centre, performance appraisal, training, career paths, international assignment, job posting, and succession planning. These practices provide information to employers in identifying individuals with the potential to excel and progress in their careers (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). However, information extracted from these practices could be biased and open to different interpretations depending on organisations' practices and procedures.

As a result, it is possible to argue that signalling theory is intrinsically gendered. One explanation for this is that career management activities, such as career planning and employee practises, are frequently delegated to line managers, who may not be as aware of gender prejudice as HR professionals. As a result, numerous studies have revealed that women encounter prejudice from their line supervisors, which impedes their job advancement (Schein, 2007; Bates et al., 2021). Furthermore, the assumptions of signalling theory may fail to account for the special obstacles that women experience in their professional lives. Women, for example, may be disproportionately affected by the "maternal wall bias," which believes that after having children, they will be less engaged to their employment (Correll et al., 2007). This bias can result in women being passed over for promotions or being given less challenging assignments.

Furthermore, women are more prone to experience imposter syndrome, which causes them to doubt their abilities and makes them less inclined to communicate their competence (Clance & Imes, 1978). As a result, women may be passed over for career prospects or promotions.

As a result, while signalling theory can help us understand how people communicate their competence and aptitude to employers, it must be understood that the theory is not

immune to gender prejudice. To overcome this, HR professionals and line managers must be aware of the unique problems that women experience in their careers and seek to make the workplace more egalitarian.

2.9.3 The relational mechanism (OCM practices that impact relationships)

The OCM practices that offer employees the support of their managers and colleagues and visibility are categorised within the relational mechanism. Two theories underpin the relational mechanism – development career theory and social capital theory (Bagdadli and Gianecchini, 2019). Development career theory proposes that individuals grow through four life stages regardless of their occupation, gender or background: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. One of the critical elements in career success, according to this theory, is the importance of establishing relationships with other people throughout each stage of the individual's career journey. This theory fails to recognise that organisations should understand the circumstances people face at different times in their careers, especially women, which should be considered when designing and providing programmes at various career stages. However, the impact of gender on these stages and women's career progression has been widely researched and documented.

For example, during the exploration stage, individuals begin to explore their interests, values, and abilities to identify potential career paths. Women may face systematic barriers, such as gender bias and stereotypes, which can limit their exposure to certain career paths and reduce their confidence in pursuing non-traditional career paths (Eccles, 2007). In the establishment stage, individuals typically focus on building their skills, gaining experience, and establishing themselves in their chosen field. However, women may be faced with the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities, which can limit their ability to take on additional responsibilities or work long hours required for career advancement (Barnett & Hyde, 2001).

During the maintenance stage, individuals typically focus on maintaining their skills and experience and advancing in their careers. Women may face barriers to advancement, such

as the “glass ceiling” that limits their ability to reach top leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Finally, in disengagement stage, individuals may begin to plan for retirement or seek new opportunities outside of their current career. Women may face additional challenges during this stage, such as, ageism and sexism, which can limit their opportunities for meaningful work or financial security in retirement (Fischer & Good, 2020).

Overall, the four life stage of career development theory are inherently gendered, as they do not fully account for the unique challenges women face in their career progression. The impact of gender bias, gender-based stereotypes, work-life balance challenges, and systematic barriers such as the glass ceiling and ageism, can all limit women’s career advancement and financial security. To address these challenges, career development theory must adopt a more gender-sensitive approach that takes into account the unique experiences of women and provides strategies of overcoming systematic barriers to gender equity in the workplace.

OCM practices that align with development career theory based on relationships and influence of other actors in career success are mentoring, networking, and career counselling. Moreover, this theory shares the importance of relationships with social capital theory, which also focuses on relationships as a crucial aspect of career success. The OCM practices representing social capital theory are development assignment, international assignment, and career workshops. Social capital is created when people interact with each other and, accordingly, they benefit from this interaction. The benefits are gained from access to information from various resources and career sponsorship to help the individual’s career progression (Seibert et al., 2001).

Numerous studies have found that providing supportive supervision or mentorship is connected with the assignment of essential jobs that help individuals grow in their careers. Furthermore, Choi (2018) found that having influential contacts has a positive relationship with promotions. As a result, according to Forret and Dougherty (2004), it may be especially important for women to create and foster social capital in order to advance their

job success. Furthermore, sponsorship can be considered as a form of social capital that can aid women in their job advancement. Having a sponsor in the workplace can give women access to vital networks, opportunities, and resources that can help them develop their abilities and advance their careers. However, other research has found that women are less likely than men to have access to sponsorship possibilities (Hewlett et al., 2016). This lack of sponsorship can be linked to a variety of causes, including gender biases and prejudices that make it difficult for women to develop relationships with senior executives and obtain visibility within their businesses (Ibarra et al., 2010).

To summarise, human capital theory, social learning theory, social capital theory, and career development theory are all intrinsically gendered. These ideas have typically been formed primarily on men's experiences and viewpoints, and they may not adequately account for the particular experiences and obstacles that women confront at work.

Human capital theory, for example, promotes the value of education and training for job success, but it may fail to account for the gendered structure of educational and occupational segregation. Although social learning theory emphasises the importance of observation and imitation in professional growth, it may fail to account for how gender preconceptions and biases can limit women's possibilities for observation and learning.

In a similar vein social capital theory emphasises the importance of networks and relationships for job success, but it may not completely account for the gendered character of networking and the difficulties that women experience when seeking sponsorship. Career development theory emphasises self-efficacy and career decision-making, but it may not completely account for how gendered expectations and societal norms influence women's career choices.

As a result, scholars and practitioners must critically assess existing theories through a gender lens and create new frameworks that account for the particular experiences and obstacles that women encounter in the workplace.

2.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter investigated the career literature related to women's career management, which is limited, as it does not provide any distinction between men's and women's career requirements and developmental needs. Women encounter many obstacles and challenges during their career trajectories in comparison with their male counterparts, which affects consequently their career success and progression.

Additionally, the chapter outlines the framework adopted for this thesis that examines the relationship between organisational career management (OCM) and objective career success, supported by various theories, including human capital theory, social learning theory, signalling theory, development career theory, and social capital theory. However, these theories are inherently gendered and fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's career progression, given the different challenges and barriers they face throughout their career journey.

Furthermore, the literature does not propose any distinct framework for women that takes into account their challenges and circumstances. It merely emphasises formal equality in organisational policies and approaches that apply to both male and female employees. However, this approach ignores that formally equal policies may not produce equal outcomes, as demonstrated by women's unequal representation in senior managerial positions. This underscores the need for organisations to develop approaches that focus on women's developmental requirements, which differ from those of their male counterparts, in response to the various challenges and circumstances women encounter during their career journey.

Building on these insights, the subsequent chapter delves into the specific barriers and challenges that women encounter and their impact on their career progression.

CHAPTER 3: BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S CAREER PROGRESSION

3.1 Introduction

This section sheds light on the second aim of this study that focuses on the barriers that women encounter throughout their career journey that could hinder their career progression; in addition to the organisational role in either challenging or perpetuating these inequalities. This section categorises and discusses the roots of these barriers into three different levels: individual, societal and, specifically, the organisational level.

It is crucial to shed light on different factors and their roles and interrelation in influencing women's career progression. However, this study's primary focus is the organisational level, as organisations could be considered as entities where different actors and their influences have various impacts on individuals. Consequently, organisations play a significant role in either challenging these influences or maintaining gender inequality in the workplace, resulting in the scarcity of women at senior managerial levels. Organisations also have a leading role in framing the opportunity structure for career progression. Hence, they could be researched as feasible entities for change in improving women's career progression.

Therefore, this chapter is divided into two sections: the first section sheds light on the organisational barriers, whereas the second section highlights the individual and societal barriers that influence women's career progression.

3.2 Organisational barriers to women's career progression – meso level

One of this study's aims is to identify and examine organisational facilitators and barriers to women's career progression. Several facilitators have been discussed by shedding light on different OCM practices and their effect on creating competencies, information and relationships that either strengthen or hinder employees' career success and progression. This section discusses and elaborates on different organisational barriers that are gender-based, to cover the scope of this study.

The challenges or barriers women encounter throughout their career journeys that hinder their career progression have been the subject of intense debate within the social science community. They reflect the central issue of gender inequality, which hinders women's career progression into senior managerial levels. Numerous studies link the barriers to women's career progression to various phenomena, such as the glass ceiling, sticky floors, and the labyrinth.

Some scholars root the barriers to women's career progression in the 'glass ceiling' effect (e.g., Cotter et al., 2001; Davis and Maldonado, 2015; Folke and Rickne, 2016; Glass and Cook, 2016; Newman, 2016). This metaphor was first used during the 1980s by Gay Bryant in *The Working Woman Report*, describing how women at the top positions of middle management were stuck and could not progress further (Bryant, 1984). The glass ceiling was defined by Barreto et al. (2009, p. 5) as:

the phenomenon whereby men dominate the upper echelons of management. The word 'ceiling' implies that women encounter an upper limit on how high they can climb on the organisational ladder. The word 'glass' refers to the relative subtlety and transparency of this barrier which is not necessarily apparent to the observer.

This definition offers a broad overview of the explanation and meaning of the phenomenon. However, some scholars relate the underrepresentation of women in senior managerial levels to the organisation's internal or external procedures, which result in discrimination or bias against women. For example, Folke and Rickne (2016) argued that the notion of a glass ceiling emphasises discrimination against women regarding promotions within organisations, which is more severe and evident in the top levels of authority. Fernandez and Campero (2017) proposed that the glass ceiling can also be the result of external recruitment processes, where bias is evident when screening women for leadership positions. However, women still lack support and authority, even if they rise above the glass ceiling (Glass and Cook, 2016). In contrast, other studies have reported that males are usually supported and selected for supervisory or managerial positions, even in female-dominated sectors (OECD, 2015).

Contrary to the published studies regarding the glass ceiling effect, Eagly and Carli (2009) argued that the glass ceiling metaphor is outdated and misleading, specifically in indicating that the difficulties women face are represented by a single barrier (that is, the glass ceiling). The status of women who reach leadership positions negates the glass ceiling argument. In their discussion of the glass ceiling, Eagly et al. (2007) further criticised this metaphor which suggests that women have the same and equal access to entry-level positions as men. Also, it implies that the barriers cannot be detected and cannot be seen. Accordingly, they are challenging to solve and overcome to facilitate a possible transition to leadership positions.

Although many studies relate the existence of gender inequality at top leadership positions to the effect of the glass ceiling, other studies argue that the barriers are located at the lower career levels by a phenomenon called the 'sticky floor' (e.g., Bjerk, 2008; Yap and Konrad, 2009; Christofides et al., 2013). This phenomenon explains how women struggle more than men to get onto the ladder (Baert et al., 2016). This emphasises the argument

that there is a lack of women available to be positioned or promoted to middle or senior managerial levels (Yap and Konrad, 2009).

Moreover, Shoaib et al. (2010) argued that women in lower positions are denied attending professional training and development that would help them progress in their profession and excel in managerial positions. Reasons could vary from discrimination to being in jobs that do not provide any career development, or lack of interest from the individual.

As per the above discussions, some scholars believe that women's scarcity in leadership positions is due to the glass ceiling effect, which implies that women face obstacles when they reach certain managerial positions and cannot proceed further. Other scholars suggest that it is due to sticky floors, which implies that women cannot proceed to any career advancement beyond entry-level. Both phenomena provide justifications for the reasons behind women's lack of representation at managerial levels. However, they do not present the overall picture of the barriers that women face throughout their career journey. The phenomenon of the 'labyrinth' (Hilton, 2007; Eagly and Carli, 2009; McDonagh and Paris, 2012; Carli and Eagly, 2016; Phillips and Grandy, 2018) offers an adequate explanation of the factors contributing to women's underrepresentation at senior managerial levels. It incorporates factors stemming from both phenomena that have been highlighted before. This underlines the second aim of this study: to identify the barriers to women's career progression at various points and twists in their career journeys.

Carli and Eagly (2016, p. 517–518) stated that the labyrinth 'implies that women face challenges throughout their careers, from the moment they began to chart a course to leadership until they reach their goal'. Accordingly, women's advancement to leadership positions is possible and can be accomplished, but they encounter many more challenges and barriers along the way than men do. The labyrinth permits some women to achieve high leadership positions; however, the walls do not fade away, but instead remain in their place presenting obstacles that women need to overcome to follow the path to success. Consequently, not all women are able to achieve advancement as some are unable to overcome the challenges for various reasons discussed in this section.

The literature on women's careers has offered considerable interest in identifying factors that could explain the differences between men's and women's career progression (Tharenou, 1997; Metz, 2003). Women experience more barriers than men do, such as discrimination, structure and culture of the organisation, organisational practices, lack of networking, and lack of mentoring.

3.2.1 Gender discrimination

One of the most critical factors of gender inequality is discrimination. Gender discrimination evolves and exists throughout all factors. These factors are interrelated and could be causal to one another. Hence, discrimination could be considered the most crucial factor at the organisational level. Burke and Attridge's (2011) study on gender differences in factors that affected the career trajectories among a sample of senior-level employees revealed a significant gender difference in prejudice and discrimination. Three-quarters of women had experienced this in their career trajectories compared to only one-third of men.

There have been several attempts to eliminate discrimination by different concerned entities. For example, at the international level, in 1979 the UN adopted an agreement on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (United Nations, n.d.). The UN states have also been taking part by setting laws and regulations to help organisations prevent unfair practices against women. For instance, in the UK there are many acts that have been established to ensure women that are not discriminated against in the workplace; such as the Equal Pay Act (1975), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), the Human Rights Act (1998), the Gender Recognition Act (2004) (Dickens, 2007), and, the Equality Act (2006, 2010) (Hepple, 2011). The results of all these interventions at different levels should be influential on organisations to support women's career progression.

Despite these efforts, reality, unfortunately, reveals other facts regarding discrimination against women in the workplace, which can take one of two forms, either direct or indirect. Direct discrimination is when someone is treated less favourably because of specific

characteristics of who they are. This could be related to age, gender, pregnancy and maternity, religion, and many more (Besson, 2008).

In contrast, indirect discrimination occurs when organisations' policies and practices impact a disadvantaged group of people who share specific characteristics (Besson, 2008). It is not considered to be against the law if the employer can justify it and show that no alternatives were available for the benefit of the organisation (ACAS, 2013). The position of managers and employers towards women's status is one of the critical issues influencing career progression. They can be barriers against achieving senior positions or facilitators who provide support and advancement (Burke et al., 2006).

Discrimination is a very challenging factor, particularly because, in some instances, it is practised unintentionally, and it is embedded throughout organisational processes and practices, which makes it hard to eliminate or tackle. Some scholars refer to organisations' gendered substructures to explain some of the causes of gender discrimination in organisations. For example, Acker (2012, p. 215) pointed out that inequalities are 'built into the job design, wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the workplace, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behaviour at work'. However, Gelfand et al. (2013) argued that in organisations that are characterised by their bureaucratic nature, gender discrimination is perpetuated because the job ladders are typically segregated by gender, with women being offered fewer opportunities, less visibility, and lower pay. Acker's (2012) argument, however, provides a broader prospect on explaining the existence of discrimination embedded within organisations' structure, regardless of whether they are bureaucratic or democratic.

3.2.2 Structure of the organisation

Existing research recognises gendered organisational structures' critical role in creating and perpetuating negative attitudes and stances towards women's work in organisations. Several studies suggest that the focus should be on organisations' structure and how to engender better structures, rather than deviating to other causes that are difficult to contain

and control (Iverson, 2011; O'Neil and Hopkins, 2015). It is also important to recognise that an organisation's structure is managed and maintained according to the dominant group's specific norms and values. Hence, controlling the organisation's structure is not an easy task and cannot be accomplished without the recognition of an existing problem that must be addressed and solved.

Acker (1990) adopted a similar position in her argument that men are the dominant group, occupying the most powerful positions in organisations because organisations are formed and managed by men. Consequently, they dominate the structures or positions of control and power, and women are marginalised in organisations due to this dominance, which overwhelms the employment in organisations, particularly in high positions.

Regarding the power that is embedded within the structure of the organisation, Rao and Kelleher (2003) claimed that men use their power to exclude women and keep their interests and viewpoints in many aspects out of reach. They add that even if women are given senior positions, their influence and power are not guaranteed. Rindfleish and Sheridan (2003) also made a similar proposition in their study of senior women managers' response to gendered organisational structures. They highlight the lack of commitment from many women in senior managerial positions towards other organisations. Although these women's positions allow them to challenge the organisation's gendered structures, they do not consider this as part of their role responsibilities. Many reasons could be considered in this scenario, such as keeping a good relationship with their male colleagues and superiors by maintaining the status quo regarding power and authorities, hence preserving their positions as seniors in the organisation and gaining the support of their superiors.

The above arguments show that women are also contributing to the reproduction of inequality, even if they are able to eliminate inequalities and support women's career progression. In the same vein, Forbes (2002) argued that women in organisations are programmed with men's values, which dominate how men and women communicate and contribute to the production of patriarchal systems in organisations. The patriarchal

culture of organisations considers what women do or say as second rate compared to men, subsequently positioning them at a subordinate level.

3.2.3 Culture of the organisation

Organisational culture is considered to be another barrier to women's career progression, particularly in male-dominated organisations. Different cultures exist in various organisations and even within one organisation. Jandeska and Kraimer (2005) stated that culture represents the norms, values and beliefs formed by the dominant members of the organisation, which shape accepted and expected behaviours and attitudes. One such culture is based on an autocratic leadership style that functions according to hierarchical authority, independence, and top-down communications (Bajdo and Dickson, 2001). In contrast, another cultural environment that exists within organisations is based on a democratic model. It functions according to a distributed leadership style that aims to be respectful of human status with no bias towards any gender (Woods and Gronn, 2009). Although most, if not all, leaders claim to adopt a democratic leadership style, gender bias is in place.

However, despite the type of leadership styles that are practised in organisations, the gendered characteristics are rooted in everyday social practices. They are also shaped by the culture inherent in the organisation. Although organisations' cultures consist of masculine and feminine traits, they tend to be more masculine and value men over women (Noback et al., 2016). This is because, essentially, men are in positions of power, and they function in a closed male circle, choosing people for critical positions who think the same way they do (Itzin, 1995).

Moreover, Jandeska and Kraimer (2005) posited that women can function and be productive in masculine organisations, but it comes with a cost of limited career success and achievements. They add that some women attempt to match males' behaviours for career advancement, creating a false identity that could be revealed anytime and could be considered manipulation or lead to conflict in decision-making. Oakley (2000) described

this as a behavioural ‘double bind’ because, whatever women try to do to be in leadership positions, they will not be able to win. For example, they have to be rigid and authoritative (like men) for leadership positions to be taken seriously. However, they will be observed as mean or rude if they act aggressively, as men do.

Nonetheless, despite the existence of different cultures within different contexts (e.g., countries, societies and organisations), Acker (2012) pointed out that different cultures of inequality are also evident in organisations’ subunits. Some of these cultures support women’s career advancement, depending on the extent to which superiors are supportive, and other cultures are resistant to change and do not accept any change in leadership style, maintaining a ‘think manager – think male’ mindset (Itzin, 1995).

3.2.4 Bias and discrimination in organisational practices

The differences in treatment between men and women are what produce gender issues in the workplace. Women are treated less favourably than men in organisations, which holds them back from advancing to senior managerial levels (Michailidis et al., 2012).

Following is an elaboration on some crucial practices that discriminate against women, hindering their career progression in the workplace.

3.2.4.1 Bias in recruitment and promotions

Decision-makers worldwide claim gender neutrality in all their policies and practices, particularly when it comes to recruiting qualified and competent employees. The non-debatable argument of choosing the best candidate for the job is persistent. However, this creates inconsistency with the fact of the scarcity of women in leadership positions. Beattie and Johnson (2012) argued that the possibility of such actions and results consequently could relate to the unconscious bias in recruitment and promotions. They added that many large organisations are now more convinced and aware of the negative role that unconscious bias plays in recruitment and promotions.

Likewise, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) outlined that a male manager's typical characteristics are used as a default for the standard expectation against which women managers are 'unconsciously' compared during recruitment or promotion, because women's characteristics are devalued. However, it could be argued that being aware and convinced of unconscious bias is a dilemma, mainly because employers blame discriminatory actions against women on spontaneous unconscious behaviour.

In addition to the issue of unconscious bias discussed above, some studies link the discrimination that women face in recruitment and promotions to other phenomena, such as homosociality, which means sharing similar interests and social identity (Holgersson, 2013; Koch et al., 2015). Hence, decision-makers tend to recruit or promote their own gender, particularly those who build a friendly rapport with them. The preference in gender relations is also discussed by Holgersson (2013) in the elaboration of the 'homosociality' concept, which results in the preference of appointing men to the top managerial levels. The newly appointed men share similar interests and social identities with the panel members. This subsequently results in the exclusion of women.

In support of the above argument, the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Koch et al. (2015) of experimental studies on gender bias in employment decision-making revealed that men were preferred for employment, particularly in male-dominated jobs. In contrast, no gender preference was found in female-dominated or integrated jobs.

However, Cohen and Broschak (2013) found that an increase in the number of women in senior managerial roles increases the number of female recruits. Although some studies outline that increasing female roles in leadership positions impacts the cultural stereotypes of management roles (Dasgupta and Asgari, 2004), meta-analytic evidence claims that the relationship between leadership role and masculine traits continues to be strong (Koenig et al., 2011). This indicates that if gender inequality against women exists in top management, women will remain underrepresented and face barriers when applying for either junior or mid-level management positions.

Previous research has also established that male decision-makers tend to use gender-based models and criteria for decision-making in the case of high-level hiring. Men are more comfortable working with men, and some men view women as less committed and competent for senior positions (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2006; Allen et al., 2016). Also, Lyness and Thompson (2000) pointed out that males usually secure their promotions through informal networking, whereas women depend on formal organisational procedures, which negatively affects their career advancement. In the same vein, Johns (2013) elaborated that for high positions, most organisations promote via networking, and some advertise internally and externally to find the most competent candidate for the position. Preston (1999) claimed that women are most likely to be recruited in positions that do not secure internal promotion within the same context. Hence, they are clustered at lower levels that exclude them from being in the pipeline for promotions to higher positions.

Nevertheless, other researchers (e.g., Heilman et al., 2015) referred to the ‘lack of fit’ model as a framework in explaining and understanding the bias in recruitment and selection of women in organisations. The ‘lack of fit’ model, as elaborated on by Heilman et al. (2015), considers the characteristics required in male-type jobs to be associated with men and not with women. Hence, women will not be seen as fit for these occupations. However, it is considered that perceptions that are linked with the lack of fit for women are framing a stereotypical concept of women: that is, what women should do and are suitable for, in the perceptions of others, particularly employers, to be successful in male-dominated occupations. In this model, women are not seen as a compatible fit to be either selected or promoted to leadership occupations due to these beliefs’ consequences.

Moreover, some literature sheds light on discrimination practices against women with children in particular. For example, Correll et al. (2007) conducted a study on recruitment and promotion decisions on men, women and women with children. They found that discrimination is practised against women with children, mainly due to the perception that women with children are less committed to work than men or women without children. This perception is probably based on the time women with children spend at work,

depending on how many children they have and their children's ages; it is challenging for them to undertake extra work, which will result in their lack of availability outside of working hours. In addition, several types of leave could be taken by women with children—for instance, maternity leave, emergency leave, and leave to accompany sick parents or children. In a similar context, Longarela (2017) argued that family leave is considered to have a more negative impact on female career progression than any other type of leave.

Hakim (2006) claimed that around half of women in top managerial positions in Britain are childless, whereas men with children can achieve the same status at work if they have a wife who is a full-time housewife, or who can balance between work and family responsibilities. It is a known fact that women's careers are more complex and challenging than those of their male counterparts. Although many scholars emphasise the importance of implementing family-friendly policies to solve the issue of balancing work and family (Allen, 2001; Kalysh et al., 2016), Hakim (2006) believed that these policies reduce equality in the workforce and produce the glass ceiling. Burkett (2000) supported Hakim's argument in that these policies create a sense of discrimination among the single and childless employees in that they gain no advantage from such benefits.

3.2.4.2 Limited training and development opportunities

A considerable amount of research (e.g., Oakley, 2000; Jackson, 2001) explores the limited opportunities offered to women for their career advancement as part of discriminatory practices in the workplace. Development opportunities could take the form of rotation to other departments to gain experience in various fields. For instance, not many women are offered opportunities to work in operations, manufacturing and marketing, thus affecting their chances to be selected for senior positions (Oakley, 2000). Also, development opportunities could be offered through special assignments inside or outside the organisation that would enhance women's visibility to the management and consequently increase their chances for promotions to higher levels.

Lyness and Thompson (2000) explained the views against women taking an international assignment by the stereotypical stance that links women directly to children and family

responsibilities. Hence, these assignments are mainly offered to men by default, which consequently adds to their career development and success at the workplace.

Hopkins et al. (2008) suggested that leadership development needs should be customised uniquely and differently for women to meet their specific needs. The belief in the existence of a difference between men and women is the basis for gender inequality practices in organisations, which cannot be solved by imposing additional measures to strengthen women's current status. The implementation of equal development opportunities for women and men might achieve the required outcomes regarding women's positions in organisations.

Several studies (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005) have also considered mentorship an essential tool for training and development for upward professional progression in organisations. However, the lack or shortage of mentorship is a primary concern for women in many organisations and is considered one of the organisational barriers to women's career progression (e.g., Lyness and Thompson, 2000; Benschop et al., 2015; Bynum, 2015; Gipson et al., 2017; Place and Vardeman-Winter, 2018).

Gipson et al. (2017) argued that women are usually paired with male mentors because men hold most leadership positions. This mentorship could be problematic for women with high potential because of the conflict and bias stemming from gender and power relations, which could impact these relationships' effectiveness. The mentorship, on the other hand, could also be observed to be beneficial. The power and authority of the mentor play an essential role in the career advancement of the mentee. Male mentors in top managerial positions possess more power and authority than female mentors. Hence, it could be more beneficial for a female to be mentored by a male mentor to secure successful career progression. However, some scholars claim that women benefit more from female mentors for their career advancement as they are aware of what women go through and can help them overcome the barriers that stand against them in their career journeys (Lyness and Thompson, 2000). Unfortunately, due to women's scarcity in senior managerial levels, mentorship between women is rare.

3.2.4.3 Lack of networking

A considerable amount of literature has been published on networking. These studies establish an association between networking and the reproduction of gender inequality in the labour market (Linehan, 2001; McGuire, 2002). Some scholars affirm the advantage of networking for employees in exchanging information, forming relationships and support, and gaining visibility with employers, which consequently assists in employees' career progression (Linehan and Scullion, 2008). Durbin (2011) differentiated networks into formal and informal and argued that senior women are excluded from informal networks (known as old boys' networks), which denies them important information and involvement in different strategic decisions.

Women and other minorities could be associated with other networks which are less influential and less powerful. However, being a member of or having access to the 'old boys' network' could significantly increase a person's opportunities in the labour market. This is because these networks provide essential information sources, influence, and status in relationships with others either within the workplace or outside (Loury, 2006; McDonald, 2011).

Many published studies (e.g., Eby et al., 2003; Hezlett and Gibson, 2007) consider networking a powerful tool that functions on multiple levels and in various directions. Ibarra (1993) identified the presence of networking on two levels: organisational and personal. Generally, the relationships at both of these levels are related to work, are social, or are a blend of both. Ibarra (1993) added that networking at the organisational level consists of relationships within the boundary of the organisation, whereas personal networking is defined by the relationships that tie an individual and their direct contacts with others.

Metz (2009) linked networking and male domination of top positions and argued that this has a consequence in dominating the social networks at such levels, impacting negatively on women's career advancement. Accordingly, and due to this relationship, support is only maintained among males. Hence, social networking is more approachable by men

than women, which consequently impact their career progression positively (Forret and Dougherty, 2004).

Metz (2009) also claimed that the organisation's size could influence the formation of networks, as it is hard for employees to know each other in large organisations and develop relationships with decision-makers. In addition, in large bureaucratic organisations, managers have less power or influence in decision-making than in small organisations. However, a notable weakness with this argument is that it does not consider that social networks affect people's relationships with each other either within the organisation or out of it, despite the size of the organisation or the level of analysis. It is generally accepted that people exchange information and support for each other for common interests.

Research conducted by Ibarra (2016) showed that it is harder for women to be involved in networks for three reasons. First is the 'likes attract' principle, where people tend to be more connected with others with similar attributes, such as personalities, attitudes and hobbies, particularly in male-dominated senior positions, which means that women need to work harder to form relationships with decision-makers.

Second, work and social networks are separate spheres. For women, their work and social networks tend to overlap less than those of men. They have two different lists, one for social activities and one for work activities. In contrast, men often have some duplicate contacts on both lists. They commonly play squash, watch a sports match or go out for dinner. In this debate, functioning in separate domains can put women at a disadvantage, as it is time-consuming to manage two separate networks. It is more convenient that a person would accomplish two things simultaneously, like having dinner and talking about some work issues. Also, talking about work outside the boundaries of the organisation builds more trust and strengthens relationships.

Third is using people in the form of selfish gain for career advancement. The problem with forming networks with similar people is that it produces homogeneous networks, whereas diversity should be taken into consideration, as it opens various doors needed to

understand the world around us to make good decisions and persuade people to get on board with our ideas for better progress (Ibarra, 2016).

In addition to the organisational barriers that are hindering women's career progression, the next section highlights other factors or barriers that affect women's career progression. These barriers have been categorised into individual and societal barriers.

3.3 Individual and societal barriers to women's career progression

This section sheds light on two other levels that barriers stem from – the micro level (individual barriers) and the macro level (societal barriers).

3.3.1 Individual barriers – micro-level

Several studies have shown that individuals are the key to their own career success and advancement (e.g., Harris, 2004; Hoyt and Murphy, 2016; Hurley and Choudhary, 2016; Kossek et al., 2017). Factors could include personality traits, age, role models or lack thereof, and work–life balance.

Some studies suggest that the differences in personality between the two genders are among the evidence for men's emergence as managers. Women are described to have personality traits such as agreeableness, warmth, and openness to feelings which are associated negatively with managerial roles (Georgellis and Sankae, 2016). On the other hand, many scholars point out that managerial roles are stereotypically associated with traits like assertiveness, ambition and outspokenness, which are mainly related to men (e.g., Allen et al., 2016). However, Hoyt and Murphy (2016) assumed that individuals are responsible for the choices they make. The individual can adopt and develop any trait related to the career they choose to undertake by programming the mind to act and respond in different roles.

Furthermore, some scholars argue that the lack of confidence could be considered a barrier that women face in advancing to higher management levels (e.g., Michailidis et al., 2012;

Guillén et al., 2018). Allen et al. (2016) believe that society and the media also harm women's self-esteem. The image of women is demeaned and weakened in many ways, for instance in phrases like 'fight like a girl' or do something 'like a girl'. The images the media sends regarding women are mostly about their appearance and their sexual appeal. These phrases and images probably send messages that erode young women's confidence, particularly when they are competing against men. Allen et al. (2016) added that women with low self-esteem and a lack of willingness to compete will not meet their career aims, or they may make a decision that would hinder their career growth and advancement.

Age is another factor that could play a role in the career progression of women. Different OCM practices have different effects on different groups of employees. For instance, training activities would be more influential in the success of young and new employees. In comparison, older or more senior employees will benefit more from developmental assignments (Tharenou, 2001). Other factors such as management aspiration and work-family conflict also affect career progression, particularly for women. Before women start their careers, they first face a very significant barrier that can impact their career choice and consequently their growth. Knowing about the challenges women face (e.g., gender discrimination) is in itself a barrier that affects women's willingness and aspirations to progress (Watts et al., 2015).

Research in this area has shown that some women prefer not to be in positions that would shift them to a phase full of stress, long working hours and mobilisation, or to be on call during their annual leave (Hakim, 2006; Kan, 2007, Poggio, 2010). Women who aspire to achieve a high managerial position realise that this comes with a negative cost to other aspects of their lives (Watts et al., 2015).

Supporting this view, Sheppard (2018) conducted a study on US undergraduate students on leadership aspirations and job and life attribute preferences. She found that female students reported lower interest than male students in leadership positions. They were also less likely than males to accept a promotion with more responsibilities and more working hours that would mean sacrificing their enjoyment of life. Although both groups of

participants, men and women, had similarities in ranking the importance of job and life preferences, female participants emphasised the significance of life attribute preferences more, such as family and good health. On the other hand, male participants emphasised the importance of job attribute preferences such as high salary and status.

Previous research has found that some businesses are using women's limitations, like the lack of ambition and prioritising family over career, as an excuse for penalising women who try to advance in their career (Ezzedeen et al., 2015).

Another stream of research has considered the limitation of female role models occupying senior managerial positions as a contributor to the lack of women's aspirations to progress in their careers and hold managerial positions themselves. Role models influence individuals in achieving their goals and support them throughout their career journey (Morgenroth et al., 2015). In contrast, other researchers (e.g., Hurst et al., 2016) argue that women in senior managerial roles do not necessarily have the willingness to assist other women but could be working against other women's interests in the organisation (i.e. 'queen bee' syndrome). Hurst et al. (2016) added that successful women believe that since they did it without help, anyone else can if they are talented and competent enough.

Furthermore, women's career decisions are different, as many influences affect women's career paths, and their decisions are dependent on a broader life aspect. When making career decisions, women usually consider how that work would influence their relationship with their spouse and other responsibilities towards children and elderly parents. The tension between women's personal lives and career decisions significantly affects their positions in organisations (Hurst et al., 2016).

Adopting a similar position, Allen et al. (2016) stated that women, particularly working mothers, face pressure from society on their responsibilities as mothers, which stereotyped the identities of working women in general. This notion emphasises the challenge women face in being successful in work and at home at the same time. Allen et al. (2016) reported that approximately 66 per cent of caregivers are women taking care of children, ageing parents or relatives. These women are middle-aged, married and working. The pressure

on women from caregiving vs career suggests that one of these responsibilities will be changed and prioritised in the process.

Moreover, Kiser (2015) believed that since women are the caregivers in their families, their time is divided between work and family responsibilities. Some researchers argue that long working hours have become customary and are seen by employers as essential for an ideal employee for career growth and progression. Consequently, this is not possible for caregivers to accomplish and excludes them from participating in organisational decision-making. Accordingly, women with family responsibilities are in a disadvantaged position compared to others with no family obligations due to lack of work–life balance (Kiser, 2015; Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016).

3.3.2 Societal barriers – macro level

The societal context – including aspects such as culture, patriarchal attitudes and expectations about gender roles – influences people and organisations’ beliefs and behaviours, which include the methods applied by managers in implementing strategies and performing assigned tasks (Tayeb, 1995). Organisational structures and practices are also affected, including the roles allocated to women in the workplace (Omar and Davidson, 2001).

Cultures are structured differently among countries that serve central beliefs within a society that differentiate between the accepted roles of men and women (Adler, 1994). In the context of careers, Thomas and Inkson (2007) stated that culture influences individuals’ careers by legitimising and shaping career patterns in society and through individuals’ cultural perceptions of a suitable career. It influences individuals’ beliefs and attitudes about their capabilities when choosing a career, to the extent that individuals then perform according to gender-differentiated perceptions when making career decisions. Cultural beliefs about gender direct men and women into various career pathways (Correll, 2001). For example, it is culturally perceived that mathematics skills are

associated with masculinity, contributing to the gender gap in careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (Correll, 2004).

However, the cultural beliefs in societies that form different preferences in careers among men and women are mainly patriarchal (Moghadam, 2004). The nature of patriarchal societies is almost always associated with a negative influence on women's status in organisations, particularly at management levels, as access to privilege and power is granted to men, not women. It is considered normal in patriarchal societies that leadership is given to men over women. This explains the cluster of women at lower occupational and managerial levels and the difficulties they face in gaining power and control in the workplace (Sultana, 2010).

Furthermore, existing research (e.g., Heilman, 2001; Poggio, 2010) also recognises the critical role of stereotypes in causing gender inequality. Deuhr and Bono (2006, p. 816) defined gender stereotypes as 'categorical beliefs regarding the traits and behavioural characteristics ascribed to individuals based on their gender'. They produce a belief about what is expected from men and women and how they should behave both at home and at work. This is evident in the different roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. Males are usually brought up with encouragement and special treatment to become breadwinners.

In contrast, women take the responsibilities of nurturing and raising children. Hence, each gender develops different traits and attitudes towards what are they capable of and roles expected of them by society (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994; Anker et al., 2003). Therefore, women have a lower status and limited access to managerial positions that require authority and decision-making (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

Some studies highlight that successful management is considered a 'manly business' (Heilman, 2001). Throughout the cross-cultural studies of Schein (2007) on the 'think manager – think male' attitude among men and women in China, Germany, Japan, the UK and the US, she found that men continue to see women as incompetent and less qualified for managerial positions. Thus, gender stereotyping of positions at the managerial level

adopts prejudice against women in selecting them for managerial positions, promotion and training.

3.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter discussed different barriers that hinders women career progression within three different levels, focusing particularly on the organisational level. The literature highlights that the main challenges women face at the workplace are based on discriminatory practices. The role of organisations in tackling these challenges has not been clarified by the literature, which is considered as another gap this thesis is highlighting. The existence of barriers till date explains the perpetuation of gender inequality in organisational practices against women and following a male organisational model in their functions and operations. It also highlights the limited support women gain from organisations to progress further in their career.

Furthermore, the negative impact that these barriers have on women's career progression highlights the need for organisations to consider implementing interventional strategies targeted at women to support them specifically in their career progression. It is essential to state that interventional strategies work as a support system for women's career progression to ensure the continuous implementation of formal equality policies and measures. The next chapter elaborates on these interventional strategies and their effectiveness in women's career progression.

CHAPTER 4: INTERVENTIONAL STRATEGIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter's focus is on the third aim of this study, which is to explore the effectiveness of interventional strategies applied by organisations to assist the development of women in progressing in their career to higher managerial levels. The chapter first discusses some of the equality legislation issues that organisational choices are framed by and operate within. This ensures that compliance with the law is adhered to, and equality and fairness are applied throughout organisational policies and practices. Then, different organisational interventions are examined that should work as a support system for women's careers to assist them in overcoming the barriers that hinder their career progression, and provide them with more suitable and effective developmental opportunities to increase their chances for career success and progression.

4.2 Gender equality legislation and models: framing the organisational context

The 1970s are considered to be when British equality legislation was born. These legislations became more inclusive, and the emphasis shifted from focusing on anti-discrimination to promoting gender equality (Dickens, 2007). Organisations are obliged to function within these legislations, which should protect all employees' right to be treated equally. One of the policy initiatives is the Equality Act 2010, which is considered the main milestone established to eliminate discrimination and put an end to the struggle for equal rights (Hepple, 2011). There are many published studies (e.g., Gregory, 1987; Yap, 2005; Forowicz, 2017) on gender equality approaches or models. All of them share two main models of gender equality, which are widely used: the formal model and the substantive model.

4.2.1 The formal equality model

This model was considered among the first generation of British legislation to be rooted in the politics of immigration and race (Hepple, 2001). Graycar and Morgan (2004)

described the formal equality approach as written rules that do not differentiate between men and women. Both men and women are to be treated precisely in the same manner in any circumstances; Arneson (2002) suggested that the slogan ‘careers open to talents’ establishes the main idea of the formal equality model.

However, equal treatment does not necessarily reflect equality as a concept with the same outcomes, particularly for women. Instead, it could permit discrimination; Barnard and Hepple (2000) described it to reflect ‘direct discrimination’. In the same vein, Yap (2005) found that gender discrimination against women would satisfy the position of equality according to the formal equality model. This is because all women are treated in the same way as men, without considering the barriers and challenges they face. In addition to that, women have a history of not being equal to men and treating them the same way now would only reinforce women’s disadvantaged position (Graycar and Morgan, 2004). Similarly, Temkin and Sardoc (2016) argued that the aim of equal opportunity legislation reflects a concern regarding fairness that is based on a comparative approach between men and women (Hepple, 2011).

4.2.2 The substantive equality model

This model has been developed due to the criticisms and limitations of the formal equality model. The substantive equality model focuses on results rather than treatment (Barnard and Hepple, 2000; Fredman, 2016). Fredman (2016) proposed that this approach provides a framework to tackle all inequality issues in organisations. The substantive equality model focuses on two objectives: fair equality of opportunity and equality of results (Fredman, 2005).

First, the ‘fair equality of opportunity’ or ‘competitive equality’ approach exists when all individuals are allowed to compete equally for opportunities or rewards of any kind. It is described as removing all obstacles and barriers to ensure fair competition among people (Cockburn, 1989; Sachs, 2012; Dahlerup, 2007). With this approach, the barriers and challenges women face should have been tackled, and women’s representation in senior

managerial positions should have been achieved. However, Roemer (2002) argued that equal opportunity policies should create a level playing field for all as a starting point for competition. After that, each will be on their own, and the outcomes will be the individual's responsibility. They will represent the efforts of the individual, which are acceptable on an ethical basis.

Pignataro (2012) elaborated on the reasons for levelling the ground for individuals, indicating matters that people do not have influence or control over – for example, the social and living environment provided by parents, or the circumstances that a person could find themselves in – which have consequences when prioritising many aspects of life. However, this does not explain the techniques or criteria chosen and implemented to level individuals at the starting point. Also, it does not elaborate on how justice is achieved or how opportunities are offered to employees that are discriminated against due to their 'unchosen circumstances', particularly in the case of women. Hence, this approach fails to achieve equality in results due to the scarcity of women in senior positions, which is still evident.

The second approach is the equality of results or 'outcomes'. This approach directly intervenes in workplace practices to ensure that a fair distribution of rewards is achieved (Cockburn, 1989). Fredman (2016) argued that this approach permits unequal treatment to reach equal results, calling for 'positive discrimination' (Cockburn, 1989). Furthermore, Noon (2010) proposed that positive discrimination is a necessary means of intervention that permits decision-makers to consider prioritising disadvantaged groups in the evaluation process for any benefit they are underrepresented in. This is the reason for speeding up the progress of equality in the workplace. However, Bacchi (2004) stated that 'some contemporary theorists have criticised positive discrimination' due to the concept's limitation, and they advise against its use. Also, it is generally unlawful in the UK to apply positive discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 to support specific groups in issues like equality (personneltoday.com, n.d.).

In addition to positive discrimination, an alternative strategy applied by organisations is affirmative action. Bacchi (2004) stated that affirmative action could be described as or represent 'preferential treatment'. Iyer (2009, p. 259) explained the importance of affirmative action in that it 'implements concrete measures to monitor and change organisational policies and practices actively, both to ensure that bias is eliminated and increase the target's representation and status group'. Affirmative action could look into policies and practices of implementing equal opportunities in all fields (e.g., recruitment, retention, promotion, career paths), which should eliminate the roots of discrimination against women and minority groups. This could also be a means of encouragement for women to compete for such positions in a changed and different setting and enhance their chances of success and progress (Balafoutas et al., 2016).

It can be observed that the legislative framework that organisations are operating within represents fair and equal opportunities for all employees despite their gender. However, there is a lack of equality of outcomes, represented by women's scarcity in senior managerial positions, as the challenges women go through are not considered when entering the competition for senior position or throughout their career journey, which puts them in an uneven position compared to men. This could question organisations' commitment to providing the necessary support for women to overcome the challenges they face in their careers, consequently helping in their career progression. Nonetheless, this argument contradicts organisations' efforts, which are represented by the interventional strategies that are offered to women to support their occupational status, which is discussed in the next section.

4.3 Organisational interventions

Organisations have been striving to challenge gender inequality and the practices that influence different equality issues that place women in a disadvantaged position. Organisations implement various interventional strategies in an attempt to support women's career progression. Some of the primary interventions are discussed here.

4.3.1 Family-friendly policies

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of work–life balance on the attitudes and wellbeing of employees and, accordingly, the performance and effectiveness of organisations (Brough et al., 2008). Hence, organisations are required to produce some measurable interventions in this regard; for example, ‘re-designing jobs to provide employees more autonomy and variety, providing benefits and policies such as flexi-time, providing social support (supervisor support) and developing a family-friendly organisational culture (work–family culture)’ (Baral and Bhargava, 2010, p. 275). Similarly, Brough et al. (2008) identified four main categories of work–life balance initiatives adopted by organisations:

1. Flexible or alternative work arrangements: for instance, part-time or temporary positions and compressed working weeks
2. Arrangements for paid and unpaid leave: for example, paid leave for maternity, paternity and adoption, and unpaid leave for personal reasons such as sabbaticals or cultural events
3. Services for dependent care: for example, childcare or elder-care services
4. Provisions of information, resources and services such as programmes related to employee assistance or stress management and health facilities.

However, Brough et al. (2008) argued that these policies’ influence on organisations is not clear and is debatable, because of cross-cultural differences in government regimes, employment policies and labour market conditions (Ackers, 2003). Brough et al. (2008) added that some aspects of family-friendly policies have created financial pressure on the labour market in the conditional costs drawn for these policies’ implementation. For example, the provision of flexi-time or extended paid maternity leave will force an organisation to recruit replacement staff on a part-time or temporary basis. The organisation could reduce the cost by assigning some staff extra responsibilities, but this will cost the organisation in employee stress, turnover, and absenteeism.

In addition to the negative impact on organisations, the negative impact on women's career progression is evident. Although these policies are produced for both genders, they are utilised by women and it could be argued that they target women because they address the challenges women face in organisations. Therefore, they are a means of perpetuating and maintaining women's disadvantaged position in organisations. In support of this argument, Rogier and Padgett (2004) found in their study that women working on a flexible schedule are perceived as less dedicated to their work and career and to have less desire to advance. Adopting a similar position, Kossek et al. (2017) argued for the need to reduce flexibility and family structure bias and focus on promoting leaders' modelling of balanced work and life behaviour. Accordingly, male participation in these benefits should be encouraged by organisations to reduce the negative implications for women's career progression (Eagly and Carli, 2018). However, the organisational role in supporting these policies is essential regardless of who benefits from them.

4.3.2 Leadership programmes

Leadership development training is offered to employees with high potential, to assist them in their career progression. Leadership differs among women and men in terms of style, behaviour, and sex-related differences such as personalities. Hopkins et al. (2008) stated that leadership development for women should be different, unique and customised to meet their specific needs. Hopkins et al. (2008) added that programmes should focus on the organisation as well, as they should be aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives, otherwise they will not achieve the required outcomes.

Tailored leadership programmes for women who have been targeted as having the potential to progress to senior management is one of the approaches to progressing women's careers (Clarke, 2011), particularly since the traditional leadership programmes have failed to meet the requirements of women (Brue and Brue, 2016). As per Clarke's (2011) findings on development programmes that are targeted at women only, these programmes provide a relaxing and supportive environment for learning new skills and

enhancing self-confidence and could be a way of learning from the experiences of role models who have succeeded in their careers.

However, Ely et al. (2011) criticised these programmes for the lack of coherence between practitioners and educators. In other words, what is delivered and taught to women in these programmes does not necessarily amount to effective and practical techniques that can be implemented in reality in the workplace, unless the educators have industrial experience, making them aware of all the challenges and barriers that stand against women's career progression. It could be argued that these leadership programmes may have an impact on women's advancement.

Along the same lines, Ely et al. (2011) proposed a framework that links theory with both gender and leadership practice. They posit the theory that leadership is identity work and describe how gender bias affects women leaders' identity work. Then, based on the scholars' experiences, they design and deliver women's leadership programmes, including such matters as negotiations and leading change, and other developmental tools like 360-degree feedback. Contrary to Ely et al. (2011), Day (2000) argued that feedback does not necessarily reflect positive change in the individual's performance but might have the opposite effect, leading to frustration or decreased performance.

4.3.3 Succession planning and career development

Greer and Virick (2008) believe in the importance of incorporating diversity in succession planning and looking for approaches to develop women as successors for senior positions. Some scholars (e.g., Beeson and Valerio, 2012) have discussed an approach to be considered within organisations for women's talent development and opportunities that emphasises actions on two fronts. One involves actions taken by organisations, and the other, actions taken by women themselves. Baruch (2006) disagreed with this statement and believes that organisations are mainly responsible for individuals' career development. He also argues for a balanced view that emphasises the relationship between individuals and organisations in employees' careers management.

Specific organisational practices that could be included in the processes of succession planning and career development consider the importance of levelling the playing field for women's advancement. This is accomplished by identifying the practices in succession planning that address gender stereotyping and encourage equality.

McDonagh and Paris (2012) believe that CEOs and the board of directors are primary contributors to change in any organisation. A CEO's resignation would result in a change of management approach, and hence a possible discontinuation of strategies. Employees holding managerial positions also have a significant impact on the process of leadership development. They are believed to add exceptional value in constructing the pipeline for leadership positions (Groves, 2007). In addition to this, usually the pipeline for leadership positions lacks women's presence, which contributes, as a consequence, to the lack of women in senior positions and their existence as role models (McDonagh and Paris, 2012).

As discussed by Beeson and Valerio (2012), other measures should be taken into consideration as well. For example, in-depth discussion regarding potential candidates, either women or men, could identify future leaders. This could be conducted with trained facilitators who would assist in providing information about candidates' strengths, development needs, career goals and potential for career advancement, and the 'best fit' position-wise. Another practice is identifying the positions that have produced senior leaders historically and monitoring the number of women considered for these positions. Moreover, keeping track of trends associated with the promotion and retention of women versus men is recognised, to identify candidates for the leadership pipeline, along with developing innovative methods to give women international experience.

However, Cohn et al. (2005) discussed some of the challenges facing succession planning implementation. One of the obstacles is resistance from some CEOs and employees at senior managerial levels. They equate succession planning with plans for their own exit, which leads to fear and a desire to maintain the status quo. Another obstacle and misconception faced by succession planning, as discussed by Cohn et al. (2005), is that many CEOs consider that leadership development is the primary responsibility of the HR

department, whereas it actually lies in the hands of line managers. Organisations that are successful in growing leaders hold line managers accountable for developing their subordinates by identifying their needs, assisting them in developing new and required skills, and providing them with opportunities for career growth.

4.3.4 Mentoring

Mentoring and sharing experience has been discussed by many scholars (e.g., Allen et al., 2004; Gayle Baugh and Sullivan, 2005; Beeson and Valerio, 2012) as a development tool to build the talent of women leaders. The failure to identify talented women could be detrimental to the effectiveness of the organisation. It may result in not meeting the requirements of equal opportunity policies or the goals of affirmative action programmes (Noe, 1988).

Mentoring is associated with career benefits for the mentee (i.e. the protégé), as explained by Allen et al. (2004), both objectively (e.g., compensation and reward) and subjectively (e.g., career satisfaction and growth). The strength of the relationship between the mentor and the protégé determines how effective and suitable the outcomes are for all parties involved (i.e. mentor, protégé, organisation). If the relationship is good, then the outcomes are beneficial; and if the relationship is dysfunctional, then the outcomes are full of problems and issues for all parties involved (Gayle Baugh and Sullivan, 2005).

Maintaining a good relationship with mentors is essential in the career growth and progress of an individual. As Karm (1985) posited, a healthy relationship with peers is required to assist career growth. These peers could act as friendly role models who encourage and support women directly in their career development path. However, research has shown that men mentors are not suitable for women, as their relationship results in conflict on most occasions (Hunt and Michael, 1983).

Durbin (2016) shed light on the role of mentors at a more strategic level where he claims that mentors give their mentees creditability and trust when introducing them to meaningful and robust networks. Durbin (2016) described this as probably the most

essential service a mentor can provide to their mentee. Moreover, mentoring does not have to reflect a long-term relationship to be successful but could be associated with different mentors at other occupational levels. Gayle Baugh and Sullivan (2005) highlighted what they considered the primary reason for the changing nature of organisations and careers: the emergence of online media is a significant development in the labour market.

Headlam-Wells et al. (2005) discussed the use of e-mentoring as a replacement for the traditional practice of mentoring. E-mentoring can be implemented via e-mail or chat rooms where the virtual mentor can be present anytime and anywhere. This is considered an advantage to women with care responsibilities or with a disability, and it is also cost-effective for organisations. This could also be useful in solving some of the relationship issues that affect women negatively.

Furthermore, Beeson and Valerio (2012) emphasised the importance of recognising mentors' efforts and rewarding them, particularly male mentors who 'champion' women to develop their skills and progress in their careers. This has a consequence in encouraging other males to assist women throughout their careers and build a positive, diverse workplace. However, what remains questionable is that organisations offer women mentoring for their career progression, keeping in mind the gendered structure of organisations and the culture dominating them.

4.3.5 Networking

A wide range of literature has been published on the influence of networking on employees' career progression (e.g., Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Linehan and Scullion, 2008; Harris and Rae, 2011). Organisations should encourage women's networking to share their experiences and increase their chances of advancement (Beeson and Valerio, 2012). Gibson et al. (2014) believe that networking does not positively impact the individual only, but also extends to reach the organisational level. For example, networkers can provide their employers with strategic information regarding their competitors. However, women's organisational interference is necessary due to their

exclusion from these networks, since they are dominated by men (i.e. ‘old boys’ networks’). Hence, organisations either impose women’s presence in these networks or allow women to have their own networking activities (Perriton, 2006).

Durbin (2016) indicated that women’s networks are formed and funded formally by organisations. They are controlled by committees and consist of women from different levels, including some women holding senior positions. As argued by Durbin (2016), these networks could be a source of identifying talented women and promoting them to senior positions. However, to what extent women in these networks are empowered to decide on promotions and career progression is debatable. The networks could be a means of social interaction among women, but do not extend to making decisions for or about other women.

Some scholars (e.g., Donelan et al., 2009) have provided a positive account of online networking to solve the scarcity of networking possibilities for women, to help their career progression, including mailing lists, web forums, social networking sites, and career-based social networks. These platforms facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge on a particular subject with other interested individuals in the same field.

4.3.6 Structural and cultural change

Over the past three decades, many organisations have removed some middle management layers and entrusted decision-making to the lower levels of the organisation. These changes are described as interventions to eliminate old bureaucracies’ inefficiencies by reducing the hierarchical structures and gender inequality (Acker, 2006).

Kossek et al. (2017) proposed that organisations should consider changing the design of jobs and cultural and social aspects to encourage better relationships among the workforce. For example, instead of creating competitive cultures, the focus should be on collaborative cultures. Most employers are starting to realise the critical role of women’s talents for organisations’ futures, which could be a milestone in breaking the culture of masculinity. Some address the issues of workplace culture by providing more support for

women to be leaders and make it possible for them to break away from support positions (e.g., HR, marketing or planning) to positions where they can contribute to revenue generation and be expert at the core business (McDonagh and Paris, 2012).

Furthermore, Ng and Sears (2017) posited that having female CEOs would help change the culture in organisations to a less stereotyped vision of women in management positions. Since women are more aware of the difficulties they face breaking through barriers, they are more supportive of other women and act as role models for those looking to advance in their careers.

Some organisations were seen to recruit women to senior positions, but at times of crisis and risk. This phenomenon is known as the ‘glass cliff’, and it does not impose equality between the two genders but instead emphasises inequality in the way women are observed. Women are hired in times of poor performance and productivity not because they are predicted to recover the situation but because they are seen as the right people to be blamed for the organisation’s failure (Ryan et al., 2007).

Moreover, mostly in male-dominated organisations, women leaders themselves can practise discrimination against junior women and maintain a distance from them in what is called the ‘queen bee’ phenomenon. This results from the threat of losing their position. Hence, they align themselves with the dominant group and adopt the leadership style that suits the masculine organisational culture. So, instead of supporting their female subordinates, they distance themselves from them (Derks et al., 2016).

4.3.7 Role models

A considerable amount of literature discusses the scarcity of senior female role models as one of the barriers to women’s career progression (e.g., Gibson, 2003; Baker and Casey, 2010; Sealy and Singh, 2010; Durbin and Tomlinson, 2014). Sealy and Singh (2010) argued that there are very few women in top positions who could act as role models to provide other women with advice on ways to overcome the challenges they face throughout their career journeys (e.g., exclusion from networks, a masculine culture that

does not support women's advancement). On some occasions, men act as role models to women and provide the necessary support in developing their leadership styles, even more than women provide this support to other women (Baker and Casey, 2010).

Sealy and Singh (2010) added that those women at executive levels who provide support are accelerating other women's promotions. They have the ability to influence organisational policies and culture towards a more attractive environment for women to work and stay in. Therefore, this emphasises the need for organisations to increase women's visibility at senior managerial levels so that they can become role models to other women (Durbin, 2016).

Furthermore, the Mentoring Foundation, which operates a FTSE 100 cross-company programme, argues that organisational interventions and positive mentoring relationships with successful and influential business role models fulfil women's career needs, contributing to their success. Most importantly, women in senior positions should have the willingness and motivation to be role models who influence other women and mentor them. By this means, the gender balance could be effectively changed in organisations (Durbin, 2016).

A recent study conducted by Cross et al. (2017) revealed that role modelling could have an unintended harmful effect on women's career progress at lower managerial levels. The struggle that women face at senior managerial levels – particularly women with children – is observed by other women and results in them refusing to be in the same position of struggle and making sacrifices on behalf of the family. Cross et al. (2017) suggested that human resource policies and practices should be re-examined and customised to include the different needs of female managers. Nonetheless, Cross et al. (2017) did not consider the perpetuation of the same scenario of focusing only on women's needs, as it will lead eventually to their disadvantage. For example, women usually who utilise the work-family policies to balance between their work and family responsibilities, whereas men do not need to utilise these policies since women shoulder the main responsibilities of the

household. Consequently, men end up in better image of their commitments towards their employers.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter started with an elaboration of different gender equality legislation that frames the organisational context for the implementation of policies and practices that target equal treatment for both male and female employees. Unfortunately, equality of outcome is lacking which is evident in women's scarcity at leadership positions. The equality models emphasise on equal treatment, whereas women's position at the workplace is not equal at first place due to the challenges they go through during their career journey, which is not taken into consideration by organisations to support women's career progression.

Furthermore, the literature on the interventions were limited in addressing these strategies as a support system to help women's career progression. However, although these interventions are beneficial, their implementation is doubtful: evidence from the literature shows that organisations agree on the support women need for their career progression, but they fall short in adopting a strategic approach, which results in the scarcity of women in higher managerial positions (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). This highlights another gap in the literature that this study is addressing.

4.5 Conclusion of the literature review

The literature review from Chapter 2 revealed different perspectives on careers that varied between traditional and contemporary approaches, which have changed over time. Another perspective that focused on a balanced career, blending individual and organisational needs, was more consistent. However, what is mostly missing from these perspectives is a consideration of gender. Hence, the concept of the career is gendered from the very beginning, as the literature indicates its dependence on a male model. Moreover, studies have identified gender differences in career pathways that result in general assumptions about what is important to men and women in terms of objective and

subjective success, further limiting consideration of the various barriers women face that negatively affect their career choices and progression.

It is noted from the literature that women's careers are not treated differently from men's careers, which could be seen as adherence to equality policies. However, it is important to acknowledge that some scholars have urged different treatment depending on gender. The concept of 'career' has been developed throughout the years without focusing on women (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005), a gap highlighted by this thesis that emphasises the need for organisations to consider different approaches that focus on women's different developmental requirements, caused by the various challenges and circumstances they face during their career journeys. Therefore, this study's first research aim is to address this gap by examining how career management practices impact women's career progression. Accordingly, a comprehensive framework or model could be developed to target women's career success.

In addition, the theories that underpin the explanation of how organisational career practices support employees' career progression are inherently gendered. These theories fail to take into account the unique challenges that women face throughout their career journey, which can impede their access to developmental opportunities offered by organisations. The gendered nature of these theories can lead to a narrow and incomplete understanding of the factors that influence women's career success, which is considered as another gap highlighted by this study.

Chapter 3 discussed the barriers women face throughout their career journeys that hinder their progression. Although organisations comply with gender equality legislation that results in equal treatment or implementation of policies, they do not consider that equality of treatment does not necessarily translate to equality of outcomes, which is evident in women's scarcity in senior managerial positions.

Although, conceptually, organisations agree that women require support for their career progression (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005), practical aspects are still lacking. The role of organisations is unclear in how they are tackling barriers to enforce the practice of gender

equality, which is considered another gap underlined by this thesis. Therefore, organisations' role in either perpetuating or challenging gender inequality is explored as the second key aim of this research.

The third chapter of the literature review discussed different interventional strategies established by organisations to support women's career progression. However, the literature related to the interventions is limited and does not address the strategic approach followed by organisations in supporting women's progression. Although these interventions are considered essential and are thought to support women's career progression, their insufficient outcomes in women's career progression casts doubt on the mechanisms by which they are designed and implemented, which emphasises the third gap. Hence, the reasons for these interventions' failure in supporting women's career progression are investigated as the third aim of this study.

A methodological limitation has also been identified from the literature. Current career and gender studies related to women's career progression are derived from obtaining data from employees at managerial levels, mostly women. However, this study acknowledges the concept of the labyrinth, which highlights the existence of different barriers throughout all women's career journeys; hence, it targets employees of both genders from different occupational levels. To achieve this, the study adopts a qualitative case study approach as a valuable method of exploring different experiences of employees of their career journeys, which is explained in detail in the following chapter.

Due to the gaps in the literature, the following study aims, and research questions are addressed (Figure 4.1).

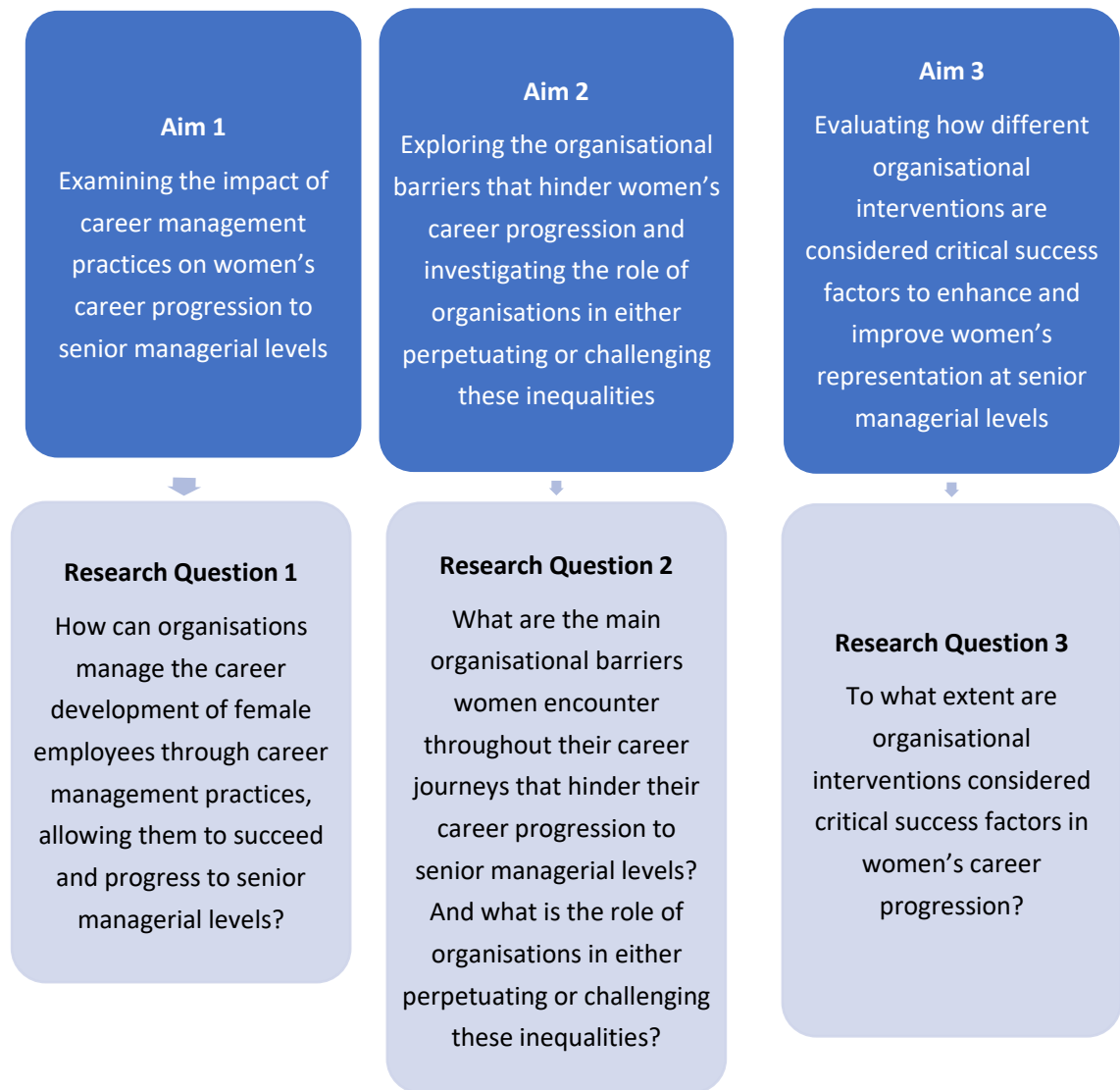


Figure 4.1 Study aims and research questions

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology and approach used in this study. As shown in Figure 5.1, it begins first by presenting the philosophical underpinnings of this research and justifies adopting a critical realist approach. Second, the chapter explains the consideration of qualitative approaches and clarifies the research design. Next it outlines the method used in collecting the data and the sampling strategy, in addition to the interview guide and the interview process. The chapter then explains the thematic analysis, which is adopted for the data analysis of the study, and sheds light on the validity of data and ethical considerations for the study. The chapter concludes with reflections on the methods applied and the challenges that the researcher encountered during the field work.

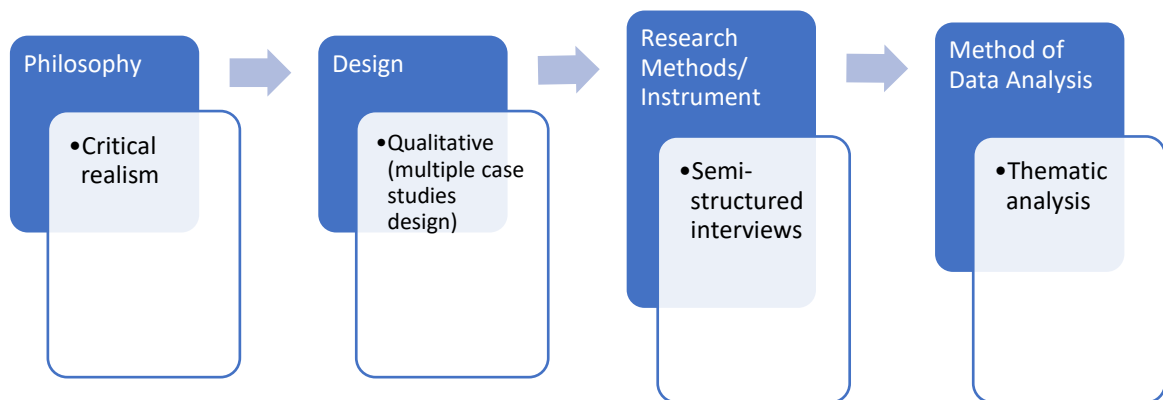


Figure 5.1 Methodological framework

5.2 Research philosophy

The adoption of an appropriate research philosophy is based on how the researcher views the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2009). Management research has been influenced by three main philosophical paradigms that are used to clarify and describe how research is perceived: positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism (Krauss, 2005).

The philosophy of positivism is based on the view that objects or phenomena have an independent existence that can be discovered through research (Scotland, 2012). Positivists ignore how individuals create and give meaning to social experiences. Hence, positivism is objective and focuses only on facts that can be measured using quantitative methods and analysed statistically (Anderson, 2004). However, as explained by Myers (2013), the main disadvantage is that many of the social and cultural aspects of organisational contexts are lost or considered only superficially. Hence, a study that includes and covers influences, experiences and behaviours would not benefit from adopting a positivist approach. Accordingly, the philosophy of positivism is excluded from this study.

From an interpretivist perspective, reality is socially constructed and influenced by individuals (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Interpretation of reality by each individual may be different, which results in different and multiple realities that could change over time (Holloway, 1997; Saunders et al., 2009). Hence, the researcher's views are subjective and can best be captured using qualitative methods (Saunders et al., 2009). The interpretivist perspective typically aims to interpret individuals' behaviour within the organisational context or societal values and norms. However, interpretivism has been criticised for neglecting other structures and divisions of power in society (Cohen et al., 2013) and the change that could be introduced as a result of conducting the study. Accordingly, it does not align with the main aims of this study.

The critical realism paradigm offers a third option from the two paradigms described above (Sayer, 2000). It assumes that reality has been structured and influenced by various

factors, such as society, politics, culture, the economy, ethnicity and gender. Hence, it has a subjective reality that is based on real phenomena, which is influenced by different factors that could change from time to time (Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012, p. 13) stated that 'the critical paradigm seeks to address issues of social justice and marginalism'. Crotty (1998) added that critical methodology reveals dominance and injustice, and it challenges conservative social structures; consequently, it results in actions for justice. It is mainly concerned with empowering human beings to overcome the challenges they have faced because of their gender, class, or race (Fay, 1987). Critical research also creates an agenda for change to improve the participants' lives (Cohen et al., 2013). Sayer (2000) argued that different research methods can be utilised within the context of critical realism, as long as it achieves the outcomes of the study undertaken. In this light, the research aims not only to understand the phenomenon but also to shift perspectives attached to it. Critical researchers have an essential agenda of improving marginalised groups' disadvantaged positions by exposing the structures of power that can lead to inequality (Cohen et al., 2013).

Based on the above discussion and the objectives of this study, outlined in Section 1.6, in looking at how women's career progression to senior managerial levels is constrained by organisational and other barriers that lead to their unequal position in life, this research is firmly located within the critical realist approach. This study highlights women's unfair position in a society that also compounds their unfair position in the labour market, which is caused by various influences, discussed in Chapter 3, involving societal, organisational, and individual factors that interact to affect and influence women's career progression. Moreover, this study highlights the various interventions adopted by organisations to support and improve women's career progression to senior management in the workplace to change and improve their current disadvantaged status. Critical realist approaches recognise the requirement to understand and change the unfair practices towards women in the workplace that affect their career progression and, accordingly, can transform the status quo (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Bhaskar, 2013). Accordingly, the research philosophy

of critical realism frames the research design and methods used in this research, which is considered in the next section.

5.3 Research design/qualitative approach

As elaborated in the previous section, this study adopts the critical realism paradigm as its philosophical stance. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches are all considered appropriate (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach

Tend to or typically ...	Qualitative approaches	Quantitative approaches	Mixed methods approaches
Use these philosophical assumptions	Constructivist/transformative knowledge claims	Postpositivist knowledge claims	Pragmatic knowledge claims
Employ these strategies of inquiry	Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, narrative	Surveys and experiments	Sequential, concurrent, transformative
Employ these methods	Open-ended questions, emerging approaches, text or image data	Closed questions, predetermined approaches, numeric data	Both open-ended and closed questions, both emerging and predetermined approaches, both quantitative and qualitative data and analysis
Use these practices of research as the researcher	Positions himself or herself Collects participant meanings	Tests or verifies theories or explanations Identifies variables to study	Collects both quantitative and qualitative data Develops a rationale for mixing

	<p>Focuses on a single concept or phenomenon</p> <p>Brings personal values into the study</p> <p>Studies the context or setting of participants</p> <p>Validates the accuracy of findings</p> <p>Makes interpretations of the data</p> <p>Creates an agenda for change or reform</p> <p>Collaborates with the participants</p>	<p>Relates variables in questions or hypotheses</p> <p>Uses standards of validity and reliability</p> <p>Observes and measures information numerically</p> <p>Uses unbiased approaches</p> <p>Employs statistical procedures</p>	<p>Integrates the data at different stages of inquiry</p> <p>Presents visual pictures of the procedures in the study</p> <p>Employs the practices of both qualitative and quantitative research</p>
--	--	--	---

Source: Creswell, 2014, p. 47

Table 5.1 provides distinctions that clarify each approach's attributes and hence justifies the selection of the appropriate one to answer the research questions stated previously in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4).

Accordingly, this thesis aims to explore three significant organisational aspects in influencing women's career progression: (1) career management systems that are provided for women's career success and progression; (2) organisational barriers that hinder women's career progression and the role of organisations in either challenging or perpetuation gender inequality practices; and (3) organisational interventions that are offered to support women's career progression and reasons for their insufficiency. Accordingly, the research approach implemented in this study, which is targeted at answering the research questions, is qualitative. The decision to implement this approach was influenced by both the philosophical viewpoint and the nature of the research questions, which require in-depth investigation.

Qualitative methods focus mainly on contextual understanding compared to quantitative methods, which focus mainly on identifying variables and using statistical relationships to answer research questions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). In contrast, the mixed methods approach utilises both the qualitative and quantitative designs to collect detailed views from participants in two phases. The first has a broader nature and the second is based on the results of the first (Creswell, 2014). This thesis, however, accepts that qualitative research data provide the appropriate approach to answer the research questions since the study has a strong focus on the context and is of an exploratory nature.

Furthermore, qualitative research is used to understand the attitudes, behaviours and opinions of people who are related to the subject studied, and it is known for its subjectivity (Hennink et al., 2015). Also, it is beneficial for researchers who are planning to study the subject area in detail because it provides the researcher with the flexibility to prioritise the importance of data to the research subject (Yin, 2011). Järviluoma et al. (2003) stated that gender studies are most suitably conducted via qualitative research. In comparison, quantitative methods are based on statistical patterns of association rather than uncovering a rich explanation of the subject studied (Saunders et al., 2009).

The research questions in this study are exploratory. They aim to investigate and understand employees' different experiences in the banking sector concerning their career progression, in addition to the differences and similarities among women's experiences based on the context of the bank they are working in and different factors influencing their career progression, along with the interventional strategies offered by the banks. It is argued that qualitative methods are more appropriate for research that highlights actual experiences and realities of work (Saunders et al., 2009). Similarly, Bryman and Bell (2015) proposed that qualitative methods are more useful to apply when the study aims to explore the experiences of individuals. Overall, qualitative research offers the appropriate methods to gain an in-depth and detailed understanding of how women's career progression is constrained or facilitated by organisational factors explained by employees at other occupational levels. However, some limitations should be considered when using

a qualitative approach in terms of validity and reliability. As opposed to quantitative researchers, who apply statistical methods for establishing validity and reliability of the findings of the research, qualitative researchers apply different strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of their findings. Data triangulation is a strategy that is used for this study – more specifically, the use of data source triangulation, which involves the collection of data from different types of people to gain multiple perspectives and validation of the data (Carter et al., 2014). The current study adopts a thorough research technique, encompassing both primary and secondary data collection methods, to establish the reliability and validity of the data obtained. Furthermore, the research study includes individuals from various professional levels, such as senior managers, HR development managers, and employees from various administrative levels, ensuring the validity of the findings. Furthermore, triangulation is used at multiple levels, drawing from various sources, to improve the resilience of the data. This method makes it easier to assess the consistency and coherence of the obtained data, which improves the overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

5.3.1 Case study research design/choice of cases

A case study can refer to an individual, a small group, an organisation, or a partnership, as well as a community, a relationship, or a decision process, according to Creswell and Poth (2016). The two case studies chosen for this study will look into the underrepresentation of women in the banking sector, taking into account a variety of factors that influence women's career advancement. Critical realism, the philosophical viewpoint used in this work, is particularly suited to case research since it focuses on in-depth investigation and aims to understand the mechanisms that underpin the observed events (Easton, 2010).

Critical realists are fascinated with the deep layers of reality and the structures and mechanisms that underpin various occurrences and crises. The case study approach, as highlighted by Wynn and Williams (2012), is an excellent way to analyse the interactions

between structures, events, employee actions, and context, allowing the researcher to find and explain the mechanisms that generate various challenges. Using a case study technique, the researcher can investigate the topic of women's underrepresentation in the banking sector from numerous angles, finding the various factors and impediments to women's career advancement.

Furthermore, by identifying potential issues within organisational structures and practises, the researcher can propose suitable policy reforms and practises aimed at improving the status of women in these companies. The case study method allows the researcher to delve thoroughly into the specifics of each company, studying its unique qualities and practises and identifying possibilities for change. As a result, the study's findings will provide useful insights on women's underrepresentation in the banking sector, which may be utilised to inspire policy and practise reforms targeted at enhancing gender diversity and inclusion in the business.

Nevertheless, this study adopts a case study design to explore, in depth, how different organisational processes and practices play a major role in affecting women's career progression. However, there are three types of case studies: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study (Cresswell and Poth, 2016). In the instrumental case study, the researcher selects a case to study and investigate the issue of interest in depth. In the collective or multiple case study, the researcher selects multiple cases to conduct the study to compare or show different perspectives on the issue studied. In the intrinsic case study, the case represents a unique or unusual situation that is the focus of the study. However, according to the aims and objectives of this study, it adopts a multiple case studies approach. This study involves investigating two organisations (international vs. local) to compare and show different perspectives on the subject studied. Also, it allows the researcher to understand the similarities and differences between the two cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, adopting a multiple case studies approach provides more compelling evidence, and the

research is considered more robust than when using a single case study (Yin, 2015). Furthermore, in multiple case studies design, the researcher can analyse data within and across each situation, where data can be used to indicate contrasting results for expected reasons or similar results (Yin, 2003). According to Gustafsson (2017), recognising similarities and contrasts between case studies can have a substantial impact on the literature. Furthermore, as Eisenhardt (1989) points out, several case studies can provide a more comprehensive knowledge of complicated events by revealing patterns and themes that may not be obvious in a single case study.

Furthermore, as Yin (2009) argues, many case studies might improve external validity by verifying the findings' generalizability to a larger population. Furthermore, as Stake (1995) points out, several case studies can improve data triangulation, boosting the reliability and validity of the findings. Furthermore, as Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) contend, several case studies can aid in theory development by finding underlying mechanisms and processes that may be applicable in different circumstances. Furthermore, as Yin (2009) points out, several case studies can permit cross-case comparison, providing insights into why particular occurrences occur in certain circumstances. Thus, conducting a multiple case study allows for a more in-depth exploration of the research questions, as it enables the identification of similarities and differences across multiple cases, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Furthermore, the selection of the cases for this research is based on the dominant sector within the banking industry in Oman, which is the commercial sector (Tarawneh, 2006). The two cases that are selected for comparison within the commercial sector are a local bank and an international bank. The banks could share similarities in their operations, but also differences could exist within their structures and practices that could be influenced by various factors, consequently affecting the career progression of women. The decision to conduct the cases from the commercial banking sector is based on the following reasons:

1. The banking industry in Oman, particularly the commercial sector, is considered to be one of the most important and developed industries and is characterised by solid and competent policies and procedures for the management and development of employees (Al-Lamki, 2005). This makes it an appropriate and challenging field for investigating the subtle forms of gender inequality that influence women's career progression to senior managerial levels.
2. The comparison between two different case studies from the banking sector (international versus local) allows the researcher to assess whether there are differences or similarities in the approaches applied to women's career planning and progression. These approaches could be influenced by various factors that should lead to different outcomes on the career progression issue. The international bank is influenced by Western and global practices/policies that are consistent with attention to gender equality. Hence, more commitment and positive practices towards women's career progression are expected. In contrast, the influences of the local bank might be more local and more context-specific. Accordingly, this study compares the practices and policies of the two banks and identifies the differences or similarities in the policies and practices that are affecting women's career progression.
3. This research allows testing of the extent to which the organisational practices of an international bank are implemented in the host country depending on its structural and contextual conditions. This reflects the nature of global organisational approaches and the extent to which these might drive similarities or differences when compared with a local bank.
4. No previous research has been conducted on the impact of organisational career planning and practices on the career progression of women that also highlights the barriers and challenges women encounter throughout their career journeys in such contexts in Oman.

Moreover, the cases are investigated by conducting semi-structured interviews with employees from different occupational levels, in addition to HR development managers. The next section elaborates more on this aspect.

5.4 Research method

Methods of research are the tools used by researchers to examine their topic and build their arguments and discussions (Lapan et al., 2011). This research aims to obtain data from three different levels: senior level, HR level, and employees from other occupational levels. Thus, choosing an appropriate method/s is a critical aspect to achieve the objectives of this study. The most common instruments that are used in qualitative methods are observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2007). Researchers using observations to collect their data benefit from recording the information as it occurs so that unusual aspects can be noticed. In contrast, the researcher could be seen as intrusive and would create an uncomfortable atmosphere. The audio-visual materials are a creative instrument that would capture visual attention and allow the participants to share their realities (Creswell, 2014). However, these two instruments are not applicable to achieve the objectives of this study, which requires obtaining information on employees' work experiences and organisational perspectives on policies adopted for employees' careers' success and progression.

The most widely applied data collection tool in qualitative research is conducting interviews (Cassell, 2005; Alsaawi, 2014). This is due to the nature of qualitative interviews being flexible, which allows the researcher to design different interview questions to target different participants, allowing the interviewer to probe for further information during the interviews (Berg, 2007). Interviews can take many forms, such as face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, focus group interviews, and e-mail interviews (Cresswell, 2014). Using telephone interviews could make the participants more relaxed in responding to questions, but they are used less often than face-to-face interviews. The absence of the visual image in telephone interviews results in the loss of

contextual and non-verbal data. It is difficult for the interviewer to establish a good rapport with the participant, thereby producing a lower quality of data (Novick, 2008). Similarly, e-mail interviews share the same difficulties as telephone interviews, yet could be time- and cost-effective (Meho, 2006). However, these two types of interviews are not suitable for collecting data for this study due to the importance of face-to-face interaction and the sensitivity of the data that are being sought; the interviewer attempts to gain rich information and probe for more information to develop an understanding from the participants regarding the subject (Berg, 2007; Rowley, 2012). Hence, telephone interviews and e-mail interviews will not accomplish the researcher's aim.

Focus group interviews can produce high-quality data, which is very useful to the interviewer. These data are generated from arguments and debates among the group members, leading to the development of in-depth and rich information (Alsaawi, 2014). In contrast, data generated from focus groups is challenging to transcribe, particularly when there is overlap among participants. Also, there is a possibility that some of the focus groups will have a dominant participant who could influence the discussion, which would negatively impact the richness of information gathered (Smithson, 2000). However, focus group interviews are not appropriate to use as a data collection method for this study because of confidentiality and fear of revealing sensitive data among a group of participants. Hence, it is possible that the data would not reflect reality due to the risk of information leakage that could affect the participant in the organisation.

The anonymous blog technique was examined as a feasible data collection method in this study. Blogs are online platforms that consist of a series of regularly updated, reverse chronologically sorted posts on a single web page (Hookway, 2008). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), the majority of blogs contain introspective, descriptive, interpretive, and exploratory content, which aligns with qualitative research approaches. Furthermore, blogs are distinguished by immediate publication and the option for participants to remark at their leisure. They are free to the public and give transcripts for researchers (Hookway, 2008). Furthermore, data gathering through anonymous blogs can expand the richness of

data and engagement, particularly in light of the limitations and obstacles given by the COVID-19 pandemic, where online solutions were one of the most feasible possibilities for data collecting.

However, using anonymous blogs to collect data has some difficulties. To begin with, it may not be favoured by senior management because it may be time-consuming and require some level of technical abilities to navigate and interact with the blogging environment, particularly for persons unfamiliar with social media (Wilson et al., 2015; Hookway, 2008). As a result, using anonymous blogs to acquire data from senior managers who may choose not to participate in the study may be impractical. Second, there is no control over the content or veracity of the data gathered. Anonymous bloggers may supply biased or erroneous information, affecting data quality (Hookway, 2008).

Third, it may be difficult for the researcher to verify the identity of the bloggers as well as their degree of skill or experience, which might undermine the data's reliability (Agarwal & Liu, 2009). Fourth, studying data obtained through anonymous blogs may be difficult because blogs are generally distinguished by unstructured and informal content, making it difficult to adequately identify and code the data (Hookway, 2008). Finally, data obtained through anonymous blogs may not be representative of the target demographic, as bloggers may not always reflect the perspectives or experiences of the general public (Agarwal & Liu, 2009).

While blogs provide some potential benefits for data collection, researchers must carefully assess the obstacles and limits of this medium to determine if it is the best option for their study aims. The researcher rejected the anonymous blogging technique from this study due to potential constraints and the targeted sample of senior managers, HR managers, and employees from various professional levels.

Hence, the most useful tool for collecting data for this study is conducting interviews, as primary data, and collecting documents related to the topic investigated, such as the organisations' policies, represented as secondary data. Documents represent important

data that are useful for the research as written evidence, which could be compared or replicated to provide reliability of data used in the research (Hox and Boeije, 2005). Nevertheless, documents are only accessible to the researcher if the organisation agrees to disclose such important items (Creswell, 2014).

Accordingly, the most effective method of data collection to answer the research questions is face-to-face interviews. Three types could be applied depending on the study's objectives: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Bryman, 2001). For this research, semi-structured interviews will be adopted to gain the required information to achieve the study's aims. Structured interviews were disregarded because they act as a verbal questionnaire where the interaction between the interviewer and the participant is limited by a fixed set of questions (Wilson, 2014). Gill et al. (2008) also state that structured interviews do not allow for follow-up questions to answers that might require more elaboration, to reveal an important point for the research. Thus, this type of interview limits the in-depth and rich information that is essential for the research.

On the other hand, unstructured interviews are the opposite of structured ones. They provide flexibility to the interviewer in asking questions and elaborating on any point. However, they are also disregarded in this study because they are very time-consuming and can be challenging to manage and participate in. The lack of prepared questions for the interview provides minimum guidance on what to talk about and what to ask next (Gill et al., 2008). Additionally, Rowley (2012) suggested that they generate many transcripts that are hard to compare and incorporate into a thematic analysis. Accordingly, the semi-structured interview is selected as the most appropriate method for data collection for this study.

5.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the most common type of interviews used; they are convenient for data gathering within qualitative research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Qu

and Dumay, 2011; Rowley, 2012). This is because of their flexibility, accessibility, intelligibility and, most importantly, their ability to reveal important and hidden facts about human and organisational behaviour (Qu and Dumay, 2011). This type of interview combines structured and unstructured techniques. It combines predefined questions like those used in structured interviews with the open-ended investigation or elaboration of unstructured interviews (Wilson, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are based on an interview guide representing the scheme of questions or subjects to be elaborated on by the interviewer. The questions consist of the main questions and many sub-questions related to the main ones (Jamshed, 2014). Bryman (2008) stated that, to achieve the best outcomes from responses, the researcher should know about and have a comprehensive understanding of the subject area so that they have the skills and confidence to probe for essential details and information from the participants.

The adoption of semi-structured interviews is considered appropriate for collecting data for this study because they allow a deep understanding of individuals' interpretations of their own work experiences, as well as considering the organisational perspectives on these issues.

However, two main challenges confront the researcher in conducting face-to-face interviews. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced restrictions on many aspects of people's lives, including face-to-face interaction. Second, there are logistical challenges to interviewing participants in Oman while studying in the UK, in addition to travel restrictions imposed because of COVID-19. Due to these challenges, interviewing via the internet is considered more appropriate, particularly now that internet communication is widely applied as the new norm of communication in the workplace. Online platforms can be considered a replacement for face-to-face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). One of the most important advantages that online communications offer is being able to conduct interviews while maintaining physical distancing, which, at the time of writing, was the primary measure taken globally to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Despite the

advantages of online communications, there are some limitations, such as response rates, which tend to be lower than with traditional methods due to lack of face-to-face communication. Moreover, technical difficulties are considered a problem for some people, as not everyone has access to the latest technologies or the resources for using them (Granello and Wheaton, 2004).

However, the advancement in communication technologies provides many opportunities for data collection. From these, the decision was taken to use Zoom, a video conferencing platform that is widely used almost everywhere for communication (Archibald et al., 2019). Zoom offers many features, such as online meetings, group messaging, and security in recording sessions. The feature of secure recording and storage is critical in research where keeping sensitive data protected is required (Archibald et al., 2019). On the other hand, similar to other online platforms, privacy issues concern hackers joining open meetings and calls. As a solution, the company suggests locking the meetings and ensuring that guests can only join by authentication provided by the host (Lobe et al., 2020). Hence, using Zoom for conducting interviews under the current circumstances of the pandemic is the best approach to take this research study forward.

5.4.2 Secondary data

The previous section (i.e. 5.4.1) discussed the primary data method adopted for this study, which is the semi-structured interviews, whereas this section highlights the second source of data that is complementary to the primary data in terms of adding more information, comparing and validating, which is the secondary data. Devine (2003) argued that secondary data analysis is widely applied by scholars conducting analysis of quantitative data but has also begun to be utilised as qualitative data. Devine (2003, pg., 285) suggested that secondary analysis “involves the use of existing data, collected for the purposes of a prior study, in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from the of the original work”.

Johnston (2017) also emphasised the viability of using the secondary data method in the process of conducting research and utilising the existing data for the purpose of presenting useful information related to the research. Moreover, it was implied by Hox and Boeijs (2005) that for some social research questions, it is possible to use secondary data for purposes other than research, such as official statistics, administrative records, or other accounts kept routinely by organisations. Devine (2003), however, highlighted several advantages of undertaking secondary analysis. For instance, the researcher saves time, and money as secondary data are available without any cost as the researcher does not have to undertake the same process of collecting data as in the primary method. Furthermore, secondary data are considered to be of high quality since they have been analysed previously where obvious errors and biases should have been noted and resolved.

On the other hand, secondary data have their own limitations as well. Hox and Boeijs (2005) opined that secondary data were originally collected for a different purpose and, hence, it may not be ideal for some of the research problems addressed, or in the case of qualitative data, they may not be easy to interpret without clear information on the context. Devine (2003) noted that the location and accessibility of data could be challenging for researchers, as some topics are not necessarily available. She added that data could be presented in unfamiliar format that the researcher will need to adapt. In addition to the fact that secondary data were originally collected for different purposes other than for any particular research, consequently, it is not necessary that they include all the required data the researcher is searching for. Finally, secondary analysis of qualitative data raises concerns on ethical issues of which confidentiality is the main concern. Although guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity are given by the researcher, the detailed access required on the subject implies that these guarantees can be breached unintentionally.

As suggested by Boslaugh (2007), in order to achieve a strong alignment between the research questions and the required data, this study will collect secondary data that focuses on three specific research questions related to the underrepresentation of women in senior

leadership positions in the context of career management systems. The second section identifies the challenges that women encounter in furthering their careers, while the third section focuses on the interventions provided by banks to assist women in advancing their careers.

The researcher will acquire secondary data from journals and bank websites to supplement the original data. Because the banks' policies are secret, information concerning their career management practises can only be obtained through these means. Furthermore, the researcher will use this secondary data to provide context and background information for the case studies. However, in order to protect the banks' secrecy, these resources will not be directly referred to.

Although the primary data collected in this study is essential to answer the research questions, the use of secondary data will provide a complementary perspective and validate the findings. Therefore, both primary and secondary data sources will be adopted to ensure that the study is based on a variety of rich and viable data resources.

5.4.3 Sampling strategy

This section elaborates on the sampling strategy, which is based on targeting the objectives of the study, listed in Section 5.4.1. Although some studies of women's career progression target mostly women at either managerial or senior managerial levels (e.g., Sealy, 2010; Abalkhail and Allan 2016), other studies target both men and women but, similarly, at managerial levels only (e.g., Jogulu and Wood 2011). This study is distinguished from others on women's careers in that it targets female and male employees from different occupational levels, as stated in Section 1.5, from administrative levels to senior managerial levels. This approach acknowledges the labyrinth concept, which highlights the existence of different factors that influence women's career journeys from the start of their career. A career is considered a lifetime journey that involves all the twists and turns the individual takes during their tenure, which are influenced by several factors. These

factors are considered very important to investigate, so that the reasons behind the scarcity of women in senior managerial positions are identified and examined.

Sampling mechanisms allow the researcher to reduce the amount of data that are required to be collected by only considering data from a subgroup instead of all possible cases or participants (Saunders et al., 2012). The sampling frame of this study includes male and female employees from different occupational levels to investigate and understand the phenomena from different perspectives and levels, and also to ensure consistency and reliability of data. The following represents the targeted sample due to their direct involvement in the study context:

1. HR training and development managers
2. Senior managers
3. Employees from other occupational levels:
 - a. Administrative staff who have completed a minimum of five years in service; hence, the employee has ample work experience, and their performance could be acknowledged for promotion or other career planning and management practices
 - b. Supervisory level
 - c. Line and middle managerial levels

Due to the restrictive policies followed by the banking sector related to their employees, the researcher was unable to obtain detailed information about the targeted sample. This is consistent with the approach the banks follow in involving their employees in research studies, which is based on voluntary participation (Gill, 2020). As a results, the researcher had no control over the sample size of the study.

A convenience (voluntary) sample strategy was utilised to recruit participants, in which participants volunteered to engage in the research study after receiving communication

from the HR department via e-mail. Each bank provided the researcher with the respondents' names, contact information, positions, and schedules.

Purposive sampling was used in addition to convenience sample to acquire a deeper grasp of the research problem by selecting participants from three different levels. Given the limitations of directly engaging potential participants, the researcher suggested that the HR department target employees from all three levels who were educated about the subject in order to collect rich data. Purposive sampling, however, places the research questions at the centre of the sampling considerations. It is a non-probability type of sampling, often associated with qualitative research, particularly in case study research design (Bryman, 2012; Taherdoost, 2016). This means that the researcher can select participants and sites for the study because they can purposefully provide an understanding to the research problem (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Also, this technique allows the researcher to select participants based on the objectives of the research (Holloway and Brown, 2012), with no clear rules on the size of the sample (Silverman, 2005). However, the researcher aims to interview 50 employees from the two banks selected as cases for this study. However, the sample sizes for qualitative research are set on reaching saturation when collecting data (Patton, 2002). Data saturation refers to the state where additional data do not bring new information or value that adds to the study (Howitt, 2010).

In this study, the researcher was able to collect data from a total of twenty-six participants from the two banks due to the voluntary approach of the banks in engaging their employees to participate in research studies. While a larger sample size is often preferred, there are advantages to using purposive sampling and focusing on key employees with relevant expertise and experiences. According to Patton (2014), the focus of qualitative research should be on the quality of data rather than the quantity of data. The researcher can gather rich and thorough insights from a smaller number of less-informed participants by conducting in-depth interviews with key personnel. Furthermore, as Morse (2015) suggests, a smaller sample size can allow for a more nuanced grasp of the topic and can

lead to more in-depth analysis. As a result, the researcher's decision to focus on a smaller but more knowledgeable set of participants can be viewed as a strength rather than a drawback of the study. While the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings, the insights gained from key personnel might contribute to the study and provide practise recommendations.

Furthermore, although this study draws on women's experience in the workplace to answer the research questions, it also targets male employees. This is because, first, interviewing men in senior positions gives insights into the processes and practices that produce inequality and discrimination. Second, it helps investigate their career pathways, highlighting the facilitators and barriers they faced and strategies they adopted to overcome the challenges in their journey to senior positions, and if they are different from those that women face. Third, men in senior managerial positions are also the decision-makers in the organisation. Hence, interviewing them sheds light on the interventional and support schemes they are adopting to support women in their career progression. Finally, interviewing men from other occupational levels shows whether they are given more opportunities or support to advance in their careers compared to women at the same occupational levels, and how their career pathways are planned differently to those of women.

5.4.4 Piloting

There has long been a dispute in the world of research over the necessity and usefulness of doing pilot studies. While some argue that pilot studies are necessary for testing research instruments and preparing for any challenges that may arise during data collection (Malmqvist et al., 2019), others argue that they are time consuming and may not necessarily improve the quality of the research (Sampson, 2004). Nonetheless, despite the disagreement, many academics recognise the value of pilot studies.

According to Creswell (2014), pilot testing can assist establish the content validity of instrument scores and help enhance the questions, structure, and scales utilised in the research. Furthermore, Majid et al., (2017) underline the value of interview piloting because it helps researchers to test questions and develop interviewing experience.

Despite the benefits of piloting, the researcher was unable to perform a pilot study in this study due of the COVID-19 epidemic and restrictions on employee engagement in research trials. Furthermore, the researcher believed that performing a pilot study would result in even fewer employees participating in the actual interview process, reducing the sample size. As a result, the researcher decided against conducting a pilot study and instead conducted the interviews. Although piloting is typically thought to be advantageous, the conditions of this study did not allow for its use.

Overall, while pilot studies can provide significant insights and increase research quality, their utility may vary depending on the individual conditions of each study, and researchers should carefully examine whether doing a pilot study is necessary for their research effort.

5.4.5 Interview guide

Patton (2002) has implied that an interview guide is beneficial to ensure that the lines of enquiry are constant and followed with each participant. It provides a clear and full picture on the subjects the researcher wants to cover in the interview questions. Hence, it provides a framework for the interview process to ensure that various elements of the subjects are discussed with all participants in a standardised manner (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Saunders et al. (2016) stated that the interview guide is developed to investigate the research themes through a systematic framework of interview questions. Accordingly, the researcher developed a matrix that relates each of the interview questions at different occupational levels to the research questions. Thus, the data required from each interview question, and the expected themes that could occur were recorded (Appendix A).

Therefore, the interview guide for this study was developed on the basis of including key literature areas (research themes) and the specific research questions related to each area. The data required from each area were specified in the guide to formulate the right set of questions to answer the main research questions. The interview questions were developed into three sets to target the three occupational levels to increase the reliability and validity of the data (Appendices B.1, B.2 and B.3). Moreover, the final set of interview questions for employees from other occupational levels was translated into Arabic taking into account the various levels of English of participants, to avoid any misunderstanding of the questions and provide a flexible and comfortable setting for participants to share their views in the language they choose.

5.4.6 Interview process

The interview process for the study started during December 2020 and ran to April 2021. It was planned that interviews would be conducted face-to-face to build a rapport and establish a comfortable interaction with participants, because this is important for the quality and quantity of data collected (McGrath et al., 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought social distancing, restrictions, and a shift to working online (DeFilippis et al., 2020). This shift resulted in the researcher conducting the interviews through Zoom, which is commonly used by organisations worldwide. The researcher was located in the UK and the participants in Oman; hence, due to the time difference and nature of bankers' busy work schedules, the researcher was flexible in conducting the interviews at any time to suit the participants, starting at 9 am (UK time) onwards from Sunday to Thursday, taking into consideration the weekends in Oman (i.e. Friday and Saturday).

The interview process commenced with the researcher approaching a senior manager from each organisation informally through networking to assist in accessing the banks. After that, the researcher sent an e-mail to the department concerned (i.e. HR), the details of which were provided by the senior manager, and a meeting was arranged between HR, the senior manager, a representative from the legal department, and the researcher. Once

approval was obtained from the bank, a focal person was assigned from the bank to coordinate between the researcher and participants for interviews. Nevertheless, as per the policy of the banks, participation was voluntary. Hence, 11 employees volunteered from the international bank and 16 from the local bank, resulting in 27 male and female participants from senior management, HR, and other occupational levels. However, HR agreed with the researcher to ensure that employees who are approached for participation should be competent, directly relevant to the topic, aware, and knowledgeable about career management system. So, the researcher can obtain related and valuable information on the research topic. Furthermore, the duration of each interview was approximately 45 minutes. Robson (2002) stated that valuable interviews should last more than half an hour, but be less than one hour, to achieve an optimum outcome in terms of quality.

Each interview began with a welcome and acknowledgement message in appreciation for participating in the research. The study was then introduced with a brief explanation on the aims and outcomes anticipated on completion. After that, the researcher made the Participant aware of the audio recording of the interview for the purpose of transcribing once the interview was completed. Recording interviews allows the researcher to take in everything that is said without the distraction of taking notes, which could prevent them from focusing and probing for detailed answers (King et al., 2018). Consequently, interviews can be transcribed later for the process of data analysis that will commence after data collection. The researcher used two devices to audio-record each of the interviews (i.e. mobile phone and laptop), in addition to the in-built audio recording and transcription on Zoom. Having more than one device for recording is advisable in case the recording on one device is damaged or lost, so that the researcher will have another recording in place (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). The interview process also involved follow-up interviews with some participants to clarify some of the information collected earlier, and to fill some gaps noted by the researcher when conducting interviews with other participants.

5.5 Data analysis

A research project consists of many stages, and data analysis is often considered the most time-consuming stage of the project (Denscombe, 2017). Qualitative data analysis is a complicated process that includes many steps, such as data collection, organisation, categorisation, synthesis, pattern-finding, and informing others (Cohen et al., 2013). The most commonly used approach for qualitative data analysis is thematic analysis (Saunders et al., 2016), which is used in this study. Thematic analysis is defined by Clarke and Braun (2014, p. 297) as ‘a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data’. The thematic analytic process consists of four steps, as stated by Jones et al. (2013): (1) data management – the researcher finds a system for organising, ordering and storing the collected data; (2) transcription – all interviews are transcribed; (3) familiarisation – reading and viewing the transcripts repeatedly; and (4) reduction – coding and categorising the data to build themes. However, many patterns can be identified within data collected; hence, by applying thematic analysis, the researcher can identify the data that are relevant to answer a particular research question (Braun and Clarke, 2012).

Jones et al.’s (2013) four-step thematic analysis informed the data analysis of this study. At the first step of the data analysis, the researcher referred to the matrix that was prepared prior to data collection. The matrix helped in identifying the required data from each question and the theme that was expected to occur (Appendix A). Second, the researcher transcribed all audio-recorded interviews including some in Arabic. Although Zoom transcribes audio recordings in English, the researcher had to go through them again as the accuracy of transcription is poor. Then, the researcher started the coding process by reading the transcripts line by line (open coding), investigating and breaking down the data into pieces, and then naming these pieces (Jones et al., 2013). The researcher arranged the transcribed data in a table adopted for data analysis from Gibson and O’Conor (2003) and repeatedly read the answers to each question from different participants and started to search for patterns. This technique helped in identifying important information about the

data in relation to the research question and represented patterns of responses within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It also helped in the categorisation of the main concepts in the findings. After that, the researcher sorted the different codes and categorised them into themes.

The process was complicated and took a long time, as the researcher used two tables for analysis that were constructed in two different stages. The process started initially with the first table that arranged the interview questions as per the research question. The interview extracts were arranged for each Participant. The researcher went through each extract many times to identify the patterns that could be translated into codes. The researcher used two codes; the first codes were for information directly extracted from the data transcript whereas the second codes represented the main concepts that reflect the first codes, from which themes and sub-theme were identified. Patterns of data related to specific themes were coded with different colours, to make it easier for the researcher to identify them: an example is shown in Appendix C. Using different colours for different codes made the process easier to relate data from all the extracts and organise them in the second table as per their thematic grouping. Accordingly, the themes of the study were identified (see Appendix D).

Furthermore, the data analysis for this study was conducted manually despite the availability of computer software for this purpose, such as NVivo. The manual analysis of the data familiarised the researcher with the data, which consequently makes identification of themes easier (Creswell, 2007).

Figure 5.2 represents the seven themes identified after a thorough analysis of the data collected from the career trajectories of Participants as identified by the researcher, and their relation to the research questions. These themes are closely associated with the research questions stated in Chapter 1. Hence, the findings are presented under the themes drawn from the research questions and the literature review, which guided the interview questions.

Research Questions:

RQ1: How can organisations manage the career development of female employees through career management practices, allowing them to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?

The first research question explores the mechanisms or approaches the organisation applies in managing career development for women to help them progress to senior managerial levels. Through data analysis, three themes emerged to answer this research question, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

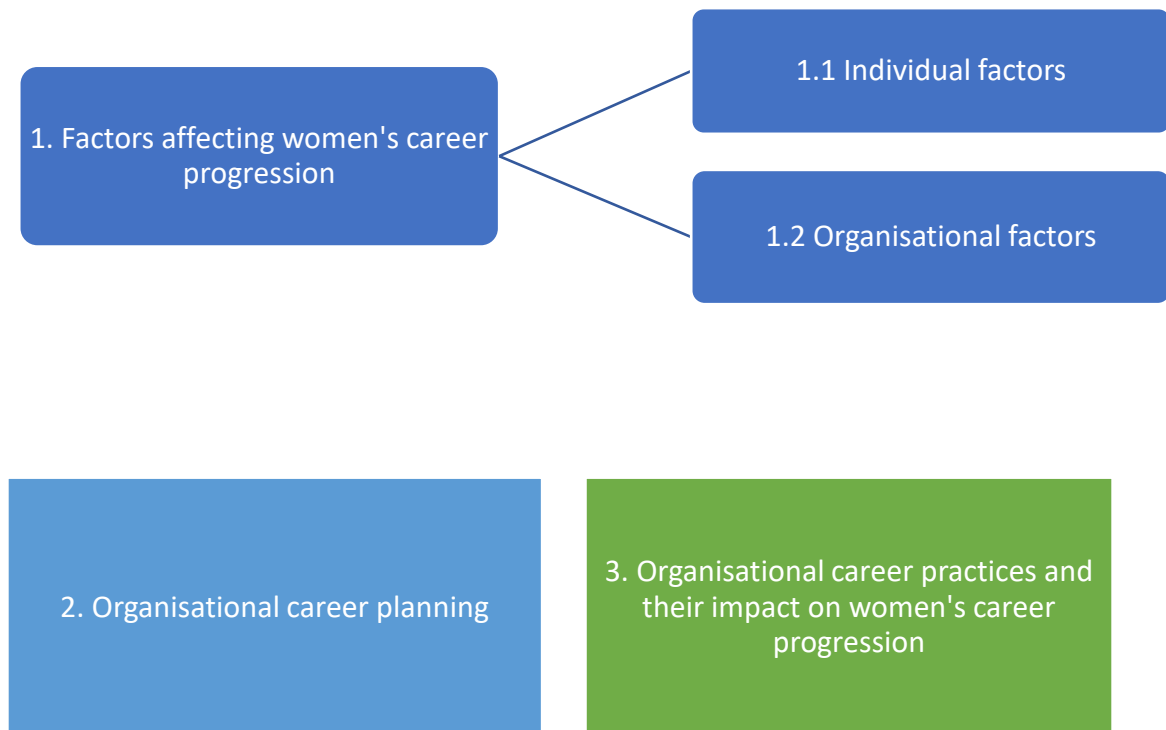
RQ2: What are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career journeys that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities?

The second research question aims to investigate the organisational barriers women face that affect their career progression and explore the organisation's position on gender inequality regarding women's career progression. The data analysis revealed three themes that answer this research question. Figure 5.2 shows a representation of these themes.

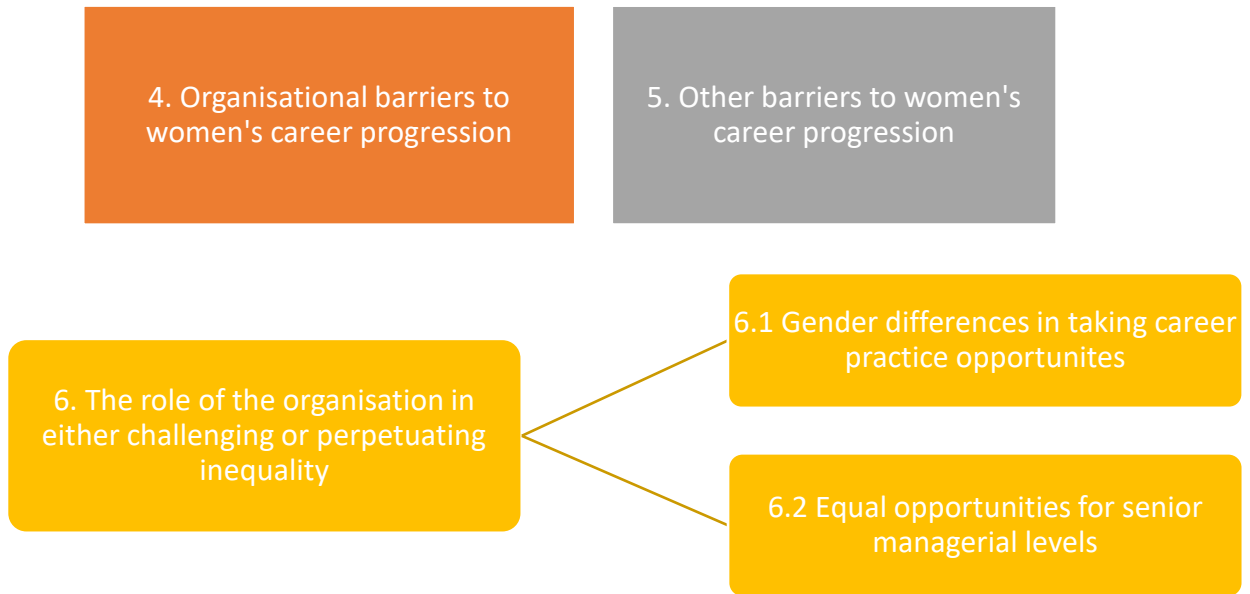
RQ3: To what extent are organisational interventions considered critical success factors in women's career progression?

This research question targets exploring the interventional strategies that the organisation uses as a support system to help increase the representation of female employees at senior managerial levels and their effectiveness in achieving the required outcomes. One theme emerged from the data analysis that answered this research question, as illustrated in Figure 5.2.

RQ1



RQ2



RQ3



Figure 5.2 Themes and sub-themes

The findings reported in chapters 6 and 7 of this study are based on the themes identified during the data analysis process, as illustrated in Figure 5.2. The opinions and explanations offered are substantiated by excerpts from the responses of the participants. While there

are no hard and fast rules about how many quotations a researcher should use, Polit and Beck (2016) argue that the researcher must establish the proper quantity of quotations and how they suit the research. The researcher used quotations as examples in this study to highlight specific elements of the data and clarify the main difficulties identified in the study. The utilisation of quotations from participants at all targeted levels was also used to highlight and corroborate the validity of various points of view on an issue. This technique is compatible with Eldh et al.'s (2020) recommendations for the use of quotations in qualitative research. However, as Silverman (2016) suggests, it is critical to utilise quotations sparingly and not overload the reader with information.

5.6 Validity and reliability of the research

In qualitative research, 'validation' is an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings, as described and interpreted by the researcher, the participants, and the readers/reviewers (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Angen (2000) used the term 'validation' to emphasise a process, rather than verification. Jones et al. (2013, p.166) defined validity as 'the equivalent of the common-sense term of truthfulness and soundness, no matter what type of inquiry researchers adopt'. Hence, in qualitative research validity addresses how the researchers efficiently and precisely reflect the participants' thoughts in the findings by utilizing certain procedures (Creswell, 2014). Also, in qualitative research, validity has two components, internal and external validity.

Internal validity, as stated by Court et al. (2018, p.43), 'is the key to trustworthy qualitative research'. Internal validity in qualitative research refers to credibility. In this study, the researcher applied several practices to achieve credibility so that this study can be considered as credible as possible.

First, as mentioned previously the researcher used triangulation to collect the data. Corroborating evidence through triangulation is one of the common strategies used for validation, as highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2016). Triangulation is a powerful

strategy for increasing the credibility and validity of the research by the use of more than one data collection method, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly analyse individuals' perspectives on the impact of organisations on women's professional advancement. To accomplish this goal, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and secondary data gathering procedures to collect primary data. This methodology allowed for a complete grasp of the participants' viewpoints while also allowing for a multi-faceted investigation of the phenomena, taking into account the interviewees' different positions. As Ritchie et al. (2004) pointed out, qualitative research is susceptible to researcher bias, which can impact participant replies in favour of the researcher's beliefs and perspectives, potentially leading to the rejection of opposing viewpoints. The application of triangulation methods, on the other hand, helps to eliminate such bias (Maxwell, 2013).

Second, the researcher requested data from people at various levels of seniority, such as senior managers, human resource managers, and employees from other occupational levels who are relevant and applicable to the research topics. This method is backed by Flick (2018), who adds that gathering data from a variety of sources and persons is critical in qualitative research to ensure a thorough and nuanced knowledge of the topic under inquiry. Furthermore, the study questions were designed to cross-check data from various occupational levels, thereby confirming the data by cross-verification from several sources. As observed by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009), who emphasise the necessity of gathering data from persons at diverse levels of seniority in organisational research, this strategy ensures that the conclusions provided from the field are robust and credible. Furthermore, the inclusion of a diverse group of participants is consistent with Smith's (2019) call to consider the diverse backgrounds and experiences of research participants, particularly in research that seeks to explore issues of power and inequality, as

perspectives may differ based on an individual's position in the social hierarchy, as Silverman (2016) points out.

Third, as discussed in section 5.4.2, the current study used secondary data as an extra source of information, which can give a viable and dependable option for researchers to obtain data that has previously been compiled for another primary reason (Johnston, 2014). Secondary data is commonly used in qualitative research since it can enhance and expand primary data sources (Punch, 2014). According to Johnston (2014), the process of gathering secondary data includes developing research questions, identifying data sources, and analysing data. In this study, the researcher first described the research needs, focusing on the research objectives and questions, and then searched for suitable secondary data sources, such as publications and various websites. The data was then identified and gathered based on its relevance to the study. Finally, according to Bryman (2016), the data was appraised for its usefulness in answering the study questions. Secondary data sources were used in this study to gain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under examination and to validate the primary data sources.

To summarise, collecting both primary and secondary data is critical to this research study since it allows for the triangulation of information from multiple sources, ensuring the reliability and validity of the data acquired. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), using numerous data sources can improve the credibility and robustness of qualitative research findings. Data triangulation from many sources can also help to eliminate bias and boost the study's objectivity (Bryman, 2016). The mix of primary and secondary data sources can provide a more complete and nuanced view of the research issue. Secondary data sources can include historical and contextual information, which can help to contextualise primary data and provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under inquiry (Punch, 2014). Furthermore, primary data sources can provide unique and in-depth viewpoints from research participants, which can supplement and improve the conclusions of secondary data (Johnston, 2014).

5.7 Ethical considerations

The question of identifiability, confidentiality and privacy of individuals or cases involved in the research always raises concern about how data are handled by the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). Hence, ethical issues in qualitative research appear in many stages of the research process (Creswell, 2013). The main principles underlying research ethics are honesty and respect for the rights of individuals (Veal, 2006). This study adhered to the University of Strathclyde's ethical guidelines.

First, approval for this study was obtained from the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee, which reviews applications to make sure that the rights, dignity, safety, and wellbeing of all participants are protected. The application included: (1) three different participant information sheets, each addressed to the occupational level concerned, providing information on the researcher, purpose of the investigation, what is expected from the participant, and data privacy; (2) a privacy notice for participants in research projects; and (3) a consent form to be signed by each participant. In addition to the above, the researcher obtained a support letter from both the employer and the supervisors to help in accessing the organisations and collecting data.

Moreover, prior to data collection, the researcher was required by the organisations to sign consent forms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the banks and the participants. Consent forms are also signed by participants prior to engaging in the research and confirm the protection rights of participants during the data collection process (Creswell, 2014). According to research ethics, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants must be protected so that individuals cannot be identified once the thesis is complete (Fisher and Vacanti-Shova, 2012). Hence, prior to commencing data collection, the researcher sent the banks the participant information sheets, privacy notice, and consent forms so that the organisations and participants were aware of their rights and the protection of their data. Also, the researcher requested that the participants sign the consent forms before the interviews were conducted. However, some of the participants

did not sign the consent forms as they were worried about being identified; they were not forced by the researcher to sign, as implied by Creswell (2014).

In addition, prior to each interview, the researcher explained the aims of the research along with some important information, such as the rights of participants, the confidentiality of the data shared, the anonymity of their identities, and the recording of the interviews. The researcher coded the participants (Creswell, 2014) by assigning numbers to each Participant in addition to their gender (M or F), and the bank type (i.e. 'I' for the international bank and 'L' for the local bank) to protect the identities of both the banks and the participants. Thus, for example, later in the findings chapters the Participants are identified as, for example, Sr. Manager 1-M.L indicating a male Participant from the local bank, and Sr. Manager 3-F.I indicating a female Participant from the international bank. In addition, the international bank is referenced as 'IntBank', and the local bank as 'LocBank'.

5.8 Reflections and limitations

Adopting a qualitative approach urges the researcher to take into consideration the importance of understanding potential biases, values, and perceptions that influence the research process (Chenail, 2011; Noble and Smith, 2015). Research related to gender studies raises more concerns about encountering bias particularly if the researcher is female, as it is common for researchers to presume that women are more ethical than men because they are usually the disadvantaged party (Bossuyt and Van Kenhove, 2018). However, the design of the interview questions limits the bias that could occur unconsciously on the part of the researcher, as the interview sample includes both genders from various occupational levels. This provides a cross-checking mechanism to ensure that biased interpretation by the researcher is limited and also to increase the validity and reliability of the data.

Another challenge the researcher faced was the use of online platforms to conduct the interviews, particularly Zoom. Prior to the interviews, the researcher attended a short training course on Zoom to familiarise herself on how to properly utilise the platform for the benefit of conducting the interviews smoothly. However, a few of the Participants requested that the interview be conducted on other applications, such as Webex and Teams. This challenged the researcher to learn about the use of these applications in a short period of time.

Also, some disadvantages were noted while using the online platforms, which were not the first choice of the researcher to begin with, but due to the pandemic there was no other option to proceed with. First, the researcher assumed that Zoom would provide ready-to-use transcripts after each interview; unfortunately, Zoom does not provide an accurate transcript when users are speaking English as a second language, and many errors were noted that led the researcher to depend mainly on writing out the transcripts from the audio records herself. The researcher benefited from only a few of the transcripts, from interviews with participants who are proficient in English. Second, the Participants preferred to turn off their video and hence the interviews were mostly like phone interviews, which resulted in a lack of rapport with Participants and the loss of social cues, such as body language, which can add value by providing additional information on questions (Opdenakker, 2006). Third, some Participants had to do their interview at the workplace where no private space had been provided; distractions and Participants feeling restricted in sharing some confidential information could affect the outcome.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the research methods in many aspects. The measures (i.e. lock-down, different restrictions) that have been taken by countries to control the spread of the coronavirus have had a disruptive impact on the wellbeing and work of many individuals (Ones, 2020). The researcher is a mother working from home, who had to shoulder many responsibilities of the household, looking after the children, home schooling, and conducting interviews while at home. This situated her in a very stressful position, lowering her productivity and reducing her focus due to handling many

responsibilities and continuous distraction (Paula, 2020). Also, the lock-down prevented the researcher from accessing resources such as the university and its facilities, for example for printing the data collected for analysis, since the researcher is more of a visual learner. Analysing the data by scrolling up and down on a laptop instead of having paper versions was very challenging; whereas, having all data on papers is more convenient and easier to highlight and take notes of important information.

The participants were also impacted as the nature of their jobs changed to mainly working from home, but for the bankers it was not a full shift, as the nature of some positions requires employees to be physically present. However, those working from home were distracted by family members/children and at times by disconnection of the internet, which affected the continuity of the interviews and, hence, the quality and quantity of the data.

Another challenge was the expectation that the researcher would conduct 50 interviews from both banks, but the actual number was 26 employees in total, and 27 interview transcripts. The limitation on participation was out of the researcher's control, as the banks restricted her ability to reach employees. The banks' approach was based on voluntary participation by employees, which resulted in low numbers of participants (see also section 5.4.3). However, prior to data collection, and based on the purposive sampling the researcher is following, the HR agreed to provide the researcher with access to competent employees from the targeted levels, who are aware of career development policies and procedures and also knowledgeable of career management systems. Consequently, the outcomes of the data collected is valuable and answers the questions proficiently, hence mitigating the risk of low participation. By this approach, the researcher adopted the purposive sampling, that was discussed above in Section 5.4.3. That is, she could select participants best suited for the study because they can provide an understanding of the research problem (Creswell and Miller, 2000). Furthermore, the researcher planned to use the banks' policies and regulations on career management and progression as secondary data. However, due to the banks' policies in prohibiting the sharing of such confidential

documents with the public, the researcher was not able to obtain these policies. Accordingly, the researcher decided to look for published journals, if available, related to practices applied by the banks studied, to be used as secondary data.

Reflecting on the difficulties experienced along the researcher's trip, it is possible to conclude that these difficulties provided excellent learning opportunities and aided in the development of a variety of skills required for executing a successful PhD research project. The researcher's ability to approach these problems with a positive attitude and a willingness to learn contributed considerably to the project's success. Analytical and problem-solving abilities were among the major talents obtained by the researcher. By combining multiple components of the research, the researcher was able to select the most appropriate strategy to addressing research questions. The researcher was able to critically examine the data collected and choose the appropriate way to analyse it by using scientific reasoning. Furthermore, the researcher noted that decision-making is an important ability to have during the data collection stage. Every action made had an immediate good or negative impact on the research project. As a result, when devising a method to evaluate data and synthesise conclusions, the researcher needed to make well-informed decisions.

Furthermore, the researcher recognised that performing study could provide unforeseen difficulties. Despite the unexpected conditions, the researcher discovered that it was critical to remain adaptable and agile in order to complete the research project. The researcher was able to overcome these hurdles and continue the study trip by exploring various pathways. Effective communication was another essential ability that the researcher mastered. The researcher acknowledged the significance of properly presenting study findings to various audiences. The researcher improved her capacity to express complicated thoughts and concepts in simple terms, making study findings more accessible to a wider audience.

Finally, the researcher's path to completing the PhD research study was not without difficulties. These hurdles, however, created wonderful possibilities for growth and development. The researcher gained a variety of talents, including analytical, problem-solving, decision-making, and effective communication abilities, which contributed considerably to the project's success.

5.9 Chapter conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodologies applied in the research. It highlighted that the decision to adopt qualitative research was influenced by the philosophical perspectives of the qualitative approach and the nature of the research questions, which investigate women's career management and barriers to their career success and progression. A multiple case study design was applied, using semi-structured interviews with male and female employees from HR, senior management and other occupational levels. The chapter also outlined the thematic data analysis, validity, and ethical issues of the research. Finally, it concluded with reflections and challenges faced by the researcher during this critical stage of the study. The next chapter outlines the background of the two cases including each bank's profile and the HR career practices applied.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BANK

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the secondary data (as discussed in section 5.4.3) and empirical data collected from semi-structured interviews with 11 employees from three different occupational levels at the international bank in Oman: (1) senior managers, (2) employees from other occupational levels, and (3) HR development managers (Table 6.1). This chapter will first highlights the profile of the bank. Then, it will discuss the themes identified, considering the findings from each level.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, thematic analysis is employed, and quotations from participants are given to illustrate and support relevant points. To guarantee anonymity and confidentiality, each participant was given a code, as in table 6.1. For example, Sr. Manager 1-M.I indicates a senior manager who is Male from the International bank. Additionally shown, IntBank is the code used for the international bank. However, the table does not present any demographic data on HR managers as the objectives of the study do not require the career journey of HR managers. Hence, this information was not sought.

It is worth mentioning again that, although the thesis is focused on women's career progression, men were included due to the emphasis on gender inequality issues in this study. Hence, it was essential to interview men to investigate the variations of responses between the genders. As a result, many issues are revealed, indicating the different impacts of organisational practices on men and women, and what contributes to the success and progression of males. In addition to the fact that most senior managers are men, which means that they are the decision-makers, data obtained from interviewing them provide a robust understanding of women's underrepresentation at senior managerial levels.

6.2 Profile of the bank

The secondary data shows that the IntBank is considered to be one of the largest banking and financial services providers worldwide. The network of the bank covers more than 50 countries in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Latin America, and North America. This international bank was established in Oman decades before the 1970s, and the head office is located in Muscat. It has more than 500 employees, and more than 40 branches across the country. However, the ratio of male to female employees was not published.

6.3 Demographic data

The demographic data of the participants, both men and women, are represented in Table 6.1. Overall, 11 employees participated in this study from senior management, other occupational levels, and the HR department. The four participants from the senior managerial level had equal numbers of men and women. From the other occupational levels, two men and three women participated in the study. Two managers participated from the HR department. The gender from this level is not considered for the study, yet both were women. However, they shared their experience of being women at a senior managerial level, which was beneficial for the study.

Occupational levels	Participants' coding	Sex	Age group	Marital status (age of children)	Educational level
Senior level	Sr. Manager 1-M.I	Male	45 and above	Married -4 children (16-21)	Master's in Business Administration (MBA), Professional certificates
	Sr. Manager 2-M.I	Male	45 and above	Married – 4 children (9-22)	MBA
	Sr. Manager 3-F.I	Female	31–44	Single	MBA
	Sr. Manager 4-F.I	Female	31–44	Married – 3 children (12-20)	MBA
Other occupational levels	Employee 1-M.I	Male	31–44	Married (no children)	HND
	Employee 2-M.I	Male	31–44	Married – 2 children (2-4)	MBA
	Employee 3-F.I	Female	30 and below	Married -1 child (4)	Bachelor's in e-Security
	Employee 4-F.I	Female	31–44	Married – 2 children (8-12)	MBA
	Employee 5-F.I	Female	31-44	Married – 2 children (4 -7)	Diploma
HR development managers	HR 1-F.I	Female	NA	NA	
	HR 2-F.I	Female	NA	NA	

Table 6.1: Participants' demographics and codes (International bank)

At senior managerial level, both male participants are in the age group 45 and above, whereas the female participants are in the 31–44 years age group. All participants regardless of their gender are married with children, except for one female participant (Sr. Manager 3-F.I), who is single. The youngest child among these married participants is less than 10 years and older than five years. Moreover, all the participants hold a Master's in Business Administration (MBA), in addition to extensive banking experience.

Participants from other occupational levels are aged 31–44 except for one female participant (Employee 3-F.I) who is in the age group 30 years and below. All participants are married with one or two children of different ages (2, 4, 8, 12 years), except one male participant (Employee 1-M.I) who does not have any children. Moreover, participants hold MBA, Bachelor's degree, and HND. All the participants have banking experience from different fields and departments, and they are at first-to-middle managerial levels, except for Employee 5-F.I, who is at a lower level than the others.

6.4 Factors affecting women's career progression

The participants shared their work experiences, education, and career journeys and offered very insightful explanations. The following examination of both the professional and personal spheres of female employees at senior and other occupational levels, in addition to the HR perspective, offers an understanding of various factors that affected their career progression. In addition to the organisation's role in career planning and management practices, the sections also present the findings of male employees at the two levels to explore the career trajectories of senior managers and the contributors to their success, in addition to observe any variations between the genders.

Two sub-themes emerged from this theme: individual factors and organisational factors, where both are considered significant in women's career progression.

6.4.1 Individual factors/contributors

Senior level	Different levels	HR level
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualifications
<input type="checkbox"/> Banking experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Banking experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional qualifications
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Experience
<input type="checkbox"/> Seizing the opportunity / lateral moves	<input type="checkbox"/> Seizing the opportunity/ lateral moves	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> Family support		<input type="checkbox"/> Family support

Figure 6.1 Individual factors affecting women's career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

Individual factors affecting women's career progression shared some similarities among the three levels, presented in Figure 6.1.

6.4.1.1 Qualifications

At the senior managerial level, women faced different circumstances when completing their studies (e.g., family responsibilities), which consequently affected their career progression. Sr. Manager 3-F.I entered the banking sector without an educational certificate and started at a very junior post, which also affected her promotion.

Every time I ask for my promotion, they reject me because I don't have a certificate (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Moreover, a postgraduate certificate is considered necessary for promotion to a senior level.

I have an MBA from [...]. I have done it because I saw an advertisement about a senior role, and one of the requirements is the MBA (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Women at other occupational levels joined the bank with other qualifications. For example, Employee 3-F.I started to work with the bank with a Bachelor's degree in e-security and started her career as a manager. At the same time, Employee 4-F.I started her career as a cashier with a school diploma. She progressed further in her career after obtaining her college diploma until she reached the position of manager. Also, she completed her MBA but without any progress afterwards.

I completed my master's degree two years ago in business administration. But I didn't get any promotion (Employee 4-F.I).

HR managers confirmed the necessity of having qualifications related to the field for an employee to be entitled to a senior position. Professional qualifications are also preferable for some senior positions.

In some of the senior roles in the bank, at a bank level, there are certain qualifications they need to have. For example, you can't have someone as a head of investment without having the qualification on investment. Usually, we also specify at which level. The same with the head of the audit; it requires qualification related to the audit. So yes, in some senior management roles, it requires a certain qualification to be obtained before filling the role. It is more professional but in specific fields (HR 2-F.I).

Men's perspectives

In contrast to other male senior managers, Sr. Manager 1-M.I holds a bachelor's degree, which granted him a position of supervisor at the start of his career journey, and he progressed further after that by obtaining different professional and postgraduate qualifications. Also, Sr. Manager 2-M.I indicated that not having an MBA affected his career progression negatively.

So, for example, in my time with the previous bank while I was holding a senior role, if the bank took an interest in investing in my development and networking, then definitely the current bank will select me to be in a senior role. I think I was not that much prepared; I wasn't holding my MBA. I did it after that. Things would've been different (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

Men at other occupational levels started to work at junior levels, for example as call agents, as they joined with a High School Diploma. They completed their studies while working and progressed accordingly. For example, Employee 1-M.I started as a call agent, then became a team leader, and then a manager.

I started with just my High School Diploma, until last year when I got my HND ... and now I am doing my MBA (Employee 1-M.I).

Therefore, having a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree secures a good position for the employee at the bank and also helps in the progression process; this applies to both men and women at any occupational level.

6.4.1.2 Banking experience

Banking experience is a common factor for success and progress shared by all participants, either male or female, at all occupational levels including the HR managers. Employees in the banking sector usually progress through finding job opportunities in different banks and departments.

I've been progressing very well until I reached the regional manager position in that organisation [i.e. previous bank]. Then I have joined IntBank as an acting general manager title, looking after regions (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

In [a previous bank], I reached up to acting head of retail banking, and later I left to [another bank] as head of distribution again. In 18 months, I was promoted to

deputy general manager, and a year later, I left them for the general manager position in IntBank (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

My overall work experience is almost 15 years. When I joined IntBank in 2009 and this is the only place I worked in till today. From my first job till now. I held first as a teller, or another word is a cashier. Then I moved to the Credit Risk Administration Department as an assistant. I spent about three years then I moved to Administration Department. From there I moved to Procurement. Then I moved to retail banking from 2013 up to now. I hold the position of process and system manager (Employee 4-F.I).

The banking sector attracts candidates, both men and women, from within the industry with banking experience, and most of them (men and women) progress in their careers by moving from one bank to another.

6.4.1.3 Personal traits and attitude

Female senior managers identified several characteristics that a person should have throughout their career journey to help in their career progression; for example, an outspoken personality, self-motivation, self-initiative, self-investment, integrity, aspiration and willingness to hold a high position. Also mentioned were employee ownership of and commitment to self-development, excellent attitude and behaviour, market intelligence, and the ability to work for long hours and be mobile.

At other occupational levels, women stated that the employee should be committed to self-development, be willing to progress, and have the ability to self-market to earn the trust of the line manager and seek opportunities for promotions.

The HR managers indicated the importance of employees' ownership of their own development when asked about the most crucial factor for career development and progression in the bank.

One of the most important things is the employee himself, that they need to own it; they need to be responsible (HR 2-F.I).

Men's perspectives

On the other hand, in addition to what was shared by female senior managers, Sr. Manager 1-M.I emphasised the importance of making the right decision by joining interested leaders in their employees' development and progression.

I have always joined leaders. I never joined institutions. I always joined leaders, except for the first job, where I was a new fresh graduate looking for a job, so I moved to operations, where I joined a leader, and when I left the operations and joined the main branch again, I joined a leader. And when I left and joined the IntBank, again I joined with a leader, and so on. I am always looked at whether the leadership can get the best of me. For me, there are two key inputs in a career progression: one is the leader who should take 100 per cent commitment to developing people (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

In brief, female and male Participants identified different personal characteristics, depending on their career experiences, that they observed to help them advance.

6.4.1.4 Seizing the opportunity (Lateral moves)

Female employees mentioned this factor at both levels as essential for development and progression. As part of senior female managers' career journeys, grabbing opportunities and making them a priority is necessary for advancement. For example, Sr. Manager 3-F.I postponed her studies for an opportunity that opened the door for her progression.

So, they told me the first thing I must start in Salalah to join people from Pune. I didn't say no to this opportunity – I postponed my studies, and I took this opportunity. So, I was in Salalah in the process of explaining the transformation of the system, and it was such a good journey for five months (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Also, when Sr. Manager 3-F.I was asked about the factors that influenced her career progression, she responded:

The other factor is the employee himself; grabbing the opportunity when it comes (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

At the other occupational levels, when Employees 4-F.I and 5-F.I were asked if they thought they were on the right path to be eligible for a higher position, they said:

Yes, because I am in the process of developing myself, looking for any internal vacancy in the bank (Employee 4-F.I).

Men's perspectives

Seizing opportunities also helped male senior managers in their career progression, as stated by Sr. Manager 2-M.I. Moreover, it had the same impact on male employees from other occupational levels.

The second thing is the opportunities. I think in my career I found a lot of opportunities within the organisation. So, these two things made me achieve my career growth (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

Seizing opportunities is observed to be significant by male and female Participants, as some preferred to grab the chance to secure a place at the bank rather than complete their studies, which they pursued later.

6.4.1.5 Family support

Female participants at the senior level confirmed the importance of having a supportive family to allow them to dedicate time and effort to their work and be rewarded

accordingly. Sr. Manager 3-F.I considered financial rewards as motivating as well as being recognised by her family.

I have a very supportive family. Travelling or working long working hours has never been an issue. My husband is very supportive; he knows the requirements of the job. And the reward system is very helpful as well. When you work hard and have been recognised for that, and you share the recognition with your family, that's something that creates a positive environment in your life (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Also, when the researcher asked the HR managers about the factors that help in career development and progression in the bank, one of the factors highlighted by HR 1-F.I was the importance of having a support system that would help women in their career progression, particularly women with children.

Number four is your support system, having people around you that will support you. So, let's say that you are a working mother with young children, and you need to be doing courses in the evening, so do you have somebody to support you with the kids – your husband, your mother, a nanny, whoever it can be that could help you – because you need the time to study or whatever it is (HR 1-F.I).

However, female participants from other occupational levels did not outline the support of family as a factor or requirement for success, which could reflect their current role responsibilities. But some female participant, such as Employee 5-F.I, highlighted that family responsibilities is a challenge affecting her career advancement. In contrast, none of the male participants at all occupational levels mentioned family support as a factor for success.

In sum, the most common individual factors considered necessary in helping female employees in their career progression were highlighted by participants from the three targeted levels. Similar opinions were shared by all participants on the importance of these

factors in their career progression, except family support, which was highlighted only by female senior managers and HR managers. The following section will present the organisational factors and approaches in appointing senior managers at the bank.

6.4.2 Organisational factors/approach

Female employees mentioned some factors categorised by the researcher as organisational factors, as presented in Figure 6.2. These factors helped their career progression, which also indicated the organisational approach in appointing senior managers internally.

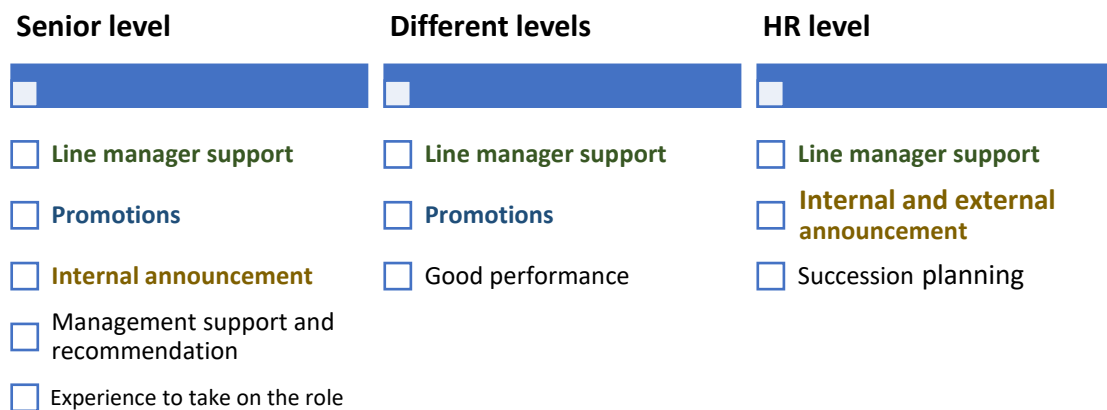


Figure 6.2 Organisational factors affecting women's career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

6.4.2.1 Line manager support

A standard view among participants was the critical role of the line manager in their career development and progression – the line manager was considered a focal point of connection between the employee and the management. As indicated by the participants,

line manager support is provided in many ways, such as discussing careers and opportunities for development, promotions and mentoring.

For instance, Sr. Manager 4-F.I from the senior occupational level said:

I put targets for myself, and ask my supervisors about the opportunities available, so I know my next step. And the good thing about the IntBank is that you can put forward your career plans, then they approve them, and you show them that you want that; they support you. There is a good support system (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Furthermore, Employee 3-F.I from other occupational levels indicated that progression through promotions depends mainly on the relationship with the line manager. Employee 4-F.I was also of the opinion that promotions are dependent on the line manager's recommendation.

There was a procedure the bank was following that each staff can apply for any position after working for two years in the same position, which is that, even without the approval from the line manager, the staff can apply for any higher position. However, this procedure has been changed, which means it depends on the promotion that the line manager can suggest to the management only (Employee 4-F.I).

Similarly, with Employee 5-F.I, who also progressed through promotions that were recommended by her line manager.

It was an internal promotion based on the years of service and the qualification, recommended by my manger and approved by the head of the department (Employee 5-F.I).

However, participants considered that the power of line managers that could control their career progression from many aspects is somewhat frustrating, as it depends on the relationship of the line manager with the employees, which could take many forms

including fairness. This issue is elaborated on in Section 6.8 as part of organisational barriers to employees' career progression.

From the HR perspective, the line manager or the department head is involved with the HR department in discussions regarding succession planning for their employees and their readiness level. Also, HR 1-F.I commented that one of the most critical factors for career progression is to have a supportive line manager that would assist employees in their career plans. This view was also shared by HR 2-F.I.

Employees are developed through different methods, through the PDP [personal development plan], that identifies their needs and learning requirements, of course with coordination and approval of the line manager (HR 1-F.I).

The role of the line manager is also found in the secondary data claiming the critical role of line managers in setting clear goals with the employee for career development. The line manager will help in identifying opportunities and the abilities the employee requires to be effective in their role. Also, in the process of performance review, the line manager sets goals and provides feedback to help the employee achieve them, in addition to encouraging employees to take responsibility for their own personal development.

Men's perspectives

Male participants also expressed the importance of the line manager's role in their career progression. For example, a senior manager (Sr. Manager 1-M.I) emphasised the critical role of line managers in his career progression, as he always made decisions to join managers or leaders committed to their employees' development and advancement.

I have always joined leaders. I never joined institutions. I always joined leaders, but when I moved from finance, the reason I left finance was that I couldn't find my thoughts compatible with my line managers, so I moved to operations, where I joined a leader, and when I left the operations and joined the main branch again, I joined a leader. And when I left and joined the IntBank, again I joined with a

leader, and so on. I am always looked at whether the leadership can get the best of me, whether they create a psychological safety environment to voice my concern to do my best, but at the same time learn. So, I think the main key is the leaders. The reason why I join organisations as leaders (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

Similarly, when the researcher asked Employee 1-M.I from other occupational levels about the factors that helped him progress in his career, he said:

The role of the supervisor is important in providing support and guidance and tell you about the opportunities. Like, for example, in my studies, it was advice from my line manager. She told me that for you ... be in a better position to excel in your career; you need some sort of certification because your school diploma will not take you where you want to be. Then I realised to continue my studies and I had support from my line manager (Employee 1-M.I).

In brief, participants from all levels including men and women expressed the significance of the line manager's role in contributing to the success of employees and their advancement.

6.4.2.2 Promotions

Female participants at the senior managerial level noted that promotions were one of the approaches used by the organisation in their career progression from a lower position to a higher one.

I got a promotion first as an officer, and then after one year I got another promotion to be a manager – virtual premier relationship manager – and then after one year I got a promotion to be a wealth relationship manager, and then after one year, I got a promotion to be a senior wealth relationship manager (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

However, this is not the case with all employees, as each differs in their career journey and the circumstances they face. For example, with Sr. Manager 3-F.I, another factor that assisted her career progression was her exposure to the CEO, which granted her annual promotions. This also highlights the significance of networks that assist in obtaining promotional opportunities, which in this case flags an unfair practice.

Although participants from other occupational levels believed that promotion is an approach for progression applied by the organisation, none of the participants has progressed through promotions, due to a lack of line manager support.

Men's perspectives

The same views were shared by male participants at the senior managerial level and other occupational levels. Senior managers progressed through promotions throughout their career journeys at different banks before joining the international bank, reaching a senior level. At the same time, employees at other occupational levels were promoted up to manager position before joining the international bank. For example, Employee 1-M.I was promoted up to the role of a manager in his previous bank:

I was promoted as the assistant manager for internet banking. Then next year, again I was promoted to a project manager for the enterprise project management, enterprise department (Employee 1-M.I).

In brief, promotion is one of the organisational approaches to progress employees in their careers. Yet, the reasons for getting promoted differ from one employee to another. The difference indicates that various other factors contribute to employee promotion in addition to employee performance.

6.4.2.3 Internal and external announcement

All participants at senior and other levels, either female or male, shared similar opinions regarding internal announcement as one of the bank's approaches to filling a senior

position or for employees to progress in their careers to higher positions. Candidates who apply through internal announcement undergo different assessments and interviews before being selected for the post. The researcher also found that the organisation approaches some employees and communicates with them directly to apply for senior positions, which they are selected for later. However, as stated previously, the senior managers interviewed had already progressed to a senior level before joining the international bank. Nevertheless, Sr. Manager 2-M.I faced a challenge with the structure of the international bank, which downgraded his position, and he had to apply through an internal announcement for a senior role after being approached by HR to apply for the post. The comment below illustrates Sr. Manager 2-M.I's experience as part of his career progression through internal announcements.

In IntBank, it was different; for the regional manager, they advertised for the role, and they asked me to apply for it and then interviewed me and selected me (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

Another employee who went through the same process is a female senior manager.

I have been approached by the organisation. They told me about the job role and responsibilities. They have highlighted the challenges for that role, and I went through the interviews, and it went well and then they gave me the offer and I accepted it (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Participants at other occupational levels, men and women, had not experienced progressing through internal announcements, but they mentioned it as an organisational approach for an appointment.

The HR perspective indicated the transparency and fairness of the recruitment process, either internally or externally, where the preference is always given to current employees. However, in certain circumstances and due to time constraints, the post is announced internally and externally. Also, it is essential to mention that not all senior positions are

revealed. If a successor is available, then the successor, if ready, will automatically take over the position; otherwise, the post will be announced.

In terms of if there is a vacancy, and we are looking to find a suitable candidate for that position, then yes, we do have a policy in place, and it's... we put it out in public through our internal portal. All employees can access this policy to read and it's a transparent and fair process where all eligible employees can apply for the vacancies, and the process of recruitment in terms of interviews and selections and shortlisting takes place to try to find the best candidate for that position. Our approach is first we look at our internal people, but in certain circumstances, to buy time, we advertise the vacancy both internally and externally. And we start the interviews with the internal candidates, and to give a comparison to satisfy ourselves that, yes, who we have internally are stronger. But usually, we do give the priority to our internal employees (HR 2-F.I).

However, similar experiences were shared by male and female senior managers on progressing through internal announcements, where the bank approaches particular candidates informally to apply for the announced job, which they are selected for later after going through the hiring formalities. As the approach applied in hiring through internal announcement is informal in that it is announced to all employees, HR also contacts and encourages particular employees to apply, after which they are selected for the position. Nevertheless, the experiences were different for male and female employees from other levels, as they had not experienced progression through internal announcements; but they agreed on it as an approach the organisation applies for employees' career progression, and as confirmed by HR.

6.4.2.4 Succession planning

Although succession planning is considered a career practice, it is an organisational approach more specifically for the appointment of senior managers. HR 1-F.I, from HR, explained the process of succession planning. It is done for regulated positions that are

very senior positions defined by the Central Bank of Oman, such as general managers and director/general manager. These types of positions (i.e. regulated) require approval from the Central Bank for an appointment. The Bank is also working on succession planning for roles that are critical for the business, where the person who occupies this role has a skill set that is unique and very difficult to find.

The succession planning process starts with a discussion with the heads of departments regarding talented employees and their readiness levels. The plan is discussed and approved by different committees. Finally, a developmental programme is provided for successors to qualify for the future position.

Therefore, for senior appointments only, the organisation applies succession planning to progress talented employees and prepare them for higher and senior roles. At other occupational levels, this is handled by the line manager, which could be subject to discrimination and bias.

6.4.2.5 Other organisational factors

Female employees identified other factors at senior and other occupational levels, such as management support and recommendations, experience to take on the role, and good performance.

In contrast, male participants at all levels mentioned the same factors as the female employees but also highlighted the headhunting that the organisation uses on some occasions to fill a senior post.

These factors were equally shared by male and female employees to be important in career progression.

6.5 Organisational career planning

This section presents the second theme that emerged from the data analysis that reflects the first research question on how organisations manage women's career development through the career planning and practices offered to help them progress. Therefore, this section will shed light on organisational career planning, whereas organisational career practices will be elaborated separately in the next section (Section 6.6).

The questions that the researcher asked participants with regards to career planning as per their occupational levels were designed to investigate the organisational approach to employees' career planning as follows.

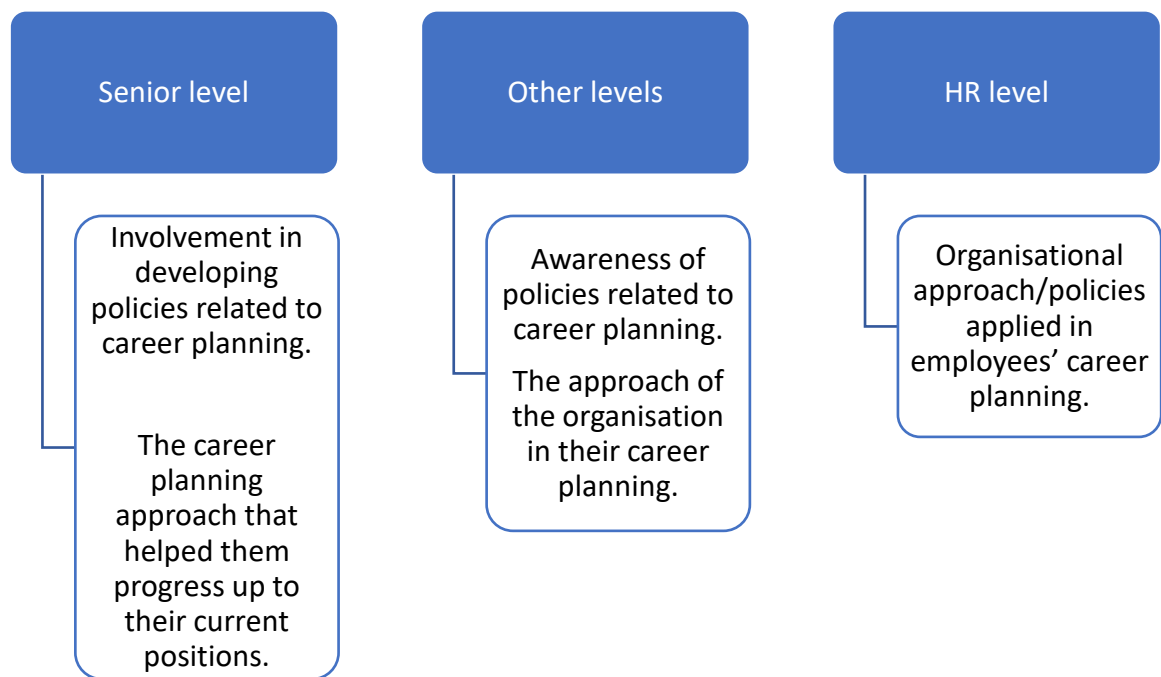


Figure 6.3 Investigation of career planning at different levels (*Source: The Researcher*)

Women at the senior managerial level had not been involved in the development process of policies related to employees' career planning, as indicated by Sr. Manager 3-F.I and 4-F.I.

No, I have not been involved in developing any of the policies. It's mainly the role of HR (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

When I joined, the policies were already there. So, no I was not involved (Sr. Manager 4-F.I)

In addition, when asked about their approach to career planning, Sr. Manager 3-F.I noted that it was self-effort, and she was the one who decided where to be next, whereas Sr. Manager 4-F.I implied that the organisational approach of using a personal development plan (PDP) for her career planning helped her progress. Also, the line manager's support is essential. However, the individual has a critical role in achieving the targets in their PDP, as there is a procedure that the bank follows in appointing senior managers.

The career progression of the individual, remember when I said about the PDP, if you have a crystal-clear PDP, the organisation will help you to reach your goal. And this is through one-to-one discussion with your line manager. When you identify areas where you need to progress, you need to find your aspirations. Also, if you want something, you have to self-study; you need to invest in yourself. Are you doing this? Are you preparing yourself for that role? It is not a bonus position. You need to work to reach that position. Then it will not be granted for you, because you have reached that level. For example, if I am a branch manager, I can't go by default for regional manager. No. you need to opt for that position if the position is open and need to go through the process (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Female employees from other occupational levels expressed different opinions on their awareness regarding career planning policies. Employee 3-F.I said that she was unaware of the guidelines,

I am not fully aware of it. [...]. They do also the career development plan for you, and make sure what you want to be. They make sure that you're on the right track for it (Employee 3-F.I).

Whereas Employee 4-F.I expressed her awareness.

Yes, I am aware. We have also PDP which is recently the HR team conducted the sessions which were there before, but the HR introduced this recently about before 2 months back.

Both participants indicated the use of PDP for career planning, which were explained only recently by the bank's HR. However, Employee 4-F.I stated that she was not approached for career planning, but she focused on self-development through the PDP. She emphasised that the employee should be committed to self-development, as sometimes it is challenging to find support for your career development.

No, not anyone from HR or my line manager. This is only self-development. The staff only should interact with the team, like HR, and should develop the development plan in the system. It is more of a self-commitment to develop yourself and the manager wants you to focus on your work only to get the required results (Employee 4-F.I).

In an international organisation, as stated by Employee 3-F.I, the employee can select a mentor globally, who will follow up on their progress, instead of the line manager. But Employee 3-F.I was not approached by her line manager, and she learned from her colleague.

For me, I was not approached by my line manager, and I didn't have a mentor, but my colleague was like my mentor she taught me everything in the department (Employee 3-F.I).

Hence, it is noted that career planning is mostly self-initiated, as it depends mainly on the ambition of the employee. There are different ways to learn and be guided if the employee wants to develop. However, the formal path adopted by the bank is the most secure one for progression, as the bank should be aware of steps taken by the employee in their personal development and offer them additional support and recognition.

Figure 6.4 shows the policies or procedures that the organisation adopts for employees' career planning, as participants from HR explained. Competent employees are selected to join the bank, as per their qualifications and skills, by either internal or external postings. They undergo different assessments and interviews to be shortlisted for the position. The bank also has policies on employee development through developmental opportunities and PDPs that identify their needs and learning requirements, with the coordination and approval of the line manager.

Employees are developed through different methods through the PDP that identify their needs and learning requirements, of course, with coordination and approval of the line manager (HR 1-F.I).

So, the PDP is there for all employees, but it should be initiated, or the ownership is the employee himself to go to the system and to put the PDP. So, the responsibility for that is the employee himself to do that, then the line manager also (HR 2-F.I).

However, HR 1-F.I indicated that the employee should initiate the process for their own development, and the support is available through the developmental tools the bank provides. Also, the bank applies succession planning for talented employees for occupying senior and critical roles. As part of employees' progression, the bank helps with lateral movements if vertical movements are unavailable. The lateral moves help employees gain different experiences and exposure that qualify him or her to hold a higher position.

Regarding family responsiveness, HR 1-F.I explained that the bank provides flexibility to help employees balance work and family responsibilities, to help in their career progression. She also said that performance appraisal provides indications on the performance of the employees and highlights any developmental requirements. However, she indicated that the international bank maintains global policies, with minor customisation in a few aspects.

Similarly, HR 2-F.I emphasised the importance of the procedures the bank follows, first identifying talented employees and coordinating with line managers regarding the employees' skills, strengths, and areas requiring development. But she also indicated that the employee should take ownership of their PDP.

Men's perspectives

While sharing their career trajectories, it was found that male senior managers had not been involved in the development process of career planning policies, similar to female senior managers. However, Sr. Manager 1-M.I had developed programmes to help employees progress in their careers. Moreover, Sr. Manager 2-M.I stated that the bank's policies are standard globally with a small amount of customisation in some countries.

They are standard policies across the globe. However, they are customised a little bit in some countries. In Oman, HR plays a higher role; however, the business experts have their input in terms of what is the requirement, what are they looking for and so on (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

When the researcher asked senior managers about their career planning, Sr. Manager 1-M.I answered that part of his career was planned by his line managers. Still, mostly it was self-effort and commitment, in addition to working with a leader that has an interest in the career development of their employees.

No [laughing], unfortunately not. There were parts of it planned, and other parts were not planned, so I was very fortunate to always had good bosses and I think when I joined the banking sector, I always knew that I want to work with someone who really have interest in my development (i.e. a leader). But also, I always used to show them that I am willing to spend any amount of time to progress in my career (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

Sr. Manager 2-M.I expressed that his career had been developed and progressed through promotions that are based on performance.

So, in terms of my career until I become an employee of IntBank, my career progressed through selection of senior management on my performance. I was not provided with any career planning (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

Males' employees from other occupational levels indicated their awareness of policies related to career planning and management. In addition, when they were asked about their career planning approach, both participants expressed that they had been approached

their line managers and had discussed their PDPs. However, Employee 2-M.I emphasised that the PDP is self-initiated and then reviewed/discussed with the line manager, where both should agree on the plan.

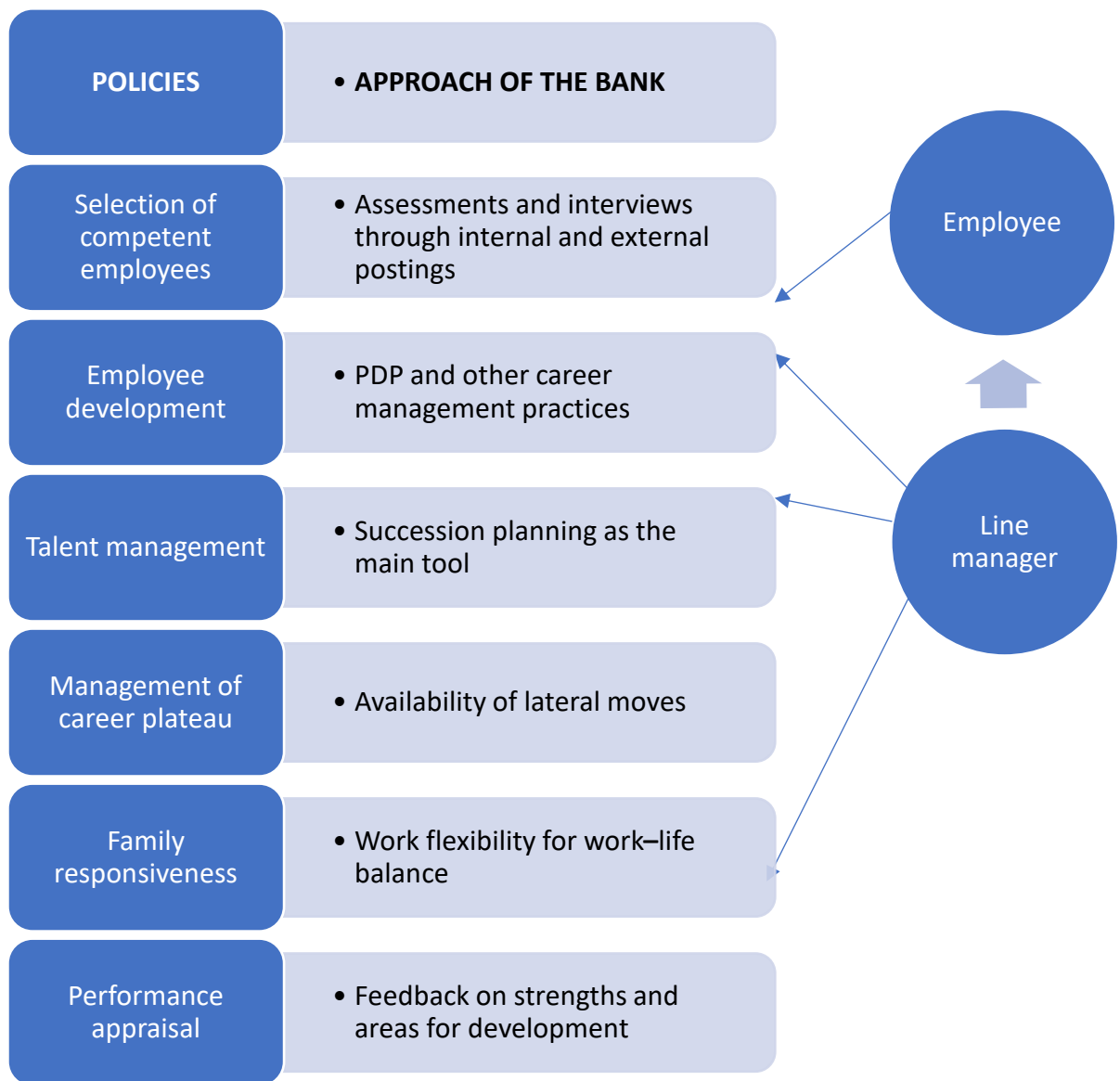


Figure 6.4 HR perspective on organisational approach for employees' career planning; the line manager provides support to the employee (*Source: The Researcher*).

In sum, the career planning of the IntBank is based on various approaches as shown in Figure 6.4. In addition, reflecting on the career trajectories of employees, two female senior managers' experiences in career planning were different, as one's was through her PDP and the support of her line manager whereas the other's experience was all based on individual effort due to a lack of support from her line manager. Male senior managers

also had different experiences, as one participant's career plan was partly planned with the help of his line manager, while the other participant's career was not planned, but was based on self-effort and promotional progress. At other occupational levels, the researcher spotted a significant difference between the career plans of women and men. Women's experiences were mostly self-initiated through their PDP, whereas men's career plans were implemented through their PDP and the support of their line managers, which women lacked at this level.

6.6 Organisational career practices and their impact on women's career progression

Organisational career practices is the last theme that reflects the first research question on how women's careers are developed in organisations. As explained in Chapter 2 (Section 2.6), Bagdadli and Gianecchini's (2019) framework has been adopted to examine how women's careers are developed through different organisational practices that aim to help employees succeed and progress through three mediators (i.e. career development, information, relations). The framework provides the most common career practices, which participants have been asked about, and how they impacted their careers in career development, information and relations.

The secondary data analysis indicates that IntBank helps women progress through a robust strategy for career management and development that targets employees' career success and progression. This strategy is based on one of the bank's values of believing in differences in people and their strengths, experiences and voices. The bank attempts to achieve an inclusive workplace where all employees have the opportunity to develop and progress. IntBank states that it considers the talent and diversity of employees as the foundation of its success. Hence, it supports employees and helps them improve their skills and achieve their career goals by offering them a wide variety of career management and developmental practices.

In line with the secondary data, the primary data analysis showed also that women at senior levels in this study had been offered all the career practices. These are assessment centres, career counselling, career paths, career planning workshops, developmental assignments, external seminars, international assignments, job enrichment, job postings, job rotation, lateral moves/job transfer, mentoring, networking, performance appraisal, succession planning, diversity and inclusion, formal and informal channels of communication and training. These are in addition to other practices the bank offers, such as support to obtain professional and educational certificates, job testing, job shadowing and e-learning (including the bank's library), which offers training on different subjects and fields.

By sharing her career progression experience through career practices, Sr. Manager 3-F.I said that the bank is helping her by providing training to gain the certification for her next career position.

If you just recall that I mentioned that the next step for me from being a senior to be a financial advisor, I have shown interest in it, so they sent me on training with an international certificate and the bank has registered me for it and I have finished that training, which is one of the career management plans for the next position I am looking for. The other thing is the exam – I have to go through it. Also, there is, like, you get training for the exam, plus you can initiate within (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Sr. Manager 4-F.I elaborated on one of the career practices used in the bank that helps employees to progress to the next higher position in their careers, which is job assessment or role assessment. So, if the employee aspires to be a general manager, they should go through the role assessment in the system. The employee initiates this process by rating themselves for every capability for that role. After completing this first step, the link then goes to the line manager for discussion. The line manager starts checking the capabilities and puts a rating against the employee's rating. In the end, the employee will receive a

very detailed report about the abilities they possess and the areas that require further development. Finally, the employee selects all the training or developmental practices from the bank's library that were stated in the report.

When the researcher asked about the impact of career practices on career progression, Sr. Manager 3-F.I and 4-F.I believed that all the methods they have used helped in their career development, since they target employee development. Also, they add to their knowledge as the employee learns something new by being on a training course or being given an assignment, while benefiting from the networking that exposes them to different people.

So for me, attending courses helps in building networking. For example, when we join training courses there are people from different organisations helps a lot in networking and knowing a lot and gaining knowledge. So, they added a lot of values (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Female employees from other occupational levels had different experiences regarding the career practices offered to them. The line manager also plays a significant role in supporting them with the career practices. For example, Employee 3-F.I had been through job tasting and e-learning courses.

Yes, there is job tasting where you can apply through the portal (online courses) where you can find also a lot of developmental things you can apply for. Also, it depends on your line manager. There are managers who are very supportive and some are not (Employee 3-F.I).

Whereas, Employee 4-F.I attended some training courses and went through several job transfers that helped her move from one position to another and gain knowledge and interact with different people.

Employee 5-F.I attended different career practices, such as, assessment centre, career counselling, performance appraisal and training as well. In addition to 'future leader' programme that taught her supervisory skills.

Attending and playing a big role in the 'future leaders' programme that helped me in managing and guiding my team members. Although they are in the department before me, but I am the one who is leading them now (Employee 5-F.I)

On the impact of career practices, Employee 3-F.I, 4-F.I and 5-F.I shared a similar opinion on the benefit of networking while attending the career practices.

First of all, it creates your network. You know other people from different departments, and you hear and learn from their experience. For example, we met people who started from point zero in their career, started as tellers, and now they are heads of departments. So, they explain to us the obstacles they faced and how did they overcome these issues (Employee 3-F.I).

Information, knowledge and also interacting with people because whenever we enter a training, we know other people who we don't see again. It more relates with networking, if you want something you know who to go to; if you need help you know who to ask from (Employee 4-F.I).

knowledge, self-confidence, career development, and build strong relationships with other departments (Employee 5-F.I).

However, Employee 3-F.I believes that the networking is not the main factor in her career progression but the employee is responsible for his/her own progression, in addition to the support of the line manager.

Networking is not a main factor but could assist you. The person him/herself is the main factor. The employee should have the willingness, and also depends on the manager's support in addition to the department you are working in (Employee 3-F.I)

Similarly, Employee 4-F.I believes that career practices offered to her did not relate to her career progression.

It doesn't have relation in my progression. Just as I mentioned before adding knowledge and networking (Employee 4-F.I)

However, the participants from HR explained the change in developmental requirements from one person to another, which accordingly affects the practices they are offered to overcome their skills gaps for further development. HR 1-F.I expressed the availability of different practices in the bank that help employees in their career progression. She indicated that the global nature of the bank plays a significant role in the wide variety and quality of practices available to employees around the world, as stated by HR 2-F.I:

We always adopt what is the best in the market and I am proud to say that some of the programmes that we have, just because we are a global and international bank, so whatever is launched in the group, we adapted here. And usually, when they learn something, they study about it before its launch, and many of the programmes that we are the first organisation to launch, and that's the benefit of working for an international organisation (HR 2-F.I).

Moreover, on the career practices offered, HR 1-F.I mentioned many of the practices, such as:

- The bank's university, available on the intranet, which offers a wide range of courses
- Internal and external courses
- PDPs, in which the employee works with the line manager
- Employees can set up meetings with the learning and development team to see what courses are available based on their career plan
- Staff can register for certain certification outside the bank, which they can be reimbursed for
- Reimbursement of study fees (70 per cent), if the employee obtains a certificate in his or her field of work
- Classroom training

- Internal postings of vacancies
- Job shadowing
- Job testing
- On-the-job training
- Short-term assignment outside Oman
- Career planning workshops
- Career counselling.

The secondary data also indicated various types of support provided in relation to employees' career practices.

1. The bank launched a learning hub in 2017 to assist employees to develop in their current role or prepare them for a future role. The group head of HR added, 'We've designed this learning hub to support our people and help them develop the skills, behaviours and confidence to take on the new challenges of leading a global bank'.

The bank claims that their learning hub provides opportunities for employees worldwide ranging from beginner to expert level, to train, learn skills, and obtain qualifications that can be achieved in several ways, such as in face-to-face training, online courses, or opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. First, the bank places a high value on face-to-face training because it gives a chance not only to acquire skills but also to share knowledge, develop ideas, and build relationships with colleagues. Consequently, the bank is building new university training facilities in different locations including the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, and the UK. Second, the general courses that are available vary from team management, leadership, IT, and personal skills. These courses are beneficial for employees who choose to work flexibly or remotely, as they allow them to study in their own time and at their own pace. Third, other developmental opportunities include mentoring, job shadowing, on-job coaching, networking, and volunteering in ways that can expand experience and expertise.

2. Employees are expected to complete some learning activities based on local regulatory requirements or the nature of the role, in addition to choosing courses that are linked to employees' own interests or supporting personal development.

3. The bank provides international opportunities for career development through the provision of international assignments that could be for a period of three months to three years. The international management programme is another opportunity offered to highly talented employees to pursue an internationally mobile career in several roles and locations.

4. A future skills curriculum was launched in 2020 to help employees globally to manage and handle change, improve resilience and take on a growth mindset. This curriculum includes skills of curiosity, creativity, connectivity, and customer engagement and helps employees to develop and communicate with an outcome for future success.

5. Inclusion and diversity is reflected in recruitment practices at the bank, which ensures that the hiring managers complete mandatory training on how to address bias and attract and hire the strongest candidates from diverse talent pools. The bank also ensures the diversity of interviewers in assessing shortlisted candidates with a focus on increasing the underrepresented groups. Another important diversity aspect when recruiting is to have a gender-balanced population, which is considered an important foundation for a diverse workforce for the long term.

6. The bank offers several initiatives that allow employees to learn from others and shape their own development – for instance, mentoring and buddy schemes – in addition to employee networks that allow collaboration among employees within shared interests.

Accordingly, Figure 6.5 represents the management career practices indicated to be adopted by the bank to support employees' career development and progression.

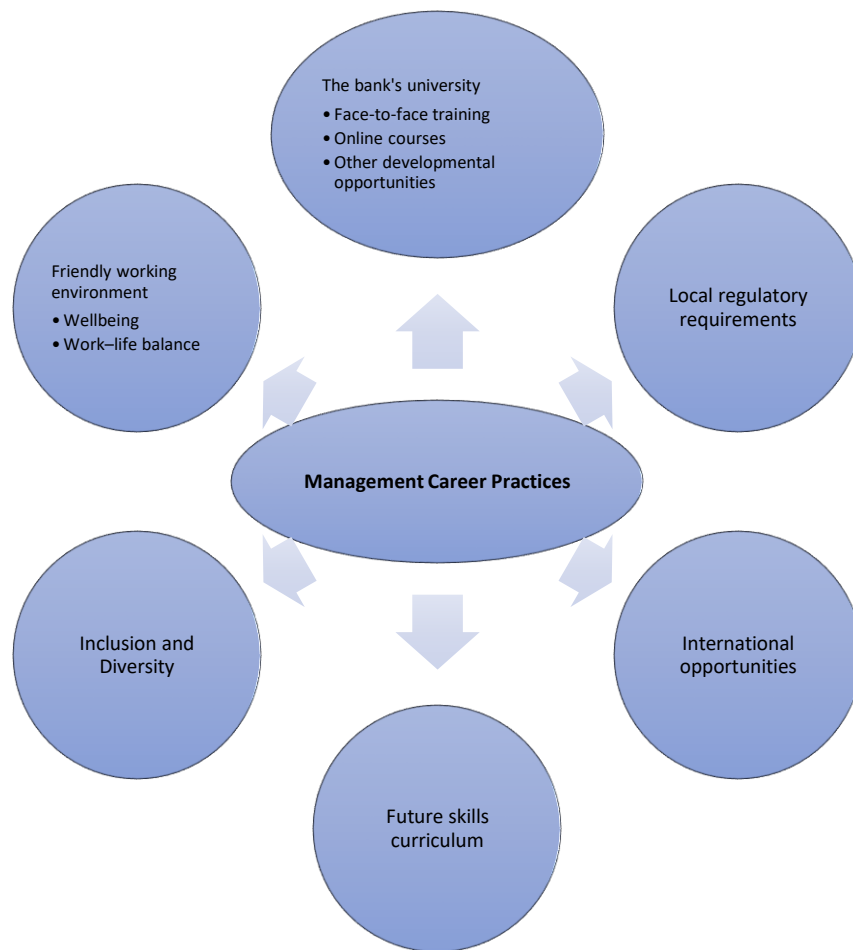


Figure 6.5 The international bank's management career practices

On the impact of career practices on employees' progression, the participants from HR indicated that all practices are targeted at employees' career development. The bank also uses the primary tool for employees' career planning (i.e. the PDP) to provide information on areas of developmental focus and a suitable approach to achieve it. Line managers provide information on their employees' learning and developmental needs and provide support for achieving them. The line manager also decides on the value added based on the employee's productivity and how efficient the employee is. Some of the career practices, such as job rotation and testing, provide visibility for employees, which helps

them in any opportunities to move, as they will be exposed to other managers, making it easier to be selected. However, for junior positions, decisions on progression are made at a departmental level, whereas they are handled at the committee level for senior positions.

These practices in general are targeted at employees' career development. And of course, they provide information like the PDP, on areas that helps in employees development and the suitable learning approach that would be taken. Also, the line managers have a role on providing information about their employees and their learning and development needs. Regarding relations, some practices like job rotations and testing would provide visibility of employees, that would help them for the lateral moves, as they will be known and there work as well, so if there were an opportunity for a lateral move then that will be easy for them in terms of skills and experience of that field and in terms of being exposed to other managers that will make it easier to be selected (HR 1-F.I).

Moreover, HR maintains a profile of up-to-date information on the achievements and progress of employees based on their PDPs. These profiles provide information about the employees and are used whenever opportunities arise. For example, suitable employees could be approached and asked to apply and compete for specific positions that would fit their profile. Also, HR 1-F.I stated that employees who utilise many of the practices consider that they support those with potential in achieving their goals, to succeed and progress.

And you can tell if a person is utilising a lot of these practices and working towards achieving his goals as stated in the PDP, then he's a hard-working employee, that tries to succeed and progress, and in these cases, the organisation supports the employee towards achieving what they aspire (HR 1-F.I).

Moreover, HR 2-F.I indicated that some of the training is mandated by the regulators (i.e. the Central Bank of Oman). Quarterly reports are expected to be sent by the bank. Whereas

some of the training is beneficial for the individual's current role, some helps them develop for future positions.

Furthermore, career practices that add to employees' knowledge and relations could be applied to develop their careers, which results in career success and progression. They could also be used as a disciplinary measure that could marginalise the individual and hence result in maintaining the status quo in terms of their development and progression. Career practices (e.g., job transfer) can also be part of regulatory tools that are applied to mitigate the risk of fraud and provide employees with updated knowledge on security and essential subjects required in the banking sector. Figure 6.6 summarises the impact of career practices on women's career success and progression.

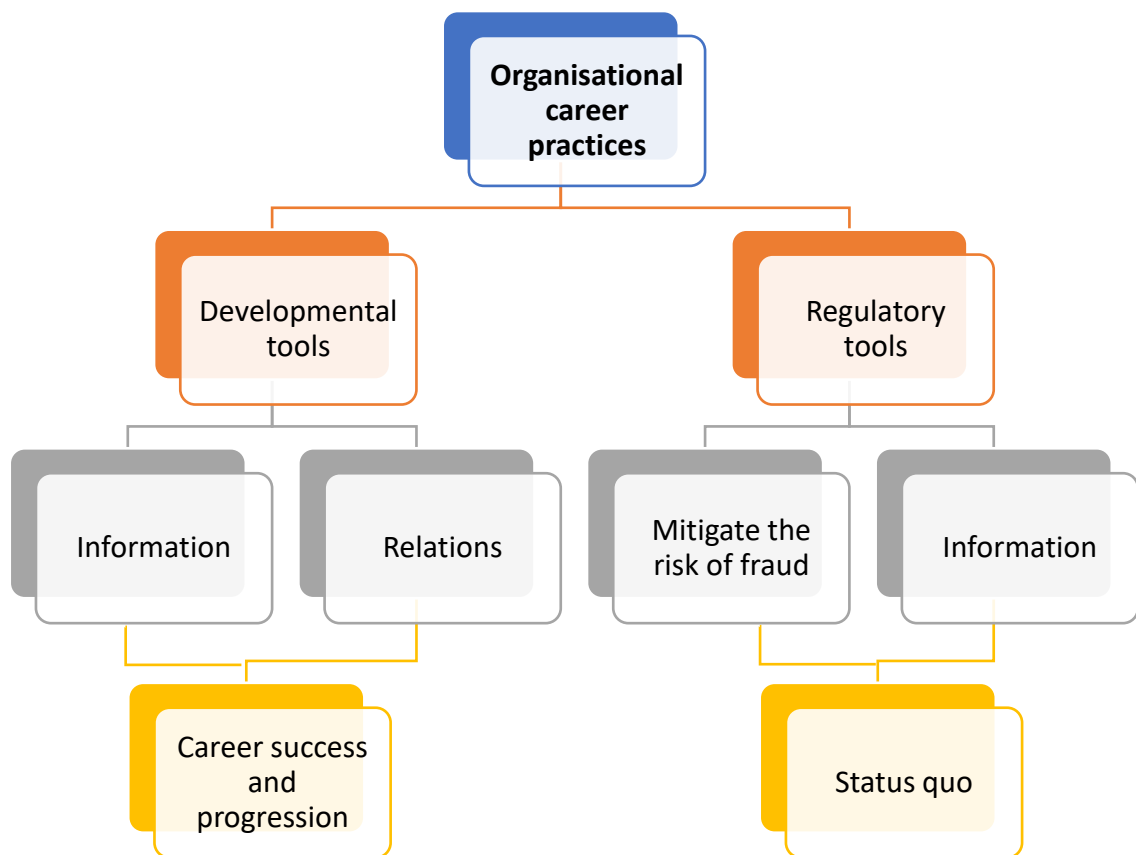


Figure 6.6 Impact of career practices on women's career success and progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

Men's perspectives

Also, male senior managers were offered career practices that helped them progress. For example, Sr. Manager 1-M.I had been offered succession planning, mentorship, gap analysis, additional projects inside and outside Oman, the support of his line manager, career advice, PDP and lateral moves/transfers. On the impact of these career practices on the participant's progression, he said:

They helped me in adding knowledge and skills and building relationships with other leaders and knowing my next career point (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

Sr. Manager 2-M.I's experience was different. Although he did not elaborate on the practices offered, he indicated that the plan in his PDP did not achieve the required outcomes or goals in terms of his subsequent career role. But he stated that the career practices added knowledge and improved his skills and helped him build a good network around the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa). These career practices helped prepare him to take up more senior roles.

Males' participants from other occupational levels had different experiences of career practices. For example, Employee 1-M.I had used more career management practices than Employee 2-M.I had. For example, as mentioned by Employee 1-M.I, he was offered career counselling, assessment centres, career paths, career planning workshops and developmental assignments, in addition to international projects, job enrichment, job posting, job rotation, lateral moves, mentoring, networking, performance appraisal, succession planning, and training. Also, e-learning and the bank's university offer training in many different fields. These career practices improved his knowledge and network. He believes that good networking helped him get work done faster and helped him in his

transfers, as he is known to heads of departments, and if there were any vacancies, they would offer him the post because they knew him.

The experience of Employee 2-M.I was like that of Sr. Manager 2-M.I from the senior managerial level. He did not elaborate on the career practices he had used but stated that he was offered the practices according to his PDP, in addition to job testing. He said that these practices provided him with exposure and networking along with the experience and skills he gained from job testing.

Based on the findings of this theme, female and male participants at the senior level were offered many career practices that helped them progress. At other occupational levels, the scenario is different. Women do not seem to be offered as many practices as their male counterparts at the same level, which could refer to the lack of line manager support. The line manager, as discussed above, plays a significant role in examining and approving PDPs for employees and, accordingly, career management practices.

6.7 Organisational barriers to women's career progression

This theme provides data for the first part of the second research question, which identifies organisational barriers that women face and that affect their career progression to senior managerial levels. Male employees were also asked about the obstacles that affected their progress to examine the differences between the genders. In addition, males at senior managerial levels are decision-makers and are aware of the underrepresentation of women at senior levels. Figure 6.7 represents the organisational barriers these women face throughout their career journeys. The researcher collected data from all participants at all occupational levels, including men, women, and HR managers. This section states these barriers as per the data analysed from each occupational level, starting with women at the senior managerial level.

First, examining the organisational challenges women face at a senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 3-F.I described a lack of support from her line manager, which resulted in a

lack of guidance and coaching, which demotivated her because it affected her career progression. She also shared the method she applied, which was self-initiated, to overcome this challenge: mentoring with managers in positions she aspires to, with the advantage of selecting any manager around the globe.

The challenges are always there. I didn't have a very supportive manager and I was feeling down about it because my manager didn't coach or support me. So, I was always the one who asks. You expect your manager to look after you and support you when you need support, like my manager threw me in the war, and just do whatever you do. So, I think there was a period where I didn't have that support and guide. So, I was missing a guide (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

However, Sr. Manager 4-F.I's experience was different; she indicated that she did not face any challenges. Still, she expressed her gratitude to her line managers for being supportive and to the HR team for following up and providing her with feedback to progress further in her career.

Sr. Managers 3-F.I and 4-F.I were also asked about the underrepresentation of women at the senior level since they also supervise women and are aware of their career journeys. Sr. Manager 3-F.I believes that women hold themselves back from progressing due to one challenge or another. She added that women also face many responsibilities, balancing family and work, and many sacrifice their careers for their families.

The reason why you don't see a lot of senior women at the top is because women hold themselves back. And I forgot we take up a lot of responsibilities actually, and most of the time women who sacrifices a lot of things. Like you're expected to become a mother, a wife, then of course you will need time, you can't spend a lot of time at the workplace. But, on the other hand, you always give your husband time to improve himself and his career, and consequently, you will take more responsibilities on yourself. So definitely you'll not make it there like the other gender, like males who

can make it because they have all the time and support to make it (Sr. Manager 3-F.I)

Sr. Manager 4-F.I stated that it depends on the individual and how much she is investing in her development and to what level she aspires, as many are satisfied with what they are doing.

But again, I will say if the individual wants. Because sometimes I can see a lot of role matching, e.g., my direct report. I will call the individual and I will ask her why you're not applying for the job. She will reply I am happy with this job. So, if you are not ambitious for high positions, then that's it (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Female employees from other occupational levels also faced various challenges that affected their career progression. For example, Employee 3-F.I has spent five years at the bank and has not been promoted, which has created frustration and demotivation. In addition, she was offered lower pay than her other colleagues in the department. She believes that the reasons for not getting a promotion are the lack of support from her line manager on her requests for promotions.

I requested for a raise as I was offered the basic since I was a fresh graduate. So, comparing to all who are with me, I am the lowest, although I am a hard worker. I put a lot of efforts in my work and more. So, I requested three times for a raise, but I never got an acceptance. This frustrated me a lot and de-motivated me, as it also affects the bonus. From my personal experience, it all because of my managers, as I don't market myself well. I will just do my job and submitted. Hence, I never get a promotion until now (Employee 3-F.I).

A similar experience was shared by Employee 4-F.I, as her line manager was not supportive and did not treat her fairly (i.e. was discriminatory), which affected her career progression.

In some cases you can find sometime a manager who can take things personally, and not treat you fairly (Employee 4-F.I)

From the HR perspective, HR 1-F.I indicated that lack of a line manager support could be very challenging for employees trying to progress. They could decline developmental opportunities for employees that would help them, such as job shadowing or a training course, due to workload or any other reason.

If you have a line manager that stops you, so whenever there are initiatives such as job shadowing or job tasting opportunities and they decline, or training courses that you want to do and they say no for workload or any other reason, then obviously it's going to be very challenging and there will be that conflict between the employee and the line manager (HR 1-F.I).

Also, the participant explained that stereotypical perceptions of women as being pregnant and taking time off still exist and negatively affect female employees.

Because some people still have this perception of women, oh she's going to take time off, because she will get married and eventually gets pregnant (HR 1-F.I).

Speaking from her own experience, HR 1-F.I said that, in some departments, the proportion of men is higher than women due to the job requirements and nature of the job, such as working mainly outside the office and meeting with clients and having dinner with them.

Maybe in certain departments, and I think due to probably the job requirements, and I know because of the focus groups that I run, and also because of me being a female, a mother, and a wife. ... It's the nature of these jobs. For example, having to constantly meet with clients in ministries. The role requires you to constantly be outside the office, at meetings, and the time also it could be at evening over dinner, which could be challenging which is understandable for Omani ladies with families. So yes, you would find that a lot of time that these positions will be taken,

if women, by expats or single ladies, and rarely would you find Omani women taking these roles because they need a very strong support system to be able to take up those roles (HR 1-F.I).

Furthermore, the data analysis revealed that although the bank has policies and procedures related to employees' career planning and management, it lacks a clear career system applicable to all.

Men's perspectives

From men's perspective, senior managers expressed their opinions regarding the organisational barriers to women's career progression. Sr. Manager 1-M.I said that one of the main barriers is that leaders in top management, who are men, set all the policies and procedures and make all the strategic decisions.

An important challenge is probably of leadership where all policies, procedures, strategic decision are made by men colleagues on the top, and in my view, these people who should make change in term of the diversity and inclusion. People who are at top are capable of changing the position of females' colleagues (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

Sr. Manager 1-M.I added that another reason for the underrepresentation of women at senior levels is that many decision-makers are unconsciously biased.

Today, if you go and see the top 300 senior executives in the banking industry you'll find 15 women only. If you go and see the boardrooms of the top 19 banks in Oman, you will find maybe only 10. This is the challenge that we are living in. men who are the decision makers have a lot of unconscious biases. So if you're asking me to train people, the first people that should be trained are leader at the top who are the majority males (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

In addition, there is a history of male dominance, where men are preferred for senior positions. This view was shared by Sr. Manager 2-M.I.

I guess because of history. This is an issue long back. Men were always preferred to be given senior positions (Sr. Manager 2-M.I)

Senior managers described different challenges when reflecting on males' career experiences and the organisational challenges they faced. Sr. Manager 1-M.I stated that the main challenge he faced is the nature of the organisation as global, and hence it is very competitive when it comes to being heard by leaders. He worked on this challenge by focusing on his circle of influence, where he had control and a voice. On the other hand, Sr. Manager 2-M.I faced frustration when the salary structure of the bank downgraded him. He said that the previous organisation he worked at did not invest in his development. Hence, when he moved to the international bank, he did not qualify for the position he was holding; accordingly, he was downgraded. However, the international bank invested in his development and provided him with postgraduate studies later, and accordingly extended his role. On the other hand, male employees from other occupational levels did not face any organisational challenges that affected their career progression.

In sum, the organisational barriers that women face are based on discrimination, summarised in Figure 6.7, whereas those faced by men are based on the structure/ nature of the organisation of being a global entity. For instance, some senior roles will be open for competition within the network of the bank, which is a global context. Hence, this draws fierce competition to obtain these positions.

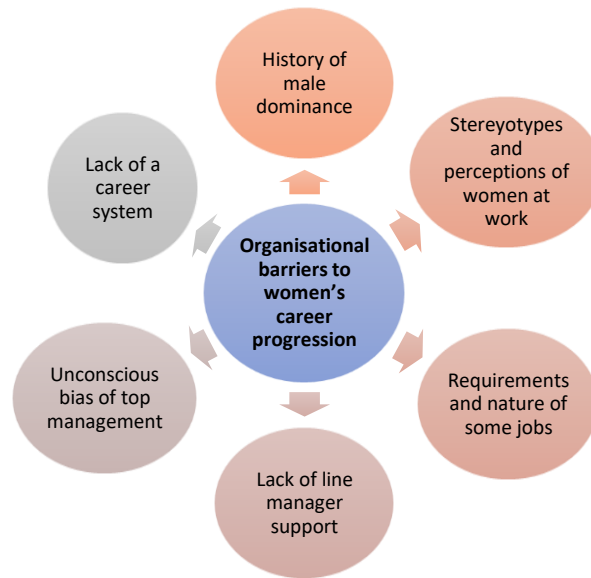


Figure 6.7 Organisational barriers to women's career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

6.8 Other barriers that affect women's career progression

In addition to the organisational barriers identified in the previous sections, other barriers were also identified that affected women's career progression, which are mainly societal and individual. This section briefly highlights these barriers, shared by all participants from all occupational levels, as represented in Figure 6.8. These barriers can be divided into two categories representing individual barriers and societal barriers.

In societal barriers, which include the cultural challenges women face, a female senior manager (Sr. Manager 3-F.I) indicated that many women at the senior level are single, which shows a cultural barrier in terms of the requirements of being in a senior role.

I just want to add that it made me really sad that most of the senior women who are at the top are single (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

HR 1-F.I added that women are overloaded with more responsibilities than men, taking care of the household and children, which affects their progression.

We know at our culture there are more obligations on women than men. And that shouldn't be a barrier for her to progress in her career, but unfortunately it is a barrier (HR 1-F.I).

At the individual level, Sr. Manager 3-F.I said that women face a significant challenge of achieving a work–life balance, which all other participants from different levels similarly shared. Employee 2-M.I noted that women face a lack of work–life balance at some point in their career journey, and that is when they have young children, which results in less focus on the work aspect and more on the children. Responsibilities for children continue until the children grow up and are independent, then women tend to focus again on work. This view was also confirmed by HR 1-F.I, who indicated that having young children could be very challenging for women to handle alongside work.

I noticed that there is a time when the female focuses less on work environment and focuses more on after work environment, like family. When the female feels that her life is stable again, like her kids in school and can depend on themselves, then at that period of time, she come back and focus on work-life balance and that depends on how quick she can recover from that period and get her focus again at work (Employee 2-M.I).

Children responsibilities is a challenge. But the bank is trying to give me flexible timings (Employee 4-F.I).

Some of the women tell me that I don't want to apply for that role because I know I can't handle it. I am not in a stage that I can't take more because I have my children are still very young. But maybe after some years, when I have more time I can (HR 1-F.I).

Sr. Manager 4-F.I mentioned some other individual barriers that women face, such as lack of interest or ambition to hold a senior position.

Strategies related to career development is effective but can't be achieved if the employee is not willing or not aspired. Some female employees are just happy where they are (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Sr. Manager 1-M.I, a male senior manager, also added that some women lack confidence, as they doubt their capabilities to hold a senior role, which affects their career progression.

I appointed the first branch manager outside Muscat in one of the banks. She was the best for the job. We appointed her but she insisted if she was appointed, she will resign and I had to tell her that she's the best for the position, and if you didn't take it then your manager will be someone that you're better than. Someone who won't be as good as you. So 4% of branch regional managers were appointed females, they didn't apply for the job I had to convince them. So, their common reason is that I am not ready for it. Most of senior appointments that I made I hand-picked individuals and put them on the seat. Where men will come to you if they are not even 2% ready for it (Sr. Manager 1-M.I)

This view was also shared by participants from HR, who said that women lack the confidence to hold a senior position.

Yes, I emphasise this yes. It's the confidence. It's the females' employees themselves who hold themselves from progression (HR 1-F.I).

Actually statistically, most of the females at middle management, or at the beginning of their seniority, they will lack confidence. So, they might be 70% ready for the job, but they will still consider about the 30%. And it's the other way with the males, where they may be ready 30% but they feel like they really ready (HR 2-F.I).

In sum, women face many barriers that can be divided into two main categories: societal and individual. Figure 6.8 summaries those barriers. Men, in contrast, did not indicate other barriers, that affected their career progression, except those discussed in the previous section (i.e. 6.7).

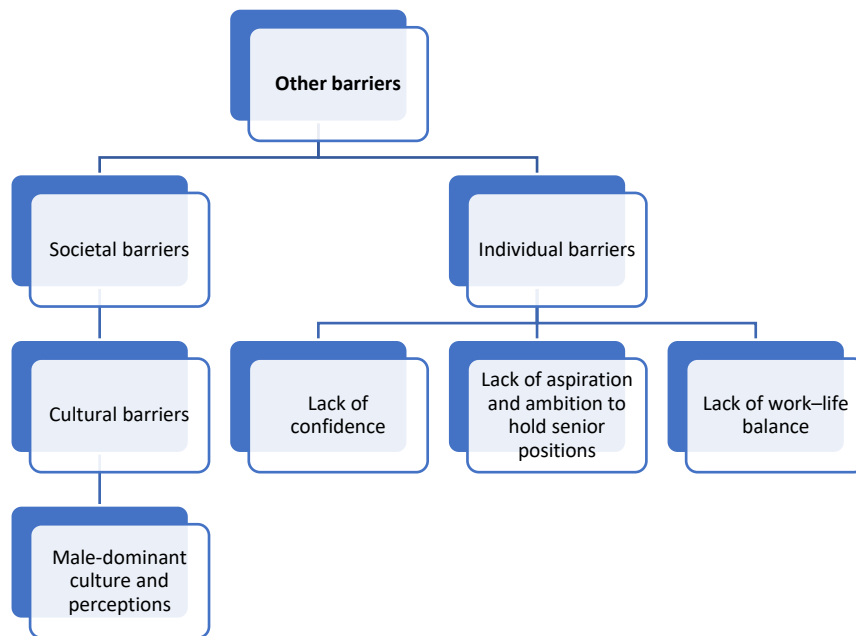


Figure 6.8 Other barriers that affect women’s career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

6.9 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality

The data revealed from this theme reflect the second part of the second research question, which examines the organisation’s role in providing equal opportunities to women and men in terms of the career practices offered and opportunities for senior managerial positions.

6.9.1 Gender difference in career management practices

Sr. managers 3-F.I and 4-F.I, both female, at the senior managerial level confirmed that equal opportunities are provided for women and men. However, Sr. Manager 3-F.I elaborated that taking up opportunities depends on the employee regardless of their gender. She added that, usually, women hold themselves back from these opportunities.

It depends on the person. The organisation gives you equal opportunities but who holds themselves back most of the time is the individual. For example, for women, the organisation will give equal opportunities for both but it's all because most of the time women hold themselves back with different excuses (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Yes, the opportunities are equal to all (Sr. Manager 4-F.I)

Participants from other occupational levels expressed various reasons for their inability to use all the career practices offered. As a result, although the career practices are provided equally, obstacles can restrict some employees from attending. For example, when Employee 3-F.I was asked about attending career management practices, she said:

Most of it. But whenever my calendar is free, I attend and join. Mainly I attend a lot of work meetings which make it hard to attend all of the career practices offered (Employee 3-F.I).

Employee 4-F.I stated there are times when she does not attend because of her lack of awareness about using the training portal or the bank's university and the PDP. She explained that HR had only recently elaborated on and trained employees in how to use and initiate the career practices, as previously there was no guidance.

Not always, because this is recently have been implemented. Before, there was no guidance or explanations on how to use them (Employee 4-F.I).

Employee 5-F.I expressed another view, where she confirmed her attendance to the career practices offered to her due to their benefits.

Yes, I do. Because I know it will be in my benefit. So I attend them (Employee 5-F.I).

Participants from HR confirmed that career management practices is based on the PDP and not based on gender, as, at the mid-managerial level, there is a good split between men and women.

They are mostly based on the PDP that is initiated by the individual and agreed and supported by the line manager. It's a process (HR 1-F.I).

Men's perspectives

Male senior managers also agreed that career opportunities are offered equally to all employees. Participants from other occupational levels indicated their total attendance at the career opportunities offered. Employee 2-M.I emphasised that cooperation between the employee and his or her line manager is needed to initiate the requests for attending career practices.

In sum, at the senior managerial level, female and male participants confirmed that equal opportunities are available to all employees in attending the career practices. However, the case is different at other occupational levels. Women at this level indicated that opportunities are equal, but participation could be restricted for various reasons, such as workload or lack of awareness about using the learning portal. Hence, the organisational role is limited in this aspect at this occupational level. In contrast, men at this level indicated their total attendance at the practices offered, and that the line manager support helps them in attending these developmental opportunities, where women could lack this support which affect the opportunities in attending the career practices.

6.9.2 Gender differences in taking senior managerial positions

Sr. Managers 3-F.I and 4-F.I shared the same view that opportunities given to men and women when opting for a senior managerial position are equal. However, Sr. Manager 4-F.I emphasised that all positions are internally advertised to all employees, and it depends totally on the individual to take these opportunities.

Well, I will say, if you don't opt for it, or if you don't invest in yourself from day one, it's a journey, and if there is a position, it will be on a public site, and you apply for it (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

At other occupational levels, participants were asked if they had applied for a higher position before and about the outcome of the application. All female participants stated they did not apply for a higher position.

No, I haven't, because I didn't see an opportunity that I want to be in or that fit me (Employee 3-F.I)

No, because there was no guidance or explanations on how to grab these opportunities (Employee 4-F.I)

From the HR perspective, HR 1-F.I confirmed that the bank provides equal opportunities for senior managerial positions without considering gender. Supporting women to reach senior positions is deemed to be necessary at group and local levels. Also, women's status at the bank has changed and improved.

It's based on who applies but the hiring process is very fair. It's not based on a man or woman. Now, if you look at the actual statistics, then yes, we do have more men than women at [...] positions, but if you compare it to our historical number, we had no women who are in senior managerial levels. So, there is an improvement there; there is a focus at a group level and at a local level to support

our female colleagues to move into more senior managerial levels, but if you look at the hiring process, it's very fair and transparent (HR 1-F.I).

In the same vein, the secondary data revealed that the bank recognises the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions. Hence, it has a clear gender diversity target to drive progress. In 2018, the bank set a target of achieving 30 per cent of women in leadership positions by 2020, and they achieved 30.3 per cent. The target was extended to achieve 35 per cent women in leadership positions by 2025. Figure 6.10 represent the progress of women in senior leadership positions globally during the period 2012–2020.

Share of women in senior leadership roles globally

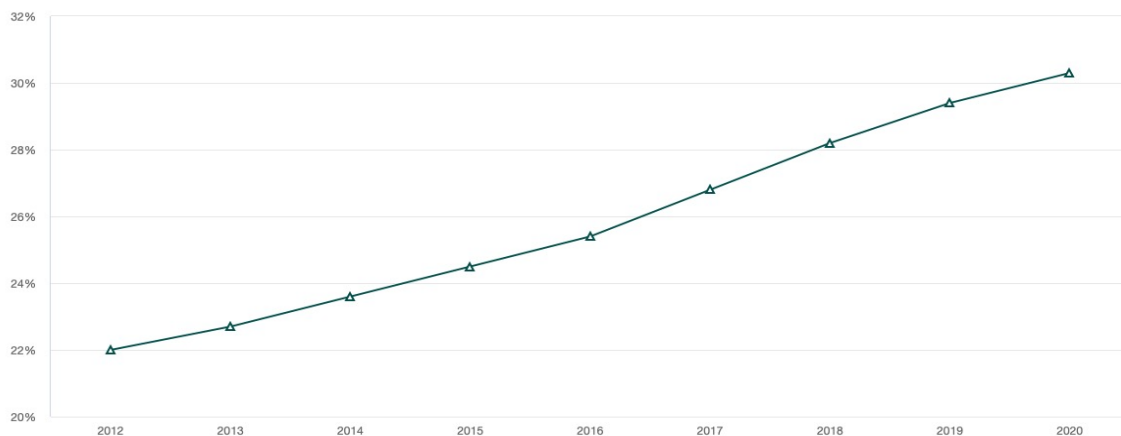


Figure 6.9 The increasing share of women in leadership positions (from the bank's website)

Men's perspectives

Male senior managers said that opportunities are equal, but women do not take these opportunities. Sr. Manager 1-M.I stated that men always opt for opportunities whether they are ready or not for that role, which is the opposite to women, who do not apply. On

many occasions, as elaborated on by Sr. Manager 1-M.I, women must be approached and convinced to apply for a senior position. From his experience in supporting women to reach higher positions, he said:

I appointed the first branch manager outside Muscat in the bank She was the best for the job. We appointed her but she insisted if she was appointed, she will resign and I had to tell her that she's the best for the position, and if you didn't take it then your manager will be someone that you're better than. Someone who won't be as good as you. So, 4 per cent of branch regional managers were appointed women. They didn't apply for the job; I had to convince them. So, their common reason is that I am not ready for it. For most of the senior appointments that I made, I hand-picked individuals and put them on the seat. Where men will come to you if they are not even two per cent ready for it (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

When male participants from other occupational levels were asked if they had applied for a higher position and the outcome of their application, Employee 1-M.I said that he applied and was successful. Employee 2-M.I also applied for a higher position but was not successful due to a lack of qualifications; the person chosen for the post was more qualified, more experienced, and had more knowledge of the role.

In sum, female senior managers confirmed that senior managerial positions are offered equally to men and women, whereas male senior managers noted that opportunities are equal, but women do not opt for these opportunities. Furthermore, at other occupational levels, female participants expressed the lack of suitable opportunities to apply for, and a lack of support and guidance. In contrast, men from other occupational levels indicated their success in applying for higher positions. Accordingly, it is repeatedly noted that women at other occupational levels face challenges and difficulties in their career advancement.

6.10 Organisational interventions and their impact on women's career progression

The bank's concern about the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions prompted their action to intervene and offer additional support to help overcome this issue. Therefore, this section addresses the third research question of this study by exploring the interventional strategies the bank is adopting and their effects on women's career progression, represented in Figure 6.10. The section elaborates on the interventions that have been provided to women from different levels that helped them progress. Also, the HR perspective on the interventional plans that support women's advancement is discussed. Finally, the section sheds light on males' career experiences regarding the interventions that helped them progress. However, it is worth mentioning that each employee's career journey is different as various factors contribute to their progression.

At senior managerial levels, Sr. Manager 3-F.I indicated that she was provided with additional support, in the form of career management practices, that was effective and helped her progress, such as being assigned other projects that prepared her for her next role.

Yes, they did. So, every role you do they add more project for you, so in addition to my responsibilities, I also manage 2 projects for the department. This is for the next level actually so e.g. I manage the project of liability which most important. I manage another project which is contract strategy of the department. So, these are like practices to prepare you for the next level (Sr. Manager 3-F.I).

Sr. Manager 4-F.I's experience was different, as she was provided with a programme called '360-Degree Self-Awareness'. As elaborated on by the participant, this programme offers awareness of how employees perceive the organisation and how the organisation perceives the employee. In addition, it provides 360-degree feedback reports from peers, stakeholders and all who are included or involved in the work outcome of the employee. This programme was efficient for the participant as it helped her approach and solved many challenges in her career.

Yes, I can't recall the programme name, but it was outside IntBank where I need to do 360 degree of the self-awareness and about the career and how I perceive the organisation and how the organisation perceives me, and 360 degree report from peers and stakeholders and it is been a very useful journey because during that it was 9 months journey, and it was outside the organisation, so it was like no fear, you can share whatever challenges or if there is any kind of advice you want, how you are approaching the management. It has been very effective and adding value kind of training. It was one of the programmes that I appreciate the bank for giving me the opportunity (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Moreover, Sr. Manager 4-F.I added that being a female in a senior position is considered inspirational to junior female managers. Being a role model helps push women in their aspirations and increases the possibility of reaching a high position.

But being a female, holding such positions, I am considered as inspirations to junior manager or any individual female sitting in the front line. And sometimes you hear them, I want to reach the position of you. That's like a role model to them (Sr. Manager 4.F.I).

Also, the bank conducts a forum called 'The Balance' that targets both male and female employees. This forum allows open communication between staff and senior managers. Employees, particularly women, share their concerns and challenges and there is collaboration between everyone to overcome the challenges. Attending these forums also provides an understanding to male managers and colleagues of the challenges that women face and how they can help and support them.

And the balance is bringing all employees, either men or women, and hear from them, the challenges and concerns, and how male employees can support female employees in the workplace. So, I am taking the best practice and downloaded it to my female staff (Sr. Manager 4-F.I).

Sr. Manager 4-F.I shared that the bank also conducts surveys from time to time, to receive feedback on satisfaction and highlight any concern or challenge.

Employee 3-F.I from other occupational levels shared her experience on the interventional plan offered by the bank, targeted to support and elevate employees to higher positions. As a result, she was selected to join a programme called ‘Future Leaders’, which is based on exposing employees to work in different departments to qualify them to hold a higher position. As pinpointed by the participant, this programme helped build confidence and knowledge in different areas of work that would assist her eventually to hold a higher position. Employee 4-F.I considered flexible hours as an intervention that helped her balance between her family responsibilities and work. These are the only interventions that were provided for Employees 3-F.I and 4-F.I.

The HR managers provided very insightful information on the interventions that the bank adopts. HR 1-F.I emphasised the significance of work–life balance to help women thrive and progress in their careers and take care of their families/children at the same time. However, the relationship of the employee with his or her line manager is significant to ensure successful work–life balance. HR also conducts sessions or forums with line managers to discuss work–life balance and understand circumstances that women could face. HR 1-F.I shared a personal experience of being a mother and a senior manager at the bank.

So let me give you a personal example: when I had both of my children, after I had each of them, I would leave work on time; I did not stay late because it was very important to me that I get a few hours in the day with my kids. So, after I put them in bed, I can log in and do some work, and there was no issue there, no one raised any comments that, oh, if I said I am sorry, I can't join a meeting starting at 5 pm, my line manager was very understanding. I also had these conversations with them, when I had my babies; I was open, like, listen, when I have my child, I don't intend to stay here until 5 or 6 pm. I will not be able to join, but I am happy to log

in later at night to cover up for whatever work needs to be done. So, the employee also needs to own that but again you need to have a line manager that supports you (HR 1-F.I).

However, if the line manager is not supportive, the employee should speak up to the HR department and raise her concerns. The speak-up culture is encouraged at the international bank for raising concerns. Accordingly, HR intervenes to solve the issues raised. HR believes that this mechanism takes complete control away from the line manager, particularly if there is a conflict between the line manager and the employee, which consequently affects the employee negatively.

If the line manager is not supportive, here the employee has to arise it. Even in the forums that we run, we do tell employees that you have to speak up, so speak up culture is very important at the bank. Thus, if you face issues you need to raise it to HR the only way we can support if you come and speak to us. So, I remember one of the cases where, even for volunteering for CS projects, and employee came to me and said oh my line manager didn't allow me to join, I have to withdraw my application, so and I spoke to him, because she spoke to me, so I could speak to him to understand what is the background what is the reason? And then he accepts it. But if someone didn't raise the issue, there is nothing we can do. So, people have to speak up, and we do intervene whenever needed (HR 1-F.I).

HR 1-F.I also explained another approach or intervention that they are applying at the bank: running forums on different subjects. These forums are based on virtual meetings because of COVID-19, which changed the work routine and standard procedures; however, they are led by senior managers and a specialist on the subject being discussed. Nevertheless, HR has been leading many forums on matters such as speak-up culture, performance and development, career planning, and work-life balance. Some of these forums are designed based on employees' concerns.

In support with above findings, the secondary data also indicated the provision of interventional strategies that are offered to women to support them in their career journey to achieve senior positions. The bank states the provision of the following programmes and initiatives:

- a. The Accelerating Female Leaders (AFL) programme focuses on increasing the visibility, networks and sponsorship of high-performing women at managerial levels, which consequently increases the number of sponsors and participants.
- b. The Accelerating into Leadership (AIL) programme offers group coaching and development for high-performing women at managerial levels, and it is expanding to include ethnic minority employees across genders.
- c. The talent pipeline is being diversified, as underrepresented groups are actively sponsored by members from the Group Executive Committee and members of their management teams.
- d. There is participation in external initiatives that are designed to support the development and advancement of leaders from underrepresented groups. These initiatives include the Mentoring Foundation's FTSE 100 cross-company mentoring programme and the 30% Club's cross-business mentoring programmes.
- e. IntBank indicates that speak-up culture is encouraged, as it makes employees feel safe to raise concerns and to be certain that the bank will take them seriously. This increases the loyalty and commitment of employees by making them feel heard and part of a family. There are many ways in which employees can speak up. First, they can communicate directly with their line managers, as managers can provide feedback themselves to the employees or can take their concerns to senior leaders. The bank also offers training materials to help managers encourage open conversations with their staff. Second, the bank has 'exchange' meetings to share ideas and offer feedback. These meetings are held without agendas to help people discuss their concerns and matters that are important to them. Third, the global employee networks allow like-minded employees around the organisation globally

to share their views and ideas with each other on different topics of interest. Fourth, working with leaders and business/functional teams across the bank provides valuable feedback and insights that help in adopting more inclusive working practices at the bank.

- f. In addition to informal communication channels offered by the bank for speaking up, it also for employees to raise concerns, because the bank recognises that relationships with line managers can be biased. Hence, employees can report their concerns to HR directly and discreetly, in addition to the availability of the global whistleblowing channel. This channel allows employees to raise concerns about actions and behaviours that are considered against the values of the bank, and that break the law or breach regulations or practices.
- g. The bank has a friendly, open working environment that focuses on the wellbeing of employees and work–life balance. For example, the bank supports flexible working, and it is planning to educate all managers on mental health issues, how to spot their signs, and how to guide employees towards the right help.

In sum, Figure 6.10 represents the interventional schemes that are applied, as found from primary and secondary data.

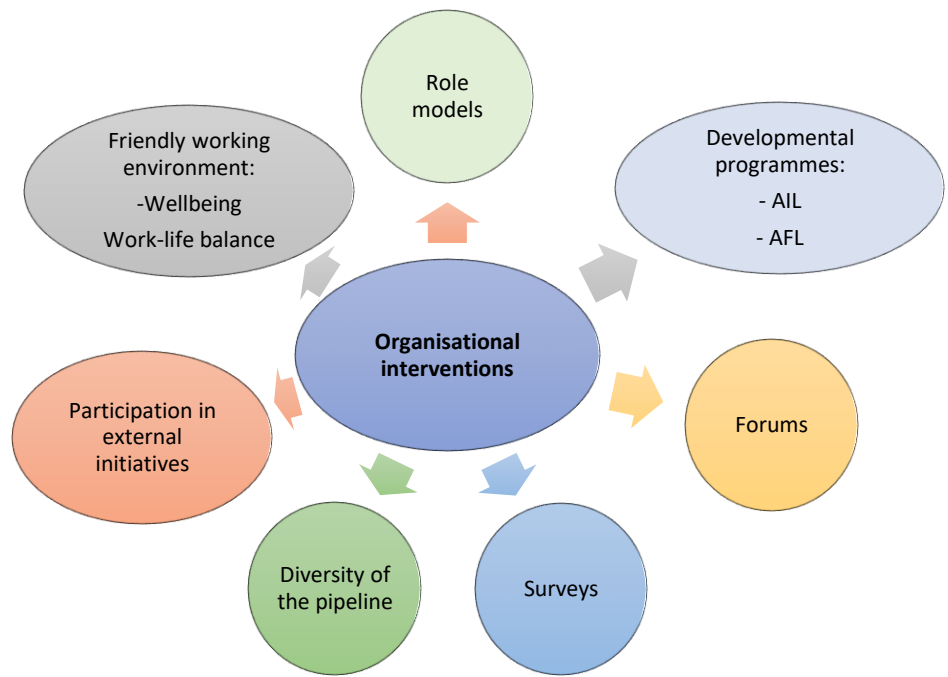


Figure 6.10 Organisational interventions to support women’s career progression

(Source: *The Researcher*)

The effectiveness of these interventions on women is not measured by HR. However, the bank aims to support all employees with whatever challenges they face, and particularly women, because they face more challenges than their male counterparts.

Men’s perspectives

At a senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 1-M.I emphasised interventional strategies that the bank applies to support women, such as having flexi-working hours, a global policy that works towards implementing work–life balance, particularly for women. However, Sr. Manager 1-M.I emphasised the importance of coordinating with the line manager and approving the arrangements. In addition, the bank also provides intervention at an individual level. For example, while sharing his career experience, Sr. Manager 2-M.I said that the bank provided him with a scholarship to pursue his postgraduate studies and empowerment as an interventional strategy to support him with his career progression.

Sr. Manager 1-M.I added that the bank ran a programme on careers, led by successful female leaders who are role models.

They are running a programme that focused on career. Selecting successful female leaders to talk to our upcoming talents, as role models, give them confidence, so they can see that this is possible (Sr. Manager 1-M.I).

Also, another programme exists about gender balance, targeted to all employees to influence the culture towards a more balanced approach to help women to progress in their career, as stated by Sr. Manager 2-M.I:

There is a programme – I don't recall its name – but it's about gender. They are trying to push that programme to change the mindset of people and the culture in the IntBank that we need a gender balance. Some people think they are stuck, like, preferring men, so they try to change this, which will be helping women a lot in progressing (Sr. Manager 2-M.I).

Most of these interventions are designed and delivered to support employees' career progression, particularly women, because they have different experiences to men at work and at home. However, some of these strategies, like 'The Balance', reveal the challenges women face and how males can help overcome them.

Reflecting on the experience of males from other occupational levels, Employee 1-M.I was selected to be in the 'Future Leaders' programme to help and prepare him to progress in his career. The bank also provided him with support to pursue his studies; first an HND and then postgraduate qualifications. However, these were based on individual-level support for progression, as discussed in some cases before.

In sum, as Figure 7.10 shows, the organisation adopts some interventions to support the progression of employees, particularly developmental programmes that are targeted at men and women. The bank also applies other approaches to provide awareness about issues affecting women and the support they need for their career advancement.

6.11 Chapter conclusion

This chapter yielded several significant findings. Firstly, it was found that the most significant contributor to women's career progression to senior managerial levels is sponsorship by top/senior male managers. Secondly, factors that influenced the career progression of employees were identified: a combination of constant factors, such as qualifications, experience, support from line managers, and lateral moves, as well as variable factors unique to each employee based on their individual decisions and circumstances.

Thirdly, the role of the line manager was identified as a crucial factor in the success or failure of an employee in all aspects of work, including career planning, practices, barriers, and interventions. However, it was also revealed that women lacked organisational support and guidance from their line managers compared to their male colleagues, indicating the perpetuation of gender inequality through discriminatory practices and bias. Women faced various organisational, societal and individual barriers that hindered their career progression and stemmed from cultural perceptions and stereotypes of gender roles. Fourthly, the bank offered interventions to support women's career progression, either on an individual basis or in group sessions and programs. However, the effectiveness of these interventions has not been systematically measured, and the desired outcomes have not been achieved.

Finally, the international nature of the bank presented two significant findings. Firstly, employees benefited from international programs and practices, such as having a mentor from another country who exposed them to international approaches and practices, and programs that adhere to international standards. Secondly, the bank's international character contributed significantly to recognising women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions and working towards increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions through various strategies and interventions.

The next chapter will present finding from the local bank and compare them to those of the international bank in terms of women's career progression.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS FROM THE LOCAL BANK

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from secondary and primary sources. The primary data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with 16 employees from the targeted occupational levels at the local bank. The researcher also took the opportunity to explore the career journey of one of the HR managers who was interviewed, as she is a female in a senior position, totalling 17 data transcripts from the local bank.

The chapter is divided into 12 sections. Section 7.2 presents the profile of the bank, where Section 7.3 highlights the demographic characteristics of the participants. Section 7.4 onwards examines the themes that emerged from the data, ending with a conclusion.

7.2 Profile of the bank

The data collected from secondary resources shows that LocBank was established in the 2000s and is headquartered in Muscat. It operates through wholesale banking, retail banking, government and project finance syndication, investments, treasury, and Islamic banking segments. It manages a network of more than 30 branches around the country with more than 500 employees.

7.3 Demographic data

This section covers the demographics of the male and female participants working in the local bank, which is summarised in Table 7.1. The table also includes the codes used for each participant. For example, Sr. Manager 1-M.L indicates that Senior manager 1 is a **Male** from the **Local** bank. Additionally, LocBank is the code used for the local bank. Furthermore, the participants consist of two men and two women at senior managerial level, in addition to one of the HR managers (HR 2-F.L) who was added as a third female senior manager (Sr. Manager 3-F.L) and distinguished to present the different views of

being a senior manager from being an HR manager. Moreover, six men and four women were interviewed from other occupational levels, along with two managers from HR. However, the table does not present any demographic data on HR managers as the objectives of the study do not require the career journey of HR managers. Hence, this information was not obtained.

Occupational levels	Participants' coding	Sex	Age group	Marital status (age of children)	Educational level
Senior level	Sr. Manager 1-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 3 children (7-14)	Master's Professional qualification
	Sr. Manager 2-M.L	Male	31 – 44	Married – 1 child (younger than 3 years)	Bachelor's in business admin Professional qualification
	*Sr. Manager 3-F.L	Female	31-44	Married (no children)	Postgraduate
	Sr. Manager 4-F.L	Female	31-44	Single	Master's
	Sr. Manager 5-F.L	Female	31-44	Married – 2 children (9 -13)	Master's Professional qualification
Other occupational levels	Employee 1-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 4 children (5-12)	MBA
	Employee 2-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 1 child (younger than 10 years)	Bachelor's
	Employee 3-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 3 children (6-15)	Diploma
	Employee 4-M.L	Male	31-44	-	Bachelor's
	Employee 5-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 1 child (younger than 18)	Bachelor's
	Employee 6-M.L	Male	31-44	Married – 3 children (6 months-6 years)	Bachelor's
	Employee 7-F.L	Female	31-44	Single	Diploma
	Employee 8-F.L	Female	31-44	Married – 4 children (2-15)	MBA

	Employee 9-F.L	Female	31–44	Married -2 children (5-8)	Bachelor's
	Employee 10-F.L	Female	31–44	Married -2 children (3-11)	Bachelor's Professional qualification
HR development managers	HR 1-M.L	Male	NA	NA	
	*HR 2-F.L	Female	NA	NA	

**Sr. Manager 3-F.L and HR 2-F.L is the same employee; interviewed being a senior manager and an HR manager*

Table 7.1: Participants' demographics and codes (Local bank)

All participants from senior and other occupational levels, men and women, were of the age group 31–44 years. Both male participants from senior level are married with children, the youngest being less than five years old. In contrast, one of the female participants at this level is married with no children and one was single, whereas the third participant is married with two children, the youngest of whom was less than 10 years old. In terms of educational level, one male senior manager holds a master's degree and the other one a bachelor's degree, but they both hold professional certifications in their field of work. On the other hand, the female senior managers hold postgraduate and master's qualifications, in addition to one of the participants also holding professional certificates due to the nature of her work.

The majority of other participants from other occupational levels are married with children; except for one male participant who did not declare his marital status, and one female participant who is single. However, the youngest child from the male participants is less than two years old while from the female participants, the youngest child is less than three years old. The educational level of all participants at this level varies from a Diploma to a bachelor's degree up to master's level. Of the participants, only one of them (Employee 10-F.L) also holds a professional certification.

In sum, all participants (men and women) from senior and other occupational levels were of the 31–44 years age group. The majority of participants at senior level hold a master's degree and the majority of males also hold professional certification. Male participants are married with children, whereas only one female participant at senior managerial level is married with children. At other occupational levels, qualifications vary among participants from Diploma up to master's level.

7.4 Factors affecting women's career progression

This theme is categorised to be part of answering the first research question because the data shed light on how organisations manage the career development of women and how they appoint senior managers. The theme that emerged represents the factors that affected the progression of female employees and helped them in their career journey. The data have been extracted from the career trajectories of women at senior and other occupational levels, in addition to the HR perspectives that explain the organisational approach in this subject. Moreover, the section will highlight the males' experiences as well and the factors that affected their career progression. Elaborating on the males' career journey will highlight if there are different approaches or factors that affect their progression. Although the unit of analysis for this study is organisations, individual factors were also identified. Hence, the findings include the individual factors as well since they are considered a critical part of employees' career progression

7.4.1 Individual factors/contributors

Senior level	Different levels	HR level
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/> Qualification – minimum Bachelor's degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Lateral moves	<input type="checkbox"/> Lateral moves (Seizing opportunities)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lateral moves (Seizing opportunities)
<input type="checkbox"/> Professional certification in related fields	<input type="checkbox"/> Banking experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Professional certification
<input type="checkbox"/> Banking experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Experience
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> Family support	<input type="checkbox"/> Personal traits and attitude
<input type="checkbox"/> Family support	<input type="checkbox"/> Speak-up	<input type="checkbox"/> Family support
		<input type="checkbox"/> Balance between work and family
		<input type="checkbox"/> Change of career path

Figure 7.1 Individual factors affecting women's career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

Figure 7.1 presents the individual factors that female employees from all levels and HR shared, and some similarities have been identified among the factors that affected their career progression. The next section elaborates on the individual factors stated above in more detail.

7.4.1.1 Qualifications

HR 2-F.L stated that qualifications are one of the factors that help women progress. She emphasised that the candidate should hold at least a bachelor's degree to enable her to enter the banking sector. This contrasts with times past, when it was easy for school diploma holders to enter the labour market. But now, the competition for employment is tough and challenging.

Shedding light on senior female managers' career trajectories to examine the impact of qualifications on the progression of their career, it was observed that Sr. Manager 4-F.L entered the banking sector holding a Higher National Diploma and progressed through promotions and moving from one position to another, as she said when asked about what factors helped her progress:

I think it's bits and pieces from here and there. It is your determination. It is in your qualification. I was holding an HND once I joined the bank. I was an officer, and then from officer I developed up to reaching a senior manager. I have progressed by promotions. And I have developed by moving from one position to another and I was successful (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

Sr. Manager 5-F.L entered the bank as a head, and she held a bachelor's degree in computing science as well as a master's degree.

However, the career trajectories of participants at this level vary and the impacts of different factors that could be interrelated are also different from one person to another depending on the circumstances that influenced their educational status. It was observed that participants entered with different levels of education, and yet progressed due to the impact of other factors.

At other occupational levels, which includes first and middle managers, most female participants entered the banking sector holding Diploma certificates, mainly in the administration or business fields, and completed their studies, either a bachelor's or a Master's, during their tenure. Nevertheless, Employee 8-F.L held a Diploma in Science (physics, chemistry and biology) and started at the bank in a very junior position, as cashier. She progressed up to the position of manager by applying for different posts and departments. Progressing further seemed challenging due to the specialisation of her qualification, as she explains:

I decided to complete my studies at that time, because it might open doors for me, as everywhere I apply, they tell me your qualification and experience doesn't match, so that's why I decided to do a Master's in Business Administration so my qualification will match with my experience (Employee 8-F.L).

Accordingly, women can obtain junior positions at the bank with a Diploma but possessing a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree could secure them a better position, which consequently helps in their career progression. It was also noticed that obtaining a postgraduate qualification is crucial for employees when applying for senior positions.

Men's perspectives

At senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 1-M.L joined the banking sector at a junior level, holding a diploma. He progressed up to a position of a manager through promotions, then obtained his master's afterwards. However, he was at a senior managerial level before joining the LocBank and maintained the same level on joining. Sr. Manager 2-M.L joined the bank with a Diploma as well, as he chose to work instead of completing his Bachelor's, due to family circumstances. However, he completed his studies by taking unpaid leave later, then he continued his career at the same bank. He moved to the Loc Bank as a trainer and progressed through promotions.

At other occupational levels, Employee 1-M.L entered the banking sector with a Diploma in engineering and held a junior position in the call centre. He progressed through lateral moves until he obtained the position of deputy manager, then he moved to the local bank. During his tenure, he pursued his MBA, which was self-funded. When Employee 1-M.L was asked if he was on the right path to be eligible for promotion, he responded:

Yes, I believe that my qualification puts me in the right place for a higher position (Employee 1-M.L).

Employee 2-M.L held a bachelor's degree on entering the banking sector. He progressed through lateral moves. Currently, he holds the position of branch manager at the local bank.

It is observed from the above findings that men's perspectives either at senior or other occupational levels are the same as the women's perspectives stated above.

7.4.1.2 Professional certificates

HR 2-F.L. From the HR, considered obtaining professional certificates in related fields at work to be more valuable than postgraduate degrees. She stated:

I personally believe in enhancing your professional expertise more than the MBAs. Like, if you are taking a route to become an HR professional in the banking sector or anywhere else, for me, CIPD [a professional certificate in learning and development] becomes very important, just as an example. So, ACCA, CFA, so these professional qualifications are a must to have to succeed in your careers (HR 2-F.L).

At senior managerial level, obtaining professional certificates helped Sr. Manager 5-F.L to progress and be promoted to senior levels.

I need to focus on what are the professional certifications that I need. So professional certifications helped me a lot in my career and at the same time having this critical thinking (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

Employee 10-F.L, from other occupational levels, entered the banking sector in a junior position, and she held a professional certificate. She did not highlight any impact of having a professional certificate on her career progression, but she did complete her bachelor's degree afterwards.

Holding professional certification in certain fields could be deemed critical for developing and progressing. However, it does not seem to be clear as a requirement or a factor that helps in career progression among participants, particularly those at first and middle managerial levels.

Men's perspectives

Senior managers emphasised the importance of having professional certificates for progressing in their career. For example, Sr. Manager 1-M.L indicated that obtaining a professional certificate helped him to be promoted to the next level.

So, when I reached to a position, I thought of obtaining a professional qualification, which really helped me out for the next level to be promoted (Sr. Manager 1-M.L).

Sr. Manager 2-M.L was of the same opinion, as having a professional qualification helped him to obtain a post at an international bank placed at a managerial level.

Then I was the team leader; the role was called the unit head of retail banking programme. But it was pretty much just a simple team lead role, and then I've done my CIPD. I have got the professional diploma and that helped me for my transition from a local bank to an international bank, where I worked as a manager (Sr. Manager 2-M.L).

Similarly, to women at other occupational levels, men at other occupational levels also did not indicate any awareness of the importance of having a professional qualification.

7.4.1.3 Banking experience

Participants from HR indicated that experience is one criterion that candidates should possess when they apply for a managerial position. Talking about the factors that helped female senior managers in progressing up to this level, HR 2-F.L said:

So, these are very critical positions, I mean very senior levels; so by their competencies and their experience they obtained these positions (HR 2-F.L).

However, HR 2-F.L did not refer to banking experience specifically, but overall experience that also relates to the competency of the candidate.

At senior levels, two of the three female senior managers who were interviewed (Sr. Managers 3-F.L and 4-F.L) started their career journeys in the banking sector in very junior positions. The lateral moves added to their experience and employability. Also, it helped them progress up to a senior level.

I have 20 years' experience and that entire experience is in the banking sector, in which I have worked in two leading banks in Oman. When I started, I had the position of a supervisor for approximately five to six years. I felt that the career progression is very slow, and I had to move, so I joined this bank (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

In contrast, as her first experience in the banking sector, Sr. Manager 5-F.L joined the local bank at a senior level because she had experience from different industries.

At senior and other occupational levels, most of the participants – both men and women – started their career journeys in the banking sector. They progressed through having banking experience from different banks, in various departments (i.e. lateral moves). Moving from one bank to another is considered an opportunity to progress both horizontally and vertically depending on the available opportunities. Usually, employees move for a higher position and salary, but there are also cases where employees move to gain experience and exposure at other banks, which accordingly adds to their market value and demand.

Men's perspectives

In contrast to the work experience of the female senior managers, the male senior managers who were interviewed both started their career journeys in the banking sector. Similar to women's career trajectories, both male participants share the career route of moving from one bank to another and gaining experience, working in different departments (i.e. lateral moves).

The same is found with participants from other occupational levels, as they started their career journeys in the banking sector, and one of the factors that helped them progress is the lateral moves that added value and experience to them.

Hence, men and women share similarities in their career trajectories in this aspect, as their career is focused on working in the banking sector.

7.4.1.4 Personal traits and attitudes

At the HR level, HR 1-M.L indicated the importance of having the skills, knowledge, competency, and dedication to occupy a senior position, where priority is given to the candidate who meets these requirements. Similarly, HR 2-F.L stated that competency is one of the criteria the candidate should possess to be selected for a senior role, in addition to other attributes such as confidence, flexibility, and keeping updated about the market. When asked about the important attributes or factors that help employees succeed to a senior level, she explained:

Actually, the characteristics itself, attributes, decides on the fate of that individual. So, from my personal experience, I feel first of all 'you can do' attitude, the confidence, your inter-personal skills, and the most important is to believe in yourself; that, yes, I can do that. And then you have to be agile, because the world is moving fast, so you have to be, as a personality, you should be agile to adapt to the new systems, practices and processes. You always have to keep yourself updated in what's happening within the market, and what's happening in the globe

actually. So, you have to be in the game by identifying that; this is on the personal attribute level, and then you also have to be very flexible, and you have to prioritise (HR 2-F.L).

Women at senior levels shared their experiences on the personal traits and attitudes that helped them in progressing to senior levels. Some of these criteria, as shared by Sr. Manager 3-F.L, are being passionate about your work, putting in extra effort, taking additional responsibilities, self-initiative, and self-learning. Sr. Manager 4-F.L added that determination and acting like a leader helped her to reach to the position she is in now. Sr. Manager 5-F.L said that it is very important to have leadership skills to be able to hold a senior position.

At other occupational levels, many opinions were shared among participants. For example, Employee 9-F.L believes that being knowledgeable, focusing on self-development, being independent, and being firm in making decisions would help in succeeding and reaching a senior position. Employee 9-F.L added that self-motivation is also important for progression:

I think you should be self-motivated. You should initiate the move for you to get developed and accordingly progress in your career (Employee 9-F.L).

Hence, employees identified different traits and attitudes based on their work experience that helped them in their career development, albeit at their occupational level.

Men's perspectives

At senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 1-M.L stated that taking additional responsibilities and ownership helped him progress in his career.

The more responsibility you take for yourself and ownership, the faster you grow in the organisation (Sr. Manager 1-M.L).

He added that knowledge, the aspiration to hold a senior position and putting in extra time helped him in his career development, up to his current position, whereas Sr. Manager 2-M.L said that his English language skills played a major part in his progression. He also highlighted that working long hours helped him to be noticed by other managers and opened up opportunities for him. However, organisational consideration of these factors in the career progression of employees raise concerns on equality issues reflected on work-life balance measures. Also, the proficiency in English language does not reflect the competency of the individual, but probably is viewed as a good communication skill. In addition, the long working hours could be a discriminatory factor, as not all employees were able to work out of hours due to other commitments including mainly family.

Furthermore, Employee 2-M.L, from other occupational levels, believes that the employee should be competitive, take on more responsibilities, and have initiative to be taken into consideration for higher positions by managers.

However, different views and opinions about what helped them progress in their careers were shared by men and women according to their experiences. Some similar criteria that were shared are being knowledgeable, taking on additional responsibilities, and having initiative, in addition to the other criteria discussed above.

7.4.1.5 Family support

Family support was among the factors that were highlighted as important for career progression by participants at all targeted levels. For example, from the HR perspective, HR 2-F.L indicated that women require the support of their family to be successful in their career.

And then the support, being a lady, if you don't have the support of your family, your husband, your parents, your children, then it becomes very challenging (HR 2-F.L).

At senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 3-F.L stated that the support of her husband and his understanding helped her in her career growth. Similarly, Employees 12-F.L and 13-F.L from other occupational levels emphasised that family support had helped them to avoid the conflict that would otherwise occur between work and family responsibilities.

Men's perspectives

In contrast, males at all targeted occupational levels did not highlight any conflict between family and work, and they did not report that they need family support to be successful in work. This relates to the cultural perceptions of the role of the wife in taking care of domestic/family responsibilities.

Accordingly, this is considered a difference between men and women in their requirements to succeed and progress, as women at all levels interviewed emphasised the importance of having a supportive family for their career progression.

7.4.1.6 Lateral moves (Seizing opportunities)

The HR managers and participants from other occupational levels shared the same view on the importance of seizing available opportunities. HR 1-M.L from HR stated:

The competition is open for everyone based on the knowledge, experience, and qualification. It's like, who takes these opportunities (HR 1-M.L).

Sr. Manager 4-F.L, at senior managerial level, developed and progressed to senior level by taking opportunities to move between different positions (i.e. lateral moves).

And I have developed; I took a position from one position to another, and I was successful (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

Employee 9-F.L, from other occupational levels, indicated that for employees to be successful in their career, they should look for opportunities and grab them whenever possible.

And you should, as a person, go after opportunities and look for them even through the HR. At the bank, if you don't initiate and start looking for opportunities yourself to develop yourself, you will remain where you are, at the same place (Employee 9-F.L).

As was clearly mentioned by the HR managers and women from other occupational levels, seizing opportunities is an important factor to succeed and progress. However, women at senior level did not highlight the same but, in discussing their career trajectories, it was obvious that lateral moves helped them progress in their careers.

Men's perspectives

Similar to senior women's career experiences, men at the same level have taken up job opportunities from different banks and from one position to another, which helped them succeed and progress up to their current level. Also, men at other occupational levels commented that taking other work opportunities helps employees to progress.

After four years, I decided it's time to progress, so I got an opportunity to get another job in another bank, in [...] bank, in a different field (Employee 2-M.L).

Accordingly, lateral moves are considered as an important factor that helped employees, both men and women at all levels, to progress at the banking sector.

7.4.1.7 Other individual factors

The HR managers also spotted other individual factors that they consider to be crucial. For example, HR 2-F.L indicated that employees, specifically women, should balance their work and family responsibilities to be able to succeed and progress, as some women prioritise their family, which affects their commitment to their work.

There are actually priorities, where the ladies usually have their own priorities when it comes to the children, family, husband, the work–life balance. So, the commitment level sometimes becomes low from the ladies (HR 2-F.L).

Another important factor that was highlighted by HR that helped employees to progress in their career is the change of career path.

We had many examples for those people who applied for vacancies, and they change their even career path to another one, which give them more career progression (HR 1-M.L).

The career trajectory of Sr. Manager 5-F.L demonstrates how the change in her career pathway helped her progress up to a senior managerial level. She started her career as an assistant lecturer, then changed her pathway to work in an audit department. Hence, she changed her career from being a lecturer in the education sector to being an auditor in the insurance sector, which opened an opportunity for her to join the banking sector at a senior level.

Furthermore, at other occupational level, Employee 9-F.L considered that speaking-up is important to obtain the organisation's support for career progression.

So, whenever I was applying, they wanted some experience in the same field, until one day I was called by the HR, because I was making a noise to be transferred to another department (Employee 9-F.L).

Likewise, it was noted that male participants from the same occupational level are progressing through self-efforts, and they benefit from the career practices because they initiate and speak-up about their developmental requirements; accordingly, they were supported.

In sum, the individual factors discussed above are considered to be important for employees' career success and progression. Men and women share similar views on most

individual factors, listed above, except on family support that requires a balance between work and family responsibilities, which are proposed to be crucial factors specifically for female employees to progress in their careers.

7.4.2 Organisational factors/approach

Senior level	Different levels	HR level
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> Line manager support	<input type="checkbox"/> Line manager support	<input type="checkbox"/> Announcements
<input type="checkbox"/> Promotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Promotions	<input type="checkbox"/> Succession planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Announcements (Internal and External)	<input type="checkbox"/> Announcements (Internal and External)	<input type="checkbox"/> Talent pools
<input type="checkbox"/> Networking	<input type="checkbox"/> Networking	<input type="checkbox"/> Competition
	<input type="checkbox"/> Expansion of department	

Figure 7.2 Organisational factors affecting women's career progression

Different organisational factors have been identified by women at senior and different levels as having contributed to their career success and progression, in addition to the HR perspective on the organisational approach to appointing senior managers. This section sheds light on these factors, summarised in Figure 7.2.

7.4.2.1 Line manager support

The critical role played by line managers in supporting and providing developmental opportunities for their employees was emphasised by senior managers and other employees from other occupational levels. For example, at senior level, Sr. Manager 3-F.L indicated that she had the support of her line manager, as she described him as her 'mentor', who assisted her to be where she is now. Sr. Manager 4-F.L stated that among

the factors that help in career progression is maintaining a good relationship with the line manager. In the same vein, Sr. Manager 5-F.L linked career progression to maintaining a good relationship with the line manager:

There are many things that help as well, and all of them are linked with each other. For example, if you don't have the support of your line manager, you will not be able to have any developmental opportunities whatsoever. So, employees should keep a good relationship with their managers (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

Women at other occupational levels were of same opinion as senior managers. They outlined the importance of having the support of line managers, in addition to maintaining a good relationship with line managers, to succeed and progress.

Most importantly are the direct managers/the heads; you should have a communication channel with them to gain their support for development. The relationship is very important. The line manager is the one who recommends you to the HR and the managers above him (Employee 7-F.L).

The line managers also play a crucial role in providing recommendations for their employees to be promoted either financially or position-wise, as in the case of Employee 10-F.L:

In the bank, I moved to senior relationship manager by a promotion that was recommended from my manager (Employee 10-F.L).

Hence, at both levels, women share views on the importance of the support provided by the line manager in women's career progression.

Men's perspectives

Men at senior managerial level also confirmed that line managers have a key role in their career development and progression. Sr. Manager 1-M.L indicated that his line manager

groomed him for the next level, and that he was supported by his direct managers throughout his career. Similarly, at other occupational levels, Employee 1-M.L stated that the recommendation of the line manager is an important factor in helping employees enter higher positions. Also, he implied that individuals have a responsibility to take the initiative and learn from the line manager and follow his or her path, to be going in the right direction for a higher position. Employee 2-M.L added that direct communication with the line manager on weekly basis is an important factor for career progression.

In sum, men and women at senior and other occupational levels share similar views on the important role played by line managers in their employees' career development and progression.

7.4.2.2 Promotions

Promotion is another organisational factor identified by some participants that helped them progress in their careers.

When I joined the bank, I was an officer. And then from officer I developed to a senior manager, and I progressed by promotions (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

I have been in the bank since November 2013 as a relationship manager, and then got promoted to senior relationship manager (Employee 10-F.L).

Employee 10-F.L revealed that promotions depend on the recommendation of the line manager. Hence, the relationship between the employee and the line manager is one of the main factors that has weight in the career progression of employees.

And there should be a proper system for promotions, as it should not go entirely on the recommendation of the line manager. There should be a process, because we have employees who have promotional opportunities every year and others are still on the same grade, same job title, same salary from the day they joined, although they are excellent in their jobs (Employee 10-F.L).

However, it is observed that although promotion is indicated as an organisational factor that helps in the career progression of some employees, it could not be generalised to all women as other factors could interfere, such as the relationship with and support of the line manager.

Men's perspectives

At senior level, the progression of Sr. Manager 1-M.L was based mainly on promotions.

I joined at a very low level, as a very junior level in my career. Gradually, I was promoted to supervisor, junior officer, officer, senior officer, and manager in a span of seven years. Then I have been promoted to a senior managerial level (Sr. Manager 1-M.L).

At other occupational levels, Employee 1-M.L commented that promotion is one of the methods used to enter a senior position. Also, Employee 6-M.L stated that he progressed to the next higher post through promotion which is based on his performance. Men and women share similar views with regards to the promotion factor and its impact on their career progression.

7.4.2.3 Announcements (Internal and External)

Internal announcement is an organisational approach for appointing for vacant positions including senior positions, where employees can apply for these positions to progress either horizontally or vertically. HR emphasised that internal announcements are part of the recruitment process at the bank and are applied to provide opportunities for internal employees to occupy senior positions.

And then how to plan their growth, whether it is horizontally or vertically, but as of now we are considering such opportunities as part of recruitment process. So, we normally post these positions internally. So, there will be a competition. And then there will be assessment through interviews and sometimes we have

psychometric assessment as well, too, to benchmark the ideal profile against the profile of the candidate (HR 1-M.L).

We have a very scientific way to identify the people who could occupy a senior position internally in the bank, so it's called internal job posting (HR 2-F.L).

Sr. Manager 4-F.L, from the senior level, indicated that, in addition to the impact of promotions on her career progression, she also applied for positions through internal announcements, and she went through interviews in which she was successful, hence progressing up to a senior level.

At other occupational levels, HR advised Employee 10-F.L to apply for a higher position that was announced internally, to progress further.

And I was advised by someone from HR that if you want to develop you have to apply for a higher position, not same position level in another department. But if you apply for a higher position, it will be different scenario: you will be on probation for three months, and then if you prove yourself, you can get it, and I got it (Employee 10-F.L).

Employee 9-F.L progressed through lateral moves, moving from one department to another by applying through internal announcements.

It was through the internal job advertisement. When I feel I learned enough from this department, then I go to the next step for something new (Employee 9-F.L).

Hence, women at senior and other occupational levels progress in their career by moving from one department to another, whenever an opportunity arises through internal announcement. The move could be horizontal or vertical, and both help in the career progression of employees.

Men's perspectives

At senior level, participants progressed in their careers due to factors other than internal announcements, as they joined the bank at a senior level. On the other hand, at other occupational levels, when Employee 1-M.L was asked how candidates enter a higher position, he indicated that positions are announced and accordingly the competition will be open to all:

There is competition over an announced position, plus you need to be ready for any coming challenges (Employee 1-M.L).

In addition to the internal announcement, employees in the banking sector, in general, also progress through the external announcements. It has been noted through the career journeys of participants that the lateral move is an essential practice for progression, either internally or externally. For instance, Employee 3-M.L worked in two banks where he progressed in his career through the lateral moves.

I worked in two banks where I moved from one bank to another because I found a better opportunity for me, so I moved (Employee 3-M.L).

In sum, focusing on the organisational factors, internal announcement is considered as an important factor used by the bank to provide internal opportunities for employees to develop and progress, and its success was demonstrated through the internal moves of employees, both male and female, horizontally and vertically.

7.4.2.4 Networking

Networking plays a role in the career development of some employees. For example, Sr. Manager 4-F.L, from the senior level, came to know about a vacancy through networking, where she applied and was selected accordingly. She added that networking is an important factor regardless of the skills and competency of the candidate.

It's like part of networking. It is really an essential factor; and no matter how skilled you are, no matter how talented you are, I do believe that you have to know how to play it right (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

Employee 7-F.L, from other occupational levels, decided on a horizontal move to the local bank, where she knew about the vacancy through networking, which was the same for Sr. Manager 4-F.L, from the senior level.

I moved to the LocBank with the same job title in the treasury department. So, one of my colleagues who is working in the bank asked me if I am interested to move as there was a vacancy, so I thought of applying and competing for the job and gaining the experience as well, as I wasn't the only one who applied. So, I went through the interview, and I was successful and selected for the job (Employee 7-F.L).

Hence, women at both levels share similar views on how networking can be helpful in career progression.

Men's perspectives

Sr. Manager 2-M.L commented that the individual should maintain a personal image or a brand within the organisation, where everyone knows who this person is, which would consequently assist in his or her career progression.

It's a form of networking: people know you; people recognise you, people remember you when it's time to promote someone when there's a vacancy (Sr. Manager 2-M.L).

Therefore, networking, as discussed above from different experiences of men and women at senior and other occupational levels, is considered an important factor in developing and progressing at the bank.

7.4.2.5 Other organisational factors

Other factors have also been proposed by HR as important in helping employees' career development and progression. For example, succession planning is a practice used for senior managers' placement. Also, the bank has established a talent pool, which helps talented employees to develop further and hold senior and critical positions, in addition to the competency factor that the bank bases most decisions about senior appointments on (Employees 12-M.L and 13-F.L).

Women from different levels also identified other factors that helped them in their career progression. One of the factors is the expansion of the department, which was the case with Employee 10-F.L.

And HR told me to apply for it, so I did, but at the beginning they kept me on the same level, operation manager, then after six months I got the senior position, then after two years, they gave me unit head operations. Because this department had been expanding so I got these opportunities (Employee 10-F.L).

Male participants did not share any other organisational factors that assisted them in their career progression.

In sum, the organisational factors listed above are considered to be important for employees' career success and progression. Men and women shared similar views on the impact of these factors on their career progression. Yet, it is important to highlight that those different factors could be interrelated in some individual cases, where more than one factor affected career progression. To elaborate more, networking could be a major factor for an individual's career progression, whereas promotion could be the main factor for another employee, or it could be a combination of different factors; for example, the

support and recommendation of the line manager could grant the employee opportunities to be promoted and hold higher positions.

7.5 Organisational career planning

This section elaborates the second theme that emerged from the data analysis that answers the first research question: how can organisations manage the career development of female employees through career planning and practices allowing them to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels? Therefore, this section presents organisational career planning, and career practices are explained separately in Section 7.6.

Accordingly, the researcher asked participants different questions with the aim of investigating the organisational approach as per employees' occupational level, as shown in Figure 7.3.

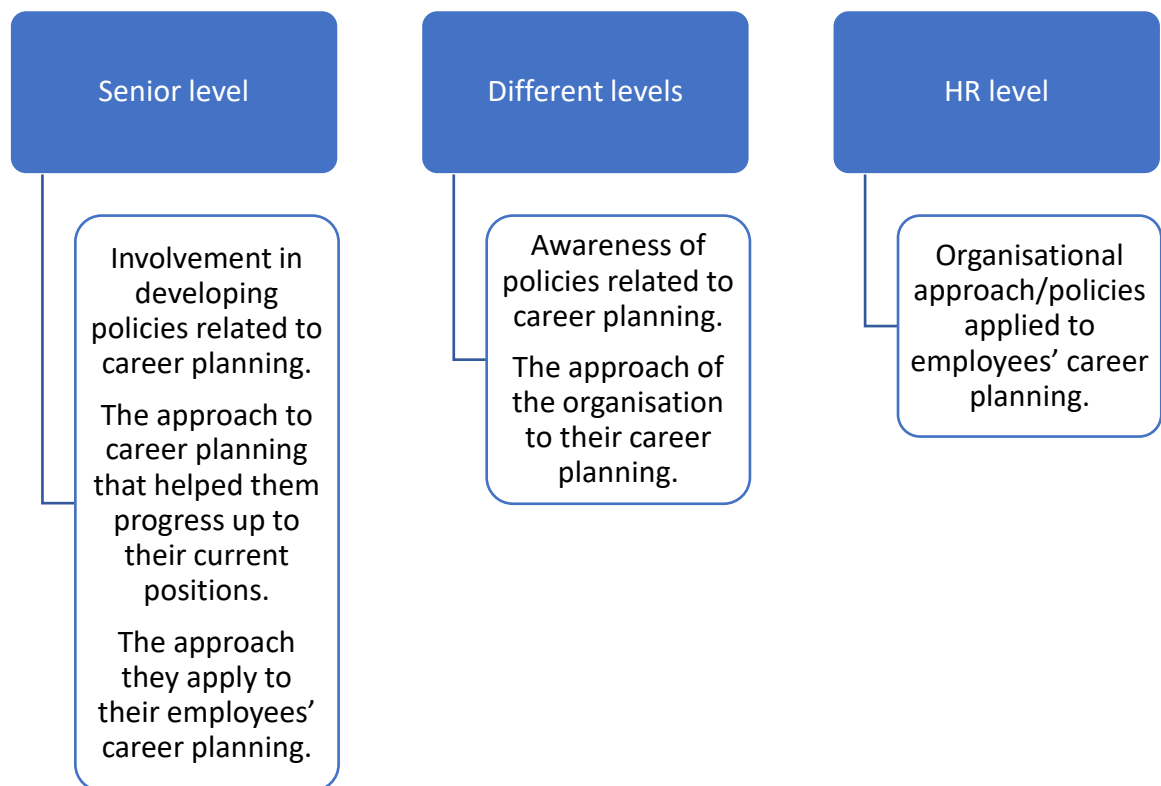


Figure 7.3 Investigation of career planning at different levels (*Source: The Researcher*)

Two of the three female senior managers have been involved in the development process for policies related to employees' career planning and development (i.e. Sr. Manager 3-F.L and 5-F.L). However, their involvement is based on the nature of their job role. Hence, it is part of their duties to establish and review the policies. On the other hand, Sr. Manager 4-F.L indicated that her role and probably the role of other senior managers is to identify talented employees and refer the matter to the HR department.

Our role is to highlight the staff and their capabilities and then these are addressed to a certain division within the HR, and they look into this (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

In addition, when Sr. Manager 5-F.L was asked about the method implemented for employees' career planning in the department, she stated that they analyse critical areas and discuss them with the team. Accordingly, and as per their preferences, a plan is forwarded to HR that could include recommendations for obtaining professional certificates, on-the-job training, or other types of training.

We are analysing the critical areas and the subject matters that are required, and then we discuss with the team what are their preferences, which area they want to get more expertise about. So, based on that, we discuss with the HR department on our requirements that we need training on this area, or we need professional certification for this staff and the bank is supporting us in this thing through their, like they are, like, you can refund. Or you can claim any money or any cost you paid for your professional certification, or if you require any education in that part (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

Shedding light on the organisational approach to senior managers' career planning that helped them progress up to their current position, all female Sr. Managers (3-F.L, 4-F.L and 5-F.L) stated that they progressed through self-effort. Sr. Manager 5-F.L added that

the career path is clear for the next level, but the individual should take the initiative for their progression.

So, no plans, but to be honest, here, I can see that there is, like, a clear career path where you can proceed. It's only, like, personal initiative; you have to do it by yourself (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

Figure 7.4 summarises the career planning approach at the senior level.



Figure 7.4 Career planning at senior level (*Source: The Researcher*)

At other occupational levels, as Figure 7.4 shows, the researcher was investigating two main points:

1. Awareness of the employees about the policies related to career planning
2. Organisational approach to employees' career planning.

Highlighting the first point, the majority of Employees (7-F.L, 8-F.L and 10-F.L) indicated their awareness of the related HR policies. Employee 7-F.L highlighted that those policies and procedures are communicated by HR to all employees through e-mails.

Employee 10-F.L added that HR shares their policies and plans by assigning a member from each department as an ambassador to convey all updates to the department.

Yes, I do, because in the last two years, HR nominated some staff from each department, like ambassadors, so every month we meet, and they share with us the HR policies and their plans and strategies for development. So, I am among this team; that's why I know (Employee 10-F.L).

On the second point, most Employees (8-F.L, 9-F.L and 10-F.L) stated that they were not approached by anyone for their career planning.

No one asked me about my career and where I want to go next. You have to do it yourself (Employee 9-F.L).

However, as Figure 7.5 shows, employees seem to be aware of policies related to career planning, but the researcher doubts this fact. Reflecting on the data collected from different participants, it is perceived that career planning is not established systematically at the bank yet. Employees' responses probably refer to the overall HR policies.

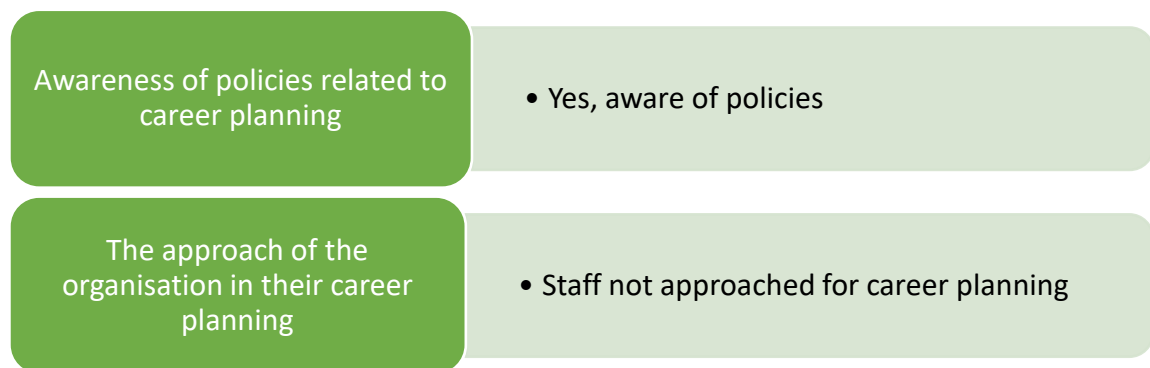


Figure 7.5 Career planning at other occupational levels (*Source: The Researcher*)

The HR perspectives, presented in Figure 7.6, indicate the policies and approaches followed by HR with regards to employees' career planning.

POLICIES	• APPROACH OF THE BANK
Selection of human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the recruitment policy • Internal and external postings • Experience, skills and qualifications • Assessments
Employees' development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance management system • Training needs analysis • Staff survey on career aspirations and expectations
Talent management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent acquisition policy • Succession planning
Management of career plateau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of lateral moves
Family responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly environment

Figure 7.6 HR perspective on organisational approach for employees' career planning
(Source: *The Researcher*)

HR 1-M.L implied that the selection of human resources is set by the recruitment policy, which depends on selecting employees according to their skills, experience, and qualifications. HR 1-M.L and HR 2-F.L stated that, for senior positions, the post is first announced internally, as priority is given to internal employees.

Priority is given internally. In case we have a scarcity, and the expertise are not available within the organisation, then we go external (HR 2-F.L).

HR 1-M.L elaborated on other methods that the bank applies for employees' development, such as a performance management system and training needs analysis. HR 2-F.L added that the bank conducts staff surveys on their career aspirations and expectations, to help employees identify their path and for the bank to help them achieve it. She added that the bank also uses PDPs for employees' career development.

Furthermore, as part of talent management, HR 1-M.L stated that the bank possesses a talent acquisition policy with which talented employees are identified and developed further. He added that the bank carries out succession planning for critical roles in the bank. In the same vein, HR 2-F.L commented that the bank identifies talented employees by assessing them, starting at leadership level, as developmental opportunities cannot be provided to all employees of the bank. However, the assessments consist of assessing behavioural and technical competencies, which assists in identifying learning gaps, and hence learning opportunities can be provided accordingly.

We take care of the high talent and to retain them. We do the assessments for the employees because career development cannot be done for the entire workforce. So here with us we prioritise. That means start at the top leadership, then we go down (HR 2-F.L).

With regards to family responsiveness, HR 2-F.L stated that the bank provides a very friendly environment, where they emphasise the importance of building a rapport with employees and their families.

Men's perspectives

In contrast to women's views, male senior level have not been involved in the development process of career planning policies. However, Sr. Manager 2-M.L has been involved in sharing knowledge from his previous experience on some policy matters. Nevertheless, it can be proposed that the nature of his job, as he works in the learning and development division, plays a role in contributing to the development of policies.

Second, outlining the organisational approach to his career planning, Sr. Manager 1-M.L. stated that it was a blended approach, where part of it was self-effort and part was organisational support in achieving his goals.

It's a blend of both. You have to put efforts to reach your goals, and if you're serious the bank will support you (Sr. Manager 1- M.L).

The case was different with Sr. Manager 2-M.L, whose progression was based fully on self-effort.

No, it was all self-efforts. I planned my own career, and I took all steps required to be here at this level (Sr. Manager 2-M.L)

Third, the role of senior managers in their employees' career planning, as discussed by Sr. Manager 1-M.L, is to identify talented employees and refer the matter to HR, whereas Sr. Manager 2-M.L implied that HR take a major role in identifying potential candidates and preparing them for higher roles.

At other occupational levels, some males indicated their awareness of the career planning policies of the bank, and some did not. With reference to the approach of the organisation to their career planning, different opinions were expressed by participants, but the majority have not been approached for their career planning. For example, Employee 1-M.L stated that he was approached by HR and his line manager for his career planning (this was four to five years ago, but no progress was made due to a lack of line manager support).

My previous line manager did not allow me to attend meetings with him to learn or to shadow him. So, lack of line manager support, as if he wanted to succeed, he should also help his employees to succeed, as a leader (Employee 1-M.L).

Employees 2-M.L, 3-M.L, 4-M.L, 5-M.L, and 6-M.L were not approached by anyone for their career planning.

Hence, at senior level, female and male employees shared similar opinions on the three aspects investigated: (1) involvement in developing policies related to career planning, (2) the approach to their career planning and progression, and (3) the approach applied to their employees' career planning.

At other occupational levels, male and female employees also shared similar views on their awareness of the bank's career planning policies. With regards to the organisational approach, female employees indicated that they were not approached by anyone. The same was indicated by male employees, except Employee 1-M.L, who stated that he was approached but no improvements were observed in his career status.

Yes with Head of HR and also the line manager is involved. But it has been a while, say for 3-4 years now with no follow up (Employee 1-M.L).

Hence, this implies that the bank lacks a structured process of career planning for employees.

7.6 Organisational career practices

This section demonstrates the last theme to emerge from the data analysis that targeted the first research question on how women's careers are developed. The participants were asked about career practices offered and how they helped them progress in terms of development, information and relations.

The data analysis revealed that women at senior managerial levels have been offered some career practices, such as assessment centres, performance appraisal, job posting, job enrichment, job rotation, job transfer, networking, succession planning, training and mentoring, in addition to other practices the bank offers, such as support to obtain professional and educational certificates (i.e. financial reimbursement).

However, Sr. Manager 3-F.L stated that her progression is mainly based on self-development.

Mostly I am a self-developed person. I have not gone through many training programmes from the organisation, no; I have personally invested in myself a lot in terms of reading, using Google (Sr. Manager 3-F.L).

Hence, her success and progression were not based on the career practices offered by the organisation; she believes that learning opportunities are available and free, if the individual is willing to learn and is passionate about their work.

In addition to the career practices mentioned above, Sr. Manager 4-F.L commented that the bank uses PDPs and she was interviewed as part of hers, but no outcomes from the interview were observed.

We were involved in the PDP in the meetings; we were interviewed, but nothing has been implemented, unfortunately (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

Different views were shared on the impact of these career practices on senior managers' career progression. Sr. Manager 3-F.L's success and progression were based on self-effort and self- investment in developmental aspects.

Self- efforts and development. I Did not rely on the organisation for my progression! (Sr. Manager 3-F.L)

Whereas Sr. Manager 4-F.L highlighted that these career practices are opportunities for career development, as they add to the individual's knowledge and strengthen their networking with others. Sr. Manager 4-F.L emphasised that networking itself is an essential factor for progression, but in terms of who the individual knows, regardless of how competent the individual is.

Politics. It's like part of networking. So, politics is really an essential factor; and no matter how skilled you are, no matter how talented you are, I do believe that you have to know how to play it right (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

Also, some career practices, such as job rotation and transfer, are applied not for the purpose of career development, but as disciplinary measures, which can marginalise a person, and hence maintain the status quo with no development, as outlined by Sr. Manager 5-F.L:

The criteria behind the rotation and job transfer, it's not always about staff development; sometimes it's kind of maybe just to put him aside, sometimes maybe just for the sake of bringing someone expert in that area (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

She also stated that networking is conducted for the purpose of socialising but is not part of career practices that aim to develop employees.

On the other hand, Sr. Manager 5-F.L praised the performance appraisal practice and its impact on her career development, as the discussion with her line manager provides a clear picture on the gaps in her knowledge and areas that need to be improved. Also, the impact of training was positive on her career development in terms of updating and gaining knowledge and networking and knowing people that would assist in her career development.

Also, another thing is the trainings. The trainings that I attended also helped me in improving my career; like, you get yourself updated, of course, you will add value to the organisation, and you will enhance even your performance. You will also get yourself known, like, people will know you, will know that you are expert in this area, or you are the right person to talk to in case if they need any question or they need any consultation, so those are, like, helped me a lot also (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

At other occupational levels, participants shared some career practices that have been offered to them, such as lateral moves, training, job enrichment, job transfer, job rotation, developmental assignments, performance appraisal, and job posting in addition to coaching and supporting/sponsoring them in educational studies. Employee 8-F.L

elaborated on a training programme called ارتقاء (i.e. Elevation, translated to English). This programme is offered to all employees in batches, and its content varies according to the occupational level of the employee.

Every year, we attend training, we have a programme called 'ertiqā' (ارتقاء) it's a blended learning. It's like an agreement of the bank with Harvard university. You learn in different ways, most of it is online, and everywhere you go they give you a session and the exam related in the training centre. so, every occupational level they have different program, different programmes designed for different levels (Employee 8-F.L).

On the impact of the career practices offered for employees' career development and progression, all participants were of the same opinion; that these practices have added knowledge and developed their networking channels, in addition to the confidence they gained from attending career practices such as training, which consequently could create opportunities for progression.

I gained a lot of networking with different departments. And it expanded my relations with many people from departments. And added a lot to my knowledge and skills. But as far as promotions, there is nothing yet (Employee 8-F.L).

This has enhanced a lot of confidence in my own personality and developed my communication skills and networking (Employee 9-F.L).

Employee 7-F.L commented that career development is owned by the individual, in terms of how to plan for their career and how to execute the plan. Also, she proposed that networking is an individual effort based around how the individual can market or represent themselves appropriately to others, as networking cannot help in the progression of employees by default.

I won't call it networking. I will call it how to market yourself. It's not only in the bank, but everywhere. If people know you then they know your work and how capable you are (Employee 7-F.L).

From the HR perspective, it was highlighted by the participants that the bank offers many career practice opportunities. These include assessment centres, career counselling, job enrichment, job posting, job rotation, internal moves, job transfer, performance appraisal, succession planning, training, career paths, developmental assignments, external seminars, job enrichment, deployments, job rotations, job postings, lateral moves/job transfer, mentoring, and networking.

However, these career practices are not structured systematically, as some are not fully functioning, such as the assessment centres, and some are targeted at specific levels or segments; for instance, the career path is currently focused on leadership roles.

So, assessment centre we do have. And we already started the assessment for some roles to identify the gaps or the strengths as well, points to enhance people's potential, so this is one (HR 1-M.L).

The career path, as I explained to you, we do have for a certain segment of our staff, so our focus now is on the top leadership, then goes to the middle management level, then we will go below (HR 2-F.L).

The secondary data indicates that the LocBank aims to develop and prepare Omani employees, in general with no specification of gender, to hold leadership positions, as this also aligns with the government's plan on personnel nationalisation. Accordingly, the bank claims to offer the following programmes and initiatives for this purpose.

1. Talented and capable employees are promoted to deputise high-level positions, so that they will be groomed to hold higher roles within the organisation. As the ex-acting CEO of the bank said, 'Promoting experienced employees to positions of greater responsibility

aligns with our commitment to fulfil the government's plans on manpower nationalisation'.

2. The bank focuses on developing existing employees and attracting potential aspirants to benefit from ongoing talent development initiatives. The following are some of the initiatives provided by the bank:

- a. One-year programme that was launched in 2018, which aims to develop the skills and enhance the employability of ambitious and high-calibre Omani graduates by providing them on-the-job training to build successful careers. On successful completion of the programme, the trainees are considered for vacant positions in the bank. The CEO of the bank (2020) stated:

The programme reflects the bank's commitment to promote a qualitative shift in national workforce through relevant training and internship programmes. The programme is designed to further energise the Bank's HR development initiatives in line with the Sultanate's quest for youth empowerment.

- b. The bank launched a six-month management skills and development programme for around 100 of the bank's employees. The programme was delivered in association with Harvard Business Publishing and employed a blended approach to corporate education, featuring online learning, practical exercises, work-based projects, and critical reflection and discussion sessions to boost the effectiveness of the bank's future managers in its drive for service excellence. The programme was tailored to different grade levels based on employees' years of tenure with the bank, and it ran across four levels including supervisory level, managerial level, senior management, and executive level.

3. The bank considers the wellbeing of its staff among its priorities for success, as it highlights the bank's corporate culture and its focus on leadership, health and safety standards, and employee welfare. The bank is committed to hiring the right people,

providing them with an enabling and growth atmosphere, and retaining them by looking after their personal needs.

On the impact of career practices on employees' career progression, participants indicated their importance in terms of their development and improvement in different areas, in addition to the knowledge gained, which is considered an essential requirement for progression. HR 1-M.L indicated that employees gain networking as they establish relationships with others, which is also essential for career success.

Relationship and networking the employees gain from the practices is also essential, because you need that person who is really open minded, I mean a character, to get a better reach to other people to have a cross-functional collaboration in the organisation itself (HR 1-M.L).

He also stated that the performance management system is not only considered as a feedback session between the employee and the line manager; it also provides information to the organisation on how to develop and improve the performance of employees.

However, the system or procedures that the bank follows in offering career practices make a difference to the impact they have on employees' career progression, as commented by HR 1-M.L:

So, if it is in a structured way and in a targeted way, yes, it is one of the success factors towards the right career progression (HR 1-M.L).

Furthermore, HR 2-F.L indicated that vertical opportunities are limited due to the stability of the bank, as the bank is not expanding. Hence, employees are provided with horizontal opportunities more than vertical ones.

However, according to the findings presented above, the bank offers some career practices but in an unstructured and unplanned manner, as they are not aimed directly at career development and progression. Furthermore, career practices could be applied to develop

employees' careers, which would add to their knowledge and relations, which consequently results in their career success and progression; or could be used as a disciplinary measure that could marginalise the individual and hence result in maintaining the status quo in terms of their development and progression. Career practices (e.g., job transfer) could also be part of regulatory tools that are applied to mitigate the risk of fraud and provide employees with updated knowledge on security and essential subjects required in the banking sector. Figure 7.7 summarises the impact of career practices on women's career success and progression.

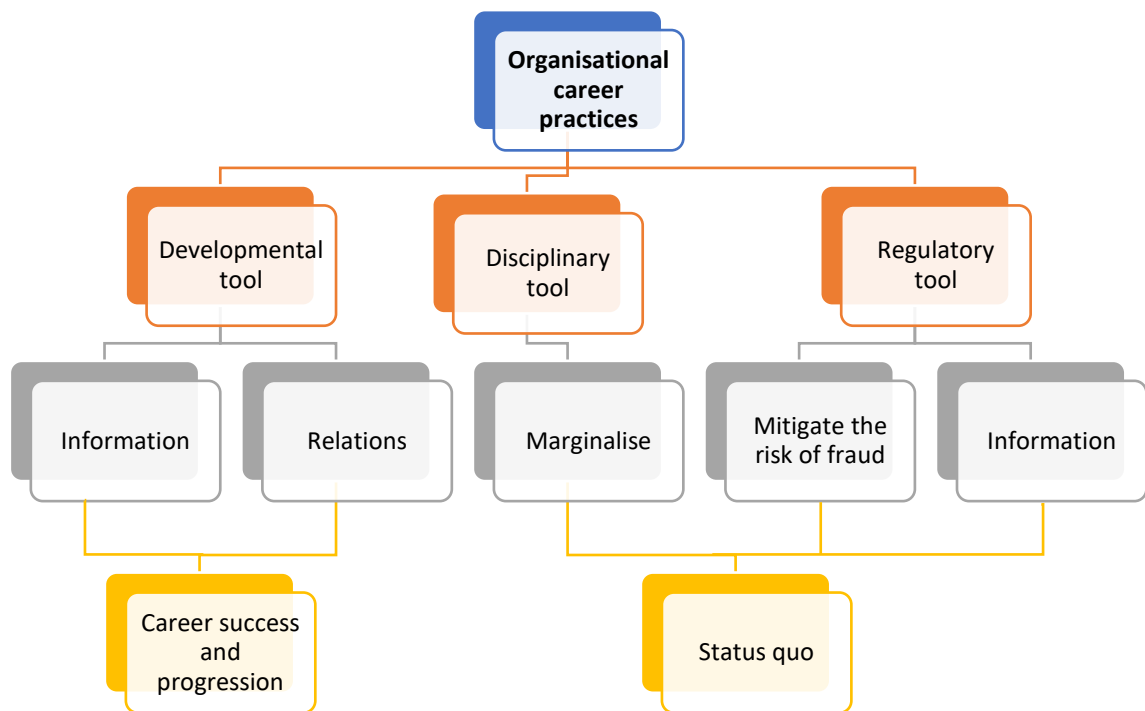


Figure 7.7 Impact of career practices on women's career progression in the banking sector
(Source: The Researcher)

Men's perspectives

Sr. Manager 1-M.L has mostly been offered short-course leadership programmes and coaching from his line manager, whereas Sr. Manager 2-M.L has been offered some

professional certificates that he considered to be valuable, due to his role being in the learning and development unit. However, it is observed, strangely, that employees working in HR take up fewer opportunities than others when it comes to career practices. This is evident with Sr. Manager 2-M.L who is a senior in the learning and development department.

To be honest, when you are in learning and development, then the number of programmes you are offered are usually very small, because you're more focused on getting to deliver for your stakeholders than yourself (Sr. Manager 2-M.L).

On the impact of career practices on career success and progression, Sr. Manager 1-M.L stated that training programmes and coaching added to his knowledge and increased his contacts and network. Obtaining professional certificates helped Sr. Manager 2-M.L to learn and hence develop in his career up to the position he holds now.

CIPD is a professional certificate in learning and development, that paved the path for me to learn a lot of what I've learned, where I stand today by learning development (Sr. Manager 2-M.L).

Male participants from other occupational levels indicated that, mostly, their career planning and management is based on self-efforts, as they initiate and work hard to develop and progress in their career. This also applies to the career practices, as they apply for and request to be considered for the available opportunities. The main practices that have been utilised are developmental assignments, job enrichment, job postings, performance appraisal, and training. Furthermore, when they were asked about the impact of these career practices on their career progression, most of them indicated that these practices did not help in their career progression.

I have managed to engage in many career practices and trainings. Unfortunately, it was helpful in my knowledge but not in my career path or progression (Employee 3-M.L).

Not much added. But they should have; however, these practices have limited influence on the career path I had (Employee 5-M.L).

Based on the findings of this theme, it is evident that career planning and practices at the bank are offered on an unstructured basis mainly based on self-efforts, which is affecting the career progression of employees in general.

7.7 Organisational barriers to women's career progression

This theme reflects the second research question, which examines the organisational barriers women face that affect their career progression to senior managerial levels. It is important to highlight again that males are also among the participants in this study to examine the differences between the two genders, and because they are the dominant leaders and decision-makers and are aware of different issues at the bank, including the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions. The section starts by shedding light on the barriers faced by senior female managers throughout their career journeys.

One of the challenges Sr. Manager 3-F.L faced as a female climbing the ladder is employees at the same level putting obstacles in the way of someone who is perceived to be successful and progressing.

Organisationally speaking, I got some challenges, because when you grow in your ladder, you will find many people who are jealous of you and putting obstacles in front of you to fail, which is very natural (Sr. Manager 3-F.L).

Sr. Manager 4-F.L felt she was not valued by the organisation, which demoralised her and negatively affected her career progression.

At other occupational levels, two of the participants shared the organisational challenges they and some of their other colleagues are facing that are affecting their career progression. Employee 10-F.L stated that some of her colleagues have been in the same

positions for years, as they have not been approached by anyone about their career requirements. There is also a lack of clarity on some policies, such as promotions and those related to career progression. Lack of line manager support is a very challenging issue that some employees face, as the opportunities for promotion and career practices depend on the line manager.

I have some colleagues at the same department for many years, why? Because no one approached them and asked them. No one asked about their requirements. The bank say that they have a system for that, but I can't see it, because I still have colleagues today, they are at same departments with the same job, demotivated and frustrated. And also, if the line manager said that you're not good, then that's it, no one will listen to you. The line manager word is taken for granted. So, there should be follow-ups on employees and more encouragement. And there should be a proper system for promotions, as it should not go entirely on the recommendation of the line manager (Employee 10-F.L).

In the same vein, Employee 7-F.L outlined some of the challenges that are affecting her career progression – for example, lack of career planning, lack of guidance, and lack of clarity and transparency on policies related to career progression.

From the HR perspective, participants highlighted the following challenges that women face that affect their career progression negatively, which are mainly based on discrimination:

- Lack of line manager support
- Stereotypes and perceptions of lack of commitment from women when they get married and have children
- Perceptions that men are more expert than women in some specialised functions
- History of men dominance – culture of males dominating at senior level, which creates a lack of comfort about working at senior level with the opposite gender

- Perceptions on the requirements and nature of some jobs, for example, long working hours or evening meetings/dinner.

Men's perspectives

Senior managers did not mention any organisational challenges that affected their career progression. However, they described some of the challenges that women face at the organisation. For instance, Sr. Manager 1-M.L stated that women prefer not to stay after working hours, particularly those who are married with children. The response of Sr. Manager 1-M.L is a live example of how senior managers are unconsciously biased against women, as he believes that not being able to stay after working hours is a barrier to success. Sr. Manager 2-M.L added that men cultural views and stereotypes still exist and affect the progression of women. Similar to women's challenges at different occupational level, men at the same level expressed some organisational challenges as well that could be similar to women's challenges – for instance, the lack of line manager support and bias and discrimination in appointments for some positions, lack of career planning, lack of guidance, and lack of clarity and transparency on policies related to career progression. They also drew attention to the change of management from time to time that affects the strategy of the bank, which consequently impacts the approach it has to its employees, including their personal development plans.

Yes, the management changes, hence, the change of knowing you. Most recently the change of my career path due to lack of line manager support, and without any clear guidance on the new role from HR (Employee 3-M.L).

Yes, the change in organisation strategy very frequently and change of hierarchy, and the unclear career path and development (Employee 5-M.L).

In sum, the majority of employees have faced organisational challenges throughout their career journey, except for male senior managers who did not indicate any challenges that influenced their career progression negatively. The fact that male employees also face

challenges at the bank means that there are weaknesses in strategies related to employees' career planning and development that is affecting the employees' career progression despite their gender. However, Figure 7.8 summarises the barriers women face that affect their career progression.

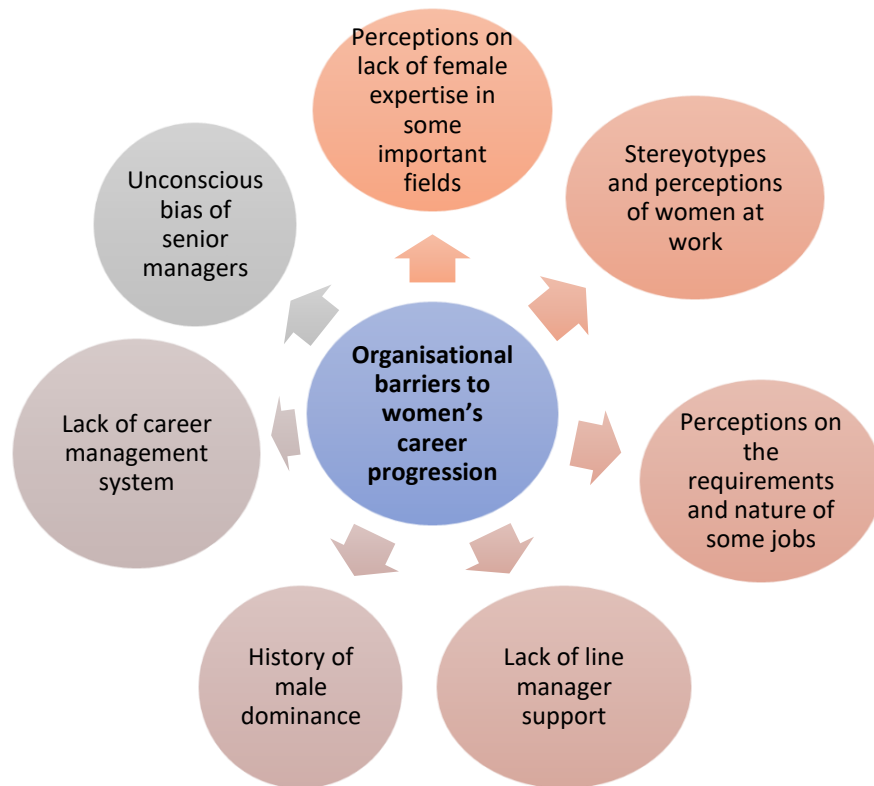


Figure 7.8 Organisational barriers to women's career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

7.8 Other barriers that affect women's career progression

This section briefly highlights other barriers to women's career progression identified by the participants. Although this study is focused on the organisational perspective, it is important to highlight other barriers as well, because they contribute to the scarcity of women at senior managerial levels.

At senior managerial level, Sr. Manager 4-F.L stated that leaders in top management have the perception of women as being sensitive and emotional, which are not suitable characteristics for a leader.

The top management think that females are not capable. Females are known for their sensitivity and being emotional or soft. So they have the perception that females don't have strong and hard personalities that are required to be a leader (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

At other occupational levels, Employee 7-F.L said that 'men are more fearless than women' in taking leadership positions.

Men are fearless and they don't hesitate to ask for help. Whereas, women they feel shy to ask for help (Employee 7-F.L).

Employee 10-F.L indicated the lack of work-life balance as a barrier to some women, whereas Employee 8-F.L said that 'men don't accept women because women get pregnant and proceed to take maternity leave'. She added that some women are the reason behind men's negative perceptions about them.

Men don't accept women, because women get pregnant and proceed on maternity leave, we have a lot of these examples in the bank. And by the way, women are not offered much of projects to handle for this reason also. And also, there are some women who always make excuses about their kids, husbands and all that, and this affects perceptions taken on other hard-working women (Employee 8-F.L).

Economic collapse and COVID-19 were among the barriers identified by Employee 10-F.L. These barriers minimised and limited opportunities for progression in positions being posted and in career practices being provided.

From the HR perspective, participants outlined some of the barriers women face that could affect their career progression. For instance:

- Lack of work–life balance that results in prioritising one aspect over the other
- Some women are satisfied with their current status, and they do not look for a higher position. This could relate to the individual personality, or because it fits with other demands on their time, or they might not be genuinely ambitious.
- Male-dominant culture and sensitivity issues around women being leaders.
- Labour market barriers – Lack of educational qualification in some specialised fields.

Men's perspectives

Male participants indicated that women could be hesitant in taking senior leadership roles due to the requirements of the job, such as long working hours, as they have other family responsibilities, particularly married women (Sr. Manager 1-M.L). Sr. Manager 2-M.L claimed that guidelines from the authorities about the proportion of women at senior level are lacking. In addition to the cultural view of the role of men as breadwinners and hence superior in most life aspects including work. He added that general stereotypes and perceptions could be playing a role in the underrepresentation of women at senior managerial levels. None of the male participants indicated any other barriers that affected their career progression.

There is no clear guideline by an upper body. Just to ascertain what is the proportion for the female [...]. It could be that I would assume that it's mainly the whole cultural view of all men are more dependable on. But yeah, I see it as a serious concern that need to be addressed. I can't tell you what exactly the, main reason for that, but I would assume it just general stereotype (Sr. Manager 2-M.L).

Figure 7.9 presents a summary of the other barriers that affect women's career progression, divided into two categories: societal and individual.

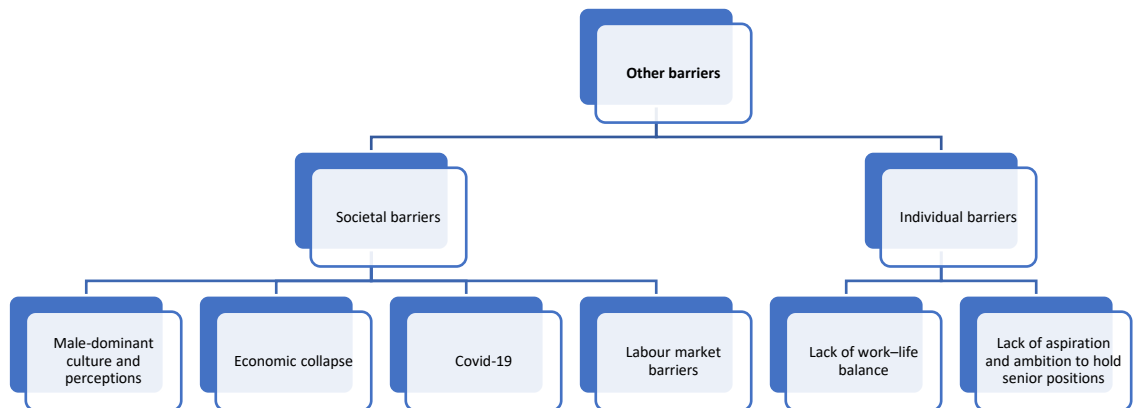


Figure 7.9 Other barriers that affect women’s career progression (*Source: The Researcher*)

7.9 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality

The data analysed for the second research question are represented within two themes. The question is: what are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career journey that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities? The first theme, the organisational barriers to women’s career progression, was discussed in Section 7.8 and the second theme is elaborated on in this section by examining the organisation’s role in providing equal opportunities to women and men in (1) the career practices offered and (2) opportunities for senior managerial positions.

7.9.1 Gender difference in taking management career practices

At senior managerial level, all participants confirmed that the bank provides equal opportunities to men and women to attend career practices. At other occupational levels, all participants implied they attend all career practices offered to them. In addition, Employee 10-F.L said that some of the courses are mandatory (e.g., related to security, fraud and money laundering) as they are set and required by the regulator, i.e. the Central Bank of Oman, and linked to the performance appraisal of employees.

From the HR perspective, participants stated that gender is not considered when offering career practices for employees, as opportunities are open to all equally.

Men's perspectives

Males' participants at senior level were of the same opinion, as they indicated that the bank offers equal opportunities on career practices to all employees. However, Sr. Manager 1-M.L commented that although the practices are offered equally to all, uptake depends on the career practices themselves and individuals' willingness or ability to accept them. For example, if the career practice requires attending after working hours or travelling, this could be restrictive to certain female employees, and hence their participation will be lower than that of their male counterparts. At other occupational levels, participants stated that they take career practice opportunities whenever they are available but, mostly, the employee should initiate and request to attend the practice.

In sum, all participants from all targeted levels confirmed that the organisation provides equal opportunities to attend career practices to all employees regardless of their gender. Yet, it was indicated that some women could be restricted in attending some of the practices due to certain circumstances, as indicated above. In addition, it was highlighted that some of the training courses are mandated by regulators. Hence, it is observed that the organisation is not following a consistent approach in offering career practices to

employees, nor considering the issue of gender inequality in its approach as it is mainly based on self-efforts and willingness to attend.

7.9.2 Gender differences in taking senior managerial positions

All participants at senior managerial level confirmed that opportunities for leadership positions are offered equally to employees, men and women. However, Sr. Manager 4-F.L outlined that men are usually selected for leadership positions.

I won't say that the opportunities are not equal; they would give you the opportunity. But they do prefer males; they select males. Overall, the management, and when I say about the management, all the top management, are males. So, I think they have this idea that males will take up responsibilities more (Sr. Manager 4-F.L).

It was also indicated by Sr. Manager 5-F.L that the majority of women who are in managerial positions are at middle managerial levels.

Here in the bank, there are ladies who are leading like in a leadership position, but not in a very high level. You know, it's only maybe in the middle management (Sr. Manager 5-F.L).

When female participants at other occupational levels were asked if they had applied for a higher position, the majority of them had not been selected when they had done so. Employee 10-F.L highlighted that she was not selected because she applied in a different field that requires a certain educational background and specific experience.

From the HR perspective, participants confirmed that the bank offers equal opportunities to all employees to apply for senior positions based on criteria that apply to all equally. HR 1-M.L outlined these criteria to be candidates' competency, the skills required to perform the role, experience, and exposure to that function. He added that the proportion of women at the organisation is 31 per cent of the total, which could partially justify the

scarcity of women at senior levels. In other words, the population of women at the bank is lower than their males' counterparts, which could justify the lower numbers of women at leadership positions. Contrary to this view, HR 2-F.L stated that the application rate for senior positions is equal between men and women, but the success rate is 70 per cent for men and 30 per cent for women, which is low. However, HR 2-F.L emphasised the fact that the underrepresentation of women at senior leadership positions is not a local or national issue, but rather a phenomenon that exist around the globe.

The success rate actually when it comes to application, I would rate it 50:50 per cent, but when it comes to selection, its 70:30 per cent; 70 per cent goes to men and 30 per cent goes to women. Our female ratio overall is 30 per cent, which is quite healthy. But when it comes to the senior leadership roles, it becomes very narrow because, not only us, but actually the entire globe is facing this challenge (HR 2-F.L).

The response of HR 2-F.L indicates that women are given equal and fair opportunities to apply for senior positions as their male counterparts. However, the selection rate implies that women are not supported throughout the selection process, which consequently indicates that the LocBank does not create a level playing field of opportunity for women.

Men's perspectives

Males' senior managers also confirmed that the organisation provides equal opportunities for senior leadership positions to all employees regardless of their gender. However, Employees 1-M.L, 2-M.L, 3-M.L, 4-M.L, 5-M.L and 6-M.L from other occupational levels indicated that they had not been selected when they had applied for a higher position. Elaborating on some experiences of male participants when they were asked

whether they had applied for a higher position and the outcome of their applications, one said:

Yes, I have, and I was not accepted. I have not been chosen because top management already had someone in mind to bring for this position (Employee 1-M.L).

I requested in 2020 for which I was eligible but got rejected, and I don't know why (Employee 4-M.L).

Yes, I did apply but I was not selected. The reasons were not given (Employee 5-M.L).

In summary, all targeted participants at senior managerial level confirmed that the organisation offers equal opportunities for leadership positions to all employees regardless of their gender. Yet, this is not carried through to the selection process, as the priority is given to men, which is indicated by the selection rate of 70:30 stated above by HR 2-F.L. At other occupational levels, both men and women experience the same challenge of applying for higher positions but not being selected due to different reasons. Hence, both male and female employees face challenges in advancing in their careers in addition to prioritising men over women for senior positions, which could be based on different discriminatory grounds.

7.10 Organisational interventions and their impact on women's career progression

This theme addresses the third research question: to what extent are organisational interventions considered critical success factors in women's career progression? Hence, the researcher examined the interventional schemes that are applied by the bank and their effectiveness in increasing women representation at senior managerial levels.

First, shedding light on interventional schemes offered to senior female managers that affected their career progression, Sr. Manager 5-F.L said that she was included in a

leadership programme ‘Itemad – اعتماد’ (Reliance, translated to English). This programme is a government initiative targeted at the private sector to prepare key Omani employees to hold senior positions. Sr. Managers 4-F.L and 5-F.L stated that the organisation does not provide any interventional schemes to support women in their career progression. At other occupational levels, the majority of participants implied that they have not been provided with additional support/interventions for their career progression, except for Employee 10-F.L, who commented that the bank provides flexibility in working hours, which helps her balance work and family responsibilities.

From the HR perspective, there was an emphasis on the provision of a family-friendly environment through offering many events for all staff and their families for the purpose of building a rapport between the bank and its employees. HR 2-F.L commented that, due to this friendly environment, the retention rate is high. She added that the bank conducts educational forums on balancing work–life responsibilities, presented by successful women as role models to share their experiences on how they climbed the leadership ladder to senior managerial positions. On being a role model and encouraging other female staff to hold senior positions, HR 2-F.L said:

Being myself a lady, as I am the only one among the top management, one lady, so actually I really focus a lot and encourage more ladies to come up. So we do that; we encourage ladies (HR 2-F.L).

The bank also conducts monthly meetings with the CEO – ‘coffee with the CEO’ – targeted at all employees as an opportunity to highlight any challenges the employee might face during their journey with the bank. However, HR 1-M.L indicated that the bank does not focus on women separately, as these interventions are provided to all. Both Participants from HR highlighted that there is no particular system for the interventions, as they are not based on specific objectives. Nevertheless, HR 2-F.L added that interventions could be offered at an individual level as follow-ups on the employee’s progress, offering different practices to help them succeed.

Men's perspectives

Shedding light on men's experience of the interventional schemes, Sr. Manager 1-M.L, from the senior level, stated that he was provided with the leadership programme 'Itemad – اعتماد' (Reliance), similar to a female Sr. Manager 5-F.L from the same level. At other occupational levels, however, participants confirmed that they had not been provided with any additional support for their career progression.

Reflecting on this theme, the bank does not provide any interventional schemes based on objectives to be achieved or targeted at a specific segment (i.e. women). Yet, some initiatives are conducted that target all employees (activities and events), individuals (follow-ups on career progress), and women (work–life balance forums and role models).

7.11 Chapter conclusion

One of the key findings of this chapter is that the career progression of women is influenced by a combination of factors, creating distinctive patterns but also some commonalities among individuals. From another perspective, similar to the findings of the international bank, the career journey is shaped by constant and variable factors arising from organisational and individual factors. The constant factors include those shared by senior managers who have progressed in their careers, while the variable factors are unique to each individual's decisions and circumstance that shape their career trajectory.

Another notable finding is that the bank's career planning and practices lack a systematic approach and do not aim directly to develop employees. Instead, sometimes some of them are used as disciplinary or regulatory tools. The barriers women face from organisational, societal and individual levels are not that different from those faced by women at the international bank, as they are based on discrimination and bias, making the role of the organisation in tackling these barriers unclear.

Furthermore, while the bank acknowledges the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions, it does not consider it a priority issue to address. The bank emphasises that senior managers are appointed based on competence, regardless of gender. Additionally, the interventions applied by the bank to support career progression are not exclusive to women but also target men.

The next chapter compares the international bank and the local bank to identify the variations in and influence of the policies and practices applied to women's career progression within two different contexts.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF THE TWO CASES' FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

The main aim of this thesis is to examine the issue of the underrepresentation of Omani women at senior managerial levels, focusing on career developmental practices and their impact on women's career progression. Accordingly, this chapter discusses the findings from the international and local banks and compares them.

The objective of this chapter is to delve into the research results and establish connections with the literature highlighted in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Through this discussion, the research findings will be examined in terms of how they align with, expand upon or contradict prior research, while also exploring the novel aspects that this research has uncovered. The chapter is divided into nine sections which revolve around the three research questions originally set out in the introductory chapter. These sections form a structure for evaluating, contrasting and examining the study's findings, which address the following research questions:

1. How can organisations manage the career development of female employees through career management practices, allowing them to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?
2. What are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career journeys that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities?
3. To what extent are organisational interventions considered critical success factors in women's career progression?

Following from the introductory section, a comprehensive analysis of the demographics of both banks is represented. The first research question is addressed in Sections 8.3 and 8.4, while Sections 8.5, 8.6, and 8.7 offer insights into the second research question. Furthermore, Section 8.8 examines the impact of organisational interventions, which reflects the third research question.

8.2 Demographic data

In this section, three aspects and their impact on women's career progression are discussed and compared between the international bank and the local bank: age, qualifications, and marital/family status.

8.2.1 Age

At the international bank, male senior managers are in the age group 45 and above, whereas women from the same level are 31–44 years old. An explanation to consider on the age difference between men and women is that the retirement age of women is lower than that of men, as they can retire at 55 years, whereas the retirement age of men is 65 years old. Accordingly, men are observed to have longer tenures than women in senior positions. Furthermore, what could explain the age variations among men and women senior managers is that women of a younger age are discriminated in opportunities offered due to their family status and children's responsibilities, which explains also the challenges women face in balancing between work and family responsibilities. This is consistent with what has been found in previous studies. For instance, in McIntosh et al.'s (2012) study on the impact of motherhood on career progression indicates that women's career progression is hindered due to having dependent children, as the younger the child the greater impact it has on their career progression.

Nevertheless, after women reach a stable stage with regards to their children status, only then they are considered by male senior managers for senior opportunities, as they can dedicate more time and efforts to work. This is an important finding in the understanding of the impact of age and gender on career progression. A similar pattern of results was obtained from Goldberg et al.'s (2004) study on the effects of age and gender on career progression outcomes, where the study implied that men and women are treated differently as they age in the workplace as men's salaries and status increase more than women with age.

This finding reflects on the career development theories, such as Super's theory of career development, that recognise that individuals progress through a series of stages as they navigate their careers. Super's theory (discussed in Section 2.9) proposes that individuals move through four stages: growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance. The career development theory stated that growth in stages can undoubtedly affect women's professional progression, as women confront specific barriers and opportunities at each level of their careers. Women may experience obstacles related to gender stereotypes and societal expectations around gender roles during the phase of growth. For instance, they may be discouraged from pursuing traditionally male-dominated fields or careers, or they may be urged to prioritise family over career advancement. This can limit women's prospect and growth potential.

As the findings show, women may experience problems linked to gender bias and discrimination in the workplace during the phase of exploration. They may be passed over for promotions or positions of leadership, or they may not have access to the same resources and opportunities as their male counterparts. This may limit their capacity to pursue other job paths and gain new skills and experience. Women, on the other hand, may confront obstacles relating to work-life balance and caregiving duties during the establishment stage. They may have to choose between their career and their families, limiting their prospects for promotion and growth. Finally, during the maintenance period, women may confront gender bias and ageism issues. As they age, they may be perceived

as less capable or valued, or they may be passed over for opportunities and promotions in favour of younger, male colleagues. As a result, women may confront problems and barriers to advancement at various stages of their careers. Therefore, career development theory can be difficult for women, especially if it is not gender inclusive. Traditional career development theories were formed focused on the experiences of males in the industry, and as a result, they do not adequately account for the experiences and obstacles that women confront.

On the other hand, all participants at the local bank who are from senior and other occupational levels are in the 31–44 years age group. The congruity in age distribution among the different levels, explained in Chapter 7, can be attributed to the bank's strategic approach to bolstering the nationalisation percentage by proactively promoting young employees to senior positions. This is consistent with the existing talent management literature, which underlines the need of firms nurturing and retaining promising young talent through focused career progression programmes. As a result, the bank's emphasis on promoting younger employees to senior positions indicates its dedication to developing a strong and diversified talent pool capable of efficiently meeting the needs of a dynamic and expanding industry.

The literature is abundant in its support for the value of elevating young talent to senior roles in organisations. Collings et al. (2019), for example, emphasise the importance of talent management as a fundamental driver of organisational performance. They underline the importance of firms identifying and developing young talent through targeted development programmes to maintain a consistent supply of talented and motivated personnel.

8.2.3 Qualifications

The findings of this study reveal a significant difference in educational qualifications between participants at the international bank and those at the local bank. Specifically, almost all participants from the international bank hold an MBA, while senior managers at the local bank hold master's degrees and other employees hold varying degrees ranging from Diploma to bachelor's degree up to master's level. This difference in educational qualifications can have a significant impact on career development and progression.

Scholars such as Mihail and Elefterie (2006) and Baruch (2009) suggest that MBA programs aim to develop managerial knowledge and skills, which is consistent with the finding that the majority of participants at the international bank hold an MBA. This can be seen as an indication of their awareness of the requirements for career progression and a commitment to developing their managerial knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, the study found that participants at the local bank did not indicate the same level of awareness of the importance of obtaining a postgraduate qualification to progress in their careers. This is consistent with the findings of a study by Kramar and Syed (2012), which found that many employees in developing countries may not recognise the value of postgraduate qualifications for career development and progression.

However, it is vital to note that other criteria, such as work experience and on-the-job training, may also help to professional advancement. According to a study conducted by Kakarika et al. (2014), while educational qualifications were beneficial for initial job placement, work experience was a more crucial determinant in career growth. As a result, while establishing career development programmes, it may be required to take into account a variety of criteria, including both educational qualifications and job experience.

Almost all participants from the international bank hold an MBA. In contrast, senior managers at the local bank hold master's degrees, and other participants from other occupational levels hold different educational qualifications that vary from Diploma to

bachelor's degree up to master's level. It is indicated by many scholars that MBA programmes aim to develop managerial knowledge and skills (Mihail and Elefterie, 2006; Baruch, 2009), as observed with the majority of participants at senior level and at different levels at the international bank. Holding an MBA at other occupational levels indicates that employees are aware of the requirements to progress in their career, which is evident at the international bank. This is contrary to participants from the local bank who did not indicate their awareness of the importance of obtaining a postgraduate qualification to be able to progress further in their career.

8.2.3 Marital/family status

The influence of family circumstances on the career progression of women to senior managerial positions has been the subject of considerable research interest. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) suggest that family responsibilities can pose a significant challenge to women seeking to balance work and family commitments. This is particularly evident among women in lower occupational levels in the international and local banks.

However, the findings from both banks on senior women do not support the notion that family status negatively impacts career progression. In fact, women with children were found to have reached senior managerial positions without any negative impact on their families. This suggests that women at the senior level may not view family matters as a hindrance to their career progression, and even downplay the role of family support in their success to avoid being perceived as unappreciative of their organisation's support.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the majority of women at senior levels express gratitude for the support they received from their organisation in their career development and progression. This underscores the importance of organisational support and family-friendly policies in promoting gender diversity and equity in the workplace.

Further research has also highlighted the importance of work-family balance in promoting women's career progression. For instance, a study by Kossek et al. (2019) found that

flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting and flexible schedules, can help women balance work and family responsibilities, leading to greater job satisfaction and career success. Similarly, the research of Gazioglu and Tansel (2006) suggests that family-friendly policies, such as parental leave and child care support, can help women overcome the challenges of balancing work and family commitments, leading to improved career outcomes.

8.3 The organisational role on women career progression through career management practices

The analysis of the data collected in this study suggests that women at the senior level have been sponsored by senior male managers in their career development and progression. Senior female managers reported that being sponsored by males senior managers helped them in their career progression to senior leadership positions.

This finding is consistent with those from previous studies on the importance of sponsoring women to advance in their career, as it provides them with access to opportunities, resources, early promotion, and an increase in human and social capital (Seibert et al., 2001; Helms et al., 2016; Bhide and Tootell, 2018; Sharma et al., 2019). However, some studies have reported that women are less likely to advance in their careers because they are not actively sponsored the way men are (Ibarra et al., 2010).

This finding suggests that sponsoring women for growth is critical for attaining gender diversity in the workplace and providing equitable opportunity for all employees. According to research, women are frequently underrepresented in leadership roles and face a variety of barriers to advancement, including biases and preconceptions, work-family conflict, and a lack of access to key networks. Senior leaders in the organisation who serve as sponsors can help to reduce these obstacles by giving direction, advocacy, and exposure to high-profile initiatives and assignments. Nevertheless, despite the benefits of sponsorship, many women continue to struggle to find sponsors due to a lack

of support and opportunities available to them, as evidenced by the lack of support women face at other occupational levels, which limits their opportunities for climbing the leadership ladder.

This finding provides compelling evidence that social capital theory is inherently gendered, with senior managers' individual perspectives, biases, and social networks heavily influencing decision-making processes surrounding the support and sponsorship of women in senior positions, rather than organisational policies and initiatives. This shows that tackling gender disparity in the workplace necessitates a multi-level approach that not only acknowledges and tackles implicit biases at the individual level, but also encourages organisational measures that reduce gender disparities and promote diversity and inclusion.

Another important finding is that women at other occupational levels lacked the support of their line managers in their career planning and development, which influenced their progression negatively. Contrary to their male colleagues at the same levels who received full support from their line managers in their career development. This finding indicates that in terms of planning and recommending developmental practices, line managers play a critical role or even considered responsible for employees career development and progression. Unfortunately, women are found to be the disadvantaged party in this support that leads to developmental opportunities. This finding indicates the discrimination and bias of line managers towards female employees that affects their career progression.

This finding is consistent with prior research that suggested supervisors' gender influences their behaviours towards their subordinates and that gender bias exists in the workplace. According to Coffman et al. (2018), male managers were more likely to give male subordinates with more prospects for professional growth than female subordinates. This shows that when it comes to career opportunities, male supervisors may prefer male subordinates over female subordinates. This could also be explained by the widespread presence of homosociality in the workplace, in which men tend to support other men with

whom they share interests and social identities, resulting in a culture of exclusion and discrimination against women, who may be perceived as less competent or committed to their careers because of their gender. This can lead to a lack of trust and support from male coworkers and managers, as well as impediments to women's professional advancement and success (Burke and Attridge, 2011; Koch et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2015; Glass and Cook, 2016).

This finding suggests that women are frequently passed over for career advancement possibilities in favour of men, even when they are equally or more competent. This can be attributed to line managers' unconscious bias, who may hold traditional notions about women's competence, devotion to their careers, or appropriateness for leadership jobs. Furthermore, the existence of homosocial networks in the workplace may serve as an informal avenue for male employees to gain preferential treatment and access to possibilities for career advancement, exacerbating the bias. In addition, women face microaggressions or discriminatory behaviour from their bosses, such as receiving less feedback or appreciation for their work or being excluded from informal social networks. This can lead to a workplace culture of exclusion and animosity towards women, restricting their possibilities for advancement and success.

In contrast, male employees are offered more opportunities for career advancement, as they may be seen as more suitable or competent for leadership roles, or may benefit from the informal support and mentorship provided by homosocial networks. This can further reinforce existing power structure and limit opportunities for women to achieve parity with their male counterparts.

Overall, this finding indicates that discrimination and bias against women by their line managers have a significant impact on their career progression, limiting their access to opportunities and resources, and perpetuating gender-based inequalities in the workplace.

Furthermore, the findings of the study have shown that most career practices theories are fundamentally biased towards gender, and this bias predominantly favours men over

women. The theories can present compelling arguments in support of male career progression, but fail to provide an adequate explanation for how these practices can benefit women's careers. The notion that building relationships is crucial for career progression, as espoused by social capital theory and social learning theory, is not fully applicable to women, as the managers who control career opportunities tend to be the primary actors responsible for implementing these practices. Similarly, signalling theory assumes that employers use signals to make objective and rational decisions about promoting employees. However, as the findings reveal that managers often rely on subjective and biased decisions which results in discriminating women from career opportunities. As a result, these theories fail to address the specific challenges women face in career progression, and do not provide adequate support for their advancement.

Another important finding is that both banks consider career practices as a developmental tool that provide employees with information and relations that lead to career success and progression, but also, specifically in the banking sector, they are used as a regulatory tool imposed by the Central Bank of Oman to ensure that employees are updated with the latest regulations and are aware of security issues. In contrast to the findings that consider career practices as a developmental tool, other findings from participants at different occupational levels suggest that these practices have not been effective in promoting their career progression. This result aligns with a study by Karpinski and Migneault (2020) where they found that while companies often offer formal career development programs, these programs may not always be effective in promoting career advancement for employees. The authors suggest that this may be due to a lack of alignment between the formal programs and the actual career paths available within the organisation.

Furthermore, the local bank applies some of the career practices as a disciplinary tool that leads to maintaining the status quo in employees' careers (see Figure 7.7). For instance, job transfer could be used by the bank to marginalise employees by transferring them from their current position to another, less-valued, position. Also, giving employees poor

performance appraisal would impact their chances in receiving promotions or being selected for training and development opportunities.

This finding is consistent with previous research in this field that applies some of career practices as a disciplinary tool. Weiss and Livengood (2011) proposed that career practices can be subject to biases and unfairness from line managers which affects the career development of employees. Line managers may have personal bias towards certain employees based on factors such as their gender, race, age or personal relationships. These biases can influence their decisions on career practices, leading to unfair treatment of certain employees. Furthermore, line managers may use subjective performance rating to evaluate employees, which can be influenced by personal biases and opinion. This can result in unfair treatment of employees who may be performing well but are not favoured by their line managers.

Comparing the two banks, although it was found that the international bank maintains policies and procedures for career planning and management, it was also found that the implementation and outcomes vary among employees, as the responsibility for employees' career planning and management is entirely devolved to the line managers. This finding reveals that the bank lacks a career management system that is clear and implemented equally for all employees. In addition, career planning and management at the bank could be subjective, as decisions could be influenced by the feelings, preferences, and opinions of line managers, as also supported by some previous studies (Renwick and MacNeil, 2002). Furthermore, and as found and discussed above, because banks are gendered organisations, managerial beliefs about gender roles also come to the fore (Daverth et al., 2016).

At the local bank, there are also policies and procedures for employees' career planning, as claimed by the bank. However, as per the findings, the main approach to employees' development and progression is through self-effort. This finding confirms that the boundaryless career approach is followed in the local bank, whereby this approach, the

literature indicates that individuals take full responsibility for their career advancement (Hall, 1996; Briscoe et al., 2006). The boundaryless career approach emphasises the importance of employees taking ownership of their career development, as opposed to relying solely on their organisation for career progression. This approach allows employees to pursue opportunities outside of their current organisation, which can lead to a more diverse and enriching career path. By developing skills and experiences that are transferable across different banks, employees can increase their employability and create more opportunities for themselves, as found from the career trajectories of employees. In agreement with this findings, a study by Joo and Lim (2021) found that employees who adopt a boundaryless career orientation are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviours, such as networking and seeking out developmental opportunities. The authors suggest that this can lead to increased career success and job satisfaction for these employees. Also, a meta-analysis by De Vos et al. (2019) found that boundaryless careers are positively related to a range of outcomes, including job satisfaction, career success, and well-being. The authors suggest that this may be due to the increased autonomy and control that employees have over their own career development.

The present study's findings suggest that women are adopting the boundaryless approach to career development and progression, which is based on mobility, in contrast to previous studies that suggest mobility is a challenge for women. For example, the study of Williams (2010) explores how family responsibilities, including the need for geographical stability, impact women's ability to pursue mobility in their careers.

However, the finding is consistent with recent research that highlights the changing nature of women's career aspirations and the growing importance of mobility in achieving career success (Matusik & Hill, 2014; Kim & Feldman, 2017). For example, Matusik and Hill (2014) argue that women are increasingly seeking opportunities for global assignments and cross-functional experiences as a means of developing their skills and expanding their networks, which aligns with the boundaryless approach. Similarly, Kim and Feldman (2017) found that women who actively pursued international assignments were more

likely to receive promotions and salary increase than those who did not, indicating the importance of mobility for women's career progression.

Overall, it is important to note that the literature on mobility and women's career is complex, and there may be factors that influence the extent to which women are able to pursue mobility in their careers, such as family support, work-life balance, and social norms around gender roles. Nonetheless, the present study's findings provide new insights into the ways in which women are navigating their careers and suggest that mobility may be a viable strategy for women to achieve career success.

8.4 Factors affecting women's career progression

According to the results of the career paths of senior managers and employees at different occupational levels, a recurring theme regarding the factors that facilitated and could facilitate the progression of women in the careers emerged in both banks. The findings suggest that women's career progression could be influenced by consistent factors such as qualifications, banking experience, lateral job transitions, the support of line managers, and, as discussed in Section 8.3, by sponsorship of male senior managers. Additionally, there are distinct sets of factors that impact individual employees differently. These factors differentiate employees' career trajectories based on a variety of circumstance and decisions they make throughout their careers, ultimately shaping their career paths.

The factors stemmed from individual and organisational factors. Participants from the international and the local banks identified similar individual factors that helped them in their career progression. However, the difference that was identified between male and female participants from both banks is that women require the support of their spouse/family to be able to focus on their careers and progress further, whereas men were not in need of this support. This result ties well with previous studies wherein the stereotypes of gender roles emphasise men being the breadwinners and hence the

providers of support, and women taking responsibility for children and family (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994; Anker et al., 2003).

There have been various studies conducted on the factors that impact women's career progression, and some support and others contradict this finding. For example, a study published in the Harvard Business Review in 2020 found that women who were promoted to higher-level positions were more likely to have received guidance and support from senior leaders, rather than just their immediate managers. This contradicts the finding that line managers' support is the among the primary factors influencing women's career progression (Ely et al., 2020).

On the other hand, a study by Dang and Diddams (2019) found that women's career progression was positively impacted by factors such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and networking. This supports that individual and organisational factors can impact women's career trajectories.

In assessing the factors affecting the progress of women's careers, it is essential to consider the study's primary objective, methodology, and sample populations, given that various studies may yield different conclusions. This is particularly relevant for a study focused on the Omani banking sector, where the country's culture has a strong influence on the workforce, especially women. Thus, when analysing the career trajectories of employees across different countries, it is proposed that differences may exist in how individuals make decisions throughout their career journeys based on their values and beliefs. Studies have shown that cultural factors can significantly impact women's career progression and decision-making processes, especially in countries with traditional gender roles and norms (Al Dajani & Marzouq, 2020).

8.5 The main organisational barriers to women career progression

These barriers were identified by female participants from senior and other occupational levels, as well as senior male managers, who are decision-makers and aware of issues

affecting women at the bank. However, while examining the organisational barriers, other barriers were also identified at the societal and individual levels that also influence women's career progression. These barriers are discussed briefly in the study due to their importance and interaction with one another. This finding is consistent with other research showing that women are influenced by many factors in organisations, and at societal and individual levels (Bain and Cummings, 2000; Alhalwachi and Mordi, 2021).

Organisational barriers women face at the international and local banks were represented in Figures 6.7 and 7.8, respectively. These are rooted in subtle gender discrimination and bias. The majority of the identified organisational barriers of both banks, which are discussed next, are similar, which indicates the influence of the Omani context on the international bank.

8.5.1 History of male dominance

As the findings reveal, there is a strong link between the history of male dominance and the Omani context, as Oman is a traditional society that has been shaped by patriarchal norms and values for many years. Historically, Omani society has been male-dominated, with men holding positions of power in government, business, and other area of society. The banking sector is no different than other sectors in Oman which is dominated by men, specifically at senior leadership positions. Similar to other male-dominant cultures like construction, engineering and surgery where the literature indicates that this type of culture creates a lack of comfort for women in working with the opposite sex, particularly with men who are used to communicating with each other informally and entertaining themselves sometimes with sexist conversations and jokes in meetings or gatherings (Hirayama and Fernando, 2018; O'Connor, 2020). A consequence of this situation is that all policies and strategic decisions are made by men, and hence they reserve positions of power and authority for themselves, i.e. they maintain the status quo, as emphasised by previous studies of O'Neil et al., 2008. This finding shows that the IntBank and the LocBank are gendered organisations, where inequality is perpetuated (as discussed in

Chapter 2, Section 2.5). In these types of organisations, as the literature indicates, men hold powerful and authoritative positions, which results in a gendered structure and culture, and gendered procedures in the organisations (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2003).

8.5.2 Stereotypes and perceptions of women at work

Oman is a conservative country where conventional gender roles persist in many aspects of society. Women in Oman have achieved tremendous progress in terms of education and labour-force participations in recent years, but they continue to confront obstacles due to cultural norms and gender stereotypes. There is a traditional perspective of gender roles in Oman, with women considered housewives and men as providers. This viewpoint can hinder women's access to particular jobs and industries because they are expected to put their family duties over their careers.

As the findings from the study indicate at both International and local banks, women at work are stereotyped as being less committed to their work once they are married and have children, as pregnancy and long maternity leaves are perceived by male leaders as obstacles to success. At this stage, women face some challenges to balance work and family responsibilities, and leaders translate this challenge to a lack of commitment towards work, creating a perception that women are less competent to hold senior managerial positions. This finding ties well with previous studies wherein stereotypes and perceptions of women taking the responsibilities of nurturing and raising children affect their career status (Anker et al., 2003; Correll et al., 2007; Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

In addition, the finding revealed that women who are single or married without children have more opportunities to reach senior positions, as they may be perceived as more committed to their career and have more time and energy to devote to their work. This finding is consistent with Hewlett et al. (2005) study that found that women who are married without children are more likely to reach senior management positions than women with children. The study suggests that women who don't have children may be viewed as a more committed to their work and more prepared to take on hard assignments.

Furthermore, Budig and Misra (2020) noted that the motherhood penalty, or the disadvantage that working mothers face in terms of income, promotions, and developmental opportunities is primarily determined by gendered organisational practices rather than by individual choices or qualities.

Also, the finding indicated that expat women are among the group of women who have more opportunities to hold a senior position than women with children. It is possible that some expat women may have more opportunities to hold senior positions due to their availability and willingness to dedicate more time to work. This may be related to their personal goals and reasons for working in a foreign country.

This result contrasts previous research on the difficulties expatriate women confront as a results of cultural differences and language limitations, which can impair their capacity to excel in a foreign work setting. Shortland and Perkins (2015) found that expatriate women may experience obstacles connected to family duties, such as obtaining acceptable childcare choices and resolving work-family conflicts. This can have an influence on their capacity to devote time and energy to their careers, thus limiting their possibilities for advancement. McNulty (2017) reported that expatriate women experience additional hurdles as a result of gender norms, which may be more evident in some cultures than others. The study showed that expatriate women may struggle to overcome cultural expectations on gender roles, work-life balance, and leadership styles, which may pose further impediments to their career advancement.

However, Omani women who are married with children may face societal expectations and pressures to prioritise their family responsibilities over their careers, which impacts their opportunities for career advancement. Men have an advantage when it comes to advancing in their careers and obtaining senior positions, as the findings show that they are able to rely on their partner to take on a greater share of caregiving responsibilities, which frees up their time and provide them with support.

8.5.3 Requirements and nature of senior jobs

The findings from both banks show that being in a leadership position has some requirements that are considered essential. For example, a senior manager should be flexible in their working hours, as they will be required to work long hours, be able to attend meetings after working hours, be available after working hours, be mobile for any official travel, and be able to attend different occasions related to work, including work lunches/dinners. As the finding indicates, these requirements could be challenging for some women due to cultural restrictions or family responsibilities, especially in a country like Oman, where cultural expectations that women should behave modestly and not draw attention to themselves is anticipated. Concerns about harassment and discrimination may also cause women to avoid socialising with male co-workers or limit their contacts in order to avoid harassment or negative views. This finding is consistent with prior studies on varied requirements for leadership positions that are perceived to be difficult for women to handle, which affects women's participation at leadership levels (Hakim, 2006; Correll et al., 2007; Poggio, 2010; Longarela, 2017). Furthermore, Ragins et al. (2018) demonstrated that women who participate in mentoring relationships with men may encounter extra obstacles, such as concerns about sexual harassment or bad perceptions from co-workers.

8.5.4 Lack of line manager support

As per the findings from the international and local banks, women faced a lack of line manager support in their career planning and management, which hindered their career progression. It is important to highlight the finding that line managers play a key role in employees' career success and progression, as they are responsible for career planning and, accordingly, the practices offered. It was found that the employee, whether male or female, needs the assistance of their line manager in order to transfer to another department, apply for another positions, and be recommended for promotions. Line managers are also in charge of reviewing staff performance, which can result in financial

rewards, as well as identifying areas for development. As a result, a lack of line manager support would undoubtedly have a negative impact on women's career advancement. Similar to prior research (e.g., Maxwell and Watson, 2006), the findings of this study demonstrate that many HR tasks, including responsibility for career planning and management, have been devolved to line managers. Similarly, Crawshaw and Game's (2015) study indicated that line managers are the major organisational agents in the career management process of employees. This implies the critical role played by line managers in the career development and progression of employees.

However, according to the findings of this thesis, this devolution is discriminatory towards women's career progression, as it marginalises them from opportunities to progress. As indicated by some scholars, the consequences of this devolution could be positive as well as negative (Perry and Kulik, 2008).

8.5.5 Unconscious bias of top management – decision-makers

Unconscious bias of top management was highlighted at the international bank as an organisational barrier to women's career progression. This may help to explain some of the discriminatory actions and bias women face, which are reinforced and perpetuated at organisations despite gender equality legislation. This finding is consistent with other research that confirmed unconscious bias as a major barrier to women's career progression (Evans and Maley, 2021), which is an increasingly common explanation for the perpetuation of gender inequalities and discrimination against women (Foley and Williamson, 2018). As the finding reveals, women can face unconscious bias not only from top management, but also from their line managers, of either sex. Evidence from the literature also confirms that women are discriminated against unconsciously in many aspects, such as recruitment, promotion, performance evaluation, and career development (Evans and Maley, 2021).

Furthermore, according to the findings of the National Bureau of Economic Research, women with children suffer significant obstacles in being employed and promoted when

compared to men and women without children. The study found that unconscious biases about parenting and views of work commitment reduce the likelihood of women getting employed and promoted (Bertrand et al., 2010). This finding is consistent with the discussion presented in Section 8.4.2.

8.6 Other barriers to women's career progression

Other barriers that emerged from the data from both banks could be divided into two categories: societal and individual. The societal barriers at the international bank consist mainly of cultural challenges women face from men's dominant culture and perception. In line with previous studies (e.g., Leung et al., 2005), the findings reveal that the dominant culture of a country has an impact on the operations of international organisations, as it determines some managerial practices. Moreover, cultural beliefs differentiate between the roles of men and women (Alder, 1994). Many studies have emphasised the part of culture in differentiating between the roles of men and women, with men typically being the breadwinners and women being the nurturing element that takes care of the family and home (Thomas and Inkson, 2007). Hence, each gender develops different traits and attitudes about what they are capable of depending on the roles expected of them by society (Lahtinen and Wilson, 1994; Anker et al., 2003).

The local bank also identified cultural perceptions of male dominance as a barrier to women's career progression. In addition, three other barriers were acknowledged that have influenced the progression of women: economic collapses and COVID-19. Oman faced a tremendous economic recession starting in 2014 due to the collapse of oil prices, which the country depended on. This had a significant financial impact on many organisations (Ennis and Al-Saqri, 2021), including the banking sector. Accordingly, some of career development practices at the bank were affected, including promotions and some of the career practices, such as international assignments. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant global crises for employees and organisations, as it entailed restrictions on many aspects and called for change in several organisational

practices, including career management (Akkermans et al., 2020; Guan et al., 2020; Vande Vusse et al., 2021). For instance, the direction towards online platforms in training and development practices. In addition to limitation in available posts especially at a senior level.

However, the absence of these barriers at the international bank outlines the international standards of management practices, as the bank has well-established career management, offered to employees globally, and hence the country's crisis did not have a significant impact on the organisation's practices. Moreover, the shift of work practices to online, which was introduced due to the impact of the pandemic, was a practice at the international bank that was established before the pandemic. The bank had already implemented flexibility in working hours, in addition to online career practices, and hence employees including women were not impacted by this aspect.

Furthermore, a labour market barrier was also identified from the findings of the local bank that affected the career progression of some women, which is the lack of female expertise in some specialised/technical fields, such as IT.

However, the underrepresentation of women in some specialisations, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and maths, is well documented in the literature (Beede et al., 2011; Su and Rounds, 2015; Wang and Degol, 2017). Hence, the scarcity of women in some specialised fields signals to senior management that there is a competency gap between men and women that restricts or limits women's ability to handle senior positions. The lack of female expertise in some specialised fields is a complex issues that can be influenced by variety of factors. For example, stereotypes about gender roles and abilities can create biases that limit women's access to certain fields or discourage them from pursuing careers in those fields. For instance, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are often seen as male-dominated, and women may face resistance or negative perceptions when trying to enter these fields. Also, women may face barriers to accessing education and training in specialised fields, which can limit their

ability to develop the necessary expertise. For example, women may be discouraged from pursuing advanced degrees in STEM fields due to the high cost of education, lack of mentorship or role models, and hostile work environments.

The second category of barriers is individual barriers, and women at both banks experienced similar barriers that affected their career progression, such as lack of work–life balance and lack of aspiration and ambition to hold senior positions. This finding is consistent with other studies that discussed the importance of work–life balance for women to manage the responsibilities of work and family (Kiser, 2015; Hurst et al., 2016). In addition to these two barriers, women at the international bank also faced a lack of confidence, which hindered their career progression to senior level. This finding is in line with other research findings on the negative impact of lack of confidence that some women might suffer regarding their career development and progression (Michailidis et al., 2012; Guillén et al., 2018).

Previous research has also indicated the lack of aspiration and ambition of some women to hold senior positions for one reason or another. For instance, some prioritise family over career progression, and some are satisfied with their current position and are not eager to shoulder additional responsibilities (Ezzedeen et al., 2015; Baker and Cangemi; 2016). Other studies (e.g., Ryan et al., 2007) consider that the individual barriers women face are actually organisational ‘push’ factors to marginalise women and challenge their progression, because they are known and can be solved by organisations, but they have been neglected and considered as individual barriers to women’s career progression. Harman and Sealy (2017) have added that considering the individual barriers perpetuates the view that women have inherently lower ambition than men to hold senior positions, which reproduces gender inequality in the form of discrimination and bias against women. These studies relate to this thesis on the identification of individual barriers that are believed to hinder women’s career progression. Although the banks are aware and suggested the existence of individual barriers which are hindering women’s career progression, there is no support provided to overcome these issues which ties well with

the organisations' intentions to marginalise women from senior positions and repeatedly indicates that these banks are gendered organisations.

8.7 The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality

The role of banks in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality and providing equal opportunities was examined through two main aspects: (1) gender difference in taking career practice opportunities; and (2) gender differences in opportunities provided to hold senior positions. It was discussed above that the banks were found to be gendered organisations, which implies that inequality is perpetuated through the practices and procedures of the banks. Accordingly, this section will compare the findings of two banks in these aspects and identify variations and inequality issues in women's career management.

8.7.1 Gender differences in taking career practice opportunities

The findings from the international and local banks suggest that career practices are offered equally but women face some challenges in attending these practices. For example, at the international bank, some women could not benefit from these practices due to workload, and some were not aware of how to use the learning portal; hence, these are considered organisational restrictions on career advancement. At the local bank, women faced some challenges which lowered their participation rate in career practices compared to their male counterparts. For instance, attending any of the career practices after working hours or travelling to attend a seminar or a training course could be challenging for women. However, these barriers are individual barriers that women could face due to family responsibilities. Nevertheless, family and lifestyle factors are highlighted by Hewlett and Luce (2005) as 'pull' factors that influence female employees to withdraw from developmental opportunities. This explanation is overshadowed by organisational 'push' factors that force some women to choose family over work or even have lower level of ambition, as they feel undervalued and lacked opportunities for

progression (Ryan et al., 2007). (IBID, 2007) also confirmed that ‘push’ factors implies that women’s experiences at the workplace is different than their male counterparts which could explain their underrepresentation at senior leadership positions.

Nevertheless, the banks, both international and local, were not found to be supportive or active in addressing issues restricting women’s participation. Hence, this confirms that the banks are gendered in their structures and practices. Providing equal opportunities for career management implies that the banks act within equality legislation, but the subtle gender discrimination and bias in their practices indicates the existence of inequality at the banks. This is similar to prior research, which indicated that employers depend on subtle discrimination to display bias in a way that does not contravene equality laws and legislation (Husu, 2000; Jones et al., 2017). Other results also supported this finding, indicating that subtle gender prejudice obstructs women’s growth possibilities and hence causes and reproduces inequality in the workplace (Roos and Gatta, 2009; Ibarra et al., 2013).

8.7.2 Gender differences in opportunities provided to hold senior positions

The findings show that both banks claim to offer equal opportunities for men and women to hold senior managerial posts. However, the provision of the same process and support by providing equal opportunities to men and women does not level the playing field for women to reach senior leadership positions due to the challenges that women face during their career journey.

At the international bank, the findings reveal that women encounter two major challenges when seeking senior leadership positions. Firstly, women don’t opt for pursuing such opportunities in comparison to their male counterparts. Secondly, they encounter a dearth of assistance and direction towards applying for senior positions. Senior male managers opine that women often do not perceive themselves as competent enough to assume these positions, indicating individual obstacles stemming from a lack of confidence, which has

been previously discussed in Section 8.5. However, this perception may be influenced by cultural expectations among some Omani men who do not approve of their wives working long hours, attending lunch or dinner meetings, or traveling. Such men prioritise familial responsibilities over professional ones. Additionally, some men may be unwilling to have their wives surpass them in professional or financial spheres, indicating potential bias.

According to research, women are observed to be less likely to pursue senior leadership posts for a variety of reasons, including self-doubt, a lack of confidence, cultural expectations, and implicit prejudices. For example, Eagly and Carli (2007) found that gender stereotypes and cultural expectations in society make women less inclined to pursue leadership roles. In a similar vein, Hewlett et al., (2013) reported that women frequently lack support and advice from their male colleagues, which is a substantial impediment to their job advancement. Furthermore, research has shown that male biases and cultural expectations frequently impact assessments of women's competence and aptitude for senior managerial positions. For example, Eagly and Karau (2002) reported that males frequently regard women as less capable than men leadership posts, despite identical levels of education and experience.

At the local bank, on the other hand, women and men are both facing challenges from accessing leadership positions, as the decision on appointments is biased for some positions. Although policies and procedures are followed for recruitment and selection, in some cases, the management already has a candidate in mind for the position, which indicates the existence of subtle discrimination and bias in the practices of the organisation, similar to the international bank. Subtle bias and discrimination in recruitment and selection have been well documented in the literature. This could include unconscious bias and the phenomenon of homophily as well (e.g., Jones et al., 2017; Whysall, 2018; Nielsen, 2021).

Overall, despite the implementation of equality legislation on providing equal opportunities to men and women, in career management and leadership positions, it was

found that women face many challenges that influence their career progression negatively without the support of the organisations, in addition to the subtle gender discrimination and bias that exist at the banks, which stand against women's career progression. In addition, it was found at the international bank, which is subject to international standards on gender equality and equal opportunities, that practices and procedures are more structured and less subject to discrimination, whereas the local bank does not have well-established career management and is not focused on gender equality issues and increasing the representation of women in senior positions. Consequently, it affects the decisions and practices followed at the bank resulting in scarcity of women at senior leadership positions.

8.8 Organisational interventions and their impact on women's career progression

The international bank recognises issues around the scarcity of women in leadership positions and provides some interventions that are targeted at women; for instance, role models, work-life balance measures, developmental programmes, forums and surveys. These findings tie in with previous studies on interventional schemes provided to women to help them progress in their careers. For example, Sealy and Singh (2010) confirmed the importance of involving female senior managers as role models for other women, as examples of success and the possibility of reaching senior positions, and as support to help women reach senior positions. Furthermore, work-life balance has been a crucial area for women's career progression, supported by many studies (e.g., Forret and Doherty, 2004; Brough et al., 2008). Mousa et al. (2021) emphasised the necessity to provide women with interventions to help them progress. However, the findings shows that the bank does not have a mechanism to measure the effectiveness of the interventions on women's career progression, which brings into question the objectives of offering these interventions in the first place.

In contrast, although the local bank recognises the issue of the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions, it was emphasised by the bank that their

appointment is based on competency only. Accordingly, the bank is of the view that intervention is not required for women to progress in their career, as whoever is hired would be the best fit for the position. This view does not reflect the providence of the bank in the issue of scarcity of women in senior leadership positions. Otherwise, it would have a mechanism or a strategy to tackle this issue towards preparing women to handle senior positions. However, the bank only conducts work–life balance forums for women, presented by successful senior women as role models to increase the productivity of female employees, and overcome the challenge of balancing between their work and family responsibilities.

This suggests that the local bank focuses on work–life balance as an area that needs intervention to assist women to balance different responsibilities at work and home. However, the bank’s point of view on the issue of the underrepresentation of women in senior positions does not reflect the provision of work–life balance as an intervention to help women succeed and progress in their careers, but rather as an action or a weakness or a limitation to women’s capabilities in handling different responsibilities, which explains the targeted group. This result is consistent with unequal practices at the organisation, which could be perpetuated via the unconscious bias of seniors; in an attempt to help women, they actually discriminate against them by enforcing stereotypical gender roles and undermining the capabilities of women at work. This result casts a new light on the implications of unconscious bias for work–life balance, where the negative outcomes have a long-term effect on women’s career progression, which leads to a scarcity of women in leadership positions.

Some research supports the concept that work-life balance is an area that requires intervention to help women in balancing various duties at work and at home. There is also evidence that implies that women’s scarcity in senior jobs is the result of unconscious bias and gender stereotypes, rather than women’s incapacity to undertake several duties. For instance, according to a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, women who had access to flexible work arrangement, such as telecommuting and flexible

scheduling, had higher job satisfaction and were more likely to stay with their employer (Giebelhausen et al., 2020). Another study, carried out by Moen et al., (2019), revealed that when leaders supported work-life balance, employees felt more in control of both their professional and personal lives, which led to improved job performance.

Other research, however, imply that providing work-life balance may not be adequate to solve the underrepresentation of women in top positions. According to Dierdorff and Wilson (2020), while work-life balance practices were connected with higher levels of job satisfaction for women, they did not necessarily lead to higher levels of career advancement. According to the authors, this may be due to the fact that work-life balance practices are frequently perceived as ‘women’s issue’ rather than a broader organisational issue, which can lead to women being stigmatised or penalised for utilising these practices.

According to the evidence, work-life balance appears to be a significant component in promoting women’s career success, but it should not be considered as a stand-alone solution to eliminating gender imbalance in the workplace. Organisations must take a more comprehensive approach, which involves tackling unconscious bias and gender stereotypes, as well as offering professional development opportunities and support for women at all levels.

It was found that the banks, particularly the international bank, provide interventions to assist women without precisely specifying the results they seek to achieve. For instance, they provide a leadership development programme for women without specifying how many women should be promoted to senior positions as a result of the programme. It might be difficult to assess the effectiveness of an intervention if there are no clear goals. Moreover, they lack a solid framework in place to track and evaluate progress towards those objectives. For instance, while the international bank wishes to raise the number of women in leadership positions, it does not keep track of the number of women who seek for leadership positions or who are promoted. Furthermore, banks provide interventions to help women while failing to address underlying biases that may be contributing to their

underrepresentation in leadership roles. Furthermore, banks may lack diversity in career development and promotion decision-making processes, which can result in interventions that are ineffective for all women. For instance, the banks that are predominantly headed by men may provide interventions that favour women who conform to traditional gender norms more than women who have other professional goals or family commitments.

In sum, the findings imply that there is a difference between the awareness and approach to tackle the issue of scarcity of women at senior leadership positions in both banks. International equality standards are imposed at the international bank, which urge the bank to intervene in increasing the representation of women at senior positions by providing various interventions. Conversely, at the local bank, although there are equality legislations at a state level, the issue of the scarcity of women at leadership positions is not observed as a critical issue that needs to be addressed. However, it is important for the banks to take a strategic approach to measuring the effectiveness of interventions to support women in their careers, and to address underlying biases and lack of diversity in decision making processes. Without these measures, interventions may fall short in achieving their desired outcomes.

8.9 Conceptual framework of the study

Drawing upon the foundational conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.1, this study has yielded a comprehensive framework (Figure 8.1) that sheds light on the factors and barriers affecting the career progression of women in the banking sector through career management practices and offer possibilities to enhance the representation of women in senior leadership positions. The framework delineates the external and organisational factors that exert an impact on women's career progression. External factors comprise societal and individual challenges that impede women's progress throughout their careers, whereas organisational factors highlight discriminatory practices and biases against women in the workplace.

Researchers and policymakers have long been concerned about the chronic underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Women continue to face significant barriers to career advancement, despite recent progress. In this context, contemporary career development theory provides a useful framework for understanding how women can progress in their careers through intentional and proactive career management practices. This argument draws on the existing literature to support the notion that contemporary career development theory can be used as a foundation for women's professional advancement.

The relevance of career management practices that focus on development, relationships, and information is emphasised in contemporary career development theory. Individuals can progress their careers, according to Lent and Brown (2013), by seeking out challenging and important work experiences, expanding their skills and knowledge, and forming good relationships with colleagues and mentors. Individuals can benefit from these practices by increasing their visibility, influence, and prospects for progress.

When it comes to career advancement, women confront different obstacles such as, bias, discrimination, and limited access to mentorship and sponsorship opportunities (Eagly and Carli, 2020; Settles et al., 2019). Women on the other hand, can improve their chances of success by enrolling in career development activities. For instance, Ledge et al. (2014) noticed that women who actively sought out mentors and sponsors were more likely to get promoted and achieve job success than those who did not. As a result, contemporary career development theory underlines the significance of active and intentional career management. This is especially crucial for women, who confront numerous challenges and obstacles to development in their careers. Women can boost their chances of reaching their job goals by actively managing their careers and searching out developmental opportunities (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2015).

Furthermore, contemporary career development theory emphasises the psychological and social elements that influence women's professional choices and habits. The idea

underlines the need for self-awareness in job decisions, challenging individuals to recognise their abilities, values, interests, and personality qualities, as well as how these relate to their career goals. According to a study conducted by Lent and Brown (2013), the adoption of career development theories like self-efficacy and social cognitive career theory can assist women in overcoming challenges to professional growth. These theories, through increasing self-awareness and the development of skills and competence, can assist women in making informed career decisions and developing strategies to overcome difficulties. Furthermore, development career theory has resulted in the development of various interventions, including mentoring, coaching, and training programs, with the goal of providing women with the information and relationships they need to thrive in their jobs. A review of the literature by Fitzgerald and Harmon (2019) found that interventions based on career development theories can have positive effects on women's career progression. These interventions offer women the assistance and direction they need to navigate their job and build the skills and competencies needed for advancement. However, contemporary career development theory recognises also the importance of social and cultural components in decision-making.

Interventions, another organisational factor, are implemented to increase the representation of women in senior leadership positions. These interventions should be designed, implemented, and measured based on objectives aimed at increasing the representation of women at senior leadership positions. Also, the interventions could be aimed directly to increase the representation of women at senior positions through equality of results approach that permits direct interference to tackle the issue. Furthermore, the framework offers an approach that emphasises the contributors who can assist women in their career progression. These contributors are based on the contemporary career development theory emphasising the value of obtaining qualifications and experience and the role of sponsorship, mobility/lateral moves, and support of line managers in advancing women's careers.

In conclusion, the framework developed in this study offers valuable insights into how organisations, particularly those in the banking sector, can improve policies and practices to enhance the career progression of women and increase their representation in senior leadership positions.

External Factors

Organisational Factors

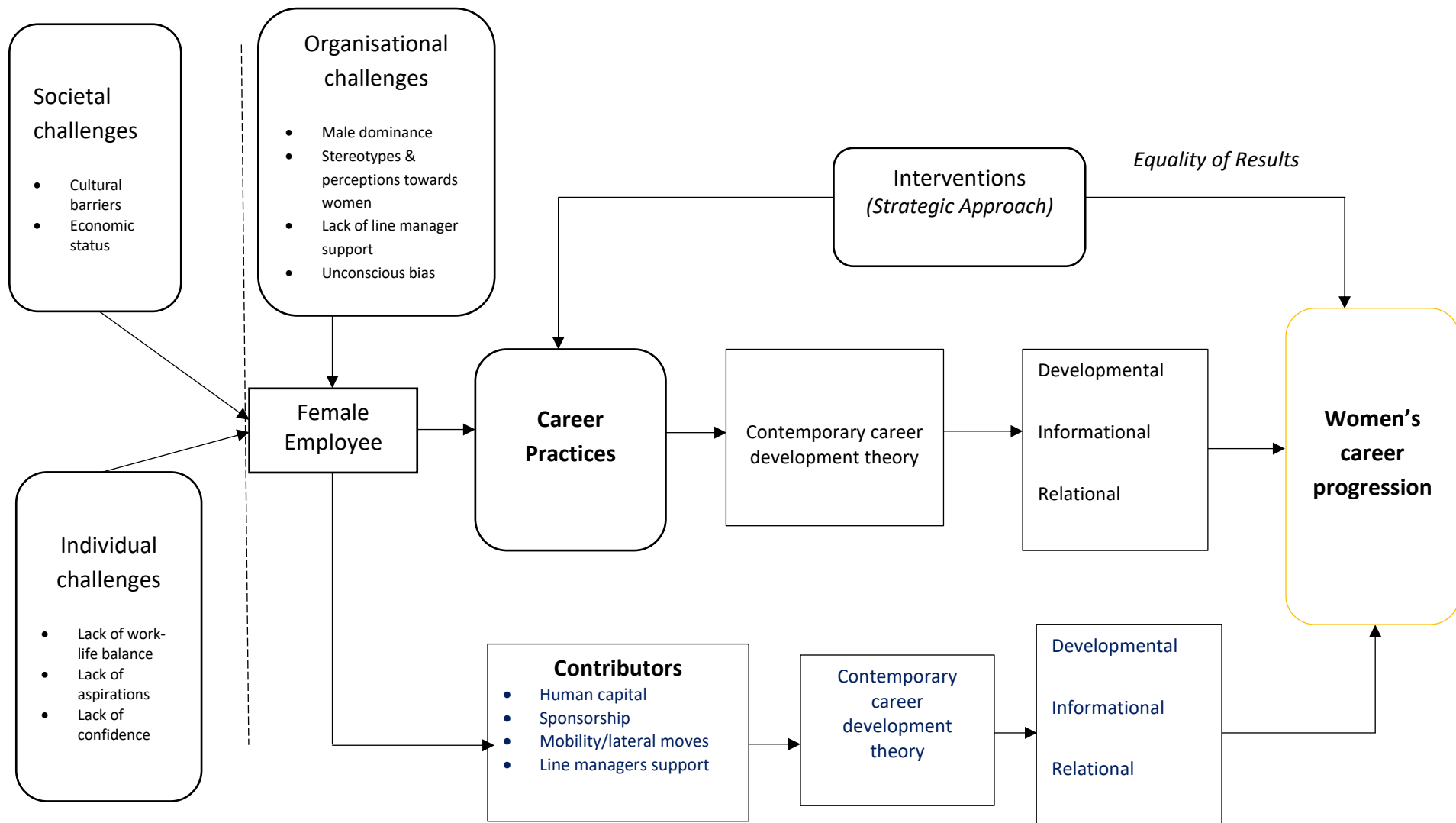


Figure 8.1 A conceptual framework of this study

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the conclusion of the thesis, beginning with an overview, followed by the contributions of the research. The contributions section addresses four main aspects: (1) gaps in the literature, (2) new findings on the Omani banking sector, (3) methodological contributions, and (4) recommendations to policy and decision-makers. Finally, the chapter outlines the limitations of the research, and sets out suggestions for future research.

9.2 Overview of the thesis

Chapter 1 outlined the research background and provided the reasons for conducting the research. It highlighted the main aim of the research, which was to study the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions through the lens of career management system and its impact on women's career progression. The research framework was highlighted, which explored the relationship between management practices and career success and progression.

The literature review was divided into three chapters, each highlighting a particular research question of the thesis. Chapter 2 discussed different perspectives on careers, including traditional and contemporary careers, in addition to the differences between men and women in career pathways, where women are affected by their circumstances. The chapter also highlighted the characteristics of gendered organisations and how they impact women's career progression negatively.

Chapter 3 shed light on different barriers that women face during their career journeys, including organisational, societal, and individual. However, the chapter focused on the organisational barriers since organisations are the unit of analysis for this study.

Chapter 4 reviewed the literature on two main topics: the equality legislation issues that frame organisational policies and practices to ensure that the law is complied with, and

how equality and fairness are applied throughout organisational policies and practices. The chapter also discussed different interventional strategies that should work as a support system for women to progress in their careers to senior leadership positions.

Chapter 5 outlined the methodological approach of the thesis and justified the rationale for the research methods adopted. It highlighted that the decision to adopt qualitative research was influenced by the philosophical perspectives of the qualitative approach and the nature of the research questions, which investigate women's career management and barriers to their career success and progression. Furthermore, the chapter discussed the sampling strategy and the interview guide and process. The chapter also outlined the thematic data analysis, validity, and ethical issues of the research. Finally, it concluded with reflections and challenges faced by the researcher during this critical stage of the study.

Chapters 6 and 7 reported the secondary and primary findings from the international bank and the local bank, respectively. The data were presented as per the themes that emerged after a thorough analysis of the collected data as identified by the researcher, and their relation to the research questions. The chapter investigated the career trajectories of employees at senior and other occupational levels and highlighted the contributors to success, the barriers, and the impact of the career management system on their career progression. Different factors were identified that considered as contributors to career success and progression; these were divided into organisational and individual contributors. Organisational career planning and management at the two banks was also examined, and their impact on women's career progression was highlighted. The chapter also discussed various organisational barriers that women face during their career journeys that hinder their career progression, which were based mainly on gender discrimination and bias. Furthermore, other societal and individual barriers were identified during data collection, and they were highlighted due to their negative impact and interrelation in hindering women's career progression. Also, the role of organisations in either challenging or perpetuating gender inequality was established and resulted in viewing the banks as gendered organisations that perpetuate gender inequalities. Finally, the chapter

discussed the interventions applied by the banks to support increasing the proportion of women in senior leadership positions.

Chapter 8 provided an integrated discussion of the empirical findings in the context of the overarching research questions presented in Chapter 1.

Finally, Chapter 9 is the conclusion of the thesis.

9.3 Contributions of the research

This section explains the thesis's contribution to knowledge, categorised into four sub-sections: filling the gaps in the literature, new findings in the Omani banking sector, methodological contributions, and recommendations to policy and decision-makers.

9.3.1 Gaps in the literature

First, this thesis contributes to the discourse on gender inequality in the career management of women in general, and to the literature within the context of the Omani banking sector in particular, which is unavailable. It also confirmed some previous research findings on women's career progression and associated barriers. It fills the research gap on the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions through the lens of career management systems and emphasises the lack of a systematic approach to women's career management, which reduces the representation of women in senior leadership positions.

Second, this study revealed that gender inequalities are perpetuated due to the existence of subtle gender discrimination and bias in the organisations, which may be practised unconsciously by senior or line managers. This explains the existence of various organisational barriers women face till date. Although the barriers are well documented, yet the role of organisations on tackling these barriers has not been clarified in the literature.

Third, this study established the critical role played by the line manager in either hindering or progressing the careers of female employees. Hence, it disagrees with Perry and Kulik's (2008) views on the effectiveness of devolving the HR responsibilities of people management, which includes career management systems.

Fourth, this study underlined that offering equality of opportunities among men and women does not help women to ascend to senior leadership positions, as it does not level the playing field for women due to the challenges they face during their career journey that hinder their progression. Hence, organisations should be allowed to treat women differently/ or provide more opportunities for them to increase their representation at senior leadership positions.

Fifth, the study adds to the literature on organisational interventions offered to support women's career progression, which is limited. The organisational interventions lacked a strategic approach towards their aims and objectives, which failed in helping women progress in their career.

Sixth, the study also establishes that the career progression is influenced by constant factors, such as, qualification, experience, lateral moves, and line manager support. All employees, particularly at senior level, share these set of factors, hence, they are considered as constant factors that influence the career progression of employees. In addition to variable factors, such as, networking, announcements, and family support. The variable factors distinguish the career trajectory of employees based on various circumstances and decisions that the employees undertake which shape consequently their career path. The constant and variable factors are stemmed from individual and organisational factors that influence the career progression of employees.

Finally, the study's findings highlight the gendered nature of theories used to explain career progression, which are based on the Bagdadli and Giannecchini framework (2019). The framework employs various theories such as human capital theory, social learning theory, signalling theory, social capital theory, and career development theory, but fails to account for the different challenges and barriers that women encounter in their career

journeys. As a result, the framework may not fully capture the experiences of women in the workforce and may perpetuate gender inequalities in career advancement. The study's contribution underscores the need to incorporate a contemporary approach towards career development theories that are inclusive to gender issues and provide more understanding on the various factors that affect women's career trajectories.

9.3.2 New findings on the Omani banking sector

The study contributes to the understanding of why and how some Omani women progress to senior levels in the banking sector. The analysis provided rich details of how individual and organisational contributors help in women career progression. Hence, any woman in the banking sector who seeks to be in a senior managerial position will have much to understand and learn from the career trajectories of senior managers and can follow the same path to success.

Another contribution is that the study revealed that the banking sector in Oman is gendered, and inequalities are perpetuated through subtle gender discrimination and bias in the practices and procedures of the banks, which is also evident by the organisational barriers women face that hinder their career progression. Also, the study showed that the barriers women face in the banking sector in Oman as a developing country are not too different from those that stand in the way of women's progression in developed countries.

Another contribution is the clarification that career practices in the banking sector, in addition to being used as a developmental tool that leads to career success and progression, are used as a regulatory and disciplinary tool (disciplinary at the local bank only) that maintains the status quo.

The main contribution from comparing the international and local banks is the finding that the international bank focuses on the development of the employees more so than the local bank, by providing career planning and various career practices, yet it lacks a strategic approach on the equal provision of such practices, which could allow the act of discrimination in some circumstances. Also, as a global organisation that functions within

an international equality framework, it recognises the issue of the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions and tries to apply different interventional schemes to tackle the issue, which is not the case with the local bank. However, no mechanisms are applied by the international bank to measure the outcomes of these interventions and, thus, their effectiveness or impact on women is not known.

Finally, the analysis of the study offers a framework (see Figure 8.1) for understanding women's career practices and progression in the banking sector in Oman and helps the decision-makers and policy-makers in developing strategies for improving the representation of women in Oman at senior managerial levels in the banking sector or any other sector.

9.3.3 Methodological contributions

This study has three methodological contributions. *First*, it is distinguished from other studies in the field of women's career management and progression in that it also included men for the purpose of investigating equality issues in the banking sector, as men dominate leadership positions and overwhelmingly are the decision-makers. *Second*, the study targeted men and women from senior and other occupational levels, and HR managers to gain rich, triangulated data collected from different sources to ensure accuracy and validity. Other studies within the field have targeted mainly women at the managerial level only. *Third*, it is the first study in the career management field that is based on a comparative case study between an international bank and a local bank in Oman.

9.3.4 Recommendations to policy and decision-makers

The study's results and contributions provide vital insights for policy and decision makers in the banking sector, as well as any other sector striving to improve women's representation in senior leadership roles. The following recommendations are made in light of these findings:

1. The career framework offered to women is frequently the same as that offered to men, and is based on a male model. However, women's career trajectories are unique and their needs vary depending on individual circumstances and conditions they experience. As a result, organisations must adopt a new approach to women's career practices. Organisations, for example, can create career development programs that are specifically customised to women's individual needs and career goals, providing them the tools and resources they need to advance in their careers. The framework (Figure 8.1) serves as a foundation for understanding the impact of several factors on women's career advancement and offers an alternate path for advancement by prioritising the contributors that can aid women in their career progression.
2. Policy and decision makers should actively support women's leadership and visibility inside the organisation, especially by offering them with opportunities to take part in high-profile initiatives, committees, and business events. This can help enhance the presence of women in leadership roles while also providing role models for future generations.
3. Women frequently experience difficulties balancing work and family commitments, which can have a detrimental impact on their career advancement. As a result, policymakers must prioritise the implementation of diverse work-life balance measures in order to support women and ensure that they are not disadvantaged in their career paths. These regulations should be vigorously enforced by decision makers and male managers without regard for gender.
4. The discrimination and biases that women face in the workplace, as well as the limited opportunities for career advancement, highlight the importance of establishing a tripartite relationship between HR, line managers, and employees in order to develop and implement effective career management systems for women. Organisations can also promote equality and fairness in policy and practice

implementation. Another key method is to provide managers with training and education to improve awareness of unconscious bias and prejudice, as well as provide them with the knowledge and abilities to recognise and resolve these issues. Another effective technique is to establish explicit policies and procedures that prevent discrimination and to hold managers accountable for their behaviour. These policies should be clearly publicised to all employees and should include means for reporting instances of discrimination. Organisations that use these measures can reduce the consequences of bias and discrimination, promote justice and provide possibilities for women to succeed in their professions.

5. Sponsorship is an important aspect in supporting women's job advancement. However, the scarcity of sponsors is a significant impediment to the advancement of women in leadership roles. To overcome this issue, organisations must establish formal sponsorship programs that prioritise women's support and growth. This endeavour should not be dependent entirely on senior management to find and support female personnel. Organisations must instead design targeted projects that generate sponsorships from all levels of the organisation. These programs could involve identifying high-potential female employees and matching them with sponsors who can offer advice, assistance, and access to critical opportunities. Organisations can also use internal networks to link female employees with possible sponsors as well as develop formal sponsorship programs to offer women with additional support and guidance.

Organisations can exhibit strong female leaders and emphasise their achievements in order to develop a culture of mentorship and sponsorship. This can create role models for women to look up to and highlight the concrete benefits of sponsorship. Furthermore, it is critical to encourage male colleagues to participate in mentoring and sponsorship efforts in order to foster an inclusive atmosphere that celebrates diversity and promotes women's growth. Moreover, organisations can hold managers accountable for helping female employees' career development by attaching career advancement chances to their ability to encourage and foster

female employees' career progression. Organisations can build a supportive and inclusive culture that fosters women's rise to leadership roles by employing these steps.

6. Based on the findings of this study, it is important for organisations to move beyond the traditional 'equality of opportunities' approach and adopt an 'equality of results' model to achieve gender equality in senior leadership positions. This means that organisations should intervene in their practices to ensure a fair distributions of outcomes, taking into account the challenges women face in their career journeys. To achieve this, organisations can set targets for female representation in leadership positions, create leadership pipeline, and provide opportunities for women to showcase their leadership skills.
7. In light of the study's findings, it is suggested that organisations take a proactive approach to identifying and removing the hurdles that prevent women from advancing to senior leadership positions. To accomplish this, organisations should perform a thorough evaluation of their current procedures and policies to identify areas that need to be improved. Based on this assessment, a well-designed interventional program for women at both the individual and organisational levels should be established and implemented. The interventions should be consistent with the organisation's values and goals, with the goal of increasing the representation of women in senior leadership roles. Clear targets and metrics should be define and communicated to all stakeholders to ensure the success of these interventions. Furthermore, organisations should review the success of these interventions on regular basis to make required adjustments and verify that they are acquiring the desired results.

The implementation of these recommendations can assist to build a more equal and inclusive workplace that supports women's career advancement and increases their participation in senior leadership positions.

9.4 Limitations and future research

The thesis has enhanced knowledge about the career management systems that are related to women's career progression in the Omani banking sector. However, it is important to highlight some limitations, which may impact its findings.

- Previous studies on career management systems in the banking sector in Oman are lacking, making it difficult for the researcher to obtain secondary data that could have been used to address the research problem and support the findings, and/ or to identify whether there has been change over time?
- It was difficult for the researcher to obtain policies and other documentation related to career management from the banks, due to confidentiality and sensitivity of the data, in addition to the restrictive policies of the banks on sharing and accessing this information. Hence, the researcher obtained the available data from the websites of the banks to be used as secondary data. Moreover, the published data on the local bank's website were limited compared to the international bank's published data related to career development of employees.
- The number of participations from the banks is low, but the researcher was able to interview key employees who fully possess the required data for the study. These employees are the subject matter expert in their fields and can provide detailed and nuanced perspectives that would be difficult to obtain from a larger number of less-informed participants.
- Participants from other occupational levels at the local bank have limited knowledge about career planning and practices and some of the terminology used, which could affect the outcomes of the data analysis. However, the researcher explained the terminologies in addition to conducting the interviews in Arabic for some participants, which made the discussion easier and more comfortable.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and various restrictions imposed, interviews were conducted using the online platform Zoom. The participants preferred to turn off their video, which made it challenging for the researcher to build a rapport with the participants.

On the other hand, this thesis proposes a number of potential future research avenues. *First*, the research suggests that a systematic approach to women's career management is lacking. Hence, the framework proposed by this study could be studied on women career management, and its suitability could be examined in another context, such as, the education sector. Further study in this area will add new insights to the appropriateness of using a separate framework for women's career management and progression, taking into consideration gender equality issues. *Second*, this study revealed that gender inequalities are perpetuated in the organisations due to the existence of subtle gender discrimination and bias that could be practised by managers unconsciously and causes the perpetuation of barriers that women face. Hence, further research is required on the importance of establishing a tripartite relationship at the level of the organisation consisting of HR, the line manager, and the employee to ensure equality and fairness in the implementation of policies and practices.

Third, the research revealed that providing equal opportunities for men and women in career practices and senior leadership positions does not level the playing field for women's career progression, as women are faced with various challenges/ barriers that hinder their career progression distinct from their males' counterparts. Accordingly, an equality of opportunities perspective could be an unfair organisational approach towards increasing the representation of women at senior leadership positions. Hence, a further study could be undertaken to explore the 'equality of results' approach and examine its applicability to support women's career progression.

Fourth, the research suggests that there is scope for a greater focus on the use of career practices as a disciplinary tool that helps to maintain the status quo, and the implications of this. How does it affect employees' careers? This will offer another view of career management from being a developmental tool to a disciplinary tool. *Fifth*, further research could be conducted on organisational interventions as a strategic support system to help women succeed and progress in their career. *Sixth*, the positive impact of COVID-19 on employees' career management is an area that could be studied further. As was noted, employees are more eager to attend some career practices online to avoid travel costs,

have the comfort of attending while at home, and avoid interacting and socialising with others. This also raises a concern about the change in people's behaviour to becoming more introverted than normal social nature allows. Hence, how does this change impact HR strategies on employees' developmental schemes?

9.5 Chapter conclusion

This study has provided a comprehensive overview of the contributions of the research, highlighting its significant findings and recommendations. The study provides valuable insights into the challenges that hinder women's career progression to senior leadership positions, and offers recommendations to policymakers and decision makers to increase the representation of women at senior leadership positions. The study also presents methodological contributions that can inform future research in this area. Ultimately, the study contributes to the existing literature on women's career management and career progression, and offers important insights into the banking sector in Oman.

REFERENCES

- Abalkhail, J.M. and Allan, B., 2016. 'Wasta' and women's careers in the Arab Gulf States. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(3), pp.162–180.
- Abdulkadir, D.S., Isiaka, S.B. and Adedoyin, S.I., 2012. Effects of strategic performance appraisal, career planning and employee participation on organizational commitment: An empirical study. *International Business Research*, 5(4), p.124.
- ACAS, 2013. What's the difference? Direct and indirect discrimination. [ONLINE]. Available at: <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4614> [Accessed 09 January 2019].
- Ackah, C. and Heaton, N., 2004. The reality of 'new' careers for men and for women. *Journal of European Industrial Training*.
- Acker, J., 1990. Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. *Gender and Society*, 4(2), pp.139–158.
- Acker, J., 1992. Gendering organizational theory. *Classics of Organizational Theory*, 6, pp.450–459.
- Acker, J., 2006. Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender and Society*, 20(4), pp.441–464.
- Acker, J., 2012. Gendered organisations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 31(3), pp.214–224.
- Ackers, P., 2003. The work–life balance from the perspective of economic policy actors. *Social Policy and Society*, 2(3), pp.221–229.
- Adler, N.J., 1994. Competitive frontiers: Women managing across borders. *Journal of Management Development*.
- Akhtar, N., Aziz, S., Hussain, Z., Ali, S. and Salman, M., 2014. Factors affecting employees' motivation in banking sector of Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Business Strategy*, 4(10), p.125.
- Akkermans, J., Richardson, J. and Kraimer, M.L., 2020. The Covid-19 crisis as a career shock: Implications for careers and vocational behavior.

Al-Dajani, H., & Marzouq, M. (2020). Women's career advancement in Saudi Arabia: the role of organisational support and cultural values. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(12), 1518-1543.

Al Shaibany, S., 2018. Are Omani women getting equal opportunities? [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.omanobserver.om/are-omani-women-getting-equal-opportunities> [Accessed 05 May 2020].

Alhalwachi, L. and Mordi, C., 2021. Organisational, societal, and individual factors affecting women's career progression in Bahraini banking sector. *Journal of Sustainable Finance and Investment*, pp.1–25.

Alias, N., Othman, R., Hamid, L., Salaway, N., Romaiha, R., Samad, K. et al., 2018. Managing job design: The roles of job rotation, job enlargement and job enrichment on job satisfaction. *Journal of Economic and Management Perspectives*, 12(1), pp.397–401

Al-Lamki, S.M., 2005. The role of the private sector in Omanization: The case of the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman. *International Journal of Management*, 22(2), p.176.

Allen, T.D., 2001. Family-supportive work environments: The role of organizational perceptions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 58(3), pp.414–435.

Allen, T.D., Eby, L.T., Poteet, M.L., Lentz, E. and Lima, L., 2004. Career benefits associated with mentoring for protégés: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(1), p.127.

Allen, T.D., French, K.A. and Poteet, M.L., 2016. Women and career advancement: Issues and opportunities. *Organizational Dynamics*, 45(3), pp.206–216.

Al-Rahbi, I.A., 2008. *An Empirical Study of the Key Knowledge Economy Factors for Sustainable Economic Development in Oman*. Doctoral dissertation, Victoria University.

Alsaawi, A. 2014. A critical review of qualitative interviews. *European Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 3(4).

Anderson, V. 2004. *Research Methods in Human Resource Management*. CIPD Publishing.

Anker, R., Melkas, H. and Korten, A., 2003. *Gender-based Occupational Segregation in the 1990s*. International Labour Office.

- Antoniou, E., 2010. Career planning process and its role in human resource development. *Annals of the University of Petroșani, Economics*, 10(2), pp.13–22.
- Anwar, A., Nisar, Q.A., Khan, N.Z.A. and Sana, A., 2014. Talent management: Strategic priority of organizations. *International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies*, 9(3), p.1148.
- Archibald, M.M., Ambagtsheer, R.C., Casey, M.G. and Lawless, M., 2019. Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, p.1609406919874596.
- Arneson, R. 2002. Equality of opportunity. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equal-opportunity> [Accessed 05 March 2019].
- Arthur, M.B., 1994. The boundaryless career: A new perspective for organisational inquiry. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 15(4), pp.295–306.
- Arthur, M.B. and Rousseau, D.M., eds., 2001. *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organisational Era*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Arthur, M.B., Hall, D.T. and Lawrence, B.S., 1989. Generating new directions in career theory: The case for a transdisciplinary approach. *Handbook of Career Theory*, 7, p.25.
- Arthur, M.B., Khapova, S.N. and Wilderom, C.P., 2005. Career success in a boundaryless career world. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 26(2), pp.177–202.
- Bacchi, C., 2004. Policy and discourse: Challenging the construction of affirmative action as preferential treatment. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11(1), pp.128–146.
- Baert, S., De Pauw, A.S. and Deschacht, N., 2016. Do employer preferences contribute to sticky floors? *ILR Review*, 69(3), pp.714–736.
- Bagdadli, S. and Gianecchini, M., 2019. Organizational career management practices and objective career success: A systematic review and framework. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(3), pp.353–370.

- Bain, O. and Cummings, W., 2000. Academe's glass ceiling: Societal, professional-organizational, and institutional barriers to the career advancement of academic women. *Comparative Education Review*, 44(4), pp.493–514.
- Bajdo, L. and Dickson, M., 2001. Perceptions of organizational culture and women's advancement in organizations: A cross-cultural examination. *Sex Roles*, 45(5–6), pp.399–414.
- Baker, D.P. and Casey, B., 2010. *Eve On Top: Women's Experience of Success in the Public Sector* [ONLINE]. Burlington. Available from: Elsevier Collection [Accessed 14 June 2019].
- Baker, J. and Cangemi, J., 2016. Why are there so few women CEOs and senior leaders in corporate America? *Organization Development Journal*, 34(2), p.31.
- Baker, M., 2010. Choices or constraints? Family responsibilities, gender and academic career. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 41(1), pp.1–18.
- Balafoutas, L., Davis, B. and Sutter, M., 2016. Affirmative action or just discrimination? A study on the endogenous emergence of quotas. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 127(C), pp.87–98.
- Bali, S. and Liu, M.C., 2018, November. Students' perceptions toward online learning and face-to-face learning courses. In *Journal of Physics: Conference Series* (Vol. 1108, p. 012094). IOP Publishing.
- Ballaro, J.M. and Polk, L., 2017. Developing an organization for future growth using succession planning. *Organization Development Journal*, 35(4), pp.41–59.
- Baral, R. and Bhargava, S., 2010. Work-family enrichment as a mediator between organizational interventions for work-life balance and job outcomes. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25(3), pp.274–300.
- Barnard, C. and Hepple, B., 2000. Substantive equality. *Cambridge Law Journal*, 59(3), pp.562–585.
- Barreto, M., Ryan, M.K. and Schmitt, M.T., 2009. *The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century: Understanding Barriers to Gender Equality*, 1st ed. [ONLINE]. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Baruch, Y., 1996. Organizational career planning and management techniques and activities in use in high-tech organizations. *Career Development International*.

- Baruch Y., 2004. Transforming careers: From linear to multidirectional career paths. Organisational and individual perspectives. *Career Development International*, 9, pp.58–73.
- Baruch, Y., 2006. Career development in organizations and beyond: Balancing traditional and contemporary viewpoints. *Human Resource Management Review*, 16(2), pp.125–138.
- Baruch, Y., 2009. To MBA or not to MBA. *Career Development International*.
- Baruch, Y. and Budhwar, P.S., 2006. A comparative study of career practices for management staff in Britain and India. *International Business Review*, 15(1), pp.84–101.
- Baruch, Y. and Peiperl, M., 2000. Career management practices: An empirical survey and implications. *Human Resource Management*, 39(4), pp.347–366.
- Bates, T., Thomas, C.S. and Timming, A.R., 2021. Employment discrimination against gender diverse individuals in Western Australia. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 40(3), pp.273–289.
- Baxter, P. and Jack, S., 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The qualitative report*, 13(4), pp.544–559.
- Beattie, G. and Johnson, P., 2012. Possible unconscious bias in recruitment and promotion and the need to promote equality. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 16(1), pp.7–13.
- Beede, D.N., Julian, T.A., Langdon, D., McKittrick, G., Khan, B. and Doms, M.E., 2011. Women in STEM: A gender gap to innovation. *Economics and Statistics Administration Issue Brief*, 04–11.
- Beeson, J. and Valerio, A.M., 2012. The executive leadership imperative: A new perspective on how companies and executives can accelerate the development of women leaders. *Business Horizons*, 55(5), pp.417–425.
- Belwal, S. and Belwal, R., 2014. Work-life balance, family-friendly policies and quality of work life issues: Studying employers' perspectives of working women in Oman. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15(1), pp.96–117.
- Benschop, Y. and Verloo, M., 2011. Gender change, organisational change, and gender equality strategies. In *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organisation*. John Wiley, pp.277–290.

- Benschop, Y., Holgersson, C., Van den Brink, M. and Wahl, A., 2015. Future challenges for practices of diversity management in organizations. In *Handbook for Diversity in Organizations*. Oxford University Press, pp.553–574.
- Berg, B.L., 2007. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. London: Pearson.
- Bertrand, M., Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2010). Dynamics of the gender gap for young professional in the financial and corporate sectors. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w14681>.
- Besson, S., 2008. Gender Discrimination under EU and ECHR Law: Never Shall the Twain Meet?. *Human Rights Law Review*, 8(4), pp.647-682.
- Betz, N.E. and Fitzgerald, L.F., 1987. *The Career Psychology of Women*. Academic Press.
- Bhaskar, R., 2013. *A Realist Theory of Science*. Routledge.
- Bhide, V. and Tootell, B., 2018. Perceptions of sponsoring as a career advancement tool for women: Are they different in Europe? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 16(1), pp.3–19.
- Bjerk, D., 2008. Glass ceilings or sticky floors? Statistical discrimination in a dynamic model of hiring and promotion. *Economic Journal*, 118(530), pp.961–982.
- Boslaugh, S., 2007. An introduction to secondary data analysis. *Secondary data sources for public health: A practical guide*, pp.2-10.
- Bossuyt, S. and Van Kenhove, P., 2018. Assertiveness bias in gender ethics research: Why women deserve the benefit of the doubt. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 150(3), pp.727–739.
- Brammer, S., Millington, A. and Pavelin, S., 2009. Corporate reputation and women on the board. *British Journal of Management*, 20(1), pp.17–29.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2012. Thematic analysis. In *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, Vol. 2. APA.
- Briscoe, J.P., Hall, D.T. and DeMuth, R.L.F., 2006. Protean and boundaryless careers: An empirical exploration. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 69(1), pp.30–47.
- Britton, D.M., 2000. The epistemology of the gendered organization. *Gender and Society*, 14(3), pp.418–434.

Britton, D.M., 2003. *At Work in the Iron Cage: The Prison as Gendered Organization*. NYU Press.

Brough, P., Holt, J., Bauld, R., Biggs, A., Ryan, C., 2008. The ability of work-life balance policies to influence key social/organisational issues. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 46(3), pp.261–274.

Brown, S.D., McPartland, E.B., Walsh, W.B. and Savickas, M.L., 2005. Career interventions: Current status and future directions. In *Handbook of Vocational Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice*, pp.195–226.

Brue, K.L. and Brue, S.A., 2016. Experiences and outcomes of a women's leadership development program: A phenomenological investigation. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 15(3).

Bryman, A., 2012. Sampling in qualitative research. In *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. Oxford University Press, pp.415–429.

Bryant, G., 1984. *Working woman report*. Simon and Schuster.

Budig, M. J., & Misra, J. (2020). Reconsidering the motherhood penalty: The role of gendered organisations. *Gender & Society*, 34(2), 172-195.

Burke, J. and Attridge, M., 2011. Pathways to career and leadership success: Part 2 – striking gender similarities among \$100k professionals. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 26(3), pp.207–239.

Burke, R.J. and Vinnicombe, S., 2006. Supporting women's career advancement. *Women in Management Review*, 21(1).

Burke, R., Vinnicombe, S., O'Neil, D.A. and Bilimoria, D., 2005. Women's career development phases. *Career Development International*.

Burke, R.J., Koyuncu, M. and Fiksenbaum, L., 2006. Organisational practices supporting women's career advancement and their satisfaction and well-being in Turkey. *Women in Management Review*, 21(8), pp.610–624.

Burkett, E., 2000. The baby boon: How family-friendly America cheats the childless (review). *Training*, 37(5), p.122.

- Buzzanell, P.M. and Goldzwig, S.R., 1991. Linear and nonlinear career models: Metaphors, paradigms, and ideologies. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 4(4), pp.466–505.
- Bynum, Y.P., 2015. The power of informal mentoring. *Education*, 136(1), pp.69–73.
- Caligiuri, P., Tarique, I. and Jacobs, R., 2009. Selection for international assignments. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(3), pp.251–262.
- Campion, M.A., Cheraskin, L. and Stevens, M.J., 1994. Career-related antecedents and outcomes of job rotation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(6), pp.1518–1542.
- Carli, L.L. and Eagly, A.H., 2016. Women face a labyrinth: An examination of metaphors for women leaders. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(8), pp.514–527.
- Carmody, P., 2013. The Oil Curse: How petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations.
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., and Neville, A., 2014. The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology nursing Forum*, 41(5), p. 545.
- Cassell, C., 2005. Creating the interviewer: Identity work in the management research process. *Qualitative Research*, 5(2), pp.167–179.
- Catalyst, 2020. Women in the workforce – global: Quick take [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-global/> [Accessed 17 April 2020].
- Central Bank of Oman, 2020. Oman’s financial system [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://cbo.gov.om/Pages/OmanFinancialSystem.aspx> [Accessed 21 October 2020].
- Chang, E.H. and Milkman, K.L., 2020. Improving decisions that affect gender equality in the workplace. *Organizational Dynamics*, 49(1), p.100709.
- Chenail, R.J., 2011. Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. *Qualitative Report*, 16(1), pp.255–262.
- Chisholm-Burns, M.A., Spivey, C.A., Hagemann, T. and Josephson, M.A., 2017. Women in leadership and the bewildering glass ceiling. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*, 74(5), pp.312–324

- Choi, S., 2019. Breaking through the glass ceiling: Social capital matters for women's career success?. *International Public Management Journal*, 22(2), pp.295-320.
- Christofides, L.N., Polycarpou, A. and Vrachimis, K., 2013. Gender wage gaps, 'sticky floors' and 'glass ceilings' in Europe. *Labour Economics*, 21, pp.86-102.
- Clarke, M., 2011. Advancing women's careers through leadership development programs. *Employee Relations*, 33(5), pp.498-515.
- Clarke, M., 2013. The organizational career: Not dead but in need of redefinition. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(4), pp.684-703.
- Clarke, V. and Braun, V., 2014. Thematic analysis. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Springer, pp.1947-1952.
- Cockburn, C., 1989. Equal opportunities: The short and long agenda. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 20(3), pp.213-225.
- Cohen, L.E. and Broschak, J.P., 2013. Whose jobs are these? The impact of the proportion of female managers on the number of new management jobs filled by women versus men. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 58(4), pp.509-541.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. 2013. *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge.
- Cohn, J.M., Khurana, R. and Reeves, L., 2005. Growing talent as if your business depended on it. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(10), p.62.
- Collings, D. G., Mellahi, K., & Cascio, W. F. (2019). Global Talent Management and Performance in Multinational Enterprises: A Multi-Level Perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 50(4), 530-551.
- Connelly, B.L., Certo, S.T., Ireland, R.D. and Reutzel, C.R., 2011. Signaling theory: A review and assessment. *Journal of Management*, 37(1), pp.39-67.
- Correll, J., Park, B., Judd, C.M. and Wittenbrink, B., 2007. The influence of stereotypes on decisions to shoot. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 37(6), pp.1102-1117
- Correll, S.J., 2001. Gender and the career choice process: The role of biased self-assessments. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(6), pp.1691-1730.
- Correll, S.J., 2004. Constraints into preferences: Gender, status, and emerging career aspirations. *American Sociological Review*, 69(1), pp.93-113.

- Cotter, D.A., Hermesen, J.M., Ovadia, S. and Vanneman, R. 2001. The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces*, 80(2), pp.655–681.
- Court, D., Abbas, R., Riecken, T.J., Seymour, J.L. and Le Tran, M.A. (2018) *Qualitative research and intercultural understanding: conducting qualitative research in multicultural settings*. 1st edn. London: Routledge.
- Crawshaw, J.R. and Game, A., 2015. The role of line managers in employee career management: An attachment theory perspective. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(9), pp.1182–1203.
- Creswell, J.W., 2007. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W., 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. and Miller, D.L., 2000. Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), pp.124–130.
- Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N., 2016. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Sage publications.
- Cross, C., Linehan, M. and Murphy, C. 2017. The unintended consequences of role-modelling behaviour in female career progression. *Personnel Review*, 46(1), pp.86–99.
- Crotty, M. 1998. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. Sage.
- Dahlerup, D., 2007. Electoral gender quotas: Between equality of opportunity and equality of result. *Representation*, 43(2), pp.73–92.
- Dang, J., & Diddams, M. (2019). The interactive effects of work-family conflict and gender on job and life satisfaction: An investigation of women in the U.S. workforce. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 114, 174–184.
- Dasgupta, N. and Asgari, S., 2004. Seeing is believing: Exposure to counterstereotypic women leaders and its effect on the malleability of automatic gender stereotyping. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 40(5), pp.642–658.
- Daverth, G., Cassell, C. and Hyde, P., 2016. The subjectivity of fairness: Managerial discretion and work–life balance. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 23(2), pp.89–107.

Davis, D.R. and Maldonado, C., 2015. Shattering the glass ceiling: The leadership development of African American women in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 35, pp.48–64.

Davoine, E. and Ravasi, C., 2013. The relative stability of national career patterns in European top management careers in the age of globalisation: A comparative study in France/Germany/Great Britain and Switzerland. *European Management Journal*, 31(2), pp.152–163.

Day, D.V., 2000. Leadership development:: A review in context. *The leadership quarterly*, 11(4), pp.581-613.

De Vos, A., Dewettinck, K. and Buyens, D., 2008. To move or not to move? The relationship between career management and preferred career moves. *Employee Relations*, 30(2), p.156.

De Vos, A., De Hauw, S., Van der Heijden, B. I., & Van der Velden, L., (2019). Boundaryless career and career success: A review, conceptualisation and recommendations. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 110, 401-419.

Deakin, H. and Wakefield, K., 2014. Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative research*, 14(5), pp.603–616.

DeFilippis, E., Impink, S.M., Singell, M., Polzer, J.T. and Sadun, R., 2020. Collaborating during coronavirus: The impact of COVID-19 on the nature of work (No. w27612). National Bureau of Economic Research.

DeFillippi, R.J. and Arthur, M.B., 1994. The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 15(4), pp.307–324.

DeJonckheere, M. and Vaughn, L.M., 2019. Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2).

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. eds., 2011. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. sage.

Dickens, L., 2007. The road is long: Thirty years of equality legislation in Britain. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 45(3), pp.463–494.

Dierdorff, E. C., & Wilson, M. A. (2020). When work-life balance initiatives are not enough: The influence of cultural norms and organisational support on the daily work-life interface. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 118.

Dougherty, T.W. and Dreher, G.F., 2007. Mentoring and career outcomes. In *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work: Theory, Research and Practice*. Sage, pp.51–93.

Durbin, S., 2011. Creating knowledge through networks: A gender perspective. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 18(1), pp.90–112.

Durbin, S., 2016. *Women who succeed: Strangers in paradise?* [ONLINE]. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Available from: Springerlink Collection [Accessed 14 June 2019].

Durbin, S. and Tomlinson, J. 2014. Female part-time managers: Careers, mentors and role models. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 21(4), pp.308–321.

Eagly, A.H. and Carli, L.L., 2009. Navigating the labyrinth. *School Administrator*, 66(8), pp.10–16.

Eagly, A. and Carli, L., 2018. Women and the labyrinth of leadership. In Rosenbach, W., Taylor, R. and Youndt, M., eds. *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, 7th ed. [ONLINE]. New York: Routledge.

Eagly, A.H. and Sczesny, S., 2009. *Stereotypes About Women, Men, And Leaders: Have Times Changed?* American Psychological Association.

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(9), 63-71.

Eagly, A.H., Eagly, L.L.C.A.H. and Carli, L.L., 2007. *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders*. Harvard Business Press.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S., J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological review*, 109(3), 573-598.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Lowe, A., 2002. *Management Research: An Introduction*. London: Sage Publications.

Easton, G., 2010. Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), pp.118–128.

Eby, L.T., Butts, M. and Lockwood, A., 2003. Predictors of success in the era of the boundaryless career. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of*

Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior, 24(6), pp.689–708.

Eby, L.T., Allen, T.D. and Brinley, A., 2005. A cross-level investigation of the relationship between career management practices and career-related attitudes. *Group and Organization Management*, 30(6), pp.565–596.

Eddleston, K.A., Baldridge, D.C. and Veiga, J.F., 2004. Toward modeling the predictors of managerial career success: Does gender matter? *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.

Eikhof, D.R., 2012. A double-edged sword: Twenty-first century workplace trends and gender equality. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.

Eldh, A. C., Årestedt, L., & Berterö, C. (2020). Quotations in Qualitative Studies: Reflections on Constituents, Custom, and Purpose. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19.

Ely, R., Stone, P., & Ammerman, C. (2020). Rethink What You “Know” About High-Achieving Women at Work. *Harvard Business Review*, 98(1), 106-115.

Ennis, C.A. and Al-Saqri, S., 2021. Oil price collapse and the political economy of the post-2014 economic adjustment in the Sultanate of Oman. In *Oil and the Political Economy in the Middle East*. Manchester University Press, pp.79–101.

Evans, K.J. and Maley, J.F., 2021. Barriers to women in senior leadership: How unconscious bias is holding back Australia’s economy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 59(2), pp.204–226.

Ezzedeen, S.R., Budworth, M.H. and Baker, S.D., 2015. The glass ceiling and executive careers: Still an issue for pre-career women. *Journal of Career Development*, 42(5), pp.355–369.

Feeney, M.K., Bernal, M. and Bowman, L., 2014. Enabling work? Family-friendly policies and academic productivity for men and women scientists. *Science and Public Policy*, 41(6), pp.750–764.

Feldman, D.C. and Bolino, M.C., 2000. Career patterns of the self-employed: Career motivations and career outcomes. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 38(3), pp.53–68.

Ferlie, E., 2001. Organisational studies. In *Studying the Organisation and Delivery of Health Services: Research Methods*. Routledge, pp.25–39.

Fernandez, R.M. and Campero, S., 2017. Gender sorting and the glass ceiling in high-tech firms. *ILR Review*, 70(1), pp.73–104.

Fisher, C.B. and Vacanti-Shova, K., 2012. The responsible conduct of psychological research: An overview of ethical principles, APA Ethics Code standards, and federal regulations.

Folke, O. and Rickne, J. 2016. The glass ceiling in politics: Formalisation and empirical tests. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49(5), pp.567–599.

Forbes, D.A., 2002. Internalized masculinity and women's discourse: A critical analysis of the reproduction of masculinity in organizations. *Communication Quarterly*, 50(3–4), pp.269–291.

Forowicz, M., 2017. Concepts of substantive gender equality: Looking for coherence among the regional and international perspectives. In *Towards Convergence in International Human Rights Law*. Brill Nijhoff, pp.193–212.

Forret, M.L. and Dougherty, T.W., 2004. Networking behaviors and career outcomes: differences for men and women? *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 25(3), pp.419–437.

Fredman, S., 2005. Providing equality: Substantive equality and the positive duty to provide. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 21(2), pp.163–190.

Fredman, S., 2016. Substantive equality revisited. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 14(3), pp.712–738.

Gazioglu, S., & Tansel, A. (2006). Job satisfaction in Britain: Individual and job-related factors. *Applied Economics*, 38(10), 1163–1171.

Gayle Baugh, S. and Sullivan, S.E., 2005. Mentoring and career development. *Career Development International*, 10(6/7), pp.425–428

Gelfand, M., Nishii, L., Raver, J., and Schneider, B., 2013. Discrimination in organisations: An organisational-level systems perspective. In Dipboye, R. and Colella, A., eds, *Discrimination at Work: The Psychological and Organisational Bases*. Psychology Press.

- Georgellis, Y. and Sankae, N., 2016, April. The personality of managers in Britain: Gender and sector differences. *Evidence-based HRM: A Global Forum for Empirical Scholarship*, 4(1), pp.67–80.
- Gibb, S., 2003. Line manager involvement in learning and development: Small beer or big deal? *Employee Relations*.
- Gibson, C., Hardy III, J.H. and Buckley, M.R., 2014. Understanding the role of networking in organizations. *Career Development International*.
- Gibson, D.E., 2003. Developing the professional self-concept: Role model construals in early, middle, and late career stages. *Organization Science*, 14(5), pp.591–610.
- Gibson, N. and O'Connor, H., 2003. A step-by-step guide to qualitative data analysis. *A journal of aboriginal and indigenous community health*, 1(1), pp.62-90.
- Giebelhausen, M., Robinson, S. L., & Johnson, E. C. (2020). Flexible work arrangements and employee outcomes: Exploring the moderating role of gender norms. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 163(2), 305-319.
- Gipson, A.N., Pfaff, D.L., Mendelsohn, D.B., Catenacci, L.T. and Burke, W.W., 2017. Women and leadership: Selection, development, leadership style, and performance. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 53(1), pp.32–65.
- Gill, S.L., 2020. Qualitative sampling methods. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 36(4), pp.579-581.
- Glass, C. and Cook, A., 2016. Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(1), pp.51–63.
- Goldberg, C.B., Finkelstein, L.M., Perry, E.L. and Konrad, A.M., 2004. Job and industry fit: The effects of age and gender matches on career progress outcomes. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 25(7), pp.807-829.
- Granello, D.H. and Wheaton, J.E., 2004. Online data collection: Strategies for research. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82(4), pp.387–393.
- Graycar, R. and Morgan, J., 2004. Thinking about equality. *UNSWLJ*, 27, p.833.

Greenhaus, J.H., Callanan, G.A. and Godshalk, V.M., 2010. *Career Management* [ONLINE]. Sage [Accessed 29 September 2020].

Greer, C.R. and Virick, M., 2008. Diverse succession planning: Lessons from the industry leaders. *Human Resource Management (Published in cooperation with the School of Business Administration, The University of Michigan and in alliance with the Society of Human Resources Management)*, 47(2), pp.351–367.

Gregory, J., 1987. *Sex, Race and the Law: Legislating for Equality*. London: Sage.

Grover, V.K., 2015. Second generation gender bias: Invisible barriers holding women back in organizations. *Int J Appl Res*, 1(4), pp.1–4.

Groves, K.S., 2007. Integrating leadership development and succession planning best practices. *Journal of Management Development*, 26(3), pp.239–260.

Guan, Y., Deng, H. and Zhou, X., 2020. Understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on career development: Insights from cultural psychology.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S., 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage, p.105.

Guillén, L., Mayo, M. and Karelaia, N., 2018. Appearing self-confident and getting credit for it: Why it may be easier for men than women to gain influence at work. *Human Resource Management*, 57(4), pp.839–854.

Gunz, H.P. and Peiperl, M., 2007. *Handbook of Career Studies*. London: Sage publications.

Gupta, N.D., Smith, N. and Verner, M., 2008. The impact of Nordic countries' family friendly policies on employment, wages, and children. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 6(1), pp.65–89.

Gustafsson, J., 2017. Single case studies vs. multiple case studies: A comparative study.

Hackett, G. and Betz, N.E., 1981. A self-efficacy approach to the career development of women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 18(3), pp.326–339.

Hakim, C., 2006. Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 34(3), pp.279–294.

Hall, D.T., 1996. Protean careers of the 21st century. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 10(4), pp.8–16.

Hall, D.T., 2002. *Careers In and Out of Organisations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Hall, D.T., 2004. The protean career: A quarter-century journey. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 65(1), pp.1–13.

Hall, D.T., Yip, J. and Doiron, K., 2018. Protean careers at work: Self-direction and values orientation in psychological success. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 5, pp.129–156.

Hanasono, L.K., Broido, E.M., Yacobucci, M.M., Root, K.V., Peña, S. and O'Neil, D.A., 2019. Secret service: Revealing gender biases in the visibility and value of faculty service. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(1), p.85.

Harman, C. and Sealy, R., 2017. Opt-in or opt-out: Exploring how women construe their ambition at early career stages. *Career Development International*.

Harris, H., 2004. Women's role in international management. In *International Human Resource Management*. Sage, p.357.

Headlam-Wells, J., Gosland, J. and Craig, J., 2005. 'There's magic in the web': e-Mentoring for women's career development. *Career Development International*, 10(6/7), pp.444–459.

Hedge, J.W. and Carter, G.W., 2019. Career pathways as an integrative framework for talent management systems. In *Career Pathways: From School to Retirement*. Oxford University Press, p.125.

Heilman, M.E., 2001. Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), pp.657–674.

Heilman, M.E., Manzi, F. and Braun, S., 2015. Presumed incompetent: Perceived lack of fit and gender bias in recruitment and selection. In *Handbook of Gendered Careers in Management: Getting in, Getting on, Getting Out*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.90–104.

Heinen, J.S. and O'Neill, C., 2004. Managing talent to maximize performance. *Employment Relations Today*, 3(2), pp.67–82

Helms, M.M., Arfken, D.E. and Bellar, S., 2016. The importance of mentoring and sponsorship in women's career development. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 81(3), p.4.

- Henkel, W.J. and Endres, A.C., 2019. A structural equation model of leader–member exchange, employee–supervisor relationship, performance appraisal, and career development. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology*, 18(1), pp.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I. and Bailey, A., 2015. *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage.
- Hepple, B., 2011. Enforcing equality law: two steps forward and two steps backwards for reflexive regulation. *Industrial Law Journal*, 40(4), pp.315-335.
- Heslin, P.A., 2005. Conceptualizing and evaluating career success. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 26(2), pp.113–136.
- Hewlett, S.A., Luce, C.B. and West, C., 2005. Leadership in your midst. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(11), pp.74-82.
- Hewlett, S. A., Luce, C. B., & West, C. (2005). The career cost of family. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(10), 18-19.
- Hewlett, S. A., Luce, C. B., & West, C. (2013). The Athena factor. Reversing the brain drain in science, engineering, and technology. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Hezlett, S.A. and Gibson, S.K., 2005. Mentoring and human resource development: Where we are and where we need to go. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 7(4), pp.446–469.
- Hezlett, S.A. and Gibson, S.K., 2007. Linking mentoring and social capital: Implications for career and organization development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 9(3), pp.384–411.
- Hilton, L., 2007. Women and the labyrinth of leadership and the tests of a prince. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(12), p.123.
- Hirayama, M. and Fernando, S., 2018. Organisational barriers to and facilitators for female surgeons' career progression: a systematic review. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 111(9), pp.324-334.
- Holgersson, C., 2013. Recruiting managing directors: Doing homosociality. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(4), pp.454–466.

- Holloway, I. 1997. *Basic Concepts for Qualitative Research*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Holloway, I. and Brown, L., 2012. *Essentials of a Qualitative Doctorate*. Left Coast Press.
- Hookway, N., 2008. Entering the blogosphere': some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative research*, 8(1), pp.91-113.
- Hopkins, M.M., O'Neil, D.A., Passarelli, A. and Bilimoria, D., 2008. Women's leadership development strategic practices for women and organizations. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60(4), p.348.
- Howe-Walsh, L. and Turnbull, S., 2016. Barriers to women leaders in academia: Tales from science and technology. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(3), pp.415-428.
- Howitt, D. 2010. *Introduction to Qualitative Methods in Psychology*. Essex: Pearson.
- Hoyt, C.L. and Murphy, S.E., 2016. Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), pp.387-399.
- Hunt, D.M. and Michael, C., 1983. Mentorship: A career training and development tool. *Academy of Management Review*, 8(3), pp.475-485.
- Hurst, J., Leberman, S. and Edwards, M., 2016. Women managing women: Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31(1), pp.61-74.
- Hurley, D. and Choudhary, A. (2016), "Factors influencing attainment of CEO position for women", *Gender in Management*, 31 (4), pp. 250-265.
- Husu, L., 2000. Gender discrimination in the promised land of gender equality. *Higher Education in Europe*, 25(2), pp.221-228.
- Ibarra, H. 1993. Personal Networks of Women and Minorities in Management: A Conceptual Framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(1), pp.56-87.
- Ibarra, H. 2016. Why strategic networking is harder for women [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/worldeconomicforum/2016/04/08/why-strategic-networking-is-harder-for-women> [Accessed 12 September 2018].
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N.M. and Silva, C., 2010. Why men still get more promotions than women. *Harvard business review*, 88(9), pp.80-85.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R. and Kolb, D., 2013. Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(9), pp.60–66.

Ibarra, H., 2019. A lack of sponsorship is keeping women from advancing into leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, (August 19), p.2019.

Imran, M. and Tanveer, A., 2015. Impact of training and development on employees' performance in banks of Pakistan. *European Journal of Training and Development Studies*, 3(1), pp.22–44.

Ismail, H.N. and Rishani, M., 2018. The relationships among performance appraisal satisfaction, career development and creative behavior. *Journal of Developing Areas*, 52(3), pp.109–124.

Ismail, M. and Ibrahim, M., 2008. Barriers to career progression faced by women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.

Itzin, C. 1995. The gender culture in organizations. In Itzin, C. and Newman, J., eds, *Gender, Culture and Organizational Change: Putting Theory into Practice*. London; New York: Routledge.

Iverson, S.V., 2011. Glass ceiling and sticky floors: Women and advancement in higher education. In Martin, J.L., ed., *Women as Leaders in Education: Succeeding Despite Inequality, Discrimination, and other Challenges*. ABC-CLIO, pp.79–99.

Iyer, A., 2009. Increasing the representation and status of women in employment: The effectiveness of affirmative action. In Barreto, M.C., Ryan, M.K. and Schmitt, M.T., eds, *The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century: Understanding Barriers to Gender Equality*, 1st ed. [ONLINE]. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Jackson, J., 2001. Women middle managers' perception of the glass ceiling. *Women in Management Review*, 16(1), pp.30–41.

Jandeska, K.E. and Kraimer, M.L., 2005. Women's perceptions of organizational culture, work attitudes, and role-modeling behaviors. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 17(4), pp.461–478.

Järviluoma, H., Moisala, P. and Vilkkö, A., 2003. *Gender and Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage.

- Jin, X. and Waldman, M., 2020. Lateral moves, promotions, and task-specific human capital: Theory and evidence. *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 36(1), pp.1–46.
- Jogulu, U. and Wood, G., 2011. Women managers' career progression: An Asia Pacific perspective. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
- Johns, M.L., 2013. Breaking the glass ceiling: Structural, cultural, and organizational barriers preventing women from achieving senior and executive positions. *Perspectives in Health Information Management/AHIMA, American Health Information Management Association*, 10, Winter.
- Johnston, M.P., 2014. Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and quantitative methods in libraries*, 3(3), pp.619-626.
- Jones, I., Brown, L. and Holloway, I. (2013) *Qualitative research in sport and physical activity*. London: Sage
- Joo, B. K., & Lim, S. (2021). Boundaryless career orientation and proactive career behaviours: The moderating role of perceived employability. *Journal of Career Development*, 48(1), 3-17.
- Judge, T.A., Cable, D.M., Boudreau, J.W. and Bretz Jr, R.D., 1995. An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology*, 48(3), pp.485–519.
- Kahn, S. and Ginther, D., 2017. *Women and STEM* (No. w23525). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Kakarika, M., Prouska, R., & Psychogios, A. (2014). The impact of education and work experience on the career advancement of Greek workers. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27(3), 254-276.
- Kalysh, K., Kulik, C. and Perera, S., 2016. Help or hindrance? Work-life practices and women in management. *Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), pp.504–518.
- Kan, M.Y., 2007. Work orientation and wives' employment careers: An evaluation of Hakim's preference theory. *Work and Occupations*, 34(4), pp.430–462.
- Karm, K. E., 1985. Mentoring at work: Developmental relationships in organisational life. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30 (3).

- Karpinski, J. P., & Migneault, J. P. (2020). Are Formal Career Development Programs Effective? Evidence from a Canadian Sample. *Journal of Management Policy and Practice*, 21(4), 44-58.
- Kaya, C. and Ceylan, B., 2014. An empirical study on the role of career development programs in organizations and organizational commitment on job satisfaction of employees. *American Journal of Business and Management*, 3(3), pp.178-191.
- Kemp, L.J. and Madsen, S.R., 2014. Oman's labour force: An analysis of gender in management. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 33(8), pp.789–805.
- Kerka, S., 2003. *Career Development of Diverse Populations*. ERIC Clearinghouse.
- Khan, S.A., 2010. Convergence, divergence or middle of the path: HRM model for Oman. *Journal of Management Policy and Practice*, 12(1), pp.76–87.
- Khan, S.A., Rajasekar, J. and Al-Asfour, A., 2015. Organizational career development practices: Learning from an Omani company. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 10(9), p.88.
- Kim, N., 2005. Organizational interventions influencing employee career development preferred by different career success orientations. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 9(1), pp.47–61.
- Kim, T. Y., & Feldman, D. C. (2017). Mobility and career success: An analysis of international assignments. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, 38(1), 44-67.
- King, N., Horrocks, C. and Brooks, J., 2018. *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. Sage.
- Kiser, A.I., 2015. Workplace and leadership perceptions between men and women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 30(8), pp.598–612.
- Knibbs, J. and Swailes, S., 1992. Implementing performance review and career planning. *Management Decision*, 30(1), p.49.
- Koch, A.J., D'Mello, S.D. and Sackett, P.R., 2015. A meta-analysis of gender stereotypes and bias in experimental simulations of employment decision making. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100(1), p.128.

- Koenig, A.M., Eagly, A.H., Mitchell, A.A. and Ristikari, T., 2011. Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), p.616.
- Kossek, E.E., Su, R. and Wu, L., 2017. 'Opting out' or 'pushed out'? Integrating perspectives on women's career equality for gender inclusion and interventions. *Journal of Management*, 43(1), pp.228–254.
- Kossek, E. E., Baltes, B. B., Matthews, R. A., & DeHauw, S. (2019). Telecommuting and work-family balance. In A. M. Rossi & S. E. Beehr (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of telework and tecommuting* (pp. 195-208). Cambridge University Press.
- Kraimer, M.L., Shaffer, M.A. and Bolino, M.C., 2009. The influence of expatriate and repatriate experiences on career advancement and repatriate retention. *Human Resource Management (Published in cooperation with the School of Business Administration, The University of Michigan and in alliance with the Society of Human Resources Management)*, 48(1), pp.27–47.
- Krauss, S.E. 2005. Research paradigms and meaning making: A primer. *Qualitative Report*, 10(4), pp.758–770.
- Kugelberg, C., 2006. Constructing the deviant other: Mothering and fathering at the workplace. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 13(2), pp.152–173.
- Lahtinen, H.K. and Wilson, F.M., 1994. Women and Power in Organizations. *Executive Development*, 7(3), pp.16–23
- Lapan, S., Quartaroli, M. and Riemer, F. 2011. *Qualitative Research* [ONLINE]. United States: Jossey Bass Ltd. Available from: Dawsonera Collection [Accessed 08 May 2019].
- Latham, G. P. 2011. Human resource training and development. In Kets de Vries, M.F.R. and Korotov, K., eds, *The International Library of Critical Writings on Business and Management. Leadership Development*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.3–40.
- Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D. and Hackett, G., 2000. Contextual supports and barriers to career choice: A social cognitive analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), p.36.
- Leung, K., Bhagat, R.S., Buchan, N.R., Erez, M. and Gibson, C.B., 2005. Culture and international business: Recent advances and their implications for future research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(4), pp.357–378.

- Lewis, S., 2001. Restructuring workplace cultures: The ultimate work-family challenge? *Women in Management Review*.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G., 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.
- Linehan, M. 2001. Networking for female managers' career development: Empirical evidence. *Journal of Management Development*, 20(10), pp.823–829.
- Linehan, M. and Scullion, H., 2008. The development of female global managers: The role of mentoring and networking. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83(1), pp.29–40.
- Linehan, M., Scullion, H. and Walsh, J.S., 2001. Barriers to women's participation in international management. *European Business Review*.
- Lips-Wiersma, M. and Hall, D.T., 2007. Organizational career development is not dead: A case study on managing the new career during organizational change. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 28(6), pp.771–792.
- Lobe, B., Morgan, D. and Hoffman, K.A., 2020. Qualitative data collection in an era of social distancing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, p.1609406920937875.
- Longarela, I.R., 2017. Explaining vertical gender segregation: A research agenda. *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(5), pp.861–871.
- Loury, L.D., 2006. Some contacts are more equal than others: Informal networks, job tenure, and wages. *Journal of Labour Economics*, 24(2), pp.299–318.
- Lyness, K. and Thompson, D., 2000. Climbing the corporate ladder: Do female and male executives follow the same route? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(1), pp.86–101.
- Mainiero, L.A. and Sullivan, S.E., 2005. Kaleidoscope careers: An alternate explanation for the 'opt-out' revolution. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 19(1), pp.106–123.
- Majid, M.A.A., Othman, M., Mohamad, S.F., Lim, S.A.H. and Yusof, A., 2017. Piloting for interviews in qualitative research: Operationalization and lessons learnt. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(4), pp.1073-1080.
- Malmqvist, J., Hellberg, K., Möllås, G., Rose, R. and Shevlin, M., 2019. Conducting the pilot study: A neglected part of the research process? Methodological findings supporting

the importance of piloting in qualitative research studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, p.1609406919878341.

Manz, C.C. and Sims Jr, H.P., 1980. Self-management as a substitute for leadership: A social learning theory perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(3), pp.361–367.

Matusik, J. G., & Hill, C. W. L. (2014). The utilization of contingent work, knowledge creation, and competitive advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(3), 307-328.

Maxwell G.A., and Watson S., 2006. Perspectives on line managers in human resource management: Hilton Internationals UK hotels. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17, pp.1152–1170

Maxwell, J.A., 2013. Applied social research methods series. In *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

McDonagh, K. and Paris, N., 2012. The leadership labyrinth: Career advancement for women. *Frontiers of Health Services Management*, 28(4), pp.22–28.

McDonald, P., Brown, K. and Bradley, L., 2005. Have traditional career paths given way to protean ones? *Career Development International*.

McDonald, S., 2011. What's in the 'old boys' network? Accessing social capital in gendered and racialized networks. *Social Networks*, 33(4), pp.317–330.

McElwee, G. and Al-Riyami, R., 2003. Women entrepreneurs in Oman: Some barriers to success. *Career Development International*, 8(7), pp.339–346.

McGrath, C., Palmgren, P.J. and Liljedahl, M., 2019. Twelve tips for conducting qualitative research interviews. *Medical Teacher*, 41(9), pp.1002–1006.

McGuire, G.M., 2002. Gender, race, and the shadow structure: A study of informal networks and inequality in a work organization. *Gender and Society*, 16(3), pp.303–322

McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A. and Dabir-Alai, P., 2012. Motherhood and its impact on career progression. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(5), pp.346-364.

McNulty, Y. (2017). 'Doing gender' in a feminised sector: Experiences of men and women expatriates. *Journal of World Business*, 52(2), 243-255.

- Meho, L.I., 2006. E-mail interviewing in qualitative research: A methodological discussion. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 57(10), pp.1284–1295.
- Melamed, T., 1995a. Barriers to women's career success: Human capital, career choices, structural determinants, or simply sex discrimination. *Applied Psychology*, 44(4), pp.295–314.
- Melamed, T., 1995b. Career success: The moderating effect of gender. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 47(1), pp.35–60.
- Merriam, S.B. and Tisdell, E.J., 2016. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. John Wiley and Sons.
- Metcalf, B.D., 2007. Gender and human resource management in the Middle East. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1), pp.54–74.
- Metz, I., 2003. Individual, interpersonal, and organisational links to women's advancement in management in banks. *Women in Management Review*.
- Metz, I. 2009. Organisational factors, social factors, and women's advancement. *Applied Psychology*, 58(2), pp.193–213.
- Michailidis, M.P., Morphetou, R.N. and Theophylatou, I., 2012. Women at work equality versus inequality: Barriers for advancing in the workplace. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(20), pp.4231–4245.
- Mihail, D.M. and Elefterie, K.A., 2006. Perceived effects of an MBA degree on employability and career advancement: The case of Greece. *Career Development International*.
- Modise, O.M., 2016. Career workshops as a non-traditional research model for enhanced relationships between higher education and the labour market. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 20(2), pp.152–163.
- Moen, P., Kelly, E. L., Hill, R., & Tranby, E. (2019). Time, money, and gender: How work-family policies can improve employee well-being and business outcomes. *Journal of Management*, 45(8), 3533-3560.
- Moghadam, V.M., 2004. Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 35(2), pp.137–162.

Morgenroth, T., Ryan, M.K. and Peters, K., 2015. The motivational theory of role modeling: How role models influence role aspirants' goals. *Review of General Psychology*, 19(4), pp.465–483.

Mousa, M., Boyle, J., Skouteris, H., Mullins, A.K., Currie, G., Riach, K. and Teede, H.J., 2021. Advancing women in healthcare leadership: A systematic review and meta-synthesis of multi-sector evidence on organisational interventions. *EClinicalMedicine*, 39, p.101084.

Mumford, T.V., Campion, M.A. and Morgeson, F.P., 2007. The leadership skills strataplex: Leadership skill requirements across organizational levels. *The leadership quarterly*, 18(2), pp.154-166.

Murphy, S.E. and Ensher, E.A., 2001. The role of mentoring support and self-management strategies on reported career outcomes. *Journal of Career Development*, 27(4), pp.229–246.

Nafukho, F.M., Hairston, N. and Brooks, K., 2004. Human capital theory: Implications for human resource development. *Human Resource Development International*, 7(4), pp.545–551.

Nagy, N., Froidevaux, A. and Hirschi, A., 2019. Lifespan perspectives on careers and career development. In *Work Across the Lifespan*. Academic Press, pp.235–259.

National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020a. Population Statistics 2019 [ONLINE]. Available at: https://www.ncsi.gov.om/Elibrary/LibraryContentDoc/bar_population%202019_dbf9c071-c68e-4907-ba03-6ad6aaf6ffdb.pdf [Accessed 20 October 2020].

National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020b. Statistical Yearbook 2018 [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://ecensus.gov.om/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Statistical-Yearbook-2018.pdf> [Accessed 20 October 2020].

National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2020c. Gender Statistics [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://data.gov.om/vhsktzf/gender-statistics?regions=1000000-oman> [Accessed 04 May 2020].

Newell, S., 2005. Recruitment and selection. In *Managing human resources: Personnel management in transition*. John Wiley and Sons, pp.115–147.

- Newman, B.J. 2016. Breaking the glass ceiling: local gender-based earnings inequality and women's belief in the American dream. *American Journal of Political Science*, 60(4), pp.1006–1025.
- Ng, E.S. and Burke, R.J., 2005. Person–organization fit and the war for talent: Does diversity management make a difference? *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(7), pp.1195–1210.
- Ng, T.W., Eby, L.T., Sorensen, K.L. and Feldman, D.C., 2005. Predictors of objective and subjective career success: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 58(2), pp.367–408.
- Nielsen, M.W., 2021. Gender in academic recruitment and selection. In *The Gender-Sensitive University*. Routledge, p.28.
- Noback, I., Broersma, L., and Dijk, J., 2016. Climbing the ladder: Gender-specific career advancement in financial services and the influence of flexible work-time arrangements. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 54(1), pp.114–136.
- Nobel, C., 2013. Few women on boards: Is there a fix? *Working Knowledge*.
- Noble, H. and Smith, J., 2015. Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-based Nursing*, 18(2), pp.34–35.
- Noe, R.A., 1988. Women and mentoring: A review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review*, 13(1), pp.65–78.
- Noe, R.A. and Kodwani, A.D., 2018. *Employee Training and Development*, 7th ed. McGraw-Hill Education.
- Noon, M., 2010. The shackled runner: Time to rethink positive discrimination? *Work, Employment and Society*, 24(4), pp.728–739.
- Novick, G., 2008. Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research? *Research in Nursing and Health*, 31(4), pp.391–398.
- Oakley, J.G., 2000. Gender-based barriers to senior management positions: Understanding the scarcity of female CEOs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27(4), pp.321–334.
- O'Connor, P., Martin, P.Y., Carvalho, T., Hagan, C.O., Veronesi, L., Mich, O., Saglam, G., Tan, M.G. and Caglayan, H., 2019. Leadership practices by senior position holders in

Higher Educational Research Institutes: Stealth power in action?. *Leadership*, 15(6), pp.722-743.

O'Connor, P., 2020. Why is it so difficult to reduce gender inequality in male-dominated higher educational organizations? A feminist institutional perspective. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 45(2), pp.207-228.

Olgiati, E., Shapiro, G., Bodlin, R.P. and Verborgh, E., 2002. *Promoting Gender Equality in the Workplace*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Omar, K., 2010. Typology of career development for Arab women managers in the United Arab Emirates. *Career Development International*.

Oman Vision 2040, 2020. Economy [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.2040.om/en/oman-vision-2040/themes/economy-and-development/> [Accessed 21 October 2020].

Omar, A. and Davidson, M.J., 2001. Women in management: A comparative cross-cultural overview. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*.

O'Neil, D.A. and Bilimoria, D., 2005. Women's career development phases: Idealism, endurance, and reinvention. *Career Development International*.

O'Neil, D.A. and Hopkins, M.H., 2015. The impact of gendered organizational systems on women's career advancement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, p.905.

O'Neil, D.A., Hopkins, M.M. and Bilimoria, D., 2008. Women's careers at the start of the 21st century: Patterns and paradoxes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 80(4), pp.727-743.

Ones, L., 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic: A family affair. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 26(2), pp.87-89.

Ongori, H. and Agolla, J.E., 2009. Paradigm shift in managing career plateau in organisation: The best strategy to minimize employee intention to quit. *African Journal of Business Management*, 3(6), pp.268-271.

Opdenakker, R., 2006. Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7(4).

- Opoku, A. and Williams, N., 2019. Second-generation gender bias. *International Journal of Ethics and Systems*.
- Orpen, C., 1994. The effects of organizational and individual career management on career success. *International Journal of Manpower*.
- Orser, B. and Leck, J., 2010. Gender influences on career success outcomes. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
- Özdemir, P. and Albayrak, T., 2015. How to cope with second-generation gender bias in male-dominated occupations. In *Maritime Women: Global Leadership*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, pp.217–227.
- Parker, S.K., 1998. Enhancing role breadth self-efficacy. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(6), pp.835–852.
- Patrick, H.A. and Kumar, A., 2011. Career management, employee development and performance in Indian information technology organizations. *Business Management Dynamics*, 1(5), p.24.
- Patton, M.Q. 2002a. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Patton, M.Q., 2002b. Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3), pp.261–283.
- Paula, J.R., 2020. Lockdowns due to COVID-19 threaten PhD students' and early-career researchers' careers. *Nature Ecology and Evolution*, 4(8), p.999.
- Perry, E.L. and Kulik, C.T., 2008. The devolution of HR to the line: Implications for perceptions of people management effectiveness. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(2), pp.262–273.
- Phillips, T. and Grandy, G., 2018. Women leader/ship development: Mindfulness and well-being. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 33(5), pp.367–384.
- Pignataro, G., 2012. Equality of opportunity: Policy and measurement paradigms. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 26(5), pp.800–834.
- Place, K.R. and Vardeman-Winter, J., 2018. Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 44(1), pp.165–173.

- Poggio, B. 2010. Vertical segregation and gender practices: Perspectives of analysis and action. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 25(6), pp.428–437.
- Powell, G.N. and Mainiero, L.A., 1992. Cross-currents in the river of time: Conceptualising the complexities of women's careers. *Journal of Management*, 18(2), pp.215–237.
- Preston, J.A., 1999. Occupational gender segregation. *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, 39(3), pp.611–625.
- Ragins, B. R., Lange, J., & Thiruvathukal, A. (2018). The risks and rewards of mentoring across difference. *Organisational Dynamics*, 47(1), 36-44.
- Ramsay, K. and Parker, M., 1991. Gender, bureaucracy and organizational culture. *The Sociological Review*, 39(1 suppl), pp.253–276.
- Rao, A. and Kelleher, D., 2003. Institutions, organisations and gender equality in an era of globalisation. *Gender and Development*, 11(1), pp.142–149.
- Reitman, F. and Schneer, J.A., 2008. Enabling the new careers of the 21st century. *Organisation Management Journal*, 5(1), pp.17–28.
- Renwick, D., 2000. HR-line work relations: A review, pilot case and research agenda. *Employee Relations*.
- Renwick, D., 2003. Line manager involvement in HRM: An inside view. *Employee Relations*.
- Renwick, D. and MacNeil, C.M., 2002. Line manager involvement in careers. *Career Development International*.
- Riffai, M.M.M.A., Grant, K. and Edgar, D., 2012. Big TAM in Oman: Exploring the promise of on-line banking, its adoption by customers and the challenges of banking in Oman. *International Journal of Information Management*, 32(3), pp.239–250.
- Rindfleish, J. and Sheridan, A., 2003. No change from within: Senior women managers' response to gendered organizational structures. *Women in Management Review*, 18(6), pp.299–310.
- Ritchie, B.W., Burns, P. and Palmer, C. (2004) *Tourism research methods: integrating theory with practice*. Wallingford: CABI Publishing.

- Roemer, J.E., 2002. Equality of opportunity: A progress report. *Social Choice and Welfare*, 19(2), pp.455–471.
- Rogier, S.A. and Padgett, M.Y., 2004. The impact of utilizing a flexible work schedule on the perceived career advancement potential of women. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 15(1), pp.89–106.
- Roos, P.A. and Gatta, M.L., 2009. Gender in equity in the academy: Subtle mechanisms and the production of inequality. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 27(3), pp.177–200.
- Rothwell, W.J., Jackson, R.D., Ressler, C.L., Jones, M.C. and Brower, M., 2015. *Career Planning and Succession Management: Developing Your Organization's Talent – for Today and Tomorrow*. ABC-CLIO.
- Ryan, M.K., Haslam, S.A., Hersby, M.D., Kulich, C. and Atkins, C., 2007. Opting out or pushed off the edge? The glass cliff and the precariousness of women's leadership positions. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1(1), pp.266–279.
- Sachs, B., 2012. The limits of fair equality of opportunity. *Philosophical Studies*, 160(2), pp.323–343.
- Salas, E., Tannenbaum, S.I., Kraiger, K. and Smith-Jentsch, K.A., 2012. The science of training and development in organizations: What matters in practice. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 13(2), pp.74–101.
- Sampson, H., 2004. Navigating the waves: The usefulness of a pilot in qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 4(3), pp.383–402.
- Sanderson, R.E. and Whitehead, S., 2016. The gendered international school: Barriers to women managers' progression. *Education and Training*, 58(3), pp.328–338.
- Sangeetha, K. and Pria, S., 2012. Resources Affecting Banks' CSR in Sultanate of Oman: A Stakeholders' Perspective. *Electronic journal of Business Ethics & Organisations Studies*, 17(1), pp.31–40.
- Sartori, R. and Ceschi, A., 2013. Assessment and development centers: Judgment biases and risks of using idiographic and nomothetic approaches to collecting information on people to be evaluated and trained in organizations. *Quality and Quantity*, 47(6), pp.3277–3288.

- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2012. *Research Methods for Business Students*, 6th ed. [ONLINE]. Harlow: Pearson [Accessed 26 February 2021].
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. 2009. *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson Education.
- Sayce, S., Berry, D. and Bell, M.P., 2012. Inequality in organisations: Stereotyping, discrimination, and labor law exclusions. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*.
- Sayer, A. 2000. *Realism and Social Science*. Sage.
- Schein, E.H., 1971. The individual, the organization, and the career: A conceptual scheme. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 7(4), pp.401–426.
- Schein, E.H., 1996. Career anchors revisited: Implications for career development in the 21st century. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 10(4), pp.80–88.
- Schein, V.E., 2007. Women in management: Reflections and projections. *Women in Management Review*, 22(1), pp.6–18
- Schreuder, D. and Coetzee, M., 2011. *Careers: An Organisational Perspective*. Juta and Company Ltd.
- Scotland, J., 2012. Exploring the philosophical underpinnings of research: Relating ontology and epistemology to the methodology and methods of the scientific, interpretive, and critical research paradigms. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), pp.9–16.
- Sealy, R. and Singh, V., 2006. Role models, work identity and senior women's career progression: Why are role models important? *Academy of Management Proceedings* 2006(1), pp.E1–E6.
- Sealy, R.H. and Singh, V., 2010. The importance of role models and demographic context for senior women's work identity development. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(3), pp.284–300.
- Seibert, S.E., Kraimer, M.L. and Liden, R.C., 2001. A social capital theory of career success. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2), pp.219–237.
- Seo, G., Huang, W. and Han, S.H.C., 2017. Conceptual review of underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions from a perspective of gendered social status in the

workplace: Implication for HRD research and practice. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(1), pp.35-59.

Shabiba, 2019. Manpower reveal: 62 thousand Omani women in the private sector [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://www.shabiba.com/article/234074/-محليات/القوى-العاملة> [Accessed 05 May 2020].

Sharma, G., Sarma, A.A., Walsh, M.N., Hayes, S.N., Sahni, S., Brown, S.A., Singh, T., Harrington, R.A., Douglas, P.S., Duvernoy, C.S. and American College of Cardiology Women in Cardiology Leadership Council and Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, 2019. Ten recommendations to enhance recruitment, retention, and career advancement of women cardiologists. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, 74(14), pp.1839–1842.

Sheppard, L.D.D., 2018. Gender differences in leadership aspirations and job and life attribute preferences among US undergraduate students. *Sex Roles*, pp.1–13.

Shoaib, S., Khan, R.S. and Khan, S.A., 2010. The glass ceiling effect: A Pakistani perspective. *Business Review*, 5(1), pp.79–90.

Shotland, S., & Perkins, S. (2015). Family matters: Gender, networks, and international assignee career outcomes. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(8), 1014-1034.

Singh, V., Bains, D. and Vinnicombe, S., 2002. Informal mentoring as an organisational resource. *Long Range Planning*, 35(4), pp.389–405.

Singh, V., Terjesen, S. and Vinnicombe, S., 2008. Newly appointed directors in the boardroom: How do women and men differ? *European Management Journal*, 26(1), pp.48–58.

Slocum Jr, J.W. and Cron, W.L., 1985. Job attitudes and performance during three career stages. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 26(2), pp.126–145.

Smith, K.K., Simmons, V.M. and Thames, T.B., 1989. 'Fix the women': An intervention into an organizational conflict based on parallel process thinking. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 25(1), pp.11–29.

Smith-Ruig, T., 2009. Exploring career plateau as a multi-faceted phenomenon: Understanding the types of career plateaux experienced by accounting professionals. *British Journal of Management*, 20(4), pp.610–622.

Sools, A.M., Van Engen, M.L. and Baerveldt, C., 2007. Gendered career-making practices: On doing ambition or how managers discursively position themselves in a multinational corporation. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 80(3), pp.413–435.

Spurk, D., Kauffeld, S., Barthauer, L. and Heinemann, N.S., 2015. Fostering networking behavior, career planning and optimism, and subjective career success: An intervention study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 87, pp.134–144.

Sturges, L., Conway, N. and Liefoghe, A., 2010. Organisational support, individual attributes, and the practice of career self-management behaviour. *Group and Organisation Management*, 35, pp.108–141

Sturm, S., 2001. Second generation employment discrimination: A structural approach. *Colum. L. Rev.*, 101, p.458.

Su, R. and Rounds, J., 2015. All STEM fields are not created equal: People and things interests explain gender disparities across STEM fields. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, p.189.

Sullivan, S.E., 1999. The changing nature of careers: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 25(3), pp.457–484.

Sultana, A., 2010. Patriarchy and women's subordination: A theoretical analysis. *Arts Faculty Journal*, 4, pp.1–18.

Super, D.E., 1980. A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16(3), pp.282–298.

Taherdoost, H., 2016. Sampling methods in research methodology: How to choose a sampling technique for research. *SSRN*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3205035>.

Tarawneh, M., 2006. A comparison of financial performance in the banking sector: Some evidence from Omani commercial banks. *International Research Journal of Finance and Economics*, 3(3), pp.101–112.

Tayeb, M., 1995. The competitive advantage of nations: The role of HRM and its socio-cultural context. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(3), pp.588–605.

Temkin, L.S. and Sardoc, M., 2016. The many faces of equal opportunity. *Theory and Research in Education*, 14(3), pp.255–276.

- Tharenou, P., 1997. Explanations of managerial career advancement. *Australian Psychologist*, 32(1), pp.19–28.
- Tharenou, P., 2001. Going up? Do traits and informal social processes predict advancing in management? *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(5), pp.1005–1017
- Thomas, D.C. and Inkson, K., 2007. Careers across cultures. In *Handbook of Career Studies*. Sage, pp.451–470.
- Tlaiss, H. and Kauser, S., 2011. The impact of gender, family, and work on the career advancement of Lebanese women managers. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*.
- Tomlinson, J. and Durbin, S., 2010. Female part-time managers: Work-life balance, aspirations and career mobility. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 29(3), pp.255–270.
- Tong A., Sainsbury P., Craig J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357
- Tremblay, M. and Roger, A., 2004. Career plateauing reactions: The moderating role of job scope, role ambiguity and participation among Canadian managers. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(6), pp.996–1017.
- Turner, A. and Nichol, L., 2016. Development assessment centres: Practice implications arising from exploring the participant voice. *International Journal of HRD Practice, Policy and Research*, 1(1), pp.85–99.
- United Nations, n.d. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women: New York, 18 December 1970 [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx> [Accessed 10 December 2019].
- Valcour, P.M. and Tolbert, P., 2003. Gender, family and career in the era of boundarylessness: Determinants and effects of intra-and inter-organizational mobility. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(5), pp.768–787.
- Van Veldhoven, M., Dorenbosch, L., Breugelmans, A. and Van De Voorde, K., 2017. Exploring the relationship between job quality, performance management, and career initiative: A two-level, two-actor study. *Sage Open*, 7(3), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017721734>.

Vande Vusse, L.K., Ryder, H.F. and Best, J.A., 2021. Maximizing career advancement during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recommendations for postgraduate training programs. *Academic Medicine*, 96(7), pp.967–973.

Vinkenburg, C.J., Van Engen, M.L., Eagly, A.H. and Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C., 2011. An exploration of stereotypical beliefs about leadership styles: Is transformational leadership a route to women's promotion? *Leadership Quarterly*, 22(1), pp.10–21.

Waheed, S. and Zaim, A.H., 2015. A model for talent management and career planning. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 15(5) pp.1205–1213.

Walby, S., 2004. The European Union and gender equality: Emergent varieties of gender regime. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*, 11(1), pp.4–29.

Wang, J., 2009. Networking in the workplace: Implications for women's career development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2009(122), pp.33–42.

Wang, M.T. and Degol, J.L., 2017. Gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics STEM: Current knowledge, implications for practice, policy, and future directions. *Educational psychology review*, 29(1), pp.119–140.

Watts, L.L., Frame, M.C., Moffett, R.G., Van Hein, J.L. and Hein, M., 2015. The relationship between gender, perceived career barriers, and occupational aspirations. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 45(1), pp.10–22.

Weiss, R. J., & Livengood, R.S. (2011). The use of career practices as a disciplinary tool: A review of the literature. *Journal of Business and Leadership: Research, Practice, and Teaching*, 7(2), 68-77.

Wentling, R.M., 2003. The career development and aspirations of women in middle management – revisited. *Women in Management Review*.

Wexley, K.N. and Latham, G.P., 2002. Societal concerns. *Developing and training human resources in organizations*, pp.297–342.

Whysall, Z., 2018. Cognitive biases in recruitment, selection, and promotion: The risk of subconscious discrimination. In *Hidden Inequalities in the Workplace*. Palgrave, pp.215–243.

- Widodo, A., Nursaptini, N., Novitasari, S., Sutisna, D. and Umar, U., 2020. From face-to-face learning to web base learning: How are student readiness. *Premiere Educandum: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Dan Pembelajaran*, 10(2), pp.149-160.
- Williams, J. C. (2010). The mommy track and partnership: Temporary delay or dead end? In N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom, & M. F. Peterson 9Eds., *Handbook of organisational culture and climate* (pp. 585-600). SAGE Publications.
- Williams, C.L., Muller, C. and Kilanski, K., 2012. Gendered organizations in the new economy. *Gender and Society*, 26(4), pp.549–573.
- Williamson, S., Colley, L. and Foley, M., 2020. Human resource devolution, decoupling and incoherence: How line managers manage gender equality reforms. *Public Management Review*, 22(10), pp.1560–1578.
- Wilson, E., Kenny, A. and Dickson-Swift, V., 2015. Using blogs as a qualitative health research tool: a scoping review. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 14(5), p.1609406915618049.
- Woods, P.A. and Gronn, P., 2009. Nurturing democracy: The contribution of distributed leadership to a democratic organizational landscape. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 37(4), pp.430–451.
- Wrench, J., 2005. Diversity management can be bad for you. *Race and Class*, 46(3), pp.73–84.
- Wynn Jr, D. and Williams, C.K., 2012. Principles for conducting critical realist case study research in information systems. *MIS quarterly*, pp.787-810.
- Yap, M. and Konrad, A.M., 2009. Gender and racial differentials in promotions: Is there a sticky floor, a mid-level bottleneck, or a glass ceiling? *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 64(4), pp.593–619.
- Yap, P.J., 2005. Four models of equality. *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Review*, 27(1), pp.63–100.
- Yin, R., 2011. *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Yin, R.K., 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yin, R.K., 2003. Designing case studies. *Qualitative Research Methods*, pp.359–386.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research matrix

Matrix relates the interview questions to the research questions; and the data required from each interview question at each occupational level, and expected themes that could occur

Important topics / themes	Data Required	HRD Managers	Senior Managers	Employees from different occupational levels
RQ1: How can organisations manage the career development of female employees to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?				

<p>1. Organisation al career planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Factors affecting career progression (e.g., qualification, experience, etc.) - The approach used by the organisation in employees' career planning - How the organisation knows what employees want from their careers - The mechanisms the organisation uses to identify talented and competent employees to provide them with career opportunities 	<p>1. Is there a clear system or policy by which the organisation finds a suitable person internally to occupy a senior position?</p> <p>2. How are managerial positions in the organisation filled?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open competition internally and externally - Specific criteria/skills/qualifications/experience - Performance - Succession planning - Nomination/recommendation by superiors - promotion <p>3. What are the proportions of men and women who apply for managerial position / promotional opportunities? What are the proportions of successful candidates (men vs. women)? How far does the organisation monitor this and act on what it finds?</p> <p>4. What is the approach (policies/systems) the organisation adopts for employees' careers' planning in the following aspects?</p>	<p>1. Can you tell me about your overall work experiences in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The organisations you have worked at, ○ The positions you have held, ○ Methods of obtaining the positions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New appointment : internal or external; b. Promotion: based on performance and years of service, based on obtaining a new qualification, recommendation from the management; ○ Duration in each position. <p>2. How have you been selected for this position? Is there a specific system or policy that the organisation uses for appointing senior managerial selection?</p> <p>3. What are the most important requirements /criteria employees</p>	<p>1. Can you tell me about your overall work experiences in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The organisations you have worked at, ○ The positions you had been holding, ○ Methods of obtaining the positions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New appointment: internal or external ; b. Promotion: based on performance and years of service, based on obtaining a new qualification, recommendation from the management; ○ Duration in each position.

		<p>a. Selection of human resources (<i>assessing experience, skills, qualification</i>).</p> <p>b. Development of employees (<i>assessing appropriate and suitable forms of learning</i>)</p> <p>c. Talent management (<i>talent profiles and pipelines -policy</i>)</p> <p>d. Management of the career plateau (<i>when an employee reaches to a position that does not have an opportunity for a vertical promotion</i>)</p> <p>e. Family responsiveness</p> <p>f. Performance management or appraisals (<i>assessing outcomes of the appraisals</i>)</p> <p>5. According to the strategies adopted by the organisation, do you have a pool of competent employees whose careers have been planned for to be given opportunities for career progression to senior leadership positions?</p> <p>If yes, what is the proportion of men to women in the career plan?</p> <p>If no, how does the organisation select</p>	<p>should demonstrate to be selected for a managerial position?</p> <p>4. Have you been involved in developing policies/strategies for managing employees' careers planning in any of the following aspects?</p> <p>a. Selection of human resources (<i>assessing experience, skills, qualification</i>).</p> <p>b. Development of employees (<i>assessing appropriate and suitable forms of learning</i>)</p> <p>c. Talent management</p> <p>d. Management of the career plateau (<i>when an employee reaches to a position that does not have an opportunity for a vertical promotion</i>)</p> <p>e. Family responsiveness</p> <p>f. Performance management or</p>	<p>2. How do you think most people enter a higher position?</p> <p>e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competing through a vacant position - Head-hunting - Networking - Promotion - Recommendation by managers <p>3. Do you think that you are on the right path to be eligible for a higher position? How?</p> <p>4. Are you aware of the policies the organisation adopts for employees' career planning?</p>
--	--	--	--	--

		employees for career opportunities and progression?	<p>appraisals (assessing outcomes of the appraisals)</p> <p>5. Do you think that these strategies are important and effective in employees' careers progression? Or do you think that there are other factors that influence the career progression of an employee to a senior managerial position?</p> <p>6. Reflecting on your experience, has your career been planned for in order for you to reach this position? Can you elaborate on this?</p>	<p>5. Have you been approached by the organisation (e.g., supervisor, manager, HR representative) regarding your career requirements and plan? If yes, can you elaborate on the approach? the outcomes? future plan?</p>
<p>2. Organisation al career practices</p> <p><i>Data required:</i></p> <p>- the career practices</p>		<p>6. Which of the following career management practices are offered by the organisation for employees' careers progression?</p> <p>a. assessment centres b. career counselling c. career paths d. career-planning workshops e. developmental assignments f. external seminars</p>	<p>7. Which of the following career management practices have been offered to you and helped you progress in your career?</p> <p>a. assessment centres b. career counselling c. career paths</p>	<p>6. which of the following career management practices have been offered to you and helped you progress in your career?</p> <p>a. assessm ent centres</p>

<p>offered to employees</p> <p>- What is the impact of each of the OCM practices provided by the organisation on employees' development, information, and relations that leads to career success and progression?</p> <p>- Does the organisation use any kind of monitoring system on the outcomes of these practices?</p> <p>- Does the organisation maintain a profile of employees who utilise these practices? If yes, for what purpose does the organisation use this data?</p> <p>(Decisions on promotions, compensation , ...etc)</p>	<p>g. international assignment</p> <p>h. job enrichment</p> <p>i. job postings</p> <p>j. job rotation</p> <p>k. lateral moves</p> <p>l. mentoring</p> <p>m. networking</p> <p>n. performance appraisal</p> <p>o. succession planning</p> <p>p. training</p> <p>Are there any other practices that are offered by the organisation which are not listed above? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>7. How are each of the practices affecting employees' career success and progression?</p> <p>Prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developmental - informational - relational <p>8. Does the organisation use any kind of monitoring system on the outcomes of these practices? If yes, how many people approximately take up these opportunities? Does it vary across the sexes? Do you know why? Is this something that concerns the organisation? And if so, what does it do about it?</p>	<p>d. career-planning workshops</p> <p>e. developmental assignments</p> <p>f. external seminars</p> <p>g. international assignment</p> <p>h. job enrichment</p> <p>i. job postings</p> <p>j. job rotation</p> <p>k. lateral moves</p> <p>l. mentoring</p> <p>m. networking</p> <p>n. performance appraisal</p> <p>o. succession planning</p> <p>p. training</p> <p>Are there other practices than the ones listed above that have been offered to you and helped you progress in your career? Do you think that there are other factors that helped you in your career progression? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>8. How did these career practises helped you progress? What did they add to you?</p> <p>(developmental, informational, relational).</p>	<p>b. career counselling</p> <p>c. career paths</p> <p>d. career-planning workshops</p> <p>e. development mental assignments</p> <p>f. external seminars</p> <p>g. international assignment</p> <p>h. job enrichment</p> <p>i. job postings</p> <p>j. job rotation</p> <p>k. lateral moves</p> <p>l. mentoring</p> <p>m. networking</p> <p>n. performance appraisal</p> <p>o. succession planning</p> <p>p. training</p> <p>Do you think that there are other factors or practices that helped your progress in your career other than the listed above? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>7. What was the outcomes of attending each of these</p>
--	--	---	--

<p>-What is the impact of each of the OCM practice provided by the organisation on employees' development?</p> <p>-Do these practices provide important information regarding employees' careers and decisions afterwards on promotions or compensations?</p> <p>- Do these practices provide employees with support and visibility of their managers that would help them progress in their careers?</p>		<p>9. Does the organisation maintain a profile of employees who utilise these practices? If yes, for what purpose does the organisation use these data?</p>	<p>9. Do you think the career management practices adopted by the organisations are effective in employees' careers' development and progression? If yes, can you give me an example on its impact on one of your employees?</p> <p>10. Reflecting on your experience on career practices offered, do males and female employees take up these opportunities equally? If not, do you know why?</p>	<p>career practices? What did they add to you? (developmental, informational, relational).</p> <p>8. Do you think that these career practices will entitle you to progress further in your career? If no, why?</p> <p>9. Do you always attend the career practices offered by the organisation? If no, why?</p>
<p>RQ2: What are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career pathways that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities?</p>				

3. Organisation al Barriers to careers' progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisational barriers to women's career progression - How the organisation helps employees to overcome other barriers 	<p>10. Do you think that the organisation provides equal opportunities for women and men in their career progression to senior managerial levels?</p> <p>If no, what do you think the reasons are?</p> <p>If yes, what do you think explains the relative absence of women in senior management?</p>	<p>11. Reflecting on your experience, do you think that opportunities to senior leadership positions are offered equally to men and women?</p> <p>If yes, what do you think explains the relative absence of women in senior management?</p> <p>12. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles from the organisation that affected your progression throughout your career journey up to this position? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>13. Did you face other barriers from outside the organisation that affected your progression (i.e. societal and individual)? If yes, can you briefly talk about them?</p> <p>e.g.,</p> <p>Culture</p>	<p>10. Have you applied before for a higher position? What was the outcome? If you were not selected, do you know who got the position and why?</p> <p>11. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles from the organisation that affected your progression throughout your career journey up to this position? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>12. Did you face other barriers from outside the organisation that affected your progression (i.e. societal and individual)? If yes, can you</p>

			<p>Family/ children responsibilities</p> <p>Personality</p> <p>Spouse support</p> <p>Management aspiration</p> <p>And what was the role of the organisation in assisting you to overcome these barriers?</p>	<p>briefly talk about them?</p> <p>e.g.,</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Family/ children responsibilities</p> <p>Personality</p> <p>Spouse support</p> <p>Management aspiration</p> <p>And what was the role of the organisation in assisting you to overcome these barriers?</p>
RQ3: To what extent are organisational interventions considered as critical success factors to women's careers progression?				
4. Organisational interventions	<p>- The interventional schemes provided by the organisation, if any.</p> <p>- How are they offered? On what basis?</p>	<p>11. In case that the career management practices were not achieving their outcomes on the selected employees, does the organisation provides any additional interventions/ support to help these employees progress in their careers?</p> <p>If yes, what are they?</p>	<p>14. In addition to the career management practices offered to you, have you been provided with additional support or programs from the organisation that helped you progress in your career up to this</p>	<p>13. In addition to the career management practices offered to you, have you been provided with additional support from the organisation that helped you progress</p>

	<p>- Do they work the same for men and women?</p> <p>- Is any consideration taken when designing or offering these interventions?</p>	<p>12. On what basis are these interventions are designed and offered? Is there any mechanism or system the organisation follows in this regard?</p> <p>13. Does the organisation have a monitoring system to measure the effectiveness of these interventions? If yes, is there a difference in the effect of these interventions between the sexes? How would the organisation respond on this issue?</p>	<p>position? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>15. Have you observed positive outcomes or required outcomes for employees who have been provided with career management practices? If not, does the organisation have further consideration in this issue? If yes, what is the interventional plan the organisation adopts?</p> <p>16. Do you think that this plan is as effective for women as it is for men? If not, what do you think the reasons are?</p>	<p>in your career? If yes, what are they?</p> <p>What difference did it make in your career progression?</p> <p>14. What could your organisation do (that it is not currently doing) that might help you progress to the next level?</p>
	<p>Demographic Questions</p> <p>- Impact of having children on work and progression .</p> <p>- Role of the organisation in this.</p> <p>- Career stages according to the age</p>		<p>17. What is your marital status? If married, do you have children? How old are they?</p> <p>18. Which category below includes your age?</p> <p>a. 30 years and less</p> <p>b. 31 – 44 years old</p> <p>c. 45 and above</p>	<p>15. What is your marital status? If married, do you have children? How old are they?</p> <p>16. Which category below includes your age?</p> <p>a. 30 years and less</p> <p>b. 31 – 44 years old</p>

				c. 45 and above
--	--	--	--	--------------------

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Appendix B.1: Interview Questions for HRD Managers

1. Is there a clear system or policy by which the organisation finds a suitable person internally to occupy a senior position?
2. How are managerial positions in the organisation filled?
 - Open competition internally and externally
 - Specific criteria/ skills/ qualifications/experience
 - Performance
 - Succession planning
 - Nomination/ recommendation by superiors
 - Promotion
3. What are the proportions of men and women who apply for managerial positions / promotional opportunities? What are the proportions of successful candidates (men vs women)? How far does the organisation monitor this and act on what it finds?
4. What is the approach (policies/systems) the organisation adopts for employees' careers' planning in the following aspects?
 - a. Selection of human resources (*assessing experience, skills, qualification*).
 - b. Development of employees (*assessing appropriate and suitable forms of learning*)
 - c. Talent management (*talent profiles and pipelines -policy*)
 - d. Management of the career plateau (*when an employee reaches to a position that does not have an opportunity for a vertical promotion*)

e. Family responsiveness (*family-friendly policies*)

f. Performance management or appraisals (*assessing outcomes of the appraisals*)

5. According to the strategies adopted by the organisation, do you have a pool of competent employees for whom there is career planning to ensure opportunities for career progression to senior leadership positions?

If yes, what is the proportion of females to males in the career plan?

If no, how does the organisation select employees for career opportunities and progression?

6. Which of the following career management practices are offered by the organisation for employees' careers progression?

- a. assessment centres
- b. career counselling
- c. career paths
- d. career-planning workshops
- e. developmental assignments
- f. external seminars
- g. international assignment
- h. job enrichment
- i. job postings
- j. job rotation
- k. lateral moves / job transfer
- l. mentoring
- m. networking
- n. performance appraisal
- o. succession planning
- p. training

Are there any other practices that are offered by the organisation which are not listed above? If yes, what are they?

7. How does each of the practices affect employees' career success and progression in terms of employees' **development, information, relations**?

8. Does the organisation uses any monitoring system on the outcomes of these practices? If yes, how many people approximately take up these opportunities? Does it vary across the sexes? Do you know why? Is this something that concerns the organisation? And if so, what does it do about it?

9. Does the organisation maintain a profile of employees who utilise these practices? If yes, for what purpose does the organisation use these data?

10. Do you think that the organisation provides equal opportunities for women and men in their career progression to senior managerial levels?

If no, what do you think the reasons are?

If yes, what do you think explains the relative absence of women in senior management?

11. In the case that the career management practices were not achieving their outcomes for the selected employees, does the organisation provides any additional interventions/support to help these employees progress in their careers? **If yes**, what are they?

12. On what basis are these interventions designed and offered? Is there any mechanism or system that the organisation follows in this regard?

13. Does the organisation have a monitoring system to measure the effectiveness of these interventions? **If yes**, is there a difference in the effect of these interventions between the sexes? How would the organisation respond to this issue?

Appendix B.2: Interview Questions for Senior Managers

1. Can you tell me about your overall work experiences in terms of:
 - The organisations you have worked at,
 - The positions you had been holding,
 - Methods of obtaining the positions:
 - **New appointment:** internal or external;
 - **Promotion:** based on performance and years of service, based on obtaining a new qualification, a recommendation from the management;
 - Duration in each position.
2. How have you been selected for this position? Is there a specific system or policy that the organisation uses for appointing senior managers?
3. Have you been involved in developing policies/ strategies for managing employees' careers planning in any of the following aspects?
 - a. Selection of human resources (assessing experience, skills, qualification).
 - b. Development of employees (assessing appropriate and suitable forms of learning)
 - c. Talent management
 - d. Management of the career plateau (when an employee reaches a position that does not have an opportunity for a vertical promotion)
 - e. Family responsiveness
 - f. Performance management or appraisals (assessing outcomes of the appraisals)

4. Do you think that these strategies are important and effective in employees' careers progression? Or do you think that there are other factors that influence the career progression of an employee to a senior managerial position?
5. Reflecting on your experience, has your career been planned for you to reach this position? Can you elaborate on this?
6. Which of the following career management practices has been offered to you and helped you progress in your career?
 - a. assessment centres
 - b. career counselling
 - c. career paths
 - d. career-planning workshops
 - e. developmental assignments
 - f. external seminars
 - g. international assignment
 - h. job enrichment
 - i. job postings
 - j. job rotation
 - k. lateral moves / job transfer
 - l. mentoring
 - m. networking
 - n. performance appraisal
 - o. succession planning
 - p. training

Are there practices other than the ones listed above that have been offered to you and helped you progress in your career? Do you think that there are other factors that helped you in your career progression? If yes, what are they?

7. How did these career practices helped you progress? What did they add to you in terms of your career development, information, relations?

8. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles from the organisation that affected your progression throughout your career journey up to this position? **If yes**, what are they? And how did you overcome them?

9. Did you face other barriers from outside the organisation that affected your progression (i.e. societal and individual)? **If yes**, can you briefly talk about them?

e.g.,

- Culture
- Family/ children responsibilities
- Personality
- Spouse support
- Management aspiration

And what was the role of the organisation in assisting you to overcome these barriers?

10. In addition to the career management practices offered to you, have you been provided with additional support or programmes from the organisation that helped you progress in your career up to this position? **If yes**, what are they?

11. What are the most important requirements/criteria that employees should demonstrate to be selected for a managerial position?

12. Do you think the career management practices adopted by the organisations are effective in employees' careers' development and progression? If yes, can you give me an example of its impact on one of your employees?

13. Reflecting on your experience of career practices offered, do male and female employees take up these opportunities equally? If not, do you know why?

14. Reflecting on your experience, do you think that career opportunities for senior leadership positions are offered equally to males and females? **If yes**, what do you think explains the relative absence of women in senior management?

15. Have you observed positive outcomes for employees who have been provided with career management practices? **If not**, does the organisation have further consideration in this issue? **If yes**, what is the interventional plan the organisation adopts?

16. Do you think that the interventional plan is as effective for women as it is for men? If not, what do you think the reasons are?

17. What is your marital status? If married, do you have children? How old are they?

18. Which category below includes your age?

- a. 30 years and less
- b. 31 – 44 years old
- c. 45 years and above

Appendix B.3: Interview Questions for employees from other occupational levels

أسئلة مقابلة لموظفين من مناصب وظيفية متعددة

1. Can you tell me about your overall work experiences in terms of:

١. هل يمكن أن تخبرني عن خبرتك في العمل بشكل عام من حيث:

○ The organisations you have worked at,

○ المؤسسات التي عملت بها

○ The positions you had been holding,

○ المناصب التي شغلتها

○ Methods of obtaining the positions: **New appointment:** internal or external;

Promotion: based on performance and years of service, based on obtaining a new qualification, a recommendation from the management;

○ طرق الحصول على المناصب: تعيين جديد: داخلي او خارجي، ترقية: بناء على الأداء وسنوات الخدمة،

بناء على حصولك لمؤهل جديد، توصيه من الإدارة

○ Duration in each position.

○ مدة الخدمة في كل منصب

2. How do you think most people enter a higher position in the bank?

٢. ما هي آليه الحصول على منصب أعلى من وجهه

نظرك؟

e.g.,

- Competing through a vacant position
- التنافس على الوظيفة الشاغرة
- Head-hunting
- البحث مباشره عن الشخص المناسب
- Networking
- الشبكات الاجتماعية

- Promotion
- الترقية
- Recommendation by managers
- التوصية من الإدارة

3. Do you think that you are on the right path to be eligible for a higher position?
How?

هل تعتقد أنك في الطريق الصحيح لتكون مؤهلاً لشغل منصب أعلى؟ كيف؟
٣.

4. Are you aware of the policies the organisation adopts for employees' career planning?

٤. هل أنت على دراية بالسياسات التي تتبناها المؤسسة للتخطيط الوظيفي للموظفين؟

5. Have you been approached by the organisation (e.g., supervisor, manager, HR representative) regarding your career requirements and plan? If yes, can you elaborate on the approach? The outcomes? Future plan?

٥. هل تم التواصل معك من قبل المؤسسة (على سبيل المثال – المشرف، المدير، مختص من الموارد البشرية) بخصوص متطلباتك الوظيفية وخطتك المهنية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة نعم، هل يمكنك توضيح الآلية؟ النتائج؟ الخطة المستقبلية؟

6. Which of the following career management practices has been offered to you and helped you progress in your career?

٦. ما هي الأساليب الإدارية للتطوير المهني التي تم تقديمها لك بهدف مساعدتك في تطوير مسارك الوظيفي؟

a. assessment centres

مراكز التقييم

b. career counselling

الارشاد الوظيفي

c. career paths

المسارات الوظيفية

d. career-planning workshops

ورش عمل التخطيط الوظيفي

e. developmental assignments

المهام التنموية والتطوير الوظيفي

f. external seminars

الندوات الخارجية

g. international assignment

مهمة عمل خارجية

h. job enrichment

الاثراء الوظيفي

i. job postings

الوظائف الشاغرة

j. job rotation

الدوران الوظيفي

k. lateral moves

العمل في قسم اخر بنفس المسمى الوظيفي والمخصصات المالية

l. mentoring

التوجيه الوظيفي

m. networking

شبكات التعارف والتواصل

n. performance appraisal

تقييم الاداء

o. succession planning

المخططات الوظيفية لشغل مناصب اعلى

p. training

التدريب

Do you think that there are other factors or practices that helped you progress in your career other than the listed above? If yes, what are they?

هل تعتقد أن هناك عوامل أو أساليب أخرى ساعدت في تقدمك في حياتك المهنية بخلاف المذكور أعلاه؟ إذا نعم، ما هي؟

7. What were the outcomes of attending each of these career practices? What did they add to you in terms of your career development, information and relations?

٧. ما هي نتائج مشاركتك في اساليب التطوير المهني التي قدمت لك؟ ماذا أضافوا لك من حيث التطور الوظيفي والمعلومات والعلاقات؟

8. Do you think that these career practices will assist you to progress further in your career? If no, why?

٨. هل تعتقد أن اساليب التطوير المهني ستؤهلك لمزيد من التقدم؟ إذا كانت الإجابة "لا"، لماذا؟

9. Do you always attend the career practices offered by the organisation? If no, why?

٩. هل تشارك في اساليب التطوير المهني التي تقدمها مؤسستك؟ إذا كانت الإجابة "لا"، لماذا؟

10. Have you applied before for a higher position? What was the outcome? If you were not selected, do you know who got the position and why?

١٠. هل تقدمت من قبل لشغل منصب أعلى؟ ماذا كانت النتيجة؟ إذا لم يتم اختيارك، هل تعرف من حصل على المنصب ولماذا؟

11. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles from the organisation that affected your progression throughout your career journey up to this position? **If yes**, what are they?

١١. في مسارك المهني حتى وظيفتك الحالية، هل واجهت أي تحديات أو عقبات من مؤسستك أثرت على تقدمك المهني؟ إذا نعم، ما هي؟

12. Did you face other barriers from outside the organisation that affected your progression (i.e. societal and individual)? **If yes**, can you briefly talk about them?

١٢. هل واجهت عقبات أخرى من خارج مؤسستك (اجتماعياً أو شخصياً) أثرت على تقدمك المهني؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم، ارجو منك التحدث بإيجاز؟

e.g.,

- Culture
- الحضارة/ الثقافة/ المعتقدات
- Family/ children responsibilities
- مسؤوليات الأسرة / الاطفال
- Personality

- الشخصية
- Spouse / family support
- دعم الزوج/ الزوجة/ الأسرة
- Management aspiration
- الطموح للوصول للمناصب العليا

And what was the role of the organisation in assisting you to overcome these barriers?

وما هو دور المؤسسة في مساعدتك على تخطي هذه العقبات؟

13. In addition to the career management practices offered to you, have you been provided with additional support from the organisation that helped you progress in your career? **If yes**, what are they? What difference did it make in your career progression?

١٣. بالإضافة إلى اساليب التطوير المهني المقدمة لك، هل تم تزويدك بدعم إضافي من المؤسسة لمساعدتك على التقدم في حياتك المهنية؟ إذا نعم، ما هي اوجه الدعم؟ ما الفرق الذي أحدثته في تقدمك الوظيفي؟

14. What could your organisation do (that it is not currently doing) that might help you progress to the next occupational level?

١٤. ما الذي يمكن لمؤسستك أن تفعله (ولا تفعله حالياً) والذي قد يساعدك على التقدم إلى مستوى وظيفي أفضل؟

15. What is your marital status? If married, do you have children? How old are they?

١٥. ما هي حالتك الاجتماعية؟ إذا متزوج؟ هل لديك أطفال؟ كم أعمارهم؟

16. Which category below includes your age?

١٦. أي فئة أذناه تشمل عمرك؟

- a. 30 years and less
- b. 31 – 44 years old
- c. 45 years and above

Appendix C: Data analysis 1

INTERNATIONAL BANK – HRD Managers	

RQ1: How can organisations manage the career development of female employees to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?				
Topic / Interview Question	Interview extract	Codes 1	Codes 1.1	Themes
1. Is there a clear system or policy by which the organisation finds a suitable person internally to occupy a senior position?	<p>Participant-HR1: We actively working on <u>succession planning</u>. It has taken over in the last year and we <u>started with the regulated roles</u>. <u>These roles are within the bank, but have CBO title, general managers, assistant general managers, Director general manager</u>. These three titles are regulated roles. So, we started the succession planning for those roles; and the process that we follow with the succession planning is basically <u>I work with each head of business or functions, so in the bank we have business and functions</u>. So, the business are the ones that generate revenues for the bank, like global banking, retail banking and, and functions that include HR, Audit, Finance etc. <u>So, I have a meeting with each head of business and each head of function. And we discuss the succession planning for each individual</u>. So, <u>who are the possible successors and what is their readiness level, so to determine the level</u>. We have 4 categories, <u>we have emergency</u>, we have <u>ready now</u>, we have <u>develop-on role</u>, and <u>one to two roles</u>. So, <u>one individual may have multiple successes with different readiness levels</u>. So, <u>yes there is an internal process to hire seniors to fill positions</u>.</p> <p><u>What do you think are the most important factors for employees' career development and progression in the bank?</u></p> <p>I would say number one is <u>making the tools available to employees</u>, and number two would definitely be <u>ownership by the employee</u>, and number three is to have a line manager that would support your <u>career plan</u>. So, we have the tools available so once you have an employee <u>who is ambitious, driven and owns their career progression</u>, but if you have a line manager that stops you, so whenever there are initiatives such as job shadowing or job testing opportunities and they decline, or training courses that you want to do and they say no for workload or any other reason, then <u>obviously it's going to be very challenging</u> and there will be that conflict.</p> <p><u>Number three is having a support system, having people around you that will support you, so for example that you are a working mother with young children, and you want to do training courses or the university or you have some skills to improve with, the line manager should play a supporting role, wherever it can be that could help you because you need the time to study or whatever it is</u>. And I think it's the same with males as well, they need that support system, I guess.</p> <p>Participant-HR2: Yeah, but this is in terms of there is a vacancy, and we are looking to find a suitable candidate for that position, then yes, we do have a policy and place, and it's <u>actually.. we put it in the public domain through our internal portal</u>. All employees can access this <u>policy to read and it's a transparent and fair process where all eligible employees can apply for the vacancies</u>, and the process of the <u>recruitment in terms of interviews and selections and shortlisting takes place to try to find the best candidate for that position</u>.</p> <p><u>So, if there is a vacancy for a senior role, is the post advertised internally or externally?</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Succession planning for senior roles, that are regulated by CBO (e.g., general manager, director general manager) and also for critical roles - Discussion with heads of departments regarding successors and their readiness level - The plan is taken to committee s for endorsement - Successors are developed throughout the succession plan, and PDP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Succession planning for senior roles and critical roles. - Discussion with heads of departments - Followed up by different committees - Successors are developed throughout the succession plan, and PDP - Vacancies are advertised internally for all employees. - In certain circumstance, the vacancy is advertised internally and externally at the same time for time constraints. - Priorities always given to internal employees, if they are best fit for the position <p><u>The most important/ critical factors for employees' career development and progression in the bank</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability of developmental tools to all employees - Ownership for development by the employee - Support of the line manager - Support of other people around you - To free the individual. To support the employee by freeing him to develop and learn new things - Qualification - Experience - Some senior roles require certain qualification related to the field of work, like, investment or audit. - In some roles professional qualification is more required than education certificate - Lack of line manager support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal and external announcements - Selection is based on competency 	Factors affecting employees career progression

	<p>Our approach is definitely first, we look at our internal people, but in certain circumstances, to buy time, we advertise the vacancy both internally and externally. And we start the interviews with the internal candidates, and to give a comparison to satisfy ourselves that yes, whom we have internally are stronger. But usually, we do give the priority to our internal employees.</p> <p><u>What do you think are the most important/critical factors for employees' career development and progression in the bank?</u></p> <p>Definitely, one of the most important things is the <u>employee himself</u>, that they need to <u>own it, they need to be responsible</u>. They shouldn't be thinking that someone else needs to drive their own PDP. The other thing is to <u>free that individual</u>. If the person is already at a senior level, but he is mapped to a senior level, that the individual already occupied by a lot of things to do. So, <u>the support that individual requires is to be freed for him to develop and learn new things</u>, so that's critical. The other thing as well is <u>the support of the line manager to invest money</u>, because sometime due to the cost constraints especially during COVID now, it does cost the bank when we invest in people. So, I think they need to prioritise. Definitely, the bank needs to prioritise, and this is like a long-term investment, but it is worth having it.</p> <p><u>For appointing for senior managers, are there certain criteria that the candidate should have, for example, a certain level of education in a certain area, or experience in specific areas, or specific characteristics the candidate should have?</u></p> <p>I would mention about the <u>qualification</u>, the qualification definitely it is important on the field the employee is set. <u>Education, bank's and government's requirements are important to qualifications</u>. In some of the senior roles in HSBC, at a bank level, there is a certain qualification that they need to have. For example, you can't have someone as a head of investment without having the <u>qualification on investment</u>. Usually, we also specify at which level. The same with head of audit; it requires a qualification related to audit. So yes, in some of the senior management roles, it requires certain qualification to be obtained before filling the role.</p> <p><u>So, we are talking about a master's-level education, or professional qualifications?</u></p> <p>Its more professional but in specific fields. For example, for premier, a <u>Master's will not replace the certification</u> required to be certified to sell investment. So, to be able to sell investment, you need to complete a certain level in investment. So, it is related to the role itself, not as general as a Master's.</p>	<p><u>Factors:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the development tools available to employees • Ownership by the employee • Have a line manager that supports your career • Have your own support system, having people around you that support you. <p>- Vacancies are advertised internally for all employees</p>	<p>Other important factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The employee - Initiative - PDP - Support of line manager <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualification - Experience - Professional certificates for some roles 	
--	---	---	--	--

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All eligible employees can apply for the positions. - The process is fair and transparent - In certain circumstances, we advertise internally and externally at the same time to buy time. - Priorities are always given to internal people, if they are the best for the position <p><u>Factors:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The employee himself - The employees need to drive their own PDPs - To free the individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> . To support the employee by freeing him to develop and learn new things - The support of the line manager to invest money in his employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qualification - Experience - Some senior roles require certain qualifications related to the field of work, like, investment or audit. - In some roles 	
--	--	--	--

		profession al qualificati on is more required than an education certificate like a Master's		
--	--	--	--	--

Appendix D: Data analysis 2

INTERNATIONAL BANK – HRD managers		
Themes	Sub-themes	Codes/ Data
RQ1: How can organisations manage the career development of female employees to succeed and progress to senior managerial levels?		
1. Factors affecting employees' careers progression		
	1.1 Individual factors/contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ownership by employees for development - Family support - Qualification - Experience - Professional qualification related to field of work aspiration
	1.2 Organisational factors/approach of senior management appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Succession planning for senior roles and critical roles - Discussion with heads of departments regarding successors and their readiness level - The plan is endorsed and followed up by different committees - Successors are developed throughout the succession plan, and PDP - the successful successor will take the role either by <u>promotion</u> or it could be a <u>lateral move</u>. - Vacancies are advertised internally for all employees. - In certain circumstances, the vacancy is <u>advertised internally and externally</u> at the same time for time constraints. - Priorities always given to internal employees if they are best fit for the position - Suitable Employees could be <u>approached and asked to apply</u> and compete for certain positions that would fit their profile. - Support of line manager - Internal announcement - <u>To free the individual</u>. To support the employee by freeing him to develop and learn new things (support of line manager) -
2. Organisational career planning		

	2.1 The approach of the organisation in employees' career planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee are selected as per the requirements of the jobs posted by the bank, and they go through different assessment before selection. Different practices are available based on the PDP of the employee that highlight the areas for development and progression PDP – initiated by the employee Support of the line manager Line managers help in identifying development areas of employees through PDP. Succession planning for senior and critical roles Selection of competent employees Lateral moves are available for progression if vertical movement is not possible. Performance appraisal The people committee forum follows up on the progress and readiness of talents of senior and critical roles. The performance appraisal indicates the performance of the employee and highlights the areas of strengths and weakness and other eligibility for financial rewards. For junior position, decision made with departmental level For senior positions, these are handled in the people's committee forum
3. Organisational career practices		
	3.1 Organisational career practices offered to employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The university of the organisation provides a wide range of online courses Training courses PDP Job shadowing Job testing Further education/ certification On-job training Short term assignment outside Oman Internal postings of vacancies Career planning workshops Career counselling Lateral move Promotion Job rotation Due to the nature of the organisation, being a global/ international bank, so whatever is launched in the group (in----), is adapted here in Oman. Hence, many of the programmes is launched first here, on a local level, and that's the benefit of working for an international organisation.
	3.2 Impact of organisational career practices on employees' career development, information, and relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational career practices have direct relationship with the career success and progression of employees through career development, information and relations. The <u>main tool (i.e. PDP)</u> provides <u>information</u> on areas of developmental focus and the suitable approach to achieve it (<u>strong relationship between information and career development</u>) <u>Line managers play major role in providing information</u> on their employees' learning and developmental needs in addition to providing support for achieving it. The line manager would decide on the value added based on the employee productivity and how efficient the employee became. Some practices <u>like job rotations and testing</u> would provide visibility for employees, that would help them for any

		<p>opportunities to move, as they will be exposed by other managers, which makes it easier to be selected.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees who utilise many of the practices considered as those with potential to succeed and progress • It <u>gives information</u> about the employee when opportunities arise.
<p>RQ2: What are the main organisational barriers women encounter throughout their career journey that hinder their career progression to senior managerial levels? And what is the role of organisations in either perpetuating or challenging these inequalities?</p>		
4. Organisational barriers to women's careers progression		
	4.1 Organisational barriers/challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In some departments, the proportions of males' managers are higher than females due to the <u>job requirements</u>, the <u>nature of the jobs</u>, like, constantly being <u>outside the office</u>, <u>meeting with clients</u>, <u>meetings over dinner</u>, which is hard for females Omanis with families • Perception of women or stereotyping that women get pregnant and take time off (discrimination)
5. Other barriers that influence employees' career progression		
	5.1 Other barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of confidence • Young children responsibilities • Cultural barriers – more responsibilities on women • Lack of a very strong support system to be able to take up those roles (e.g., family, nanny, etc.) - Challenges of work-life balance • Historical – men dominance • Stereotyping – perceptions that women get pregnant and take time off •
6. The role of the organisation in either challenging or perpetuating inequality		

	6.1 Gender differences in taking career practices opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career practices opportunities are not based on gender. • At mid-managerial level, there is a good split between males and females. • Employees' learning and development profiles are stored for keeping updated information on achievement and progress of employees based on their PDP. • There are certain man-hours for employees to attend that is required to be fulfilled by the regulators (i.e., CBO). • Some career practices are offered based on the PDP that highlights current role requirements and aspired/future role requirements
	6.2 Equal opportunities for senior managerial levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides equal opportunities. • There is a focus on group level and on local level on supporting women to move to more senior managerial level • The recognition of the problem and the focus on supporting women provides evidence that the organisation is challenging gender inequality in this aspect.
RQ 3: To what extent are organisational interventions considered as critical success factors to women's careers progression?		
7. Organisational interventions to support employees' careers progression		
•	7.1 Organisational interventions offered to employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on work-life balance • Focus groups for line managers to support employees' development • Speak up culture • Forums on different issues, like, performance and development and career planning