

# Shattering the glass ceiling: Challenges and strategies for women managers in steel manufacturing



## Authors:

Aaliyah Lala<sup>1,2</sup>   
Lynelle Coxen<sup>1,2</sup>   
Marius W. Stander<sup>1,2</sup>

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Optentia Research Unit,  
Faculty of Humanities,  
North-West University,  
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>School of Industrial  
Psychology and Human  
Resource Management,  
Faculty of Economic and  
Management Sciences,  
North-West University,  
Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Lynelle Coxen,  
lynelle.coxen@nwu.ac.za

## Dates:

Received: 11 Feb. 2025  
Accepted: 23 Apr. 2025  
Published: 06 June 2025

## How to cite this article:

Lala, A., Coxen, L., & Stander, M.W. (2025). Shattering the glass ceiling: Challenges and strategies for women managers in steel manufacturing. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology/SA Tydskrif vir Bedryfsielkunde*, 51(0), a2298. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v51i0.2298>

## Copyright:

© 2025. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work  
is licensed under the  
Creative Commons  
Attribution License.

## Read online:



Scan this QR  
code with your  
smart phone or  
mobile device  
to read online.

**Orientation:** Women's participation in the labour force has increased significantly; however, equal advancement opportunities remain an issue across all employment sectors, especially within the male-dominated steel-manufacturing industry.

**Research purpose:** This study aimed to explore the challenges encountered and strategies women managers use to overcome gender-induced advancement barriers in a steel-manufacturing organisation.

**Motivation for the study:** Despite efforts made to achieve gender inclusivity and equality, women remain underrepresented in management positions. Therefore, this study is important as it highlights women managers' unique gender-related challenges in South Africa's male-dominated steel-manufacturing industry.

**Research approach/design and method:** Twelve women managers were selected through purposive criterion homogenous sampling and participated in semi-structured interviews. An exploratory qualitative descriptive design was used to explore their experiences, and data were analysed using thematic analysis.

**Main findings:** Six themes emerged from the study. Themes related to advancement challenges included the following: (1) work-life balance; (2) gender bias; and (3) professional development opportunities. Themes related to strategies included (1) self-empowerment; (2) maintaining an executive presence; and (3) professional support systems.

**Practical/managerial implications:** The steel-manufacturing organisation may benefit from understanding women managers' experiences of advancement barriers and incorporating women's empowerment programmes. Various policies and processes could be implemented to assist women's career progression.

**Contribution/value-add:** This article aimed to fill the gap in literature regarding the unique gender-related barriers that women managers experience in a South African steel-manufacturing context. The study highlights strategies that women managers have implemented.

**Keywords:** glass ceiling effect; steel manufacturing; women; male-dominated; gender inequality; inclusivity; women's career progression.

## Introduction

Organisational growth and sustainability depend on employees' diverse thoughts, opinions and decisions, regardless of gender (Khan & Khan, 2022; Lahiri et al., 2022). Despite this, women remain undervalued in the competitive labour market, making up less than a third of the workforce (Bertay et al., 2020). This has prompted international research to focus on addressing gender inequality (Njuki et al., 2023), with global efforts increasingly aligned with the United Nations' fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which aims to achieve equal representation of women across all occupational levels by 2030 (United Nations South Africa, 2024). In response, organisations are driving a global gender equality movement to ensure equal opportunity based on talent and to minimise discrimination (Khan & Khan, 2022). These efforts have intensified global attention on women's empowerment and fostered initiatives on diversity, equity, inclusivity and belonging (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022).

The global gender gap – measuring disparities in salary, leadership, employment and labour market opportunities – stands at 31.5% (World Economic Forum, 2024). South Africa ranks below this average, with a female employment absorption rate of 35.8%, which is 9.1% lower than that of men, highlighting persistent gender inequality in the country's workforce

(Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2024). Although women's participation in the labour force has increased, equal advancement opportunities remain an issue, especially within male-dominated sectors such as the manufacturing industry (Norberg & Johansson, 2021). While the modern workplace enables the entry of women into occupations that men traditionally occupied, women manager representation globally has decreased from 31.0% to 29.0% (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). This decline represents lost economic potential and opportunity for women in the labour market.

Gender equality is a constitutional right in South Africa, ensuring that women, who make up 51% of the population, have the same status and opportunities as men (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020). To achieve this human right, progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment is a prerequisite (Khan & Khan, 2022). The South African Government has attempted to combat gender inequalities through the implementation of the *Constitution*, the Bill of Rights, the *Labour Relations Act*, the Commission on Gender Equity, and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equity Bill (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). Similarly, South African organisations have implemented various policies, such as diversity, equity, inclusivity and belonging strategies, to increase the percentage of women in management positions (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020).

Enabling women's participation in the economy promotes growth, diversifies the economy, narrows wage discrepancies, contributes to financial stability, improves problem-solving and positively influences innovation (Bertay et al., 2020; Khan & Khan, 2022). Although there is a relatively large body of literature on women in the workplace, there is limited literature on the advancement experiences and barriers of women managers within the manufacturing industry.

Women face career advancement challenges, often being excluded from key opportunities such as leadership training and mentorship, which reinforces the 'glass ceiling effect' (Itty et al., 2019). The glass ceiling effect imposes gender-induced advancement barriers that prevent women from progressing professionally. Gender-related barriers to career advancement can be categorised into individual, organisational and social factors (Citil, 2022). At the individual level, challenges include gender stereotypes and difficulties balancing work and family life. Organisational barriers arise from human resource policies, company culture and structures. Socially, these barriers manifest in limited access to professional networks and the added pressure on women to constantly prove their worth (Calinaud et al., 2021; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022).

Exploring women managers' experiences in South Africa's manufacturing industry is crucial, as it ranks as the fourth-largest economic sector (Stats SA, 2023). Despite its significance, the industry struggles with global competitiveness (Ngepah et al., 2024) and remains male-dominated, limiting gender equality and women's career advancement (Citil, 2022). Women only hold 25.1% of management positions within this

industry (Department of Employment and Labour, 2024), underscoring the need for greater inclusion. Addressing gender imbalances can enhance workforce diversity, improve market appeal, strengthen reputation and drive overall success (Kaftandzieva & Nakov, 2021).

Although Calinaud et al. (2021), Citil (2022) and Maheshwari and Lenka (2022) explored advancement barriers for women, they did not explore the context-specific barriers encountered within the South African manufacturing industry. This study contributes to the literature by addressing the gap in knowledge concerning the experiences of women managers in a male-dominated manufacturing organisation where gender-induced advancement barriers are prevalent.

## Research purpose and objectives

The study examined gender-based challenges women managers face in career progression within a South African steel-manufacturing organisation and the strategies they used to overcome these barriers.

## Literature review

Women make up less than a quarter of the global manufacturing workforce (Oyon, 2021). In South Africa, the proportion of working-age women declined from 50.8% to 50.4%, with only 26.5% holding management positions (Department of Employment and Labour, 2023). Despite progress in addressing historical inequalities and gendered societal roles, gender-related barriers to career advancement persist, despite legislative and policy efforts to reduce discrimination.

While gender-related barriers have lessened, biases and stereotypes still hinder women's career progress (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). These barriers contribute to the glass ceiling effect, which is an overarching metaphor describing invisible barriers that hinder women's advancement, recognition and access to opportunities despite qualifications (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022; Imadoglu et al., 2020). As a result, women remain in lower or middle-ranked positions, reinforcing stereotypes about their suitability for maternal roles (Grangeiro et al., 2022). The glass ceiling is reflected in wage disparities, fewer promotions and a lower percentage of women in senior management roles (Espinosa & Ferreira, 2022).

## Gender-induced advancement barriers

Gender-induced advancement barriers are seen as obstacles deeply rooted in societal norms that hinder individuals, particularly women, from career progression (Adeniyi et al., 2024). The following sections explore gender-related advancement barriers women face at individual, organisational and social levels.

### Individual-level barriers

**Gender stereotyping:** A key challenge that prolongs the notion of women being inferior includes gender stereotypes,

which surface because of society separating gender into groups and attributing specific characteristics to each group (Citil, 2022; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Workplace stereotyping manifests when women are perceived as less competent because of being emotional in decision-making, lacking action-oriented behaviours, being deemed incompetent in technical fields and being less dominant to hold managerial roles (Raj et al., 2023). Often, men are regarded to embody traits such as competitiveness, physical toughness and capability of handling demanding tasks, which are seen as promotable qualities. In contrast, women are perceived to be less suitable because of the perceived absence of these traits (Pitka, 2024).

**Person-centred factors:** Person-centred factors refer to an individual's unique traits, such as personality and personal characteristics (Mohamed et al., 2023). Women face criticism regarding their confidence, emotional management and sensitivity, contributing to hindered career progression. In contrast, men are perceived to display masculinity, which is a quality commonly associated with senior positions (Mohamed et al., 2023). Women managers demonstrate distinct communication and leadership styles characterised by higher ethical sensitivity, empathy and social responsibility (Kazemikhasragh & Monferra, 2021). In contrast, male managers are typically seen as more outcome-, task- and performance-focused (Kazemikhasragh & Monferra, 2021).

**Traditional roles:** Societal biases persist, asserting that men are better suited for high-ranking positions than women (Imadoglu et al., 2020). Historically, gender roles have confined men to provider roles and women to familial and/or caregiving responsibilities (Kapoor et al., 2021). Women often receive limited organisational support for caregiving responsibilities, which results in them forgoing professional opportunities or taking time off to balance career ambitions with caregiving expectations (Adeniyi et al., 2024), reducing their chances of being promoted to management positions.

### Organisational-level barriers

**Organisational culture and structures:** Organisational culture consists of a set of shared underlying assumptions involving the attitudes, beliefs, norms and rules employees have followed and normalised (Long, 2020). Some organisational cultures may support attitudes and behaviours that favour males (Long, 2020). The 'old boys' club' is an example of how organisational cultures tend to favour men as they gain an advantage in promotions and advancement through networking, socialising and building connections with those in higher positions during after-hour gatherings that are typically less accessible to women (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2019). As a result, a culture that reinforces gender inequality is fostered, making it more difficult for women to progress in their careers (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2019). Research has found that organisational structures within male-dominated workplaces are a leading source of gender discrimination (Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022). Many women

who pursue a career in management face promotional barriers because of discrimination and male-centric hierarchical structures (Khan & Khan, 2022).

**Gender bias in people management practices:** Women experience gender-related biases in various organisational processes, including performance, talent management, succession, promotions and rewards (Javadizadeh et al., 2022). Gender bias manifests as being overlooked during the promotion process, being excluded from leadership opportunities and lacking access to education and training opportunities (Srivastava & Nalawade, 2023). In addition, research has found that women are more concentrated in temporary work and earn less than men, regardless of their qualifications (Khan & Khan, 2022). This is substantiated by research, which identified in 2022, that a 17% wage difference for male and female employees will continue to persist until 2059, regardless of skills and qualifications (Haan, 2023).

### Social factors

**Networking and mentoring opportunities:** In general, research has found that women tend to avoid professional competition and are perceived as lacking ambition and self-confidence, which hinders their ability to network professionally (Lahiri et al., 2022). However, mentoring and networking relationships are equally important for men and women in management positions to facilitate career development and progression (Kapoor et al., 2021). Women managers play an essential role in mentoring aspiring women managers, especially within male-dominated career paths such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as mentoring enables overcoming gender-induced advancement challenges to progression (Barkhuizen et al., 2022).

### Strategies to overcome gender-induced advancement barriers

Women's empowerment is a key driver of career advancement. According to Starks (2021), women who have overcome gender-induced challenges focus on seeking opportunities to prove their skills and competence, and building work relationships with sponsors and mentors. In certain instances, women managers embrace a managerial style that is inherently masculine, reproducing the gendered management model that prevails in various male-dominated contexts (Cannito et al., 2023; Sealy et al., 2024). These attributes include assertiveness and directness, seen as essential in male-dominated environments.

Women managers require role models to assist them in developing themselves and their managerial identity (Barkhuizen et al., 2022). Further, many women managers work excessively as a strategy to outperform their male counterparts; however, their achievements are rarely noted or appreciated (O'Brien et al., 2022). They employ various strategies to overcome advancement barriers, including postponing motherhood, avoiding maternity leave and adopting alternative strategies to life (Cannito et al., 2023). This



implies that women respond to work–life balance challenges by prioritising career advancement over family responsibilities as a strategy to overcome barriers to progression, creating the underlying expectation that women must make such trade-offs to succeed professionally. In addition, a study conducted by Kaya and Tamer (2024) found that women managers highlight the significance of personal characteristics, such as expertise and training, as key factors for career advancement.

## Theoretical framework

Although literature on gender in male-dominated organisations exists, this study focused on a South African steel-manufacturing organisation. Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1989) as a guiding framework, the study explored the advancement challenges and strategies women encounter and implement within such environments. The framework helped to interpret the perceived challenges encountered and strategies implemented to manage significant transitions. The theory has been effectively applied in recent research by exploring transitions across life stages, roles and educational settings (see Amusan, 2022; Gbogbo, 2020; Khan et al., 2021; Osman, 2022). The theory was relevant for the study as it aided in understanding how women navigate the transitions into managerial roles and its associated barriers. The theory consists of two stages: (1) moving in, through and out, and (2) the 4S system, which involves situation, self, support and strategies (Mariam, 2022). Within this study, stage one of the theory suggests that women who have transitioned into management positions (moving in) encounter a variety of gender-induced advancement challenges (moving through), resulting in strategies that are implemented to overcome these challenges (moving out).

The second stage of the 4S system entails: (1) the situation focuses on the specific context of the transition (i.e. *being overlooked for managerial roles because of gender*); (2) the self focuses on how the transition is perceived (i.e. *how woman cope with the challenges*); (3) support focuses on the systems and resources that are available to help individuals manage the transition (i.e. *organisational support opportunities*); and (4) strategies focus on the actions that individuals take to cope with the transition (i.e. *strategies women use to navigate the challenges*) (Sachitra & Jaward, 2023). This study considered transitioning into a management role one of women's most challenging professional transitions.

## Research design

### Research approach and strategy

A qualitative descriptive design was appropriate for this study as it allowed for the collection of straightforward, first-hand accounts of the participants' experiences. The study was grounded in an ontological constructivist paradigm that emphasises subjective meanings shaped by social background and focuses on how individuals perceive and interpret reality.

### Research setting

The study focused on women managers working at a steel-manufacturing organisation in South Africa. The steel industry plays a significant role in the economy as it contributes 1.5% towards South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) and provides employment for at least 190 000 employees (Mitonga-Monga et al., 2023). However, this industry faces severe difficulties because of the escalating costs of raw materials and electricity, decreased market demands and stagnant market growth (Kleynhans et al., 2022). In addition, the steel-manufacturing organisation is male-dominated and presents a culture that contributes to gender-induced underperformance, with men occupying senior roles and women occupying supportive roles (Galea et al., 2020).

### Research participants and sampling methods

A purposive homogeneous sample of 12 women managers employed at a specific South African steel-manufacturing organisation was included in the study. The inclusion criteria involved the following: (1) must be a female employee in a junior, middle, senior or executive management position, (2) must be working in the position for at least 3 months to allow for reflection of experiences and (3) must be a permanent employee. The exclusion criteria included the following: women managers from outside the organisation who were recruited and placed in a management position rather than transitioning into one, as these managers may have been in a different industry previously and would not have experienced the specific challenges that women managers within the steel-manufacturing industry encountered. Those who participated were between the ages of 31 years and 57 years, comprising one senior manager, eight middle managers and three junior managers. Regarding ethnicity, seven were white, four were African and one was Indian. All participants were within the Gauteng province.

### Data collection methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews took place either in person or online. Face-to-face interviews allowed for building rapport and collecting contextual data, while online interviews provided convenience for geographically dispersed participants.

Ethical considerations involved obtaining written informed consent for the interview and for recording it. Participants were informed that their data would be used solely for research purposes and securely stored. The researchers followed the *Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA)* guidelines in the management and storage of data. The interview started with an open-ended question:

'Please share your development path in the organisation into a managerial role?'

Interview questions included the following with further probing specifically on the challenges encountered and strategies utilised: (1) Please tell me your understanding of

the glass ceiling effect (gender-induced advancement barriers); (2) Please share your developmental path in the organisation into a managerial role; (3) What advice would you share to assist women in overcoming advancement barriers within the steel-manufacturing industry?

The recorded interviews were manually transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, both the recordings and transcriptions were named according to participant numbers.

### Strategies to ensure quality data

Trustworthiness was ensured through a co-coder, independent of the study, to maintain objectivity during the data analysis process. Consensus discussions were held at each analysis stage. Member-checking was conducted, which involved participant feedback on the identified themes. Transparency was upheld with verbatim quotes and utilising participant numbers when reporting on the findings. Finally, an audit trail was kept throughout the research process.

### Data analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data following the steps of Braun and Clarke (2006), which included familiarising oneself with the data, coding, searching for themes, defining and naming identified themes and writing them up. To ensure the study's rigour, the researcher collaborated with an independent co-coder who was not part of the study. The researcher analysed the transcribed data manually, while the co-coder utilised the ATLAS.ti version 8 software. Although the data were analysed separately, regular meetings were scheduled for each analysis stage – open coding, axial coding and themes – where consensus discussions occurred, and the final themes were discussed and agreed upon.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-00630-24-A4). Approval to collect data from women managers at the steel-manufacturing organisation was obtained from the Chief Human Resources Officer. A gatekeeper in human resources (HR) facilitated participant recruitment and advertising. Interested individuals contacted the researcher for an information session, where consent was obtained, interviews were scheduled and unique participation codes were assigned. Confidentiality, anonymity and privacy were maintained.

## Results

This study aimed to explore the advancement challenges encountered and strategies utilised to overcome these challenges by women managers in a steel-manufacturing organisation. The themes and sub-themes of the advancement challenges encountered, as well as strategies utilised by women managers, are summarised in Table 1.

**TABLE 1:** Themes and sub-themes of the study's objectives.

Research objective	Themes and sub-themes
Challenges that women managers encountered	<b>Individual-level barrier: Work-life balance</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balancing gender roles</li> <li>The cost of ambition</li> </ul> <b>Organisational-level barrier: Gender bias</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inequitable opportunities</li> <li>Validation struggles</li> </ul> <b>Social-level barrier: Professional development opportunities</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Navigating educational and resource limitations</li> <li>Opaque criteria</li> </ul>
Strategies utilised to overcome these challenges	<b>Self-empowerment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimising opportunities</li> <li>Self-awareness</li> </ul> <b>Maintaining an executive presence</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impactful communication</li> <li>Assertiveness</li> </ul> <b>Professional support systems</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowered connections</li> <li>Mentoring</li> </ul>

### Challenges that women managers encountered

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Schlossberg et al., 1989) suggests that moving into a management position imposes multiple challenges, especially for women in male-dominated organisations, as they encounter individual, organisational and social barriers. In terms of the findings of this study, the challenges that women managers encountered are divided into the following themes: (1) individual-level – work-life balance; (2) organisational-level – gender bias; and (3) social-level – professional development opportunities. Individual-level barriers refer to personal obstacles faced by women, organisational-level barriers refer to barriers within the workplace and social-level barriers encompass external societal or cultural factors that limit professional development.

#### Individual-level barriers – Work-life balance

Participants expressed work-life balance challenges relating to balancing gender roles and the cost of ambition women face when pursuing a management position.

**Balancing gender roles:** This challenge emerged as participants expressed the struggle of being present for their children and ultimately finding a balance in expected gender roles:

'You kind of have a lot of roles to balance so you are a mother, you're a friend, you're a wife, you're a housekeeper, you're professional, and sometimes it gets really difficult to manage all of these.' (Participant 3, Middle Manager, 39 years old)

In addition, women seem not to be reasonably accommodated when they seek to find role balance. This is evident as Participant 5 took on a half-day role; however, her workload did not decrease:

'He's not going to give me less work to do. I still need to run all these projects and do my work and that was a very difficult time in my life.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

**The cost of ambition:** This sub-theme highlights women managers' sacrifices to advance in their careers. Consequently, these sacrifices – whether time or personal relationships – may compromise personal aspirations and meeting familial obligations.

Participant 7 expressed that she realised early in her career that she would have to make sacrifices that affect her family:

'Sometimes you would have to arrive at home after dinner, when the kids are almost going to bed. You will have to miss homework times with the kids.' (Participant 7, Middle Manager, 35 years old)

Participant 5 expressed that although working overtime assisted in lateral progress, not all managers saw it as progress:

'Even if you need to work an hour or two over time, it helps at the end to do that.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

Participant 10 mentioned that women need to decide where they want to be in their life:

'Are you are you willing to give up home to be higher manager ... but if this is what I want I will have later kids.' (Participant 10, Senior Manager, 42 years old)

### Organisational-level barriers – Gender bias

Women managers expressed that they experience gender bias challenges relating to inequitable opportunities and validation struggles.

**Inequitable opportunities:** This sub-theme highlights unfair treatment and bias that the participants faced during the recruitment process and regarding financial rewards. They reported encountering favouritism and predetermined outcomes during recruitment:

'We do have a culture of we already know who we want to appoint so even if you're doing the interview you might be the best candidate, it does not mean that they necessarily see it.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

Implying that recruitment decisions are made regardless of potential. Moreover, Participant 3 mentioned:

'It is a lot of bureaucracy and red tape and favouritism.' (Participant 3, Middle Manager, 39 years old)

Regarding financial rewards, women participants experienced unequal treatment, as the decision to reward was influenced by personal circumstances rather than performance, underscoring systemic barriers that limit women:

'Unfortunately, he's not going to give me what he knows I deserve as this one specific male that has two children, and he knows the male is not well off he needs the money and as I'm single, he's pretty sure that I will be able to cope without the money.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

**Validation struggles:** This sub-theme reflects the ongoing challenge that women managers face in proving their competence within a male-dominated organisation.

Despite their qualifications and contributions, women often receive little recognition. This lack of acknowledgement fosters self-doubt, which is reinforced by their male counterparts. As a result, women managers frequently seek validation, constantly questioning their own abilities:

'You get to this industry and firstly they thinking you are incapable so, in them thinking you are incapable, you have to overcompensate by doing more than what your male counterparts would be doing.' (Participant 12, Junior Manager, 32 years old)

'We had to show that we've got the capabilities.' (Participant 3, Middle Manager, 39 years old)

Women's competence has also been challenged by more senior male colleagues in open forums:

'I got open questions in forums where I made a statement ... and immediately as the statement was made the manager in charge of the meeting would ask the more senior male individual is that the case and they won't know the answer, but they will still challenge mine.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

'One of the men, it was actually a senior operator, told me you only got the position because you're a woman.' (Participant 10, Senior Manager, 42 years old)

### Social-level barriers – Professional development opportunities

Participants found opportunities for professional development as a challenge as they felt that there are limited educational opportunities, unfair selection criteria and a lack of resources available for professional development.

**Navigating educational and resource limitations:** This sub-theme highlights the barriers the participants face in accessing educational opportunities and resources, such as the necessary skills essential to be a successful manager. Despite being part of forums consisting of high-performing individuals, obtaining educational opportunities remains difficult:

'In the first round, where they identified the Women of Steel that were initiated for most individuals at that time, I didn't get it even though I was in management. There were people that got it who wasn't in management.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

Participants also found it difficult to be in a management position as they felt they required relevant skills and an established process to ease into the position:

'Now I needed skills to now manage people.' (Participant 2, Middle Manager, 44 years old)

Further, no probation period or onboarding process was implemented to provide women the necessary guidance and resources to navigate the responsibilities of a manager successfully:

'I wasn't afforded an opportunity to ease into the position. I got here, there was already problems, and I was expected to solve these problems.' (Participant 7, Middle Manager, 35 years old)

'We don't expose our identified potential to what is the expectation of a manager and actually that career path so, what do you need to be able to be a good manager?' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

'Everything I needed to do it in a rush because no one had time for me to learn.' (Participant 7, Middle Manager, 35 years old)

**Opaque criteria:** Participants experienced challenges when attempting to progress professionally as selection criteria were imposed on them but not specified during the process:

'They did not specify that they wanted someone who has a diploma.' (Participant 6, Junior Manager, 36 years old)

When it came to promotion opportunities, Participant 5 expressed:

'If you're young and you are in your reproductive years, you know you if you're in your 20s or early 30s, usually at that stage they didn't give women any promotion because you can have babies and then you're on maternity leave.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

## Strategies women managers utilise to overcome challenges

The moving-out phase in Schlossberg's transition theory indicates the strategies that women managers implement to overcome gender-induced advancement challenges. These strategies are aligned to the framework's 4S system. Firstly, women managers focused on the self through awareness and self-empowerment opportunities. Secondly, women managers utilised professional support systems through networking and relationship building. Lastly, women managers attempt to create and maintain an executive presence as a strategy to assert their management image.

### Self-empowerment

Participants enhanced their self-empowerment by seizing emerging opportunities and increasing their self-awareness.

**Optimising opportunities:** Participants emphasised taking control of their development by identifying a clear vision and setting goals to achieve this vision:

'You had need to have a personal vision for yourself as I said, the five-year plan.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

'At minimum you have to have this year's goals and it can be linked to your work career path and your KPIs, but they must also be personal drive.' (Participant 11, Junior Manager, 54 years old)

Emphasis was also placed on taking initiative, participating in continuous learning and being willing to help:

'Just be a sponge as much as you can to take in as much information as possible.' (Participant 2, Middle Manager, 44 years old)

'Raise your hand to say, hey, I will do it even when you don't know how you will ask, you will learn, but always be a be willing to help.' (Participant 7, Middle Manager, 35 years old)

And distinguishing yourself by

'Being visible to senior management.' (Participant 8, Middle Manager, 58 years old)

**Self-awareness:** The participants utilised self-awareness as a strategy as they have become aware of their specific strengths and developmental areas, which enables them to either ask others for help or leverage off their strengths when required:

'There is things that us as women cannot do, you must just be upfront to say this I cannot do and then you must then ask for people to help you too.' (Participant 7, Middle Manager, 35 years old)

'I understand my strengths, I understand my weaknesses, and with my strength, I actually capitalised on them ... and with my weaknesses as well I saw them as my space for improvement.' (Participant 12, Junior Manager, 32 years old)

'I've really made a conscious decision to use what we or most of our women have best and for us, it's normal nature to care about people and for men, it's more difficult.' (Participant 10, Senior Manager, 42 years old)

### Maintaining an executive presence

The participants maintained an executive presence by practising impactful communication and assertiveness.

**Impactful communication:** This theme focuses on the participants honing their communication skills by focusing on clear articulation and confidently sharing their opinions, resulting in asserting their presence in management roles:

'You are able to articulate yourself because you present your case.' (Participant 2, Middle Manager, 44 years old)

'You are going to have to learn when to speak your mind.' (Participant 3, Middle Manager, 39 years old)

'I think when you communicate properly and you can give your reasons, there's always people willing to listen.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

In male-dominated environments, women found that their voices were not being heard; therefore, a strategy that was implemented among the participants was voicing their opinion, which enabled them to be seen and heard:

'Don't stay quiet because nobody's gonna ask you for your opinion, nobody, voice your opinion.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

**Assertiveness:** Participants who initially experienced self-doubt started becoming more confident by utilising assertiveness as a strategy:

'It's like my experience at that stage, you know, you doubt yourself and as soon as you find your confidence, then actually you have the confidence to tell someone you know, I don't agree, let's discuss please, and when that penny dropped it, it went well.' (Participant 5, Middle Manager, 57 years old)

'So when it comes to giving out instruction or expectations ... I had to then develop assertiveness.' (Participant 12, Junior Manager, 32 years old)



### Professional support systems

The participants empowered themselves professionally by establishing connections and participating in networking activities.

**Empowered connections:** This theme highlights how participants overcame advancement challenges by building constructive relationships and expanding their professional networks. Fostering meaningful connections in male-dominated organisations provided valuable growth opportunities for women. Women emphasised the importance of building relationships with like-minded people:

'I believe it's a matter of building relationships with all the stakeholders in your environment and to ensure that you become a trusted resource that people around you can rely on.' (Participant 8, Middle Manager, 58 years old)

'Build the relationships you are spending more time here than you're spending at home.' (Participant 1, Middle Manager, 31 years old)

Women managers demonstrated the importance of shared experiences, connecting with colleagues and learning from them on how to manage challenges through networking opportunities:

'I think that was also some of the opportunities that you that, let's call it networking that is quite important as well.' (Participant 11, Junior Manager, 54 years old)

'You want to network, you know, internal and external networking, making sure you have people in your organisation that you can tap into, be it for work related matters ... learn about different departments.' (Participant 2, Middle Manager, 44 years old)

**Mentoring:** The participants found that mentorship is essential, especially when it comes to gaining insights and bouncing ideas off experts when regular evaluations and self-assessments take place:

'Having those certain people in your network ... just in general giving me advice about my career and where I could go and what I needed to do.' (Participant 2, Middle Manager, 44 years old)

'Identify a mentor for yourself and ask if it's possible just to learn from them.' (Participant 11, Junior Manager, 54 years old)

## Discussion

This study aimed to explore the advancement challenges encountered and strategies utilised to overcome these challenges by women managers in a steel-manufacturing organisation. Consistent with Citil (2022), the findings of this research demonstrate that women managers experience gender-induced advancement challenges at three levels: individual (work-life balance consisting of balancing gender roles and the cost of ambition), organisational (gender bias consisting of inequitable opportunities and validation struggles) and social (professional development opportunities consisting of navigating educational and resource limitations and opaque criteria).

On an individual level, women managers encountered work-life balance challenges, specifically in balancing their gender roles and making personal sacrifices to pursue career advancement. Research suggests that perceptions of work-life balance vary by gender, as the role of family responsibilities is one of the barriers to women's career progression (Liu et al., 2021; Tjahjana et al., 2024). Views regarding gender roles are formed because of people's observations of how men and women behave in different social roles (Raj et al., 2023). For instance, some believe that women should oversee the household, be caretakers to children and be supportive partners.

The findings demonstrate that women managers often overcompensate by working excessively and taking on additional workloads while being expected to fulfil traditional roles that men are not traditionally expected to fulfil (Kaya & Tamer, 2024; Norberg & Johansson, 2021). Consequently, women are perceived as lacking the expected behaviours and sacrifices, such as full-time commitments or working overtime, that are associated with career advancement (Meeussen et al., 2022). Citil (2022) argues that women managers often need to exert more effort than their male counterparts to achieve success, gain acceptance and advance in their careers. Sealy et al. (2024) highlight that women experience social role conflict, where they perceive it as impossible to balance work responsibilities with being a parent. Consequently, women make sacrifices to manage these conflicting demands. In this study, women made sacrifices by taking on more workload, working overtime, sacrificing time with their families or delaying childbirth. These findings align with Citil's (2022) and Sealy et al.'s (2024) studies.

Because women are generally seen as homemakers, they have limited social standing and are deemed unsuitable for professional environments (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). This is transferred on an organisational level in the form of gender bias, which refers to inequalities pertaining to opportunities, treatment and outcomes for women compared to men (Hing et al., 2023). The findings indicate that gender bias manifests in organisational processes, specifically in recruitment and reward processes. Literature confirms that organisations are less willing to recruit women in higher positions, as 'hiring bias' favouring men is common within male-dominated organisations (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Srivastava & Nalawade, 2023; Tjahjana et al., 2024). Oftentimes, men are promoted based on potential, whereas women are promoted based on current capability (Tjahjana et al., 2024). Within the study, women managers experienced various situations that fuelled doubt in their capabilities, coercing them to constantly overcompensate and prove their capabilities regardless of potential. Similarly, gender bias occurs when employee financial-related decisions are made, whether in salary, bonus or promotions, based on gender characteristics rather than performance (Deepak, 2021).



On a social level, women managers experience challenges in personal development opportunities, specifically in navigating limitations in education and resources and opaque criteria when applying for managerial roles. Challenges experienced at a social level entail the broader social structures, norms and practices within the organisation that hinder women's access to development and advancement (Abadi et al., 2022). These barriers reflect a systemic issue in which organisational and social structures fail to equally prioritise women's access to resources, with obstacles rooted in deeply ingrained social constructs of transparency and fairness. The study found that women managers faced barriers, including unfair selection criteria for educational opportunities and a lack of management support, which hindered their ability to pursue further education, a key requirement for professional advancement. Consistent with Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi (2023) and Srivastava and Nalawade (2023), women are deprived of developmental opportunities by their managers, limiting their ability to develop new skills and knowledge required for management roles. Research by Bird and Rhoton (2021) suggests that individuals who are employed and promoted into various positions are those who meet the requirements of the job. Hence, women managers advance professionally through their qualifications.

Within this study, women managers experienced limitations as they were offered opportunities to study further but were not supported and enabled to do so by management because of work commitments. Furthermore, women managers found that they lacked certain skills to be effective managers. Babic and Hansez (2021) emphasise that placing women managers in developmental positions and giving them opportunities for skills and competence development are essential to enable them to advance. Literature demonstrates that self-management skills, discreet communication, distinctive decision-making, networking ability and handling demanding tasks are important skills in management positions (Kaya & Tamer, 2024; Pitka, 2024). In the study, women managers faced challenges because of the absence of a formal onboarding process to support their transition into management roles. Moving into a management position is stressful, and men and women react differently when transitioning into new environments (Shtrikov et al., 2020). When women transition into new positions, they often experience a prolonged period of orientation and adjustment to the organisation's norms and culture, whereas men tend to begin working immediately without requiring formal onboarding (Shtrikov et al., 2020).

The second objective of this study was to explore the strategies that women managers utilised to overcome gender-induced advancement barriers in their transition to managerial roles in a South African steel-manufacturing organisation. Three main themes included self-empowerment (optimising opportunities and self-awareness), maintaining an executive presence (impactful communication and assertiveness) and professional support systems (empowered connections and mentoring).

O'Brien et al. (2022) found that women managers often overwork to outshine their male counterparts, yet their contributions remain unrecognised. The study demonstrated that women managers took on more tasks for exposure and the development of necessary skills that contributed to becoming an expert in their relevant fields. The findings suggest that women managers empower themselves by setting goals to achieve their vision in the organisation. As Calinaud et al. (2021) suggest, personal attributes such as a clear vision and self-efficacy enable women's career advancement by encouraging the proactive pursuit of development opportunities. Self-awareness is an important personal trait for managerial development and effectiveness in various fields (London et al., 2022). Within this study, women managers have made a conscious decision to become aware of their strengths and development areas and take the necessary actions to improve their developmental areas.

Current studies suggest that women's presence in management roles is scarce, as they are less assertive and less confident and pull back when they should be leaning in (Meeussen et al., 2022; Tjahjana et al., 2024). Women managers attempted to maintain an executive presence by employing impactful communication and assertiveness skills as a strategy. Impactful and assertive communication refers to an individual's ability to initiate, maintain and end conversations based on individual goals, opinions and defending one's beliefs (Tjahjana et al., 2024). Assertive women are perceived as dominant, strong, directive and task-oriented – qualities associated with masculinity (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023). Within this study, these traits are exhibited by the women managers.

Lahiri et al. (2022) found that women tend to avoid competition, lack ambition and lack self-confidence, which hinders their ability to network. However, within the study, women managers leveraged the professional support systems by actively seeking and building connections and participating in mentorship to overcome advancement challenges. Building networks has significant potential to provide insights into effective management practices within various organisations (Liou & Daly, 2020). Mentors are essential when pursuing management roles, as they provide access to valuable resources, opportunities and critical information (Tjahjana et al., 2024). Similarly, within this study, women managers built constructive relationships, networked and found mentors to broaden their knowledge and obtain advice and guidance in pursuit of career progression.

The study highlights the significant challenges that women managers encountered within the male-dominated organisation, while also highlighting the strategies implemented to overcome these challenges. The prevalence of challenges relating to work-life balance, gender bias and professional development underscores the need for diversity, equity, inclusiveness and belonging within the steel-manufacturing organisation. Further, the strategies that women managers have utilised to overcome these challenges can be leveraged off and transferred to aspiring women managers within the organisation.

## Practical implications

If organisations provide various support measures to assist women managers in achieving work–life balance, women managers will recognise the organisation's values and become more internally attached (Liu et al., 2021). The organisation must be mindful of women's roles by adding contextually relevant supports. To do so, the organisation could begin by talking to their women managers about what support and resources would be meaningful to them so that they can work optimally and experience work–life balance. The women managers in this study specifically mentioned that they require support in the form of mentorship, skills and qualification training, and to be regarded as adding value. While there may be differences between contexts, these lessons are transferable to women in various contexts and male-driven industries. Recommendations for supporting the career progression of women managers include developing tailored women empowerment programmes that focus on developing key competencies that overcome gender-related barriers (Sharma & Agarwal, 2024). The above-stated can be implemented if the organisation collaborates with the government regarding opportunities for incentives that contribute towards women's empowerment initiatives.

## Managerial implications

On an individual level, women can utilise the strategies that have been identified within the study, such as taking advantage of various opportunities to learn and develop skills, whether it be through participating in new projects, acting in management positions or volunteering to assist on an ad hoc basis. They can develop their communication style by practising impactful and assertive communication to maintain an executive presence. They can also leverage the power of connection by proactively building networks with like-minded professionals to obtain guidance, self-awareness and access to various knowledge and resources. At an organisational level, the Human Resource Department can facilitate the implementation of a proposed mentorship strategy during succession planning, talent management and performance management. In addition, identifying specific organisational barrier policies is crucial for developing tailored strategies for overcoming barriers to women's career progression. Such policies include qualification requirements, rewards and recognition, and flexible work arrangements to support and enable women's advancement. In doing so, women are more likely to be considered for advancement within the organisation (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

On a social level, management can focus on creating transparent processes for various functions, such as promotions and educational opportunities, by making known the specific criteria that women managers must meet when deciding to advance professionally.

## Limitations and recommendations

The study presents several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

While the study aimed to include women managers from the steel-manufacturing industry across South Africa, all participants were based in Gauteng province. Therefore, the findings are specific to the context in which the research was conducted and may not apply to other settings. Although the challenges encountered and strategies utilised are universal, the findings are context-specific and may differ across regions. Another limitation was that the sample did not represent all departments within the organisation. Therefore, the challenges encountered by the participants might not reflect those faced by the entire organisation, which may render the current study limited in scope.

Recommendations for future research are as follows: (1) conducting a focused case study on one department to gain in-depth insights on specific barriers encountered and strategies utilised; (2) conducting multiple interviews to track changes over time for a more holistic view as one-time interviews do not capture the evolving challenges that women managers experience; (3) utilising focus groups for data collection as they allow participants to collectively discuss challenges and strategies, providing an additional perspective to verify whether experiences are shared across departments; and (4) the developed strategy could be tested to identify its effectiveness within the industry.

## Conclusion

Women in male-dominated organisations often face barriers leading to early resignation. Growing global research on gender inequality drives organisations to implement diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) initiatives (Khan & Khan, 2022; Maheshwari & Lenka, 2022; Njuki et al., 2023). This study emphasises the need for DEIB strategies to support women's career advancement, including transparent processes, tailored programmes and mentorship for women in management.

## Acknowledgements

This article is partially based on the author, A.L.'s Master's dissertation entitled, 'Shattering the glass ceiling: Advancement challenges and strategies of women managers in a steel-manufacturing organisation', towards the degree of Master of Commerce in Industrial Psychology, in the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management, North-West University, South Africa with supervisors L.C. and M.W.S. The dissertation is unpublished at the time of publication, with an embargo of 12 months.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

A.L. served as the main researcher, while L.C. took on the role of the main supervisor, and M.W.S. acted as the co-supervisor.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, L.C. upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly accessible because of restrictions such as compromising participant privacy.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. The article does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, or agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

## References

- Abadi, M., Dirani, K., & Rezaei, F.D. (2022). Women in leadership: A systematic literature review of Middle Eastern women managers' careers from NHRD and institutional theory perspectives. *Human Resource Development International*, 25(1), 19–39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1840847>
- Adeniyi, A.O., Akpuokwe, C.U., Bakare, S.S., & Eneh, N.E. (2024). Gender equality in the workplace: A comparative review of USA and African practices. *International Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship Research*, 6(3), 526–539. <https://doi.org/10.51594/ijmer.v6i3.842>
- Amusan, A.O. (2022). *Shattering the second glass-ceiling: Interpreting the lived experiences of female entrepreneurs in Lagos Nigeria, using Schlossberg's Transition Theory*. Master's thesis, Malmö University.
- Babic, A., & Hansez, I. (2021). The glass ceiling for women managers: Antecedents and consequences for work-family interface and well-being at work. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(0), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.618250>
- Bangani, A., & Vyass-Doorgapersad, S. (2020). The implementation of gender equality within the South African public services (1995–2019). *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 8(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v8i1.353>
- Barkhuizen, E.N., Masakane, G., & Van der Sluis, L. (2022). In search of factors that hinder the career advancement of women to senior leadership positions. *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 48, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v48i0.1986>
- Bertay, A.C., Dordevic, L., & Sever, C. (2020). *Gender inequality and economic growth: Evidence from industry-level data*. International Monetary Fund.
- Bird, S.R., & Rhoton, L.A. (2021). Seeing isn't always believing: Gender, academics STEM, and women scientist's perceptions of career opportunities. *Gender and Society*, 35(3), 422–448. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211008814>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Calinaud, V., Kokkranikal, J., & Gebbels, M. (2021). Career advancement for women in the British Hospitality Industry. *Work, Employment, and Society*, 35(4), 677–695. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020967208>
- Cannito, M., Naldini, M., & Santero, A. (2023). Investigating the glass ceiling in Italian academia. Women's strategies and barriers to career advancement. *International Journal for Sociological Debate*, 17(2), 93–114. <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1971-8853/17592>
- Citil, E. (2022). Women in working life and overview studies on this theme with 'glass ceiling' concept. *Journal of Seluk University Institute of Social Sciences*, 49, 379–391. <https://doi.org/10.52642/susdeb.1153160>
- Cullen, Z.B., & Perez-Truglia, R. (2019). *The old-boys club: Schmoozing and the gender gap*. Masters dissertation, Harvard Business School.
- Deepak, S. (2021). Perceptions of organisation justice: An empirical study of working women from Bangalore. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(10), 84–100. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss6/10>
- Department of Employment and Labour. (2023, August 25). *About a quarter of females, sit in the top management level in SA labour market – Employment equity*. Retrieved from [https://www.labour.gov.za/about-a-quarter-of-females-sit-in-the-top-management-level-in-sa-labour-market-%E2%80%93-employment-equity-\(2\)](https://www.labour.gov.za/about-a-quarter-of-females-sit-in-the-top-management-level-in-sa-labour-market-%E2%80%93-employment-equity-(2))
- Department of Employment and Labour. (2024). *24th Commission for Employment Equity annual report (2023–2024)*. Retrieved from <https://www.labour.gov.za/DocumentCenter/Reports/Annual%20Reports/Employment%20Equity/2024/24th%20Commission%20for%20Employment%20Equity%20Annual%20Report.pdf>
- Espinosa, M.P., & Ferreira, E. (2022). Gender implicit bias and glass ceiling effects. *Journal of Applied Economics*, 25(1), 37–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15140326.2021.2007723>
- Galea, N., Powell, A., Loosemore, M., & Chappell, L. (2020). The gendered dimensions of informal institutions in the Australian construction industry. *Gender, Work, and Organisation*, 27(6), 1214–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12458>
- Galsanjigmed, E., & Sekiguchi, T. (2023). Challenges women experience in leadership careers: An integrative review. *Merits*, 3, 366–389. <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3020021>
- Gbogbo, S. (2020). Early motherhood: Voices from female adolescents in the Hohoe Municipality, Ghana – A qualitative study using Schlossberg's Transition Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 15(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2020.1716620>
- Grangeiro, R.R., Neto, M.B.G., Silva, L.E.N., & Esnard, C. (2022). I broke the glass ceiling, now what? Overview of metaphors to explain gender inequality in organisations. *International Journal of Organisational Analysis*, 30(6), 1523–1532. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-07-2020-2281>
- Haan, K. (2023, February 27). *Gender pay gap statistics in 2023*. Forbes Advisor. Retrieved from [https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/gender-pay-gap-statistics/#sources\\_section](https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/gender-pay-gap-statistics/#sources_section)
- Hing, L.S.S., Sakr, N., Sorenson, J.B., Starnarski, C.S., Caniera, K., & Colaco, C. (2023). Gender inequities in the workplace: A holistic review of organizational processes and practices. *Human Resource Management Review*, 33, 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2023.100968>
- Imadoglu, T., Kursuncu, R.S., & Cavus, M.F. (2020). The effects of glass ceiling syndrome on women's career barriers in management and job motivation. *Holistic Journal of Business and Administration*, 11(2), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.2478/hjbpa-2020-0021>
- Itty, S.S., Garcia, J.F., Futterman, C., Aust, S.G., & Mujtaba, B.G. (2019). Breaking the glass ceiling philosophy and reality: A study of gender progress and career development in the corporate world. *Business Ethics and Leadership*, 3(3), 6–18. [http://doi.org/10.21272/bel.3\(3\).6-18.2019](http://doi.org/10.21272/bel.3(3).6-18.2019)
- Javadizadeh, B., Ross, J., Valenzuela, M.A., Adler, T.R., & Wu, B. (2022). What's the point in even trying? Women's perception of glass ceiling drains hope. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 5, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2022.2119121>
- Kaftandzieva, T., & Nakov, L. (2021). Glass ceiling factors hindering women's advancement in management hierarchy. *Journal of Economics, Management, and Trade*, 27(2), 16–29. <https://doi.org/10.9734/jemt/2021/v27i230327>
- Kapoor, D., Sardana, T., & Sharma, D. (2021). Women as leaders: A systematic review of glass ceiling and organisational development. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(1), 572–591. <http://doi.org/10.25215/0901.058>
- Kaya, Y., & Tamer, G. (2024). The strategies of Turkish female managers to break the glass ceiling. *Socioeconomics*, 32(60), 291–315. <https://doi.org/10.17233/sosyoeconomi.2024.02.14>
- Kazemikhasragh, A., & Monferra, S. (2021). Gender diversity on corporate boards: How Asian and African women contribute on sustainability reporting activity. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 36(7), 801–820. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-05-2020-0147>
- Khan, A., & Khan, N. (2022). Impact of glass-ceiling effect on women career success with the mediating role of work family conflict and moderating role of perceived organisational support in Pakistan. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences*, 25, 139–151. <https://doi.org/10.55549/epess.1221484>
- Khan, M., Kaynat, S., Khan, I.U., Khan, S., Waheed, U., & Matullah. (2021). Assessing purpose and importance of transitional change through student development perspective. *PalArch Journal of Archaeology of Egypt or Egyptology*, 18(2), 866–874. Retrieved from <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/9644>
- Kleynhans, D.J., Heyns, M.M., Stander, M.W., & De Beer, L.T. (2022). Authentic leadership, trust (in the leader), and flourishing: Does precariousness matter? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.798759>
- Lahiri, M.M., Sarkar, S., & Bhargava, M. (2022). A brief history of glass ceiling: The past, present and future. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 26(6), 1–5. Retrieved from <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/a-brief-history-of-glass-ceiling-the-past-present-the-future-1528-2678-26-6-284.pdf>
- Liou, Y., & Daly, A.J. (2020). The networked leader: Understanding peer influence in a system wide leadership team. *School Leadership and Management*, 40(3), 163–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1686611>
- Liu, T., Gao, J., Zhu, M., & Jin, S. (2021). Women's work-life balance in hospitality: Examining its impact on organisational commitment. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.625550>
- London, M., Sessa, V.I., & Shelley, L.A. (2022). Developing self-awareness: Learning processes for self- and interpersonal growth. *Annual Reviews*, 10, 261–288. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-044531>
- Long, E. (2020). Gendered narratives relating to women in the information technology department of a South African organisation. *Journal of International Women Studies*, 21(6), 150–166. Retrieved from <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2298&context=jiws>



- Maheshwari, M., & Lenka, U. (2022). An integrated conceptual framework of the glass ceiling effect. *Journal of Organisational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, 2051–6614. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOEPP-06-2020-0098>
- Mariam, O. (2022). *Moving in, moving through, and moving throughout: Reflecting on Second-Generation Somali Youths' experiences of the Finnish education system using Schlossberg's Transition Theory*. Master's thesis, University of Oulu.
- Meeussen, L., Begency, C.T., Peters, K., & Ryan, M.K. (2022). In traditionally male-dominated fields, women are less willing to make sacrifices for their career because discrimination and lower fit with people up the ladder make sacrifices less worthwhile. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 52(8), 588–601. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12750>
- Mitonga-Monga, J., Mokhehi, M.E., Keswa, B.S., Lekoma, B.S., Mathebula, L.X., & Mbatha, L.F. (2023). Ethical leadership in relation to employee commitment in a South African manufacturing company. *Acta Commercii*, 23(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ac.v23i1.1046>
- Mohamed, F., Elsaid, A.M.M.K., & Ela, G.M.B.E.A. (2023). The glass ceiling phenomenon: A review of literature and a theoretical perspective. *The Business Management Review*, 14(2), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.24052/BMR>
- Ngepah, N., Saba, C.S., & Kajewole, D.O. (2024). The impact of industry 4.0 on South Africa's manufacturing sector. *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 10(1), Article 100226. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2024.100226>
- Njuki, J., Melesse, M., Sinha, C., Seward, R., Renaud, M., Sutton, S., Nijawan, T., Clancy, K., & Charron, D. (2023). Meeting the challenge of gender inequality through gender transformative research: Lessons from research in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 44(2), 206–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2022.2099356>
- Norberg, C., & Johansson, M. (2021). Women and ideal women: The representation of women in the construction industry. *Gender Issues*, 38, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-020-09257-0>
- O'Brien, W., Hanlon, C., & Apostolopoulos, V. (2022). Women as leaders in male-dominated sectors: A bifocal analysis of gendered organisational practices. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20, 1867–1884. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13019>
- Osman, M. (2022). *Moving in, moving through, and moving throughout: Reflecting on second generation Somali youths' experiences of the Finnish education system using Schlossberg's transition theory*. Master's dissertation, University of Oulu.
- Oyon, C. (2021). *Back to the future: Emerging topics for long-term resilience in manufacturing*. World Manufacturing Foundation. Retrieved from [https://worldmanufacturing.org/wp-content/uploads/02\\_Oyon-1.pdf](https://worldmanufacturing.org/wp-content/uploads/02_Oyon-1.pdf)
- Pitka, E. (2024). Bridging the gender gap: A Canadian study examining gender inequality in engineering workplaces. *Spectrum*, 12, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.29173/spectrum222>
- Public Investment Corporation. (2023). *Landscape of women-owned and managed businesses in South Africa*. Research and Innovation: ESG Divisions. Retrieved from <https://www.pic.gov.za/DocPresentations/Landscape%20of%20women-owned%20and%20managed%20businesses%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf>
- Raj, P., Pandey, M., & Khatoon, A. (2023). *Breaking the mold-analysing gender stereotyping in the workplace through bibliometric and content analysis* (pp. 1–3). Sage.
- Sachitra, V., & Jaward, F.S. (2023). Transition decision of hybrid entrepreneurship in the post-pandemic period: Understanding the new normal in developing context. *South Asian Journal of Social Studies and Economics*, 18(3), 16–26. <https://doi.org/10.9734/SAJSSE>
- Schlossberg, N.K., Lynch, A.Q., & Chickering, A.W. (1989). *Improving higher education environments for adults. Responsive programs and services from entry to departure*. Jossey-Bass.
- Sealy, R., Forsblad, C., & Worts, N. (2024). Chapter 11: Women's leadership ambition in early careers. In S.R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership* (pp. 171–186). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Sharma, R., & Agarwal, A.K. (2024). Breaking barriers: Unveiling the glass ceiling's impact on women in the workplace. *ICTACT Journal on Management Studies*, 10(2), 1685–1688. <http://doi.org/10.21917/ijms.2024.0296>
- Shtrikov, A.B., Busygina, A.L., & Shtrikov, D.B. (2020). Onboarding new employees taking into account gender differences. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 592–600. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.03.85>
- Srivastava, N., & Nalawade, R. (2023). Glass ceiling to sticky floor: Analogies of women leadership. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 8(4), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i4.1300>
- Starks, R.R. (2021). *Breaking the glass ceiling: A study of women in a male-dominated profession*. Master's dissertation, St. Thomas University.
- Statistics South Africa. (2023, August 15). *Equality in the job market still eludes women in SA*. Stats SA. Retrieved from <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=16533>
- Statistics South Africa. (2024, August 13). *Quarterly labour force survey – Quarter 2 2024*. Retrieved from <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02112ndQuarter2024.pdf>
- Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B.S. (2021). Gender stereotypes and their impact on women's career progressions from a managerial perspective. *IIM Kozhikode Society Management Review*, 10(2), 192–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975220975513>
- Tjahjana, D., Dwidienawati, D., Rohayati, T., Kenziro, K., Wijaya, F., Nathania, S., & Gandasari, D. (2024). The role of family responsibility, assertiveness, and networking in building female leadership aspirations. *Sustainability*, 16(5194), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16125194>
- United Nations. (2024). *Sustainable development goals. Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>