

Improving Career Advancement of Women in a Manufacturing Firm in South Africa

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ABSTRACT Career advancement is important to retain employees. Workplace gender differences globally suggest that there is inequality even in career growth. With South Africa's long history of discrimination, career advancement disparities are observed along racial and gender lines. The primary objective of this study was to investigate factors affecting the career advancement of a group of South African women working for a selected manufacturing firm. A quantitative research approach with questionnaires was adopted to gather the perceptions within the selected firm, resulting in an eighty-five percent response rate. Data analysis through regression analysis and single factor ANOVA tests showed that employment equity measures are yet to yield significant outcomes for these women in the manufacturing sector. The results highlight the importance of pre-career choices on the career advancement in the selected firm. Recommendations are that employers should consider incorporating sponsored formal tertiary education, and provide mentoring and networking opportunities as options for its employees.

INTRODUCTION

Career advancement refers to the upward progression in one's career and contributes to employee satisfaction and retention at an organisation (Letchmiah and Thomas 2017; Louie 2014; Rozman et al. 2017). McKay (2019) points out that usually, an advanced career position demands greater experience and higher education attainment, and therefore career advancement comes after additional education, training, and/or experience. When considering career advancement in South Africa, women are under-represented in the senior management levels of business. A mere 20.1 percent of top management positions in the private and public sectors, combined are occupied by women (Department of Labour 2017: 20). Wittmann (2012) argues that post-apartheid South Africa's transformation process has made significant strides in achieving gender equality through the introduction of legislation such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 that promotes the inclusion of black people, women and the disabled into the workplace. However, black women continue to be marginalised along racial and gender lines as business is an extension of society,

mirroring the complex power relations in South African society that are reminiscent of the discriminatory practices of apartheid South Africa. Parashar (2014: 750) found that white women were 25 times more likely to occupy white-collar, male-dominated positions than black women. This outcome is attributed to a practice called labour queuing, which is "the intentional or unconscious use of sex and race as hiring screens by employers".

The career advancement of black women in South Africa's manufacturing sector is negligible. This was clearly illustrated in the 16th Commission for Employment Equity Annual report 2015-2016, which reported that black South African women only occupied 2.1 percent of top management positions, 3.3 percent of senior management positions, 6.2 percent for the professionally qualified level and 10.0 percent for the skilled technical levels in manufacturing despite an economically active population (EAP) of 35.0 percent (Department of Labour 2017: 12-28). Although significant gains have been made in the enrolment of a girl child from primary to tertiary education in South Africa, these gains, in terms of female representation, are yet to be seen at the management level in the country (Statistics South Africa 2016: 6-9).

This paper seeks to identify reasons for the gender gaps in one of the areas affecting gender equality in economic participation and opportunity index, namely, career advancement differenc-

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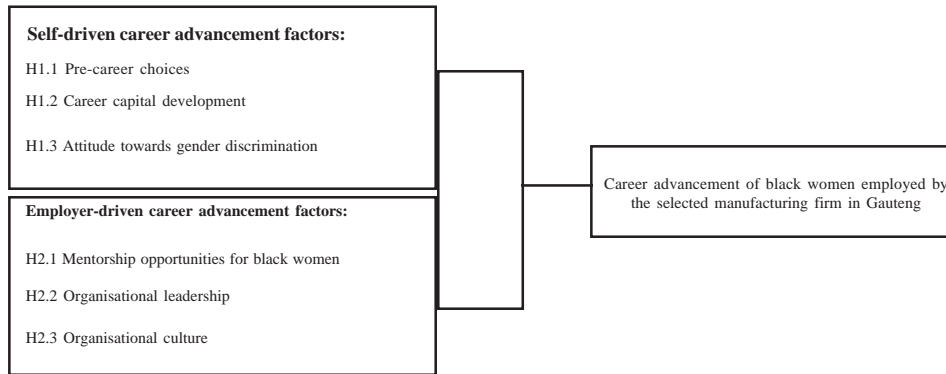


Fig. 1. Proposed hypothetical model for career advancement of black women

es. It aims to find the reasons behind the general inequitable involvement of women in decision-making structures in South Africa. This leads to the following problem, which will be addressed in this study, that is, what factors affect the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm in South Africa?

Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the factors affecting the career advancement of South African black women employed by the selected manufacturing firm. To achieve this objective the perspectives of black women were petitioned and analysed.

Six hypotheses were formulated with regards to factors affecting the career advancement of black women employed by the selected firm. These hypotheses were informed by literature and categorised into self-driven factors and employer-driven factors. The relevance of the hypotheses will be tested at p-value with a 0.05 significance level.

- H1.** Effect of self-driven factors on the career advancement of black women.
- H1.1** There is a relationship between pre-career choices and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.
- H1.2** There is a relationship between career capital and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.
- H1.3** There is a relationship between attitudes towards gender discrimination and the

career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

- H2.** Effect of employer-driven factors on the career advancement of black women
- H2.1** There is a relationship between mentorship opportunities and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.
- H2.2** There is a relationship between organisational leadership and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.
- H2.3** There is a relationship between organisational culture and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

Literature Review

This study utilises career theories to argue the factors affecting career advancement, as well as the literature that addresses the global problem of gender inequality.

Career Theories

Career theories are very clear on the paramount role of the individual in influencing career outcomes, as well as the importance of the employer, as it is within an enabling employment environment that career advancement is achieved.

Career Adaptability Theory

Bocciardi et al. (2017) promote the concept of career adaptability as a predictor of career devel-

opment and career success. Career adaptability relates to resources one draws on to cope with new and unfamiliar challenges, complex assignments or situations, and change such as new work environments or roles. Adaptability resources are grouped into four dimensions, namely, concern, control, curiosity and confidence (Savickas and Porfeli 2012). Referring to these adaptability resources, Zacher (2015) suggests that concern, control and curiosity produce aspirations and build confidence that one can realise your goals. Bocciardi et al. (2017) observed education to be a predictor of career adaptability as a strong relationship was found between education and two adaptability resources, namely, concern and curiosity. The career adaptability theory is significant for the study, as it stresses the individual's independence in building career capital and finding motivation from within.

Boundaryless Career Theory

Traditional careers are characterised by employment in one or a small number of firms coupled with job security and linear upward mobility. However, boundaryless careers are described in opposition to traditional careers that are bounded to progress through organisational hierarchies (Kuron et al. 2016: 358). Defillippi and Arthur (1994: 307) showed in their argument of how individual competency accumulation is best served, and define boundaryless careers as “sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings.” According to their research, career competencies are split into know-why, know-how and know-whom competencies. The boundaryless career theory is meaningful in the context of this study, as it emphasises the collaborative role of the individual and the employer in order for effective career advancement to be achieved. The know-why, know-how and know-whom perspectives confirm that both the employee and employer can provide motivators, influence skills proficiency, and build the influential networks required to advance one's career.

Factors Affecting the Career Advancement of Women

From the career theories outlined above and a literature review on career advancement factors,

it may be deduced that the factors affecting the career advancement of women can be categorised as self-driven and employer-driven factors (Bocciardi et al. 2017; Hango 2013; Holton and Dent 2016; Kuron et al. 2016; Schweitzer et al. 2011; Singh et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2012).

Self-driven Factors that Affect the Career Advancement of Women

Pre-career Choices

Pre-career women (women completing tertiary qualifications and entering the labour pipeline), have lower wage and promotion expectations than pre-career men (Ezzedeen et al. 2015). Pre-career choices are also listed as contributing to gender inequality, as education choices continue to be engendered, with women opting for qualifications in social sciences and the arts while men pursue business, science and engineering studies (Schweitzer et al. 2011). Buse et al. (2013) link pre-career choices to the social cognitive career theory (SCCT). SCCT finds a causal relationship between the environment and outcomes by arguing that culture has a direct impact on the career choices of women (Buse et al. 2013: 141). SCCT further posits that gender role socialisation affects views of both males and females about male- or female-dominated professions thereby limiting career interests of both genders in such engendered professions (Buse et al. 2013). Naudé (2017) concurs, arguing that subjects such as music, art, languages and home economics are generally viewed as suitable for girls, whereas science, maths and woodwork are believed to be suitable for boys.

Career Capital Development

Singh et al. (2009) believe that career capital is attained by having career competencies and relational competencies. Career competencies relate to skills obtained in mastering one's work through education, training and challenging work assignments. Relational competencies “reflect the ability to develop key relationships in the work environment” (Singh et al. 2009: 57). Relational or social capital is important in order to benefit from resources, career-enhancing opportunities and information useful to one's career mobility (An-

sari 2016). It is therefore not surprising that career capital leads to both objective and subjective career success, as it “contributes to an individual’s tradable capital in that field” (Sutherland et al. 2015: 2). Böhmer and Schinnenburg (2016) advocate for an independent development of career capital through the pursuit of boundaryless and protean career concepts, the outcome of which is value that is recognised both internally and externally. A boundaryless careerist, through education and adaptability, develops skills that allow an individual to be marketable across organisations and disciplines (Böhmer and Schinnenburg 2016).

Attitude Towards Gender Discrimination

Smith et al. (2012: 3) refer to perceptions of gender discrimination as glass ceiling beliefs, suggesting, “glass ceiling beliefs may affect a range of wellbeing and performance variables”.

Smith et al. (2012) argue that the psychological disposition of women towards gender discrimination, whether optimistic or pessimistic, affects the subjective career success of women. It is important that women are resilient and persevere in achieving their career goals in order to break the glass ceiling. Holton and Dent (2016) describe the glass ceiling as a state in which women in the lower ranks of the organisation are unable to reach senior roles in an organisation. Naudé (2017) suggests that another aspect that could be affecting women’s attitudes towards gender discrimination in the workplace may be the conflict between the promotion of gender equity and traditional and religious beliefs that reinforce patriarchal views and practices in society. The greater the pursuit of career goals and development of career capital the more aware women are of gender discrimination in the workplace and the more determined they are to break through the glass ceiling.

Employer-driven Factors That Affect the Career Advancement of Women

Mentorship Opportunities

Mentorship is viewed as critical to career advancement as it promotes career development through training, challenging work assignments

and sponsorship (Scandura and Williams 2001). Singh et al. (2009) positively linked mentorship with career advancement expectations, promotion predictions and staff retention. In addition, the benefits of mentorship may enhance loyalty, thereby binding individuals to organisations in the long term (Böhmer and Schinnenburg 2016). Ansari (2016) observed that women have less influential social networks than men, due largely to the fact that there are fewer women than men in the upper echelons of management. This also results in markedly less mentoring opportunities for women. This view is echoed by Böhmer and Schinnenburg (2016) who point to the fact that in most western organisations employee competitive behaviour is rewarded with either upward mobility or sponsorship mobility (access to career-enhancing opportunities through networks).

Organisational Leadership

Kim and Beehr (2017) believe that empowering leadership embodies the qualities that are essential to develop followers’ abilities and confidence to pursue career growth. The pursuit of gender equality is not merely as a measure of women’s standing in relation to men, but also as the means to empower women with the necessary education, skills and support to achieve career success. Coetzee (2017) suggests that South African organisations can retain female employees by paying attention to how women are treated, especially treatment from their line managers as this sets the tone for how the rest of the organisation treat women. In line with this view, Naudé (2017: 4-7) recommends strategies that organisational leadership can take, beyond compliance to legislative requirements, for inclusion of women in the workplace and in leadership roles. For example, employees must see top leadership living organisational values of inclusivity, fairness and non-discrimination through business decisions, policies and conduct.

Organisational Culture

Valencia et al. (2010: 468) define organisational culture as “values, beliefs and hidden assumptions that organisational members have in common”. The essence of organisational culture is shared values, guiding acceptable behaviour within organisations. Depending on the values the

organisational culture fosters, its impact will be reflected in the success or failure of the organisation. Holton and Dent (2016) affirm that top management commitment is essential in ensuring a culture that values women in the workplace. Such commitment is demonstrated in the existence of women's networks within the organisations, in the human resource policies that ensure promotion on merit, where men and women are equally encouraged to pursue career growth and development, as well as innovative talent management practices that grow the talent pool of women within the organisation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study employed a quantitative research approach as it seeks to find statistical associations and relationships between dependent variables (factors affecting career advancement) and the independent variable (career advancement). Factors affecting career advancement were identified from theoretical models (career theories), and a hypothetical model was constructed displaying each factor and their relationship with career advancement. The purpose of the measuring instrument was to obtain primary data to test the hypothesised relationships. A structured questionnaire was drafted from the information obtained in the literature and the perceptions of the sampled respondents were acquired using this questionnaire.

Sample

The sample chosen for this study is the total population of black women employed by the selected manufacturing firm in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. Since the total population of black women was 40 employees, 40 questionnaires were distributed, of which 34 returned questionnaires were found to be usable, therefore resulting in an eighty-five percent response rate. Stoker's sample guideline (1985) suggests that for a population of 30 people, an eighty percent response rate is recommended, and for a population of 50 people, a sixty-four percent response rate is sufficient.

According to Stoker's sample guideline (1985) as cited in Strydom and Venter (2002: 200-201),

the suggested sample size should be approximately 28 employees to be representative for this study with a population of 40 employees.

Data Collection

This study made use of both primary and secondary data. Secondary data collection was in the form of literature derived from academic journals, books, published statistics and government departmental reports. Primary data was collected from the total population through the use of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed in person to the respondents. An interview was held with the human resources manager in the selected firm with the objective to acquaint the author with the actual policies and practices adopted by the selected firm to advance the careers of black female employees as well as the strategies driving those policies and practices. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Nelson Mandela University (NMU) prior to the distribution of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyse and draw conclusion from the data. Descriptive statistics in the form of sample means and frequency distributions were used to indicate the central point around which the data clustered, for the general perception of the sampled employees. Inferential statistics included regression analysis and single factor ANOVA tests, which were used to determine the relationship among variables. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the entire scale. Face and content validity was ensured as the questionnaire was based on literature findings.

RESULTS

The empirical results of the survey are discussed. The description of the respondents is presented in Table 1, followed by tables indicating reliability of the measuring instrument (Table 2), simple regression analysis (Table 3) and single factor ANOVA tests (Table 4).

Table 1: The education attainment and employment level of the respondents

<i>Education</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Lower than Grade 12 (High school certificate)	29
Grade 12 (High school certificate)	18
National diploma / under-graduate degree	41
Post-graduate diploma / post-graduate degree	12
Total	100
<i>Employment</i>	<i>% of respondents</i>
Senior management	0
Middle management	3
Junior management	6
Professional	56
Store workers	6
Factory operator	9
Cleaner	20
Total	100

The study used education attainment as an indicator of pre-career choices and current employment level as an indicator of career advancement. Table 1 indicates that fifty-three percent of the respondents had a tertiary qualification, with forty-one percent having attained an under-graduate degree or diploma and twelve percent possessing a post-graduate qualification. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents did not complete high school and thus do not have a Grade 12 qualification. Most respondents, that is fifty-six percent, are in professional positions, which means that, they are performing skilled work but do not have employees reporting to them. Only nine percent of the total respondents were either in junior or senior management.

Reliability of the Measuring Instrument

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was employed to test the internal consistency of the research instruments and it can be viewed as a measure of how well the sum score on the selected items capture the expected score in the entire domain. The assessment was on the hypothesised relationships as depicted by the proposed hypothetical model (Fig. 1). An alpha of 0.70 or more is deemed suitable for exploratory research (Manerikar and Manerikar 2015).

Table 2 indicates that the Cronbach's alpha results of this study met the minimum acceptable level of 0.70 with most instruments far exceeding the minimum. An excellent score of 0.94 for mentorship opportunities means that the population score would closely resemble the sample results.

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha

<i>Measuring instrument</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>Validity of alpha</i>
Pre-career choices	$\alpha = 0.80$	0.36
Career capital	$\alpha = 0.70$	0.51
Attitude towards gender discrimination	$\alpha = 0.79$	0.376
Organisational leadership	$\alpha = 0.88$	0.225
Organisational culture	$\alpha = 0.88$	0.225
Mentorship opportunities	$\alpha = 0.94$	0.12

Simple Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression is a statistical method that allows the researcher to study relationships between two continuous variables. The impact of each independent variable on the dependent variable (career advancement) was evaluated using simple regression analysis, which quantified the relationship between the independent and dependent variables using a linear equation.

Regression analysis indicates which among the independent variables are related to the dependent variable. The results in Table 3 thus reflect the extent to which career advancement can be attributed to each of the independent variables. Pre-career choices are attributed with fifty percent of the variability in employment level, reflected by the R-squared value of 0.50. The other five independent variables depicted a weak negative relationship with career advancement.

Table 3: Simple regression analysis

<i>Simple Regression Analysis Independent Variable</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R-squared</i>
Pre-career choices	0.70	0.50
Organisational leadership	0.49	0.24
Organisational culture	0.38	0.15
Attitude towards gender discrimination	0.26	0.07
Career capital development	0.23	0.05
Mentorship opportunities	0.22	0.05

Single Factor ANOVA Test

Single factor ANOVA tests were performed as additional inferential tests to support the study's findings to either accept or reject the hypotheses. An alpha of 0.05 was used as the cut-off for significance (Ali and Bhaskar 2016). A result is said to be significant when its p-value is equal or lower than the cut-off. Thus, a p-value less than 0.05 is significant. Only one ANOVA test provided a p-value less than 0.05, namely pre-career choices, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Single factor ANOVA tests

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>ANOVA (p-value)</i>
Pre-career choices	0.002 < 0.05
Career capital development	0.17 > 0.05
Attitude towards gender discrimination	0.8045 > 0.05
Mentorship opportunities	0.24 > 0.05
Organisational leadership	0.62 > 0.05
Organisational culture	0.53 > 0.05

The results of the single factor ANOVA tests indicate that pre-career choices have a statistically significant relationship with the career advancement of black women working in the selected manufacturing firm. This statistically significant relationship was confirmed by the p-value of 0.002 (< 0.05) of the single factor ANOVA test.

Findings of the Study in Relation to the Hypothetical Model

Pre-career Choices: Influence on Career Advancement

H1.1: There is a relationship between pre-career choices and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

This study found a positive relationship between pre-career choices and career advancement as 49.67 percent of the variability in employment level could be explained by education level attainment. The demographic characteristics of the sample revealed (see Table 1) that sixty-five percent of the respondents occupied skilled level positions in the form of professional and management positions compared to thirty-five percent of the respondents in low to semi-skilled

positions of store workers, factory operators and cleaners. This closely resembled the education level of the respondents wherein fifty-three percent of the respondents possessed under- and post-graduate qualifications, and eighteen percent had completed Grade 12. These results highlight the significance of the education level of black women in the manufacturing sector in South Africa and suggest that lifelong learning and engendered occupations should be pursued to enable career advancement.

In order to test hypothesis H1.1, simple regression analysis as well as a one-factor ANOVA test were employed. The study found evidence (see Table 3, regression analysis) that supports the hypothesis that pre-career choices, as represented by the highest level of education attainment, have a statistically significant effect on the employment level of black women working in the selected manufacturing firm. This statistically significant relationship is confirmed by the p-value of 0.002 (less than 0.05) of the single factor ANOVA test (see Table 4). Thus the hypothesis is accepted.

Career Capital Development: Influence on Career Advancement

H1.2: There is a relationship between career capital and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

The results reflected that the respondents, who were found to be highly motivated to pursue their career goals, seek learning opportunities and develop their skills. Differences were, however, observed between employees with under-graduate degrees and those with post-graduate degrees with regards to the marketability of skills, as reflected in the perception of available jobs in the industry, and networks built within and outside of the selected firm. Employees with post-graduate qualifications were more confident of their skills and their networks than the employees with under-graduate qualifications. This finding is in line with literature, and more specifically, career mobility theory's assertion that employers place great value in education as a predictor of employee productivity (Grunau and Pecoraro 2017).

In testing this hypothesis, regression analysis indicates a weak negative relationship be-

tween career capital and career advancement. Table 3 showed that career capital merely explained five percent of the reasons for career advancement. One-factor ANOVA was used to test if variation of responses could be detected by employment level. The one-factor ANOVA test resulted in a p-value of 0.17 (see Table 4), which is greater than 0.05, the cut-off for significance. Therefore, disputing the hypotheses that there is a relationship between career capital and career advancement. Although the hypothesis is rejected, the descriptive statistics suggest that there may be a relationship between career capital and the highest level of education attained.

Attitude Towards Gender Discrimination: Influence On Career Advancement

H1.3: There is a relationship between attitudes towards gender discrimination and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

Literature argued that acknowledgement of gender differences can either motivate action to break down gender barriers in the workplace or it can result in one being resigned to the status quo (Holton and Dent 2016; Naude 2017). Of the respondents, fifty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that regardless of gender, any qualified individual can have a successful career in the organisation. Neutral means were observed when respondents were asked whether or not the contribution of both genders is equally valued by the organisation and whether or not the opportunities for career growth are determined along gender lines. The overall neutral mean for the attitude towards gender discrimination measurement reflects uncertainty, as respondents could neither agree nor disagree that gender does have a role in the value attributed to women in the organisation and the decisions made about their careers. Since gender discrimination is a sensitive issue in the South African work environment, this may have been a contributing factor for the neutral response regarding gender discrimination.

The study found no significantly statistical relationship between attitudes towards gender discrimination and career advancement. This was reflected by the R-squared value of 0.07 (Table 3) and a p-value of 0.8045, which is more than 0.05,

and thus not significant (Table 4). Hypothesis H1.3, that there is a relationship between attitude towards gender discrimination and the career advancement of black women, is rejected.

Mentorship Opportunities: Influence on Career Advancement

H2.1: There is a relationship between mentorship opportunities and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

Literature acknowledged mentorship as instrumental in improving the exposure of employees to career growth opportunities and influential network in an organisation (Ansari 2016; Böhrer and Schinnenburg 2016). However, merely thirty-eight percent of the respondents have been recipients of any mentorship. The responses of these mentorship recipients demonstrated their mentorship relationships were focused on vocational support and role modelling. An overwhelming majority of the recipients of mentoring opportunities (92%) respected their mentors' abilities to teach and motivate. Similarly, eighty-five percent of these respondents received assistance from their mentors in coordinating their career goals. These are mentoring functions that are focused on developing the career of the protégé and imparting behaviours that have the potential to build good corporate citizenship.

Since only thirty-eight percent of respondents had received mentorship, it is not surprising that the regression analysis depicted a weak negative relationship between mentorship and career advancement. Table 3 indicates that mentorship opportunities account for just five percent towards career advancement. This statistically insignificant relationship between mentorship and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm is confirmed by the one-factor ANOVA test resulting in a p-value of 0.24, which is greater than the cut-off point of 0.05 and thus not significant (see Table 4). The hypothesis is rejected.

Organisational Leadership: Influence on Career Advancement

H2.2: There is a relationship between organisational leadership and career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

The second employer-driven factor identified by this study as affecting the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm was organisational leadership. The respondents employed as professionals at the firm responded with thirty-seven percent of these women having clarity about company goals and how their roles were aligned to company goals in order to empower them. The strength of the bond between a supervisor and his or her subordinate could be the making of an empowered employee or an over-dependent one. However, only twenty-one percent of the respondents indicated that their supervisors take the time to discuss the team's concerns with them.

The simple regression analysis attributed twenty-four percent of career advancement to organisational leadership (Table 3). The single factor ANOVA test produced a p-value of 0.62, which is greater 0.05, and thus not significant (Table 4). The hypothesis is therefore rejected. There is no statistically significant relationship between organisational leadership and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm in Gauteng. This is contrary to literature, which suggests that organisational leadership should support strategies, which empower women and include women in leadership roles (Cotzee 2017; Naudé 2017). Kim and Beehr (2017) suggested that empowering leadership had a positive impact on the employees' commitment to career advancement.

Organisational Culture: Influence on Career Advancement

H2.3: There is a relationship between organisational culture and the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm.

Literature demonstrated the extension of societal values, including culture, into the workplace (Naudé 2017). Gender influences education and employment choices, and when women endeavour to enter male-dominated fields of work, the macho and hostile work environment often marginalises women (Buse et al. 2013). This study obtained perceptions regarding organisational culture as experienced by the black women in the selected firm. The instruments used explored both the perceptions relating to the respondents as team members as well as respondents as individual employees.

The regression analysis (Table 3) depicted a weak negative relationship between organisational culture and employment level and indicated that organisational culture explained fifteen percent of the reasons for career advancement. In testing the hypothesis, the one-factor ANOVA test resulted in a p-value of 0.53 (see Table 4), which is greater than 0.05, the cut-off for significance. The hypothesis formulated by the study that organisational culture has a relationship with career advancement is therefore rejected. This is contrary to research that proposes that top management should secure a culture that values women in the workplace (Holton and Dent 2016).

DISCUSSION

This study found literature to be unequivocal about the influence of pre-career choices on career advancement. Career mobility theory found a causal relationship between education and employment promotions (Grunau and Pecoraro 2017). Career adaptability theory attributed task performance, critical thinking and career satisfaction to education (Bocciardi et al. 2017). Similarly, this study was able to prove, empirically, that pre-career choices affect the career advancement of black women employed by the selected firm. Literature was equally unambiguous about the role of career capital, organisational leadership, organisational culture and mentorship in launching one's career. This was demonstrated by the boundaryless career theory that placed responsibility on both the individual and employer in educating, providing the required skills and exposing talent to influential networks. This study, however, was not able to provide empirical evidence to support the influence of career capital, mentorship opportunities, organisational leadership and organisational culture on the career advancement of black women employed by the selected firm. Attitude towards gender discrimination, as a factor affecting career advancement, was addressed in the glass ceiling beliefs literature and career anchors theory. According to Herrbach and Mignonac (2012), managerial, technical and lifestyle anchors amplified perceptions of gender discrimination. This is consistent with the optimistic perception of the glass ceiling characterised by high levels of motivation to achieve career goals (Smith et al. 2012). This study was

not able to find a relationship between attitude towards gender discrimination and the career advancement of black women employed by the selected firm.

CONCLUSION

The career advancement of women continues to be a relevant topic, globally, and its relevance will continue until gender equality is achieved in all spheres of life. Black women in South Africa's economy are still marginalised, especially in manufacturing, despite affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups. The factors affecting the career advancement of black women in the selected manufacturing firm were examined against this backdrop. These factors have been characterised as either self-driven or employer-driven, thereby stressing the collaborative effort needed between employee and employer to achieve career growth. Empirical evidence is required before reliance can be placed on these factors as determinants of career advancement for the targeted population, as only one out of the six hypotheses of this study, namely pre-career choices could be empirically proven to impact career advancement for women. This study suggests that employment equity measures, namely, promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment, have not yet ensured significant outcomes for black women in South Africa's manufacturing sector. The practical recommendations made in this study could change this reality for the selected firm. Ultimately, individuals determine their career goals and organisations should support the achievement of these goals by providing a work environment that encourages and rewards career growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, certain implications for individuals and the firm stood out and thus the following recommendations are suggested.

Education was found to be the predictor of career advancement. Although this study categorised pre-career choice as a self-driven factor in career advancement, further education continues during the course of employment for many

employees. In order to achieve career success, employees should partake in formal education. The employer, through its career development initiatives, could incorporate sponsored formal tertiary education as an option for its black female employees. Employees without Grade 12 education could be prioritised as recipients of education and training initiatives so they can progress from low- and semi-skilled employment positions to skilled positions.

Career capital development relies on individuals to assume responsibility for their career development through skills acquisition and pursuing career goals in order to achieve career success. The study found education to play an important role in career capital development. Black women working for the selected firm were found to be highly motivated but lacked networks within the firm and industry. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents occupying professional positions were not confident of the marketability of their skills. In addition to education initiatives, the firm could encourage women to form or engage in existing networks in the firm. These networks need to be supported by senior leadership (0% response by senior management in this study) to legitimise their importance in supporting organisational goals and in empowering women. All women in professional positions should be encouraged to be involved in mentorship relationships. Such an initiative could potentially improve organisational leadership and culture perceptions.

The relationship that the line manager has with his or her female subordinate sets an example for how the rest of the members of the organisation treat the subordinate. Direct leadership should be trained to be empowering leaders who share power, encourage and motivate subordinates, thereby increasing the confidence of the subordinates in their abilities as opposed to instilling fear and anxiety.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size is a limitation of the study. Although the sample represents an eighty-five percent response rate, and is appropriate for the context of the research question, the sample demographics are specific to the selected firm. The study acknowledges that factors affecting career

advancement may extend beyond the specific self-driven and employer-driven factors identified by this study.

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