Exploring characteristics that prevent the derailment of women leaders

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Abstract

The number of women in senior leadership positions globally remains inequitable with recent statistics showing that female directors make up a mere 16 % of company boards across the European Union, 20% of senior executives in U.S. companies, and 19.1% of top and 28.2 % of senior managers in South African companies. This article provides greater understanding of why some women succeed in these positions whilst others have their careers derail. Whilst taking cognisance of exiting research on leadership derailment, this article explores the personal construct systems of leaders who have avoided or overcome derailment. This aims to facilitate a greater appreciation of the role of intrinsic characteristics of women leaders, thereby creating a more integrated and holistic understanding of leadership derailment. This article further aims to extend the traditional definition of leadership derailment to include the experiences of women leaders who have avoided or overcome derailment.

Keywords: derailment, women leaders, personal construct theory, personal construct, core construct, personal construct system.

1. Introduction

In the context of the global leadership crisis and more specifically, the scarcity of women in senior and executive leadership positions, leadership derailment amongst women remains topical. Several studies espouse the benefits of better representation of women leaders in business, which include, amongst others, higher return on equity, superior sales, and higher return on investment. Despite this, the on-going challenges faced by women leaders in the workplace, remains problematic. Research over time highlights the challenges of women leaders such as gender stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, organisational practices and culture, the "glass ceiling" phenomenon and more recently the "glass cliff" phenomenon.

Whist these challenges cannot be denied, neither can the fact that some women are able to succeed despite the barriers which they face. Derailment research has typically focused on the characteristics of leaders who have derailed, whilst little, if any research, has focused on the characteristics of those who have overcome derailment. This article explores specifically the characteristics of women leaders who have either avoided or overcome derailment. Research findings in this article are framed within the broad ambit of personal construct theory and are presented in the form of a framework of characteristics which prevent derailment.

Research objective

The main objective of this article is to explore the characteristics that prevent the derailment of women leaders and to present an integrated framework of these characteristics. A secondary aim of this article is to present a more inclusive definition of leadership derailment as it is experienced and interpreted by women executive leaders.

Literature Review: Leadership derailment

Leadership derailment is defined as being when an executive who is placed in an executive role in an organization and was judged to have the ability to be successful in this executive role, is fired, asked to resign, is forced out of the organization, demoted, or has their career plateau unexpectedly (Schmidt, 2009; Lombardo & McCauley, 1988).

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Populist commentary on leadership derailment (Furnham, 2010) lists the following types of bad leaders: aberrant leaders; anti-social leaders; dark-side (triad) leaders; derailed leaders; despotic leaders, destructive leaders, incompetent leaders, malignant leaders, toxic leaders and tyrannical leaders and:

> *"…emphasizes the idea of being thrown off course. Trains on tracks derail. Leaders set fair in a particular direction deviate from the path, unable to move forward. It is sometimes hyphenated with the next word in the dictionary, namely deranged, which implies not only a breakdown in performance, but also insanity" (Furnham, 2010, p. 6).*

Hogan and Hogan (2001) postulate that derailment is due to "dark side" personality traits, which are linked to personality disorders described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Four (DSM IV), whilst Kellerman (2004) describes seven types of bad leadership which include rigid, incompetent, callous, intemperate, insular, corrupt, and evil.

The study of leadership derailment began in the 1960's with the most prominent thought leaders over time being Bentz (1967, 1985 a, 1985 b, 1990), McCall and Lombardo (1983), Morrison, White and Van Velsor (1987) Lombardo, Ruderman and McCauley(1988), McCauley and Lombardo (1990), Van Velsor and Leslie (1995), Hogan and Hogan (2001), Eichinger and Lombardo (2003), Dotlich and Cairo (2003), Finkelstein (2003) and Rasch, Shen, Davies and Bono (2008). An integrated summary and comparison of the factors, personality characteristics and behaviours, which thought leaders over time have linked to derailment, are outlined in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Characteristics associated with leadership derailment

Bentz (1985 a)	Hogan and Hogan (2001)	Eichinger & Lombardo (2003)	McCall and Lombardo (1983)	Lombardo et al (1988)	McCauley & Lombardo (1990)	Dotlich & Cairo (2003)	Finkelstein (2003)	Rasch, Shen, Davies & Bono (2008)
Personality traits leading to derailment			Behaviours leading to derailment					
Lacked business skills	Excitable	Poor administrative skills	Experienced specific business problems	Inability to build a cohesive team	Problems with interpersonal relationships	Arrogance	Overestimate their strength and underestimate the strength of their competition	Avoiding conflict and people problems
Unable to deal with complexity	Skeptical	Difficulty making tough choices	Insensitive	Over and under managing	Difficulty moulding staff	Melodrama	Put personal interests ahead of company interests	Poor emotional control
Reactive and operational	Cautious	Lack of strategic thinking	Cold, arrogant and aloof	Overly ambitious	Difficulty in making strategic transitions	Volatility	Arrogant and make reckless decisions	Over controlling
Unable to delegate	Reserved	Failure to build a team	Betrayed trust	Not supportive and demanding of subordinates	Lack of follow through	Excessive caution	Eliminate anyone who might challenge their decisions	Poor task performance
Unable to build a team	Leisurely	Lack of interpersonal savvy	Over managed and did not delegate enough	Overtly emotional	Over-dependence	Habitual distrust	Ignore operations while trying to manage their company's image	Poor planning, organisation and/or communication
Unable to build relationships with a network of contacts	Arrogant	Poor political skills	Overly ambitious	Insensitive, cold and arrogant	Strategic differences with management	Aloofness	Minimize difficult obstacles and don't plan accordingly	Rumour mongering and inappropriate use of information
Emotions cloud their judgment	Mischievous	Inability to deal with conflict	Failed to staff effectively	Maintaining poor relations with staff		Mischievousness	Rely on outdated strategies and tactics	Procrastination
Slow to learn	Colourful	Questionable integrity	Unable to think strategically	Overriding personality defects		Eccentricity,		Failure to consider human needs
Seen to have an overriding personality defect	Imaginative	Low self-awareness	Unable to adapt to a boss with a different style			Passive resistance		Failure to manage and nurture talent
	Diligent		Overly dependent on advocate or mentor.			perfectionism		
	Dutiful					Eagerness to please		

In addition to the above, researchers have found that there are specific barriers and potential derailers which are unique to women executives (Schein, 1973; Schein, 1975; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux & Heilman, 1991; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Morrison, 1992; Schein & Mueller, 1992; Valian, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002; Powell & Graves, 2003; Schneider, 2004; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004; Catalyst, 2005; Eisenhart, 2006; Schein, 2007; Schmidt, 2009). This research appears to overlap somewhat with similar factors emerging. The available literature on the internal as well as external factors leading to the derailment of women executives is thus summarised in table 2 below:

Table 2: Factors associated with leadership derailment amongst women executives

EXTERNAL FACTORS – Factors outside of women leading to derailment	INTERNAL FACTORS - Personality traits and behaviours leading to derailment
Gender Stereotyping	Leadership styles and behaviour
Gendered organisations	The inability to adapt
Gendered occupations	Wanting too much for oneself or other women
Sex segregation	Not meeting performance expectations
Tokenism	Problems with interpersonal relationships and networks
Prejudice	Failure to meet business objectives
The "glass ceiling" phenomenon	Inability to build and lead a team
The "Glass cliff" phenomenon	Inability to learn from mistakes
Organisational Culture	Not getting work out
Business operations resulted in company eliminating jobs	Not managing strategy
Discrimination	Relationship with the boss
Sabotage	Education and development
Organisational practices	Lack of initiative
Other people's reactions to a competent women	Lack of accountability
New senior leadership (not the boss)	

When considering the above research on leadership derailment in general as well as leadership derailment amongst women leaders, it is important to note that leadership derailment is a key strategic issue for organisations as leadership effectiveness is strongly correlated to organizational success factors such as retaining talent, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and profitability. A better understanding of why some women succeed whilst others have their careers derail, is thus of great significance and could be traced from the personal construct theory.

Personal construct theory

This article explores the characteristics that prevent the derailment of women leaders within the context of personal construct theory.   According to Kelly, who developed personal construct theory, "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (Kelly, 1955, 46). Simply put, personal construct theory is primarily a theory of examining how humans continually construct meaning in a continually changing world (Epting & Paris, 2006). We give meaning to our world and experiences by creating an unspoken theoretical framework, referred to as a personal construct system. It is within this system that we anticipate the future and engage with our environment.

An individual's personal construct system is made up of personal constructs and core constructs. Personal constructs allow us to make predictions about the future, as it is through our constructions of reality that we make sense of the world and anticipate events within it. Core constructs, which are higher order constructs, lie fundamentally at the heart of our sense of self, guiding each anticipatory choice, action and stance we take (Butler, 2006, p. 27). Core Constructs remain stable over time, leading us to preserve a core belief about ourselves, even in the face of invalidating evidence (Rowe, 2003).

For the fact that personal construct systems lie at a very low level of awareness, they are difficult to analyse and even more difficult to change. Core constructs are particularly difficult to identify and analyse (Leitner & Thomas, 2003; McWilliams, 2004), and are difficult to change, even if they do not serve us well, and lead to derailment.

Alternative constructions may be …"avoided in our everyday thought processes because of the incompatibility with the rest of our life" (Epting & Paris, 2006, p. 26). We attempt to preserve the core beliefs we have about ourselves, rather than seeking an alternative construction of the self. Thus invalidation of core constructs (belief about one's self) represents a profound threat for an individual. Experiences which fail to validate the self, lead to emotions such as sadness, guilt, and other negative emotions (Butler, 2006; McCoy, 1977).

This article explores the personal construct systems of women leaders who have not derailed with a view to contributing to our understanding of leadership derailment and empowering other women leaders by presenting alternative constructions, which may contribute to the prevention of their derailment.

Research design and methodology

For the purposes of this article, a qualitative research approach was adopted, making use of grounded theory. Whilst definitions of qualitative research and data may vary, (Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Gilmore & Carson, 1996; Bogdan, & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 1998; Mason, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar & Newton, 2001; Schwandt, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), they share the following key features.

- It focuses on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, and creates a view of what real life is like.
- It has richness and is conducted within a framework of holism, with strong potential for revealing complexities. According to Amaratunga et al. (2001) such data provides rich, vivid descriptions, nested in a real life context.
- The fact that qualitative data is typically collected over a sustained period makes it powerful for studying any process.
- The inherent flexibility of qualitative studies gives further confidence that what has been going on is really understood.
- It is the best strategy for discovery, exploring a new area and developing hypotheses.
- It allows the researcher to become familiar with the area(s) of interest, to explore the field and consider the dimensions involved.
- The adaptability of qualitative methods allows for a reasonably flexible plan of action that may evolve with the researcher's experiential learning and development.

As per Schram (2006), the objective of grounded theory is the development of theory that is grounded in data. It focuses on generating theory based on the study of social situations. Schwandt (2007, p. 131) describes grounded theory is a "specific, highly developed, rigorous set of procedures for producing formal substantive theory of social phenomenon".

Based on the qualities and descriptions above, it was felt that a qualitative research approach making use of grounded theory was particularly suitable for the purposes of this research.

Purposeful and snowball sampling yielded five research participants who hold senior leadership positions across a wide spectrum of South African businesses. Extended in-depth interviews were conducted, digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Emerging categories and themes from the interviews, in conjunction with data from my personal diary and project journal as well as memos and field notes, were integrated to arrive at final interpretations and overall findings and results.

Data analysis

During the data analysis phase of the research, the following qualitative data analysis process within the grounded theory framework was carried out:

Table 3: Data analysis process

Data Analysis process followed in current study
Firstly getting an idea of the whole by reading all the transcripts and jotting down ideas.
Proceeding to each transcription and understanding the broad meaning it conveys and the main categories and topics which emerge.
Applying the main categories back to the data to establish whether new categories and codes emerged.

Grouping the categories together to provide an alphabetical list of categories.
Appling line by line analysis to data in each transcription and code the data line-by-line.
Comparing and integrating the emerging categories to the categories already found from the previous analysis.
Conducting incident coding to compare the incidents with each other, and add emerging categories to the already established categories.
Applying theoretical coding to the established categories as a basis for the development of a theoretical framework.

As a point of departure to begin exploring the participants' definitions of derailment and the constructs which prevented them from derailing, we explored the participants' derailment stories and descriptions of their derailment experiences during the in-depth interviewing process. The participants' experiences of derailment are outlined in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Derailment experiences

Construct
Participant 1
Participants 1 described the situation where a project team was put together to deal with a specific project which was a few years in duration. She was the most senior person on the project team and when the project was complete, the rest of the team was absorbed back into the normal organisational structure. Because of her seniority, for her, there was no position available. She was told that the organisation could "create" a position for her, which would encompass ad-hoc duties to assist the CEO. She experienced this as very difficult and as if she was being side-lined. She seriously considered leaving the organisation and had to struggle immensely with herself. Eventually she opted to fill a position at a lower job grade and for two years reported to someone who had previously reported to her.
Participant 2
This participant reported the challenge of being appointed in the organisation due to employment equity requirements of the business, which placed pressure for the appointment of a woman. In addition to this, she reported that the view of the organisation was that her role as General Manager: Human Resources, is traditionally a woman's role. She reported that both these factors present a number challenges that she continuously has to deal with. She stated experiencing that she continually has to prove herself, even after years in the position. She believes that if she did not have the personality and approach that she does, this could easily have derailed her career.
Participant 3
This participant's challenge was not imposed on her by an external situation but rather by herself. P3 had to overcome aspects of her own personality which she believes would have led to her derailment.
Participant 4
She described failing her actuarial exams a number of times, whilst being employed in her current organisation, as almost derailing her career in the financial sector. This had consequences for her career progression and the perception of decision makers of her.
Participant 5
P5 described reporting to a CEO whom she experienced as difficult and unreasonable in terms of the demands which he placed on her and in terms of his own personality and behavioural style. She believes that her career would have been derailed had he not been forced to resign from the company.

Based on their experiences, the participants shared their personal definitions of derailment. These definitions are briefly outlined in table 5 below:

Table 5: Derailment definitions

Definition
Participant 1
When, due to discrimination, a women's success is undermined as a result of being forced to play a specific role in order to be recognised as an equal
Participant 2
Women blaming discrimination for not meeting career expectations
Participant 3
Women who make excuses for their own lack of success
Participant 4
Self-stereotyping and believing that women are less successful
Participant 5
Not meeting the expectations that you set for yourself

After an exploration of the participants' derailment experiences and definitions, we undertook a deeper exploration of the underlying and pervasive constructions held by the participants that helped them to overcome or prevent their ultimate derailment. The results of participants' constructions of derailment are outlined in table 6 below:

Table 6: Constructs preventing derailment

No	Construct	Description
Participant 1		
1	Self-confidence	This participant described an overarching sense of self confidence and the self-assurance to assert her needs.
2	Positivity	She described her positive outlook on life.
3	Emotional awareness	P1 discussed elements such as managing own emotional impulses as well as the emotions of others, emotional maturity and discerning between valid & invalid criticism.
4	Team work	The participant shared how she goes about leading her team.
5	Relationship focus	The benefits to be gained from supporting colleagues and building relationships.
6	Resilience and coping mechanisms	P1 described her ability to cope in a crises as well as her ability to recover quickly from setbacks.
7	Work-life balance	She described the importance of work-life balance and also being able to cope with the conflict that different roles engender.
8	Responsiveness to own and other's behaviours	The participant described the importance of being alert to the emotional cues and responses from others and adjusting her behaviour accordingly, especially in difficult situations or where tough issues need to be confronted.
9	Passion and drive	Participant 1 saw herself as having a strong passion, drive and having a strong desire to grow, lean, achieve, seek new challenges and self-actualize.
10	Recognition for and Reinforcement from others for contributions	P1 shared the need to contribute and be recognised and receive reinforcement for one's contributions. She shared how she experienced this as a child and how this has carried through in her career.
11	Risk taking and following one's instincts	She reported that risk taking behaviour has been beneficial to her.
12	Understanding and capitalising gendered behaviour	P1 described how she deals with some of the gender issues that arise between her and her male colleagues. She appears to frame the behaviour of her male colleagues in a specific manner and to use it to her advantage.

No	Construct	Description	Supporting quotes
Participant 2			
1	"I'm okay"	This participant described the importance of "being okay" with oneself, which in turn leads to the ability to deal with criticism and assert oneself. She described in some detail the importance of possessing a deeper seated /ingrained sense of self-belief.	
2	Positive thinking	She shared her tactic of mentally refocusing from negative thoughts to positive thoughts, and thinking about past successes in order to remain positive.	
3	Emotional control and self-awareness	P2 shared the importance of maintaining emotional composure and the harm that women do to their reputations and relationships by becoming over-emotional, "making a scene" and coming across as irrational.	
4	Nurturing relationships and the needs of others	The main areas which came through on this construct were 1) having a support structure; 2) creating time to build relationships and socialize with colleagues; 3) focusing on the needs of others and helping them achieve their goals. An element of selflessness and putting others first also came through. In this interview a strong sense of nurturing of others came through.	
5	Stress management and dealing with adversity	The participant described being able to identify women who are perpetually stressed and not coping with what is required of them. She went on to described how these women are perceived negatively by the organisation and not entrusted to deal with gruelling or difficult assignments.	
6	Managing demands of multiple roles	She is a mother of two young children and described the on-going challenges that this brings, particularly from a practical perspective when required to travel for business which she does quite extensively.	
7	Understanding behaviour and dealing with conflict	P2 spoke of protecting the self-esteem of colleagues and being sensitive to the consequences of injuring the pride of others. The Participant also described the importance of having insight into one's own emotional triggers and the perceptions that one creates through one's behaviour.	
8	Success driven	Participant 2 was unashamed and transparent in describing her desire for success and doing what is required to achieve success. I reflected this back to P2, who then stated that women feel that they cannot say out loud that they wanted to be successful, which impacts on their ability to be so.	
9	Accepting and giving recognition for achievements	The participant spoke about the positive impact of the recognition for her accomplishments which she received from her parents as a child, had on her, and how the recognition from significant others today continues to help her succeed.	
10	Confidence to take risks	She shared her perception that the women who derail are those who are reactive and fear taking risks. She shared that one has to trust one's judgement when making decisions for which the outcome is not always clear.	
11	Identity as a women as part of leadership identity	P2 expressed the view that her role as a woman is integral to her role as a leader and, as the only women on the executive team, very much forms part of her identity as a leader.	
12	Dealing with gender inequality	She was quite open about the fact that sometimes being a woman leader is difficult. However her approach is not to dwell on this and take issue with it, but rather accept the reality, and to do what is required to succeed in the environment she finds herself in. This participant expressed distaste for women who take unnecessary issue with gender	

No	Construct	Description	Supporting quotes
Participant 3			
1	Confidence in abilities and ability to assert self	The participant shared her sense of confidence in herself and her consequent confidence in her opinions and the right to have her needs met.	
2	Positive and calm approach	She discussed her ability to have a positive and calming influence on others, which she believes differentiates her from women who have derailed.	
3	Emotional awareness and control	Participant 3 described the high emotionality of derailed women leaders, but holds the belief that appropriate emotion in the workplace, especially when linked to organisational initiatives which have a potential negative impact on others, is acceptable. She further shared that her ability to emotionally detach, when required.	

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4	Cultivating networks	This participant shared a number of examples where her ability to make use of her networks has helped her meet difficult organisational challenges. She also shared that this is something she has had to teach herself as few women tend to focus on building their networks.
5	Resilience	P3 shared her experience of her father committing suicide when she was 18 years old and how this impacted on her sense of identity. Having been very close to her father, she regards his suicide as being the single biggest life changing event which she has faced, forcing her to review her sense of self and her view of the world. She shared that her struggle to come to terms with his death has equipped her to cope with her challenges as a leader and has armed her with a sense of belief in her to cope with any challenge.
6	Self-Discipline to balance multiple roles and demands	This participant shared the challenges she experienced in managing all the roles which she is required to fulfil. Her success in doing so was due to having the self-discipline to use her limited time constructively, making sacrifice and managing time (e.g. not going to all school functions, waking up extremely early), and boundaries (learning to say no).
7	Analysing, interpreting and responding to behaviour of others	Participant 3 described the importance of and her ability to garner support though understanding the behaviour of others.
8	Achievement drive and perseverance	She also described her persistence and doggedness. She also referred to the importance of enduring rather than escaping difficult situations.
9	Recognition from significant others	The participant described the importance of recognition from her family and her lack of expectation from receiving it in the work environment, despite its positive impact.
10	Confidence to take risks and be flexible	Participant 3 described that as a senior leader, she is required to take risks and that she consciously practices doing so. She links this to confidence, good judgment and flexibility.
11	Appreciation for gender differences	She expressed having an appreciation for the world-view and differing contributions of different genders. This has contributed to her success.
12	Realistic worldview	P3 appears to have a very realistic view of what she can achieve. In describing this, she did not appear to experience any negativity or resignation, but merely expressed it as a statement of fact. She believes that acceptance of this reality has enabled her not to derail.

No	Construct	Description	Supporting quotes
Participant 4			
1	Self-belief and -confidence	P4 shared her strong belief in herself and her identity of "being the best". This also implies the pitfalls of women believing that they are not as good as men.	
2	Positive outlook	The participant shared her belief that derailed women have a sense of unhappiness and dissatisfaction, whilst she sees herself as being a positive individual.	
3	Aversion to emotional displays and use of emotion as a tool	She expressed dislike for either men or women who are "drama queens" and for people who use their emotions for their own ends. She reports that he inappropriate use of emotions impacts on one's credibility in that people stop listening.	
4	Taking cognisance of others opinions and needs	P4 shared the importance of obtaining input and caring for others as a tool for her success.	
5	Tolerance for stress		
6	Ability to deal with disappointment/failure and adversity	She shared some of her disappointments and how her ability to deal with them helped prevent her from derailing. It could be seen in her sharing of these experiences, specifically with regards to her studies, that these had affected her deeply, at the time.	
7	Balancing responsibilities and roles	Throughout my interaction with P4, I was overwhelmed by her humility and almost self-effacing approach, despite her underlying air of confidence and success. She attributes this to not taking herself too seriously and taking time to step away from her role of CEO at times.	
8	Realistic self-image	This participant showed a willingness to introspect and be honest about her flaws.	

9	Drive for success	P4 expressed her sense of tenacity, drive, perseverance, competitiveness and need to win.She also shared the importance of being goal- and results-orientated
10	Need for recognition	Participant 4 provided a useful insight about using her need for recognition to drive her success."
11	Risk taking and openness to change	She expressed the importance of taking risks, seizing opportunities and not being rigid in one's expectations.
12	Mature and pragmatic approach to gender inequities	The participant shared her view on the gender inequities which exist. She appears to have a mature and pragmatic approach to these.
13	Accepting compromise	Participant 4 displayed a realistic acknowledgment of compromises and decisions which she had to make in her career.

No	Construct	Description	Supporting quotes
Participant 5			
1	Self-belief	She shared her perception of women who do not have sufficient self-belief and how this can derail them.	
2	Seeking positive meaning in events	This participant shared her belief in a positive future and finding meaning in the events that occur.	
3	Emotional control	P5 shared her ability to put her emotions aside and display an ability to deal with situations calmly and in a stable manner.	
4	Trusting relationships	The participant displayed an innate belief in the good in human nature. She also expressed the ability to build deeper and trusting relationships with colleagues, whilst being able to maintain a professional relationship with them.	
5	Sponsorships in the workplace	She described being able to identify people in the organisation who she trust and who trust her and with whom to test her opinions with. She described being able to become emotional with these sponsors, but then afterwards being better able to deal with things.	
6	Resilience and dealing with adversity	She described her emotional resilience and ability to learn from past mistakes.	
7	Balancing multiple roles and demands	The participant expressed the psychological and mental strength required to deal with the challenges of multiple roles without allowing it to derail her career.	
8	Self-insight and self-awareness	She expressed having insight into herself, but also displayed insight into the behaviour of others.	
9	Passion and drive to succeed	P5 spoke with passion about her pro-active, almost obsessive engagement with the world around her. She expressed that this has helped her succeed in her career, where others have been unable to. She also specifically highlighted the role of perseverance in her success.	
10	Sincere and genuine recognition for achievements	The participant shared that because recognition is a part of the organisational culture, it can sometimes come across as "institutionalised" and that this has the opposite effect to recognition which is experienced as sincere and genuine.	
11	Flexibility and open-mindedness	She expressed her enjoyment in having opportunities to experiment with new undertakings and improvements, despite the discomfort it causes. She highlighted the importance of flexibility, and how it contributed to her success.	
12	Realistic approach and compromise	P5 expressed the importance of the need to compromise and of being realistic within the context of being a woman leader.	
13	Dealing with gender differences	The Participant acknowledged that differences in gender exist, especially in terms of credibility being assigned based on gender. She further described how she deals with it.	

Discussion and findings

Based on the experiences of derailment and the definitions of derailment provided by the participants in this study, we were able to arrive at a more inclusive definition of leadership derailment. This definition is as follows:

when an individual in an executive role who was judged to have the ability to be successful in a role, lacks specific personal characteristics, and thus unexpectedly:

- *opts out of the position,*
- *is fired,*
- *is asked to resign,*
- *is forced out of the organization,*
- *has their career plateau below the levels of achievement expected by themselves and others,*
- *is undermined because of a specific role they are forced to play,*
- *is unable to effectively overcome or deal with issues of gender discrimination or other inequities.*
- *is unable to balance multiple roles required, due to lack of support structures*

and then fails to take responsibility for failure in the role by blaming external factors, in the event of it being of their own doing.

In addition to the above, an exploration of the constructions of the participants yielded 11 themes, which emerged from the data. Research findings show that it is the existence of a particular personal construct system, which impacts on behaviour and thus characteristics possessed by women leaders, which can prevent their derailment.
Findings further show that it is the combination of a set of personal and core constructs, rather than a particular personal or core construct or group of personal or core construct, which manifest in the characteristics which prevent derailment. These personal and core constructs are as follows:

Table 7: Core and personal constructs preventing derailment

Construct		Frequency	Theme
P1	Self-confidence	5	Self –confidence and delf-efficacy
P2	"I'm okay"		
P3	Confidence in abilities and ability to assert self		
P4	Self-belief and -confidence		
P5	Self-belief		
P1	Positivity	5	Positive outlook/optimism
P2	Positive Thinking		
P3	Positive and calm approach.		
P4	Positive Outlook		
P5	Seeking positive meaning in events		
P1	Emotional awareness	5	Emotional maturity and managing emotions
P2	Emotional control and self-awareness		
P3	Emotional awareness and control		
P4	Aversion to emotional displays and use of emotion as a tool		
P5	Emotional control		
P1	Team work	7	Building relationships and networks
P1	Relationship focus		
P2	Nurturing relationships and the needs of others		
P3	Cultivating networks		
P4	Taking cognisance of others opinions and needs		
P5	Trusting relationships		
P5	Sponsorships in the workplace		
P5	Resilience and Coping Mechanisms	6	Resilience and coping
P1			
P2	Stress management and dealing with adversity		
P3	Resilience		
P4	Tolerance for stress		
P4	Ability to deal with disappointment/failure and adversity		
P5	Dealing with adversity		
P1	Work-life balance	5	Balancing multiple roles
P2	Managing demands of multiple roles		
P5	Balancing Multiple Roles and Demands		
P3	Self-discipline to balance Multiple Roles and Demands		

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P4	Balancing responsibilities and roles		
P1	Responsiveness to own and other's behaviours	5	Insight into behaviour
P2	Understanding behaviour and dealing with conflict		
P3	Analysing, interpreting and responding to behaviour of others		
P4	Realistic self-image		
P5	Self-insight and self-awareness		
P1	Passion and drive	5	Achievement drive and perseverance
P2	Success driven		
P3	Achievement Drive and Perseverance		
P4	Drive for success		
P5	Passion and drive to succeed		
P1	Recognition for and Reinforcement from others for contributions	5	Recognition from significant others
P2	Accepting and giving recognition for achievements		
P3	Recognition from significant others		
P4	Need for Recognition		
P5	Sincere and genuine recognition for achievements		
P1	Risk taking and following one's instincts	5	Risk taking and openness to change
P2	Confidence to take risks		
P3	Confidence to take risks and be flexible		
P4	Risk Taking and Openness to Change		
P5	Flexibility and open-mindedness		
P3	Realistic worldview	8	Pragmatic approach to gender issues and willingness to compromise
P4	Accepting compromise		
P5	Realistic approach and compromise		
P1	Understanding and capitalising on gendered behaviour		
P2	Dealing with gender inequality		
P3	Appreciation for gender differences		
P4	Mature and pragmatic approach to gender inequities		
P5	Dealing with gender differences		
P2	Identity as a women as part of leadership identity		

Considering the above analysis and interpretation of the core constructs and personal constructs held by women leaders who have avoided or overcome derailment, a new framework for inclusion in future derailment research is proposed. This framework can be graphically represented as follows:

Figure 1 Characteristics preventing derailment
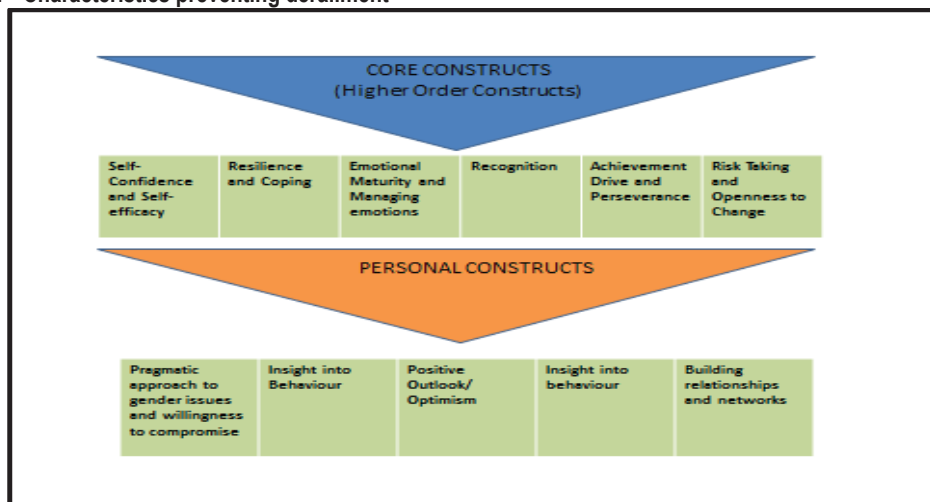
This framework could provide insight into the study of leadership derailment and assist in making women aware of what may cause derailment, prepare them better to deal with it and to develop the characteristics and behaviours required to avoid or overcome derailment. It is my belief that this will contribute greatly to the worldwide gender parity and transformation agenda at senior organisational levels.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article attempts to explore the characteristics that prevent the derailment of women leaders based on their personal construct systems and to present an integrated framework of these characteristics. A secondary aim of this article is to provide a more inclusive definition of leadership derailment.

Based on the findings of this study, it appears that the characteristics which prevent derailment develop as a result of useful and supportive personal and core constructs which women leaders hold. By better understanding these personal and core constructs, CEOs and human resources practitioners may be in a better position to recruit, select and place women executives who are less likely to derail. In addition, policy makers and drivers of organisational change may be empowered to put in place support mechanisms, training and developmental initiatives as well as coaching and mentoring practices that reliably decrease the number of executive women leaders in their businesses who derail.

The personal and core constructs which women leaders hold have the power to influence their behaviour in a relatively consistent manner. Gaining insight into and exploring the constructs of women leaders who have not fallen prey to derailment, can make a contribution to our understanding of leadership derailment amongst women leaders. This can empower women leaders through the investigation of alternative constructions, which may lead to growth, reaching of new insights, learning of new behaviours, and ultimately increased success within the leadership realm.

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