

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Women leadership: A case study in the Otjozondjupa Region,
Namibia**

Submitted by

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**In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Education
(Education Leadership and Management)**

December 2011

ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women in leadership and in particular, school leadership has been the focus of the Namibian government and the country since independence in 1990. Different policies and laws, post-independence, make provision for women empowerment and leadership in a range of organisations and institutions throughout the country. However, reports on gender equity in leadership positions suggest that Namibia is not really moving towards these policy goals at a sufficiently quick pace. A lot still needs to be achieved in terms of transforming the gender stereotyping in Namibia, which still suffers from the legacy of gender discrimination of the apartheid era.

Modern-day academic authors and journalists portray an increasing interest in an awareness of the advantages of women leadership. Women are increasingly perceived to have leadership styles more suitable for contemporary conditions than men. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to investigate women leadership in the Otjiwarongo circuit in the Otjozondjupa educational region in Namibia.

The study used a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm. It adopted a case study approach. The primary participants consisted of four women principals in the Otjiwarongo circuit and the secondary participants included four women education officers from the same circuit. Semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and observation were applied as methods for collecting data and the data collection period was just over six weeks. Data analysis was done through coding and identification of categories.

The findings revealed that women principals possessed the qualities of commitment, good communication and are passionate about their work, which are qualities normally associated with effective leadership. In terms of their role in their schools, they emerged as democratic leaders who involved all stakeholders in the decision making process through consensus. In addition, they demonstrated distributive and servant leadership in their interactions with stakeholders. The main challenge to the leadership position of these women principals seemed to be the stereotypical view held, that as women, they had to work twice as hard as men at leading schools.

The study recommended that people oriented leadership styles, such as the ones enacted by the women principals in this study, are highly recommended for effective leadership in the 21st century.

DECLARATION

I, Cornelia Araes, hereby declare that this half-thesis entitled: Women leadership: A case study in the Otjozondjupa region, Namibia, and submitted for the degree of Master of Education (ELM), is my own original work, and has not been submitted previously for a degree in any other university and institution.

Signed: _____

I declare that this information has been submitted with/without my approval.

Signed: _____

Supervisors

Grahamstown, South Africa

2011

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late sister Caroline 'Autse' Xoagus for the dream
"Make it happen" and to my Husband Deuce David De Porte Shikulo.

Special tributes to my late father Christoph Araeb, my late Aunts Augusta Araes-Kalmash
and Josephine Keises-Sticht and my three late brothers, Moses 'CruX' Kasper, Christoph
'Baka' Adams and Supply Dankie.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First I would thank God who gave me the strength to proceed with this research, despite setbacks. Without him nothing is possible.

My thank goes to my mother Hilma Araes, my three sisters, Hansina Hinda, Christel Sandra Pakote, and Dr. Clementine Xoagus, and their husbands. To my two elder brothers: Benjamin Xoagub, Zino J. Xoagub and wives, and my kid brother Ashley Ehud Araeb and my entire close-knit family.

My sincere appreciation to my supervisors, Prof Hennie van der Mescht and Dr. Callie Grant, for guidance, support and encouragement. My thanks also go to Ian Knott-Craig and to the 'class of 2011'. My house mates Ladi, Nahum and Silas - thank you for being such a wonderful team.

My gratitude to all the participants of this study and many other special people that will remain unmentioned due to limited space.

To 'Khoexa-khoeb', 'Doc' 'Ismael /Uiseb, without your support and encouragement this would not have been possible. *"The game is never over until the last whistle blows"*. I owe you greatly and will cherish those words forever!

Thanks to my girls who took care of the household, Nanguai Zøey Humajuva and Linda Nakashololo and for being companions to Danica Shikulo and Sandra Shikulo.

To Eroid Claude Araeb, Roseline MBA Shikulo and Ernrichell Blommetjie Araes:

"Please! Make it happen".

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE.....	1
ORIENTATION TO MY STUDY	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background and context of the study	2
1.3 Motivation for my study	4
1.4 Research aim and questions	5
1.4.1 Research aim	5
1.4.2 Research questions	5
1.5 Research approach	5
1.6 Structure of the thesis	6
CHAPTER TWO.....	7
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Evolution of leadership theory.....	8
2.2.1 Leadership and management compared	8
2.2.2 Trait thinking	10
2.2.3 Situational leadership.....	10
2.2.4 Transformational leadership.....	11
2.2.5 Contemporary leadership theories	13
2.2.5.1 Distributed leadership	14
2.2.5.2 Servant leadership	15
2.3 History of women leadership.....	17
2.4 Policy and women leadership	19
2.5 Key issues in women leadership	20
2.5.1 Women and leadership styles: Do women lead differently from men?.....	21
2.5.2 Stereotyping and leadership styles	23
2.5.3 Power	24

2.6 Conclusion	25
METHODOLOGY	26
3.1 Introduction.....	26
3.2. Research goals and questions	26
3.3.1 Qualitative research design.....	27
3.3. 2 Interpretive research paradigm	27
3.3.3 Case study	28
3.5.1. Semi-structured interviews.....	31
3.5.2 Focus group discussions	32
3.5.3 Observation	33
CHAPTER FOUR.....	37
PRESENTATION OF DATA.....	37
4.1 Introduction.....	37
4.2 Organisation and coding	37
4.3 The site of the study: the Otjzondjupa educational region.....	38
4.4 Biographical sketches of the principals	38
4.4.1 Principal A.....	38
4.4.2 Principal B.....	39
4.4.3 Principal C.....	39
4.4.4 Principal D	40
4.5. Leadership qualities of women principals.....	40
4.5.1 Strong self-image	40
4.5.3 Initiative in leading schools	41
4.5.4 Leading by example: Exemplary leaders who work hard	42
4.5.5 Leadership as a group activity.....	44
4.5.6 Empowerment.....	46
4.5.7 Ready to accept help and look for support.....	47
4.5.8 Good interpersonal working relationships	48
4. 5. 9 “Mother of the family”	49
4.5.10 Leadership styles adopted	50
4.5.11 Communication	51
4.5.12 Vision for school.....	53
4.5.13 Women leadership and power.....	53

CHAPTER FIVE.....	59
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	59
5.1 Introduction.....	59
5.3 Effective leadership qualities of women principals	60
5.3.1 Democratic leaders	60
5.3.2 Transformational leaders	62
5.3.3 Servant leadership.....	64
5.3.4 Collaboration and involvement.....	65
5.3.5 Distributive leadership	66
5.3.7 Principals’ interactions with parents.....	68
5.3.8 Commitment	69
5.3.9 Role modeling.....	70
5.3.10 A ‘mother figure’	71
5.3.11 Principals’ moral purpose.....	72
5.3.12 Communication	72
5.3.13 Power	74
CHAPTER SIX.....	78
CONCLUSION	78
6.1 Introduction.....	78
6.2.1 Women principals’ perceptions of their leadership roles.....	78
6.2.2. Leadership strengths of the women principals.....	79
6.2.3. Challenges to women leadership	80
6.3 Reflection on methodology.....	81
6.4 Potential value of my study	81
6.5 Suggestions for further research.....	82
REFERENCES	83
APPENDIX A.....	90
APPENDIX B.....	91
APPENDIX C.....	92

APPENDIX D.....	93
APPENDIX E	94
APPENDIX F	95
APPENDIX G.....	95

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO MY STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Educational Leadership and Management (ELM) has been an area of scholarship and research internationally for the last few decades. According to Van der Mescht (2008, p. 8), “ELM has long been a distinct area of interest and activity that has provided a ‘space’ for scholarly as well as professional activity over a sustained period of time”. In South Africa (SA) and Namibia it is still an emerging field of research interest, where more specifically, the leadership roles of women are getting increasing attention of late. That is why I have chosen to make the focus of my study, women leadership in the Otjiwarongo circuit in the Otjozondjpa educational region, Namibia.

Coincidentally, the celebration of international women’s day, celebrated internationally in 2011, adopted the following theme: *Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women*. The year 2011 is also known as the international women and girl child year. International women’s day is marked on the 8th of March every year. This year’s event in Namibia was commemorated in Namibian Schools during Education for All (EFA) week from 01-05 August 2011, under the theme: Women and Girls’ Education: ‘Yes she can’. The main event was in the Ohangwena Region and the Minister of Education, Hon. Dr. Abram Iyambo, delivered the keynote speech. In his speech, he quoted from Kofi Annan, the 7th Secretary-General to the United Nations (1997-2006), who once said, “When women thrive, all of the society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start to life”.

There are a number of studies already done in Namibia on women leadership (Udjombala, 2002; Kawana, 2004; Kauaria, 2002 & Thawley, 2006). Despite the fact that many studies were conducted on the topic of women leadership, there are still differences in terms of the way women lead their organizations which require further exploration. Many studies

revealed that traditional gender stereotypes are still some of the major obstacles in terms of the progress of women to higher positions of management and leadership in schools. My study thus attempted to make a contribution in the area of leadership, specifically in the Otjozondjupa Region of Namibia, which is a newly established region, due to decentralization. I wanted to find out how women principals' experience school leadership and how they perceive themselves in leadership roles at their respective schools.

1.2 Background and context of the study

This study explored the experiences and perceptions of four women principals in their professional contexts. These four principals lead schools which are situated in Otjiwarongo in the Otjozondjupa Region in Namibia.

Literature reveals that as far back as the 1960s, women were discriminated against. Strachard, Akao, Kilavanwa and Warsal (2010) state: "Once women are in leadership positions, gender, culture and religion play an important role in how their leadership is experienced and practiced" (p. 68). How gender is viewed impacts significantly on how women experience (or do not experience) leadership. Women brought up in cultures which emphasise male superiority, have been taught from an early age to behave submissively towards men. Traditional leadership roles and cultural influences pose challenges to woman in leadership roles.

Part of the problem, according to Moorosi (2010), is that "structural barriers to women's advancement in organizations have been created by men and are based on male experiences of management, hence a particular form of masculinity in organizational management exist" (p. 548). Leadership potential is stereotyped in terms of traditional masculine and feminine traits. Women in leadership positions are often expected to demonstrate typical masculine traits such as decisiveness, authority and directness. Women are perceived to work from a caring and relational orientation and these traits may be inconsistent with the traditional concept of leadership. However, concepts of patriarchal power and hegemonic masculinity challenge women to uphold traditional gender role expectations (Coleman, 2003, p. 63).

In Namibia, before independence, management and school leadership were dominated by men (Kauaria, 2002, p. 1). Very few women were considered for leadership positions as

confirmed by *Vision 2030*, “before independence women were poorly represented in all positions of influence” (Namibia, p. 108). After independence, different laws and policies were brought in to address gender imbalances in Namibian society. According to President Pohamba of Namibia:

The Namibian government has adopted appropriate legislative and policy frameworks to promote equal treatment of men and women, incorporating existing international principles and standards. According to the Namibian Constitution gender discrimination is outlawed, and as a result, the government is bound to promote, protect and advance the interests of women in Namibian society. (*The Namibian*, 13 April 2011).

Thus, the Namibian Constitution, together with the policy on affirmative action, similarly calls for equal opportunities for men and women, as well as the appointment of more women in leadership positions. The government embarked upon an empowerment programme for women by passing various laws such as the *Affirmative Action Act, Act no 29 of 1998* and the *National Gender Policy (2007)*, which are aimed at promoting women to leadership positions in our country. According to Van Rooyen (2000, p. 2), the *Affirmative Action Act*:

outlines measures that respective employers are required to adhere to in order to ensure that persons in designated groups [which include women] enjoy equal opportunities and are fairly represented in the various positions of employment.

It is clear from the literature that affirmative action and laws are used to create opportunities for women in Namibia to take up leadership opportunities. This is also opening doors for women to be promoted to become principals. However, little progress has been made so far in this respect in Namibia.

Despite the fact that research on women leadership, both in South Africa (Ngcobo, 1996; Mwingi, 1999) and Namibia (Udjombala, 2002; Kauaria, 2002) has indicated that women principals are perceived, by themselves and their followers, as capable, committed and as hard working as their male counterparts, cultural practices, gender roles and religion favour men as leaders above women (Kawana, 2004, p. 1). More women are entering formal employment positions and many of them are advancing to leadership positions. Despite this positive move, there is still evidence of discrimination in their workplace and the way they are perceived (Thawley, 2006, p. 16).

1.3 Motivation for my study

My interest in women leadership stems from my experience as the first Namibian woman to be appointed as a secondary school principal in the then Khorixas region at a relatively tender age in 1992. I served for 12 years as a secondary school principal through turbulent and exciting times. Furthermore, when I joined the Otjozondjupa Region in 2004, I found that there was only one woman principal in the Otjiwarongo circuit, if not in the whole region. Currently being one of the few female inspectors of education in Namibia, and indeed the only one in the Otjozondjupa Region, and realising that school leadership is still dominated by men and regarded as a male domain, I was curious about the issue of women leadership and the way women perceived themselves as leaders of educational organizations. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to explore the advancement of woman in leadership positions and to look at factors that have an influence on their performance.

From humble beginnings, it is quite amazing to observe that, within a period of five years in the Otjozondjupa Educational Region, the numbers of female principals increased gradually throughout the region as more women entered leadership positions which were previously male dominated. The study aims at drawing inferences on the perceptions of the primary participants, four school principals in the Otjiwarongo circuit. Though a number of studies were conducted in Namibia on woman principals, no study has as yet been conducted in this region, hence this study. It is hoped that this study will motivate and encourage future scholars to undertake in-depth research in the Region as a whole on women leadership. Furthermore, the findings of the study, it is hoped, will benefit the Ministry of Education and any other stake holders for future planning and development of human resources in the region.

Middle managers, teachers and particularly women that want to pursue their careers as principals can learn from the experiences and perceptions of these female principals. Evidently, there is a fear that women principals might be discriminated against, their authority may well be undermined and they may be seen as unfit to be principals at schools. However, this study hopes to motivate and encourage women to take up leadership positions in schools.

1.4 Research aim and questions

1.4.1 Research aim

The main focus of the study was to investigate female principals' perceptions of themselves in educational leadership. My study examined especially how they positioned themselves in professional contexts in the Otjiwarongo circuit of the Otjozondjupa region in Namibia.

1.4.2 Research questions

The following are my research questions which directed my research:

- How do women principals perceive their role in leading schools?
- What strengths do they bring to their leadership?
- What challenges do they experience in leading their schools?

1.5 Research approach

The study was carried out in the interpretive research paradigm. The reason for deciding on the interpretive paradigm was that it allows the researcher to gain understanding of specific events and insight into the phenomenon under study. My research design was a case study of four women principals' leadership experience and perceptions in the Otjiwarongo Circuit. The four principals who participated in this research were selected from the principals of the Otjiwarongo schools, and in the circuit as a whole, in the Otjozondjupa educational region in Namibia. The principals were purposively selected and also for my convenience, since the schools were located in my town.

The main source of data for my study was semi-structured interviews. There were follow-up interviews, which focused on probing further into their experiences and what makes them effective as school leaders. The focus group interview complemented my semi-structured interviews together with observation for a better understanding of how women principals are perceived in leading their schools. Data analysis occurred throughout the research process. Coding was used to identify categories and themes from interviews, the focus group interview and observation as a means of triangulation.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of the introductory chapter, a further four chapters and the concluding chapter.

The second chapter looks into the factors which created the current trends in the leadership of schools through reviewing the literature. It looks at various theories and how they influence women leadership in organizations and, in particular, schools.

The third chapter deals with the methodology of my research. This chapter deals with the case study approach adopted, it outlines the research aim and questions and also discusses the data collection methods used. These included the semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and observations that were made at each of the four schools. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the data analysis process as well as issues surrounding ethics and validity.

The fourth chapter basically deals with the presentation of findings as received from the raw data gathered from the participants.

Chapter five deals with the discussion of the research findings. The findings were compared with the existing research and literature on the topic.

In chapter six, I conclude my study by summarizing my conclusions of the main findings, guided by the themes as presented in chapter five. In this final chapter I also make some recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The numbers of professional women in the workplace are increasing by the day, now more than at any time before. This has occurred in conjunction with the ever-increasing acceptance of women as leaders and partners in the working environment. Although this amounts to a major paradigm shift in leadership in the educational profession, evidence suggests that the stereotypes are still in place which continue to pose challenges for women in leadership positions.

Various theories have been developed over the years in an attempt to understand what leadership is and how women function in leadership positions. This chapter aims to review the existing theories on leadership with special focus on women as leaders generally, and in education in particular. An extensive review will be made with special reference to the experiences of women as leaders and how they perceive themselves in leadership positions. Thus the purpose of this review is to help internalize the perceptions of women in their leadership roles. I locate this discussion within a broader discussion on leadership, which outlines how leadership thinking has evolved over many years and its implications for women leadership.

First, I begin with a discussion on the concept of leadership and continue with the evolution of leadership theory, which is traced from traditional to transformational and beyond. Secondly, I give a brief background of women leadership. Next, I discuss key issues in women leadership, namely women and gender, stereotyping, leadership, and the question of whether women lead differently from men. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the main points discussed in the chapter.

2.2 Evolution of leadership theory

In this section, I present a brief review of how leadership thinking has evolved over many years and the implications of this evolution for female leadership. I attempt to show how traditional leadership theories (pre-1980s) allowed little scope for thinking of leadership as anything other than a male domain. By contrast, post-1980s theories have increasingly emphasised the relational and interpersonal characteristics of leadership, opening up possibilities of thinking of leadership in a less gendered way. Before presenting a brief overview it may be helpful to say a few words about how management and leadership relate to each other. This is because I expect my research participants to be less sure about differences between management and leadership and while this study looks at leadership, it may frequently have to address management issues.

2.2.1 Leadership and management compared

There has always been something mysterious about leadership. For some, leaders are born; for others, leaders are groomed (Rickett, 2009, p. 4). Some would argue that everybody has an inborn leadership potential in them which needs to be ignited. Thus, leadership is a universal phenomenon, whether inborn or groomed, that needs willpower and a desire to succeed.

Before I continue with this discussion of leadership, I would like to give some definitions of leadership. Leadership, according to Dive (2008, p. 37), in his book *'The Accountable Leader'*, "is the process whereby an individual sets out a meaningful direction or line of action in such a way, that others will willingly move in that direction to the best of their abilities". House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta (2004) define it as "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of organizations of which they are members". Cuban (1988) in Bush (2003, p. 5), defines leaders as "people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieving certain goals and actions". For the purpose of this study, I define leadership as the ability to motivate, inspire and influence followers in such a way that they will willingly execute their tasks to the best of their abilities. The inferences that can be drawn from this definition for an effective leader, is their ability to influence, motivate and lead followers to achieve the organizational goals. Another assertion given by Bush (2003, p. 6) is that "leadership begins

with the character of leaders, self-awareness and emotional and moral capability”, emphasising that leadership is from a conviction of the personal and professional values of a leader. Since none of these definitions highlights attributes that are applicable to men alone, it seems that leadership scholars generally do not distinguish between men and women.

For the purposes of my study, leadership and management are two concepts that are very much interlinked and will be used as such. Many regard management to mean the same as leadership. According to Kotter and Cohen (2002), the two terms management and leadership go hand in hand. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that there is an important distinction between the two terms: leader and manager. According to Bush (2007, p. 392), the concept management overlaps with that of leadership, suggesting that although they are not identical, they have much in common. Cuban, cited in Bush (2007, p. 392), provides one of the clearest distinctions between leadership and management and links leadership with change (influencing) while management is seen as a maintenance (administering) activity. Though this is a study of leadership, I need to acknowledge that management (in the sense of maintenance and administration) is also likely to appear in my data, as mentioned earlier.

Leadership has traditionally been regarded as a masculine enterprise that poses huge challenges for women. This view raises the very interesting question of how women lead. Many researchers discuss gender differences and similarities in the ways men and women perceive themselves as leaders and engage in leadership, which I discuss in section 4 of this chapter in detail. The findings in Rosener (1990) and Eagly and Carli (2003) show that both men and women expect to lead in areas that were traditionally male dominated, thus placing women in a favourable position to become leaders in education. This is echoed by Bush and Coleman (2000, p. 33):

Theories about leadership are predominantly male. However, there is a growing body of research evidence that shows that experience and attitudes of women are different from men, and that a single male model of educational leadership is inadequate. In addition, the research evidence indicates that women are able to bring strength to leadership and management, which may be particularly appropriate to effective educational leadership today.

Having compared the concepts of leadership and management, I now move on to discuss the evolution of leadership. Trait thinking, as the point of departure of the evolution of leadership, is the subject of the subsequent section.

2.2.2 Trait thinking

The earliest leadership research explored the idea that people are born with certain character traits or qualities. According to Van der Mescht (1996, p. 16), trait thinking draws on the Aristotelian notion that “some are marked out for subjection, others for rule”. This notion clearly underlines the roles played by different people in society. It underpins the argument that men were born to lead and a women’s place is in the kitchen. As Roberts (2007, p. 43) argues:

These new industrial-era leaders were distinguished by their imposing or attractive appearance, ingenuity, perseverance, and intelligence, and the sheer force of their interpersonal influence. Such traits were assumed to be characteristics rather than qualities developed through exposure, experience, or learning.

Although the above-mentioned traits are not explicitly linked to men alone, they are regarded as typically ‘masculine’ qualities, thereby effectively excluding women from leadership. A Namibian study of leadership by Udjombala (2004, p. 1), found that “there has been a perception that the job of principalship needs certain traits and qualities that are associated with men, but not inherent in women”. However, the idea that traits are inborn and unchangeable has been increasingly challenged by theorists leading to the idea that leadership depended on the prevailing situation, which I discuss in the next section.

2.2.3 Situational leadership

The situational leadership theories tend to move beyond gender in the leadership debate. In the 1970s, Hersey and Blanchard developed a situational leadership model “which distinguishes between ‘relationship behaviour’ and ‘task behaviour’” (Van der Mescht, 1996, p. 21). As indicated by Taleb (2010, p. 290), the stereotype dictates that male leaders are likely to adopt a task-oriented style of leadership, whilst female leaders tend to be more concerned with maintaining interpersonal relationships. However, situational leadership stands for the idea that leaders are made by the prevailing situation and circumstances. Different leaders might be effective in different circumstances and leaders are selected in

line with the conditions that best suit their way of leading. Leaders should be flexible and adjust their styles, as followers and situations change. So while 'masculine' traits may be more suitable for men, leadership may depend more on the situation rather than the sex of the leader.

While situational theory as such had little to contribute to the gender debate, it forms the basis of a recent study by Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 129) on the leadership roles of males and females. In answer to the question of whether women lead better than men they conclude: "It all depends". In other words, the situation plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of leaders, whether male or female. In this sense situational theory resembles Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory, which suggests that the best results are obtained when there is a match between leadership style and situation.

While not contributing directly to the gender debate (by ignoring it), it should be noted that what the 'situation' theorists had in mind in the 1960s and 1970s would have been dominated by white males. In other words, the situations would have favoured male/masculine leadership. As from the 1970s, leadership has evolved from its bureaucratic tendency to participative democracy with transformational leadership as the most promising theory in leadership evolution. The transition from traditional leadership which started from simplistic trait thinking to transformational leadership with the orientation focusing on the interest of the group is explained in the next section.

2.2.4 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) opened a new chapter on leadership research when he introduced the concepts of transactional and transformational leadership. His view on leadership as a field with transactional leadership at one end and transformational leadership at the other has been influential. Transformational leadership became a dominant focus of research and practice for years to come.

Bass cited in Stone, Russell and Patterson, (2004, p. 350) believes transformational leadership occurs:

when leaders broaden and elevate the interest of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group.

This implies that transformational leadership focuses on the person, their influence and vision as the central issue of leadership, while transactional leadership is about task-person tension, and based on an exchange process. There is a growing argument by researchers that transformational leadership is the expansion of transactional leadership. However, effective leaders demonstrate characteristics of transactional and transformational leadership and both are still applicable for women leadership practice. This development drew attention to the gender issue in leadership as explained below.

Bass and Riggio (2006, pp. 114 - 115) indicate that to be effective in today's world, leaders need to be more transformational and there is growing evidence that women, as a group, are more disposed to transformational leadership behaviours. Furthermore, in line with that, Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 118) state:

If elements of charismatic and transformational leadership are analysed, they suggest that women might be more likely to engage in transformational leader behaviours and more effective transformational leaders than men.

The above sentiments on women and leadership are supported by Karuk (2004, p. 161) when he states, "the current conception of transformational leadership emphasises ... follower empowerment". This clearly emphasises the involvement of people in leadership. Karuk (*ibid*) argues that contemporary organizational changes and management theories stress the need of organizations to become less hierarchical, more flexible, team-oriented, and participative. Karuk (2004, p. 161) continues that the "massive increase of women in the workplace over the last half century, followed by their movement to management roles, have led to changes in the understanding of leadership towards followers empowerment and transformational leadership theory".

This notion resonates with studies conducted in Namibia. Kawana (2004, p. 77) found that female principals in Namibia were perceived as good leaders because they are good listeners, caring and self-disciplined - qualities usually associated with women, but also with contemporary notions of leadership. As indicated earlier, Kauaria (2002, p. 22) proposes that typical transformational leadership includes behaviours like participatory decision-making, collaboration, empowerment and quality interpersonal relationships between

leader and subordinate. This clearly promotes building of group commitment in leadership. Van der Westhuizen (1991, p. 527) cautions that these 'soft' qualities should not be regarded as being counterproductive or professionally negative, but rather as assets. As mentioned before, these 'soft' qualities would not have been included in trait theory thinking, nor would they have concerned situational theorists or featured strongly in the task-person tension that dominated leadership studies during the 1960s and 70s.

It is possible to argue that transformational leadership promoted the democratisation of organisations by balancing the task and person tension. Transformational leaders engage with staff and other stakeholders to produce higher levels of commitment to achieve the goals of the organisation. Kawana (2004) states that "although transformational leadership appears to be the model for effective leadership, some researchers are still uncertain whether there is a sufficiently solid body of evidence to support its effectiveness". In fact, according to Chirichello, (1999) in Bush (2010, p. 84), transformational leadership "may also be criticized as being a vehicle for control over teachers and more likely to be accepted by the leader than the led". Typical characteristics of transformational leaders are that they tend to be seen as heroes with charisma.

The last few decades have seen a move beyond heroic leadership, manifested in the need to move beyond transformational leadership towards contemporary leadership theories. Interestingly, this shift may be interpreted as a response to the dearth of moral, effective, trustworthy leadership in the world at large. As systems begin to fail, the ordinary citizen and so much of what has been taken for granted falls apart, like the world economy. The world seems to be saying that it is no longer wise to depend on leaders.

Hence, transformational leadership which focuses on the individual, has made way for theories which regard leadership as a group activity, something 'owned by' everyone. A selection of these theories is the subject of the next section.

2.2.5 Contemporary leadership theories

According to Bush (2010, p. 203), the essential characteristics of contemporary theories are their focus "on multiple individual perceptions rather than 'objective' reality... with power being distributed throughout the school rather than being the preserve of the formal

leaders". This signalled a move towards flatter organisational structures which brought out a sense of belonging and a sharing of power in decision making, leading to shared responsibilities within the organisations. Recent literature indicates a move beyond transformational leadership. The need for the shift is clearly indicated by Hindi and Duignan (1997) in Thawley (2006, p. 15):

The emphasis was on goal achievement rather than on serving the customer; on productivity rather than on market needs and quality; on outcomes rather than on ethical and moral responsibility; on dependency rather than mutuality; on predictability rather than continuous change and improvement; on gamesmanship rather on authenticity.

These leadership theories are also referred to as post-modern leadership theories. I hope to show that women leaders who practise contemporary leadership are more likely to succeed in being effective leaders in their schools. I discuss distributive leadership and servant leadership as examples of contemporary leadership theories.

2.2.5.1 Distributed leadership

Distributive leadership is a contemporary theory. Spillane (2005, p. 144) depicts distributed leadership as follows:

Distributive leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures; leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation; the distributed perspective defines it as the interactions between people and their situation.

From the above, it is deducible that the core aspect in distributed leadership is the practice and that all other aspects are regarded as secondary. However, leadership practice does not operate in isolation, but exists in the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation. This is best summed up by Spillane (2005, p. 145):

First, leadership practice typically involves multiple leaders, some with and some without formal leadership positions. It is essential, therefore, to move beyond viewing leadership in terms of superhuman actions. Second, leadership practice is not something done to followers. From a distributed perspective, followers are one of the three constituting elements of leadership practice. Third, it is not the actions of individuals, but the interactions among them, that are critical in leadership practice.

Both quotations make the surprising statement that it is in the interactions between and among members of the organisation that leadership lives. This statement alone shows how far distributed leadership has moved from transformational, where the key concept was influence. Spillane and Harris (2008, p. 31) concur that distributive leadership replaces the model of “heroic” leaders and that leadership is focused on teams rather than individuals; further, leadership is the domain of all, teachers and staff as well as learners. They further argue that distributed leadership takes cognizance of multiple leaders and refer to the fact that within an organization, leadership activities are widely shared. Similar views are shared by Bush (2010) when he argues that distributive leadership focuses on the collective rather than the singular.

The question arises: Does distributed leadership have anything to say about women leaders? According to Gentry et al., (2010, p. 289) inclusiveness, collaboration, participation, and interaction are associated with women’s roles. Women tend to be associated with characteristics typical of distributed leadership and it is against this background that I included it to assist me with my study to get a better understanding of my data. A phenomenological study of women leaders by Fennell (2002), similarly found that women are more interested in relationships than results and if relationships are central to distributed leadership there is no reason why women should not excel at distributing leadership throughout the organisations they lead.

2.2.5.2 Servant leadership

As is the case with distributive leadership, servant leadership is also one of the contemporary approaches to leadership. According to Bush (2007, p. 399), servant leadership is based on his “cultural model”. In cultural models, organisation members consciously work towards particular organisational cultures. Spears (2005, p. 2) refers to the work of Greenleaf, who developed this notion of leadership out of a concern that organizations were not serving the world’s needs, as follows:

Servant leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, and then learn to lead as servant. Greenleaf said that a servant-leader is one who is a servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. In *The Servant as Leader* he wrote: It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to inspire to lead. The difference

manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest-priority needs are being served.

Another definition by Laub (1999, p. 83) refers to servant leadership in terms of its practice as follows:

Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Servant leadership promotes the valuing and development of people, the community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led, and the sharing of power and the status for the common good of each individual, the total organization, and those served by the organization.

For Cerit (2008, p. 603), servant leadership is a clear advance on transformational leadership, since:

Transformational leaders' primary focus is on the organization, with follower development and empowerment being secondary to the accomplishment of organizational objectives. In contrast, the servant leader is one who focuses on his or her followers, and one who is a servant first.

These 'definitions' place a high premium on serving and catering for the needs of followers and community-building above self-interest. According to Russell (cited in Thawley, 2006, p, 15), the concept of servant leadership moves towards the improvement of those within the organisation and is based on strong personal values like listening, empathy and commitment to the growth of others. As was the case with distributed leadership, it is possible to argue that women are constantly aware of the needs of their subordinates and due to their instinctive caring nature are most likely to be associated with servant leadership. In addition, servant leaders would be more focused on the emotional welfare of followers than transformational leaders (Smith et al., 2004, p. 85). A servant leadership focus is closely linked to women leadership through its emphasis on emotional intelligence.

This clearly ties in with the socially constructed view of women and their way of leading that puts the interests of others first as they are always regarded as a 'mother figure', caring and nurturing of others and also willing to share power through involvement with stakeholders. Thus, servant leadership can be seen as an approach characterized by its ability to be used in managing educational institutions whose main function is to develop people. Moreover, servant leadership is based on moral principles and moves away from leadership as the responsibility of one person, towards the sharing of power in decision making. Servant

leadership moves towards shared and collective involvement in leadership. The stereotypical view that women are more caring and nurturing, makes their leadership style typically that of a servant leader. Socially they are seen as mothers who put the needs of others above their own.

Next I present a brief history of women leadership.

2.3 History of women leadership

Enomoto (2000) affirms that historically men have dominated leadership positions in public education and that women realised that for them to enter male-dominated leadership positions, they had to be educated. That is why women in the past voiced their ideas and opinions about establishing educational organizations for women, which included early feminists Mary Wollstonecraft and Catherine Beecher, the school principal Ella Flagg Young, and human resources theorist Mary Parker Follett.

Furthermore, Enomoto (2000, pp. 375 - 376) sketches the time-frame during the civil rights and feminist movements. This era which begun in the 1960s showed that women gradually took up increasing numbers of leadership positions as they began to get more access to previously male dominated positions. With more and more women in leadership positions, they have brought in alternative approaches as alluded to by Enomoto (2000, p. 376):

By integrating in school [leadership], women... have brought alternative approaches to educational leadership, and have recast the meaning of... leadership for all aspirants.

Besides pressure from the feminist movements, there have been other contributing factors to women's increased access to leadership positions. Oplatka (2006, p. 605) argues that women's employment opportunities as well as professional development opened up due to the rapid modernisation process. He further indicated that it led to an increase in the number of women in teaching and in leadership within many developing countries. Oplatka (2006) provides an example of East Asia where the industrial boom of the 1980s opened additional employment opportunities for women.

The conclusion is that modernization and industrialization historically have necessitated increased opportunities and access to women in education in many western countries, because of our advanced technological society's need for professional employees. However,

according to Oplatka (2006), the factors that led to the development and empowerment of women were amongst others, higher education and economic factors. Whilst this was the situation in many developing countries, it was not the case in South Africa and Namibia.

Namibia was a colony of South Africa and shares a similar history to South Africa in terms of women leadership. According to Nkomo and Littrell (2005, p. 563), South Africa had two colonial rulers, the British and the Dutch Afrikaners, who operated at the same time, followed by the government of apartheid. Nkomo and Littrell (2005, p. 653) continue: "The separation was prevalent in all aspects of life from education to employment. The historical racial division was accompanied by patriarchy with women of all races subordinate to males".

Furthermore, for Nkomo and Littrell (2005, p. 564), research suggests that "women in South Africa face similar barriers to their progress and upward mobility as their female counterparts in the rest of the world". A study done by Erasmus (1998) on South African career women indicates that:

In spite of being talented, educated and committed to their careers, misconceptions and stereotyping hindered women's upward mobility. Women were perceived as not having leadership potential and that their leader behaviour differs from traditional male leaders (Nkomo & Littrell, 2005, p. 565 cited in Erasmus 1998).

This was also the case for women in Namibia before independence. According to *Vision 2030* (Namibia, p. 108), the colonial era strengthened women's traditional subordination. It indicated that before independence, women were poorly represented in all positions of influence. No women were school principals, inspectors or heads of department (HODs), except two women who were in senior positions in the civil service. It showed the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the education sector, a fact echoed by Kawana (2004, p. 23): "In Namibia as is the case in many countries women far outnumber men in professions like teaching and nursing, but they are the minority decision makers".

Policy provision has led to gender empowerment and more access for women to leadership positions. As has been discussed, before independence of Namibia, women were not really visible in leadership positions. After independence and because of the country's policy of democracy and equity as discussed in chapter one, women could claim their place in

leadership positions. How policies influence the access of women in leadership positions in Namibia is the topic of the following section.

2.4 Policy and women leadership

In Namibia, the *Affirmative Action, Employment Act, Act 29 of 1998*, the Namibian Constitution together with policies that were introduced after independence, supported gender equality. The Namibian Constitution makes provision for women to be in leadership positions through affirmative action in Article 23, which stipulates:

It shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation (The Constitution of Namibia, n.d, p. 16)

Affirmative action was introduced to root out inequalities stemming from past discriminatory practices. The *National Gender Policy (NGP)* and the *National Gender Plan of Action (NGPA)* are national documents in which strategies for equality in gender within the country are reflected. Namibia recently revised its *National Gender Policy of 1997*, due to the discovery that new issues emerged which the old gender policy did not make provision for. In addition to the policy provisions, the Ministry of Gender Affairs and Child Welfare and The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Gender and Social Affairs were created to specifically address gender imbalance in Namibian society which is a clear indication of the seriousness towards the role of women in leadership.

However, political and legal intentions do not always translate into improved practice and the outcomes can take generations to come to fruition. The fact that little progress has been made is confirmed by LaFont and Hubbard in *Unravelling Taboos: Gender and Sexuality in Namibia* (2007, p. 4). They state that, “Dianne Hubbard, in the chapter entitled ‘Gender and Sexuality: The Law Reform Landscape’, points out that legal reform has not necessarily translated into attitudinal and behavioural changes. For example, the *Married Persons Equality Act 1 of 1996* granted women equal legal status in their household, yet most women do not seem to enjoy equality within the family in practice” (*ibid*).

Recently a local paper, The New Era, 01 April 2011, reported that the Employment Equity Commission (EEC) is encouraging employers to eliminate discrimination of any sort and

comply with legal provisions in Namibia. It proceeds by indicating that failing to comply with the provisions of the *Affirmative Action Act of 1998* would lead to a fine. According to New Era, 01 April 2011, the EECs responsibility is to enforce compliance in line with provisions of the Act. The very fact that such heavy-handed threats are necessary, indicates how slow progress has been. It is important to bear these realities in mind since principals, as school leaders, do not operate in a vacuum and to a large extent would continue to be hampered in their work by what society expects.

A brief look at this issue in South Africa would be interesting. Here I draw heavily on a study done in South Africa by Moorosi (2007). Her study produced similar findings to those outlined above. Moorosi (2007, p. 508) argues that “although South African policy guarantees equal treatment of everyone before the law ... the reality of woman principals’ experiences suggests that women fight a constant battle against discrimination”. This is a clear indication of the continued existence of barriers in women’s upward movement in educational organisations. Policies and law alone will not redress inequality: its success is grounded in changing attitudes.

This notion is echoed by Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 122) in the context of the United Kingdom, who indicated that a number of studies noted the generally negative perceptions held of women leaders. This apparent contradiction lies at the heart of various international studies; it became important for me to investigate what women’s experiences of leadership really were in the context of Namibia.

In this sense this study joins a growing body of work on women as leaders in the field of Educational Leadership and Management. Due to the constant growth in numbers of women in leadership positions, there is an increasing amount of interest in leadership styles. Since leadership is a gendered issue, researchers’ attention becomes drawn to the experiences of women leaders (Coleman, 2002). This leads me into a discussion of some of the key issues surrounding women in leadership positions in the next section.

2.5 Key issues in women leadership

There are many issues and apparently insurmountable challenges in women leadership. Some of the key issues in women leadership are considered in the subsequent sections.

2.5.1 Women and leadership styles: Do women lead differently from men?

Taleb (2010, p. 290) indicates that the term “leadership style” can be interpreted as behaviour with two obviously inter-dependent dimensions: task and interpersonal relationships. Tasks include goal-setting, organization, direction and control, whilst interpersonal relationships embrace interaction, support, communication and active listening. This chapter has tried to show that women tend to favour relationships which in part explain their suitability to contemporary approaches.

It is difficult to find an ideal definition of leadership style; however, in my view, there are numerous factors that shape a leadership style. Centry, Booyesen, Hannum and Weber (2010, p. 289) indicate that “the meta-analysis of Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that women held a more participative and democratic style of leadership, and men were more task-oriented, utilizing a more autocratic, controlling, or directive style of leadership”. Another meta-analysis as recorded in Centry et al., (2010) found that women emerged as leaders on social measures or interpersonal aspects of leadership, while men emerged as leaders on task-oriented measures of leadership.

But does this amount to what one might call a female leadership style? According to Eagly and Carli (2003, p. 808), the fact that a manager is male or female does not reflect his/her own effectiveness as leader. This implies that there is no reason to ask, ‘Who is the more effective leader?’ as effectiveness in a leadership position is not gender-based.

This argument has significant support. For example, Galanaki et al., (2009, pp. 488 - 489) argue that “leadership talent exists in both sexes and an advanced and democratic society is responsible for ensuring the appropriate ways and structures for the development of such a talent”. Studies done by Andersson and Hannson, (2011, p. 430) conclude that there is “little reason to believe that women and men are different types of managers”. According to Andersson and Hannson (2011), two other studies done by Gibson (1995) and Van Engen et al., (2001) have also not found gender differences in leadership-style dimensions and in behaviour. These findings pave the way for considering an androgynous leadership which will be discussed next.

Androgynous leadership includes masculine and feminine styles as employed by both men and women. It seems to indicate that to regard either male or female leadership styles as the best, is missing the point. Both women and men are suitable for modern organizations and they can only benefit by deploying both feminine and masculine leadership approaches. In line with this view, Pounder and Coleman (2002, p, 127) state:

Modern leaders are urged to be androgynous, a term that is used to describe a leader, regardless of biological gender, able to combine the best of male and female leadership traits. Arguably, the androgynous leadership is the style relevant to managing modern organizations with their “multi-gender”, multinational and multi-social environments.

Bass and Riggio (2006) similarly express themselves in favour of androgynous leadership. They postulate that “the balancing required of task and relations orientation leads to the propositions that the best leadership may be found in androgynous attitudes and behaviours” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. 114). As far as differences between men and women in leadership positions are concerned, contradictory views appear in the literature as indicated below.

According to Okafor, Fagbemi and Hassan (2011, p. 6718), “an argument has evolved over the last few decades which question whether women manage or lead differently from the ways men do”. According to these authors (2011, p. 6718), there are three views on this argument. The first view is that “women do lead differently”, which postulates that women inherently possess or develop certain traits that diverge from male leadership characteristics. The second is an opposing argument which suggests that there are few or no gender differences in leadership styles. The third position on this issue dismisses the differences in the leadership style debate as being “inconsequential” and instead stresses the importance of the end result.

However, this chapter has also shown that many scholars believe the opposite. Udjombala (2002, p. 2) argues that “examples of research that have been carried out on women principals indicate that successful women school principals use ... leadership approaches different from those normally associated with men”. Oplatka (2006, p. 608) adds that “female principals commonly tend to adopt a democratic, participative style, to pay much attention to vision-building for the school, to spend much time in change initiation and implementation, and to be attuned to curriculum and teaching issues”.

A slightly different perspective is provided by Eagly (2007, p. 4) when he states:

Women are faced with accommodating the sometimes conflicting demands of their roles as women and their roles as leaders. In general, people expect and prefer that women be communal, manifesting traits such as kindness, concern for others, warmth, and gentleness and that men be agentic, manifesting traits such as confidence, aggressiveness, and self-direction.

As already alluded to earlier, most women portray feminine traits which are inherent human qualities and which enable women to achieve human leadership in line with their gender. Ironically, if women principals remain in line with their feminine traits they might “be perceived as consistent with their gender and may receive higher acceptance from teachers” (Shum & Cheng, 1997, p. 181). But they may be failing to lead holistically and effectively.

It is therefore fair to conclude that women leaders lead differently. However, it is difficult to ascribe this to the difference in gender. In the case that gender is regarded as a contributing factor, it is not the only attribute accountable for the differences in women leadership. Stereotyping and other factors, for example, power relations, also play a role, as does the situation as discussed earlier.

This resonates with my argument that both men and women can be effective leaders depending on circumstances and prevailing situations. But what role does stereotyping play in our perceptions?

2.5.2 Stereotyping and leadership styles

In light of the literature’s leaning towards an androgynous leadership style, it seems obvious that stereotyping can only have negative effects on our understanding.

Elmuti, Hija and Davis (2009, p. 172) suggest that past perceptions of leadership skills, competence, aggressiveness, task-oriented leadership abilities and assertiveness, might hinder the ability of women to succeed in management. Stereotypes of women include the expectations of being modest, quiet, selfless, and nurturing which could be equally damaging when women leaders need to be assertive. Stereotyping suggests that men become leaders because of their task-orientation and this has been accepted as a normal tendency but, as I have shown, contemporary theories emphasise behaviours that are the

opposite of these. As Galanaki et al. (2009, p. 487) put it, “the maintenance of stereotypes about limited female leadership skills perpetuates discrimination against women and discourages them from taking advantage of their leadership competences”.

The respect, acceptance and authority that are attached to the position of a school principal might be under threat from those in the grip of stereotypes. However, it is the responsibility of the women principal to rise above stereotypes and gender-based discrimination and other challenges, and to prosper in school leadership positions. The job description and expectations for women principals are the same as for the men.

However, it would be naïve to imagine that moving beyond stereotyping is a simple matter. Coats as cited in Kauaria (2002, p. 10) argues:

We live in a gendered society, where not only women’s experiences are different to those of men but those differences lead to discrimination and disadvantages. The central task of patriarchy was the transformation of women from sexual beings to women as mothers.

Apart from women viewed as mothers, Centry et al. (2010) indicate that people do things that are in harmony with their gender roles. They argue: “the assumption is that females would act, behave, and respond as a leader in ways that fit their gender role, and males would act, behave, and respond as a leader in ways that fit their gender role” (p. 289). From my experience and observations, boys and girls are raised differently, with different toys and roles in the home.

2.5.3 Power

Power is the ability to influence others. Leadership suggests power by implication, while power comes in many forms. Different researchers have different perspectives on power. Burns as quoted in Fennell (2002, p. 95) views power as “ubiquitous; it permeates human relationships... power shows many forms”. Furthermore, Foucault as quoted by Fennell states that “in reality power means relations, a more or less organised hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations”. In addition to that, Miller (1992) in Fennell (2002, p. 95), defines power as the capacity to produce change. This view of power – as a process, a relationship, rather than a force or threat – emerged strongly in Fennell’s study. The six women principals she studied experienced power as potential, a positive force for good,

rather than a controlling force for submission and compliance. This 'creative' view of power could emerge as one of the key characteristics of women leadership in my study.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides a conceptual framework for the study. Key issues dealt with, include the presentation of gender in leadership and particularly how women are pictured in various leadership theories. It was found that contemporary theories seem to favour women's inherent qualities. The chapter also provides a brief historical overview of women in leadership.

Among the barriers to women leaders dealt with, are those stemming from culture and societal stereotyping. This leads to the question of whether women lead in uniquely different ways from men, a question that is perhaps not useful to pursue since situation is a stronger determinant of leadership style.

In conclusion, I showed how access to leadership has led to more women in leadership positions. Women in leadership positions have a significant impact on the national economies of their countries and there are indications of increased participation going further into the 21st century; thus leadership and gender issues remain significant topics. Finally the chapter looked at how women experience power.

In the next chapter I discuss the methodology used to conduct my study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research paradigm and the methodology of this study, which is a blueprint of the research activities that I have carried out in this research.

First, I describe the goal of my study. Secondly, since the aim of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience and perceptions of women in leadership, I explain why I worked in the interpretive paradigm and discuss it. Thirdly, I discuss case study as a research approach. I then discuss sampling and my data collection tools, which were the semi-structured interviews as my primary tool, as well as a focus group interview and observation for the purposes of triangulation. Data analysis was done through repeated reading and coding for categorization of data. Lastly, I discuss how I address the ethical considerations and the validity of my research.

3.2. Research goals and questions

My research goal was to investigate how women experience and perceive themselves in educational leadership in their professional contexts. This research sought to explore how women position themselves as principals of schools in the Otjiwarongo circuit in Namibia. My research questions were as follows:

- How do women principals perceive their role in leading schools?
- What strengths do they bring to their leadership?
- What challenges do they experience in leading their schools?

3.3. Research design

In this section I discuss the research design of this study which was qualitative in nature and fell within the interpretive paradigm. The study was designed as a case study and a range of methods were used to collect the data.

3.3.1 Qualitative research design

The study was carried out in a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004, p. 5) describe qualitative research as “a research form, approach or strategy that allows for a different view of the theme that is studied and in which the respondents have a more open-ended way of giving their views and demonstrating actions”. Qualitative research is a study where the “qualities, the characteristics or the properties of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation (Henning, et al., 2004). According to Creswell (2002), in Maree (2007, p. 259), qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding where a researcher develops a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. Creswell further indicates that “in qualitative research, a researcher often approaches reality from a constructivist position, which allows for multiple meanings of individual experiences” (*ibid*, p. 259). The qualitative researcher studies the human action from the ‘insider’ perspective with the goal of describing and understanding human action (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 646).

3.3. 2 Interpretive research paradigm

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 22), “the interpretive theory becomes sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people’s behaviour. This indicates the understanding of reality as the people experienced it”. This made the interpretive paradigm appropriate for my study. Furthermore, Cohen et al., postulate that the “interpretive paradigm is characterised by a concern for the individual and focus on individual and action” (*ibid*, p. 21).

According to Jackson (2003), the interpretive paradigm involves the understanding and interpretation of human action. In Coleman and Briggs, cited in Jean-Louis (2004, p. 43), “the interpretive paradigm is an appropriate approach in educational research as all educational research needs to be grounded in people’s experience...for interpretivists, the core task is to view research participants as research subjects and to explore the ‘meanings’ of events and phenomena from the subjects’ perspectives”. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 21) state that “the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience”.

As a result, the data that I collected as part of my interpretive research included the meanings and purposes of the four principals that I worked with. Ponterotto (2005, p. 129) maintains that “meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection. It is only through interaction that deeper meaning can be uncovered”. Thus, this paradigm enabled me to enter and grasp the subjective meaning of the female principals’ experiences, instead of imposing my views of the world on them. This put me in a position to understand the principals’ reality as they experienced it and makes the interpretive paradigm the appropriate method to use for my study.

Interpretive research provides new insights into well-known phenomenon, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) indicate. They suggest that interpretive research may be thought of as “behaviour-with-meaning. It is intentional behaviour and as such future oriented” (p. 21), thus it was appropriate for my research to get a new understanding of the phenomenon of women leadership in the Otjiwarongo circuit in Namibia. The data that I collected included the meanings and purposes of those women who were my participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 21), interpretive researchers “begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them”. The four female principals in the Otjiwarongo circuit expressed their reality in terms of their experiences and perceptions of leadership in the school context. In the interpretive research approach, the researcher is the main instrument in data collection and analysis. I made use of the interpretive paradigm to help me to focus on my research on the principals by making use of the case study approach.

3.3.3 Case study

I adopted a case study approach to investigate the experiences of women principals and how they are perceived in leading their schools. According to Bloor and Wood (2006, p. 27), a “case study is a strategy of research that aims to understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings”. Furthermore, they indicate that a case study “provides description through a detailed example or to generate or test particular theories” (*ibid*). Case studies, according to Yin (2003, p. 1), “are the preferred

strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within the real-life context". I sought to establish the way women perceive leadership by dwelling on their experiences in order to uncover how they are perceived in a gendered context. A case study would help me observe particular participants in their specific natural context, which was appropriate for my study.

Led by my research goals, I believe that the case study method provided the best way to explore the female principals' experiences and expectations of leadership in schools. Case study research has been used successfully in social science research, sociology and many other areas of research (Yin, 1994). According to Bromley (1990), in Nieuwenhuis, (2007, p. 75), a "case study is a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which claims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest". The case study research method, according to Yin in Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 75), is:

an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple resources of evidence are used.

According to Rule and John (2011, p. 117), case studies can be presented as "story (narrative), as word picture (descriptive) and argument (discourse)". My case study is descriptive and provides a unique example of real people in real situations - the experiences of women leaders in a school environment. The case study enabled me to provide rich description of events relevant to the case being studied.

One of the weaknesses of a case study approach, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), is that the results of a case study may not be generalized, except where other researchers see their applications. Sherman and Webb (1988), cited in Kauaria, (2002, p. 35), argue that "a basic social process would be identified to people in similar situations". My study sought to understand my participants' interpretations of leadership and not to prove anything. Thus my findings cannot be generalized to the whole of the Otjozondjupa region or the Otjiwarongo circuit. There seems to be resonance between case study and interpretive methodology.

3.4 Research participants and sample size

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 100), “the quality of a piece of research stands or falls not only by the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation, but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy adopted”.

From this point of view, four women principals were selected as the primary participants in this study. They were all part of the Otjiwarongo circuit and it was easy to access their schools since they were located in my home town. I also knew them personally and they were more than willing to participate in the study. Three of the principals were primary school principals and one was a principal of a secondary school. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the four schools in which the principals worked and they were also used to refer to the principals.

The pseudonyms for the four schools are as follows:

- Principal A’s School = Claude Primary school (CPS)
- Principal B’s School = Ernrichell Primary School (EPS)
- Principal C’s School = Danica Secondary school (DSS)
- Principal D’s School = Millenni Combined School (MCS)

The four principals are referred to as PA, PB, PC and PD for confidentiality and ethical reasons. The principals and schools will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. These women principals were purposely selected because of their gender. In addition, convenience sampling was also applied. The sample was therefore largely selected in line with Merriam’s (2001, p. 61) guideline: “The criteria you establish for purposeful sampling directly reflect the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases”. My sampling saved me time and money since my participants lived in my home town and were easy to contact. In addition to the primary participants, four woman education officers who worked in the Otjiwarongo circuit were also included as secondary participants in my study. As women leaders, they were selected to shed more light on experiences and perceptions of women leadership. They were selected in a bid towards triangulation of the views and experiences of women leaders operating in the region.

3.5 Data collection methods

The data collection period was over six weeks. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 181), “the qualitative researcher is able to use a variety of techniques for gathering information”. They further indicate that “the researcher can use field notes, participant observation, journal notes, interviews, diaries, life histories, artefacts, documents, video recordings, audio recordings etc”.

Qualitative data collection methods were selected for this study, since I needed to generate data rich in detail, which was imbedded in context. Three data collection instruments were used in this study. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were used, secondly, a focus group interview was completed and finally, observation was used. The data was primarily collected through individual semi-structured interviews, since my main goal was to get the unique perceptions of each woman leader about her leadership in the school. In addition, I used one focus group interview, consisting of the four women education officers from the Otjiwarongo Education Regional Office. These officers worked with the principals from the four schools in my study. Informal observation was also undertaken as a third data collection method. More detail on the methods is provided below.

3.5.1. Semi-structured interviews

According to Kvale (1996) cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 349), “an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest and sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data”. In addition, Bloor and Wood (2006, p. 104) describe semi-structured interviews as having “a more informal, conversational character, being shaped partly by the interviewer’s pre-existing topic guide and partly by concerns that are emergent in the interview”.

Rule and John (2011, p. 65), state that “a semi-structured interview would involve a set of pre-set questions which initiate the discussion, followed by further questions which arise from the discussion”.

Semi structured interviews were the primary source of my data collection process and I developed an interview schedule to guide the interviews (See Addendum A). During the

interview process, I was able to personalize questions and also probe the responses of the participants in terms of gathering further information on different aspects. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the four female principals to capture data. The interviews lasted between 50-65 minutes. Since my study was designed just to focus on women as leaders and not compare them to men as leaders, I had to do follow-up interviews to probe more deeply into the characteristics these women leaders brought to schools that made them effective leaders. The follow-up interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

A semi-structured interview, according to Rule and John (2010, p. 65), “allows for more flexibility during data collection and creates space for the interviewer to pursue lines of enquiry stimulated by the interview”. In line with the definition for semi-structured interviews, participants were asked questions on the interview schedule, and they were at liberty to give their views on the topic in their own time, without being interrupted. As such, semi-structured interviews gave participants the freedom to express themselves.

The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the permission of the participants and the responses were transcribed. Voice recording allowed me to keep eye contact with the participants and also to quote statements made during the interview. I also took notes of the key words in participants’ answers. Note taking helped in formulating follow-up questions and further probing during interviews. Note taking also served as a backup in case of technical problems.

Interviews with two participants were conducted in English and the other two participants were interviewed in Afrikaans since they preferred to be interviewed in that language. My proficiency in both languages is adequate enough to conduct interviews in either language and I translated where necessary. All interviews were transcribed and the interviews in Afrikaans were translated into English. The questions for the principals’ interviews are included as Addendum E and F.

3.5.2 Focus group discussions

The focus group was the second tool that I used to generate data as a means to triangulate the emerging data. Bloor and Wood (2006, p. 88) define focus group interviews as a “series of audio-recorded group discussions held with differently composed groups of individuals

and facilitated by a researcher, where the aim is to provide data on group beliefs and group norms in respect of a particular topic or set of issues". According to Rule and John (2011, p. 66):

Focus groups are useful for gaining a sense of the range and diversity of views, of whose views are dominant and marginal in the group, of resistance and dissent, and of how dialogue shifts the understanding of members of the group.

The focus group consisted of the four women education officers. Three of these women are subject advisors and one is a human resource officer who is also leading a number of subordinates in the division. Rule and John (2011, p. 66) indicate the purpose of focus groups as "the interaction among participants". To this end, the aim was to find out how these education officers experienced leadership and what made female leaders effective in their organizations. I probed into how the women principals are viewed and challenges they may have experienced in their leadership.

The questions for the focus group interview are included as Addendum G.

3.5.3 Observation

My third tool was observation of the leading role the four principals played in the organising of structures, events and general day-to-day happenings at their respective schools, as well as their relationships with their colleagues. Observation is defined by Gorman and Clayton (2005, p. 40) as "the systematic recording of observable phenomena of behaviour in a natural setting". De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005, p. 281) state that "in participant observation the gathering of data boils down to the actual observation and the taking of field notes". I drew up an observation schedule, which is included as Addendum H. I used it to observe each of the four female principals in their schools during morning briefings, assemblies, two school board meetings and one scheduled cluster meeting for primary schools. The duration for observation was four days at each of the four schools. The object of my observations was to consolidate and enrich the data captured from the interview sessions. Merriam (2001, p. 96) says that "during observation the ... observer obtains first-hand information and sees things as they are happening and the observer does not rely on what is in the interviews".

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis requires a coherent and systematic approach. This process involves, among others, recording of data, sorting of data, categorizing of data, determining of themes, cross indexing of data, and transcribing of data as described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, pp. 183 - 184):

Data analysis involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining the data: in short, making sense of data in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities.

Normally, in qualitative research, the analytical process begins during data collection as the data already gathered are analysed and also shape the on-going data collection.

The qualities of the voice recordings were good and, as part of this on-going data analysis process, I transferred digital audio recordings from the digital voice recorder to the computer. The transcription of the interviews and discussions from the focus group was on-going. The next step was to read through the transcripts and identify the recurring issues, coding the data into categories, and refining my understanding of the subject matter. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 462) state that "early analysis reduces the problem of data overload by selecting out the significant features for future focus". Thus, I read through the transcriptions and typed up the issues and categories as they occurred in the different interviews. I also typed the different answers to the questions. Coded data from the interviews and focus group were compared with observation notes to create themes through triangulation.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 141), "triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviours". This strategy is likely to provide rich, in-depth, trustworthy findings. The data I obtained from observation was not as much as I had planned, since by the time that I started to do observation, no official meetings involving all my participants, took place. However, I could observe morning briefings, morning assemblies, one cluster meeting and two school board meetings at each of the schools. The data I got was useful and was incorporated wherever it was relevant into the identified categories.

3.7 Ethical issues

Permission was granted by the Regional Director of the Otjozondjupa Educational Region in Namibia, before conducting the research. This was done in line with Bloor and Wood's (2006, p. 64) definition of ethics as "guidelines or sets of principles for good professional practice which serve to advise and steer researchers as they conduct their work". The participants were provided with consent letters where the purpose and methods of data collection for this study were clearly explained (See Addendum B). Pseudonyms were chosen for the schools and the principals to ensure anonymity. The identity of the female principals was kept anonymous and they are referred to in the study as principal A, B, C and D.

My position as inspector of education also posed ethical problems. Researching principals who fall under my supervision can be problematic as the respondents may not be prepared to reveal their challenges to me as their supervisor. I explained to my participants that the research was not a fault-finding exercise or an evaluation, but an attempt to understand the complexity of being a woman leader in education.

I informed the participants about the status of their involvement and that their participation was voluntary. The participants were at liberty to withdraw at any time. The participants could have withdrawn all or part of their contributions from this study at any given time but, to build trust, I reassured them of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

3.8 Validity and trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity and reliability refer to trustworthiness. In other words, they refer to the extent to which the researcher says what happened can be believed to have happened, and is not just a figment of their imagination. Bloor and Wood (2006, p. 147) define the two concepts as follows:

Reliability is the extent to which research produces the same results when replicated.
Validity is the extent to which the research produces an accurate version of the world.

Detailed narrative reporting and direct quotations from respondents provide evidence that I did interview my participants.

According to Firestone (1987), as quoted in Merriam (2001), “a qualitative study provides the reader with a depiction in enough detail to show that the author’s conclusion make sense” (p. 199). In other words, they strengthen the validity. The different data collected from the three data collection methods were triangulated to strengthen findings. Follow-up discussions were held with all the participants. I ensured validity by leaving a clear data audit trail. All instruments used for data collection purposes will be kept safe for a period to be retrieved if need be.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented and explained the research methodology. I gave the definition of the research process as well as the definitions for the research instruments used. The method used to analyse data was discussed and justified, linking it up with the research questions and goal. Ethical implications were also considered, which included my position as the supervisor of the primary participants which might have a bearing on the responses obtained throughout the research process, as previously mentioned. Lastly, issues concerning the trustworthiness of the study were cited.

The next chapter presents the data collected from the participants during the semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview and field notes from observation.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data gleaned from interviews, a focus group and observation. Firstly, I give the background of the research site to contextualize the study. Secondly, I give a biographical sketch of the four principals that were the primary participants in my study. Thirdly, I present the data in categories as they emerged through data analysis. Lastly, I give a brief summary of the findings to conclude the chapter.

4.2 Organisation and coding

The data presents women's perceptions of their leadership styles. As outlined in the previous chapter, the data included individual interviews and follow-up interviews with the principals. The four principals are referred to as PA, PB, PC and PD. Data also included a focus group interview and observation as a means of triangulation.

The pseudonyms for the four schools are as follow:

- Principal A's School = Claude Primary school (CPS)
- Principal B's School = Ernrichell Primary School (EPS)
- Principal C's School = Danica Secondary school (DSS)
- Principal D's School = Millenni Combined School (MCS)

The secondary participants are indicated as follows:

- (EO1) = Education Officer one
- (EO2) = Education Officer two
- (EO3) = Education Officer three
- (EO4) = Education Officer four

Next I describe the background of the research site where the study was conducted, followed by brief biographical sketches of the primary participants.

4.3 The site of the study: the Otjozondjupa educational region

Otjozondjupa is a recently established region in Namibia, as part of the decentralization process to bring services closer to the people, in line with policy (Namibia, MEC, 1993, p. 167). There are 70 schools in the region of which seven are private schools. Two of the private schools are combined schools. The region has:

- 47 primary schools
- 10 combined schools (Grade 1 – 10 or Grade 1 – 12)
- 13 secondary schools (Grade 8 – 10 or Grade 8 – 12)

The Otjiwarongo circuit, in which my study is located, has 21 schools and includes schools in towns outside Otjiwarongo. Schools in Kalkfeld and Otavi also form part of the Otjiwarongo circuit. The Otjozondjupa region is a vast region with long distances between some of the schools. The socio-economic level of the parents varies from well-off to destitute.

4.4 Biographical sketches of the principals

Next I present biographical sketches of the primary participants. The information gathered for these sketches was drawn primarily from the interviews. Biographical sketches give some background information of the four principals in terms of their career paths and experiences in teaching and leadership.

4.4.1 Principal A

PA started her professional career at a primary school as a pre-primary teacher in 1989. She has a higher Diploma in Pre-primary Education and an Advanced Certificate in Educational Management. She taught for one and a half years. Then she moved to another town as her husband got a post there. She started her own pre-primary school because she could not get a post as a teacher. In the year 2000, she started as a grade two teacher at a primary school. She got promoted to Head of Department in 2007. She was responsible for the primary phase of the school, as well as all administrative tasks in her old school. She started to work as the Principal of CPS in January 2010 with four teachers and five classes: three grade 1s and one class each for grade 2 and 3. She has a total of 12 ½ years teaching experience, of which four years are in leadership positions. She is the first Principal of the

Claude Primary school (CPS), which was newly established in 2010. She is 44 years old and married with two children.

4.4.2 Principal B

PB started her career many years ago in South Africa in 1973. She then moved to Namibia and taught at both primary and secondary schools. She has an Honours Degree in Music and is a qualified special education teacher. She used to be the School Psychologist and later a special class teacher before her promotion as HOD. She got promoted as HOD in 2004 and as principal in 2008. She has 38 years of teaching experience and her leadership experience in total is eight years. She is the first woman Principal at Ernrichell Primary School (EPS). EPS is an urban school with more than 700 learners from different socio-economic classes. The school has achieved the number one position in the 2009 grade five standardized test for Mathematics and English in the Region. The school offers a variety of extra-curricular sport codes and the demand for placements are high. PB turned 60 in the year of my study and is about to retire. She is married with one daughter.

4.4.3 Principal C

PC has a Bachelor of Science Degree, a Higher Education Diploma and an Honours Degree in Education. She started her educational professional career in Otjiwarongo in 1986. She taught for six years at that school till after independence in 1990. She got transferred as a teacher to Danica Secondary School (DSS) in the same town. DSS is an urban school from grade eight to ten with separate hostels for girls and boys. DSS has 720 learners and 29 teachers from different cultures and socio-economic situations. It offers five languages as subjects, some on First and Second language levels. The whole permanent school management team consists of females with one male teacher acting as Head of Department. PC got promoted as HOD at her current school in 1992. She acted as principal for eight months and got permanently appointed as principal at the beginning of 2011. She has 25 years teaching experience of which 19 are in leadership positions. She has one daughter.

4.4.4 Principal D

PD started her teaching career as an unqualified teacher many years ago after completing standard 8 (grade 10). Immediately thereafter, she enrolled for grade 12 (standard 10) and a teaching certificate simultaneously and completed grade 12 in two years and her teaching certificate in three years. She also has a Higher Education Diploma as well as an Honours Degree in Education from Rhodes University. She got married in 1987 and moved to join her husband. She has four children. She got promoted in 2000 to HOD and in 2006 as principal. She is 51 years old and has 28 years teaching experience and six years' experience as a principal. Millenni Primary School (MPS) has a primary section starting from one class of pre-primary, four classes of grade one and two, three classes of grade three. In the secondary section, the school consists of five grade eight classes, three grade nine classes and one grade ten class. Currently it is operating as a combined school. The total number of learners is 800. The school is situated in an informal settlement area and the majority of the learners are from not lower socio-economic households.

Leadership qualities of women principals that emerged through data analysis are presented in the next section.

4.5. Leadership qualities of women principals

4.5.1 Strong self-image

It emerged from the data that all four principals have a very strong self-image and they take pride in what they do. PA said: "Not everyone would be able to do what I do and did", referring to the daunting task of setting up a school from scratch and running it without many facilities in place, without HODs and as the only management member of the school. She added: "As an ordinary teacher, I took over so many of the HOD duties and the responsibilities of the male HODs and it was very easy for me". She indicated that she was exposed to the duties of a principal while just a teacher and has found it very easy now that she is a principal.

PB's strong self-image was evident in her view of herself as a winner: "My mother raised me to be a winner". She continued: "I am a positive person. In my heart, I am very positive". PC offered the following: "I see myself as a very disciplined person and I think self-discipline is a

positive for me when it comes to my management skills". She continued, "I am very self-disciplined and very, very precise in my work". When she referred to her way of leading, PC said, "Leadership comes very naturally to me, almost like breathing". PD also echoed the same sentiment that leadership is very much part of her life as it is naturally associated with the love of teaching and does not need any encouragement:

For me, education is not just a career but also my passion. I regard myself as a born teacher. I do not do it for money but for the love of teaching. Only then will you make all the sacrifices; if you do it for money, you will not make the sacrifices in teaching and will only devote your time from seven to one and keep on watching the time of the day. I do not watch the time that I spend at school and will work until five o' clock in the afternoon without realizing it.

She also said that she regards herself as a leader who works hard to achieve success and once she starts with a project, she already sees the end result in the future. "This year we bought the school write programme, the music system, as well as the fence with a sliding gate for the school. Since January until August, we managed to purchase and achieve what we planned". My observation notes confirmed that all those articles were at the school and "the wall with the gate was constructed and in place".

The data showed that all four principals regarded themselves as people with characteristics that makes them ideally suited for a principal's position and that they are confident in their role of being principals. Apart from having a strong self-image, the principals also come up with initiatives in leading their schools. This is discussed in the next section.

4.5.3 Initiative in leading schools

The principals indicated that they do things without being told. They realize the importance of taking initiative when leading their schools. They indicated the importance of tackling a problem, instead of waiting for somebody to tell them to do so. In this regard, PA referred to the fact that she had "started my own pre-primary school" and to do this, she had to "ask for a room at the secondary school to make use of their electricity". She explained that "for the first term there was no electricity until I got a sponsor for electricity to be able to use the computer and duplicating machines". This demonstrated her determination to find ways to obtain facilities and services, even if the school was without them.

Principal D also emphasized initiative in leading her school by stating that:

My own car was a very small pickup vehicle, which I used to transport desks to school almost every day. I did not wait for the Regional office to transport the furniture but just started to tackle the shortcomings and used my own car as a means of transport. I ran around to the existing schools and asked for textbooks and did not wait for orders to be delivered... I also approached other schools to assist with copies since we did not have a photocopier machine as well as textbooks. That's what I do, not waiting on others.

Principal C referred to the reward system that she brought in to reward good disciplined learners and said, "Most of them are not good performing A-students and they are B or C students. Sometimes in a system, teachers do forget about them. It was important for me to reward them within the system". Principal B described her involvement in extra-curricular activities during weekends as follows: "I became more and more involved in the school, because on Saturdays we also have some sport and as I am the principal, I see it as my duty to be there. I drive with them to Grootfontein or to Outjo or wherever the sport meeting is".

This clearly showed that this principal as a leader searched for alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the school. This is an indication that these principals change their strategies and approaches as the need arises in the schools. In this regard, one of the education officers asserted, "a woman should also be flexible". In the next section I present how principals lead schools through setting good examples.

4.5.4 Leading by example: Exemplary leaders who work hard

Most of the primary participants indicated that they set a good example to the teachers and learners by working hard. PA described herself as "hard working and leading by example. I do what I expect from them in terms of work". She continued by saying, "I like to show through my hard work and my actions, together with the teachers on their level, that this is how I want it to be done". My observation of PA confirmed that "PA joined teachers and SRC's to keep learners quiet and to stand in orderly queues" (OPA, 03 July 2011). PA further said, "because I am kind of a perfectionist and a hard worker, I think it flows over to the teachers". These excerpts indicate that PA believes that setting a good example has an effect on the other stakeholders. EO2 also stated that a leader is, "somebody that leads by example, not just by telling people what they have to do, but by showing them". According to the data, PC thought her whole management team was setting an example of hard work through their presence in the afternoons and through collaborating in leading the school.

She said, "I don't think that you will ever come here in the afternoon and you don't find the whole management team here". This was confirmed by my observation notes where I noticed that all management members were at school in the afternoon busy with administrative duties". In addition, PC made the following statement about herself.

I firmly believe that you have to walk the talk and work hard. I cannot expect other people to work hard and not be prepared to work hard myself. I must work very hard or even harder than everybody else. I am trying to set an example for the staff.

PD stated:

I should set the example to others and take the lead and not be afraid of hard work. One should be committed and lead through example and not back off from hard work. I must be the one to motivate my staff not just by talking, but also by doing it, so that they can emulate the good example set by me.

Principals C and D are very similar in the sense that both believe that hard work makes a leader effective. PC said, "You cannot expect others to work hard and not be prepared to work. I must work very hard or even harder than everybody else". In this regard, EO1 also argued that "women are hardworking and that is just there naturally". Similarly, EO2 said that "multi-tasking is also natural to women and this aids good leadership as many things can be accomplished at the same time".

The notion of hard work also arose in the focus group, as stated by EO1:

Women are hardworking. For example, if you put them in a certain division, one thing they will not like is that their division is seen as a sub-standard division. So whatever it takes, even if it's working overtime to bring things up to standard, they will just do it.

The data analysis confirms that these women set good examples through their hard work in leading schools. According to PD, "to be an effective leader one should set the example for others and take the lead and not be afraid of hard work". She went on to note that:

One must not tell the staff to be punctual but then you are the one that comes to work late. I am a leader that believes that I should be the first one to enter my office. I do not like to come to school after the staff members have arrived. I should be the first one to be at the school and to open my office.

This was also confirmed by my observation notes of 19 August 2011 where I noted that the principal was the first at the school and opened the gate and her office while the other staff was still not at school.

PD said that she grew up in difficult circumstances similar to most of her learners and is always informing them that “your circumstances must not make you a prisoner”. According to PD, she encourages her learners, “to use me as their role model since I also grew up in similar circumstances”. Referring to the home environment of the learners, she acknowledged that most of the learners do not come from well-off homes. Most of their parents are unemployed or just receive a small income. Regarding the female teachers, she said:

Women are the majority on the staff and they should take me as their role model and do what I am doing. These days, women overshadow men in education and they are the majority in education. They should try to climb the leadership ladder as they are the committed ones. When women are told what is expected from them, they will always do it.

In terms of their role models, PD regarded her mother as her role model; she said she was a single mother that worked hard to give all her siblings an education so that all of them could be educated. PA regards her grandfather as her role model. She shows the impact and role that he played in her life, by living and leading according to the principles she learnt from him. PA said that whenever she came across a challenging situation, she would first ask herself what her grandfather would say about that particular situation, and take a decision accordingly. Having presented the data on principals leading by example, I now move on to present the data on leadership as a group activity.

4.5.5 Leadership as a group activity

In a school, the principal alone may not be able to perform all functions and tasks. The data from principals’ responses in my study showed that they all see leadership as a group activity and lead their schools along with other stakeholders. All the principals acknowledged the importance of the involvement of all stakeholders in the educational process for effective leadership within the organization for learning, personal growth and achievement of school goals. These principals are aware that they cannot just lead their schools by themselves and see the need for involving other stakeholders in their leadership. Principals accomplish tasks collectively with other staff members, as noted by PC:

That is my biggest aim - to try to create in the school a ‘we’ feeling. I use my management as a sounding board in the sense of asking them how they feel about the

issue, before we walk out as a team. So it is more like 'we' address the school as a whole and not 'I' address them.

Three of the principals in my study indicated that parents are very much involved in school activities. Parents even want to remain at the school after fetching their children and the school engenders a sense of pride in them. Whenever parents are requested to come to meetings or to complete a task at the school, they are more than willing to assist. PA gave a good example of involving others:

When we started school we had meetings with the teachers and all the parents. We decided together on the school uniform and school badge and all kinds of things so that they felt that they are part of the school and that it is their school.

In addition PA said, "They (Parents) also assist us very readily with coaching of sport activities and even in the classroom should one of the teachers be absent". PA further said, "From the onset the parents were very involved, from the groundwork stage onwards". She proceeded to say that "they were involved in all discussions e.g. the school uniform was designed by them - there is no other school with the same uniform as ours".

Data confirmed that while three of the school principals in my study are satisfied with parental involvement in their children's education, principal C of the secondary school experiences a different scenario. She stated, "I need parents' involvement in their children's education". She is very concerned that parents are not involved in their children's education, "the moment they start secondary school". However, she did acknowledge the positives in this regard: "You know you can also take this as positive as they trust you with their kids". She later stated her belief in terms of the role of both the home and school in educating learners: "I will always believe that education is a triangle between the parents, learners and teachers".

Apart from parents, PA also says that she involves the teachers in the school to get things done. She regards parental and teachers' involvement as essential to her leadership in the school. PC is aware of the advantages of involving other stakeholders and said that they make use of ordinary teachers to be part of the leadership in their school. PC noted:

After young people have taught for three to four years, I give them the opportunity to be subject heads. I trust them with their task, but do not leave them alone. I keep control behind the scenes and make sure that the boat is still afloat.

Similarly, PA referred to her way of involving teachers as follows: “You give them the freedom of doing things you know they are good at and withhold the responsibility in areas you know that it might not work out”. In the two newly established schools, principals’ A and D co-opted teachers to make up the management team, due to an absence of heads of department at their schools. PC co-opted two senior teachers to form part of management, “to get an overall perspective of what’s going on in the school”.

PD said:

I only concentrated on the academic side of the school and failed to mention that I have women running the sport activities at the school. She (teacher responsible for sport/sport teacher) organizes all sport activities at school and another lady organizes all cultural activities at school. This ensures that the school performs strongly in all aspects, thanks to good teamwork.

4.5.6 Empowerment

The data revealed that not only was leadership shared, but in so doing, this sharing of leadership also served to empower others. The principals involved stakeholders in actions as part of the group leadership activities which leads to the empowerment of their teachers, school board members and learners. PC commented on her way of empowering teachers and learners through establishing management committees and Learner Representative Council’s (LRC), as well as by appointing class captains and sport captains for learners:

I am empowering them to lead in a closed environment, in all levels of management, by allowing them to take responsibility and accountability, remembering that they still remain children and that I must still be there to back them up should a problem arise.

Another way in which principals empower teachers is to involve them in decision making as stated by PD, “I like to involve people in decision making”. The principals delegate leadership responsibilities to ordinary teachers, in the process empowering them to be leaders themselves. As PD further stated, “I have a group of people that I am working with and I appointed a subject head for each subject area. Those are the people that help me with the leadership of the school”. EO1 expressed herself strongly in terms of the role of delegating tasks. She also agrees that delegation is needed in the leading process:

Delegation is seen as a way of empowering others, but not necessarily by taking away all the responsibilities that a leader should have. What I often don’t like, is that if the manager is not there or the leader, then everything comes to a standstill and that should not be the case. There should be a continuous flow of events even in the

absence of the leader, for whatever reason it might be. So, delegation helps people to become empowered ... and one day to take over when it's needed.

EO4 also said: "Women in leadership should always delegate whenever possible, for the execution of duties". Evidence for delegation derived from my observation notes at ESS, indicates that PB delegated the responsibility of attending a cluster meeting on 19 July 2011 to one HOD. This showed that she regarded delegation as an essential part of effective leadership. This is discussed next.

4.5.7 Ready to accept help and look for support

The responses showed that the four principals realize that there are limitations in their abilities and that they do not know everything. They are constantly looking for assistance from fellow principals, from parents, teachers and family members and accept the support granted, as indicated by PA:

Women are not that involved in building. I experienced problems when we started planning netball courts for the school. So I asked the husband of one of my female teachers as he is a building contractor.

PA also indicated that, "I definitely need the help from the teachers as well as the parents ". PB also said that she used to talk to her husband about schoolwork and would ask his advice. "I must say my husband is supportive". PC leans heavily on her father who was also in education and in a management position, and who has the background of management for guidance in dealing with situations: "He does guide me on how to handle situations". PD said, "I do not regard myself to be above others and will always ask for guidance." She explained:

I consult my fellow principals and colleagues for their opinion on an issue. I would consider the most suitable advice that is in line with my plans and leave those that might not be needed.

According to PB, she needs all the support she can get from her staff. She needs as much support as possible from parents and "parents must also be positive and motivate their children". Similarly PC noted, "In the first instance I need the support of the parents; they need to be 100% on board". She also emphasized the need for money as well as well-qualified teachers for the achievement of good results. PD is quite satisfied with the teachers and was of the view that "the teachers do give 150% in their work at the school and I want them to remain doing as such". However, she stated: "I expect the Ministry of

Education to provide the school with all needed materials” and I “need support from advisory teachers to provide advice to teachers and to know what’s going on at the school”.

4.5.8 Good interpersonal working relationships

Data revealed that the principals have good relationships with teachers, parents and school boards and that their working climates are good and positive. They said that they play a positive role in their relationships with teachers, parents and school boards. PA said that they work in cooperation at the school: “I think we have a kind atmosphere and are working together like a family”. She noted: “We help each other a lot and it is not just me helping the teachers, but the teachers helping amongst themselves”. She was also of the view that “the school community is really very friendly and supportive”. PB also said that her working climate is positive:

If I go into the staffroom and ask for teachers that are willing to help, for instance with a function we have, I get three to five hands going up immediately to assist. A new staff member remarked that it was one thing that stood out for him and that it is one of the most wonderful things that he sees, especially as it comes from the people themselves.

The importance of good relationships with staff members was endorsed by EO3 who explained “you must be able to have good relationships with your people”. This view was supported by EO4 who said:

There must always be a good relationship between you and the staff. Being in a leadership position, you often find that most of the people involved have an attitude problem. As the leader, you have to understand the characteristics of different people and personalities and work around that in a professional way, so that you don’t come across as an autocrat or that you are imposing things on them.

EO4 also said, “Women should also be responsible in their leadership and also respect the other people, the subordinates, that they are working with”.

In my observation notes from EPS, I noted that, “teachers were all dressed up in the school tracksuits that they got through their sponsors and they were very happy to look alike and be seen as a unit, portraying them as one family”. At EPS, apart from the tracksuits, teachers and learners organized a surprise farewell concert for the principal as indicated in my observation notes of 09 August 2011. Furthermore, “most of the learners were part of the school concert and the teachers also had an item on the program as a group and I could see that they were operating like a family to make it a success”. At MCS, PD organized a

meal for teachers and learners on the last school day, as noted in my observation notes of 20 August 2011. As recorded in the observation notes, “during break all teachers and learners joined together to enjoy the meal and they were just like a big happy family, eating and dancing and just wishing each other a happy and good holiday”. This clearly confirmed the good interpersonal relationships at these schools.

All the principals indicated that they have good working relationships with school boards, as governing bodies of the school, as indicated by PD. “They do cooperate and are very eager to attend every meeting and for them to be part of the school board affords them status and it’s a big achievement”. PB similarly said, “We have a wonderful working relationship and a very positive and strong school board member team and overall they are very lovely people chosen by the parents”.

Despite good working relationships with stakeholders, principals were concerned with the current role of school boards in their schools. They indicated that the school board rely heavily on the principals and expect them to take the lead in school development. PC stated:

We have inherited a situation where the school board waits for the principal. Sometimes I as a principal would have loved to be guided by them and for them to take more initiative.

PD also said the following in terms of the school board chosen by the parents of the school: “Sometimes I get frustrated because I have to explain an issue to them (school board), over and over again, and still they would not understand. You need patience to deal with them”.

4. 5. 9 “Mother of the family”

The ‘mother image’ portrayed by the principals was seen as a means for achieving close relationships with teachers and learners and it promoted collegiality in the study schools. The mother metaphor also focuses on the underlying idea of the school being a family as the principals’ in my study regard themselves as the ‘mother figures’ in the school. They do things together as a family but, in the same vein, also look after and look up to one another in the schools. Evidence can be found in my observation notes of 20 August 2011:

Staff members arranged a surprise birthday party for principal A. All of them contributed towards the gift and cake. They gathered in the staff room and handed

over the gifts, sung a birthday song and one staff member delivered a speech on behalf of the staff and learners. Learners were also very keen to give her birthday wishes and called her out of the staffroom and surrounded her just to give her a hug and to say happy birthday.

Principals feel a strong bond with teachers, learners and also parents. PA refers to the relationships in the school as “like a family”, while the other three principals regard themselves as ‘mother figures’. PC feels that she is like a mother, especially to the male teachers, who are very young: “They see me as a mother figure”. Similarly, PD also indicated that the learners feel as if she is their mother and said, “School learners regard me more as a mother than a principal and if they come to my office, they do not even knock. Next thing I see, they are standing next to my table and will just start talking to me”. PD also stated, “I am the principal, a mother to all 800 learners and a sister to the staff members. I also realize that I am in fact the mother to those male teachers on the staff”.

PB also uses the ‘mother image’ when she refers to the way that women interact with learners: “A woman can express herself very well when it comes to discipline, as she is a mother to her own children and also the mother of the children at the school”. She also said “I think as a mother one looks at the heart of the child”.

The education officers also indicated that women principals are like mothers, as EO2 indicated: “...mothers are normally strict...They are the ones that will make sure that rules will be implemented the way they should be and not by taking shortcuts”. The discussion brought out that women principals are not only soft and caring to teachers and learners, but can also be strict in maintaining discipline and accomplishing work that needs to be done.

4.5.10 Leadership styles adopted

On the question of how they would describe themselves in terms of their leadership style, principals referred to themselves as democratic leaders, but also added that they do not always stick to the democratic leadership style due to their overall accountability as leaders of their schools.

Three of the four principals say that they use a mixture of leadership styles, depending on the situation and circumstances that they had to deal with, from time to time at school. PA said:

I think I employ a mixture of different kinds of leadership styles. Sometimes a person must act democratically to give everybody the chance of being part of the school. Sometimes a person needs to act autocratically in terms of things that need to be done.

PB described her leadership in the following way:

I would describe myself as a democratic leader. I always like to hear the other side of the story or the other side of things. I take the lead by listening to people, because it's very important to hear what others tell me.

PC described herself as:

someone that uses two types of leadership skills, due to the position that I am placed in, as a principal. I see myself mostly as a democratic leader, as I like to lead from the front. But from time to time, situations do arise where you have to make autocratic decisions and lead in that manner. I think it's just human nature that you have to make your own decisions from time to time.

PD said, "I like to involve people in decision making. I do not take decisions on my own - even though I can later on reschedule or rethink a decision that was taken by the group - but also consider the input from others".

EO1 also raised the issue of women using a combination of leadership styles:

A woman is actually a mix of leadership styles because women can be sympathetic when they need to be. But at the same time, when policies and rules have to be implemented, then they are, can I say, a little bit autocratic.

Responses from principals and education officers showed that women tend to regard themselves as democratic but, at the same time, also autocratic, depending on the task and situation at hand. In this regard, they believe that effective leadership, regardless of the style, is needed for schools to prosper and to reach greater heights.

4.5.11 Communication

Communication plays a significant role in schools and it is central to the work of a principal. Data showed that the principals opened up the communication channels between themselves and their stakeholders. The principals indicated that they value an 'open door policy' and that they welcome communication from stakeholders for effective leadership in their schools. According to PA, her way of communicating with her staff members makes her leadership effective, while PB believed that the way she handles people makes her an effective leader. PA stated: "Obviously my office is always open for my teachers; they can come and ask if they need help or if there is something that needs to be done". In addition,

PA held the following view: “I think what helps a lot is the fact that I am very approachable. They are not scared to come to me to ask for anything”.

PA described communication between her and the parents of her learners in the following way:

Whenever we meet, we would greet and talk, they would approach me anywhere with whatever problem they might have. They feel very at ease with me...The parents also have my mobile number so they can easily phone if there is a problem at home or at the school. They have even called at night.

PB also stated, “I receive positive feedback from parents and we have an ‘open door’ policy at the school. Parents are always free to come to the school and discuss things here”. She further states, “Other people also admire a leader who listens to them”. She referred to her way of handling discipline at the school as follows, “I feel that I can do it by talking to the learners and by using other methods, rather than raising my voice and forcing my authority upon them”. PB also had this to say about communication: “I always tell myself that God gave me two eyes to see better, two ears to hear well, but only one mouth to speak. I must always be aware of what I say”. She also explained how she resolved a problem between two teachers: “I think my ability to listen to both sides of the story is one of my strongest points as a principal”. EO3 also indicated the need for a leader to have good communication skills and said, “She (women leader) must be a good communicator. She must be able to motivate people in the right way”.

Apart from verbal communication, the data revealed that principals used other means of communicating to stakeholders. In this regard, PC explained, “We also send letters to the parents and it’s only with the consent of the parents that we reward the learners by allowing them to study at home”. The data emphasized the way in which communication takes place, as well as the need for communication between teachers, learners and parents, as part of effective leadership in schools. Thus, they embarked on strategies to include stakeholders as part of their vision. PA said she needs the help from the teachers as well as parents. She said:

We have established a parents committee that is operating totally free/apart from the school board, to assist with the development at the school. We have selected one parent per class, who serves as the link between the school board and the class. This is to involve the parents so that they can be proud of their achievements and be able to

say that they helped, for example, to build a netball court. This helps to make the community proud and makes them feel part of the school.

4.5.12 Vision for school

Leadership requires vision. When asked about their vision for their respective schools, all principals indicated that they had a vision and knew where they wanted their schools to be in the future. They believed in the need for a vision for their schools to achieve success and growth. All principals strive to make their schools the best they can be, which, they believe, provides excellent all-round learners for the future. PB said, “I want my school to be the best and never give up on any problems or challenges, but face them to try to beat them and overcome the problems or challenges”. PC wanted her school, “to always be number one; multi-cultural and inclusive, meaning they would also accommodate amongst others, learners with learning difficulties”.

Both principals A and D wanted their schools to serve as excellent catchment areas for secondary schools, to provide secondary schools with learners producing work of a high standard. The vision of PD was that “within the following five years the school will produce the best secondary learners in the town”. On the same topic, PA, explained:

Our vision of the school is to send well-rounded, well-prepared learners to the high schools. I think that our vision for this school is that it must be one of the best schools in the Otjozondjupa Region and also in the whole country and I think we will achieve it.

These principals are all conscious of the type of learners they want to produce to achieve the good results needed in schools.

EO1 also indicated the need for a vision for the leaders. She defined a leader as “a person with a vision for the organization to go forward, a guide”. In their quest to achieve their vision, all principals said that they would need support from all stakeholders for them to become a reality.

4.5.13 Women leadership and power

The data revealed that principals see power as authority in their schools. All principals felt that they are ‘in authority’ and are ‘an authority’. PA said that there no day goes by without somebody coming to ask for help from her. This happens sometimes when she is at home or

even during the time that she was in hospital. She thinks that she has authority because the staff is constantly seeking approval from her whenever they have to do some tasks. PA said:

Just last week, I was in the hospital and booked off for another week. Thus, I was not at the school for a week and a half. There was not one day without somebody coming to ask for help at the hospital and even later at home.

PB regards power in terms of leadership as, “one must be a follower first and must be the best follower”. On the same topic, PC said:

In my position, I cannot divide power from authority and I think both those things are given to me by God. I must use power and never abuse power. Power is there not to lift me up but it's there to serve. I can lose power when people lose their trust in me.

PD also said, “Yes, they do regard me as their principal even though we are colleagues. There is a boundary and a distance between me and the staff who respect the authority”. When asked if they think of themselves as someone who has or had power, they responded as follows: “Yes, definitely and its power in the sense of wanting people to perform. When I give them duties they do it so well and to the best of their abilities”. PD explained as follows: “Yes, I am in charge of my school”. The issue of gender is discussed in the next section.

4.6. Gender and leadership

Principals' responses on gender in leadership brought up different views in terms of male and female leadership that makes the gender issue very complex. Most of the principals regard the issue of women leadership as no different, although they acknowledge that they deal with issues differently from what men do. PA said:

I do not know, I do not know at all. My experience that I do have is just with men. I never worked with a woman, as a principal, and even the HODs that I was working with were all men.

However, PA acknowledged that: “I think they do it differently from what I am doing. I think I do keep control as well as a man, but that I am doing it differently. It may be the case that women have more empathy”. She said the following on the way she perceived herself in terms of gender, “In relation to my fellow male principals, I feel equal; I don't feel inferior or superior at all. I believe we all have our flaws and strong points and I respect them for whom and what they are”.

In contrast, PB was of the view that “a woman is more holistic”. However, she was quick to add that “men can be as good”. Her explanation was as follows:

It sometimes comes out that a woman thinks differently from a man. Men think very straightforwardly, but a woman thinks around things. Sometimes I think women see things more as a whole, while men see only the part that they are working with. They do not encompass a wide view ... a woman, especially if you are also a mother, would see things more in perspective; you see the whole body, the whole mind.

PC noted:

No, not at all. I think in every “gender” one gets autocratic and democratic leaders. I think that we also get hysterical female and hysterical male leaders and that we are almost similar. I do not think its gender related.

But like PA, she also qualified her response:

I think that females are a bit more patient than males and that is because of biology due to the oestrogen levels. Males are more impatient but I would never say that a particular leadership skill is due to being male or female.

PD related her own views on male leadership, which are different from the other three principals:

According to me, there are differences between a male principal and a female principal. Male principals are more formal and women principals lead in an informal way. Learners become much closer to a female principal than a male.

EO2 indicated the following in terms of gender differences in leadership: “I would say yes and no” and she went on to explain as follows:

because it might be that the woman leader is more approachable than men ... And then it might be that the woman leader might be more assertive and aggressive. Because of stereotyping she wants to make a point.

EO1 supported that point by noting:

It’s true, the woman is protecting her territory and she can easily also have an attitude of letting people know “I am the boss here” because of being afraid. If I am too soft with them, they might not respect me properly.

EO2 summed it up: “So, it depends on the different people, on the different situations, on your attitude as an individual even”. The data analysis thus revealed that there are different views on gender and leadership and that it is influenced by differences in personalities and situations.

4.7 Challenges to women leaders

Challenges that the four women principals experienced while leading their schools, also emerged from the data. PA says that “time was the only challenge”. In the establishment of her school, she “hardly had enough time to take care of everything like textbooks and inventory. “There was so much to do to get everything in place. Unfortunately everybody needs to help with everything”. Even though time was her main concern, her skill of involving stakeholders and asking for assistance, as well as her good administrative skills, came in helpful for her to manage and lead the school.

PB experiences the challenge of a high demand for places at the school and the tension this creates with parents. She said, “People do want their children in this school and we can only accommodate up to a certain level and not more. Parents do not understand we cannot enrol 50 or more children in a class”. In addition, she also described how the challenge at the school was the discipline: “because I am a very disciplined person myself and I grew up as a very disciplined person. I could not understand why children were not doing homework”.

Principals B and D felt that people doubted their capabilities as principals prior to their appointments. Both mentioned that they were not encouraged to apply and that they took over from male principals. Both these principals felt that people wanted a male because the predecessors were males. PB described her situation, “In the beginning, yes a little bit. Because there was a little teasing about Big Mr... and now small Mrs... I think it was said lightly and not meant to be rude. I took it as a joke”. When asked how she felt about it she responded, “Yes, I felt a little bit irritated about it. Because what is wrong with my figure? There is nothing wrong with my voice and figure”. Reflecting on her experience at her previous school where she started her position as principal, PD stated: “I was not welcome” and “some school board members, especially male, doubted my potential - that I would be capable of managing a big school and I felt resistance”. Similarly, PB said, “My former principal doubted me as the correct candidate”. PD also revealed that she experienced problems with male teachers that test her authority. She said, “Here and there the male teachers do not accept me. They know their task and know that it needs to be done, but they are testing me to see whether I will fold under pressure”. EO2 also referred to the manner in which men responded towards female leadership, “It brings forth subordination,

because previously women were not regarded as leaders. It brings forth subordination, especially from men.”

In direct contrast, the data showed that, for two of the principals, there was no resistance. For example, PA said, “Not at all. No discrimination at all”. PC also said, “No nothing, no discrimination. On the contrary I experienced a lot of love”.

Data indicated that even though some of the principals experienced tension and resistance prior to their appointment as principals, they all now feel accepted in their positions as principals of their schools. They were very positive in terms of how stakeholders presently embrace them as their leaders. PC was adamant: “I have not experienced any negative vibes”. She proceeded by saying, “A lot of them told me that they are so proud of me that I got the post”. Furthermore, she said, “They accept me as the daughter of this town. Parents accept me due to the fact that I started at a multi-cultural school”. Similarly, PD echoed:

My staff members accept me and I do not have a big problem with them but here and there the male teachers do not accept me. My biggest advantage is that I am the oldest staff member and they have that respect for me. If that were not the case, I would have a lot of resistance from them.

PB who said “yes” to the question of whether she was accepted, further confirmed this notion. With regard to tensions that she experiences from some staff members, PD put forward her view:

They know their task and know that it needs to be done but they are testing me to see whether I will fold under pressure. It is as if they are testing me. They would complain a lot but at the end I would see that it’s done. Maybe they thought that I would back off but I would make my point and stand by my expectations that they should do what they have to. I would also tell them that there are certain things open for negotiation and others that just need to be done without negotiation.

EO1 was of the view that women leaders, in general, still experience some resistance in the workplace, “You will receive resistance from some of the people. Resistance will be there in terms of someone asking, “Who is she to tell me today what to do?” She acknowledges that “resistance is one of the things that are there for women in leadership positions.” EO2 said, “The leadership role has changed a lot, but a lot of people do not change with the times. It brings forth insubordination, especially from men”. EO2 also mentioned her experience in terms of resistance in leadership and said:

You have this extra barrier and you need to work extra hard to bring forth results. I have experienced it a lot in my position, especially when it comes to male teachers brought up in a specific culture. They just don't give a damn as to what you have to say. They have the attitude that you are not going to tell them this and this is how it's supposed to be done. It is still a problem.

Although most principals felt accepted and very few indicated resistance, the focus group discussion revealed that there is still some sort of resistance against women although they are accepted. In the next section I conclude the chapter.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the data from semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview and observation in categories as it emerged from data analysis. I wanted the data to speak for itself on the leadership qualities and experiences of women principals and to shed light on the research goal and research questions.

The following are the main findings from the data collected: The Principals' leadership approaches turned out to be democratic, distributive and transformational. The Principals showed that they are good communicators, sound administrators, with visions for their schools and that they involve and empower stakeholders in the leadership process. They also showed themselves as being in positions of power and serving as role models to stakeholders. In terms of gender, the principals generally did not see a difference in leadership based on gender, but admitted that they do things differently from men.

These findings are discussed under the themes that emerged through data analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In chapter four I presented the data as collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion and observation, in identified categories. I let the data speak for itself and did not try to ascertain if my research goals were addressed and research questions were answered. The focus of my study was to explore female principals' experience and perceptions of leadership.

In chapter five I focus on my main findings in order to make sense of the data. I enable a discourse between the data and the literature that allows me to integrate my findings with the existing research on women leaders. The main findings that emerged from the categories are discussed under the following headings: Effective leadership qualities of principals, gender, and women and challenges. Effective leadership qualities include a description of the leadership styles adopted, a strong self-image, commitment, communication, a sense of 'the mother of the family', and power. These themes are discussed in line with women leadership in relation to their effectiveness in leading schools with the research goal in mind, compared with the main findings of my study. In the next section, I remind the reader of my research goal and questions that directed my study and which guided the development of my findings.

5.2 Research aim and questions

My research goal as indicated in chapters one, three and four was to investigate and understand how women experience and perceive themselves as educational leaders in professional contexts. My research also focused on what tensions/conflicts they experienced within their organizations and to what extent they are accepted and recognized as leaders. The rationale for my study was to gain an understanding of how these women position themselves as principals of schools.

My research questions included:

- How do women principals perceive their role in leading schools?
- What strengths do they bring to their leadership?
- What challenges do they experience in leading their schools?

The data analysis revealed that there are different views on gender and leadership and that it is influenced by, amongst others, differences in personality and settings. From the data analysis, a number of themes emerged in terms of effective leadership in schools. The next section provides the participants' views on women leadership in depth and in relation to the literature as it was presented in chapter two.

5.3 Effective leadership qualities of women principals

According to Sterling and Davidoff (2000, p. 29), "a part of knowing and accepting yourself is being able to recognize the leadership approaches with which you are most comfortable". In line with this insight, it emerged that the principals regarded themselves and experienced leadership in many different ways.

5.3.1 Democratic leaders

The findings revealed that all principals described themselves firstly as democratic leaders as they accomplished tasks with the assistance of staff members, which is in line with the change towards democracy in Namibia. According to the *Guidelines for School Principals* (2005, p. 143), "Democracy is one of the key concepts in our Namibian education system and should be fundamental to the way in which schools are managed and administered". Democratic leadership is in fact participative leadership, where the principals' decentralise decision making to the level of teachers, parents and even the learners in Namibian secondary schools. In these instances, all principals confirmed that they were democratic leaders as asserted by PB: "I would describe myself as a democratic leader".

The data corresponded very well with literature discussed in section 2.4.1 and in this section I discussed how "examples of research that have been carried out on women principals indicate that successful women school principals use... leadership approaches different from

those normally associated with men” (Udjombala, 2002, p. 2). I discussed in chapter two that democratic leadership is associated with women, as indicated by Oplatka (2006), when she states that “female principals commonly tend to adopt a democratic, participative style” (p. 608). The data showed a good correlation with the literature as the principals referred to themselves as democratic leaders. According to Taylor and Hood (2010, p. 629), earlier studies such as the one by Eagly et al., (1995) found that “women tended to adopt a more democratic or participative style and a less autocratic or directive style than did men”.

The majority of principals indicated that they consulted with stakeholders before making decisions and they encouraged teamwork. For example, PA explained that “we decided together on the school uniform and school badge and all kinds of things so that they feel that they are part of the school and that it is their school”. As stated by Dele Rey (2005, p. 9), “this results in a team-based management approach, and fosters a relationship based on mutual trust and respect”. Principals also indicated that they encouraged and allowed teachers, learners and parents to express themselves. Bush’s (2003) survey of principals in Molo (2007, p. 466), uncovered that “school aims are decided in consultation with all stakeholders”. This showed a move towards consultation and participation and democracy in decision making at school level.

Consultation of stakeholders was also evident during my observation of the school board meetings at CPS and DSS schools, where the parents and learners expressed themselves during the deliberations. Decisions were taken only after consultation with and consideration of input from stakeholders. That showed a high degree of collaboration amongst staff, learners and parents, which was in line with the democratic educational goals of Namibia. According to *Namibia, Towards Education for All*, (Namibia, Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (MBEC, 1993, p. 41), “a democratic education system is organized around broad participation in decision making and the clear accountability of those who are our leaders”. Namibia is moving away from the apartheid legacy and the change is towards democracy. *Education for All* states the ministry’s intentions as:

our commitment to developing an education system that will play a central role in transforming our society. To teach democracy we must be democratic. And being democratic will enable us to expand access, promote equity and raise quality (MBEC, 1993, p. 67).

However, participants not only referred to themselves as democratic leaders but were quick to admit that while they consulted with stakeholders, from time to time they took autocratic decisions. In addition, they qualified that these autocratic decisions would be referred and explained to the stakeholders in order to build trust and respect and also to maintain good working relations within the organization. This resonates very well with the literature regarding situational leadership where a leader leads according to the prevailing situation, as discussed in chapter two, and which is echoed in the words of Eagly (2007, p. 4): “As situational theorists of leadership contend, the appropriateness of particular types of leader behaviours depends on the context-features such as societal values, the culture of organizations, the nature of the task, and the characteristics of follower”.

The data indicated in terms of the decision making process of the principals, that whether democratic and consultative or, even after consultation, taking an unpopular autocratic decision due to the situation, showed that these leaders are flexible and adapt to the situation at hand. This seems to indicate that traditional leadership theories are still applicable, even in the 21st century. The data showed that different situations demanded different types of leadership.

5.3.2 Transformational leaders

Apart from regarding themselves as mostly democratic leaders, it emerged from the findings that female principals tended to be transformational leaders, as they emphasized personal relationships and worked to empower teachers, parents and learners. Furthermore, the data indicated that the women principals liked to show and teach people things that they did not know. This resonates with the literature in section 2.2.4 on transformational leadership:

When leaders broaden and elevate the interest of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. (Bass, cited in Stone et al., 2004, p. 350).

Bush (2011a, p. 84) explains transformational leadership as:

This form of leadership assumes that the central focus of leadership ought to be the commitments and capacities of organisational members. Higher levels of personal

commitment to organisational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing those goals are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity.

The data revealed that the women principals were transformational leaders as they involved stakeholders in their actions as part of a group activity that led to the empowerment of their teachers, school board members and learners. The data illuminated how these principals empowered teachers and learners through the establishment of committees such as management committees and SRCs, the introduction of class captains and sport captains for learners:

I am empowering them to lead in a closed environment, in all levels of management, by allowing them to take responsibility and accountability, remembering that they still remain children and that I must still be there to back them up should a problem arise.

This correlates with section 2.2.4 of the literature where Karuk (2004, p. 16) states:

A massive increase of women in the workplace over the last half century, followed by their movement to management roles, have led to changes in the understanding of leadership towards followers empowerment and transformational leadership theory.

This, in turn, correlates with a study done in Namibia by Kauaria (2002) which described how “typical transformational leadership includes behaviours like participatory decision-making, collaboration, empowerment and quality interpersonal relationships between leader and subordinate” (p. 22).

According to Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (2003, p. 56), “a vision is a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization”. Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith, (1994, p. 299) indicated that “at the heart of building shared vision is the task of designing and evolving on-going processes in which people at every level of the organization, in every role, can speak from the heart”. The data showed that the principals emerged as crafting the vision of good performance for their schools. It indicated that all principals wanted to achieve the maximum results for their schools. All participants indicated that they wanted their schools to be the best in the region, if not in the whole of the country, which is best described by the excerpt from PA:

Our vision of the school is to send well-rounded, well-prepared learners to the high schools. I think that our vision for this school is that it must be one of the best schools in the Otjozondjupa Region and also in the whole of the country and I think we will achieve it.

The importance of vision that emerged in the data aligns with the concluding remarks of Bush (2007, p. 403) that:

Leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs and leading to a 'vision' for the school. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain the commitment of staff and stakeholders to the ideal of a better future for the school, its learners and stakeholders.

In this regard, Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 123), present transformational leadership as an idealizing influence or charisma when they state: "The leader provides vision and a sense of mission, instils pride, gains respect, trust and increases optimism. Such a leader excites and inspires subordinates". Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 123) support the argument when they quote Rosener (1990), who says there is a line of argument contending that female leaders tend to be more transformational. Rosener's (1990) findings in De le Rey (2005, p. 6) state that "women leaders were characterized by a style of interactive, 'transformational' leadership and that they actually worked to make affirmative interactions with their subordinates and create a work environment where everyone is involved".

According to Loden (1985) in Nixdorff, (2004, p. 2) feminine leaders see the world "through two different but concurrent lenses and, as a result, respond to situations on both thinking and feeling levels. Women embracing this type of leadership create a climate of cooperation, participation, and shared accountability". She proceeds by stating that "sharing power includes vision sharing". According to Senge et al., (1994, p. 299) "the shared vision discipline is essentially focused around building shared meaning". Shared meaning is a collective sense of what is important, and why".

Not only did the principals in my study emerge as transformational leaders, but their leadership styles also went beyond transformational leadership towards putting the interest of stakeholders first as in servant leadership, which I discuss next.

5.3.3 Servant leadership

The interpersonal style of the principals was geared towards informal relationships. Findings in the data revealed that teachers could come and ask for help at any time and that principals would attend to their needs immediately. Thus, putting the needs of their staff first correlates with the idea of servant leadership, as defined by Greenleaf that "servant

leadership begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, and then learn to lead as servant” (Spears, 2005, p. 1). Furthermore, data indicated that these principals liked to improve the understanding and knowledge of their staff. There were clear examples of involvement and empowerment of stakeholders by the principals in my study, a reflection of servant leadership qualities as discussed in chapter two. In this regard, Laub, (1999, p. 83), indicates:

Servant leadership is an understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Servant leadership promotes the valuing and development of people, the building of community, the practice of authenticity, the providing of leadership for the good of those led, and the sharing of power and status for the common good of each individual, the total organization, and those served by the organization.

In addition, the study done by Kawana (2004, p. 77) reveals “that female principals in Namibia were perceived as good leaders because they were good listeners, caring and self-disciplined”. Thus, in my study, the individual interests and needs of stakeholders were regarded as important to the principals and they placed emphasis on personal interactions in the schools.

5.3.4 Collaboration and involvement

Eagly and Carli (2003, p. 809) state “trade books urge managers to put people first by using resonance-building styles...that support commitment, involvement, active pursuit of vision, and healthy, productive work relationships”. The data revealed that the principals involved stakeholders in leading their schools and that they all saw leadership as a group activity. All principals acknowledged the importance of the involvement of stakeholders in the educational process for effective leadership within the organization; for learning, personal growth and achievement of school goals, as PC mentioned:

That is my biggest aim to try to create in the school a ‘we’ feeling. I use my management as a sounding board in the sense of asking them how they feel about the issue, before we walk out as a team. So it is more like ‘we’ address the school as a whole and not ‘I’ address them.

This comment corresponds with Kawana’s (2004) findings that saw a strong correlation between teamwork and leadership success. It also resonates well with Karuk’s (2004, p. 161) argument concerning contemporary organizational changes and management theories

stressing the importance of team-oriented organizations amongst others, as discussed in section 2.2.4 of this thesis.

According to Muzvidziwa's (2006, p. 174) findings on women leadership:

Participants had a strong sense of connectedness with their school communities, and that seems to have contributed towards the creation of a positive school environment and team spirit within members of the school community.

Distributed leadership that encourages teamwork and delegation is discussed next.

5.3. 5 Distributive leadership

Distributed leadership is described in Grant (2005, p. 44) as "a form of collective leadership where all people in the organization can act as leaders at one time or another". Harris (2004, p. 13) explains how "distributive leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than seeking this only through formal position or role". According to Grant (2005), due to the complex nature of schools in the 21st century, one person can no longer be expected to lead and manage a school effectively (p. 46).

This distribution of leadership by the participants in my study led to improved teamwork and communication between staff and principals. Thus, distributed leadership was used as a means to involve teachers as leaders as confirmed by PA by when she referred to her way of involving teachers: "You give them the freedom of doing things you know they are good at and withhold the responsibility in areas you know that it might not work out". The data indicated that the principals were aware of and honest about their limits and knew that they needed to work with people whose strengths they lacked. As PA indicated, "I definitely need the help from the teachers". Looking for assistance was also an indication that they were aware of their limitations and they saw the need to involve others in leading their schools. As shown by the following excerpt by PA:

Women are not that involved in building. I experienced problems when we started planning netball courts for the school. So I asked the husband of one of my female teachers as he is a building contractor.

PD also indicated the need for assistance and said, "I do not regard myself to be above others and will always ask for guidance". Principals demonstrated the need to apply

distributive leadership to achieve their goals and vision for their schools. This resonates well with section 2.2.5.1 of the literature which states, according to Centry et al. (2010, p. 289), “inclusiveness, collaboration, participation and interaction are associated with women’s roles”. This is a clear indication that women tend to be identified as distributive leaders applying teacher leadership in leading their schools as effective leaders.

This notion is captured in the words of Harris (2004, p. 16):

Successful heads recognized the limitation of a singular leadership approach and saw their leadership role as being primarily concerned with empowering others to lead.

This correlates with *Guidelines for School Principals* in Namibia (1993, p. 143):

Although the principal carries the ultimate responsibility and accountability for the effective and efficient management of his or her school, this does not imply that the principal shall do everything alone, or should be an autocratic manager.

The women principals in my study distributed leadership and involved teachers in the leadership of their schools. Teachers were involved in both formal and informal leadership roles. PC is aware of the involvement of followers and said that they make use of ordinary teachers to be part of the leadership in the school. PC noted:

After young people have taught for three to four years, I give them the opportunity to be subject heads. I trust them with their task, but do not leave them alone. I keep control from behind the scenes and make sure that the boat is still afloat.

Delegation of tasks seemed to be top-down, and it emerged that this was the most frequent way in which principals shared leadership with their staff members. This led to authorized distributed leadership through informal and formal roles. This is best illustrated by Gunter’s (2005, p. 51) explanation of distributed leadership:

Distributed leadership as authorized is where work is distributed from the headteacher to others. This distribution is usually accepted because it is regarded as legitimate through the complex operation of both hierarchy in the form of subordination and through attribution in the form of giving status to a person to determine activity and take actions.

The notion that principals share their duties with staff members was clear as all the women principals in my study delegated tasks to their staff members and believed in delegation as a means of getting tasks done, which in turn empowered the teachers. PA said:

I only concentrated on the academic side of the school and failed to mention that I have women running the sport activities at the school. She (teacher responsible for sport/sport teacher) organizes all sport activities at school and another lady organizes all cultural activities at school. This ensures that the school performs strongly in all aspects, thanks to good teamwork.

What was revealed was that the principals realized that they could not fulfil the tasks and functions alone. Through delegating some of their duties to staff members, principals involved them with the positive outcome of effective shared responsibility. As PD further stated, "I have a group of people that I am working with and I appointed a subject head for each subject area. Those are the people that help me with the leadership of the school".

Fennell's (2002) study states "many principals' experiences were based on power sharing, collaboration, decentralized decision-making and were inherently rational" (p. 111).

5.3.7 Principals' interactions with parents

The data showed that parents, teachers and, in some cases, learners formed part of the leadership of schools. Principals felt that school board members should take more of a lead and initiative in terms of their role as stakeholders in education. For example, it was mentioned by one principal, "I would have loved that they take the lead". It emerged that principals have a role to play in teaching and helping school board members to become more active and involved in school governance. This resonates very well with the findings of Niitembu (2004, p. 78) that "the school management should help parents to learn and practise their roles effectively in school governance".

The data also indicated that principals went to the extent of practically teaching school board members their responsibilities and duties. Another Namibian study done by Mungunda (2003, p. 41) on participative management found that his participants saw stakeholder involvement "as a fundamental aspect of participative management". In line with this thinking, the Namibian, *Toward Education for All: a development brief for education, culture and training* document, states that "a democratic education system is organized around broad participation in decision-making and the clear accountability of those who are our leaders" (MBEC, 1993, p. 42).

The data also indicated the three primary school principals' satisfaction in terms of parental involvement as asserted by PA: "From the onset the parents were very involved". From the

data it emerged that the younger the learners, the more parents were involved in schools. Parents became less involved in their children's education the older the learners became. This seemed to be in line with the secondary school principal's experience of parents not attending meetings. PC stated her desire for parental involvement: "I need parents' involvement in their children's education...I will always believe that education is a triangle between the parent, learner and teacher and that's one big obstacle".

5.3.8 Commitment

Commitment is a theme that constantly came up in leadership literature and is defined in *Thesaurus online dictionary* as "the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action" as well as "the act of sharing in the activities of a group".

The data indicated that all participants had a strong sense of self in terms of being hard workers, which showed their commitment towards leadership in their schools. This aligns with Taylor and Hood (2010, p. 631) that "the self-enhancement motive tends to have a stronger influence on the self-concept and individual behaviour than other motives". It emerged from the data that the principals had a very strong self-image of themselves as leaders. In fact, "the desire to think well of oneself is apparently stronger ... Thus commitment cannot be taken as an automatic quality in every leader and should not be taken for granted" (Kawana, 2002). According to Sterling and Davidoff (2000, p. 27):

One may have status, authority and responsibility of a leader, but this does not automatically make one an effective leader. The first step in turning around a negative situation is the commitment to lead. Commitment frees one from making excuses as to why a negative situation cannot change, and allows one to make a real difference to practically any situation.

Kawana, (2002, p. 52) found that her participants saw commitment as being "related to leadership success in a school". The data in my study showed that the principals were very aware of their own abilities, capabilities and competencies. These principals turn out to be their own best friends by showing a strong self-image. All the participants regarded themselves as very hardworking and committed to leading the schools. It supports Grant's (2005, p. 54) findings that "women have to work twice as hard as men to be acknowledged as a leader".

Kawana (2002, p. 52) found that her research participants showed commitment as being related to leadership success in a school, which resonates well with the following statement from PC in my study:

I firmly believe to walk the talk and work hard. I cannot expect other people to work hard and not be prepared to work hard. I must work very hard or even harder than everybody else. I am trying to set an example for the staff.

In this regard, Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 34) state that “the effective leader is able to align ...facets of commitment to show the goals and values of the follower, the group, the leader, and the organization are in basic agreement”. Hard work and commitment are essential for effective leadership by principals in schools. The data indicated that the principals in my study strived to achieve maximum results and were steering their schools onto the path of excellence through hard work.

5.3.9 Role modeling

Bass and Riggio (2006, p. 36) indicate, “ a leader who is a role model for followers, and one who behaves consistently with the values she or he espouses, can more easily build commitment to a group’s or an organization’s values, goals, or standards of behaviour”. Fennell (2002) also speaks about power associated with being a positive role model (p. 111). In her findings, Fennell’s principals “acted as a role model to teachers, students and parents by demonstrating the importance of making and supporting difficult decisions for the good of everyone” (p. 110). Principals in my study served as role models to teachers and learners. PD affirmed this when she asserted that:

I should set the example to others and take the lead and not be afraid of hard work. One should be committed and lead through example and not back off from hard work. I must be the one to motivate my staff not just by talking, but also by doing it so that they can emulate my good example set by me.

This indicates a good correlation between the literature and my findings. The four principals perceived themselves as role models for their staff and learners and indicated that they led by setting a good example through hard work. Role modeling is a very important aspect as Kauaria (p. 65) cautions, “What a leader is doing and how he or she is doing it, is very important”. She continues:

When leaders are role models, then in a way they convince their followers that they know what they are doing and they are thus confident and through that they generate hope and confidence in their followers. I think how a leader leads his/her life determines whether followers want to put their lives in his or her hands. (*ibid*)

Udjombala (2002) found in her study on women leadership that women serve as representatives of their sex and should set a very good example to be followed by others. She stated that women's actions are evaluated as if it represents the way all women work "particularly if they make the slightest mistake or error of judgment" (p. 82). The need to set a good example is also very important in leading their schools, as women fulfill the role of pioneers and examples to other women who follow in their footsteps.

Apart from just being role models, the findings indicated that all of the principals' own role models played a significant part in their methods of leading the schools. They regarded their role models as influencing the way they lead which included fathers, mothers, grandfathers as well as very influential leaders from yesteryear. As stated by one principal, "my grandfather taught me my principles". This resonates with findings in Kauaria (2002, p. 65) which indicate that "they seemed to have learnt a lot from their role models - love, honesty, fairness to all and trust". According to Jean-Louis (2004, p. 81), role modeling is what "leaders use in order to be effective in their leadership" which resonates with my findings.

5.3.10 a 'mother figure'

Interpersonal leadership links with qualities of the collegial model and was witnessed in my principals, who showed consensus in their decision making processes, their passion towards their work, and their love and care for the teachers and learners, to achieve excellence in education. The data in my study also revealed that women principals served the role of 'mother' to teachers and learners. The 'mother figure' emerged as the leadership approach used by most of the principals and portrayed the happy family relationships that prevailed in the schools. The principals showed a sense of love and care and were nurturing towards staff members and learners in the school. This promoted collegiality in the schools, coupled with trust and support towards stakeholders.

Principals specifically referred to younger male teachers and learners, both male and female, who would come into the office and discuss personal issues and seek guidance. PD described the manner in which learners regard her as their mother as, "School learners

regard me more as a mother than a principal and if they come to my office they do not even knock. Next thing I see, they are standing next to my table and will just start talking to me". Furthermore she stated, "I am the principal, a mother to all 800 learners and a sister to the staff members. I also realize that I am in fact the mother to those male teachers on the staff". Positive relationships that exist between staff members encourage a "sense of optimism which facilitates group performance" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 45).

5.3.11 Principals' moral purpose

Fullan (2001, p. 13) describes an effective leader as someone with a moral purpose. A person with a moral purpose is someone who cares about and loves what they are doing. Enomoto (2000, p. 384) states: "The many positive normative concepts ...deal with parental nurturing, love, generosity, and humanitarianism: unconditional love, optimism, trust, compassion, and a capacity for intuition, creativity, and happiness". This resonates with how some principals described themselves in chapter four, when they explained that, "it comes naturally to me, almost like breathing" and, "inherently, I am a loving person". This showed that they are caring persons who are passionate about their work and want to make a difference in the life of their schools. They believed in the need to empower their staff to achieve their full potential and make the interpersonal relationships work at the school.

They shared their passion with stakeholders for a common purpose, since leadership without passion is like an empty promise. The data indicated that principals were passionate about leading their schools and were constantly looking for new ways to improve on their leadership abilities. This was evident in the following words by PD: "For me education is not just a career but also my passion". The data confirmed this as it showed that all the principals were constantly looking for alternative ways to achieve the objectives of their schools.

5.3.12 Communication

Communication has, throughout history, played a significant role in the life of human beings. It is important that leaders apply effective communication skills that promote effective communication in their schools. Almost all the principals in my study alluded to the fact that they place a strong emphasis on communication and stated that they have an open

door policy with stakeholders in their respective schools. Some principals even went to the extent of providing parents with their contact details. They appeared to be approachable and were willing to listen to the teachers, learners and parents, concerning themselves with effective communication regardless of the level of the stakeholders. PA emphasised this when she stated: "I am very approachable". She also explained that she had an 'open door' policy.

Principals did not only use verbal communication, but the data also showed that listening was another important component in their method of communicating. PB stated, "My understanding of leadership is that one should always to listen to the other side of the story". Information sharing was very important to them, as PC said: "...it is not just the sharing of information, it also empowers them by building on their communication skills". Listening, as indicated in Russell (2001), is a way of showing appreciation towards other people and that corresponds with my findings. Nixdorff (2004, p. 3) referred to Rosener's (1990) findings on interactive leadership, when he said:

Women in her qualitative study actively worked to make their interactions with subordinates positive for everyone involved. The women encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people's self-worth, and get others excited about their work.

The data in my study revealed that the principals made time for stakeholders and listened to their concerns and views, enabling them to be empathetic when taking consensual decisions; these qualities denoted democratic decision making and a distributive leadership style. As PB explained, "I think my ability to listen to both sides of the story is one of my strongest points as a principal". As stated in chapter two, findings in Centry et al., noted that "women emerged as leaders on social measures or interpersonal aspects of leadership". Furthermore, in chapter two, Taleb (2010) states, "interpersonal relationships embrace interaction, support, communication and active listening". The principals' experience was that of sharing power with stakeholders, so that all could participate in leading their schools.

The data revealed that principals also showed a high degree of emotional intelligence as they spent time on relationship building with stakeholders. The principals demonstrated the skill of bringing stakeholders together through their way of communication. They possessed social skills and an ability to work with stakeholders, which indicated that they had

developed leadership qualities. PB raised this point: “I always tell myself that God gave me two eyes to see better, two ears to hear well, but only one mouth to speak. I must always be aware of what I say”. The data indicated that the principals shared their views with stakeholders, which developed sound communication skills. As PA pointed out, “whenever we meet, we would greet and talk; they would approach me anywhere with whatever problem they might have”. According to Rosener (1990, p. 123), “information is a source of power” and power will be discussed in the next section.

5.3.13 Power

According to Udjombala (2002, p. 77), studies done on women in leadership found that power has different meanings for men and women. According to Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 125):

Female school principals are more likely to employ the “power through” and “power within” approaches to leadership associated with empowerment and participation than the “power over” approach associated with control of dominance that is a masculine image of power.

Women are often regarded as too emotional and weak in their leadership. Many regard women as lacking the capabilities to lead a school. However, all the principals in my study felt that they were ‘an authority’ and were also ‘in authority’. Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others and the principals acknowledged that their positions put them in a powerful position to influence stakeholders in their schools.

The data showed that all four women principals held legitimate power due to their positions in the schools, but they also realised that power has nothing to do with their hierarchical positions, as real power is built on trust and must not be misused. In the words of PC, “I must use power and never abuse power. Power is there not to lift me up, but to serve. You can lose power when people lose their trust in you”. The principals’ power is by virtue of their influence over the teachers, parents and learners at their schools. Thus, a leader with authority is better than a leader who only has authority.

Fennell (2002, p. 100), citing Hurty (1995), indicates the “five dimensions of ‘power with’ as emotional energy in their interactions in leadership, nurturing growth and learning in working with others, listening and sharing different viewpoints, pondered mutuality that

involved keeping others' interest and needs in mind in planning and decision-making and the process of collaborative change". Principals' experiences in my study were based on power sharing. This resonates well with the findings of Muzvidziwa (2006, p. 151), when she states that the women in her study emphasized the issue of "sharing ideas, sharing information and power".

5.4 Gender and leadership

Nixdorff (2004, p. 2) states that "gender is always an issue when female leaders are evaluated and acts as a filter for assessing women's leadership skills and effectiveness". The data revealed that three of the principals in my study said that there was no difference between the way men and women lead and that both men and women are similar in their way of leading. This aligns well with the literature in section 2.5.1 that calls for androgynous leadership for modern organizations. As Pounder and Coleman (2002, p, 127) state:

Modern leaders are urged to be androgynous, a term that is use to describe a leader, regardless of biological gender, able to combine the best of male and female leadership traits. Arguably, the androgynous leadership is the style relevant to managing modern organizations with their multi-gender, multinational and multi-social environments and is also employed by women.

This further correlates with the study done by Pounder and Coleman on leadership roles for male and female in which they concluded, "It all depends" (Pounder & Coleman, 2002, p. 129).

However, some principals indicated that there was a difference in the way they do things. For example, PC stated that:

I think that females are a bit more patient than males and that is due to biological influences such as oestrogen levels. Males are more impatient, but I would never concede that a particular leadership skill is due to being male or female.

This view differs from PD who indicated that there are differences between the leadership styles of men and women when she stated:

According to me there are differences between a male and female principal. Male principals are more formal and women principals lead in an informal way. Learners become much closer to a female principal than a male.

This resonates well with Udjombala, (2002, p. 2) who indicates that “examples of research that have been carried out on women principals, as found in literature, indicate that successful women school principals use ... leadership approaches different from those normally associated with men”.

5.5 Resistance to women leadership

The Namibian Constitution, Gender Policy and Affirmative Action Policy make provision for women to participate in decision making positions as stated by Article 23 of the Namibian Constitution:

It shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation (The Constitution of Namibia, not dated, p. 16).

As stated in chapter two, the Namibian Government has put measures in place for eradicating and restructuring inequalities and discrimination stemming from the past injustices of the apartheid legacy which did not include women in leadership positions. But discrimination is still a factor, as indicated in the literature in chapter two, and despite these legal provisions, there is still prejudice against some women in leadership positions. In the words of Moorosi, (2007, p. 519):

Policy alone cannot guarantee gender equality. Hence, these gendered social practices both within schools and the society have to be identified and tackled as and when they happen in order to achieve broader and genuine gender equity.

Apart from the women principals perceiving themselves generally as effective leaders, the data revealed that despite an inclusive Constitution and policies, some women still experienced discrimination in leading their schools. The data indicated conflicting results in terms of discrimination. Some principals indicated that they never experienced discrimination as asserted by PA, “Not at all, no discrimination”, while other principals revealed that they experienced tension in the process of taking up their positions as principals, as stated by PB, “...in the beginning, yes, a little bit”. The fact that women principals in my study experienced resistance in taking up leadership positions resonates with findings in Moorosi’s study on women principals in South Africa:

Some woman principals were found to have experienced blatant discrimination in their earlier attempts to participate in management on the grounds that male candidates were sought after (2007, p. 508).

In contrast, the data revealed that two of my study principals felt that Namibia is way past the stage of women not being accepted in principals' position.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the themes that emerged from my data analysis. It surfaced through data analysis that the principals in the study showed some effective leadership qualities like good communication, role modeling, serving as a 'mother figure' and showing characteristics of leadership styles. Their leadership qualities went beyond transformational leadership and showed traces of servant and distributive leadership. As Bush (2011b, p. 514) mentions, "the role of the principal is widely regarded as central for school improvement and enhanced student outcomes". There is growing support for principals to distribute leadership in schools to stakeholders. Bush (2011b) concludes by indicating that "despite the normative support for shared, or 'distributed' leadership (Harris, 2010), the position of the head teacher remains vital if schools are to be successful learning organizations" (*ibid*).

The next chapter concludes the study by presenting a summary of the main findings and a critique of my research. It also provides recommendations for further research in the field of women leadership.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was on four women principals' experience and perceptions of women leadership. The main aim was to understand how these women position themselves in terms of leadership. Findings on principals' effective leadership characteristics were discussed in the previous chapter as were the strengths they brought to their leadership as well as the challenges they encountered.

In this chapter, I start with an overview of the main findings as discussed in chapter five, by summarizing the study in relation to my research questions. I present my reflections on the methodology I adopted and I discuss the potential value of my study. Recommendations for women principals' leadership as well as for further research conclude my study.

6.2 Summary of main findings

My study investigated how women leaders position themselves in terms of leadership in their schools. The rationale of the study was to find answers to the research questions. The main findings of my study emerged from the semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview as well as observation of the primary participants. In this section, I present a summary of the main findings in response to each of my three research questions.

6.2.1 Women principals' perceptions of their leadership roles

In relation to the first research question on women's perceptions of their leadership roles, the data sketched a picture of the principals viewing themselves as transformational leaders, who adopted an authorized form of distributed leadership as well as demonstrating characteristics of servant leadership in their schools.

The principals believed they took initiative in leading their schools and were passionate about their work. They indicated that leadership came very naturally to them and that they had a love for their work. Their nurturing, loving and caring values emerged strongly and teachers and learners perceived them as mothers. Principals were quite happy to take up the role of a 'mother figure' in relation to teachers and learners at their schools. The principals had a clear understanding of where they wanted their schools to be in the future. The principals emerged as visionary leaders who provided their teachers with the responsibility of putting plans and ideas into action to conform to educational standards and values. Their clear vision gave direction to stakeholders to move towards the achievement of set goals.

Also, in relation to the first research question, the principals as leaders explained how they were influenced by their own leader role models. They indicated that they led their schools according to the guidance that they received from their own role models. The principals also served as role models to the staff and learners by setting good examples through hard work, dedication and being reliable in their work. The principals gained the trust and respect of stakeholders by showing faith in them. In line with transformational leadership, these principals inspired their followers and empowered them to reach their full potential through commitment towards their profession.

Contradictory findings emerged in relation to the women principals' perceptions of their leadership styles in comparison to men. While some indicated that there was a difference between women and men in relation to their leadership styles, others indicated that there was no difference in leadership styles. The fact that some did not see a difference, confirmed that women, in some instances, lead similarly to men and it all depended on the circumstances and the situation with which they were confronted. These women believed that one's leadership style has nothing to do with whether one is a man or woman. This is an indication of a move towards a more androgynous form of leadership as a modern leadership approach.

6.2.2. Leadership strengths of the women principals

In relation to the second research question, the women principals displayed a range of strengths. The principals believed they demonstrated self-sacrificial behaviour, through

taking initiative and accepting assistance from stakeholders. This built trust which brought out characteristics of servant leadership. In line with the concept of servant leadership in the context of the schools, principals made sacrifices for the betterment of their schools. These principals believed they led by example, worked with their staff members in teams and established collegiality in their schools.

In relation to strengths, the principals admitted that they could not do everything and that there were limits to their skills and knowledge. The principals therefore approached stakeholders for assistance and drew on teachers' knowledge and skills to achieve set goals for the schools. The fact that they reached out for assistance showed that they were willing to admit their shortcomings and weaknesses in the quest for the most effective school leadership possible. This was a clear indication of their humility and they were realistic about what they individually could and could not achieve.

As a consequence, the principals delegated tasks to their teachers and involved them formally and informally in leadership roles. The findings indicated that the principals emerged as distributive leaders who promoted teacher leadership in their schools. They provided teachers with responsibilities and trusted them with their work in their schools. Teachers were regarded as assets because they contributed towards the development and growth of the schools. In line with contemporary leadership theories, the principals focused on involving, supporting and directing staff members to achieve the goals and purposes of the schools. They increased the effort of achieving goals through hard work, communication and involvement of staff, learners and parents. I consider this a real strength of these four women principals.

6.2.3. Challenges to women leadership

In relation to the third research question, it was interesting that the principals felt they were faced with very few challenges. Whilst it was evident from the data that the principals showed a high level of commitment and emerged as hard working in their task of leading schools, this could be construed as a challenge. This was because these women needed to work harder than their male counterparts, which confirms the literature which suggests that women have to work twice as hard as men to be accepted as leaders in organizations. This can therefore be considered as a challenge to women leadership.

A further challenge which some of the participants experienced, was the extent to which they were accepted and recognized as leaders in their schools. On the whole, it emerged that although some of the principals felt resistance prior to their appointment as principals, the negative attitudes and prejudices lessened after the formal appointments. The longer they held the position of principal, the less the resistance became. At the time of my study, all four principals were confident that they were accepted as leaders of their schools.

6.3 Reflection on methodology

As stated in chapter one and three, this study was a case study in the qualitative, interpretive paradigm. The case study approach enabled me to focus on the leadership of four women principals. The case study approach led to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of women leadership under investigation. The study investigated how women principals experience and perceive themselves as leaders in their schools. It looked at how they positioned themselves in terms of leadership.

Semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview and observation were used as an attempt towards triangulation of data. Multiple data gathering methods were suitable, since they enabled me to gather rich descriptions of how women experience and perceived them as leaders. I believe that the case study approach was best suited to my research and allowed me to gather a range of data from different sources which ensured the trustworthiness of my findings.

6.4 Potential value of my study

My research questions served as a guideline towards the potential value of my study, which looked at how women principals experience and perceive themselves in their leadership of schools. It is important to note that my study found that leadership does not depend on the gender of the leader, but depends rather on the situation in which the leader finds him or herself. Thus both men and women leaders can make a positive contribution to the education of the learners. It is hoped that these findings can enhance the positive role that the growing number of women leaders can play in the leadership of schools. I am of the opinion that my study contributed to the overall deliberation surrounding women

leadership.

I hope that the findings of this study will benefit the Ministry of Education and any other stake holder for future planning and development of human resources in the Otjozondjupa Educational Region, particularly in terms of women leadership in schools. Middle managers who want to pursue their careers as principals, and particularly newly appointed women leaders, might benefit by reading this thesis and engaging in issues and challenges in relation to their leadership.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

As stated in chapter one, it is hoped that this study will inspire and motivate future scholars to undertake further research in the Otjozondjupa region on women leadership. Further suggestions for research would be a large scale survey on women leadership using closed questionnaires. It would also be worthwhile to suggest that future researchers do more qualitative cases as further samples on women leadership in different types of schools in the region: rural, urban, primary, secondary, private etc. The primary participants in my study were principals. There is a need to explore parent and teacher perceptions of women in leadership positions as well. Therefore, all conclusions drawn from this study should remain tentative. In conclusion, I believe that this study should be regarded as exploratory and preliminary to the development of further studies in this area.

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APPENDIX A



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8383

Fax: +27 (0) 46 622 8028

PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140

21 June 2011

Mrs Faustina N. Caley
Regional Director
Otjozondjupa Region
Private Bag 2618
Otjiwarongo
Namibia

Dear Mrs Caley

Permission to conduct research in your region

I am writing to obtain your permission for Ms Cornelia Araes (student number 11A5375) to collect data from schools in your region. She is a registered Masters student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa in the field of Educational Leadership and Management under my supervision. She has reached the point where she is ready to conduct his research. She wants to investigate women leadership in schools in your region.

Mrs Araes will need access to documents, to observe the school in action to get a sense of its climate and culture, and to interview and conduct focus groups with principals. She deserves all the assistance she can get for this project. Gender in leadership is an important issue in education in Namibia and the rest of Southern Africa but as yet under-researched. Mrs Araes has done well so far in her coursework and I have every confidence that she will produce a good study.

Thank you in anticipation for your permission and support. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely



(Prof) Hennie van der Mescht (Supervisor)

APPENDIX B



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8383

Fax: +27 (0) 46 622 8028

PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140

17 June 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Ms Cornelia Araes (student number 11A5375) is a registered Masters student at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa in the field of Educational Leadership and Management. She has reached the point where she is ready to conduct her research. She wants to investigate women leadership at selected schools in her region. The purpose of this letter is to obtain your permission for her to collect data from your school.

Ms Araes will need to observe the school in action to get a sense of its climate and culture, and she will need to interview you as the principal. Ms Araes deserves all the assistance she can get for this project. Gender is an important issue in leadership today, particularly in Southern Africa, but as yet under-researched. The caliber of Ms Areas' work so far suggests that she will produce a sound thesis and add significantly to the field of Educational Leadership and Management.

Thank you in anticipation for your permission and support. If you have any queries please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely



(Prof) Hennie van der Mescht
(Supervisor)

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM: PRINCIPAL

Mrs. Cornelia Araes is herewith given permission to conduct interviews, observations and to have access to school's documents, which forms part of her data collection process for her writing of her research theses in completion of her Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and Management.

I am aware that transcripts of the interviews will be used in the final research project. I have been assured anonymity in the report in terms of my school and myself.

Signature of Principal:

Date:



APPENDIX D

WOMEN LEADERSHIP: 2011

WOMEN LEADERSHIP SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS: INTERVIEW 1

1. When did you start your professional career in education? When did you get promoted?
2. Can you describe what it was like for you when you were first appointed to your current position?
3. How long have you been a principal at this school?
4. Are you the first women leader at this school?
5. How do you see yourself in relation to your male colleagues?
6. How do you understand what a leader is? Can you define what it means? In your own words / understanding?
7. Tell me about your background and how has this influence your achievements?
8. Who are the leaders you admire? And why?
9. Do staff members give you the cooperation as their leader? What help do you receive from colleagues?
10. How do you motivate/guide fellow staff members as a leader?
11. Do you feel that women in work and personal setting help each other become leaders?
12. Does your workplace encourage women to develop their leadership skills?
13. Do you think women principals lead differently from male principals?
14. Do parents accept you as leader at this school? How do you involve them? How do they get involve?
15. What is your biggest achievement as leader? Why?
16. Can you comment/ (describe on any challengers that you face as a leader of this school?
17. Have you experienced discrimination of any form?
18. Do you experience any kind of resistance in being women principal?
19. Apart from leading what other role/responsibility do you have at this school?



APPENDIX E

WOMEN LEADERSHIP: 2011

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW: INTERVIEW 2

THE SEQUENCE OF THE QUESTIONS MAY DIFFER FROM ONE PRINCIPAL TO THE OTHER.

1. How would you describe yourself in terms of leadership? What kind of leader are you?
2. What characteristics did/ do you bring to your school that makes others view you as a leader?
3. Do you think there is a difference in leadership styles based on gender?
4. How do you motivate and empower your staff members and learners?
5. How would you describe your work climate at the school?
6. How would you describe your working relationship with the school board?
7. What is your vision as a leader in terms of your school?
8. What forms of support do you need to make this vision possible?
9. Do you have a platform as women principals to discuss possible challengers in terms of leadership?
10. What is your view on power?
11. Do you think of yourself as someone who has or had power?



RHODES UNIVERSITY

Where leaders learn

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1. What is your understanding of a leader?
2. What type of leadership styles is associated with women leadership?
3. What characteristics do women bring to their work place that enables them to be viewed as leaders?
4. What special qualities do women leaders offer to be effective leaders?
5. What challenges/problems do women encounter with leadership?
6. How do women motivate and empower their subordinates?
7. How do women balance the professional role and their household responsibilities?
8. Are women leaders accepted in schools and in the communities?
9. What is your view of culture on women leadership?

APPENDIX G

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS LEADING SCHOOLS

DATE:

Focus areas for observation	Remarks	Comments on each area
Morning briefings /Involvement & Empowering		
Caring for teachers and Learners		
Leading by example		
Communication		
Sharing of responsibilities / Delegation / Teamwork		
Open door policy		
Contributions during meetings		
General mood of the school/meetings		

SUMMARY OF THE DAY

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