

**Women in management and leadership in Oman: A comparative analysis of
career progression in the public and private sectors**

Mohammed Al Balushi

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**Newcastle University Business School
Newcastle University**



February 2025

Supervisors: Professor Charles Harvey and Dr Ana Lopes

Declaration

I declare that I am the author of this thesis, which is my original work. The content of this thesis has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. The research presented adhered to the guidelines established by Newcastle University and satisfies all applicable regulations and policies.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Swt', located on the right side of the page.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Almighty Allah for giving me the strength, knowledge, and determination to complete this PhD journey.

I am very grateful to my family for believing in me and their continuous support. Their motivation and encouragement have given me strength during times of doubt and difficulties throughout the learning journey. My grandfather's life and wisdom have been a source of inspiration.

To my dear wife, Azza, your patience, understanding, and support have been endless. Your sacrifices and encouragement have made this possible. I feel proud to dedicate this work to our lovely children, Taimur and Jouri.

I want to extend my sincere and warm gratitude to my supervisors, Professor Charles Harvey, and Dr. Ana Lopes, for their guidance, expertise, and constructive feedback. Your mentorship has improved the quality of this work and contributed to my growth as a researcher. To Professor Charles, your support and encouragement have been life-changing. Your belief in me pushed me to explore beyond my limits, and your high standards forced me to produce high-quality work. I am very grateful for your support during the financial difficulties I faced in the middle of the journey, which allowed me to continue my studies uninterrupted. Your mentorship goes beyond academia. To Dr. Ana, your support has been the substance of my success. You showed trust in my ability to finish this journey and go beyond my research. Thank you for believing in me and for helping me achieve it.

I want to show my gratitude by thanking everyone who has been part of this journey, directly or indirectly. This thesis is the result of collective effort, support, and inspiration.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all the great Omani women who are the backbone of our nation's future. Your stories, struggles, and achievements have been the inspiration of this research. May this work open doors to more opportunities and recognition.

Abstract

This study explores the advancement of Omani women into management and leadership roles, examining their current status and future opportunities in the public and private sectors. This is the first comparative study in Oman to examine how organizations reproduce cultural constraints while creating spaces for women's career advancement. The main objective is to advance understanding the structural, cultural, and institutional factors shaping Omani women's career paths. It also investigates the barriers that hinder their access to management and leadership roles and the strategies women use to navigate male-dominated leadership hierarchies. The study answers the focal research question: *how and to what degree are Omani public and private sector organizations empowering women to take up management and leadership roles?* The methodological approach is interpretivist and the theoretical stance predominantly that of Bourdieusian social theory. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Omani women at different hierarchical organizational levels and human resource managers, and from organizational documents. Data were analysed using thematic analysis combining the methods championed by Braun and Clarke and Gioia. The analysis is guided by four sub-research questions, one for each empirical chapter.

This study makes four main empirical contributions to the literature on gender and leadership in Oman and the Middle East. First, it shows that women's leadership progression is still hindered by deeply rooted cultural norms and organizational biases despite government efforts to promote gender inclusivity. Second, it finds sectoral differences: public organizations maintain traditional hierarchies while offering cultural acceptance, and private organizations show progressive practices but sustain subtle gender biases. Third, it reveals that economic capital alone is not enough for career progression; instead, strategic accumulation and deployment of social and cultural capital are key to overcoming workplace gender barriers. The thesis deploys the concept of adaptive habitus to show how women modify their behaviours and leadership styles to balance traditional societal expectations with professional aspirations. Fourth, it conceptualises the leadership field as a contested space wherein patriarchal organizational structures, evolving policies and shifting societal attitudes simultaneously create barriers and new opportunities for women's career mobility.

The research extends Bourdieu's capital theory to explain women's leadership and social mobility in Oman, highlighting the importance of recognition and legitimacy within the

dominant organizational and cultural field. It refines the concept of habitus by adding gender as a primary axis of power, revealing that women's habitus is not only shaped by deep-rooted patriarchal expectations, but also that they develop a dual habitus through education, work experience, and policy change. The study demonstrates that social change is subtly dynamic, with new policies, social movements, and global influences constantly changing gendered power structures and creating new opportunities for women's advancement.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Chapter 1- Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Advancements of women in Oman.....	1
1.3 Justification for the study	3
1.4 Motivation for the study and research objectives	3
1.5 Research questions	5
Research Questions.....	5
1.6 Thesis Structure	5
1.7 Conclusion.....	7
Chapter 2- Literature Review	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Definitions of management and leadership.....	8
Definitions of Management	9
Definitions of leadership.....	10
Differences between management and leadership.....	11
Evolution of definitions toward inclusion	12
2.3 Women in management and leadership	15
Women’s management and leadership styles.....	16
Role congruity theory	17
2.4 Barriers to women’s career progression.....	18
The glass ceiling	19
Work-life balance.....	21
Patriarchy.....	22
Lack of mentorship programmes.....	24
Lack of Networking and professional development.....	26
2.5 Gender equality in Oman	28
Religion.....	29
Culture	30
Structural barriers	31
Women in the public and private sectors in Oman	32
2.6 Gaps in the literature.....	33
2.7 Theoretical framework: Bourdieusian social theory.....	36
Bourdieu’s concepts.....	36
Habitus.....	36
Field.....	37
Capital.....	37
Application of Bourdieu’s theory in this study.....	39
2.8 Conclusion.....	42

Chapter 3- Research Methodology	44
3.1 Introduction	44
3.2 Research philosophy.....	44
Research ontology.....	45
Epistemology	46
3.3 Research methodology.....	47
Qualitative research approach.....	49
3.4 Data collection methods	52
Sampling.....	52
Purposive sampling.....	52
Snowballing	53
Selecting samples.....	53
Interviews.....	55
Semi-structured interviews	56
Audio recording.....	59
Interview protocol.....	60
Interview questions.....	60
3.5 Analysis of data.....	62
Credibility and trustworthiness.....	69
Ethical considerations	70
3.6 Conclusion.....	71
Chapter 4-Women, Economy, Society and Politics in Oman.....	73
4.1 Introduction	73
4.2 Geography of Oman	73
Strategic geographic location.....	74
Demographics of Oman.....	76
4.3 Culture of Oman	78
4.5 Political position of Oman.....	80
4.6 Economy of Oman	82
4.7 Labour market of Oman	85
4.8 Status of Women in Oman.....	88
Women’s education.....	88
Rules and Regulations for Women	92
Honourable Lady (First Lady)	94
Women in the labour market.....	95
Women in management.....	98
4.9 Conclusion.....	100
Chapter 5- Impediments to Women Progressing into Management and Leadership Roles in Oman	102
5.1 Introduction	102

5.2 <i>Embedded patriarchal norms in organizations</i>	103
Gender role expectations	107
Role in the family	111
Maternity bias	112
Double standards and doubts about ability	114
5.3 <i>Social constraints in organizations</i>	118
Internalised cultural attitudes.....	118
External sanctions	120
5.4 <i>Differences between the public and private sectors</i>	123
Promotion.....	123
Lack of training and mentorship.....	126
5.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	131
Chapter 6-Progress and Prospects for Change	133
6.1 <i>Introduction</i>	133
6.2 <i>Navigating through traditional values to career opportunities and ambitions</i>	133
Work-life balance.....	134
Adjusting traditional values to the new work reality	137
6.3 <i>Factors driving change</i>	142
Social change	144
Changing societal perceptions of working women.....	147
Changing family attitudes.....	149
Self-perceptions and career ambitions.....	152
Proactive career planning.....	153
Financial independence.....	154
6.4 <i>Organizational change factors</i>	156
Organizational support and transformational leadership	156
Evolving work environments.....	157
6.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	158
Chapter 7-Women in Senior Management Positions in Oman	160
7.1 <i>Introduction</i>	160
7.2 <i>Barriers to career progression</i>	161
Patriarchal norms and gender role socialization	165
Minority status and symbolic representation.....	169
Exclusion from informal networks	171
7.3 <i>Resistance to the authority of women leaders</i>	173
7.4 <i>Overcoming challenges to achieve career progression</i>	176
Navigating through societal resistance	176
Leveraging societal and organizational change	177
Family and spousal support	179
7.5 <i>Conclusion</i>	180
Chapter 8-Conclusion	182

8.1 Introduction	182
8.2 Overview of the thesis.....	182
8.3 Core findings, empirical contributions, and implications of the research	184
8.5 Limitations of the study.....	195
Methodological limitations	195
Contextual and sample-related limitations	196
Language and cultural translation limitations.....	196
8.6 Proposals for future research	196
References.....	198
Appendix (A)	217
Appendix (B).....	219

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Evolution of definitions of leadership in the twentieth century.....	13
Table 3.1: Interpretivist research philosophy.....	46
Table 3.2: Differences between inductive, deductive, and abductive research approaches.....	49
Table 3.3: Gender distribution of interviewees.....	54
Table 3.4: Distribution of interviewees by occupation	55
Table 3.5: Interview questions	61
Table 4.1 Changes in population and GDP of Oman over 20 years	77
Table 4.1 General economic indicators for Oman, 2003-2022.....	84
Table 4.2 Composition of the labour market in Oman.....	85
Table 4.3. Education indicators in Oman, 1969-2022.....	89
Table 4.4. Participation in higher education according to gender.....	91
Table 4.5. Distribution of men and women in different majors in Omani universities.....	92
Table 4.5 Gender distribution in the public and private sectors.....	96
Table 4.6 Distribution of Omani women in different subsectors	98
Table 4.7 Distribution of top management in the public and private sectors.....	100
Table 5.1 Word counts of patriarchal terms used by interviewees in both sectors	103
Table 5.2 Gender distribution of interviewees	105
Table 5.3 Paradox on women leadership abilities between public and private sector organizations.....	116
Table 5.4. Promotion strategy in the public and private sector.....	124
Table 5.5 Types of training programs Offered by women in the public and private sector...	128
Table 6.1 The differences between sectors in work-life balance initiatives.....	136
Table 6.2 The changes in traditions perceptions and practices	141
Table:6.3 Factors bearing on improved career prospect for Omani women.....	142
Table 7.2: Challenges faced by women when seeking promotion.....	162

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Management skills.....	10
Figure 2.2. How managers and leaders can work together	12
Figure 2.3. An Integrative model of challenges women face in organizations.....	19
Figure 2.4. Career development problems women face in Saudi Arabia.....	29
Figure 2.5. Bourdieu’s Concept of Capital	38
Figure 3.1: Inductive approach	47
Figure 3.2: Abductive research process	49
Figure 3.3: Streamlined code-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry	65
Figure 3.4: Structure of thematic analysis using the gioia method.....	66
Figure 3.5: Research design and process	69
Figure 4.1. Location of the Sultanate of Oman.....	74
Figure 4.2. The Strait of Hormuz and trading routes	75
Figure 4.3. Omani population pyramide	77
Figure 4.4 The Omani Empire in 1856	78
Figure 4.5. Expatriate labour distribution in the Omani private sector	86
Figure 5.1 The organizational views of women's role and the impacts	109
Figure 5.2 organizational internalising culture and the avoidance of external sanction.....	121
Figure 5.3: women's career bath in the public and private sector.....	130
Figure 6.1: The cycle of family change attitude	152
Figure 7.1 Barrier to women's career advancements	161

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter establishes the framework for the thesis. After providing a brief overview of Oman's social and economic changes since the 1970s and the progress made by women, I emphasize the increasing contribution of women's roles in the country's workforce, especially in management and leadership roles. The background, scope, and justification for this study are elucidated. The research questions and objectives are presented, focusing on the factors impacting women's participation in management and leadership roles, the organizational practices that support or hinder their progression, and the personal experiences of women who have achieved these roles. Next, the structure of the thesis is summarized, offering an overview of how the study is designed to accomplish its objectives and contribute to the existing literature on gender equality in management and leadership in Oman and the Arab Middle East.

1.2 Advancements of women in Oman

Oman has experienced considerable social and economic changes since the 1970s when Sultan Qaboos bin Said's modernisation renaissance (May God have mercy on him) began, changing the country's society from traditional to modern with ambitions to be one of the leading economies in the Middle Eastern region. One of the important aspects of this change has been the role and status of women in society, particularly in education, employment, and other aspects of social participation.

“We are continuing this path, God willing as we are, that the country, in its blessed march, needs both men and women because no doubt it resembles the bird in relying on both its wings to fly high on the horizons of the sky. How can this bird manage if one of its wings is broken? Will it be able to fly?” (His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, 2009)

Education is the cornerstone of Oman's development strategy, as global research indicates that education is a crucial factor in women's empowerment and advancement in management and leadership roles (Moghadam, 2013). The late Sultan's vision for a modern Oman aimed to provide education for all citizens, regardless of gender. This strategic shift established the foundation for the gradual yet significant changes in women's roles within Omani society (Al-Lamky, 2007). Furthermore, legal and policy frameworks have evolved to

support women's participation in the labour force. The Basic Law of the State, Oman's constitution, prohibits gender discrimination and enforces equal opportunities for all citizens. The country accepted the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2006, which aligns with the ILO's standards of global best practices for gender equality in the workplace (ILO, 2019). Yet, despite these legal developments, women still face difficulties progressing to management and leadership roles in the workplace. Cultural norms, societal expectations, and organizational practices that favour men are still barriers to women's advancement (Al-Lamky, 2007).

With a growing economy and the need to compete with global gender equality standards, women's participation in management and leadership roles has become a more important issue for the government and society. In addition, researchers argue that gender inclusion and diversity in management and leadership are associated with better performance, more innovation, and sustainable business (McKinsey, 2020; Post & Byron, 2015). Therefore, empowering women to reach their full potential is not just a matter of justice and fairness but an economic necessity. Traditionally, Omani society and culture, like many in the Arabian Gulf, has limited women's participation in the public sphere. However, these dynamics have shifted over the past few decades, driven by government policies, changing social attitudes, and economic necessities. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), women's participation in the labour force has increased over the past few decades, constituting 32 per cent of the total workforce in 2022 compared to just 3 per cent in 1970. However, their presence in senior management and leadership roles remains low, especially in the private sector, where they hold only 13 per cent of management and leadership positions (NCSI, 2023). Though the numbers vary between the public and the private sector, it is agreed that women are underrepresented in senior roles.

To understand Omani women's progress, we need to look at the global context of women in management and leadership. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, women are underrepresented in comparison to men in management and leadership roles in most countries and economic sectors. The report states that only 27 per cent of all managers are women worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2021). This issue is emerging in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, including Oman, where cultural, societal, and organizational factors have traditionally limited women's advancement to leadership positions (Metcalf, 2008). The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2023) shows the challenges in achieving gender equality in economic participation and leadership

internationally, with Middle East countries averaging 62.6 on the Global Gender Gap Index, where a score of 100 equals parity between men and women. This is far lower than other regions; Europe scoring 76.3, North America 75, Latin America and the Caribbean 74; Eurasia, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific 69, Africa, 68.2, and Southern Asia 63.4.

The importance of studying women's advancement into management and leadership roles is more evident in developing countries and conservative societies. As Metcalfe (2008) illustrates, understanding the challenges and opportunities for women's leadership in different cultures is the key to developing the right strategies to promote gender equality in leadership. Kemp and Zhao (2016) illustrate that the intersectionality of gender, culture, and organizational practices in Gulf countries (The Middle East) is uniquely conservative, a point brought home forcibly by Nazzal et al. (2024) in their article on the "webs of oppression" confronting women activists in Palestine. Therefore, Oman's rapid modernization while maintaining its cultural heritage requires focused research in this context. Examining the current situation, identifying the enablers and barriers to women's advancement, and exploring the prospects for change can provide valuable insights, in turn enhancing policies and practices. Further research in this important area will help support the Omani and Middle Eastern women's efforts for better and equal career opportunities.

1.3 Justification for the study

Research on women in management and leadership positions in the Middle East, particularly in Oman, mainly focuses on the educational sector, as women are more involved and employed in the sector than elsewhere. There is a significant lack of research on women in management and leadership roles in either the public or private sectors, although both have experienced a notable increase in women's participation in recent decades. This research gap highlights the necessity for more studies to understand the evolving role of women in management and leadership across economic sectors and beyond education. Their experiences and challenges across various fields highlight changes and obstacles to women's career growth. Furthermore, extending the research scope to encompass both public and private sectors facilitates a deeper understanding of women's advancement in management and leadership enhances efforts to promote gender equality in these sectors.

1.4 Motivation for the study and research objectives

This thesis studies Omani women's work situations, challenges, and opportunities in management and leadership roles, focusing on the factors that affect their career development

and progression. The broad goals are to understand the development of women's management and leadership opportunities in the country over the recent decades and to create a roadmap for change in the future.

Gender disparity in management and leadership worldwide is a prominent societal issue requiring ongoing research and understanding. Reaching 32 per cent of women's participation in the workforce in Oman is a significant accomplishment and should not be downplayed. However, it does not in itself signal the imminent accomplishment of gender equality or fair career competition, especially in management and leadership roles. Women are underrepresented in management and leadership roles, even in developed countries. According to Arar (2018), this issue is even more complex in the Arab world where women face persistent social subordination. Consequently, understanding the roots of domination in the Omani context is crucial to developing effective ways to increase women's participation in management and leadership roles.

As social, economic, and technological changes reshape the world, understanding how these changes play out in the Middle East generally and in Oman specifically becomes more important, especially for women seeking to progress into management and leadership roles. Metcalfe and Mimouni (2011) note that these changes differ across various countries and contexts. Thus, comprehending their effects on women's management and leadership aspirations in Oman contributes to the country specific, regional, and global literatures on the topic of gender discrimination in management and leadership.

The thesis has five main objectives. First, to clarify the current situation of women in management and leadership positions in both public and private sectors, where official statistics show a clear gap in women's participation in the two sectors. Second, to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder women's advancement to management and leadership roles. Presenting the factors that affect women's career growth is essential to develop effective strategies to enhance women's future career progression opportunities. Third, this research offers especially strong insights into deep-seated issues based on the experiences and views of women who have reached management and leadership positions at different levels in both sectors. Hence, it helps in identifying the successful strategies and best practices that can support women's career progression ambitions. Fourth, the study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and initiatives. This will help to identify the structural weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. Fifth and finally, this research aims to add to the little literature on women's

management and leadership in the Middle East. Hitherto, there has been no comprehensive study on women in management and leadership in Oman; therefore, this research is the first of its kind, providing solid ground for future research.

1.5 Research questions

Research Questions

The main research question motivating this thesis is *how and to what degree are Omani public and private sector organizations empowering women to take up management and leadership roles?*

The central argument of the thesis is developed in stages by answering four chapter-specific research questions as follows:

RQ 1 (chapter 4): How do economic, cultural, and political factors influence women's participation in management and leadership roles in Oman?

RQ 2 (chapter 5): What policies and practices have Omani public and private sector organizations adopted to facilitate women's progression into management and leadership roles?

RQ 3 (chapter 6): What factors are driving the entry of more women into management and leadership roles in Omani public and private sector organizations and why do some women succeed in progressing their careers while others do not?

RQ 4 (chapter 7): What career lessons can be learned from the experiences, tactics and strategies of existing women leaders in large Omani public and private sector organizations that might benefit women seeking career progression?

1.6 Thesis Structure

Qualitative research methods are used in this study, as they are most appropriate for investigating and understanding the phenomena within its cultural context, enabling the researcher to achieve the study objectives. This thesis is comprised of eight chapters as outlined below.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research. The introduction provides background information related to the research study, followed by an explanation of its purpose and a clarification of its rationale. In addition, it outlines the research objectives and questions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The chapter critically reviews empirical and theoretical literature relevant to what follows in the remainder of the thesis. First, the definitions of management and leadership and their implications for women's career progression are examined. Secondly, a brief discussion of Bourdieusian theory is presented, which serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Thirdly, the discussion focuses on women's leadership styles and the impact of prejudice on their participation in management and leadership roles. Fourthly, the chapter examines various factors that influence and hinder women's career advancement. Research gaps in women's advancement to management and leadership in Oman's public and private sectors are identified.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The chapter presents and justifies the methodology employed to conduct the research presented in this study. It illustrates the steps to create an appropriate framework for conducting the research and validating the findings to answer the main research question and achieve the objectives specified above. My research philosophy, design, data collection methods, tools, and analytical methods are explained.

Chapter Four: Women, Economy, Society, and Politics in Oman

This chapter is largely contextual, examining the factors that have affected women's management and leadership opportunities over the last twenty years. It discusses the educational, political, cultural, economic, social and legal factors that have assisted or obstructed women in making their careers. It answers this research question: *How do economic, cultural, and political factors influence women's participation in management and leadership roles?*

Chapter Five: Impediments to Women Progressing into Management and Leadership Roles in Oman

The chapter presents findings from in-depth interviews with human resources (HR) managers from the public and private sectors. It details organizational views and practices impacting on women's careers, focusing on the cultural beliefs, norms and practices that impede women's progression into management and leadership roles. The chapter answers the question: *What policies and practices have Omani public and private sector organizations adopted to facilitate women's progression into management and leadership roles?*

Chapter Six: Progress and Prospects for Change

This chapter explores how Omani women balance traditional values and norms with modern career demands. It explains recent changes and identifies the future horizons of women's participation in the workforce and in management and leadership roles. The chapter answers the question: *What factors are driving the entry of more women into management roles in Omani public and private sector organizations and why do some women succeed in progressing their careers while others do not?*

Chapter seven: Women in Senior Management Positions in Oman

The chapter examines the challenges that Omani women experience in progressing and attaining senior management and leadership roles. It investigates the relationships between societal norms, organizational cultures, and personal dynamics that shape women's management and leadership experiences in both the private and public sectors. It explores the strategies and strength of women leaders as they navigate the constraints. The chapter answers the question: *What career lessons can be learned from the experiences, tactics, and strategies of existing women leaders in large Omani public and private sector organizations that might benefit women seeking career progression?*

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations.

This concluding chapter provides an overview of the research, its main findings and contributions to the literature, empirical and theoretical. It examines the extent to which the research objectives have been achieved, addresses the study's limitations, and makes recommendations for further research. The chapter answers the main research question: *How and to what degree are Omani public and private sector organizations empowering women to take up management and leadership roles?*

1.7 Conclusion

The government of Oman and leading organizations in both the public and private sectors have come increasingly to recognize in recent times that talented and highly motivated women have a lot to offer in management and leadership roles, and that they should be encouraged and supported in developing their careers. However, as we will see in what follows, policy aspirations remain ahead of organizational and societal realities such that women, however able and motivated, still struggle to overcome the career challenges that beset them. The research presented below is dedicated to showing what is needed to speed progress and liberate the full potential of women in management and leadership in Oman.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter defines the literature relevant to this thesis and identifies study gaps. It starts with examining the definitions of management and leadership and their implications for women's career progression. Next, it gives a short overview of Bourdieusian theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for this research. It then discusses the position of women in management and leadership, focusing on women's leadership styles and the impact of prejudice on their engagement in senior roles through the lens of role congruity theory. Following that, it addresses the various factors and barriers affecting women's career progression in the workplace, such as the glass ceiling, work-life balance, patriarchy, lack of support and mentorship, and insufficient networking and leadership development opportunities for women. Finally, it considers the literature on gender equality and explains the differences in women's progress in management and leadership roles within Oman's public and private sectors.

2.2 Definitions of management and leadership

The differentiation between management and leadership is crucial in facilitating women's progress in the workplace. Traditional theories of leadership prioritise directive and assertive styles, often overlooking the transformative approaches employed by women (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Meanwhile, management stereotypes often fail to recognise women's strategic capabilities, as noted by Mintzberg (1973). Therefore, one can acknowledge the combined management and leadership abilities of women if broader definitions of those terms are employed (Mintzberg, 1975; Kotter, 1990). The explicit clarification of the differences between management and leadership can then help to reduce unconscious bias in talent development and promotion practices. Additionally, organizations would be able to recognise, promote, and incentivise harmonious combinations of leadership and managerial capabilities in women and establish avenues for them to progress to high-level positions more effectively. The following section examines definitions of management and leadership in the literature and their consequences for women's progress in the workplace.

Definitions of Management

Management has been defined from various perspectives by influential scholars, from Fayol's (1949) classical approach focusing on functions to Drucker's (1954) view emphasising strategic alignment. Fayol emphasised the importance of structured supervision and internal management and defined the fundamental managerial tasks as planning, organization, command, coordination, and control (Fayol, 1949). This viewpoint prioritises managerial techniques used to achieve operational efficiency, although some argue that it places excessive emphasis on internal processes rather than external strategy (Mintzberg, 1973). Drucker (1954) provided an alternative definition, where management is seen as actions aiming to set a clear direction in order to effectively coordinate the efforts of individuals and unite them in moving towards a shared objective. Nevertheless, Drucker has been criticised for underestimating the importance of organizational structures to facilitate implementation (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). Kotterman (2006) and Wajdi (2017) have presented modern perspectives on management, defining it as involving administrative planning and problem-solving to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between stability and oversight. At the same time, it can be argued that such pragmatic perspectives underestimate the importance of strategic and leadership capabilities in management (Toor, 2011).

According to various philosophies, management may be defined as the systematic control and supervision of organizational operations and resources. Katz (1955) emphasises that effective management necessitates mastering technical, analytical, interpersonal, and conceptual skills to coordinate and exercise authority effectively (see Figure 2.1). Thus, definitions of management represent various theoretical perspectives. New viewpoints regularly emerge in response to various changes that naturally occur due to cultural, organizational, and intellectual changes in practice and management.

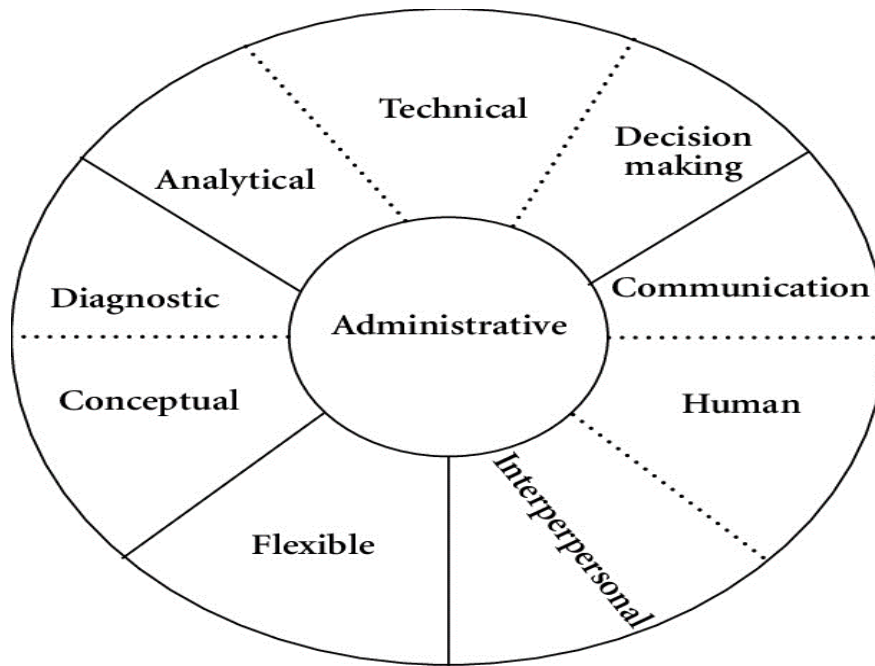


Figure 2.1 Management skills

Source: Peterson and Van Fleet, 2004 (adapted from Katz, 1955)

Definitions of leadership

Leadership is the act of establishing a course of action, formulating a vision, and guiding and inspiring followers through the use of influence rather than relying solely on formal authority (Kotter, 1990b; Hughes et al., 1999). Leadership prioritises flexibility, originality, and novel approaches that align with a leader’s values and convictions. Leaders demonstrate a participatory and transformative style, effectively conveying a vision, empowering their followers, and cultivating dedication toward new objectives (Zaleznik, 1977). In addition, they enable adapting, altering, and pursuing new strategic routes based on their vision and beliefs (Kotter, 2001). Their primary objective is to attain long-term objectives by evaluating the potential risks and advantages of groundbreaking concepts (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Influential leaders exhibit resourcefulness, a readiness to embrace uncertainty, and the capacity to foster dedication among followers through mastery in a particular field. Gosling and Murphy (2004) argue that individuals can redefine difficulties, imagine desired results, and articulate captivating visions of the future. Therefore, desirable leadership attributes encompass self-assurance, genuineness, audacity, and unwavering conviction (Capowski, 1994). These definitions differentiate leadership from management in their emphasis on informal authority, vision, and adaptability rather than formal control. There are many differences between these concepts. The following section discusses these differences and explains them.

Differences between management and leadership

Although scholars may have differing viewpoints, there is a consensus that effective organizations require a cooperative relationship between management and leadership (Northouse, 2018). Leadership is perceived as setting a strategic course, whereas management is responsible for carrying out operational tasks. Studies suggest that effective leadership involves the capacity to adapt and take transformative action that leads to substantial change. At the same time, management tends to require a more transactional approach that prioritises stability and incremental improvements (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). On one hand, leadership represents the driving force behind change, which is achieved through vision and motivation. On the other hand, management focuses on the maintenance of stability and organization by overseeing the use of resources (Kotterman, 2006; Avolio et al., 2009). Most theorists contend that management and leadership are both indispensable, with the former responsible for pioneering new directions and the latter overseeing the practical aspects of tasks (Northouse, 2007).

Excessive attention to leadership can result in unsupported visions, whereas undue emphasis on management may lead to organizational inertia. Therefore, an effective combination of effective management and leadership is the optimal approach for the achievement of high levels of performance (Hughes et al., 1999). Significant discourse exists regarding the differences between management and leadership. They are generally assumed to involve distinct activities, skills, and orientations, although there is some disagreement regarding the overlapping of the two functions (Northouse, 2007). Kotter (2001) strongly supports the idea that management and leadership have complementary roles, requiring a careful balance if organizational goals are to be attained (see Figure 2.2).

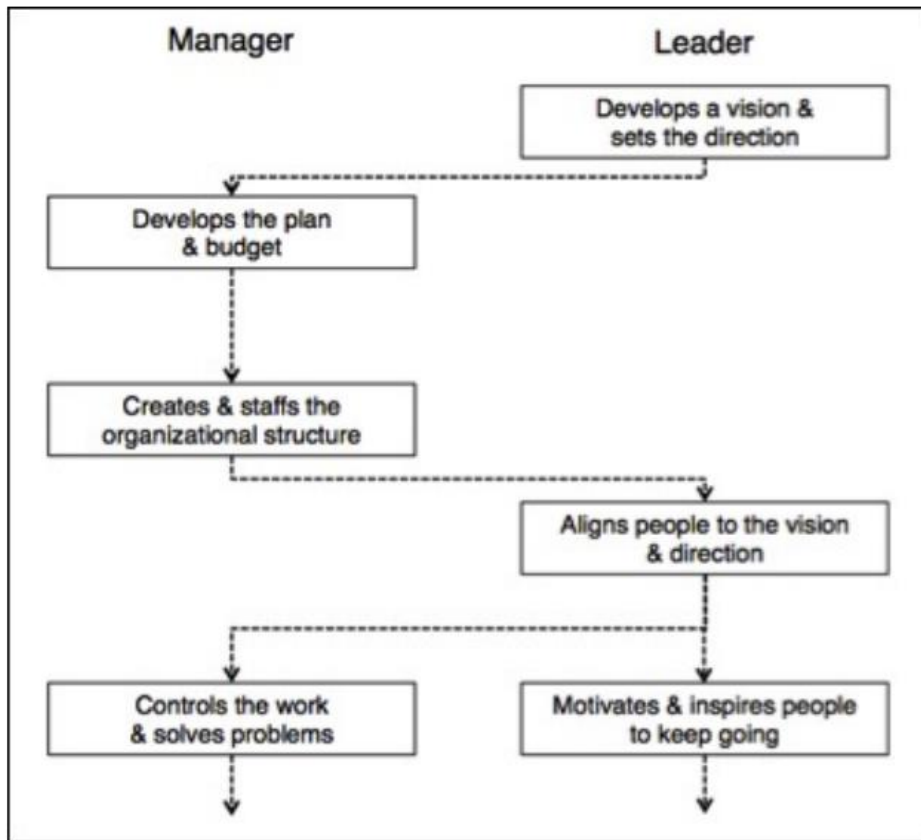


Figure 2.2. How managers and leaders can work together
 Source: Rindahl and Blackett, 2014 (adapted from Kotter, 2001)

Evolution of definitions toward inclusion

In the early twentieth century, leadership was defined in narrow terms, generally associated with ‘masculinity’ and centred on authority, control, and supervision (Tead, 1935; see Table 2.1). Dominant discourses and research at the time framed leadership as the direction of others in a commanding, assertive manner, portraying it as an inherently male pursuit and set of characteristics (Schein, 1973). Therefore, prevailing constructs of leadership at that time centred on stereotypically masculine prototypes of assertion, domination, and control as the basis for effectively leading organizations. Such conceptualisations restricted any widespread perception and acknowledgement of women’s capabilities or potentiality as leaders. However, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, mainstream conceptualisations began to gradually evolve and expand as more women entered management and leadership roles. Definitions of leadership came to be focused less on directive control and more on providing direction to groups in an engaging, participatory, empowering manner. This rhetorical shift allowed for the acknowledgement and inclusion of supposedly ‘feminine’ leadership styles, which emphasise collaboration, empowerment, developing others, and the building of interpersonal rapport

(Stogdill, 1974; Burns, 1978). Scholars recognised that attributes which are often culturally associated with femininity, such as participatory engagement and the supportive development of followers, could also serve as impactful foundations for leadership. The models proposed by Burns (1978) of transformational and servant leadership formally incorporated feminine characteristics as vital components of impactful leadership. Although leadership discourse still tended to centre on directing organizations, the overall understanding of the function expanded to encompass more participatory, development-focused and inclusive approaches.

By the 1990s, growing empirical research had demonstrated that men and women could be influential leaders using varying styles and approaches appropriate for different contexts and follower groups (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Leadership became increasingly characterised by facilitation, empowerment and development, and the leader’s role in unleashing full potential of followers through motivation, inspiration and participatory engagement was highlighted (Kotter, 2001). Such conceptual models validated what were hitherto stereotypically feminine transformational and participatory leadership methods as impactful. Definitions of leadership had transitioned from a narrow masculine-centred focus to more multidimensional, diverse and gender-inclusive conceptualisations that acknowledged women’s capabilities as influential organizational leaders in many contexts.

Table 2.1 Evolution of definitions of leadership in the twentieth century

Year	Definition of Leadership	Source	Masculine or Feminine?
1930s	“Leadership is the result of an ability to persuade or direct men, apart from the prestige or power that comes from office or other institutionalised authority.”	Tead (1935, p.20)	Masculine
1950s	“Leadership is the initiation and maintenance of structure in expectation and interaction.”	Stogdill (1974, p.411)	Masculine
1970s	“Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement.”	Rauch & Behling (1984, p.46)	Feminine/Masculine
1990s	“Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished.”	Bennis (2009, p.9)	Feminine/Masculine
2000s	“Leadership is about coping with change; management is about coping with complexity.”	Kotter (2001, p.85)	Feminine/Masculine

Source: Author

Similarly, definitions of management have progressed towards a greater acknowledgement of the importance of cooperation and inclusivity (Likert, 1961; Drucker, 1974). The human relations movement emphasised the importance of emotional intelligence and skills related to building and maintaining relationships, and this rhetorical shift allowed for the emergence of so-called feminine management styles characterised by democratic and transformational approaches (Eagly & Carli, 2003). As definitions of management became more accommodating, feminine characteristics were acknowledged as effective, thereby allowing women to emerge as leaders (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). In addition, modern theories of management have evolved towards more empowering, participatory, and dynamic conceptualisations, which present fresh prospects for women to progress into leadership positions.

According to Eagly and Carli (2007), most definitions of leadership do not acknowledge that it can involve various styles, including ‘feminine’ ones that prioritise collaboration and empathy. As a result, women are often perceived as lacking the aptitude for leadership due to their distinct inclinations as compared to men. Furthermore, definitions of masculine leadership result in inconsistent criteria being applied when assessing women leaders. Women who display direct and assertive behaviours are often punished for being overly dominant, whereas communal behaviours are expected of women (Eagly et al., 1992). Women leaders are constrained by a double bind that imposes narrow expectations on their behaviour. They are expected to be authoritative but not excessively dominant and assertive but not to be perceived as bossy or aggressive (Ely et al., 2011). The contradictory communication demonstrates how traditional notions of male leadership confine women within narrow behavioural norms.

Critics emphasise that the advancement of women leaders will require more than a broadening of leadership definitions. Inclusive definitions do not inherently overcome structural barriers such as inflexible work arrangements, lack of family-friendly policies, and broader organizational gender disparities that impede women’s progress (Kossek et al., 2016). Eagly and Karau (2002) contend that contextual elements such as stereotypes and cultural factors can influence the leadership behaviours of individuals of different genders, leading to observable disparities. Moreover, masculine connotations and biases persist in everyday language and cultural norms that continue to reinforce gendered prototypes such as ‘chairman’ (Schein, 2001). Some further argue that definitions of inclusive leadership may create an illusion of progress without changing the reality of representation in senior positions (Witt & Stahl, 2019).

The broadening of definitions to encompass diverse, gender-neutral leadership styles could allow the impartial assessment of women leaders according to universal standards. Furthermore, organizations would be enabled to enhance women's untapped potential more successfully. However, shifts in definitions alone will not fully dismantle systemic biases without accompanying practical efforts targeting culture and structure at the organizational and societal levels (Debebe, 2011). An inclusive basis must be paired with comprehensive strategies to achieve gender balance in management and leadership roles. Therefore, while not in itself sufficient, the establishment of conceptual foundations that acknowledge women's capabilities, talents and potential as leaders is a vital step. Therefore, the following section discusses women's leadership abilities and the obstacles that they face.

2.3 Women in management and leadership

Women's involvement in management and leadership roles has been extensively discussed and researched in recent decades (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Powell, 2018). With the increasing presence of women in influential roles in various sectors such as business, politics, and society, there is a growing interest in understanding the effects and significance of women in management and leadership positions. Conventional leadership theories based on masculine stereotypes have led to widespread biases and the idea that women naturally lack the skills necessary for leadership in comparison to men (Schein, 1973). The prevailing perception of ideal leaders has traditionally been associated with masculine traits such as authority, assertiveness, and decisiveness, with feminine characteristics considered to be incompatible with effective leadership (Schein, 2001). However, an influential meta-analysis conducted by Eagly and Johnson in 1990 questioned the central beliefs regarding the superior leadership abilities of men. Their analysis of more than 100 empirical studies found no noteworthy disparities in demonstrated leadership effectiveness between men and women in various fields such as business, government, the military, and education. The study also presented conclusive quantitative evidence that feminine leadership approaches which emphasise collaboration, participation, and fostering the development of others are as valuable as masculine styles that emphasise authority, direction, and control.

Research has shown that companies with more women in executive teams enjoy higher profitability, better governance, and increased innovation. Additionally, these companies experience higher employee satisfaction and better corporate reputations than companies with mostly male leaders (Adams & Kirchmaier, 2016; Huang et al., 2019; Catalyst, 2020). Based on the McKinsey study (2019), companies that have a more significant percentage of women

in their workforce, specifically those in the top 25 per cent, have a 25 per cent higher chance of attaining greater profitability compared to the average. Meta-analyses conducted by Post and Byron (2015) and Pletzer et al. (2015) notice questionable evidence about the direct impact of women leaders in improving companies' financial performance and profitability. Nevertheless, researchers such as Ely et al. (2011) warn that the mere presence of women leaders is not an indicator of advancement. Organizations still face numerous obstacles, both in terms of structure and culture, that limit the ability of women to progress into leadership positions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Consequently, for women to effectively prove their leadership abilities, organizational cultures must shift towards inclusion by adopting different leadership styles and departing from traditionally masculine leadership paradigms. Therefore, the following section examines the literature on women's management and leadership styles.

Women's management and leadership styles

In some studies, women leaders were found to be more inclined to demonstrate 'feminine' approaches that prioritise collaboration, foster employee growth, and promote participation (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women generally embrace a more democratic and transformational approach, prioritising inclusion, consensus-building, and mentoring, whereas men tended to use directive and transactional leadership styles which prioritised hierarchy, task focus, and authoritative control (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Although there are still debates about whether observed gender differences in management and leadership are due to inherent biological factors, the most compelling evidence suggests that contextual influences and learning experiences play significant roles in shaping leadership styles. Eagly and Johnson discovered moderate levels of variation in leadership style in relation to gender, but no disparities in overall effectiveness (1990). Powell's (2018) research revealed no substantial differences between men and women in their demonstration of consideration of and regard for subordinates as well as initiating structure (focus on task execution). These findings indicate that the perceived differences between 'feminine' and 'masculine' leadership styles may be exaggerated.

Leadership effectiveness is contingent upon contextual factors such as organizational culture, the leader's personality, and the challenges encountered. Exemplary leaders of both genders can demonstrate a comprehensive spectrum of effective leadership behaviour. However, the consistent attribution of a specific style exclusively to women can result in the perpetuation of stereotypes. For example, women leaders frequently receive unfavourable evaluations when demonstrating authoritative behaviour, whereas male leaders

who exhibit similar conduct are generally perceived positively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This paradoxical situation creates additional challenges for women in assuming leadership roles.

Modern academics promote accepting diverse leadership styles rather than restricting progress to those that adhere to limited masculine models. The relevance of directive, control-focused leadership is diminishing in contemporary, rapidly changing work environments (Wang et al., 2014). On the other hand, having a diverse set of feminine and masculine skills enables one to adapt most effectively to different situational demands, and research has shown that the ability to adopt various leadership styles in different situations is now recognised as an essential ability for leaders (Chin, 2010; Kark et al., 2012). The use of feminine approaches should not be perceived as a weakness but rather as a valuable strength that influential leaders integrate harmoniously. Recent empirical research indicates that leadership teams consisting of both men and women exhibit higher levels of collective intelligence, creativity, and overall performance (Post & Byron, 2015; Hoobler et al., 2018).

Role congruity theory

More academic research has expanded upon Eagly and Johnson's (1990) influential work to further examine the details of gender and leadership dynamics. Role congruity theory explains how gender stereotypes concerning leadership hinder women's career progression (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Prejudice occurs when perceived women's gender roles clash with masculine leadership stereotypes. Here, a tendency to 'think manager, think male' refers to the belief that leadership is often associated with culturally masculine traits such as authority, ambition, and dominance (Schein, 1973). Conversely, womanhood is associated with feminine attributes such as collaboration, caregiving, and consideration for others in conventional gender frameworks (Sczesny, 2003). Consequently, women leaders encounter adverse reactions and disadvantages when they display behaviours traditionally associated with women which are considered incompatible with effective leadership (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Conversely, when women attempt to address the mismatch between their leadership role and societal expectations by adopting 'masculine' behaviour, they often face criticism for deviating from traditional gender norms (Rudman et al., 2012). This situation creates a dilemma in that women are required to display masculine attributes in order to be perceived as capable leaders while also subject to adverse consequences if they demonstrate these attributes too forcefully. Commonly referred to as a 'tightrope', this phenomenon limits women leaders to a narrow range of acceptable behaviour (Carli & Eagly, 2011). Such biases are evident in studies that demonstrate preferences among both men and women evaluators for men leaders who display

stereotypically masculine attributes when choosing candidates for high-level management positions (Powell & Butterfield, 1979; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). These biases result in systematic barriers influenced by deeply ingrained ideals of masculine leadership. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and understand these barriers. The following section explains some common barriers women experience to progress in their workplaces. Therefore, presenting women in higher positions is important for organizational performance. However, women are still facing barriers to career progress. The following section explains some of these barriers.

2.4 Barriers to women's career progression

Women still encounter systemic and cultural obstacles that impede their advancement into more senior management and leadership positions (see Figure 2.3). A significant barrier is the enduring presence of gender stereotypes and societal convictions that women possess inferior management and leadership abilities in comparison to men (Schein, 1973; Heilman, 2001). This can affect hiring and promotion practices, as women may be perceived less favourably when being considered for management positions. Women may also encounter difficulties in effectively managing the demands of both their professional and family obligations. They are often burdened with the majority of caregiving responsibilities, making it challenging for them to fully commit to leadership positions that demand rigid work schedules and frequent travel (Sandberg & Grant, 2015). Further obstacles include the scarcity of mentors and sponsors to offer assistance in navigating organizational dynamics and fewer chances for the networking that facilitates professional growth. Additionally, exclusion from informal social circles and discriminatory organizational cultures pose additional challenges (Brass, 1985; Roth, 2006). Over time, these obstacles build up, causing relatively minor problems in the early stages of a career but resulting in significant disparities in representation at higher levels. To achieve gender parity in leadership, it is necessary to address and eliminate structural and cultural biases. This will require targeted intervention to overcome the many obstacles faced (Ely et al., 2011). Some of these obstacles such as the glass ceiling, work-life balance, patriarchy, lack of mentorship, and lack of network access.

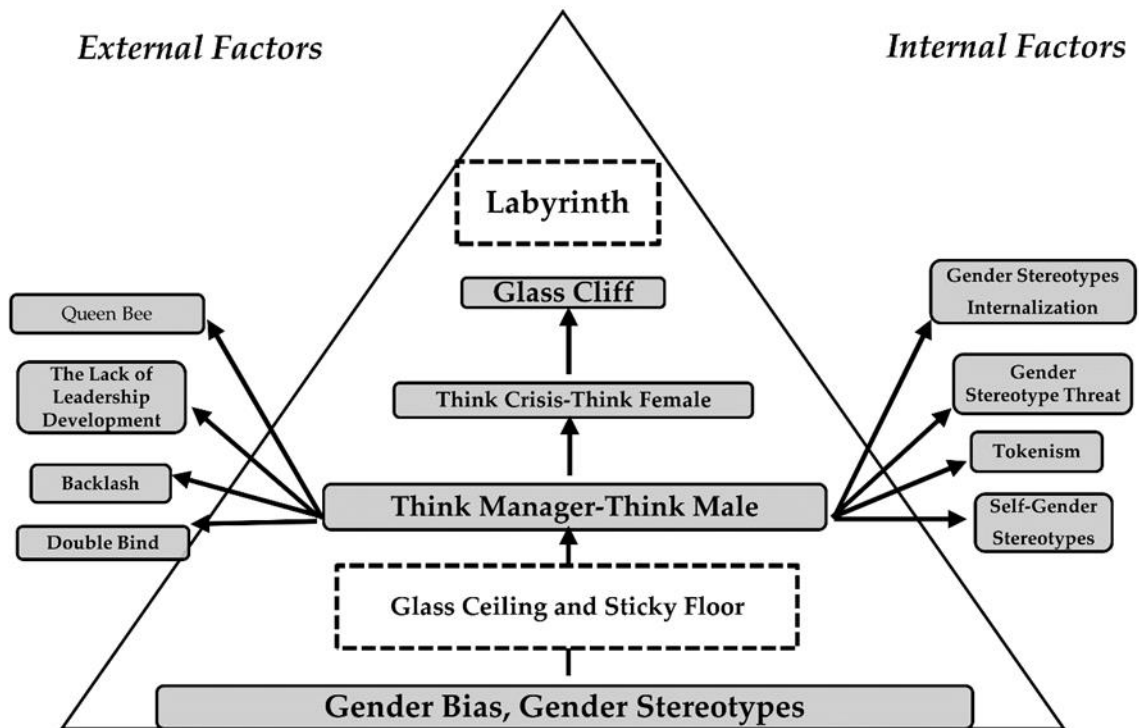


Figure 2.3. An Integrative model of challenges women face in organizations

Source: Enkhzul and Sekiguchi (2023)

The glass ceiling

The concept of the glass ceiling is a metaphor that refers to intangible obstacles which prevent women from attaining high-level leadership positions (Smith, 2020). It refers to a series of concrete and entrenched obstacles sustained by systemic prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory actions which impede women’s career advancement. Prominent factors include antiquated organizational cultures, implicit gender bias, limited mentorship opportunities, and biased policies and practices (Johnson, 2017; Patel, 2019; Ross & Robertson, 2021; Williams, 2022).

Despite heightened awareness regarding gender inequality and extensive policy reforms worldwide over the years, the glass ceiling continues to represent a significant obstacle which impedes the progress of many women in attaining top-tier management and leadership positions and influence within organizations. Based on research published by Catalyst (2019), women occupy only 29 per cent of senior management roles worldwide, and the figures at the highest levels of corporate authority are even more discouraging. According to their findings, women currently hold 41 (8.2 per cent) CEO positions at Standard and Poor (S&P) 500 companies. Gender stereotypes, male-dominated organizational cultures, limited access to sponsors and mentors, and cultural norms regarding caregiving persistently impede the

advancement of talented women, preventing them from fully realising their capabilities (Patel, 2019; Miller, 2021; Lean In, 2020; Ross & Robertson, 2021). Then, in the absence of visible models of achievement and sources of inspiration for individuals with ambitions, women find it challenging to imagine themselves in similar positions. This can represent a substantial psychological obstacle for women's aspirations, which serves as a deterrent to career progress.

The glass ceiling has several adverse outcomes in addition to hindering women's career progress. It causes organizations to lose talented individuals, unequal pay structures are maintained, and women representation in positions of authority is lacking as a result, which hinders economic growth (Davis & Jones, 2018; Catalyst, 2020; Clark, 2023). According to a study conducted by McKinsey (2019), 44 per cent of employees sampled believed that their organizations were not adequately tackling gender inequality. Prejudiced perceptions frequently result in baseless generalisations regarding a woman's aptitude for leadership, leading to discriminatory hiring and promotion choices.

The glass ceiling also persists in impeding the progress of women in Arab countries toward attaining senior leadership positions despite improvements in women's rights and opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2021). Arab nations generally have a low standing in terms of global gender equality indices and the economic and political empowerment of women. Such measures indicate the presence of cultural prejudices and institutional barriers that impede women's progress in attaining positions of authority. For example, the 2021 *Global Gender Gap Report* ranked Kuwait 77th, Saudi Arabia 147th, and Yemen 153rd, whereas Oman was ranked 121st out of 156 countries (World Economic Forum, 2021). Women comprised only 2 per cent of CEOs in the Middle East compared to 5 per cent globally (McKinsey, 2022). A survey of over 600 companies in Saudi Arabia found that women occupied only 1-5 per cent of leadership positions (Elamin & Tlaiss, 2015). Women in these countries are put at a disadvantage by cultural biases, organizational barriers, and implicit stereotypes in organizational policies and practice due to unclear and subjective recruitment and promotion standards, unconscious bias, and a lack of flexible work options and parental leave, among other causes (Kattara, 2005; Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Metcalfe, 2008, 2011; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). They additionally face entrenched patriarchal beliefs, stereotypical notions of leadership, and limited opportunities for women to benefit from influential networks and mentors, as well as a scarcity of visible women role models (Hutchings et al., 2012; Tlaiss, 2015; Barnett, 2020; Alhamadi, 2022; McKinsey, 2022). Although claims have been made that explicit discrimination is decreasing, research indicates that implicit and unconscious

biases continue to exist regarding the competence of women as leaders and managers in the Arab region (Kelan & Ngunjiri, 2015; Barnett, 2020).

There is a strong correlation in Oman between the understanding of leadership qualities and masculinity. Additionally, cultural prejudices against women authority have resulted in a limited number of women attaining high-level positions in management (Al-Lamky, 2007). Omani women aspiring to leadership positions must challenge ingrained assumptions that men inherently possess a superior aptitude for the exertion of authority (Tlaiss, 2013). The obstinacy of stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits hinders the recognition and promotion of women (Sidani et al., 2015). To break the glass ceiling, it will be necessary to change cultural attitudes and remove systemic organizational obstacles through public awareness campaigns and education, establish and enforce laws that promote gender equality, and offer support to women who are attempting to balance multiple responsibilities (Madsen, 2010; Hutchings et al., 2012). However, overcoming deeply ingrained sociocultural barriers will likely require long-term, intergenerational endeavours.

Work-life balance

Attaining a balanced harmony between work and personal life has become increasingly challenging for numerous professionals in contemporary times, particularly for women who frequently shoulder an unequal share of household duties alongside their professional pursuits. Multiple studies indicate that women encounter more pronounced challenges in attaining a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives than do men. In a study of more than 20,000 American men and women, Bianchi et al. (2012) discovered that women devoted significantly more time to household responsibilities and childcare compared to men, even when both partners were employed full-time. Moreover, a study conducted for Pew Research found that 39 per cent of women surveyed took substantial periods off from their jobs to provide care for a family member, whereas only 24 per cent of men had done the same (Parker & Wang, 2013). Disparities in the allocation of household chores can also pose difficulties for women in juggling professional and family obligations (Michel et al., 2011).

The many challenges in the work-life balance that women encounter can adversely affect their career advancement in various ways. Women who take a break from their careers to give birth and raise children frequently experience interruptions in their employment history resulting in missed chances for career progression (Berheide et al., 2014). In addition, women occasionally decline promotions or career opportunities that would impose greater time demands on them and potentially hinder their ability to handle domestic responsibilities

(Correll et al., 2007). In order to address issues of work-life imbalance, women often choose flexible work arrangements such as reduced working hours, telecommuting, or job sharing. However, these arrangements can unintentionally hinder the advancement of women's careers, as those in flexible positions are offered fewer training opportunities, promotions, and incentives for career growth (Maniero & Sullivan, 2006). Gender stereotypes attributing women's lower levels of commitment to their careers as a result of family obligations also play a role in biased performance evaluations and limited career advancement prospects for women.

Arab women face challenges stemming from the patriarchal nature of gender roles, which designate women as carers and men as providers. The cultural expectations surrounding family responsibilities in Arab societies frequently disrupt the professional trajectories of advancement opportunities for Arab women once they become mothers (Gallant & Pounder, 2008; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The 'maternity penalty' refers to the missed opportunities for promotion that women encounter when they temporarily leave their jobs to have children. At the same time, fatherhood improves men's perceived dependability and employment prospects (Metcalf, 2008). The confluence of these biases results in a dearth of women in top-tier positions. Motherhood is frequently perceived as a drawback due to negative perceptions about taking time off for family responsibilities (Gallant & Pounder, 2008). Studies conducted by Burgess (2013) and Benard & Correll (2010) indicate that, regardless of gender, evaluators perceive mothers as less competent, productive, and committed to paid work compared to women without children or fathers.

Patriarchy

The system of patriarchy, characterized by male dominance in political leadership, moral authority, and property control, has influenced societies and organizations for centuries (Walby, 1990; Liu, 2021). Although there has been an increase in educational and employment options for Arab women in recent years, traditional patriarchal beliefs and behaviour persist in the political, economic, and cultural establishments of the Arab region (Metcalf, 2011). Women in Arab countries encounter biased opportunity structures and confront gender stereotypes that result in their abilities being underestimated and their equal leadership potential compared to men denied (Jamali et al., 2006; Tlaiss, 2014). These biases are rooted in patriarchal cultural norms that link leadership attributes to masculinity, and autocratic male leadership styles are preferred (Karam & Afiouni, 2014), so women are portrayed as unsuitable candidates for positions of authority. As a result, women face systematic barriers that hinder their access to management positions, promotions, and rewards compared to their male counterparts at the

same level. This continues explicit and hidden forms of discrimination which hinder women from entering and progressing in fields such as business, law, science, and technology (Thompson, 2020). Women who challenge these norms by achieving exceptional success in traditionally ‘masculine’ fields encounter resistance and discrimination. It has been found that such biased beliefs favouring male dominance cause occupation assessors, regardless of their gender, to underestimate women’s leadership capabilities while overestimating men’s qualifications even when their credentials are identical (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Jones, 2020).

Arab societies are characterised by patriarchal family structures that burden women unequally within the domestic sphere, hindering their career opportunities (Omair, 2008). Research by Mahmood (2005), for example, shows how patriarchal religious customs pressure women to assume the primary responsibility for domestic tasks, thereby serving as a manifestation of devout feminine identity and consequently limiting their career prospects. In Oman, cultural norms place a high value on marriage and motherhood for women, resulting in negative perceptions of women leaders. They are seen as neglecting their house and family responsibilities in favour of work, which goes against the traditional gender roles established by patriarchal society (Rizzo et al., 2007). Omani women may also experience a lack of support from their spouses in pursuing professional ambitions. These factors combine to hinder women from attaining high-ranking positions. Despite formal policies and evaluation processes, the prevailing culture and informal norms in many modern workplaces still exhibit lingering patriarchal values such as favouring competitive and aggressive behaviour, the exclusion of women, and rigid expectations of conformity to tradition (Karam & Afiouni, 2014; Tlaiss, 2014). The presence of such patriarchal assumptions also bolsters male solidarity, which in turn leads to the marginalisation of women through their disregard, interruption, and dismissal (Metcalf, 2008).

According to Al Lamki (2006), Omani women face societal pressures to display feminine submissiveness and compliance, resulting in assertive leadership behaviour exhibited by them being condemned for violating gender norms. Furthermore, Omani women may be perceived as being aggressive and domineering when they seek mentoring or advancement support. When taken together, these patterns result in women being under-represented in high-ranking functional positions, regardless of their education or demonstrable skills. In addition, organizational policies and practices that align with patriarchal values, such as the absence of support for a healthy work-life balance, reinforce the unequal responsibility for caregiving ascribed to women, thereby impeding their professional advancement (Williams, 2020). The

presence of masculine leadership standards also results in accomplished women being viewed as deficient in the necessary likability and adherence to expectations of women's pleasantness (Heilman et al., 2004).

Other authors, however, argue that the influence of patriarchy on women's career prospects has significantly diminished (Jones, 2021). According to scholars who hold this viewpoint, patriarchy now has a minimal impact on the potential for women to advance in their careers in modern times due to legislation aimed at safeguarding women against discrimination, efforts by organizations to mitigate bias, and the decreasing wage disparity between the genders (Kalev et al., 2006; Blau & Kahn, 2017). These scholars contend that the remaining differences primarily arise from variations in vocational interests, priorities, and choices related to the balance between work and family life, which reflect personal freedom in an egalitarian society rather than being imposed by patriarchy (Hakim, 2006; Ceci & Williams, 2011).

Lack of mentorship programmes

Many significant studies provide evidence that women who engage in structured mentoring and leadership development initiatives experience higher rates of advancement into managerial and executive positions compared to those who do not participate. Underhill (2006) conducted a meta-analysis of more than 40 studies, which noticed that individuals with mentors experienced higher rates of career advancement and more significant increases in compensation compared to those who did not have mentors. A significant study conducted by Allen et al. (2006) illustrates that women who participated in a formal mentoring programme at Ernst & Young were promoted at a rate six times higher than women who did not participate in the programme, and the researchers emphasised that structured activities and the active involvement of senior leaders were crucial factors in achieving success. A survey conducted by Hewlett et al. (2011) of over one thousand professionals found that women with high potential who had an active mentor were more inclined to aspire to top leadership positions than their unsponsored peers. In addition, Debebe et al. (2016) interviewed 36 women who had successfully finished a leadership development programme, and the participants expressed heightened motivation and a perceived capacity to assume more advanced positions. They also believed that they now had a better ability to navigate organizational politics and networks that are predominantly male-dominated.

Although leadership programmes for women can have a significant effect, some possible constraints or criticisms associated with them have also been highlighted. Ely et al. (2011) contended that such endeavours should be perceived as short-term solutions rather than integral components of a complete transformation in organizational culture. Tharenou (2005) also stressed the importance of implementing strategies beyond individual training to manage systemic gender bias effectively. In addition, mentoring can strengthen traditional masculine leadership norms rather than encourage inclusive leadership models (Brinia et al., 2021).

Women ambitious to progress into management and leadership roles encounter notable difficulties in obtaining influential mentors to support them. Research indicates that mentoring relationships do have a positive impact on women's chances of promotion, aspirations, and satisfaction levels (Tharenou, 2005; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008). However, many women face difficulties in finding mentors who can offer personalised guidance and support. Therefore, the establishment of professional networks, training programmes, and other formal initiatives would enable more women to connect with mentors who share their demographic characteristics and are equipped to provide customised career guidance and psychosocial support (Ely et al., 2011). Extensive research consistently shows that having mentors with similar backgrounds and experiences creates many advantages. Kram (1985) emphasised the crucial importance of shared identity in facilitating mentors to offer both career advancement and profound psychosocial assistance. However, women face obstacles in finding mentors who have the appropriate experience and demographic characteristics. Due to the continuing lack of women representation in high-level management and executive positions, only a limited number of potential women mentors are available who can offer guidance based on shared career experiences and challenges (Travis et al., 2013; Lopes et al., 2015; Durbin et al., 2020). In Ragins' (1989) seminal research, women protégés who trained with male mentors received lower levels of psychosocial support such as through counselling, companionship, and the provision of positive examples. According to Blake-Beard et al. (2011), demographic variations can hinder meaningful involvement in addressing women's challenges and developmental requirements. As a result, male mentors may unintentionally offer guidance that reinforces traditional gender roles instead of empowering women to take on new challenges and risks (Tharenou, 2005).

The term 'queen bee syndrome' is used to describe the behaviour of senior women leaders who deliberately distance themselves from and decline to support the progress of junior women in organizational cultures that are predominantly male. Mavin (2008) conducted extensive

interviews with fifteen women executives and documented the prevalent queen bee behaviours, including intentionally creating distance from junior women, denying the existence of gender barriers, feeling threatened by talented women who may outperform them, and adhering to competitive masculine cultural norms. The participants openly acknowledged engaging in these behaviours, explicitly stating that they intentionally isolated themselves from junior women and formed alliances with male executives so as to maintain their symbolic representation in leadership positions. They perceived their identity and achievement as contingent upon creating distance from other women who represented potential danger. Mavin concluded that, despite attaining high-ranking positions themselves, queen bees contribute to the continuation of gender bias within systems by maintaining male-dominated cultures that put women at a disadvantage.

Several researchers have criticised Mavin's interpretations and conclusions. According to Ellemers et al. (2012), she misinterprets the interview data by attributing conscious intentions to queen bees in isolating junior women. Senior women may even argue that they have valid reasons to distance themselves, such as to avoid accusations of favouritism. It could be argued that Mavin pathologizes individuals who exhibit queen bee behaviour. Derks et al. (2016) challenged Mavin's assertion that queen bees intentionally perpetuate gender inequality. Their study found that women leaders may unconsciously adopt male norms in order to succeed, which can result in distancing behaviour. Thus, such behaviour could represent inadvertent self-protective adjustment rather than a deliberate perpetuation of bias. Other research has questioned the extent to which 'queen bees' impede the progress of junior women. Thoroughgood et al. (2016) discovered that queen bees were not biased against the promotion of qualified women, although they did provide women with less social support compared to men. This suggests that queen bee behaviour may not itself directly hinder women's career progression, even though it may indicate psychological detachment. Although Mavin offers valuable qualitative data on the distancing behaviours displayed by senior executive women, some of her assumptions and interpretations are clearly open to criticism.

Lack of networking and professional development

Women can enhance their opportunities to overcome structural barriers and navigate male-dominated hierarchies by developing and expanding their professional networks. This allows them to gain access to valuable information, resources, sponsorship, and increased visibility (Bickel, 2014; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014). Burt (1998) discovered that specific network configurations, such as those which bridge structural gaps between different groups,

significantly correlate with the achievement of promotion, increased visibility, and faster career progression. Enhancing social capital directly improves measurable career outcomes such as salary, promotion rates, perceived success in one's career, and leadership abilities (Singh et al., 2006; Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2008). For instance, Singh et al. (2006) discovered that social capital obtained from networks was a significant factor of the probability of promotion for women. Women professionals frequently have fewer essential links that connect different groups compared to their male counterparts during the early stages of their careers. This highlights the importance of expanding one's networks beyond immediate work teams (Singh et al., 2006).

Cultural conventions may present further challenges, since women who engage in extensive self-promotion contradict the societal expectation of modesty and may face negative consequences for assertive networking (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Cultural norms also influence women's approaches to networking, as they may feel uncomfortable when engaging in self-promotion as well as facing negative consequences when they deviate from societal expectations regarding gender roles (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Women who engage in extensive networking activity may be seen as lacking legitimacy or showing excessive confidence (Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2008). Women also experience more difficulty obtaining peer endorsement, resulting in less social capital obtained through networks than men.

The dominant managerial classes in Arab nations consist of socially interconnected individuals who employ implicit knowledge and insider connections to maintain male dominance in senior positions (Metcalfe, 2008; Tlaiss, 2014). Women's endeavours to enter these vital networks are often ignored or rejected. Therefore, the absence of women at higher levels impedes the chances for junior colleagues to obtain the mentorship and assistance essential in navigating the intricacies of organizational politics and attaining equitable access to leadership prospects comparable to men. Kalev (2009) found that male managers tend to establish networks mainly consisting of other high-status men, leading to a dearth of diversity. Research has demonstrated that men actively assist other men by leveraging their networks to obtain new job prospects, gaining access to influential individuals who hold significant decision-making power, and receiving informal advice on how to navigate the internal workings of an organization to progress in their careers (Smith, 2002). However, men are considerably less likely to provide these crucial networking benefits to women colleagues. Women not only face entry barriers but are also excluded from influential informal networks

that men use to obtain insider information, establish sponsorships, and receive implicit career support (Smith, 2002; McDonald, 2011). Women's endeavours to join these exclusive male-dominated networks often fail, constraining their opportunities for career advancement (Kalev, 2009).

In Oman, the commitment to tribal customs that emphasise the establishment of tight-knit connections among men obstructs the involvement of women in crucial networks associated with decision-making procedures (Al Lamki, 2006). Additionally, the segregation norms that keep men and women separate in communication and interaction disadvantage Omani women in accessing the same routes to promotion as men because advancement advice is transmitted informally among men (Metcalf, 2011). Cultural taboos surrounding cross-gender interaction also impede the mentorship of Omani women by male leaders (Rizzo et al., 2007). The following section explains factors that influence Omani women's participation in the workplace.

2.5 Gender equality in Oman

Countries in the Middle East, including Oman, continue to face significant issues regarding gender inequality and the lack of women in management and leadership roles. These concerns arise from a combination of conservative religious interpretations, discriminatory cultural attitudes, and structural barriers that hinder women's progress in careers. Alsharif (2018) has identified some difficulties that Saudi women face in their career development (see Figure 2.3), which can be similar to the Omani women, as we share the same environment and customs. She illustrated several cultural, organizational, family, geographical, and economic challenges. The predominantly Islamic societies in the Middle East, including Oman, are greatly influenced by religious principles when it comes to shaping perceptions of gender roles. In Omani society, traditional interpretations and implementations of Islamic teachings have repeatedly stressed the idea of gender complementarity, where men receive authority and leadership roles in the public sphere while women are primarily confined to the private domestic sphere (Afsaruddin, 1999; Keddie, 2007). Oman has made notable advances in educational achievement among women and their participation in the labour market, as evidenced by different sources such as, Al Wahaibi (2020) and NCSI (2024). Hence, it is possible that continuous, even minor, shifts in cultural beliefs may be occurring despite the lasting influence of traditional religious and tribal practices (Metle, 2001). This section discusses Omani women's career progression and barriers to their presence in management and leadership positions in the public and private sectors.

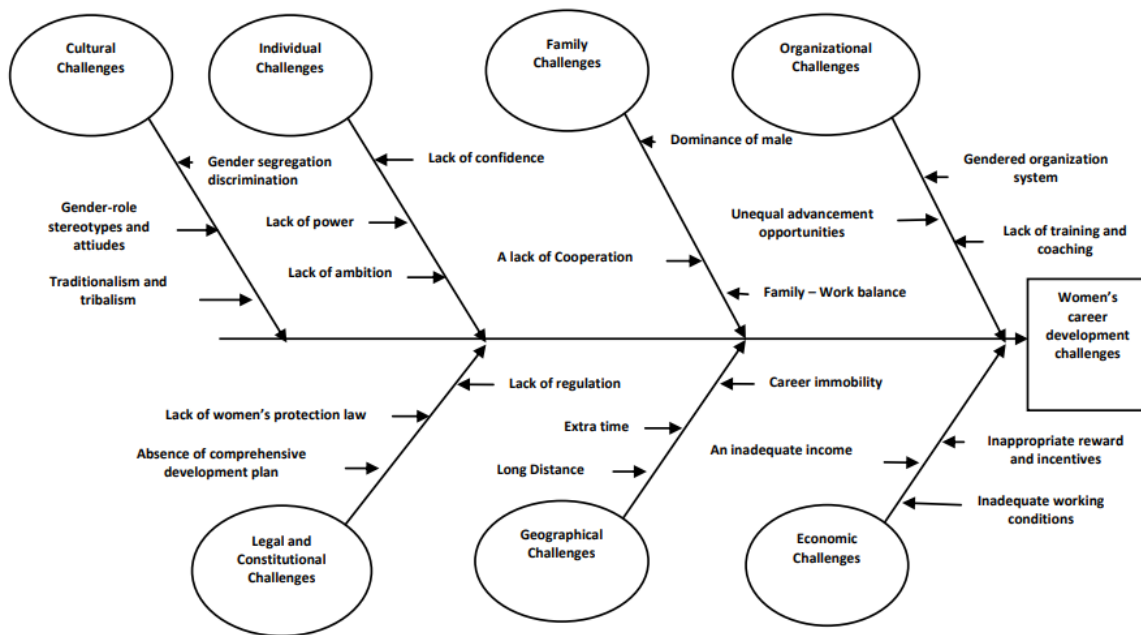


Figure 2.4. Career development problems women face in Saudi Arabia
 Source: adapted from Alsharif (2018)

Religion

The dominant Ibadi Islamic tradition in Oman is known for its adaptability and moderation, and it may allow for more liberal theological interpretation regarding women's rights and position when compared with the stricter Sunni and Salafist doctrines prevalent in other areas of the Arab Gulf region (Varghese, 2016). Qualitative studies such as AL Lamki (2007) demonstrate that Omani women themselves downplay the importance of religion as the sole barrier to their professional and leadership progress today. However, they attribute the perpetuation of negative attitudes towards women in positions of power within institutions more to enduring tribal and cultural belief systems, stigma, and inherited customary laws rather than Islamic values (McElwee & Al-Riyami, 2003). On the other hand, research conducted in various Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, and Lebanon reveals that women in these countries do perceive religious principles and understanding as the main obstacle to their attainment of leadership positions rather than cultural norms (Ali et al., 2011; Koca et al., 2011; Tlaiss, 2013). This indicates the vital role of human agency in influencing the way religious scriptures and principles are chosen and emphasised and influence social behaviour within specific cultural contexts, where people are influenced by various ideological, cultural, and institutional factors that actively shape their social roles and identities (Metcalf, 2008).

Culture

The cultural norms and beliefs that lead to the prioritisation of male characteristics as essential for leadership and decision-making create substantial obstacles for Omani women who seek positions of power and influence (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011; Karam & Afiouni, 2014). Customs in rural tribal areas impose significant constraints on women's autonomy and ability to assume leadership positions, irrespective of their qualifications and capabilities. This dramatically hinders their professional progress (Al-Sadi et al., 2011). Local Omani tribal customs have long instilled a prevailing acceptance of male dominance, authority, and leadership as customary ideals passed down through the generations. Qualitative research suggests that traditional patriarchal tribal customs in these rural communities confer exclusive control over local decision-making and leadership positions to village elders and men (Tlaiss, 2013).

Prevailing societal beliefs describe women as inherently deficient in the qualities of assertiveness, rationality, and decisiveness, which are considered crucial for someone to effectively occupy positions of authority. At the same time, these beliefs idealise feminine attributes such as modesty, obedience, and nurturing which are defined as fundamentally incompatible with leadership roles (Marmenout, 2011). Women who openly challenge male dominance and traditional gender norms often face social disgrace, discrimination, and allegations of tarnishing the reputation and values of their families, all of which are intended to discourage their aspirations (Al-Lamky, 2007). Oman's predominantly conservative socio-religious environment has led to cultural beliefs and practises that promote feminine characteristics such as nurturing and obedience as inherent virtues of women. At the same time, stereotypically masculine qualities like assertiveness, courage, rationality, and decisiveness are strongly associated with the essential traits of leaders. These beliefs and practises have been shaped and reinforced through complex reciprocal interactions among religious authorities, tribal structures, and family systems (Metcalf, 2008). Multiple sociocultural, ideological, and institutional factors have come together over generations to create a patriarchal gender structure in Oman. This structure creates significant barriers for Omani women who aim and attempt to hold positions of authority as leaders, managers, policy-makers, and community decision-makers in today's society.

Nonetheless, culture is defined by its dynamic nature rather than being a static phenomenon. For example, an analysis of quantitative empirical data demonstrates from NCSI (2024) a gradual but noticeable rise in the rate of Omani women's participation in the labour force since the 1970s. This reflects fundamental changes in women's economic role which are

happening alongside the continued presence of deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs in the culture (Al-Lamki, 2006). In addition, younger, educated, urban Omani women are showing growing support for egalitarian beliefs and acknowledging women's leadership abilities (Syed & Van Buren, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research has revealed a small yet growing group of Omani women who openly recognise and critique certain traditional patriarchal beliefs that limit their independence and progress, especially in areas such as education and employment (McElwee & Al-Riyami, 2003). These findings indicate that women constantly seek more influential roles in their careers and society. This growing awareness reflects a significant common understanding that can facilitate significant changes.

Structural barriers

Omani women face pressures not experienced by men in managing their domestic caregiving responsibilities alongside professional obligations outside the home. Women who aspire to achieve leadership positions also encounter various challenges that extend beyond the influence of prevailing restrictive ideologies. Their economic participation has been restricted due to practical material barriers, irrespective of their capabilities and qualifications. These structural barriers include insufficient transport options that cater to the specific mobility requirements of culture for women in Oman, the absence of family-friendly policies within organizations that promote a healthy work-life balance, and the lack of institutional policies that facilitate increased gender diversity in management and governance (Marmenout & Al-Zeera, 2014). The complex nature of these issues further reflects the intersection between significant structural factors and sociocultural biases, resulting in a complex variety of challenges women in Oman face (Tlaiss, 2015).

Although patriarchal gender biases do persist, quantitative indicators demonstrate a gradual increase in Omani women's educational attainment and labour force participation rates over recent decades (Al-Lamki, 2006). Omani government consistent progressive efforts in modernisation, urbanisation, educational progress, and global economic integration have led to the first signs of changes in gender role attitudes across the generations despite the enduring influence of traditional patriarchal tribal biases (Marmenout, 2011). The collective exercise of activity by Omani women in seeking better educational and employment prospects while facing various structural obstacles has gradually empowered more women to actively renegotiate and redefine their societal roles. The implementation of governmental reforms focused on socio-economic development has also contributed to the gradual transformation of society. Despite the enduring influence of conservative religious and cultural restrictions on

women's roles, overall indicators indicate a shift away from traditional attitudes. This reflects gradual and significant changes in women's roles that have emerged and accumulated over time, even in the face of deeply rooted traditional cultural beliefs.

Women in the public and private sectors in Oman

The significant under-representation of Omani women in leadership positions within the public and private sectors has been extensively documented. Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive research regarding the details of factors that hinder women's progress in attaining positions of managerial and decision-making power. The few studies that have been conducted provide general insights rather than a deep understanding of the barriers to career advancement faced by Omani women.

Quantitative data demonstrates a significant lack of women in leadership positions within the public sector in Oman. According to Al-Siyabi (2016), the representation of women in middle and senior management roles in government ministries and agencies in 2014 was below 11 per cent. Meanwhile, there are significant variations in levels of women representation in middle management positions in public sector organizations. Al-Siyabi (2016) found that women occupied 15-22 per cent of mid-level managerial positions in the Ministries of Health and Education, and the slightly higher levels in these sectors because the work involved may be considered to be associated with traditional women roles. Conversely, the proportions of women holding middle management roles in other important government departments like the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Commerce were lower than 5 per cent (Al-Siyabi, 2016). Therefore, although there are some areas where advances are apparent, women are still predominantly restricted to subordinate rather than leadership roles. This represents a lack of authentic advancement since women only achieve positions of influence in less esteemed fields while male dominance prevails at the highest levels.

In addition to the macro statistics, qualitative records of the experiences of women leaders reveal deeply ingrained cultural obstacles in Oman's public sector. Male decision-makers often view women as unsuitable for high-level leadership positions, and they are believed to lack the necessary abilities and expertise (Al-Lamky, 2007). Men's authority and privileges stemming from traditional patriarchal norms create obstacles for women in exercising power, leading independently, and making essential decisions in leadership positions (Al-Lamky, 2007). Biases persist and are deeply rooted in the frameworks, procedures, and regulations of public institutions, ultimately upholding male hegemony in the upper levels of power (Kemp & Madsen, 2014). Women striving for leadership positions also encounter

significant challenges since they must manage both professional and family responsibilities while navigating unsympathetic organizational environments.

The evidence suggests that Omani women face even greater challenges in the private sector regarding reaching managerial positions and having a voice in leadership. According to a comprehensive study of employment data, Kemp & Madsen (2014) found that women held a mere 2-3 per cent of senior and middle management roles in private sector organizations across various industries such as trade, finance, and services. A stark division of labour continues to exist, with women concentrated in low-status administrative and clerical occupations. Unlike in the public sector, deficiencies in the qualifications held are not the main cause of gender inequality in private sector management representation, with discriminatory organizational processes and entrenched cultural biases being primarily responsible for the lack of women in leadership positions (Kemp & Madsen, 2014).

Qualitative observations indicate that women face more inflexible cultural barriers within private enterprises in Oman. Male leaders adhere to conventional patriarchal beliefs that classify women as less dedicated as employees and leaders in comparison to men (Belwal & Belwal, 2017). Private sector organizations also lack the family-friendly policies and career development support which may be available in the public sector (Belwal & Belwal, 2017). These findings indicate that the nature of Oman's private sector poses significant obstacles for women seeking managerial positions and professional advancement on an equal footing with men.

2.6 Gaps in the literature

There is a shortage of studies that specifically investigate women's progress into management and leadership positions in the workplace in Oman. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on women's career advancement. Only seven publications were identified that examined the situation of Omani women in management and leadership roles from a broad perspective without offering detailed analysis, and these reported on studies conducted by Al-Lamkyi (1999, 2007), Kandpal et al. (2013), Kemp and Madsen (2014), Belwal and Belwal (2017), and Al Wahaibi (2020).

No studies have conducted comparative research on differences in women's representation in leadership roles between the public and private sectors. The studies cited above offer analyses of the obstacles encountered by Omani women in the labour market. Nevertheless, they lack specific insights into women's professional experiences within the

public or private sectors, as well as factors affecting their advancement in managerial and leadership roles. The current lack of research on the private sector is notable in the existing literature since there may be significant variations between industries and between the public and private sectors, and systematic studies of women leaders across diverse private sector fields could provide crucial insights. This research aims to investigate in more detail the experiences of Omani women working in public and private sector organizations. It contributes valuable empirical evidence and in-depth insights in an area that so far has been insufficiently studied. The primary objective of the study is to examine the professional career trajectories of Omani women in both the public and private sectors, which means that it represents original research of its kind addressing the gaps identified in the existing literature.

The perspective obtained directly from Omani women themselves is limited, as it primarily relies on data collected from small subsets of women participants. So far, no comprehensive examination has been conducted of the career advancement of Omani women within various organizational hierarchies or of their viewpoints concerning the obstacles which hinder and factors that support their progress. A primary limitation is the limited variation in perspective examined since most studies focus on women currently occupying leadership or managerial roles. The absence of study about the perspectives of ordinary working women and men obstructs an understanding of the obstacles women face by excluding essential points of view. Therefore, this study sampled staff at different levels in organizational hierarchies and valued the views of every woman from different positions. Moreover, Belwal and Belwal (2017) present a contrasting approach that relies solely on the viewpoints of managers, which introduces the potential for bias by excluding women's perspectives. To enhance the depth and accuracy of insights, it is beneficial to broaden the range of samples and diversify the data sources. Thus, this thesis effectively incorporated and involved both parties, namely the employees and the employers, through interviews with HR managers from the targeted organizations. The majority of the studies rely on quantitative rather than qualitative data. Although the detailed qualitative data obtained from these limited samples provides valuable insights, the limited scope of the study makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the broader population of working women and leaders in Oman. Therefore, this thesis enhances the findings significance, broadens the interview scope, and utilises all valuable resources, whether qualitative or quantitative data.

Another constraint is the inadequate application of relevant leadership and social theories, leading to missed chances to improve the conceptual examination of systemic gender

prejudices and power dynamics. Based on the investigations mentioned above, the sole study that put this into practice is Al-Lamki's (2007) research. The present study uses Bourdieu's social theory to analyse variations by sector occupation, which are valuable for uncovering social realities that often remain hidden from view (Maclean & Harvey, 2019).

Another notable limitation obstructing understanding is the frequent lack of meticulousness and accuracy in the analytical methodologies. Several studies such as Al-Lamky (1999, 2007), Kandpal et al., (2013), Kemp & Madsen, (2014), Belwal and Belwal, (2017), and Al Wahaibi, (2020) offer only preliminary descriptive findings rather than engaging in a comprehensive thematic analysis of patterns, tensions, and meanings within subjective data. The analysis primarily focused on presenting or assessing narratives instead of obtaining a deeper understanding. This hinders progress beyond the preliminary documentation of women's experiences to a better understanding of the complex interconnections among cultural norms, organizational dynamics, and individual choices that influence the development of managerial paths. Therefore, this study uses different analytical techniques, which is essential for generating accurate, evidence-based findings that can inform interventions aimed at fostering women's participation and leadership in the rapidly evolving socio-economic of the Sultanate of Oman.

The literature highlights the significant impact of cultural and societal obstacles that impede women's professional advancement, including entrenched attitudes concerning gender roles and the absence of policies that support a healthy work-life balance. Nevertheless, despite the recognition of these obstacles, there is a lack of clear explanation regarding the prioritisation of the most significant cultural and structural barriers that hinder women from advancing to leadership positions. An organised evaluation of the obstacles that present the most substantial difficulties would enable policymakers and organizational endeavours to focus on solutions effectively. Combining various sectors and thoroughly analysing barriers could provide valuable insights. Furthermore, the suggested initiatives for promoting women's progress lack specific information regarding the practical execution, essential parties involved, and methods for evaluating the impact. The practicality of changing well-meaning suggestions into tangible actuality remains uncertain. Therefore, this thesis proposes concrete initiatives and effective monitoring systems that could enhance the implementation of research findings in practical settings. This study aims to greatly enhance the existing literature and knowledge by addressing these limitations through a broader scope, larger scale, increased rigour, and diverse perspectives.

2.7 Theoretical framework: Bourdieusian social theory

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field can be employed to provide a useful theoretical framework for the examination of the progression of women into management and leadership positions in Oman. Bourdieu's approach enables an analysis of how gender dynamics and patriarchal structures within Omani society, business, and culture shape women's experiences of and opportunities available when seeking management and leadership roles. In addition, Bourdieu's theoretical concepts offer a valuable framework for an examination of the dynamics influencing Omani women's management and leadership attainment. Moreover, Bourdieu's social theory provides valuable tools which could be used to identify the social and institutional processes of exclusion that lead to gender disparities in professional advancement. His concepts can produce policy recommendations to support women's capital acquisition and promote equal opportunity.

Bourdieu's concepts

Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice places great importance on the concept of the habitus, which represents the ingrained behaviours, inclinations, and customs individuals develop through socialisation (Maton, 2008). Bourdieu argues that the habitus is a long-lasting and influential construct which generates practices that replicate the patterns inherent in the objective conditions of their origin (Bourdieu, 1977, p.78). The habitus can be defined as a set of enduring, internalised patterns of thought, perception, and conduct that individuals acquire during their early socialisation. These patterns become ingrained, encourage a sense of comfort, and operate subconsciously to influence the individual's actions in different social situations (Navarro, 2006). The habitus is an intermediary between structure and agency and organises an individual's current and future behaviour. According to Maton (2008), it creates perceptions, aspirations, and practices which perpetuate current social structures.

The habitus generates behaviours that validate subconscious assumptions derived from broader societal frameworks, such as class, race, and gender (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu posits that this phenomenon explains the persistence of social disparities and constrained social mobility from one generation to another. Bourdieu contends that the habitus serves as a pivotal mechanism in perpetuating gender inequality and imposing restrictive norms on women within society. Therefore, girls develop a feminine habitus, shaped by societal gender roles and expectations, from a young age (McNay, 1999). This habitus engenders self-perceptions, inclinations, and actions congruent with being modest, obedient, and suitable for domestic life

rather than assertive or ambitious in the public domain (Bourdieu, 2001). A woman's feminine habitus causes her to unconsciously conform to patriarchal structures, leading to self-imposed limits on aspirations and practises and accepting men's dominance (Adkins, 2004). As an illustration, Bourdieu explains how women frequently minimise their academic achievements or adjust their behaviour and speech in order to seem less intimidating to male peers (Bourdieu, 1984). This habitus perpetuates the prevailing gender hierarchy by compelling women to opt for more conventional feminine roles, thereby excluding themselves from male spheres of influence and authority.

Field

Bourdieu's definition of a social field refers to a well-organised area of individuals, their interactions, and the specific resources or assets associated with that particular field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Fields are self-governing domains around specific wealth and interests (Swartz, 1997). Agents within each field engage in strategic efforts to amass the most highly esteemed capital within that particular domain so as to enhance their standing within the hierarchical structure of the field (Wacquant, 1993), where the arrangement and proportional distribution of resources determine one's position within the structure of a particular field (Swartz, 1997). The structure of a field reflects the essential positions that emerge from the distribution and composition of capital among agents (Gorski, 2013).

The assets and capabilities that empower individuals to exert authority and control are symbolised as 'capital'. Various forms of capital hold value in distinct domains, such as economic capital in business, cultural capital in the arts, and social capital in bureaucratic settings (Bourdieu, 1986). The assumption of a position in a specific field exposes individuals to particular influences and opportunities for action, shaping their attitudes and interests in alignment with the field's objectives (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). Fields enforce specific 'rules of the games' on participating individuals, yet no field operates independently. Their positioning concerning one another occurs within the broader domain of power or social space (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, the boundaries between and hierarchies among fields exhibit continuous conflict as individuals in society strive to amass resources and establish principle of validation (Bourdieu, 1994). Fields are dynamic systems that consist of interconnected relationships, which can change through conflict regarding established beliefs.

Capital

Capital refers to collected work in physical or tangible forms that allow individuals to control social resources and exert influence in different areas of activity (Bourdieu, 1986). Figure 2.5

shows Bourdieu’s (1985) four forms of capital, which are: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. An understanding of the structure of the social world is facilitated by recognition of the various forms of capital present in the field since capital serves as a representation of the underlying structure of that world. The primary origin of power within society stems from ownership of the four forms of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Harvey & Maclean, 2008). Economic capital encompasses monetary assets, including cash and various kinds of financial assets, stocks, property, and other tangible goods that can be readily converted into money (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986, p.252), economic capital is “at the root of all other types of capital” and is used strategically to obtain and maintain other forms of capital. Individuals who possess significant economic resources can exert considerable influence over the social sphere. However, Harvey and Maclean (2008) highlight Bourdieu’s point that the various forms of capital are transmutable to some extent, though they differ in terms of liquidity. Economic capital can be converted into cultural capital, for example, by the purchase of an elite education. However, this process cannot be taken for granted, and newcomers to a field may possess financial assets but lack other types of capital which confer legitimacy (Harvey & Maclean, 2008).

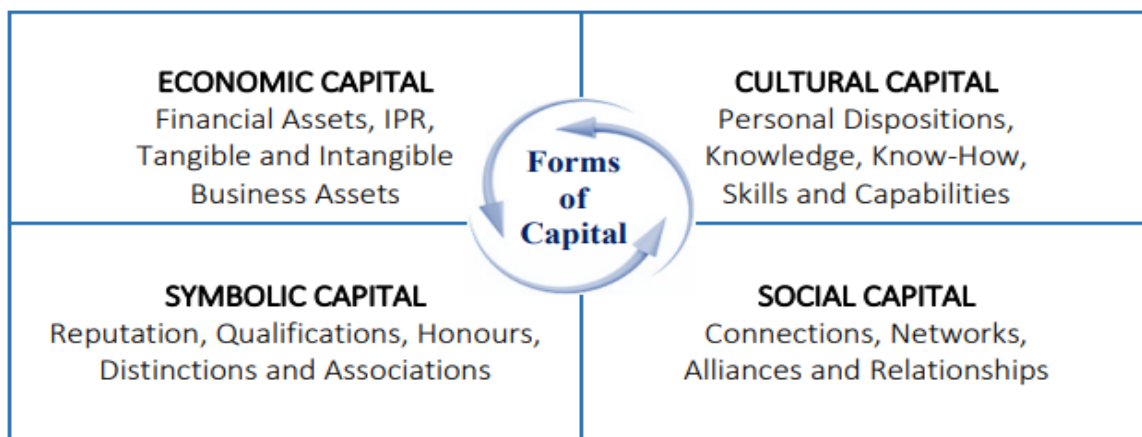


Figure 2.5. Bourdieu’s Concept of Capital
Source: Adapted from Maclean et al. (2006, p.29)

Cultural capital can be categorised in three forms. When embodied, it refers to the dispositions, habits, schemas, skills, and competencies acquired through lifelong socialisation and learning (Bourdieu, 1986) which are represented in tangible form expressed through cultural products, possessions, assets, and media that necessitate the cultivation of cultural knowledge and expertise. In an institutionalised manner, cultural competence and authority may be validated by academic qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Holding esteemed cultural

knowledge and belonging to established cultural institutions leads to symbolic benefits related to social recognition. At the same time, social capital is obtained through participation in networks and social circles (Bourdieu, 1986). It symbolises the assets and authority obtained through associations, positions of responsibility, affiliations, and collective unity. The active cultivation and maintenance of relationships are necessary to develop social capital, which allows network members to access the emotional, material, and informational resources they collectively possess. The magnitude of social capital is contingent upon the scale and composition of an individual's enduring network. Meanwhile, symbolic capital encompasses the recognition and legitimacy that prestige, reputation, renown, and social consecration bestow (Bourdieu, 1989). It signifies the accumulation of respect and recognition of power and acts as a "certificate of social competence" that enables individuals to exert control in particular domains (Bourdieu, 1989, p.21). Symbolic power can be established by legitimising other capitals as shown by Stringfellow et al. (2015) in their study of the UK accounting field.

Application of Bourdieu's theory in this study

Bourdieu's theoretical concepts can offer a fruitful perspective as a basis for an analysis of women's leadership in Oman. Bourdieu elucidates how gendered tendencies, and a lack of socially valued resources, impede access to leadership positions that men predominantly occupy. Bourdieu's approach facilitates an examination of how gender dynamics and patriarchal structures in Omani society, business, culture, along with other factors, influence the experiences of and opportunities available to women who aspire to leadership positions and enhance the solutions to eliminate these obstacles.

According to Bourdieu, to understand the hierarchy of positions within a field and where individuals are located within it, one should look at their capitals and the struggles over forms of capital in that field. Individuals are socialised to think and respond in particular ways and to understand the relationships between the positions they and others hold in the field. The present research therefore considers the resources that define and are valued in the field being investigated, the resources possessed by the women participants, how they can use those resources, and the sense they make of the environment in competing with men so as to be able to occupy management and leadership positions. Bourdieu acknowledges the multi-dimensional nature of an individual's social world and how this affects their dispositions and the volumes and types of capital they accrue, which may or may not be transferrable to their working lives. He says that "The body is in the social world, but the social world is also in the body" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.190). In chapter five, this study uses Bourdieu's field theory to map

the power dynamics and capital relations within the fields of Oman's public and private sectors by identifying the critical and dominant networks involved, gender ratios in leadership roles, and the capital configurations valued in each field. This information can be used to elucidate how women must strategically accumulate field-specific capital and leverage supportive relationships in order to counter male dominance and access senior management and leadership roles. In addition, the differences in the rules of the game, capital values, and opportunity structures in more traditional public sector contexts compared to modern private sector ones are analysed in chapter five of this thesis.

The habitus develops from the established patterns and self-perceptions that Omani women develop in terms of traditional feminine roles and traits during their early socialisation. These can either encourage or restrict their aspirations for professional success, self-assurance, and perceptions of themselves as leaders in different situations (Bourdieu, 1986). This process engenders specific ingrained perceptions, behaviours, and attitudes. In Oman, prevailing cultural norms have historically been influenced by strongly patriarchal social systems which grant men more authority and prestige while limiting the presence and impact of women in public life (Al-Lamky, 2007). Women conditioned to be supportive and helpful may not see themselves as leaders or actively seek promotion as much as their male colleagues would. The presence of gender stereotypes that depict women as less capable but more altruistic than men encourages a tendency towards modesty rather than self-assertion (Rudman & Glick, 1999). This excludes women from leadership positions that demand explicit demonstrations of ambition, confidence, and self-interest. Therefore, Bourdieu's habitus concept is applied in chapter six in an examination of how family background, early socialisation, and past experiences shape Omani women's dispositions, self-perceptions, aspirations and behaviours regarding professional development, as manifested in their habitus, in order to understand how this facilitates or hinders their progression into higher positions.

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualised social fields as spheres characterised by shared values, behaviour, and power dynamics, and gender dynamics have a significant influence on the existing structure of various fields. Eagly & Carli (2007) analysed the historical prevalence of male dominance in organizational fields where men have traditionally held positions in the hierarchy that provide advantages to them compared to women. Leadership tends to be perceived and constructed as a domain that is predominantly associated with masculinity. Likewise, the organizational field in Omani workplaces demonstrates clear gender stratification, so that fewer women have access to high-status positions or leadership

opportunities (Tlaiss, 2015). This ‘glass ceiling’ reflects a bias favouring masculinity in determining the types of capital considered valuable within the field. In order to change such deeply rooted social systems, it is necessary to increase the resources and skills of women and promote their abilities as leaders to all individuals involved in the field (Aaltio & Mills, 2002). Chapter six in this thesis discusses women’s chances to attain a more significant presence and credibility and their potential to gradually reshape leadership domains so that they are more equitably represented. By incorporating Bourdieu’s social notion perspective, efforts to dismantle gender barriers and promote fairer access to positions of power could be enhanced.

Gender dynamics frequently limit women’s ability to acquire capital and convert it into power within various domains (Ridgeway, 2011). When applied to gender, Bourdieu’s concepts can be used to shed light on how patriarchal social structures restrict women’s ability to accumulate capital and direct them towards roles and positions of lower status (Lovell, 2000). Gender socialisation in the early stages of life promotes the cultivation of feminine qualities such as being nurturing and supportive, while suppressing assertiveness and ambition (Eagly & Wood, 2013). This hinders the growth of women’s cultural capital in the ways that are valued in areas of management and leadership.

Historically, women have faced limited opportunities to acquire the credentials and connections which are valued in the upper echelons of the business world due to restricted access to elite educational institutions and career networks (Ibarra, 1993). The Omani government is presently trying to enhance the educational opportunities for girls which would allow them to develop cultural capital (Aaltio & Mills, 2002). Nevertheless, it is essential for organizational policies to actively foster the development of women’s management and leadership channels in order to enhance their professional capital (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In addition, networking initiatives can expand women’s social capital by facilitating connections with mentors and sponsors (Metcalf, 2011). To effectively address long-standing gender bias, it is necessary to employ strategies that empower women with different resources and advantages. Chapter seven of the thesis explores the factors which contribute to women’s success in Oman, utilising the board field, capital, and habitus notions. A focus on the narratives and perspectives of women leaders allows the development of an understanding of how gender bias and resistance operate within institutional cultures in Oman to constrain or propel women’s advancement strategies. The research is attentive to how women’s experiences in top positions vary according to the intersections of social class, family status, education, age and generation, and marital status. Furthermore, it considers the strategies women employ to defy the barriers

arising from societal norms and preconceived notions and the potential positive outcomes this may yield for women in authority and managerial positions. Viewing the situation through a women's lens helps in understanding how Oman's recent reforms in education, the economy, and law have successfully increased the presence of Omani women in various sectors of the public sphere, particularly in leadership positions in public sector administration.

Using Bourdieu's theory, chapter seven of this study aims to provide multi-faceted initiatives to empower women with valuable resources and enhance their presence, which can gradually transform deeply embedded gender prejudices within organizations. An examination of the gender bias inherent in particular fields in Oman and implementing strategic measures to reorganise them through a field lens offers a valuable understanding of how to overcome patriarchal obstacles that hinder women's achievement in management and leadership positions and provides specific actions that Omani institutions can take to challenge the advantages enjoyed by men and promote the idea that leadership is a pursuit for both men and women within the realms of organization, institution, and culture. Therefore, Bourdieusian theory is used to interpret the research data and answer the research questions.

2.8 Conclusion

After discussing the body of literature drawn upon in the research, some understandings have been built. Firstly, definitions of management and leadership derived from the literature are presented and evaluated, and their implications for women's career progression over time are discussed. Examining the evolution of definitions of and distinctions between management and leadership establishes a critical background for analysing factors influencing women's career advancement. An understanding of how concepts of management and leadership came to be associated with masculine stereotypes provides context on embedded gender biases in promotion practices. Comparing traditional versus modern interpretations indicates perceptions are slowly becoming more inclusive, but work remains to undo outdated associations. Reviewing the shifting delineation between management and leadership creates space to critically re-evaluate organizational values and promotion criteria through a gender lens.

Secondly, studies of women's management and leadership abilities and styles have been reviewed. The identification of leadership approaches, such as transformational or participative styles shared by women leaders, highlights the diverse perspectives they contribute. Additionally, research on tendencies such as collaboration and integrating diverse viewpoints

underscores multifaceted capabilities beyond masculine stereotypes. Exploring possible variations in communication patterns, decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict management illuminates the range of strengths women managers add. Developing an understanding of women's management and leadership styles, values, and contributions provides a foundation to correct outdated gender stereotypes and build more inclusive models of effective leadership in the literature.

Thirdly, barriers to women's career progression are summarised. An analysis of the myriad barriers impeding women's career advancement provides indispensable perspectives for the literature. Moreover, the identification of factors such as gender bias, lack of access to sponsors, and challenges associated with the work-life balance enables the investigation of the root causes of women's underrepresentation in senior roles. Tracking how the obstacles accumulate over time builds an understanding of the systemic nature of the limitations women provoke. The analysis of women's own experiences and voices regarding the effects of the barriers they face enables more victim-centred and culturally contextualised solutions. Therefore, the results of a thorough investigation of the obstacles blocking women's progression can inform targeted, evidence-based initiatives to dismantle barriers, reshape biased systems and cultures, and create more equitable access to leadership roles.

Fourthly, the theoretical framework used in this thesis combines Bourdieu's theory of social fields and his concepts of capital and the habitus. This framework is employed to examine women's progress in leadership roles in Oman. Bourdieu demonstrates the constraints of gender norms and the scarcity of valued resources on women's opportunities to attain predominantly male leadership positions. The Bourdieu's ideas facilitate an investigation of how patriarchal gender dynamics in Omani society, business, culture, along with other factors, influence the experiences of and opportunities available to women as leaders. This integrated viewpoint can provide insights useful in efforts to address barriers to women's progress in leadership roles in Oman.

Finally, studies of gender equality in Oman are surveyed to identify gaps in the literature. It is found that there is a shortage of studies that specifically investigate women's progress into management and leadership positions in the workplace in Oman. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on women in Oman in general. Several studies have examined the careers of Omani women in management and leadership roles; however, these studies were broad without offering detailed analysis.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and examines the methodology used in this research. It provides a detailed analysis and clear justifications for the methods I used in conducting this study and validating its findings. It emphasizes and assesses the process that executes the research and analyses the data collected. It describes the research philosophy with a clear discussion of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study. The qualitative approach adopted in this research is also described, as it is considered to be the most appropriate for conducting such studies, and the interview process and its constraints and difficulties are discussed in depth. An overview of the validity and reliability instruments employed in the research is then presented. Finally, it discusses ethical considerations related to this sensitive research subject.

3.2 Research philosophy

The research philosophy is a critical element in conducting research and enhancing the credibility of its outcomes. A research philosophy is a framework that guides how a study should be conducted based on ideas about reality and the nature of knowledge (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p. 43). In other words, research philosophy refers to the evolution (Saunders et al., 2009) and investigation of the nature of knowledge itself (Patton, 2002). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2012), understanding research philosophy enables a researcher to identify and specify the best study methods to use. The choice of philosophy consequently affects the identification of sources of data and the nature of responses to the questions to be asked, and the types of data needed for the investigation, as well as assisting the researcher in interpreting the research findings. Therefore, the following section discusses the paradigm I used in this research.

Harré defines a paradigm as “a combination of a metaphysical theory about the nature of the objects in a certain field of interest and a consequential method which is tailor-made to acquire knowledge of those objects” (1987, p. 3). Fraser and Robinson (2004) believe that a paradigm is “a set of beliefs about how particular problems exist and a set of agreements on how such problems can be investigated” (p. 59). Therefore, all social scientists approach their subject through explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and methods used to investigate it (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Understanding the relationship between theory, philosophy (such as questions of ontology and epistemology), methodology, and research methods is crucial in any research (Howell et al., 2015). According to Scotland (2012) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), a research paradigm has four main components relating to ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. To identify these elements, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed three main questions concerning ontology (what is the nature of reality?), epistemology (how we can know about that reality?), and methodology (what practices and tools allow us to know about that reality?).

Research ontology

Ontology refers to a researcher's beliefs about what is real and what is true (Bryman, 2008). Ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the assumptions we make to believe that something makes sense or is accurate, as well as the nature or essence of a social phenomenon under investigation (Scotland, 2012). Building an ontological philosophy at the beginning of any research is vital to a paradigm as it helps to understand the things that make up the world as it is known (Scott & Usher, 2004). According to Hudson and Ozanne (1988), Ontology is a philosophical concept in the researcher, and the societal phenomena under study are inextricably linked and dependent on one another.

This thesis employs an interpretive approach using thematic analysis. Interpretivism involves the belief that humans can adapt to new knowledge and that no one can gain prior knowledge of time- and context-bound social realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Thus, the knowledge generated in research is limited to the time and place where and when it was investigated (Krauss & Putra, 2005) and is thus open to re-interpretation (Angen, 2000). Many factors can influence the generation of meanings, including the researcher's "prior experience and knowledge, political and social status, gender, race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, personal and cultural values" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 40).

The study of phenomena in their real environment is vital to interpretivist. Because it is based on personal contributions considering various variables, the interpretivism paradigm would generate high-level validity in data (Myers, 2008).

Table 3.1: Interpretivist research philosophy

Ontology (nature of reality or being)	Epistemology (what constitutes acceptable knowledge)	Axiology (role of values)	Typical methods
Interpretivism			
Complex, rich Socially constructed through culture and language Multiple meanings, interpretations, realities Flux of processes, experiences, practices	Theories and concepts too simplistic Focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations New understandings and worldviews as contribution	Value-bound research Researchers are part of what is researched, subjective Researcher interpretations key to contribution Researcher reflexive	Typically inductive. Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative methods of analysis, but a range of data can be interpreted

Source : Saunders et al. (2019, p. 145)

Epistemology

Epistemology is “the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 13). It is a philosophy of knowledge that deals with beliefs about “how phenomena (can) come to be known” (Giacomini, 2010, p. 131) and how we obtain knowledge about a phenomenon that arises from a researcher’s worldview (Marsh & Stoker, 2002; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Weber, 2004; Taylor, 2007). Different epistemologies exist, and it is asserted that the researcher should choose the one most appropriate to his/her standpoint and justify its use (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012).

In this research, I adopt an interpretivist epistemological approach (see Table 3.1). Data was obtained through direct interactions with different actors in the field. Interviews were the primary source of data. From an interpretive standpoint, all knowledge is anchored in individual experiences; it is subjective and connected to the natural contexts in which we enact our lives, and hence is ontologically relativist (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Greene, 2010). Schwandt (2003) adds: “From an interpretive point of view, what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful. Thus, to understand a particular social action ... the inquirer must grasp the meanings that constitute that action” (p. 296).

It is challenging to acquire a single and clear explanation when investigating a social issue. Consequently, interpretivism is frequently applied (Maxwell, 2012; Glass & Cook, 2016). Interpretivism allowed me to interpret the qualitative data gathered, since each woman in a different position might have different life experiences, perspectives, and historical

backgrounds, so that generalization would not be possible. I had to interpret the various views of participants and the stories they narrated in order to identify common and contrasting opinions, facts, ideas, feelings, and beliefs they have elevated to frame the most suitable picture of what the best approach might be to manage existing barriers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Thus, the necessity to rely on the interpretation of views expressed by women and other participants about the multiple realities of the situation made interpretivism particularly suitable for this part of the research (Creswell, 2009), lending depth and richness to the analysis (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Bryman, 2016).

3.3 Research methodology

The research approach refers to “the extent to which the researcher is clear about the theory at the beginning of the research” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 124). There are three main types of research approach, which may be inductive, deductive or abductive.

Induction is the process of first perceiving or observing something and then drawing inferences or forming broad generalizations based on those findings (Goddard & Melville, 2004; Creswell, 2013); see Figure 3.1. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), an inductive researcher works from the bottom up, using participants' perspectives to develop more prominent themes and construct a theory that connects the topics. The inductive approach begins with observation and case extraction, then moves on to hypotheses and eventually theory generation (Collis and Hussey, 2003, Goddard & Melville (2004). In other words, the researcher depends on the collection of data using a qualitative method such as interviewing and then examines the data to generate theory (Harriman, 2010; Graebner et al., 2016; Locke, 2007). The importance of inductive research lies as it involves perspectives and is easy to change part of research data collecting to account for relevant data emerges.

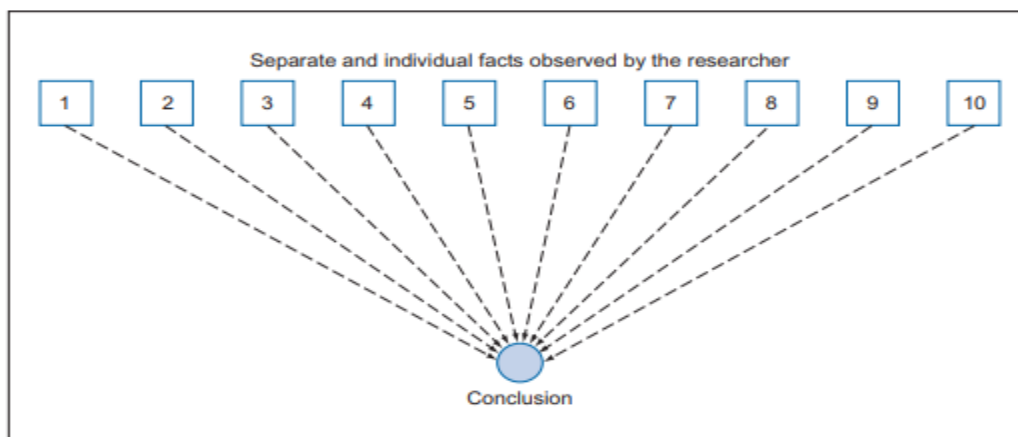


Figure 3.1: Inductive approach

Source: Leedy and Ormrod (2015, p. 38)

In contrast to the inductive approach, a researcher using the deductive approach has to start by conceiving the theory, asking questions, proposing hypotheses, and finally collecting data to test the theory (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Becker & Bryman, 2004; Wilson J., 2010). A deductive researcher “works from the ‘top-down,’ from a theory to hypotheses to data to add to or contradict the theory” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 23). According to Becker and Bryman, (2004), this approach is commonly used along with quantitative methods.

The abductive approach combines inductive and deductive approaches. It moves back and forth between inductive and open-ended research settings to more hypothetical and deductive attempts to verify hypotheses (Suddaby, 2006; Thompson, 2022). This approach can explain, develop, or change the theoretical framework before, during, or after the research process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). It allows creativity and intuition to inform theoretical evolution and understanding of the generalizable facts of observed phenomena (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Kovács & Spens, 2005). Table 3.2 illustrates the main differences between the three types of approach, as explained by Saunders et al. (2019).

This research studies women in management and leadership roles in Oman, a critical issue and an existing phenomenon. However, due to the shortage of research on women’s progression in managerial and leadership positions in Oman, I decided to use an abductive approach which involves conducting corresponding and equivalent engagement with empirical data and actual theoretical knowledge (Kelle, 1997; Atkinson et al., 2003; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Hurley et al., 2021; Rinehart, 2021) to find the most logical solution and valuable explanation for the phenomena under study (Peirce, 1974; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Reichertz, 2013; Hurley et al., 2021). Observing and analyzing all data sources in both ways (up-down/down-up) would allow for a more in-depth understanding and the best usage of available data sources (see Figure 3.2).

Table 3.2: Differences between inductive, deductive, and abductive research approaches

	Deduction	Induction	Abduction
Logic	In a deductive inference, when the premises are true, the conclusion must also be true	In an inductive inference, known premises are used to generate untested conclusions	In an abductive inference, known premises are used to generate testable conclusions
Generalisability	Generalising from the general to the specific	Generalising from the specific to the general	Generalising from the interactions between the specific and the general
Use of data	Data collection is used to evaluate propositions or hypotheses related to an existing theory	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework	Data collection is used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns, locate these in a conceptual framework and test this through subsequent data collection and so forth
Theory	Theory falsification or verification	Theory generation and building	Theory generation or modification; incorporating existing theory where appropriate, to build new theory or modify existing theory

Source : Saunders et al. (2019, p. 153)

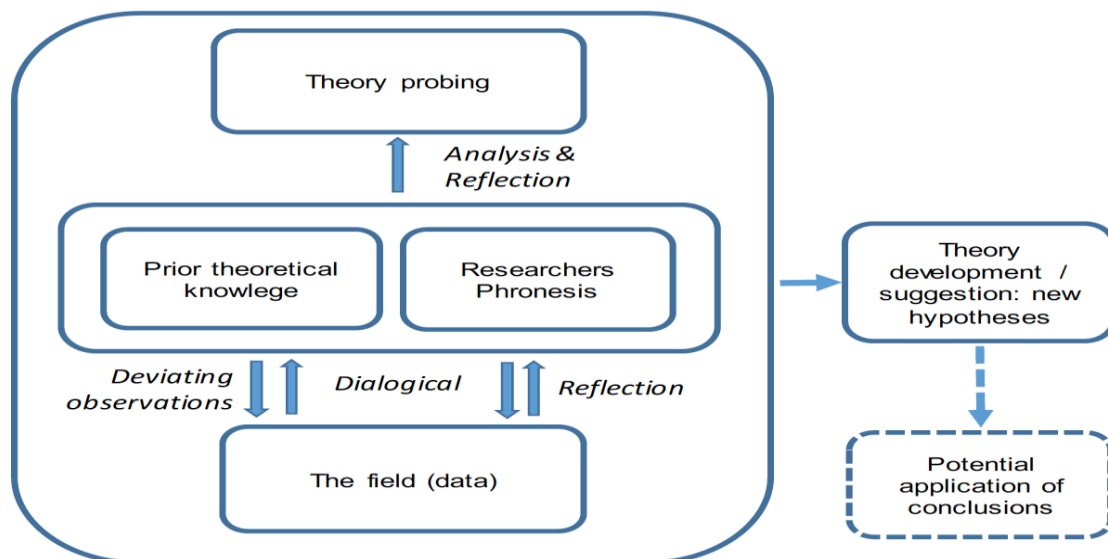


Figure 3.2: Abductive research process

Source: Conaty (2022, p. 4); adapted from (Kovács & Spens, 2005, p. 139)

Qualitative research approach

There are two basic types of methods for analysis: quantitative (deductive) and qualitative (inductive) approaches (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Though there appears to be some dispute among academics over the appropriate strategy to utilize when conducting research and collecting data, these two strategies are not mutually exclusive and commonly address the same subject by the utilization of various research methodologies. Reichardt and Cook (1979, p.18) conclude that research in the qualitative paradigm is “grounded, discovery-oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive, inductive.” In contrast, research in the quantitative

paradigm is “ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential, hypothetico-deductive.” Quantitative research methodologies and deductive reasoning are thought to be more suited to theory testing, whereas qualitative approaches and inductive reasoning are said to be better suited to theory construction (Trochim, 2001; Niglas, 2007; 2010; Saunders et al., 2015).

Quantitative methods, on the one hand, attempt to quantify data and generalize outcomes from a sample of a target population (Macdonald et al., 2008, p. 9). They employ systematic data-gathering procedures, with data output in the form of numbers. Quantitative research also uses objective statistical analysis (Macdonald et al., 2008, p. 9). Quantitative measurement techniques are utilized for three reasons: generality, replication, and causation (Bryman & Bell, 2007), where the researcher seeks to quantify things to explain what has been observed, then to make predictions, and subsequently to provide causal explanations. Based on a report by Global Market Research (2019), quantitative research represents the most significant proportion of research worldwide, used in 78% of all research studies.

Qualitative techniques, on the other hand, are predominantly dependent on non-numerical characteristics. Bryman defines them as involving “a research method that generally stresses words rather than quantification in the gathering and interpretation of data, and that opposes the praxis and norms of natural scientific models” (2004, p. 21). They seek to create a thorough and detailed account of the observations of a researcher (Macdonald et al., 2008) and to allow the contextualisation and interpretation of the data collected. This type of study is subjective and necessitates a limited number of appropriately selected respondents. Quantitative research starts with hypotheses and progresses via logical and scientific procedures based on facts, where the volume of data acquired is frequently enormous and must be filtered and classified.

Qualitative research is also known as interpretative research or the field study. Qualitative research methods, such as case studies and ethnography, allow ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions to be answered and organizational processes to be detected over time (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 42). Qualitative researchers analyse social phenomena and express the sentiments and views of persons under investigation.

This research considers issues relating to Omani women in various governmental and private organizations and revolves around the women, their management and leadership roles, and the opportunities and challenges that they face to attain these positions. Therefore, it is

essential to understand the context according to the interactions of different individuals and those affected by this phenomenon in their areas of work. This development of this understanding relies on qualitative data and reports issued by various parties to represent reality, through which the research seeks to obtain clear and accurate answers to the main research questions.

Many researchers prefer qualitative approaches because they allow them to generate ‘detailed descriptions’ of the social environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The goal is to comprehend the significance of social activity by investigating it in its social context (Maxwell, 2012; Glass & Cook, 2016). Creswell (2013) believes that meaning is related to identifiable experiences that one has either lived, felt, or, better yet, in any case. Thus, according to Robson (2011), qualitative research assumes that people’s experiences include embedded meaning. Therefore, rich data can be gathered about the ideas, feelings, and experiences of women from different organizational levels, as well as their interpretations, in order to understand their perceptions of opportunities for women’s management and leadership roles and to determine different players in the field.

The present study’s design is intended to facilitate the identification, description, and examination of unique experiences within complex settings that affect women in Oman in general and leadership issues in particular. Therefore, an exploratory, qualitative case study appeared to be most suitable for this research. Even if at the expense of the greater generalizability of findings, an in-depth qualitative research approach can provide the researcher with “a thorough knowledge of the reality of leadership” (Bryman, 2004, p. 763) and the surrounding environment that contributes to the imposition and creation of reality. Here, the researcher needs to get closer to the respondents and capture their opinions and viewpoints, such as through in-depth semi-structured interviews and the analysis of all relevant documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013).

However, traditional qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviews, case studies, observation, and ethnography are time-consuming and may only be possible with small samples. Furthermore, vast volumes of data in various formats may be generated. As a result, the analysis of data may be complex and challenging to comprehend (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The following section demonstrates this study's data collection and analytical methods.

3.4 Data collection methods

The sampling of a population is a vital and fundamental factor in research (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Cohen et al., 2013), and decisions on it should be based on “who in the group or organization is the most knowledgeable individual and can provide accurate information” (Czaja & Blair, 2005, p. 14). An essential step for the researcher is to identify the features and characteristics of the target population and then try to locate individuals who possess the specific qualities relevant to the questions asked in the study (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009). Therefore, there is a necessity for appropriate access to relevant data, which can be gained from different sources such as personal interviews or reviews of documentation, files, or previous observations (Yin, 2014).

Qualitative researchers prefer non-probabilistic sampling because they aim to understand social processes rather than achieve statistical representativeness (Cohen et al., 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) and uniquely reflect the phenomena of interest (Marshall, 1996). Non-probability sampling is a sampling strategy that is not directed by chance. Instead, the sample population may be chosen based on specific criteria, and this method is also known as purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006). In studying issues such as the meanings individuals attach to their experiences, qualitative research methods might yield more reliable data than quantitative research approaches (Yin, 2014) and are highly relevant to the study topics. Non-probabilistic sampling approaches include purposive, convenience, theoretical, and quota sampling (Wellington, 2015). Therefore, for the best sampling that would serve the research, I adopted a purposive and snowball sampling strategy in this study. The following section explains them in detail.

Sampling

Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is among the most prevalent non-probabilistic sampling procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). It relies on the researcher’s judgment to define a representative sample by including and omitting groups from the selection (Palys, 2008; Patton, 2015). Bryman (2016) described this sampling strategy as “essentially strategic [...] entail[ing] an attempt to establish an appropriate correspondence between both the questions of the research and sampling.” As a result, participants are chosen based on their relevance to the study, where the research questions offer clues as to what units will be included (Bryman, 2012, p. 416). Purposive sampling aims to imitate the make-up of a particular community (Kruskal & Mosteller, 1980), and this approach can increase the rigour of qualitative research by ensuring

that the variety among heterogeneous populations is captured (Barbour, 2001; Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling is beneficial in allowing the identification of people with in-depth knowledge of a specific subject, for example due to their professional occupation or experience (Cohen et al., 2013).

Snowballing

Snowball sampling was employed to discover possible participants since this is deemed a useful strategy for locating individuals who are otherwise difficult to identify in a particular community (Babbie, 2015). In snowball sampling, a convenient set of people is enrolled in the study, and these volunteers are then asked to give the researcher information about other possible participants (Babbie, 2015). Members of the sample introduce the researcher to additional, comparable persons who may also be acceptable for inclusion in the research (Wellington, 2015). Snowball sampling has proven beneficial in studies involving political and interactional concerns (Noy, 2008). However, this type of sampling has several limitations. Bernard (2011) notes that it can lead to selection bias, as initial participants often refer individuals from their own networks, resulting in a homogeneous sample that may not represent the target population's diversity. Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight challenges in verifying the eligibility of referred participants and the risk of community biases, where specific subgroups may be systematically excluded. Therefore, I have taken steps to avoid these drawbacks by identifying initial participants from different demographic backgrounds, geographical locations, or social groups to ensure a broader representation of the target population and asking them to refer to specific participants that meet the research targeted group. Additionally, the background of the participants was studied before the invitation.

Selecting samples

The recruitment of interviewees in this study was not easy, especially since the subject of the research is sensitive in a conservative society where meeting women involves specific standards and codes that must be respected and followed. Codes involved taking specific measures to prevent cultural and social harm. For instance, all interviews with women were arranged at times and locations that suited them, usually in private, secure rooms at their workplace for personal comfort. I avoided questions that could be seen as intrusive to family or marital matters unless the participants chose to bring them up. I was careful not to confront religious or cultural values during our conversations and refrained from using language that might alienate participants or seem culturally imposing. Following research ethics guidelines,

I ensured confidentiality by anonymising names and eliminating organizational identifiers to avoid any indirect disclosure.

On the one hand, snowball sampling was used for participant recruitment and selection in order to gather responses from the researcher’s own professional networks (Saunders, 2011). Contact with potential participants was gained mostly via my personal and professional network, and some of my friends searched for potential volunteers in their organisations. Potential candidates in a particular organisation were then interviewed and asked to nominate other potential candidates based on the criteria adopted. On the other hand, the purposive sampling method was used by directly contacting the HR departments of targeted organisations, who were asked to circulate information about the study in order to help recruit participants.

According to Miles and Gilbert (2005), the methods and criteria used to select a sample should be determined by the amount of generalization the researcher desires and believes can be obtained from the analysis of the data collected. The samples of participants in this study were selected carefully based on four main criteria relating to gender, workplace sector and location, and role in the organization. The main goal of this study is to discover the opportunities for management and leadership for women in the public and private sectors. Therefore, it was crucial to select appropriate samples from these sectors. Within each sector, I tried to include participants from different organizations and sub-sectors to ensure a comprehensive selection from the target group is selected and in order that the findings of the study could be generalized. Regarding gender, the research was about women. Therefore, most of the interviews were with women; however, three male participants were interviewed, and these were HR department managers (see Table 3.3). The total number of interviewees is thirty-eight, distributed among the public and private sectors.

Table 3.3: Gender distribution of interviewees

Gender	
Male	3 (Interviewees)
Women	35 (Interviewees)
Total	38(Interviewees)

Source: The Author

To ensure the participation of women from different cultural and work backgrounds, I intentionally selected interviewees from different cities and rural areas in Oman. This provides a detailed picture of the influence of cultural and other factors affecting women in the workplace. The women were interviewed from different organizational levels, from top levels

to middle management levels and even from the bottom of the workplace hierarchy. This provides insights into obstacles and opportunities for women to enhance their management and leadership odds (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Distribution of interviewees by occupation

Sector	Public	Private	Total
Top-level positions	4	5	9
Middle-level positions	8	8	16
Lower-level positions	8	5	13
Total	20	18	38
Percentage	53%	47%	100 %

Source: The Author

I attempted to comprehend phenomena for persons or backgrounds that indicate enormous variations or diversity regarding a researched topic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Patton, 1990). Consequently, I determined the fundamental characteristics according to which the sample population would be likely to differ and then chose individuals likely to produce the most variance (see Figure 3.6).

Interviews

According to Patton (2002), qualitative data includes detailed descriptions of situations, individuals, interactions between different attributes, observable behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and ideas, and direct statements from persons who have witnessed the phenomena being studied. Interviews, observations, relevant documents, and audio-visual resources are four primary sources of qualitative data, according to Creswell (2013). Therefore, the researcher has to decide which sources are most suitable when collecting data and will increase the legitimacy of the information gathered in answering the research questions and thereby to design the study on the basis of a solid foundation.

Kvale defines qualitative interviews as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to reveal the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (1996, p. 1). The interview method is employed extensively in qualitative research because it can provide in-depth insights into human behaviour (Creswell, 2006) and allows an examination of the meanings that subjects attach to their behaviour (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, this method is frequently used in women’s leadership research (Glass & Cook, 2016) and many other investigations in the field of gender studies (Hopf, 2004; Moore, 2012; Weaver-Hightower et al., 2013). Face-to-face interviews are often conducted between the participant and the researcher (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) to transfer expert facts, to record and analyze the subjective viewpoints of informants, and to

gather accurate data (Hopf, 2004). Using interview techniques, the researcher commonly aims to obtain the interviewees' own perspectives by asking them to interpret the meaning of the phenomena described (Kvale, 1996, p. 6).

Interviews are recommended as an appropriate method when a study aims to develop an understanding of the constructs that agents use as a basis for their beliefs or opinions about a particular topic. This is especially the case where the logic of a situation is not clear, such as the conditions that Omani women face as leaders, and the societal, personal, and political influences that directly or indirectly affect women's opportunities for leadership or even their general development and employment (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). None of these factors can be examined thoroughly unless the researcher conducts direct interviews with the relevant people in the field. Hence, the interview method has been chosen as the primary method to collect data in this study to provide large datasets that can enable an understanding to be developed of why, how, and in what particular context certain phenomena existed. The ability to hear the participants' voices, which adds meaning to their personal experience, is critical in this research. Thus, interviewees can use social evidence as well as nonverbal behaviour such as facial expressions, speech tone, and body language to demonstrate a position and illustrate a situation in depth and detail. In this research, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The following section explains the implementation of this method.

Semi-structured interviews

Researchers can conduct semi-structured interviews, group interviews, and focus group interviews, as explained by May (2003). Each of these categories entails its own forms of data collection and interview methods. According to Bryman (2012), the critical distinctions between interview styles are the manner in which interview questions are constructed and the level of latitude provided to interviewees in their responses to each question. In structured interviews, there is no variation in the questions asked of every participant whereas unstructured interviews may have no predetermined set of questions at all. Semi-structured interviews fall in between these extremes, and the questions asked are relatively open-ended so that there are few restrictions on the interviewees' answers (McCracken, 1988; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Therefore, this approach methods can reveal new facets to an existing issue (Miller & Brewer, 2003) through a process akin to that of oral history (Maclean et al., 2015).

The use of semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants was deemed ideal in the present research for the following reasons. Firstly, Smith (1975) argued that semi-structured interviews are suitable for the elicitation of information about beliefs, attitudes, and

values where the participants can express themselves in their own words. The research aims to explore the ability of women to compete for higher positions in organizations and the difficulties they face in securing these positions. Therefore, an understanding of the historical context and all relevant factors concerning the working environment is vital, and the women and other interviewees can feel free to move between their answers and to offer information on the causes of and explanations for their responses. Secondly, the use of semi-structured interviews in this study allowed me to stay flexible and involved throughout the process. Therefore, it was possible to dig deeper and to extract more comprehensive replies. Thirdly, there is a lack of existing research in this field, and so this type of interview allowed me to design open-ended questions within an interview and to not be overly constrained by a preset structure and expectations. Thereby it was possible to generate new insights into the research problem by illuminating attitudes and obtaining facts (Saunders et al., 2015). Fourthly, Creswell (2013) suggested that semi-structured interviews can be used effectively to investigate novel challenges. These types of research are rare in the context of the present study, and thus, the semi-structured interviews were expected to generate new knowledge and a genuine, authentic understanding of aspects of the lives of Omani women.

One of the most important issues the research has to consider is that the interviews were cross-gendered since the researcher is male. Most of the interviewees were women who were raised and grew up in a conservative culture. The discussion of women's issues with men is critical and could result in legal accountability if the discussion went too far in terms of taboo subjects that would be considered culturally red lines for men to cross and ask. Therefore, it was essential to keep cultural differences and gender sensitivity in mind and to make sure that interviewees were relaxed and topics presented clearly. Ensuring participant comfort and psychological safety was fundamental to the ethical and methodological framework of the data collection process. It was vital to foster an environment where participants felt respected, heard, and safe to share their thoughts openly. Most interviews were held in the participants' workplaces, private meeting rooms, or quiet offices of their choosing. While this approach ensured convenience and accessibility, it also required an awareness of potential limitations stemming from institutional settings, such as the fear of being overheard or concerns regarding employer responses. To remove these concerns, I explained that the interviews were completely confidential, not disclosed to their organization, and that participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time.

As I am from the same cultural background, and due to my reflexive research approach, this helped in preventing misunderstandings and asking inappropriate questions. To enhance psychological safety, I employed a non-judgmental and empathetic interviewing style. At the start of each session, I restated the ethical guarantees, highlighting that there were no correct or incorrect answers and that participants could skip any questions that made them uncomfortable. I also remained attuned to non-verbal signals, offering breaks if a participant seemed exhausted or emotionally affected and refraining from pressing with follow-up questions in delicate areas. I was conscious of power dynamics during the interviews, particularly across gender lines. As a male researcher interviewing women about their experiences with exclusion and marginalisation, I explicitly acknowledged the potential discomfort this might induce. This reflexive stance, active listening and allowing participants to guide the conversation helped build trust and enhance the participant's engagement.

It should be emphasised that women were very open to speaking to men about their issues, as they felt comfortable expressing their feelings and thoughts. This was helpful in allowing the exploration of issues and obstacles from different angles. I preferred face-to-face interviews since they provide rich evidence, including facial expressions and body language, and a deeper understanding of the nature of the interviewees' answers.

The responses of interviewees concerning the two sectors considered were different. In the public sector, finding potential interview candidates was much easier than in the private sector. This was due to the government's commitment in supporting the research and the strong representation of women in this sector compared to the private sector. In the latter, meeting candidates and arranging meetings took a long time (around two weeks and sometimes up to two months). In addition, there were more concerns in private companies about the information that would be shared and the extent to which the organization would be involved in the research. I think this is because disclosing information might affect the company's position in the market. These concerns were tackled by sending a clear message to the companies concerning the goals of the research and promising not to identify the organizations by name.

Only one government institution requested a copy of the interview questions before the interviews were scheduled, and they insisted upon checking the questions before the employees were interviewed. When the list of questions was sent to them, they expressed reservations about questions relating to harassment they thought were inappropriate to ask women, but they did not ask for them to be removed or changed and instead left this to my discretion. I explained

the purpose and clarified the intentions behind these questions. Meanwhile, not sharing details of the questions with participants before the interviews enabled the interviewer to gather more authentic responses instead of pre-prepared answers. Before the interviews, introductions were made to the candidates via email or telephone and the general objectives of the study were discussed with them. After the participants agreed to participate in the research, appointments were set for interviews, typically at the participant's workplace in a meeting room or the employee's private office. I followed all necessary steps and protocols to make sure of the success of the interview, as illustrated in the following section. The interviews were developed to be direct one-on-one conversations and were conducted in a flexible and unconstrained manner so as to allow the interviewees to engage with the questions and enhance the accuracy of answers. Thus, rich data were generated that build on existing knowledge (Bryman, 2004) and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 38 individuals as part of this study. A total of 60 women were approached initially, but in the end 22 of these withdrew from the process for unspecified reasons. The interviewees were allowed to speak in any language they preferred. Most participants preferred the Arabic language, and two of the interviewees preferred to speak in English. The interviews ranged from forty minutes to two hours and were carried out from January to June 2022. All interviews were conducted in one session except for one, where two sessions were needed due to the details expressed and her interest in the research. All the interviews took place at the participants' own workplaces.

Audio recording

Audio recordings were used to record the interviews so as to enable the collection of data for subsequent analysis, and an iPad was employed as a backup device. It would be challenging to manage interviews properly and write simultaneously. Thus, it was vital to record them (Creswell, 2013). Notes were also taken manually in case of any technical failure. At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed that the interview would be recorded, and they were asked for permission to record it. Assurances were given that their interview comments would remain confidential. All participants gave their consent. The recorded interviews enabled me to revisit the collected information, identify gaps, and transcribe the data (Wyse, 2014).

The recordings also allowed me to recognise each interviewee's tone and reveal their responses and pauses; however, recording the interview might negatively affect the participants' comfort in sharing information. It could lead to fears about any negative

consequences of this evidence. However, most participants were very open in the discussions and exhibited no obvious effects arising from the use of the recording devices. However, although one participant was very open in discussing issues in her organization, she subsequently approached me after the interview to ensure that the recording would not be shared with anyone in the organization and that the data would be fully secured.

Interview protocol

At the beginning of the interview, the purpose and structure of the questions were defined to break the ice between the interviewee and interviewer. The participants were asked if they had any questions before starting the interviews. Ensuring at the start that the conversation flows easily and in a friendly manner is key in order to avoid a level of formality that might prevent the participant from sharing sensitive information and feelings. The questions were not asked in a particular order, and the sequence depended on the answers given by the interviewee. I asked more ‘what’ and ‘how’ than ‘why’ questions in discussing the participant’s workplace experience. Non-verbal cues such as smiling and nodding were used to express the full involvement in the conversation. Notes were made to ensure that aspects of important statements could be saved if necessary (Creswell, 2013). I confirmed to all participants that all of the data collected would remain confidential and that real names would not be used in the final thesis or research reports.

Interview questions

The interview schedule contained a list of questions that I would ask the participants during the interviews. The interview questions were derived from the literature review and according to what information was needed for the research questions to be answered. I deployed Berg’s four types of question formation. According to Berg (2001), four types of questions might be helpful in semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the most essential questions can be clustered together or distributed throughout the interview. Secondly, the additional questions would not necessarily be different from the essential questions but might be structured differently to allow the validity of the responses provided by the interviewees to be examined. Thirdly, throw-away questions were not necessarily directly related to the subject of the interview but were used to build a bond with the participant. Fourthly, probing questions are vital in semi-structured interview questions so that responses given to previous questions in the interview can be elaborated upon. The interview questions were framed based on three types of questions: open questions, in which the participants were given a chance to speak freely and provide detailed answers to the questions asked; closed questions, which were used to obtain specific

information or to confirm a statement or viewpoints, and probing questions asked to gather further details from the participants. The questions were arranged in a simple and standard method (Gomez & Jones, 2010), were worded so as to be clear and direct, and questions were avoided whose wording might bias the participants' responses (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5: Interview questions

Section 1 questions	Section 2 questions	Section 3 questions	Section 4 questions
Demographic factors: Age, occupation, educational background, marital status (ice-breaking questions)	Life history, work experience, promotion opportunities, obstacles and barriers	Organizational support: equal opportunities, effects of social factors, religion, and labour law	Future improvements, women's enforcement strategies

Source: The Author.

The questions were grouped into four sections as follows (see Appendix 1).

Section one

This section contains questions on the demographic characteristics of the participants, including their name, age, marital status, place of residence, occupation, and educational background. These questions are important for data analysis since this information might help in explaining the behaviours of different individuals and groups. They also provide a starting point for the conversation.

Section two

This section focuses on participant life histories and careers. These questions encouraged participants to engage in the process and speak fluently about their experiences in life and in their careers. The questions elicited positive reactions from the participants, who were willing to share information about their journeys and successes, providing clarity about how they had reached their current position and their ambitions for the future. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed participants to discuss their experiences without restraint. I tried not to interrupt them when speaking about their thoughts and feelings.

Section three

The questions in this section were designed to understand the effects of context, such as the law, culture, society, and religion, on women's ability to compete for or succeed in leadership positions. Answers to these questions provided a clear picture of what the women faced and

how their environment affected their chances of leading and proving their self-worth in higher positions.

Section four

These questions focused on the participants' thoughts about women's opportunities in terms of leadership positions in the future. This provided opportunity for them to express their feelings and frustrations about prevailing social values and norms that work to limit opportunities.

A second interview schedule for HR Managers followed a similar four part format. The questions in sections one and four were the same as for the other interviewers, while the questions in section two concerned women's representation in the organization and their capabilities to compete for management and leadership positions. The questions in section three sought to find out about the practices organizations had adopted to offer both genders an equal opportunity environment in which to work and develop.

3.5 Analysis of data

Data analysis is sometimes perceived as the most time-consuming phase of a research effort (Denscombe, 2017). I investigated in depth the data collected using different tools to create sensible explanations of the phenomena under study. The methods of analysis used in quantitative research differ from those in qualitative research.

The data were coded and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic approach so as to answer the research questions by finding patterns and relationships in the qualitative data collected (Martin & Gynnild, 2011; Saunders et al., 2016). Cohen et al. (2013) described thematic analysis as a widely cited method in processing qualitative data, which "provides essential abilities that will be valuable for doing many other types of qualitative analysis". Furthermore, they emphasized that thematic analysis should be regarded as a method in and of itself. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78), thematic analysis is a "foundational approach for qualitative research", and a valuable and adaptable research tool capable of providing rich information regardless of the data's complexity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a practical approach through determining flexibility in interpreting data such as the views, opinions, knowledge, and experiences of participants and categorizing it in terms of broad themes. Additionally, it can produce unexpected findings, enrich the results, and simplify the propagation of findings and results to the public (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). This technique necessitates ingenuity and tests the researcher's

ability to organize raw material in logical, relevant categories and to assess it holistically (Bryman, 2016).

Thematic analysis is primarily concerned with the identification of meaning and the provision of a systematic and rigorous interpretation of data (Greg, 2012). It helps in the identification and analysis of patterns and themes relevant to the research objectives (Bryman, 2016). In this sense, a theme is a group of related patterns that frequently develop throughout the process of inductive analysis and characterize qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2013). Therefore, critical themes might arise from acquired data through inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2017). Moreover, in contrast to other techniques of qualitative data analysis, such as grounded theory (Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) or interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Osborn, 2003), thematic analysis is considered to be a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) and therefore it is not tied to a specific epistemological or theoretical perspective.

This study used an abductive thematic approach to analysis, combining theory and empirical data (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) in coding, which inductively identified themes at the semantic level to create original themes. Then, inductive themes analyzed looked for similarities and differences from existing theories or models (Braun et al., 2016). MAXQDA was used to assist with six recursive phases of thematic analysis.

In the first phase, I familiarised myself with the data. At this stage, I built up a clear idea of the most common thoughts and answers among the participants that shape the analysis and guide to answer the research questions. Therefore, all 38 transcribed interviews were read critically and analytically to generate an impression of the data and to identify potentially interesting patterns or codes in connection to the research questions (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Poth, 2016). I took notes of initial thoughts, interpretations, and questions (Tuckett, 2005).

Since interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English, primarily in Arabic, a thorough translation and back-translation process was implemented to maintain the integrity of participants' meanings during data analysis. All Arabic interviews were initially professionally transcribed verbatim in Arabic by a transcription company experienced in qualitative research. After transcription, I reviewed all transcripts for completeness and accuracy, cross-referencing them with audio recordings to clarify sections with unclear speech or contextual ambiguity. The initial English translation was performed by a professional fluent in Omani Arabic and knowledgeable about social science terminology. A second translator independently translated

the English texts back into Arabic (back-translation) to ensure accuracy. I then compared the original Arabic transcripts, the English translations, and the back-translated Arabic texts. This triangulation helped identify discrepancies and subtle nuances that could have been lost or misrepresented during translation.

Despite this thorough approach, I recognise that some culturally specific terms, idioms, or emotional expressions lack direct English equivalents. For instance, the term “‘ayb” (عيب)—which implies shame or social impropriety—has complex sociocultural meanings in Omani society that a single English word cannot fully capture. In these instances, I included the original Arabic word in brackets within the English transcript and provided contextual interpretive explanations. I also critically examined how the translation process may have influenced data interpretation. In qualitative research, meaning is conveyed through words, tone, pauses, repetition, and culturally rooted expressions. These meanings are inevitably filtered through a different linguistic and epistemic framework, even with careful translation. Therefore, I was cautious about making overly confident claims and consistently revisited the original Arabic transcripts during analysis to ensure that my interpretations aligned with the participants’ meanings. Therefore, to avoid losing rich and relevant data such as new ideas and interviewees’ emotions and feelings, I coded each interview separately, which provided an initial understanding of the data and the analysis process (Saldaña, 2021).

In the second phase, I generated initial codes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this phase begins after reading and becoming acquainted with the unstructured data by thinking about what is in the data and what is interesting. Having read the interviews comprehensively, I have listed potential codes (Bryman, 2016) that could generate an understanding of the issues and obstacles facing women in leadership positions in Oman. Saldaña (2021) defined a code as a word or a phrase that aggregates, summarises, and stands for a set of detailed data. Coding reduces the volume of qualitative data by labelling and highlighting specific sentences and paragraphs based on their characteristics relevant to the research questions and the literature (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Saldana, 2015). Some categories may contain clusters of coded data that merit further subcategorisation. By comparing and consolidating significant categories, I moved beyond the data’s “particular reality” toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical (Saldana, 2015). As a fundamental process, coding follows the ideal, streamlined scheme depicted in Figure 3.3.

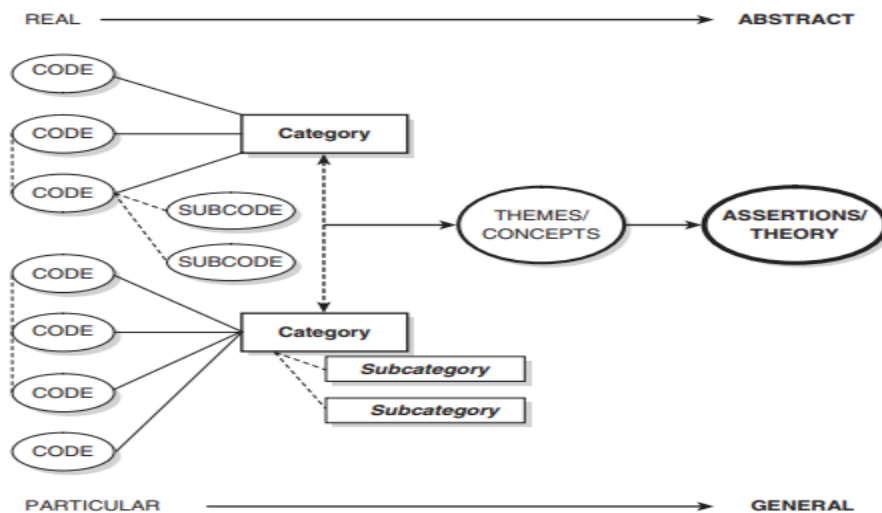


Figure 3.3: Streamlined code-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry

Source: Saldana (2015)

I used the MAXQDA software suite to sort and organize the data. This system is an effective qualitative data analysis software that provides tools for researchers to handle different types of data and do a combination of methods analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). It shows outstanding modelling capabilities, coding systems, and data organization. It enhances the efficiency of the work with complex coding schemes and large amounts of text, allowing a more in-depth and sophisticated analysis (King, 2004). However, it creates main challenges, such as increased costs, technical difficulties with large datasets, and a massive learning curve for new users (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). This research used open coding with no pre-set codes; however, codes were developed and modified during the coding process. The coding process varied based on codes being tied to semantic or latent meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2012) and was implemented in two rounds. In the first coding round, I linked the raw data with cognitive interpretations of it. Every single point deemed to be significant was assigned a code (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldaña, 2015) in order to extrapolate as much semantic meaning as possible. In the second coding round, codes that could be included under a single heading were combined, and those deemed insignificant or not repeated were removed (Saldaa, 2015). The coding framework was implemented abductively, where issues thought relevant in the data were coded inductively or were decided deductively according to specific theoretical frameworks (Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the third phase, I searched for themes. This stage involved sorting and organizing all of the potentially relevant coded data extracts into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is a process of identifying patterns that concern something important and describe the

same concept or phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Bryman, 2016; Saldaña, 2021) present in the data and related to the research questions (Braun and Clarke (2006) that link substantial portions of the data together (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). Themes are identified by combining components or fragments of the ideas or experiences of participants that are often meaningless when viewed separately (Aronson, 1994). Therefore, there are no hard and fast rules about what constitutes a theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

In the fourth phase, themes were identified. At this stage, the themes represent refinements (Braun & Clarke, 2006) where data are organised to generate meaning and which make sense in producing knowledge from the data collected (Smith & Firth, 2011; Richards & Morse, 2012). The identification of themes implies that the data has been theoretically conceptualised and is comprehensive. Themes are then revised, appear coherently, and reflect the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes can be based on semantics, as summarised content is taken from the surface-level information about what was said or in the sense of going beyond the data content and using theory to explain the findings conceptually (Campbell et al., 2021). Groups of themes then began to appear, and each part of the data was divided into separate files completed for analysis using the Gioia method. This analytical method balances the prerequisite for the development of new concepts through induction and the integration of demanding standards (Gioia et al., 2013). It tends to research that deliberate multiple data types and offers itself to adaptations related to the phenomenon in a study (Gioia, 2012; Saunders, 2019). Additionally, the subjects and researchers are assumed to be knowledgeable agents capable of articulating and analysing socially constructed realities in the method (Gioia et al., 2013). There are three orders of analysis in the Gioia method. Firstly, the voices of respondents are represented by first-order concepts, where codes are quotations from the data. Common themes are then identified in the second-order analysis, whereas the third-order analysis identifies aggregate dimensions which demonstrate a higher-order concept (see Figure 3.4).

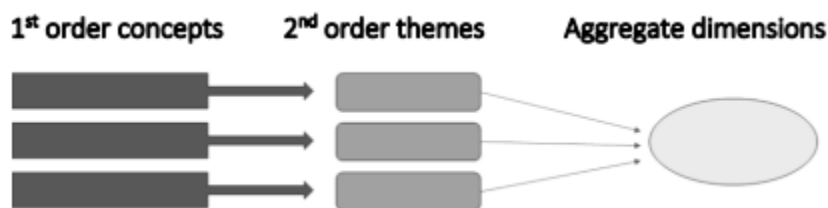


Figure 3.4: Structure of thematic analysis using the gioia method
Source: Gioia et al (2013)

I then compiled a detailed analysis and identified each theme's story (Braun & Clarke, 2006). King (2004) believed that themes should not be considered to be finally established until all the data have been read through and the coding inspected at least twice, by which time the researcher should have invested enough time to ensure that the themes labelled and introduced are based upon a solid coding foundation. Finally, I prepared a more comprehensive report, including a literature review and discussion, with headings to denote each theme (Guest et al., 2012). Every theme was linked theoretically and supported by quotations from the data in order to provide pragmatic evidence for the theorization (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). See Figure 3.5, which illustrates the process adopted to conduct this research till writing it up. Each step was linked, allowing back-and-forth movement throughout the process.

Employing interpretative methodologies in qualitative research creates difficulties in differentiating between researchers' personal perspectives and objective study observations (Saunders et al., 2006). Therefore, In data analysis, reflexivity involves continuous self-awareness of how the researcher's background, assumptions, and theoretical frameworks may affect the interpretation of results (Maclean et al., 2012b). This approach necessitates careful documenting of analytical decisions, recognition of potential biases, and clear reporting of how the researcher's perspective may influence the developing themes and findings (Haynes, 2012). Consequently, the evolution of novel theoretical insights emerges through a dynamic process in which researchers' preliminary understanding is continuously modified and reconstructed by interaction with the data and study methodology (Mason, 2017). This recurring process of reflection and interpretation enables to recognise and address positionality while developing new theoretical understandings.

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue that social scientists must critically evaluate their positions within the social space to reveal the original assumptions, values, and symbolic power that influence the research process. In this work, embracing reflexivity is not just an ethical or methodological enhancement; it fundamentally informs the epistemological stance that drives knowledge production and interpretation. My position as a man in Omani society, including the gender and power relations it involves, is critical to the research context. I recognise myself as an Omani man privileged by the advantages accorded to men in a patriarchal society. These advantages affect the boundaries of legitimacy and authority in daily interactions and institutional environments. My habitus, shaped by my cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds, is characteristically gendered. While my educational and professional experiences have heightened my awareness of gender equality and women's empowerment, I

remain connected to the patriarchal norms and organizational frameworks that continue to relegate women. This insider perspective granted me institutional access but also risked an epistemic imbalance, where female participants might limit their disclosures or tailor their narratives to gendered social expectations.

As Bourdieu (1991) stresses, researchers must examine their relationship to the research subjects and the symbolic violence in the research process. Throughout this study, I was particularly conscious of the power dynamics between myself and the women interviewed, especially regarding the culturally sensitive discussions on leadership, authority, and gendered experiences in the workplace. I do not presume that participants revealed everything they might have shared with a female researcher or that their stories were devoid of the limitations imposed by gendered self-presentation. I also recognise the risk of over-interpreting or misrepresenting their voices filtered through my positional lens.

To moderate these issues, I adopted several methodological and ethical strategies. First, I emphasised the importance of women's viewpoints in my analysis, regarding their narratives as primary sources of insight rather than interpreting them through a male perspective. Second, I practised member checking, seeking clarification and validation during interviews to ensure my interpretations faithfully represented their intended meanings. This collaborative methodology allowed me to oppose potential biases and opened pathways for alternative interpretations of the data.

Additionally, I drew upon feminist scholarship to understand the complex and intersectional dimensions of women's leadership experiences in Oman. Influential scholars like Metcalfe (2008), Tlaiss (2014), and Mahmood (2005) provided theoretical frameworks that challenged essentialist and deficit-focused narratives about women's roles. These perspectives enriched my understanding of gender as a lived, embodied, and relational scope of power rather than just a variable.

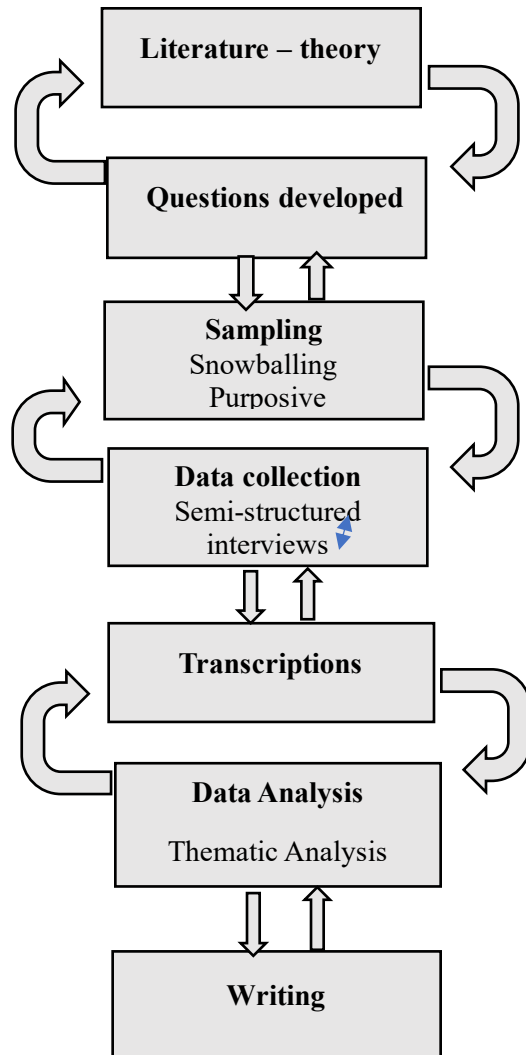


Figure 3.5: Research design and process

Source: The Author

Credibility and trustworthiness

The credibility of qualitative research needs to be assessed (Lincoln & Guba, 1984b), as the adoption of different validity and reliability methods is essential to increase transparency and to confirm the minimisation of bias on the part of the researcher (Singh, 2014). Cohen et al. (2013) have proposed four criteria in the evaluation of the reliability of qualitative research. First is credibility, which concerns the relationship between the views of research participants and the researcher’s own point of view. Second, transferability in the sense of the extent to which findings can be generalized. Third, dependability in terms of the suitability of the methods used to collect and analyse data. Fourth is conformability, in that the research findings are interpreted in such a way that is grounded in the data collected.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, I used the method of triangulation. In using this method, I sought to authenticate and confirm the participants’ perceptions and highlight

contradictory evidence (Yin, 2009). Triangulation is considered to be the most suitable method for checking the trustworthiness of the research. It enables the researcher to be deliberate about the issue in a study from multiple dimensions (Walliman, 2011) with a comprehensive view and then cross-check and validate the results and outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). There are four common types of triangulation. The first is data triangulation, which involves triangulation in terms of time, space, and persons (Cohen et al., 2013). In time triangulation, I considered changes in women's development in the organizations covered in this study and in women's representation over a longer period, such as in the past ten years. Person triangulation involves the collection of data from respondents in various demographic categories, such as men and women and different ages and occupations, so as to support and validate findings (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). In space triangulation, data from different organizations in different sectors and subsectors are analysed. I interviewed candidates from different organizations from different locations in Oman, which enhances to study the effect the effects of the societies and the generalising of the outcomes. The second type of triangulation is methodological triangulation. I adopted an abductive research approach, which encourages using both tools and allows more data to be collected, compared, and evaluated in order to produce transparent and trustworthy findings. The two other types of triangulation were not used in this research. Investigator triangulation was not applicable since only one researcher conducted the study, while theoretical triangulation is typically used in quantitative research where there is a theory to test and hypotheses to test.

Ethical considerations

This research was conducted on a sensitive topic related to diversity and gender issues, which are considered to be sensitive subjects since they deal with a complex combination of social norms and ideologies. Discussion of the issues involved may be thought to lead to moral transgressions that are punishable by law and in society. This section describes the ethical considerations taken into account in the present research. According to Saunders et al. (2003, p. 129), the term ethics “refers to the appropriateness of your behaviour and the rights of those who become the subject of your work or are affected by it. These authors also argue that researchers must follow no absolute right or incorrect ethical process but that behaving ethically in conducting research is critical if high-quality data is to be obtained and in preventing harming the study area.

One of the most critical ethical issues is the confidentiality of information given by participants, which should always be protected (James & Busher, 2009) since it helps in the

collection of accurate information from respondents (Saunders et al., 2009). Therefore, I followed all of the necessary steps to prevent the identity of participants from being recognized or revealed in research reports. However, efforts to maintain anonymity may not always ensure confidentiality, since other information may indirectly identify a participant (Cohen et al. (2013). With this in mind, it was ensured that no information in reports reveals any of the participants' identities. Pseudonyms have been used to protect all participants, such as for organizations, individual identities, and exact positions. Protecting the participants from any psychological, physical, social, or legal harm or risk is a priority among the researcher's responsibilities (Saunders et al., 2009). Before the interviews, the participants were informed about and the objectives of the research (James & Busher, 2009). Without applying any kind of pressure, the participants were then asked to participate in the study voluntarily. They were also given the freedom to withdraw from participation at any point without needing to give reasons, and thus, informed consent was gained.

The researcher must avoid sensitivity when dealing with emotionally fraught questions (Bryman, 2016), as the interview should not cause any emotional distress to any participant, especially to women. Therefore, I carefully monitored the participants for any sign of distress or emotional damage and was prepared to stop the interview whenever necessary. However, none of the participants appeared to experience emotional discomfort or pain during the interviews. All efforts were made to ensure that the participants were protected from any physical, psychological, social, or legal harm or risk (Saunders et al., 2009).

However, it is difficult for a study to be completely free of ethical issues (Flick, 2015). Ethical concerns in qualitative research might emerge before the study has begun, at the start of the study, during data collection, analysis, or reporting, or while publishing the results. Therefore, the researcher has to assert the ethical principles necessary to facilitate an investigation's trustworthiness (Busher, 2005). Thus, potential ethical issues in this research were considered from the earliest stages of the research design onwards, and all of the ethical standards and protocols required by Newcastle University were followed.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed in detail the research framework and methodology adopted in this study. The ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research have been discussed, along with the ethical considerations relevant to this thesis and the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness. The section on research philosophy explained the methodological design of

the study using an abductive approach. The research methodology underpins the interpretive research philosophy, and the qualitative approach used involves the abductive thematic analysis of data. Additionally, this chapter has clarified the reasons for using semi-structured interviews as an effective instrument for the collection of research data. Snowballing and purposive sampling were utilised as suitable sampling tools, and the data were analysed using MAXQDA software. The entire data collection process has been explained, from interview preparation to reporting.

Chapter 4

Women, Economy, Society and Politics in Oman

4.1 Introduction

To provide context for the theme and focus of the current research, this chapter offers a general background on the Sultanate of Oman. Therefore, a concise summary covers the country's geography, demographics, political framework, economic landscape, labour market metrics, and conditions for Omani women. Additionally, a thorough explanation details the factors that have greatly impacted women's chances for management and leadership roles in the past two decades. A discussion of the educational and political support for and cultural background of women in the country represents a reasonable basis for understanding the pivotal changes that have affected women's presence in the labour market, along with an analysis of the social and legal factors that have supported or hindered women's chances of obtaining more significant competitive opportunities. This information provides the basis for an understanding of the role of all these factors in women's ability to lead and compete equally with men in higher positions. Based on recent data from various governmental sources, international organizations, and corporate and institutional reports, this chapter seeks to answer this research question: *How do economic, cultural, and political factors influence women's participation in management and leadership roles?*

4.2 Geography of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is located in the Middle East in the southeastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula (see Figure 4.1). The Arabian Peninsula consists of six countries that have joined politically in an organization called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and a seventh country, Yemen. Oman stretches from a longitude of 51.50 to 59.40 degrees east and a latitude of 16.40 to 26.20 degrees north. The area covered by the Sultanate is 309,500 square kilometres, which is approximately the same size as the United Kingdom, and the coastline is 3,165 kilometres long. The geographical composition of the country includes various topographic elements, such as coastal plains occupying 3 per cent of the total area, mountain ranges covering 15 percent, and desert constituting 82 per cent of the total land area of the country (Jafari, 2012). There are also many islands in the Arabian Sea and Arabian Gulf alongside its mainland. Oman shares land borders with Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the United

Arab Emirates (UAE) and maritime borders with Pakistan and Iran on the Arabian Sea and the entrance to the Indian Ocean (Ministry of Information, 2023).



Figure 4.1. Location of the Sultanate of Oman
Source: The World Atlas (Bartholomew, 1985)

Arabic serves as the official language in Oman and is mainly utilised as the country's primary mode of communication and education. At the same time, English is extensively used and can be regarded as a second language due to its prevalence in business communication, private companies, and higher education institutions. In addition, due to the country's diverse cultures, various languages are spoken, including Jabali, Mahri, Swahili, Balochi, and Urdu (Al-Ghatrifi, 2016). Islam has been Oman's designated and recognised religion since the life of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him), and native Omanis embrace Islam as a religion from different schools such as Ibadi, Sheea and Suani. However, it is worth noting that minority populations of Christians and Hindus exist within the country and are considered part of the foreign workforce. Therefore, to enhance the harmony of society, the law strictly prohibits any form of religious or sectarian discrimination that impedes the freedom to practice one's religion and is considered a crime. This has made coexistence between members of society peaceful and allowed everyone freedom of belief (Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, 2023).

Strategic geographic location

Oman is considered a wealth of historical, geographical, cultural, and societal information, encompassing various aspects such as its location, traditions, and social norms (Al Foori, 2016). According to Al-Deen (1994), the historical origins of Oman can be traced back to approximately 12,000 B.C. Due to its strategic location in Asia, Oman has played a historical role over centuries. Its geographical location has greatly influenced the country's foreign

policy, trade relations, cultural adaptations, and integration into and openness to the outside world. At times, the Arabian Peninsula has been considered to be an enclosed region, governed by closed ideologies around its ideas and trends, which greatly affected the internal culture and customs of the countries. Oman's strategic importance lies in its control of the Strait of Hormuz, which is a gateway for trade between Gulf countries in the Middle East and the rest of the world (Benz, 2013; see Figure 4.2). Therefore, its significant role location has attracted external aggression from various entities, including the Persians, British, Portuguese, and other foreign states (Kechichian, 2007). Oman's strategic location and long coastline on the Arabian Sea facing the Indian Ocean have granted it dominance over the oldest and most significant maritime trade route connecting the Gulf region to the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the country's engagement in global trade networks has granted it a favourable position, allowing for the establishment of a history of trade with foreign nations that dates back to pre-Islamic eras (Jones & Ridout, 2015).



Figure 4.2. The Strait of Hormuz and trading routes
Source: New York Times (2019)

Historical records in documents from the Acadian and Sumerian civilisations (located in what is currently Iraq) provide evidence of Oman's previous name, Majan, and its maritime connections with these civilisations dating from the early 3rd century B.C. During this historical era, the primary economic pursuit in Oman revolved around the process of smelting, which entailed extracting and purifying copper and exporting frankincense, which was used for religious purposes in temples, medicinally, and by the Egyptian Pharaohs for mummification. Consequently, commercial transactions increased with the region of Mesopotamia, which was an ancient civilisation known for its advanced trade networks and economic activities (Rippenburg, 1998). Therefore, these connections facilitated a robust trading network that extended to regions such as Africa and the Indus Valley via Oman

(Hourani & Carswell, 1995), which benefited greatly from its distinguished location as an important commercial intersection.

Nowadays, around 35 per cent of global oil consumption passes through the Hormuz Strait daily, making it a critical strategic location for international trade (US Energy Information Administration, 2018). The state of Oman has adopted a policy of positive neutrality out of its responsibility in today's world, especially given its position in a region which is politically volatile and culturally complex. The Sultanate of Oman is pivotal in today's world by resolving political complexities and opening the horizons for peace between countries (Ministry of Foreign, 2023). The country is well-accepted among the global political elites. It has essential roles in global stability, bringing viewpoints closer and resolving complex problems, such as the Iranian nuclear agreement and the war in Yemen.

Demographics of Oman

Oman's population is relatively modest in size compared to its counterparts within the Arabian Gulf. It is ranked the 120th most populous country in the world, according to data from the United Nations (2023). Based on the most recent census data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in July 2023, the total population of Oman is 5,135,977. Native Omanis number 2,912,079 individuals, accounting for approximately 56.70 per cent of the total population, while the remaining 43.30 per cent are expatriates, totalling 2,223,898 individuals (NCSI, 2023). The native Omani majority of the population consist of individuals in their youth age. The population pyramid exhibits a notable concentration in two age cohorts: the 0-14 year-olds, representing 38.4 per cent of the total population; and the 15-64 years group, representing 57.9 per cent of the total population (see Figure 4.3). Omani women represent 49.65 per cent of total native Omanis, whereas men are in a slight majority of 50.35 per cent.

The total population of Oman has experienced an increase from 2,340,815 individuals in 2003 to 4,933,850 individuals in 2022. The number of Omani nationals exhibited a moderate increase within this total population, whereas numbers of expatriates witnessed rapid growth. The expatriate population grew from 559,257 individuals in 2003, constituting 23.9 per cent of the total population, to 2,066,239 individuals in 2022, making up approximately 43.9 per cent (see Table 4.1).

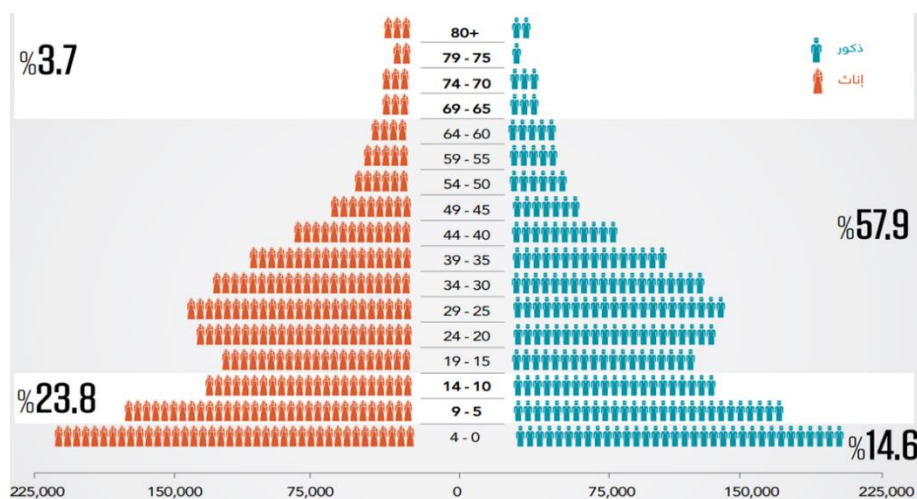


Figure 4.3. Omani population pyramide

Source : Oman NCSI (2020)

The significant increase in the number of expatriates is due to the rapid development and expansion of the Omani economy, which has witnessed surges in the last 20 years due to rises in oil prices, which has contributed to supporting governmental and private economic activities in the country (see Table 4.1). The GDP per capita has jumped from 8896.9 dollars in 2003 to 25056.8 dollars in 2022. This vast development has required additional labour, especially in construction, reconstruction, and engineering works, which required importing workers from East Asia due to their low cost.

Table 4.1 Changes in population and GDP of Oman over 20 years

Year	No. of Omanis		No. of expatriates		Population	GDP per capita
	Women	Men	Women	Men		
					-	-
2003	881,018	900,540	146,558	412,699	2,340,815	\$8896.9 (3425.5 RO)
2008	973,060	994,120	206,954	693,294	2,867,428	\$22974.3 (8845.6 RO)
2013	1,071,388	1,100,614	281,583	1,401,621	3,855,206	\$23563.9 (9072.6 RO)
2018	1,279,495	1,299,741	332,108	1,690,362	4,601,706	\$19887.6 (7657.2 RO)
2022	1,423,765	1,443,846	447,453	1,618,786	4,933,850	\$25056.8 (9647.4 RO)

Source: NCSI (2023) and World Bank (2023)

4.3 Culture of Oman

The rise of the empire of Oman in the 1850s made it a prominent maritime power at the intersection of trade routes in Africa and Asia, especially after taking control of East Africa, the Gulf, and regions on the other side of the Arabian Gulf and the sea of Oman which are currently part of Iran and Pakistan (see figure 4.4). Its development as a growing commercial society enhanced an openness to ethnic and cultural differences, which contributed significantly to the creation of modern Omani culture. In addition, Oman has witnessed numerous invasions by various foreign powers and dynasties throughout its history (Al-Khalili, 2009); for example, the Carmathians from 931 to 934, the Seljuk state from 1053 to 1154, the Portuguese from 1515 to 1650, and the Ottomans from 1550 to 1588 (Akseki, 2010). These historical events introduced new concepts and renewed ways of life for Omanis at different times. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that throughout the changes that the country has witnessed, the Omanis have strived to preserve their Islamic cultural authenticity and adhere to it while being open to others.

The fundamental elements of Omani culture primarily stem from the Islamic faith. According to Article (1) of the Omani Constitution, “the Sultanate of Oman is identified as an Arab, Islamic, and independent State that possesses complete sovereignty.” The Islamic religion holds a prominent position in Oman, serving as the prevailing faith and the foundation for its legislative framework and constitutional order. Consequently, Islamic principles and teachings predominantly shape or influence the country’s rules, regulations, and customs. Additionally, the geographical characteristics of the country have greatly influenced the cultural scene and the formation of Omani customs which were greatly influenced by their openness to the outside world and the expansion of its empire.

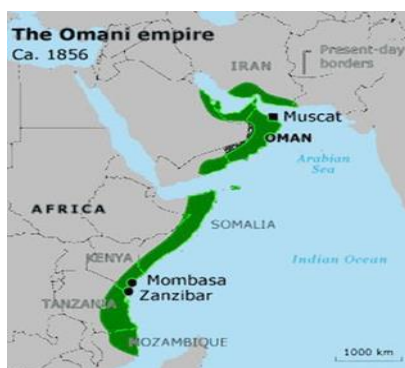


Figure 4.4 The Omani Empire in 1856
Source: worldpress.com

In the mid-19th century, Oman emerged as a formidable empire, exerting its influence over the East African coast and fostering a prosperous maritime trade network among the continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe (Almezaini & Rickli, 2016). The study of historical trade practices reveals that Omanis travelled to numerous territories around the world, from the Straits of Hormuz to Persia and extending to Indonesia, as well as reaching Cape Town in South Africa through the Malacca Strait. Therefore, the commercial and geographical expansion of the Sultanate contributed to the migration of individuals from diverse ethnic and tribal backgrounds to Oman. Over time, individuals from various backgrounds have chosen to settle and live in Oman and have established long-standing roots in the region. According to Peterson (2004), there existed in the 20th century a heterogeneous composition of various ethnic and cultural groups alongside the original population of Omani tribes.

Nowadays, Omani society comprises diverse ethnic groups, including Arabs, Zanzibaris, Hindu Banians, Balushis, Liwatyahs, and Iranians (Alkindi, 2009). Members of these ethnic groups enjoy the freedom to express and practise their cultures. Indeed, these cultures have blended with Omani culture and become part of the country's general culture. Consequently, there is a degree of overlap of some languages in the colloquial Arabic language spoken in Oman; for instance, it contains common words such as Portuguese and some Arabized English words. Throughout history, Oman and its inhabitants have successfully preserved their heritage while simultaneously incorporating the most advantageous aspects of contemporary society (Taism, 2018). This is evident in the significant differences between Oman and neighbouring countries in terms of internal peace, freedom, and openness to the world while retaining an Omani identity. Therefore, Oman positions itself as the most culturally heterogeneous nation in the Gulf region.

Oman exhibits another distinctive characteristic within the Arabian Peninsula, as it is home to two important Muslim factions, namely, the Sunni and Ibadi sects or schools. A significant proportion of Omanis adhere to the Ibadi school of Islam, which can be traced back to its origins in Iraq. Ibadhism in Oman was shaped by many religious figures, including Abd Allah ibn Ibadh from whom the sect derived its name (Eickelman, 2002). One of the defining features of Ibadhism is its emphasis on non-sectarianism and openness to other denominations and religions. According to Ghubash (2014), individuals who identify as Ibadhi Muslims can engage in worshipping activities within any mosque and demonstrate a willingness to embrace Muslims belonging to other groups, encouraging joint worship experiences. Despite Oman being predominantly Muslim, Muscat has also accommodated several Christian churches and

Jewish synagogues without experiencing religious conflict (Baabood, 2016). The open political role of the Omani sultans and rulers towards others and the significant trading exchange between Oman and many of the world's countries have played a significant role in the culture of tolerance, which is notable in the Omani societal fabric in the past and today. Therefore, it is essential to understand the formation and basis of the country's political standpoint. The following section discusses the political background.

4.5 Political position of Oman

The political structure of the Sultanate of Oman is an absolute monarchy, wherein the Sultan exercises supreme authority in the country and is the head of the state and responsible for its affairs with full powers of intervention in all political and social aspects of government and society. The constitution in Oman, known as 'the Basic Statute of the State' or 'the Basic Law of the State,' was promulgated through Royal Decree No. 101/96 in 1996. The constitution is extensively viewed as the fundamental framework that guides the formulation and implementation of policies within the country and serves as the primary source for all royal decrees and legislation (Ministry of Information, 2023). The document explicitly outlines the structure of the governing body and the underlying principles that guide its policies while also ensuring the protection of the freedoms and rights of all people in the country while also ensuring the preservation of their liberties, safeguarding their well-being, upholding their dignity, and protecting their entitlements (Miller, 1997; Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2023). Two primary councils exist under the monarch's authority: the Ministers Council and the Oman Council. The system of governance is known as Sultani, which is characterised by its hereditary nature, specifically in the male lineage of Sayyid Turki bin Said bin Sultan who is the grandson of the founder of the governing family Ahmed bin Said. The governmental structure comprises three fundamental entities; namely, Majlis al-Shura, commonly called the Consultative Council, Majlis al Dawla, also known as the State Council, and the Council of Ministers which the Sultan heads. These three entities collectively represent a legislative body known as Majlis Oman, alternatively referred to as the Council of Oman, which is considered the highest authority in the country after the sultan.

The Omani legislative framework is primarily influenced by Islamic principles and customs, with the Shura (consultation) being a key component in the process of issuing rules and regulations which entails engagement in consultative discussions to facilitate decision-making (Almoharby, 2010). Consequently, the Majlis al-Shura was founded during the early 1990s to enhance the people's participation in government and to implement democratic

principles in the country and enforce a system of oversight and responsibility. The members of this council have the authority to offer suggestions and proposals only for the modification of legislation as well as enhancing various aspects of the welfare of citizens (Rippenburg, 1998; Almoharby, 2010). Omani citizens elect members of the Majlis to represent each of Oman's sixty-three wilayat (provinces) (Ministry of Interior, 2023).

The primary function of the Majlis al Dawla is to provide recommendations and resolutions to address the challenges confronting the state and its people. The individuals who comprise its membership are designated through appointment by His Majesty via a royal decree, with selection criteria primarily based on their qualifications, knowledge, experience, and community prestige. The Majlis al-Shura, as previously mentioned, serves as an intermediary between the people and the government and its members are elected directly by Omani citizens.

Before 1970, significant underdevelopment was evident in Oman across various sectors, including housing, health, education, social welfare, communication, infrastructure, and other vital modern features. Furthermore, the nation experienced a period of civil conflict referred to as the Dhofar Rebellion, which took place in the southern region of the country and involved a communist insurgency with the participation of some countries in the region that wanted to control the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and implement their political and ideological agenda (Allen et al., 2000).

Following the ascension of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos (God rest his soul) to the throne in 1970, Oman experienced a progression toward democratic political advancement and social re-energisation. He pledged to the citizens of Oman his commitment to advancing the establishment of a contemporary governmental system: to the "Omani people ... I will work as quickly as possible to make you live happily in a better future ... Each of you must help in this duty ... Our country was in the past famous and powerful, and if we work in unity and cooperation, we will restore our past again and reach a prestigious place in the Arab world" (Sultan Qaboos Bin Said, 1970).

Sultan Qaboos successfully balanced regional, ethnic, and tribal interests in establishing a united national administration by building a new country with new goals and dismantling all of the old ideologies which had led the country to poverty and internal conflict. He led advances in the nation's infrastructure, healthcare, and education. In one of his most critical historical speeches, he immortalised a saying which is now considered a firm rule in Omani society

regarding the importance of education: “We will teach our sons and daughters even under the shades of the trees”. All his policies positively impacted the progress and advancement of Oman and its population (Peterson, 2004; Funsch, 2015). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP,2011) ranked Oman as the most improved country in the world in 2010, indicating its status as one of the most developed and politically stable nations in the Arab World.

Following the demise of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said (May his soul rest in peace), Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the cousin of the deceased Sultan, assumed power on January 11, 2020. The newly appointed Sultan exhibited proficiency in effectively overseeing domestic and international affairs, garnering considerable acclaim for his adeptness in fostering collaborative relationships among nations worldwide (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). Sultan Haitham received significant support and acceptance from Omani society, which has exhibited a strong sense of unity and solidarity from the outset of his inauguration. This widespread backing has ensured the nation’s stability and prevented any potential divisions or fragmentation.

4.6 Economy of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is considered to be a significant producer of oil and gas in both the Middle East and the global context and a member of OPEC+, which controls around 40 per cent of the world’s petroleum products. The economy of Oman is classified as a high-income country which is primarily reliant upon its abundant natural resources, particularly oil and gas. Over the past fifty years, the country’s economy has experienced significant and swift progress, which is attributed to extensive dependence on these natural resources and the government’s strategies for economic diversification.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) and the Ministry of Finance, (2024), fossil fuel resources accounted for 60 per cent of the total export earnings, 50 per cent of the government revenues, and 49 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the country financial year 2023. According to data from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (2024), the energy sector holds considerable importance in the country’s economy, as it encompasses a substantial amount of established crude oil reserves at a total of 4.9 billion barrels. These reserves account for 1.2 per cent of the aggregate amount within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region and approximately 0.4 per cent of worldwide total reserves. Based on the current oil production rate of 1.064 million barrels per day, it is estimated that the existing oil reserves will last for approximately twenty years.

Oman is currently confronted with the challenge of reducing its reliance on oil-generated income due to the finite nature of this resource and the unpredictability of fluctuations in oil prices. In the past four decades, the Omani economy has experienced four significant economic shocks. The first was in 1985 when the price of oil experienced a significant decline worldwide, dropping from \$27 per barrel to \$13 per barrel, leading to a decrease of 12.5 per cent in Oman's GDP. Oil prices also fell in 1998, \$19 to \$12 per barrel, which led to a negative GDP growth rate of -11 per cent. Another notable decrease in oil prices occurred in 2016, from \$120 to below \$50 per barrel (Ministry of Industry, 2014; Ministry of Finance, 2016; see Table 4.1). This had a considerable effect on the country's economy and led the government to drain its cash reserves while foreign debts reached 63.8 per cent of the GDP (see Table 4.1). The most recent decline in oil prices from \$64 to around \$20 per barrel occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This economic instability has had vital effects on the country and society, such as on public spending, unemployment, and infrastructure projects. Potential future ramifications and detrimental outcomes can lead to significant economic challenges associated with all aspects of people's lives.

Foreign direct investment in Oman experienced a notable increase of 7.7 per cent in 2023, reaching a value exceeding OM25.4bn (\$65.9bn), according to the Ministry of Economy (2024). The United Kingdom has been responsible for approximately 48 per cent of all foreign direct investment at OM10.2bn (\$25.9bn), followed by the United States with OM3.6bn (\$9.3bn) and China with over OM1.04bn (\$2.7bn). Investments lie in different sectors, including mining, clean fuels, advanced technology-related projects, retailing, and defence.

In order to enhance the government's strategic plans to utilise the country's total revenues, improve the diversification of the economy, and facilitate access to healthcare and education, and particularly the training of Omanis and foster the development of their skills and abilities so as to achieve prosperity, the government initiated a series of five-year development programmes starting from 1976. At the outset of the ninth five-year development plan, which ran from 2016 to 2020, the government set sector-specific objectives for contributions to GDP. These sought to bolster economic diversification by focusing on manufacturing industries, mining, fisheries, tourism, and transport and logistics services (Supreme Council for Planning, 2017). The focus was also on future endeavours, and especially renewable energy, including hydrogen and solar power. This lies through appropriately exploiting the country's geographical nature, which has abundant sunlight and unique resources to produce clean hydrogen energy.

The primary objectives of the tenth five-year development plan from 2021 to 2025 encompass a sustained emphasis on economic diversification and amelioration of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This exhausted the economy, caused severe damage to all sectors, and changed the balance of the global as well as local economy. Many countries worldwide are still suffering from the effects of this pandemic, and their governments are trying to develop their plans to save what can be saved.

Table 4.1 General economic indicators for Oman, 2003-2022

Year	Real GDP (US/b)	Real GDP growth (annual % change)	Inflation (%)	Unemployment (%)	Gov debt (% GDP)
2003	25.3	1.8	4.6	5.1	26.3
2007	56.4	9.3	4.9	4.3	33.6
2014	91.1	4.3	3.6	2.9	46.9
2016	73.9	-0.6	0.9	2.5	50.8
2017	79.1	0.2	1.3	2.3	53.9
2020	78.5	-3.1	0.1	1.7	63.8
2021	82.9	-1.3	2.2	2.9	62.3
2022	114.7	4.6	3.2	2.7	60.1

Sources: IMF (2023); NCSI (2023); World Bank (2023)

Oman's economy demonstrates considerable growth and periodic problems, as evidenced by financial data from 2003 to 2022. The Real GDP rose considerably from US\$25.3 billion in 2003 to US\$114.7 billion in 2022, with especially strong development between 2007 and 2014. During this time, yearly growth rates were often above 5 per cent, reaching a maximum of 9.3 per cent in 2007. Nevertheless, the economy experienced several challenges from 2015 to 2021. Significant contractions were observed in 2016 (-0.6%), 2020 (-3.1%), and 2021 (-1.3%), driven by global fluctuations in oil prices and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economy showed resilience by returning to a growth rate of 4.6 per cent in 2022.

Inflation has largely been attainable, with a significant increase of 7.6 per cent in 2008, although generally remaining around 4 per cent afterwards. The unemployment rate demonstrates gradual improvements, decreasing from 5.1 per cent in 2003 to 2.7 per cent in 2022, reflecting successful labour market changes. Government debt as an amount of GDP has shown a worrying upward pattern, rising from 26.3 per cent in 2003 to a maximum of 63.8 per cent in 2020, followed by a small drop to 60.1 per cent in 2022. This indicates increasing

financial affects that might require consideration regardless of an overall improvement in the economy.

4.7 Labour market of Oman

The labour market in Oman is considered to be minor and unbalanced due to the significant number of foreigners working in the country. This is due to the tremendous development at all economic levels during the past five decades, with the government’s aim, as explained in this chapter, to diversify its economy, reduce its dependence on oil, and facilitate the growth of a competitive country in the region. Therefore, there has been a very high demand for labour which was unavailable domestically due to the country’s small population and lack of skills. Importing a workforce was seen as the solution to increasing market demand (Rees et al., 2007; Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014). According to the NCSI (2024), the total number of workers in the country is approximately 2,663,160 employees. A significant proportion of the Omani population work in the public sector, at 378,414 employees who represent 89 per cent of public sector staff (see Table 4.2). In comparison, expatriates dominate the private sector with 1,420,587 employees constituting 79 per cent of the workforce. Most of these work in construction (approximately (450,000), followed by wholesale and retail (250,000) and manufacturing (195,000). (see Figure 4.5).

Table 4.2 Composition of the labour market in Oman

Sector	Nationality	No of employee	Percentage
Public Sector	Omani	378,414	90%
	Non-Omani	42,300	10%
	Total	420,714	100%
Private sector	Omani	413,946	25%
	Non-Omani	1,420,587	75%
	Total	2,663,160	100%

Source: NCSI 2024

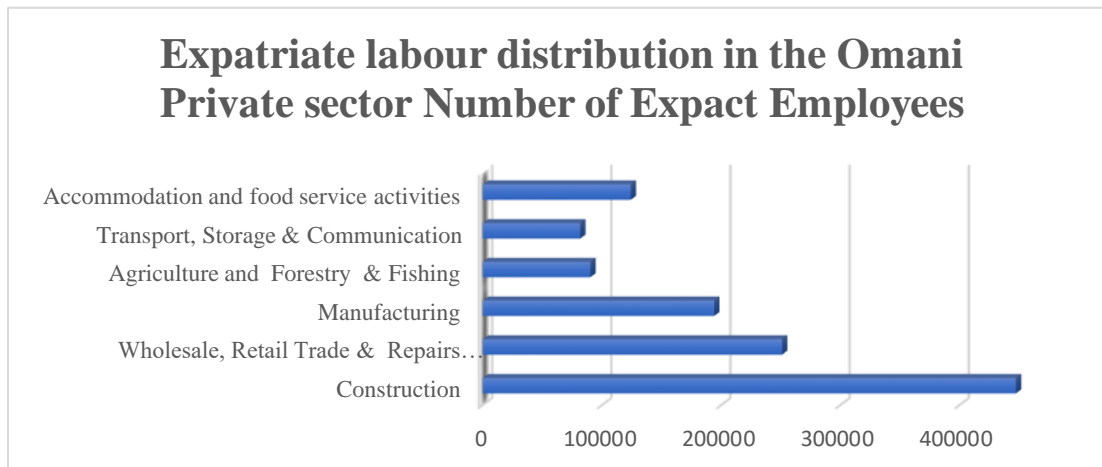


Figure 4.5. Expatriate labour distribution in the Omani private sector

Source: NCSI 2024

The government has hastened to reduce this enormous gap between the two sectors and encouraged citizens to engage in work in the private sector. This is especially urgent given the rise in the unemployment rate in the country to significant levels up to 2.327 per cent in 2022 (World Bank, 2023) with the increase in the number of young people and graduates looking for jobs, which the government can no longer absorb in the public sector. The achievement of this objective necessitates the development of skills within the domestic labour force and enhanced productivity within the private sector while ensuring the uninterrupted availability of foreign workers that the economy relies upon to attain competitiveness and growth (IMF, 2013).

The government has created many programmes and devised plans to enhance employment in the private sector, such as the policy of nationalisation (Omanization), which have increased the representation of Omani individuals especially in the private sector. However, Omani citizens are reluctant to pursue employment opportunities in the private sector due to their perception that these positions are characterised by low salaries, job insecurity, and demanding work schedules (Al Nanhdi, 2016).

Omanization

With the increases in the number of citizens seeking jobs in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and the growth of their economies which have relied mainly on oil revenues, it is deemed necessary to find quick solutions to empower citizens to take part in various businesses and jobs, which have so far been dominated since the beginning of economic development by immigrants. All Gulf countries have adopted nationalisation strategies under different names, such as Saudization, Emiratisation, Omanization, and Bahrainization, the goal of which is to systematically replace skilled foreign labour with skilled national labour over time.

The Omanization policy was introduced by the Oman government in 1988 in seeking to enhance the employment prospects and opportunities for the local workforce and to diminish the reliance on foreign labour. The year 2023 witnessed a notable emphasis on the significance of the Omanization policy in both the private and public sectors, and the government has achieved considerable advances in Omanization within the public sector. According to the NCSI (2024), the proportion of public sector positions held by Omani nationals in 2024 amounted to approximately 90 per cent. In contrast, it is worth noting that the private sector in Oman exhibits a relatively low level of Omanization, amounting to a mere 23 per cent in the year 2022; however, growing numbers of Omanis are now entering this sector. In contrast, there was a decline of 15.7 per cent in the number of foreign workers in Oman in 2020 (This high drop is due to the covid pandemic implications, where most of the businesses were affected and some of the foreigners preferred to back home), preceded by decreases of 4.2 per cent in 2019 and 3.6 per cent in 2018.

In 2022, all indicators confirmed a significant increase in the substitution of foreign workers with Omani nationals across the five key sectors of commercial banking, oil and gas, communications, insurance, and hospitality (NCSI, 2023). The commercial banks already exhibited a notable level of Omanization, as evidenced by the fact that 94.4 per cent of employment positions were occupied by Omani nationals by the end of 2022, compared to 93 per cent in 2018, while comparable figures in oil and gas companies were 88.1 per cent up from 82.5 per cent, in communications 92 per cent and 75.9 per cent, in the insurance sector 81.9 per cent and 70 per cent and in hospitality 50 per cent of the workforce compared to only 28.9 percent in 2018.

In order to bolster the Omanization strategy, the government has initiated longstanding programmes to generate employment opportunities for Omani nationals through recruitment strategies, replacement plans, and education and training initiatives in different sectors. In addition, the government has allocated targets specifying the desired percentage of Omani individuals to be employed within specific sectors, professions, and job titles (Ministry of Labour, 2017). Furthermore, the government implemented a prohibition on the recruitment of expatriates in more than 80 professions for six months in 2018. Moreover, the government terminated agreements with nearly 200 companies due to their failure to meet Omanization quotas. In 2019, the Omani government implemented an extension of the prohibition on individuals who are not citizens of Oman from occupying various positions in the private sector, including assistant general manager, assistant managers, and directors of administration,

human resources and personnel, public relations, and training, as well as all administrative and clerical roles (*Times of Oman*, 2019). Despite the potential drawbacks that different international organizations have cited concerning the consequences of such policies, for instance in impeding growth and deterring foreign investment, the implementation of quotas is beginning to yield positive outcomes.

One of the strategic goals of the Oman Vision for 2040, which is considered to be the country's most critical long-term strategy in the coming decades, is to increase the proportion of Omani citizens in the private sector workforce to more than 40 per cent overall. The sectoral target percentages are 60 per cent for transport, storage, and communications, 45 per cent for finance, insurance, and real estate, 35 per cent in the industrial sector, 30 per cent in hotels and restaurants, 20 per cent for the wholesale and retail trades, and 15 per cent for contracting activities (Implementation follow up unite 2040,2023).

The interactions of Oman's geographical, economic, and political factors have impacted the country's developmental trajectory. In addition, the country's development from a traditional culture to a modern economy, directed by strategic policies and royal vision, has provided a basis for major social change. This progression provides a basis for evaluating the vital part of women in Oman's developmental journey. The following section explores the larger developments in women's engagement in society, legislation, and the labour market, emphasizing their empowerment and growing roles in the economy and employment and, therefore, examining these effects on women's career progression and leadership opportunities.

4.8 Status of Women in Oman

Women's education

Formal education did not exist in the Sultanate of Oman before 1970. During his reign, Sultan Said bin Taimur played a prominent role in political governance and actively discouraged advances in education. The prevailing educational practices primarily revolved around religious teachings, explicitly focusing on memorising Holy Quran verses. The Sultan maintained that educational institutions functioned as environments conducive to the development of potentially subversive ideologies within Omani Islamic culture (Al Abri, 2015). During the latter part of the 1960s, the educational environment in Oman was marked by only three primary schools exclusively for male students. These schools had a combined capacity of 900 students, while no educational provisions were made available for women students (Al-Lamki, 1999). However, historical records indicate that Omani women have

played noteworthy roles in diverse cultural spheres, including Islamic jurisprudence, Quran book transcription, education, art, and even politics.

Early marriage was acknowledged as a prevalent social norm, as stated by Al-Sidani (1984), during that specific time frame. The prevailing emphasis was on women fulfilling their fundamental responsibilities within the institution of marriage, including childbearing and child-rearing. Therefore, female Omanis tended to enter matrimonial unions early in their lives, commonly aged nine to fifteen. Limited attention was given to women’s educational and personal development, primarily due to the pressing circumstances experienced in society stemming from the absence of the essential elements necessary to sustain life.

Following the modernization initiatives spearheaded by Sultan Qaboos after 1970, significant advances were witnessed across various domains of life in the country, with a notable emphasis placed on the education. The number of educational institutions in Oman has experienced a significant increase from the 1970s to the present (see Table 4.3). This primarily attributes to governmental investment and efforts to enhance knowledge and education crucial for the country development strategy. Subsequently, Oman was ranked 60th out of 188 countries as reported by the United Nations Development Program (2020) in the 2019 Human Development Index.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2023), there were 16 schools in the country in the academic year 1970/1971, in which 6941 students were enrolled, of whom girls represented 16.4 per cent. By the academic year 2021/2022, however, there were 2170 schools with a total number of students of 811679, and girls now represent approximately 48.8 per cent of them (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Education indicators in Oman, 1969-2022

Ac/year	No. of schools	No. of students	No. of girls	% of girls
1969/1970	3	900	0	0
1970/1971	16	6941	1136	16.4
1980/1981	373	106,032	35,190	33.2
1990/1991	830	387,000	170,994	44.2
2000/2001	993	554,845	270,344	48.7
2010/2011	1418	531,393	261,249	49.2
2020/2021	1813	826,165	403,154	48.7
2021/2022	2133	898,073	438,653	48.8

2024-2025	2170	811,679	402,557	49.5
-----------	------	---------	---------	------

Source: NCSI (2024) and Ministry of Education

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women by offering increased opportunities for employment and leadership. The Omani government has been fundamental in promoting women’s liberation by providing educational opportunities and implementing universal, mandatory education. This is accompanied by stringent measures and severe consequences for individuals who fail to meet educational requirements or parents who neglect to enrol their children, regardless of gender, in primary and secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The introduction of mandatory education for Omanis women has profoundly affected women’s empowerment, facilitating their ability to exert influence in diverse spheres of life and substantially broadening their range of options and social activities. Undoubtedly, there has been a noticeable trend among Omani families to actively foster their daughters’ education. Concurrently, Omani society and its younger generations have increasingly shown a preference for women to receive formal and informal education, thereby underscoring the significant societal shift that has taken place in terms of expectations placed upon Omani women. In addition, the importance of education was revealed in the interviews conducted with women in both sectors, where they emphasised that they have received support from their families to continue their studies and enhance their knowledge.

“My father has supported me significantly in my studies; he used to walk me to school and sometimes waited outside for hours till I finished. He used to say education is the only way you can achieve your dreams, and I am here today because of him.” (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Cooperation)

“After graduating high school, I could not enter a university or a college. My father and brother said I should not stay home without an education or certificate that could help me get a job. Therefore, they registered me in a training institute to learn basic skills such as computing and English.” (W: Noof Ibrahim, Ministry of RL)

The establishment of higher education in Oman is a relatively recent development, and the establishment of Sultan Qaboos University in 1986 was significant in marking the opening of the nation’s first state university. Historically, to mitigate the unequal demand for higher education, students were selected to enrol in academic courses in Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan as well as in the United Kingdom and the United States (Al-Barwani et al., 2009). The expansion of higher education in Oman has directly responded to the growth in demographics, leading to the establishment of 31 state higher education institutions (HEIs). The primary objective of this initiative is to address the increasing need for a workforce equipped with

advanced skills in both the public and private sectors (Al-Lamki, 2002). These establishments encompass diverse sectors, including general, military, health, and vocational educational universities and colleges.

Analysis of statistical data from the NCSI (2020) indicates that there are higher proportions of women students than men at the undergraduate level. The number of women graduates has dramatically increased in the last twenty years, from 41.5 per cent of total graduates between 1980 and 1989 to 62.5 per cent in 2020 (see Table 4.4). This change is evidence of the growing participation of women in higher education compared to male students and the openness to the teaching of women that society has embraced.

Table 4.4. Participation in higher education according to gender

Year of graduation	No. of male students	No. of female students	Total	% of female
1980-1989	590	420	1010	41.5
1990-1999	7224	7617	14,841	51.3
2000-2009	31,105	43,391	74,496	58.2
2010-2019	87,494	124,659	212,153	58.7
2022/2023	49215	68766	117981	63.1

Source: NCSI (2024) and ministry of higher education

Interestingly, from the general outputs of Omani universities and colleges, it can be noted that there is substantially greater demand from women for some specialisations but much less demand for other subjects. According to official data from the National Centre for Statistics (2020), women are predominant in some fields, such as graduates in health courses, where women represented 80 per cent of the total. In comparison, the proportion of women graduates in information technology reached approximately 71 per cent, which can be considered a very high percentage for this specialisation. Meanwhile, the number of female graduates in management reached roughly 62 per cent of the total during the past ten years (see Table 4.5). These are mainly office work majors where it is not required for women to mix with men and, to some extent, are socially accepted. There is huge concern among Omani families about the working environment of their daughters, and they try to make arrangements that ensure that societal norms regarding propriety are met.

Table 4.5. Distribution of men and women in different majors in Omani universities

Major subject	Male graduates	Women	Percentage of women
Admin and Commercial	25846	41603	61.6 %
Eng and technology	33943	16387	32.5%
Information technology	9617	23835	71.2%
Education	11464	20392	64%
Society and culture	10897	19267	63.8%
Natural and physics	5490	10898	66.4%
Health	2990	12258	80.3%

Source: NCSI (2024) and Ministry of Higher Education (2024)

Educational opportunities for women have expanded in recent decades, opening doors for participation in the labour market. However, educational choices are still affected by the cultural and societal factors. Women tend to choose the majors that conform with social and cultural norms in fields such as health, education, and administration, avoiding subjects that prepare for careers requiring physical work or more significant interaction with men, such as engineering. Yet, this said, 30 per cent of engineering graduates are women, which is high than in some developed countries like the UK where the number of graduates in engineering major is around 19 per cent (UK government, 2024). However, according to the official data, women job seekers represent approximately 62 per cent of the total in the country, which constitutes an essential point to discuss regarding the significant imbalance of employment between both genders. This indicates that the priority of work is still for men as they are culturally accountable for the family, for instance, marriage and family expenses (unlike many other countries, women's participation in house expenses is a choice, not mandatory, even if she works). This would make a clear conclusion: education has developed women's participation in the work market, but still, it is not a notable influence on women's empowerment in all sectors; women are concentrated in specific sectors.

Rules and Regulations for Women

Article 12 of the country's basic statutes (constitution) clearly illustrates everyone's right to justice, equality, and fair opportunity access. Article 17 of the Basic Law explicitly forbids discrimination based on colour, language, gender, origin, sect, domicile, social status, or religion (Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, 2023). Therefore, this legislation established the principle of equal rights and opportunities, explicitly prohibiting any discrimination based on gender concerning responsibilities and eligibility for public positions and social rights.

Additionally, under the principles of equality and non-discrimination, all individuals within society possess equal legal standing, are entitled to the same civil rights and have the same responsibilities. Oman's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in February 2006 affects all efforts to promote and protect women's rights. It acts as a catalyst for women to champion their legal rights proactively and publicly without hesitation.

The regulations applying to the labour market do not contain any obvious discriminatory provisions. On the contrary, these regulations ensure that individuals of all genders have equal employment opportunities and receive equal compensation, provided they possess comparable qualifications and experience (Ministry of Work, 2023). All legislation relating to human resources and work acts to ensure equal pay in both the public and private sectors, irrespective of an individual's gender. This said, implicit in the legislation are clauses that effectively single out women as a special category to be treated differently to men. An example of this can be seen in Royal Decree 53/2023 of Omani Labour Law in article 12, which emphasises workplace equality while acknowledging specific considerations for women due to perceived biological distinctions between genders and religious requirements. For example, women are prohibited from working between the hours from 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. unless authorised by a relevant ministerial decision, and moreover women are prohibited from occupations that pose risks to their well-being or physical integrity.

The law favours women in specific domains, including private interests, family circumstances, and religious considerations. An illustration of this can be seen in the provision of comprehensive maternity benefits, including fully paid leave for mothers and the option to take unpaid leave for childcare purposes, including during and after giving birth. The labour law in article 84 provides 98 days of maternity leave at full payment, with the option of an extra 14 pre-birth days, depending on medical advice. Moreover, article 76 guarantees nursing mothers one paid hour every day for daycare throughout their child's first year. Article 83 offers the possibility of unpaid leave for up to one year for those needing extended childcare arrangements yet keeping their position. Following Islamic traditions, it is also customary for a Muslim woman to be granted a period of mourning leave of 130 days. Married employees also have the right to take unpaid leave to accompany their spouses when they are sent overseas for educational or occupational purposes for up to two years (Ministry of Social Development, 2023).

Oman has established women's political rights and incorporated them into governmental structures through an open horizon to be engaged in different country political institutions and roles. Since 1994, women have had the opportunity to engage in the election process and contend for positions in the Majlis al-Shura, which serves as the lower chamber of the parliamentary system. Moreover, in November 2007, Sultan Qaboos appointed 14 women as nominees for membership in the Majlis al-Dawla (the State Council), the upper chamber of the parliament comprising 70 members. This led to a doubling of the proportion of female members compared to 2004. However, it is worth noting that female candidates were unsuccessful in winning any of the 84 seats being contested in the 2023 Consultative Council elections, representing a significant deviation from previous electoral outcomes.

Over recent years, there have been gradual changes in the traditional perceptions of women as growing numbers have assumed noteworthy roles as political contenders, company executives, and individuals responsible for making critical decisions, for instance, ministers of state, undersecretaries, and ambassadors. Despite all the privileges and rights that Omani women enjoy, Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (2010) argued that discrimination against women still exists regardless of the presence of legal frameworks promoting equality. They concluded that this can be ascribed to the predominance of men in positions of power and a general lack of awareness among women regarding their legal entitlements. Indeed, Omani women continue to encounter limitations concerning their freedom of movement, and, for example, it is expected that female university students are required to remain within the confines of campus premises and are not granted unrestricted mobility unless authorised by their male guardians.

The political elites evidently support empowering women in the country and society through supportive regulations. In addition, the government has allocated an annual day, which falls on October 17, to celebrate women and has named it "Omani Women's Day." On this day, the celebration highlights the achievements made by women and the challenges they face. This is a unique initiative to activate the role of women and highlight their essential role. However, these initiatives and empowerment efforts need more social trust to accelerate the changes. Having role models of women would support these efforts. This is why the First Lady role was instituted and enhanced in the last few years. The following section explains the role of the Honourable Lady.

Honourable Lady (First Lady)

The role of the Honourable Lady in Oman is exceptional within the country. This role has acquired notable importance in recent years, distinguishing itself within the royal protocols of

the Gulf region. Historically, during the time of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the title of Honourable Lady was conferred upon his mother, Lady Mazoon Al Mashani. This arrangement happened due to Sultan Qaboos's lack of a spouse since he had been briefly married in the 1970s before divorcing without children. The recent era of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has introduced important changes to this role. His wife, Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamad Al Busaidiyah, is taking on a more prominent position as the Honourable Lady. Her appearance at official occasions, diplomatic activities, and state visits indicates a notable change in the involvement of royal women in Oman's public life.

This occurrence is significant in the Gulf area, where the spouses of monarchs generally maintain private identities with little public involvement. Oman's government plan intentionally aims to elevate women's responsibilities throughout society. It provides an important message on Oman's commitment to the progress and modernisation of women. Through the presence of the Honourable Lady involved with diplomatic and social endeavours, Oman demonstrates how traditional civilisations may adjust to modern demands while maintaining their cultural heritage. This role also genuinely affects women's status and empowerment. It is noticeable that women are more involved in political roles and supported socially. She adopted many social programs through AHAD ASSOCIATION, which specialises in supporting women and society in different aspects (Oman gov, 2024).

Women in the labour market

Since the 1970s, Omani women have played a significant and active role in various professional domains within the private and public sectors. Changes in the perception of women from being primarily identified as 'housewives' have been influenced by changing economic activities, shifting labour patterns, and evolving social dynamics following the Omani Renaissance, leading to women becoming active participants in the country's modern development efforts.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the labour market in Oman is relatively constrained in scale and largely dependent on the fluctuations in oil and gas prices, which affect the entire national economy, as discussed previously in this chapter. Therefore, the country has experienced a state of saturation of the workforce during different periods, leading to high unemployment rates. Significant declines in women's participation in the labour force have occurred in some years, from 17.1 per cent in 1980 to 14.2 per cent in 1990. Therefore, during the mid-1990s, the government implemented a nationalisation strategy called the 'Omanization' policy to fill gaps in the labour market and reduce the unemployment rate among Omani nationals. This led to a significant decrease in the employment of foreign labourers,

focusing on encouraging the recruitment of men and women of Omani citizens for positions previously held by foreign nationals. This process has notably benefited women from economically disadvantaged standards and lower levels of educational attainment (Al Lamki, 1999), enabling them to make a living in challenging conditions and giving them novel societal positions in society due to secure employment across diverse fields, for example as janitors and kitchen assistants and in-hospital support roles. During the same period, there was also a notable increase in the number of women graduating from universities, which played a crucial role in advancing the source of women’s empowerment and engagement in the labour market.

In recent decades, economic and political changes, along with societal advances such as an emphasis on education, have resulted in substantial changes in conventional norms concerning gender roles. By 2003, a noteworthy surge in women participation in the labour market led to a corresponding rise in their representation, reaching 17.2 per cent (NCSI). Since then, a consistent increase has been observed in women’s participation in the labour market. Based on 2023 statistics, women represented 32 per cent of the workforce of Oman. Job seekers represent 4.1 per cent of the total Omani population (aged 15 years and over), among whom men constitute 37.5 per cent and women 62.5 per cent (NCSI,2024).

According to a report by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (2023), a significant majority of 89 per cent of Omanis (421,034 individuals) worked in the public sector, of whom 300489 were male and 120545 women (see Table 4.4). In contrast, a significant proportion of the labour force, at 10.8 per cent, were expatriates (44,178 individuals: 28,802 men and 15,376 women). A study by Al-lawatia (2011) revealed that women's participation in the private sector, the main employment sector for the Omani labour force, was limited to just 13% of the total workforce. By 2023, this number increased, with Omani women making up 32% of the workforce in the private sector.

Table 4.5 Gender distribution in the public and private sectors

Year	Men				Women			
	Expatriate		Omani		Expatriate		Omani	
	public	private	public	private	public	private	public	private
2018	22607	1531709	113087	187090	12811	198004	82394	65042
2019	21921	1457496	118257	191768	12549	200615	84636	70565
2020	30461	1228544	261015	187391	13451	172344	88257	67363
2021	27864	1187325	262067	213046	13777	155867	89167	126737
2022	28158	1763928	267786	302284	44056	201608	95652	136093
2023	28802	1461644	271687	212294	15376	226943	105169	145480

Source: NCSI (2023); ILO (2024)

The composition of the workforce in Oman exhibits a notable gender disparity, which can be attributed to the impact of traditional and patriarchal social norms. In Omani society, there is a prevailing belief that men are primarily responsible for providing financial support for their families. Consequently, this belief results in a bias towards male candidates during recruitment, putting women at a disadvantage (Al-Wahaibi, 2017). Additionally, employers commonly believe that women are more likely to voluntarily leave their jobs after marrying or having children, which leads to hesitancy in hiring them. As a result, women employees often face inequalities in training, career advancement, and compensation compared to men in similar positions (IFC, 2005; Women and Work Committee, 2002; Ministry of National Economy, 2004).

Between 1990 and 2000, there was a significant rise in the number of women who completed a university education, as mentioned above, and this played a pivotal role in promoting women's empowerment. Moghadam (2013) argued that women are subject to substantial constraints imposed by prevailing social norms, which confine them predominantly to the domestic sphere and restrict their entry into professional arenas while they are typically confined to traditional fields like teaching and nursing (see Table 4.6). However, these can not be generalised today, as we have discussed earlier that there is an increase in the women graduates in majors that are mainly known for men like engineering. Nowadays, women are engaging more in different sectors of the workplace. It may be slow, but it is changing to more inclusion. Moreover, the high participation of women in specific sectors such as education and health is the product of long established social norms.

According to data from the NCSI (2023), women occupy around 70 per cent of jobs in education and 62 per cent in health and social care. However, we should admit that the social environment in Oman is characterised by a patriarchal culture reinforced by conservative religious norms, impacting women's experience at work. Therefore, the influence of traditional social norms still exists, limits their opportunity to compete for leadership positions in many different sectors, and restricts them from working in sectors that women already dominate but less than before. The following section illustrates women's role in management and leadership in Oman and explores the current state in the public and private sectors.

Table 4.6 Distribution of Omani women in different subsectors

Sector	No of women employed	% of women employed
Education	52,214	68.90%
Health and social care	35,118	61.50%
Public administration and defence	28,123	52.30%
Financial services	21,107	43.20%
Business and professional services	18,112	38.10%
Trade and logistics	15,109	31.20%
Construction and manufacturing	12,106	24.30%
Agriculture and fishing	9,103	17.40%
Tourism and hospitality	6,100	12.10%
Mining and quarrying	3,097	6.10%
Total	200189	-

Source: NCSI 2023

Women in management

The Omani government has shown great interest in empowering women in management and leadership roles over the last two decades by introducing different strategies and plans. This began with women's education to qualify them for various jobs, positions, and fields, but this has happened only gradually, taking into account social sensitivities and the degrees of acceptance of the presence of women in some fields and positions (Al-Shahi, 2022). It may be that the government took too long to take the initiative to empower women in top and critical positions. No woman had been appointed as a minister of state in Oman's history until 2004. Furthermore, her appointment was to the Ministry of Social Development, whose mission is to support disadvantaged groups, build effective mechanisms for social protection, enhance family cohesion and social solidarity, and activate community partnerships and care for such as women, children, and the elderly (Ministry of Social Development, 2023). To some extent this appointment has opened up possibilities for other women to compete for higher positions in government.

Although equity policies in Oman strive to ensure equal opportunities for women, as discussed in this chapter, the present situation suggests a significant imbalance in the representation of men and women in managerial positions in both the public and private sectors. Women's presence in managerial and leadership positions has been marked by a slow rate of progress. Official statistics reveal that about 15 per cent of women occupy management roles in the country, with 17 per cent in the public sector and 13 per cent in the private sector (NCSI,

2023). A significant gap exists in the representation of women in middle and upper management positions.

Recently, there has been a growth in the number of women in leadership roles within the public sector, encompassing positions such as Deputy Minister (undersecretary), consultants, and a considerable degree of responsibility positions. However, within the Omani civil service, statistics illustrate that the concentration of women is in the education and healthcare sectors, demonstrating a significant predominance of women leadership proportions in the public sector, as indicated by the highest ratio of women in leadership roles within these fields (see Table 4.7). In a 2020 report by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank, the proportion of all positions in education occupied by women was 83 per cent, and the proportion of all positions in the health sector occupied by women was 61 percent. This may relate to social norms classifying the nature of work into what is socially acceptable or unacceptable for women, as influenced by stereotypes of gender roles (Al Farsi, 2022). Women managers dominate as deputy head teachers at schools, with 589 women compared to 355 men in the same position. However, interestingly, fewer women leaders serve as department managers, with only 283 compared to the 1857 men who dominate in this occupation. There are some areas where women have never been appointed as leaders, such as in the judiciary or government as Secretary General, Mayor, Governor, Assistant Mufti, Deputy Mayor, Deputy Secretary General, Deputy Governor, Department Head, Wali, Deputy Wali, Assistant Governor, or Head of the Minister's Office (NCSI, 2023).

Women's representation is generally lower in the private sector. As indicated by the NCSI (2023), the proportion of women in management and leadership roles is approximately 13 per cent. In the private sector, women are concentrated in the manufacturing sector at 36 per cent and the financial sector at 34 per cent, followed by the wholesale and retail trade at 23 per cent, construction at 10 per cent, and insurance at 5 per cent. There is no official data concerning the number of Omani women in management and leadership roles in the private subsectors. However, the success of women in this sector is obvious. Many successful women compete internationally, and they are influential in their fields. For instance, *Forbes* magazine has included four Omanis among the top 100 leaders in the private sector across the Gulf states (2022).

Table 4.7 Distribution of top management in the public and private sectors

Top management job	Men	Women
Undersecretary or equivalent	51	5
Head of Municipality	2	0
Governor	11	0
Head of Municipality	3	1
Deputy Secretary-General	22	2
Ambassador	48	1
General Manager or equivalent	295	29
Judge	312	0
Minister Head Office	28	0
Consultant	72	6
Expert	151	38
Deputy General Manager or equivalent	237	39
General Supervisor	12	0
Deputy Manager, and it is level	1857	283
School Manager	304	458
Deputy Manager Deputy and it is level	798	185
Deputy School Manager	355	589

Source: NCSI (2020)

There is a clear gap in women's representation in management and leadership positions in the public and private sectors. Women's increased participation in the workforce in different sectors has enhanced the number of women in top positions but not to the desirable and expected inclusion rate. Obstacles facing women in career progression efforts should be deeply studied and addressed. The following three chapters discuss these obstacles and discover the role of different players.

4.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to answer the first research question: *How do economic, cultural, and political factors influence women's participation in management and leadership roles?* The answer is that Omani women have witnessed many developments at all levels during the past five decades through political and legal support to empower them in various vital sectors. The geographical location was critical in supporting the Omani cultural difference, which has significantly contributed to women's empowerment and openness to their pivotal role in society, even if these changes have been gradual and some took a long time to be recognised. This chapter reveals Oman's significant progress in enhancing women's status, especially in education, economic, political engagement, and workforce involvement. The

change from a nation without formal education for women before 1970 to one where women represented 63.1% of higher education graduates in 2022/2023 indicates achievement in the government's modernisation and advancement efforts.

The data analysis shows that the government has shown a strong commitment through clear legal frameworks, equality regulations, and supporting policies that create conditions supportive of women's employment involvement. However, unemployment rates among women are still high, and women's representation in leadership and managerial positions is low and slowly growing. Although women's educational achievements and good labour representation compared to other Arab countries, as women hold 31 per cent of the total workforce, their presence in top decision-making positions is still limited, with only 17 per cent of management and leadership roles in the public sector and 13 per cent in the private sector. This gap raises critical questions about women's obstacles in obtaining senior positions in both fields. The persistent leadership gap shows that although Oman has effectively laid the essential foundations for women's progress via education and fundamental workforce involvement, fewer apparent obstacles hinder women from attaining the highest levels of organizational leadership. To sum up, the answer to the chapter question is that there are apparent effects of the country's economic, political, and cultural changes on women's engagement in leadership roles; however, these changes are slow. There are underlying factors slowing the progress and influencing women's representation in the workforce, especially in management and leadership roles. Consequently, it is essential to identify the challenges women face in each sector and the role of organizations that either support or obstruct their opportunities and endeavours for career advancement. The next chapter examines women's representation in each sector and the organizational factors that enhance or hinder women's participation in management and leadership roles.

Chapter 5

Impediments to Women Progressing into Management and Leadership Roles in Oman

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses organizational views and practices regarding women's equality and opportunities for career progression into management and leadership roles. In addition, it presents findings from in-depth interviews conducted with eight human resources (HR) managers in Omani organizations about existing policies, initiatives and cultural beliefs that enable or obstruct women's career advancement. The semi-structured interviews involved eight HR representatives, four from the public and four from the private sector. Among them were five women, one from the public sector and the other four from private sector companies. These representatives held positions of authority and were responsible for managing and supervising workforce development and policies within their organizations. The participants in private companies were from various sectors, such as telecommunications, manufacturing, energy, and retailing. The public sector participants were from sensitive and core ministries.

The primary goals of this chapter are to investigate participants' experiences and perspectives concerning the current obstacles or facilitating factors influencing the advancement of women's talent into higher levels of management and leadership in Omani workplaces. The analysis uncovers diversity-related organizational processes and hidden sociocultural factors that preserve the underrepresentation of women in management and leadership roles. In addition, this analysis examines the processes of sense-making. It utilises a large amount of interview data and acknowledges the significant connections between sense-making, language, and communication (Maclean et al., 2012a). By conducting micro-level empirical research, the impact of organizational actors is examined by analysing the influence of meaning systems on organizational behaviour (Scott, 2014). The analysis has explored hiring and promotion practices, work-life balance policies, diversity goals and training, mentorship opportunities, and other relevant areas from an HR perspective. The managers shared positive initiatives taken and challenges faced within their organizations based on personal experiences and observations. This chapter seeks to answer this research question: *What policies and practices have Omani public and private sector organizations adopted to facilitate women's progression into management and leadership roles?*

5.2 Embedded patriarchal norms in organizations

Arab societies display some of the most prominent signs of patriarchal values to be found anywhere in the world. Arabic cultural attitudes are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs that connect women's respect for and status to patriarchal concepts of femininity, which are mainly linked to respectful domestic roles (Moghadam, 2013; El Alami, 2020). The analysis of the interviews data reveal that gender role expectations are a pervasive and profoundly entrenched theme hindering the advancement of women's careers in both the private and public sectors. Various assumptions and stereotypes emerge in accounts that link women's identity with domestic roles and family caregiving responsibilities that negatively impact their professional progress. Although organizations claim to prioritise equality, the persistence of traditional gender roles undermines and devalues women's contributions in organizations overall and in management and leadership roles in particular. This is due to the influence of patriarchal beliefs that shape institutional behaviour and serve to maintain existing gender hierarchies (Metcalf, 2011; Mohanty et al., 2019).

The analysis confirms the significant prevalence of patriarchal values in organizations in both the public and private sectors but slightly more strongly in the public sector. In the interview, representatives from both sectors consistently used words related to women's issues and workplace situations from a patriarchal perspective, for instance, culture, children, society, family, and domestic responsibilities (see Table 5.1). The interviews demonstrate the cultural and societal pressures placed on women linked to inflexible traditional gender norms that limit and restrict their actions, ambitions, and opportunities for progress in the workplace and society.

Table 5.1 Word counts of patriarchal terms used by interviewees in both sectors

Term	Public sector	Private sector	Total
"Culture"	11	7	18
"Children"	8	7	15
"Society"	11	8	19
"Family"	12	10	22
"Home Responsibilities"	6	5	11

Source: The Author

During eight interviews with HR managers in both sectors, the term ‘culture’ was mentioned 18 times, ‘children’ 15 times, ‘society’ 19 times, ‘family’ 22 times, and ‘home responsibilities’ 11 times while discussing women in the workplace. The widespread use of gender essentialist terminology and language in assessing women’s responsibilities and abilities indicates a forceful internalisation of traditional control within various institutions. These patterns reveal a self-reinforcing balance in which limiting socio-cultural beliefs about gender hierarchies infiltrate and persist within organizational structures, obstructing the development of women’s management and leadership opportunities (Ridgeway, 2011; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). Reference to organizational representatives of women’s family responsibilities and cultural and societal obligations before considering qualifications or merit is indicative of the deep prevalence of patriarchy. Moreover, these prevailing cultural stereotypes primarily assign women to roles supporting husbands and managing households, with career pursuits perceived as inferior, and foster unconscious biases that result in the undervaluing of women’s contributions and dedication in the workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Diekman et al., 2005; Ridgeway, 2011). This reinforces patriarchal dominance in decision-making power and stifles gender equality. Efforts to change have been made; however, change is constrained by the profound belief in women’s primary roles in society and how organizations should act to align with them.

“Women’s behaviour must not be separate from our customs and culture. There are responsibilities upon the women's shoulders at home and in society, which should be fulfilled, and the organization is considering this in the company policy.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA corporation)

“Women's interest focuses on homes and families; 90 per cent of them want to stay home, and some want to work. The opportunity exists for all women to compete and participate equally in the workplace. However, there should always be respect for cultural and societal values regarding the special status of women.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

Bahja and Hamed's statements, which represent both sectors, demonstrate the deep-rooted cultural conditioning that supports traditional views of gender roles that impede women’s progress despite superficial claims of inclusivity. The claim that policies should not disrupt local customs and culture, combined with statistical estimates on the significant number of women who are persistently committed to home life, reveals the enduring influence of patriarchal identity constructs that continue to shape workplace behaviour. Below the surface of diplomatic speechmaking lies a deep commitment to traditional patriarchal paradigms that identify the role of women with family responsibilities (Mohanty et al., 2019; El Alami, 2020).

This feeling reflects the paradoxical existence of rhetoric promoting empowerment alongside exaggerated illustrations of women preferring childrearing and home instead of working and leading. Apparently, organizations in the public and private sectors attempt to mask deeply rooted systemic prejudice with superficial claims of progress.

Meanwhile, most of the organizational representatives interviewed are women (see Table 5.2). This indicates a deep penetration of patriarchal thought patterns throughout the organizational structure, regardless of gender. In addition, it highlights the extent to which patriarchal conditioning has embedded itself as an unconscious belief system that influences decision-making within organizations in the public and private sectors. As a result, internal self-regulatory mechanisms encourage individuals to willingly obey societal role expectations without needing external enforcement. Researchers emphasise that women raised in patriarchal systems frequently internalise and sustain beliefs that focus on domestic roles, neglecting alternative sources of significance or purpose. (Mahmood, 2005; Vousoloni et al., 2021).

Table 5.2 Gender distribution of interviewees

Name	Organization	Sector	Gender of representative
Badria Khalfan	Ministry of FA	Public	Woman
Hamed Majid	Ministry of CR	Public	Man
Mujahid Ahmed	Ministry of RL	Public	Man
Salim Ali	Ministry of DN	Public	Man
Bahja Rashid	SA Corporation	Private	Woman
Bushra Said	OT Corporation	Private	Woman
Amna Yousuf	GS Group	Private	Woman
Batool Khalid	NA Corporation	Private	Woman

Source: The Author

Amna, an HR manager (a woman) in a private company, clearly illustrated that women’s main job and priority is to look after their household, spouse, and children. A woman leader’s assertion that domestic duties are an unquestionable requirement for women reflects a profound internalisation of patriarchal norms that constrain priorities within the organization. The direct expression of homemaking as an unavoidable calling that all women must respect reveals antiquated stereotypes that persist even among women in positions of power.

“Women must know that their main job is to hold and build families; they must work to support their husbands and families and achieve their goals. However, when it comes to family, they must prioritise the family, not miss important milestones for their kids, and not regret it later.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

Paradoxically, women leaders maintain the obstacles to women's professional chances by enforcing conformity instead of dismantling gender-based limitations. This indicates a passive acceptance of existing conditions instead of an active analysis of the systemic disadvantages that arise from the unequal burden of domestic responsibilities placed exclusively on women. Essentially, accepting Omani women's biological destiny risks perpetuating the continuing long-term disparities in opportunities for advancement rather than fostering a fair development of talents and equal opportunity for career development and progress.

The most apparent manifestation of habitus is when women leaders internalise patriarchal values themselves. Bourdieu argues that dominated groups unconsciously incorporate the very structures of their domination into their habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This internalisation is how a habitus is a form of "embodied history" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56), where social structures become embedded in individual consciousness and practice. In addition, the use of patriarchal language in organizational discourse illustrates what Moi (1991) described as the language manifestation of gendered habitus. Using these terminologies and language reveals deeper structures of social power and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1991). Organizational representatives' constant reference to social roles and cultural obligations shows how habitus shapes individual perception and institutional practices (Metcalf & Woodhams, 2012).

The difference between the public and private sectors is notable, with public sector representatives slightly more wedded to traditional gender views. This sectoral difference supports Bourdieu's idea that habitus is neither entirely deterministic nor entirely flexible but varies across different social fields while maintaining its reproductive function (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu argues that habitus functions beneath conscious awareness and rational thought (Bourdieu, 1990), making it especially challenging to alter, even for those who would gain from such changes. Consequently, the role of women HR managers in maintaining traditional gender expectations is significant.

The inductive analysis identifies three main types of organizational barriers in the interview data. These encourage organizations in both sectors to hinder women's progression: gender role expectations, internalised cultural attitudes, and organizational structure.

Gender role expectations

Although there have been significant advances towards the achievement of gender equality in the Sultanate of Oman over the last five decades, as discussed in Chapter 4, women still encounter systemic barriers in workplaces due to persistent cultural stereotypes about gender roles. These stereotypes consciously or unconsciously affect the efforts of organizations in both sectors to empower women to progress into management and leadership roles. The social backgrounds that still tend to perceive women primarily in terms of their caregiving and supportive roles rather than recognising their equal potential for leadership contribute to the gradual accumulation of bias that limits progress in their careers (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoobler et al., 2011). The interviews with representatives from both public and private organizations have uncovered deeply ingrained and remarkably consistent gender role expectations that exert a strong influence on organizations and their perception of women in the workplace.

Statements from both private and public sector representatives, including women in senior HR positions, strongly emphasise the preservation of gender stereotypes that suggest women's primary purpose and priority is focused on family caregiving responsibilities, regardless of their individual talents or professional aspirations. Omani societal norms and sociocultural expectations place less importance on personal career objectives compared to significant life milestones such as marriage or having children. This demonstrates the significant influence of traditional patriarchal cultural assumptions on organizational perspectives regarding women's roles and appropriate behaviours in terms related to the domestic gender hierarchy. A widespread culture of enforcing strict boundaries for gender roles in both thinking and behaviour in organizations exists in both sectors. Organizational decision-makers frequently link feminine qualities with a dedication to domestic responsibilities, considering professional pursuits of lower priority. This underscores the impact of patriarchal sociocultural influences that contribute to obstacles in the workplace.

“Women are mostly focused on their family responsibilities; even if she is a minister, she has to take care of her family and kids' future; this what we see, family is always at the beginning.” (M: Salim Ali, Ministry of DN)

The perception that women's priorities are inevitably drawn towards family responsibilities, which are presented as the most important, reflects biased gender stereotypes that organizations then apply in the workplace.

“Dealing with female employees requires little of humanity; when you compare it to the conditions of the nature of women's formation, their responsibility is mainly outside the scope of work. We live as employees and as husbands at the same time, so we notice that there is a concern, which means that women want to give what is required of them at work and do not want to neglect the family side; family is important.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

“We have women who left work once they got married. They prefer to be at home instead of work, especially if the husband can financially look after the family. I think this is the best for them.” (W: Badria Khalfan, Ministry of FA).

The organizations describe professional dedication as difficult for women and employment as a role subordinate to domestic responsibilities. This creates doubt regarding the suitability of women for elevated roles unless they suppress those aspects of their supposed feminine nature that prioritise homemaking. This highlights the unequal responsibilities and expectations placed on women due to limiting societal expectations related to their roles in the household (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The enduring cognitive frameworks that associate women intrinsically with responsibility for raising children subsequently hinder professional aspirations (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). In essence, this situation highlights the predicament of women caught between conflicting expectations due to traditional beliefs. These expectations require them to make significant sacrifices to balance their professional success with adherence to traditional gender roles. When leaders at various hierarchical levels view gender as the main determinant of priorities, abilities, and potential for success, it reinforces the obstacles women face stemming from inherently disadvantaged environments. The discourse of empowerment found in the interview data often appears shallow due to a lack of consideration for the profound internal changes in mental frameworks necessary to prioritise competence, proven dedication, and foresight when assessing women rather than simply focusing on their gender.

Many assumptions associated with femininity are emphasised by the organizations, such as the belief that women prioritise their families over their careers, display communal rather than individualistic traits, and require special treatment, which therefore influences workplace evaluations, criteria and support systems and thereby undermine any recognition of their actual capabilities. Organizations seem to believe that, in this way, they are supporting women by responding to their needs and the special treatment that enables them to perform their professional duty on the surface. However, invisible barriers are created from gender biases

and stereotypes concerning women’s weaknesses and their constant need for care. These support the idea that women are not suitable as leaders or managers. Therefore, women may be displaced in managing complex work and jobs because they believe other priorities in women's personal lives may affect leadership requirements (see Figure 5.1).

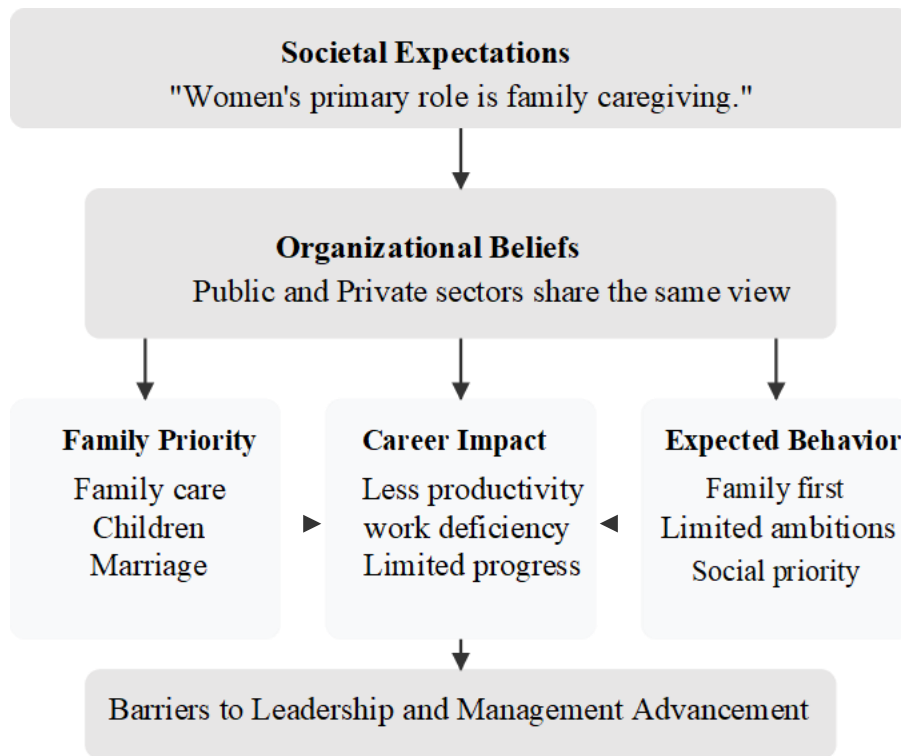


Figure 5.1 The organizational views of women's role and the impacts

Source: The author

This figure shows how traditional cultural norms about women’s roles continue to affect their career progression. The main issue is the assumption that “women’s primary role is family caregiving,” which affects both the public and private sectors. This assumption affects organizational attitudes and practices that ultimately prevent women from attaining management and leadership roles. These societal expectations are illustrated in three different dimensions. First is the focus on family responsibilities, where women are expected to put caregiving, childcare, and marriage above their career ambitions. This expectation is not just individual but is institutionalised in organizational cultures. Women are judged by this lens regardless of their efforts or ambitions, and an unconscious bias is formed about their work commitment. The second dimension is about the expected behaviours of women, where they assume that family responsibilities are above professional responsibilities. This is evident in constrained career aspirations and a focus on social objectives. These behavioural expectations

can become self-fulfilling predictions as women internalise these constraints or face social and professional consequences for challenging them.

The career impact of these expectations escalates as a result. Organizations have biases towards women's productivity and see them through potential job deficiencies, especially if they have or may have family responsibilities. This view leads to limited career prospects for women seeking management and leadership roles because of assumptions about their availability at work or commitment rather than their skills or performance. These all add barriers to women's efforts for career advancement.

A female HR manager actively promotes that being a good woman means prioritising home life. At one point, one of the managers states clearly that family is the priority and that women have to know that and not regret it later if they have focused on work more than family.

“Work is important for women; however, family is more important. Women should know that family is the most important aspect of their lives and should not be negligent; they could regret it one day. They should not compromise their families because of work.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

This shows how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about gender have been in influencing the collective mindset of the organization, leaving little room for alternative perspectives. Researchers have explored how women who grow up in patriarchal cultures often adopt and perpetuate value systems that prioritise domestic responsibilities as a means of redemption while disregarding other sources of fulfilment or purpose. This illustrates the internal processes of self-subjugation within a patriarchal system as the distinguished anthropologist (Saba Mahmood, 2005; Mohanty et al., 2019). Statements expressing the need for women to maintain a balance between their professional responsibilities and prioritising their home life reflect Mahmood's observation that women who are brought up in specific traditional patriarchal systems tend to internalise the belief that their worth as women is primarily tied to their obedience in domestic matters and their nurturing abilities. The prevailing discourse within the organizations highlights women's responsibilities towards their families, revealing a cultural environment deeply rooted in traditional beliefs about the ideal feminine role centred on domestic commitments, confirming the power of habitus in conditioning behaviours (Bourdieu, 1990). In such contexts, Mahmood proposes that women often internalise dominant gender norms to the point where they develop internal mechanisms that regulate their own behaviour. These mechanisms are activated when they engage in actions which work against deeply ingrained standards of proper conduct. As a result, they experience psychological distress when

they are unable to conform to their cultivated roles as domestic subjects. Three primary patterns of constraints are evident in the interview data: family duties, biased expectations towards maternity, and doubts about women's abilities due to double standards.

Role in the family

The enduring presence of narrow beliefs about women's primary obligations in the Omani culture based on biological determinism revolves around family responsibilities and caregiving duties. This has significant adverse effects that limit their career progress and representation in leadership roles (Ridgeway, 2011). The analysis reveals a widespread uncertainty where women tend to be viewed as naturally inclined to be carers and to prioritise the family in all aspects of their lives. Leadership considerations are often influenced by deep-seated doubt regarding women's dedication to their work due to their assumed family responsibilities, which are not expected of men. Therefore, this scepticism justifies the limited investment in women's long-term career advancement (King, 2008).

“Long working hours and sometimes shifts do affect women accepting the jobs in the private sector; I got myself as an example; I work very hard to balance between work and family; I think many women are struggling like that.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

“Women who are married are less effective than unmarried women, and we have many examples. They do get many issues in their families, and we are looking to help but not always able to do so as there are rules to be followed.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

These quotations from private and public sector representatives highlight the cultural stereotypes contributing to the career obstacles faced by working mothers by suggesting a decline in their perceived effectiveness (Correll et al., 2007). The allocation of household responsibilities to women exclusively creates a lack of responsibility distribution within the organizations, allowing such biases to infiltrate evaluation systems and criteria for advancement (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The prevailing societal role schemas that doubt women's ability to move freely due to their unavoidable domestic responsibilities create systemic barriers to their development at various levels, as discussed by Eagly and Karau (2002). Irrespective of their professional occupations, women are commonly perceived as having a primary obligation to fulfil domestic tasks and to care for their families. Organizations have consistently highlighted the belief that women are primarily expected to nurture husbands and children, which is their fundamental societal obligation, as a foundation for other endeavours. While representatives of the organizations mentioned specific cases that faced these problems and obstacles, they quickly generalised this to all women, and this applies to

the stereotype instilled in individuals and institutions about women's roles and their impact on work.

“Women are naturally concerned with the family and the practical aspects. From my point of view, a woman's tasks are greater responsibilities than a man's. She holds two positions: at home and at work. She needs to ensure that one does not affect the other.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

Despite Amna's positive wording to encourage support for women, corporate initiatives to develop women's leadership skills also emphasise the importance of managing home responsibilities. This illustrates the internalisation of societal expectations regarding gendered caregiving roles. The organization's representatives believe that women should prioritise their marital and maternal responsibilities above all else, considering them as their primary purpose and source of legitimacy in public engagement rather than considering a career as an equally valid commitment (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoobler et al., 2009).

“Time is the most important thing for human beings, which means women should not be negligent at home and with children. They will grow up, and one day, she will say, if I got time to spend more with my kids.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

While Bahja highlighted the significance of the time a person should spend with their children, she also emphasised women's roles; although spending time with children or family is vital for both men and women, the prevailing belief that associates children and family with women is what causes society, and subsequently organisations, to directly link care work for children and the home to women, thus burdening them with responsibilities accountability. The enduring presence of limiting assumptions concerning women's focus on family responsibilities has negative consequences that limit changes (Correll et al., 2007; Bear et al., 2010). Cultural scepticism towards investment in the progress of those with talent stereotypically seen as destined to be carers is one reason for the systemic barriers to their development (Ridgeway, 2011). In addition, prevailing doubts regarding women's ability to effectively manage high-level leadership positions while fulfilling family responsibilities stem from cultural beliefs that perceive these two roles as inherently incompatible, particularly for women (Lyness & Judiesch, 2014).

Maternity bias

Adverse bias resulting from conventional gender roles involves the imposition of specific penalties on women when they become mothers. The analysis demonstrates that motherhood is a significant milestone for Omani women in the workplace. Prejudices exist in both sectors,

particularly when women become mothers, resulting in negative perceptions of their competence and dedication (Bear et al., 2010) in a dominant pattern of negative presumptions and stereotypical evaluations. These assumptions and judgments of women significantly endanger how others perceive their dedication, skills, and chances for career progression in the workplace. Consequently, motherhood eliminates the individual element from leadership evaluations as oversimplified maternal archetypes are applied.

“Women often face exhausting career paths and may take leave for reasons such as maternity leave, breastfeeding leave, or issues related to their children and unavailable for work; therefore, there are sometimes specific requests for men in certain positions who are expected to maintain high attendance work.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR).

“Women who are married are less effective than unmarried women, and we have many examples. Most of the time, they are busy with their husbands, kids, and house requirements. Women are more focused on home than work, not all of them, but most.” (W: Badria Khalfan, Ministry of FA)

The frequent instances of devaluation of women in the workplace bring focus to the underlying cultural influences that indirectly illustrate motherhood as necessitating a complete restructuring of women’s lives while excluding men. Beliefs about adherence to traditional maternal ideals hinder talent development through various interconnected socio-psychological and organizational mechanisms.

“Some women face problems, especially after marriage and pregnancy. Before marriage, the situation is different. We have a large percentage of women who want to apply for non-technical jobs after marriage. We try to consider these requests based on the availability.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

Questioning the commitment of women employees after marriage or childbirth based on societal expectations related to maternal responsibilities exposes deeply rooted gender biases that even top-level executives responsible for policies and organizational structures have internalised. Repetitive spoken stories highlight that becoming a mother is crucial, after which women experience less favourable performance evaluations and support for career growth and fewer opportunities for leadership roles, regardless of their proven skills. This bias is apparently widespread in organizational evaluation systems and decision-making processes and is frequently rooted in presumptions regarding family obligations. Maternity transition periods are crucial, during which highly motivated and skilled women frequently feel pressured to lower their career aspirations.

The data indicate that, upon becoming a mother, there is a notable decline in management’s trust in a woman’s capabilities, specifically in proficiency, concentration, and

potential for advancement. This is directly correlated with the perception of women primarily as carers rather than acknowledging their multifaceted nature and diverse capabilities beyond reproductive duties. Moreover, the comments of representatives of organizations reflect a perception that being a mother results in being prone to distraction and becoming less productive. These assumptions influence how a mother's performance is perceived, resulting in reduced levels of support and guidance compared to that previously provided to high-achieving individuals, irrespective of their actual level of productivity.

“Most of the time, men attend the training sessions, and their absence is less than women; as you know, women, especially when they get married, their priorities start shifting to the family and children, so their participation decreases.” (W: Batool Khalid, NA Corporation)

The sudden turnarounds imply maternal codes can activate unconscious prejudices that override an individual's dedication or contribution. The adoption of socially endorsed maternal roles leads to a noticeable rise in prejudice against women, particularly in ways that impede their professional advancement. Similarly, the disparities in how married and unmarried women are described in terms of workplace efficacy and concentration show that motherhood is the primary determinant contributing to these gender-based differences.

Double standards and doubts about ability

The interviews with the organizational representatives from both sectors reveal a double standard applied to women that is evident in numerous managerial statements. On the one hand, women employees receive strong commendation for their professional capabilities, and their skills in developing collective progression are praised.

“According to my observation, women are very capable of performing and have high-quality work outcomes compared to men. They do the work perfectly and will seek more solutions if they do not know.” (W: Badria Khalfan, Ministry of FA)

“Women have great passion, and they give it when the job is necessary. They never hesitate to learn and make changes in places where they are. We got good examples of hard-working women who participate effectively in company success.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

However, a contradictory attribution emerges in assumptions about women's capabilities to handle strategic leadership responsibilities and arrange whole organization agendas. The very same women praised before instead become subjects of scepticism concerning their capacity to balance the responsibilities of positions of seniority and authority with domestic duties. Remarks made, for example, question their ability to offer commitment without compromise:

“I have encountered more than one example of women being stubborn in their opinions and not listening to you. They want to let others follow them and should not say anything.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

“I expect women to be more rational and manage the matter without emotion. They are more emotional and cannot manage huge responsibilities, and when they are under pressure, they pressure others instead of finding solutions.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

Data analysis reveals such inconsistencies when organizational leaders are openly positive about the impact of women but use cautious language when discussing the possibility of their future advancement. This incongruity reflects the lingering influence of the traditionally gendered segregation of organizational spaces that welcome the presence of women in supportive ‘feminine-coded’ positions aligned with nurturing standards but resist placing greater authority in their hands.

“Sometimes women are more skilled, but some leaders prefer men, and men have more flexibility. The woman says, [Tell my husband] And they refuse. They do not have full control of their decisions; they think about their other obligations.” (W: Amna Yousuf GS Group)

In essence, the analysis reveals an organizational environment in which women’s competence in isolated domains that maintain the harmony of the status quo in the gendered division of labour is readily praised; they cannot be envisioned as CEOs or in managerial positions with multidimensional capabilities beyond family-house accountabilities. Table 5.3 illustrates the paradox in some of the organizations in both sectors. It can be clearly seen that the representatives from the private sector were more positive in opening the opportunity for women to lead. In addition, there is a sign of opening competition for both genders to attain higher positions if any of them prove their ability and gain skills. Meanwhile, in the public sector, they tend to be more negative, and this could be because of the patriarchal and close working norms.

Table 5.3 Paradox on women leadership abilities between public and private sector organizations.

Organization	Women working	View	Women leading	View
Ministry of FA	"I cannot understand why there are jobs suitable for both genders, but still, the managers ask for male candidates." (W: Badria Khalfan).	doubt	"Women can lead, but you must convince top management and open their eyes." (W: Badria Khalfan).	negative
Ministry of CR	"Women work from their hearts and try their best when they give work." (M: Hamed Majid)	positive	"Women can lead if they have the right environment. Sometimes, women are difficult to deal with." (M: Hamed Majid).	negative
Ministry of RL	"Their desire to develop and prove themselves is higher nowadays, perhaps from the standpoint of proving existence and willingness to compete." (M: Mujahid Ahmed)	positive	"Managers think men are more flexible and able to work harder and be available whenever they want them." (M: Mujahid Ahmed)	negative
Ministry of DN	"Women are likely to work harder to prove themselves, and they are ready to challenge." (M: Salim Ali).	positive	"We do not have issues with women leaders; they can do the same as men." (M: Salim Ali).	positive
SA Corporation	"The new generation of women are becoming more open-minded... The work in the company is based on hard work and great sharing in company development." (W: Bahja Rashid)	positive	"Whoever proves his/her self-presence and works hard is promoted regardless of gender. There is a clear career path for all employees for promotion, all the same in abilities to lead." (W: Bahja Rashid).	positive
OT Corporation	"I have seen women can outperform if they have given the right support." (W: Bushra Said)	positive	"Women are same to compete equally with others, and qualifications and abilities are to be decisive." (W: Bushra Said)	positive
GS Group	"When we offer higher positions, women never say no. They want to be promoted and are willing to learn new things." (W: Amna Yousuf)	positive	Women should know that they will not be given quotas because they are women. They should work hard and contribute to the company to be promoted." (W: Amna Yousuf).	positive
NA Corporation	"Women are able to work; there is no difference between genders in terms of productivity." (W: Batool Khalid).	positive	"generally, women cannot lead like men. There are many issues in women's leadership abilities, and we have seen examples, but this does not mean all." (W: Batool Khalid).	negative

Social role theory can explain the inconsistent evaluations made where women are categorised as assistants rather than authority figures, in line with a patriarchal gender schema (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although there is a claim of being modern, traditional cultural beliefs that associate leadership primarily with masculinity continue to influence how people perceive the typical characteristics of a leader (Schein, 1973; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Unspoken limitations on high-level leadership roles are evident, as these positions are often associated with traditional masculine qualities and characteristics, as discussed by Lyness and Heilman (2006). Despite the progress made in providing more opportunities for and removing obstacles to women occupying leadership roles, deeply ingrained biases rooted in cultural beliefs still associate leadership with traits that are traditionally seen as masculine and not aligned with the nurturing and cooperative qualities historically associated with femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women were praised for taking on specialised roles traditionally associated with femininity and supporting male-dominated hierarchies. However, they were not seen as capable of leading in sensitive positions and entire organizations.

Bourdieu argues that subjective understandings of gender are integrated into societal structures and gradually institutionalised as an accepted 'habitus' which defines the proper roles, virtues, and opportunities associated with categorisations based on each biological sex (Bourdieu, 2001). The accumulation of biased forms of communication, evaluations, and sanctions revolve around these generalised categorisations that create divisions, establishing norms and hierarchies that differentiate masculine dominance from feminine submission (Krais, 2006). Over time, such systematic thought patterns become ingrained in our minds without us realising it due to early social experiences. These patterns then continue to influence behaviour, leading to conformity to assigned roles and positions even without external pressure (Bourdieu, 1984). Traditional and local social norms in Oman promote the idea that leadership is primarily a masculine role while limiting women to the domestic sphere. These contrasts are inherent in the logic of belief systems that implicitly organise protocols for the promotion and distribution of opportunities, resulting in a concentration of decision-making authority in the hands of men.

The potential consequences for violating assigned professions suggest a form of control known as 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1991), a subtle means of enforcing conformity through indirect punishment. Therefore, the gender habitus serves as a framework that predefines the opportunities for mobility based on hierarchical structures. Consequently, male

dominance persists over time through complex mechanisms passed down from generation to generation. The recurring question of whether mothers can fulfil managerial responsibilities reveals the persistence of gender essentialism, which is upheld through the unquestioned transmission of restrictive messages, policies, and practices, ultimately leading to unquestioning compliance with these norms. Thus, the long-lasting effects of the initial arbitrary establishment of patriarchy continue to exist in the public and private sectors in Oman, as the gradual development of ingrained behaviours subtly and persistently shapes outcomes. Bourdieu explains the process by which the symbolic aspects of power solidify without explicit pressure but through pervasive influence over systems and individuals. This accurately reflects the findings that persistent irregular access patterns continue to hinder the emergence of women leadership despite efforts to promote inclusivity.

5.3 Social constraints in organizations

Internalised cultural attitudes

Organizations are complicated entities in which beliefs and operational frameworks combine to form organizational cultures. The phenomenon of beliefs becoming deeply ingrained as established standards within organizations have been extensively documented in organizational behaviour (Schein, 2017). Over time, ideologies gradually become established standards governing conduct and decision-making processes. The analysis of the interviews with the Omani organizations in both sectors reveals a clear pattern of localised patriarchal norms that significantly influence internal perspectives on gender hierarchies in the organizations. This reflects mental models that mirror and perpetuate societal preconceptions of traditional feminine roles and authoritative masculine roles in the workplace. Even with growing gender inclusion regulations, and initiatives in the organizations, entrenched sexism continues to obstruct women's chances for leadership (Yarrow & Davies, 2022).

“We have to consider our culture and what it accepts; some women refuse to work due to the cultural issues of mixing with males; therefore, we try to adopt this fact. There are things in society we should accept, and work based on it.” (W: Bushra Said, OT Corporation)

“Women are conservative. I heard it once with my ears. A woman offered a position. She said I work in any department but do not give me a department where I work with many men. She argues that because of society’s view of women mixing with men, and we understand this point, we need to respect our culture.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

This indicates a tendency to adopt rather than challenge the traditional patriarchal structure of the community. The widespread occurrence of comments that emphasise the

importance of maternal responsibilities and family obligations as indicators of capability reveals the extent of regressive gender essentialism through cultural conditioning (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Salter & King, 2021). Therefore, women voluntarily remove themselves from career paths inconsistent with societal expectations regarding suitable professions. This indicates a tendency among women to avoid taking risks that may challenge traditional gender roles and norms (Diekman et al., 2005; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014). The analysis reveals barriers to flexibility resulting from significant cultural conditioning weakness, which promotes self-regulation even without external pressure (Goodman et al., 2003; Castilla, 2008). That highly skilled women choose not to enter non-traditional environments or seek leadership positions reflects the acceptance and integration of inherent disadvantages into mental frameworks, leading individuals to unconsciously validate adherence to traditional norms (Fleming & Spicer, 2008; Burke & Mattis, 2013).

The repeated use of terms such as ‘our culture’ indicates that workplace decision-makers accept societal norms that define acceptable women's behaviour to be centred around caregiving, while masculine leadership is detached from reproductive, home, and childcare responsibilities (Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). In addition, the analysis reveals the deep-rooted signs of patriarchal systems reinforced by institutional decision-making processes. Therefore, managers consistently prioritise women’s domestic responsibilities over their professional advancement, as Acker (2006) and Burke Mattis (2013) highlighted. The intergenerational transmission of limiting assumptions is internalised as compassionate considerations rather than opportunities for confronting constraints. The persistence of gender binaries which associate leadership with masculinity and domestic servitude with femininity reflect how workplace structures are shaped by cultural engineering and learned social codes (Ridgeway, 2011). Despite policies and regulations which gesture toward equality, inequalities continue to exist due to the prioritisation of external exclusive logic and biological determinism over skills.

“Women prefer schoolwork and not administrative work because the society in schools is feminine, and the nature of the conservative Omani society is that they do not like to mingle while working with men, and so we do understand and respect.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

This represents a paradox. In their efforts to empower women and address gender inequality, organizations may unintentionally sustain patriarchal systems while appearing to accommodate women’s requirements (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This leads to cultural rationalisation, which distorts organizational processes such as formal performance metrics,

informal networking opportunities and many other channels of women's progress in the workplace and society (Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Castilla, 2008;). Kanter's (1993) analysis of tokenism and the 'illusion of inclusion' phenomenon in corporate environments demonstrates how organizations can unintentionally sustain patriarchy. Even when organizations have good intentions, they may unintentionally perpetuate patriarchal norms while claiming to understand women's needs, and this is clear in the organizations considered here.

External sanctions

The analysis of interview data reveals the enormous cultural and societal pressures imposed on women and organizations in both the public and private sectors, where traditional gender expectations constrain and delimit women's behaviour, aspirations, and advancement trajectories. Interviews indicate that strong regulatory social control mechanisms are upheld by norms imposing rigid expectations for femininity-coded behaviour, compelling organizations to comply or confront societal backlash waves. Breaches of the traditional gender role boundaries provoke fears of social criticism, highlighting the pressure exerted on women who could work in higher positions and on organizations to conform to society's requirements.

“There are jobs governed by customs and traditions. In the ministry, there are jobs, and women refuse work because society does not accept them; we should know that society has a great influence on government.” (W: Badria Khalfan Ministry of FA)

“We should always consider our costumes and culture, and we should not be stripped out from our identity. There are things women should accept that society does not accept, such as certain behaviours and work; we in the company try as much to comply with the cultural requirements as we do not want to clash with society.” (W: Bushra Said, OT Corporation)

Manifestations of such sociocultural pressures include women's reluctance to accept roles or assignments requiring engagement with male colleagues for extended hours and defying norms segregating gender interactions.

“We have to consider the culture and what it accepts; some women refuse to work due to the cultural issues of mixing with males or working long hours, especially after working timing.” (W: Bushra Said, OT Corporation)

Women are proactively self-selected out of advancement opportunities that could raise external examination due to forced inter-gender mixing despite personal capabilities or qualifications. Some leaders even noted preferences for women applicants for administrative non-management roles with fewer career prospects, which complied with cultural standards.

Interviews demonstrated awareness of constantly evolving lines defining acceptable degrees of confronting expectations that women tread cautiously to avoid generating external criticism.

“Cultural traditions govern certain jobs; we must consider what society accepts. Society’s view does matter. Women prefer government jobs as they are flexible, more secure, and culturally accepted. However, society is less accepting of positions in the private sector, which women tend to avoid.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation).

Organizational systems and cultures appear closely interlinked with and influenced by Omani community socio-cultural forces, causing gender biases in many contexts. Expressions such as “culture and traditions govern certain jobs” and “we must consider what society accepts” reflect the diffusion of traditional norms into workplace operations. In addition, organizational policies and structures may tend to accommodate prevailing social attitudes rather than spearhead shifts toward equity, illustrating the profound effect of cultural forces acting to preserve the gender status (see Figure 5.2).

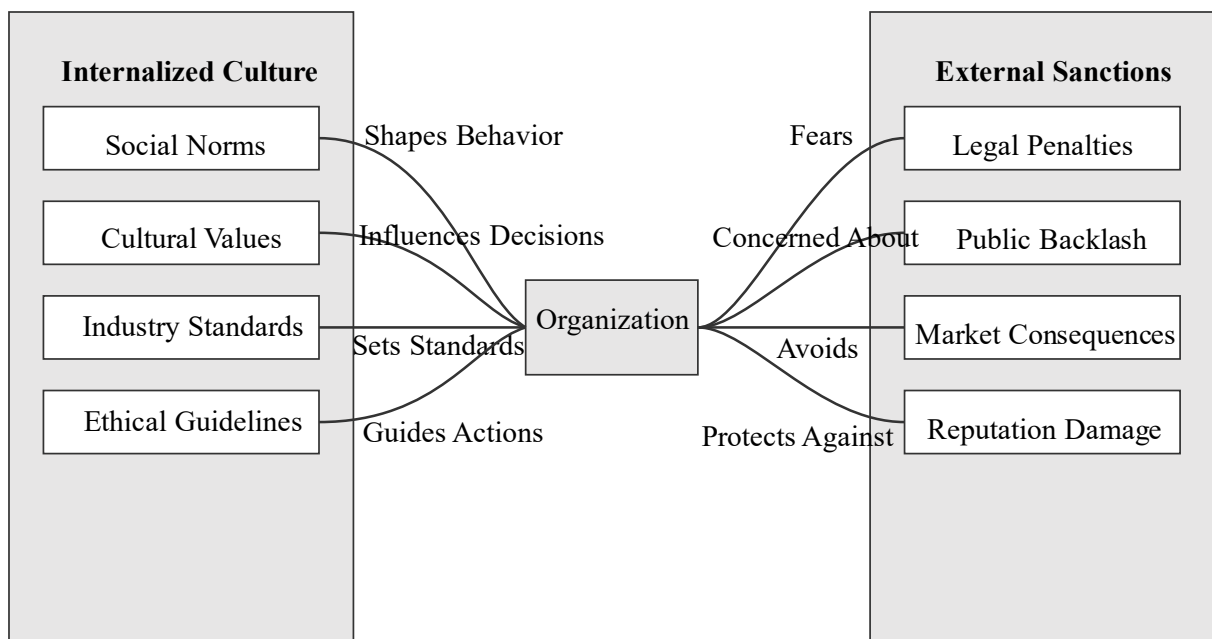


Figure 5.2 organizational internalising culture and the avoidance of external sanction
Source: Author

In addition to internalised control processes working psychologically to encourage women’s compliance with patriarchal expectations, the interviews also reveal the realistic probability of penalisation for any deviation from traditional prescriptions regulating feminine conduct and the prioritisation of domestic responsibilities. There is an organizational reluctance to implement transformative mobility policies such as equal opportunity recruitment, flexible

promotions or total work engagements, which is explained in terms of the risk of cultural censure for the institution.

“We cannot clash with tradition; otherwise, this will affect the organization. We are serving them, and the company work is based on them, so we cannot cross societal norms; otherwise, this will lead the company to lose; we have examples of companies that lost their customers because they have crossed society redlines we have to work with the cultural alignment.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

Therefore, the pressure to conform to gender traditionalism pervades macro social and workplace levels, choking empowering interventions before growth through threats of social criticism, family objections and implicit sanctions deemed damaging to the institution's image and stability (Metcalfe, 2011). Isolationist anxieties foster defensive attitudes internally resistant to change in most organizations. Organizational decision-makers expressed concerns about facing external criticism for violating patriarchal norms that regulate acceptable behaviour, mobility, and leadership ambitions among women, which differ from those for men (Goodman et al., 2003; Castilla, 2008). Their statements, for example, refer to recruitment frameworks that prioritise the ‘cultural alignment’ rather than the competence of applicants when assigning roles based on gender. These issues reveal that external social factors influence the organization's practices despite seemingly conflicting internal values of equality (Acker, 1990; Lyness & Judiesch, 2014).

These cultural forces may not be openly acknowledged but still exert a strong influence at all levels of society, leading organizations to defend traditional local customs and values, which profoundly affect initiatives for change. Excuses such as “We must take into account what society accepts” were used to explain the ongoing challenges talented women face regarding mobility. The interviewees also referred to ambiguous “customs and traditions” as reasons for the failure to support platforms that could help overcome these barriers. These quotes highlight the significant but unspoken powerful pressures exerted through indirect punishments, which risk the perceived social acceptance and subject individuals to cultural accusations when they directly challenge these barriers (Goodman et al., 2003). When the structure of an organization is believed to be at risk of being seen as radical or progressive, and reforms are seen as severing connections to tradition, many cannot resist the intense pressure to conform to traditional monitoring practices (Scully & Meyerson, 1995). Self-preservation at the individual and organizational levels leads to hesitancy to support changes that may threaten the established patriarchal status and the privileges held by those in positions of power (Carnes et al., 2015). Therefore, taken together, the psychosocial sanctions and lack of support

disadvantage women if they breach stereotypical proprieties, sustain equilibrium, preserving gender hierarchies and the status quo.

5.4 Differences between the public and private sectors

The analysis of the interview data reveals differences between the advancement opportunities available for women in the private and public sectors, regardless of the shared sociocultural influences they experience. Public sector leaders often use traditional gender roles as a justification for limiting women's career opportunities without questioning the underlying assumptions that prioritise domestic responsibilities above professional commitment. In contrast, decision-makers in the private sector prioritise the creation of career development paths that focus on skills to actively mitigate the biases that can arise from accepting traditional gender roles. Significant differences persist between the sectors regarding the criteria for the promotion of meritocracy, which prioritises capabilities demonstrated while considering cultural biases related to gender stereotypes and perceived family priorities. The interviews suggest the rise of empowered mindsets within the private sector, where systematic interventions are actively implemented to attract and support talented individuals unencumbered by gender prejudice. An increased focus on maximising employees' potential in the private sector fosters opportunities for personal growth rather than conformity to traditional norms out of fear of taking risks.

Promotion

The interviews reveal differences between the private and public sectors regarding policies and actions related to women's career advancement. A gradual but promising change seems underway in attitudes toward women in positions of authority and senior leadership roles in public and private organizations. There is a cautious recognition of changing attitudes and a willingness to accept the legitimacy of considering women as leaders who demonstrate merit, regardless of how this may differ from traditional ideas of appropriate feminine behaviour in the workplace.

“The new generation of women are becoming more open-minded, unlike previous ones. They were challenging and not easy to accept the changes, that what we have noticed from the old employees.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation).

“In the past three years, we have noticed that the women are strongly present, which reflects that the society culture is also changing. This is happening, and it is obvious for everyone.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

“Women's desire to develop and prove themselves is higher nowadays, perhaps from the standpoint of proving existence and willingness to compete. They are

willing to talk about their rights loudly, and they are making changes in society, but I think this will need some time.” (M: Mujahid Ahmed, Ministry of RL).

The representatives of all organizations in the private sector emphasised the importance of performance-based merits. In contrast, those in the public sector demonstrated the influence of the legacy of paternalism that affects staff evaluation (Acker, 2006) see Table 5.4. private sector leaders emphasised using results-based promotion criteria and incentives to encourage the advancement of dedicated talent aligned with strategic visions. This approach promotes meritocracy and equal opportunity, providing more freedom for women to compete for higher positions. Therefore, cultural paradigm shifts that create such leadership opportunities are occurring significantly more rapidly in the private sector, where competency-based advancement pathways are now envisioned without concerns about women’s traditional domestic roles, allowing women to take on leadership.

Table 5.4. Promotion strategy in the public and private sector

Organization	Promotion strategy	Chances of promotion
Ministry of FA	"Promotion is based on the manager's recommendation, and there are no clear promotional criteria."	Limited opportunity
Ministry of CR	"If you are close to the decision maker, you are more likely to be promoted. This is a fact in most ministries and government organizations."	Limited opportunity
Ministry of RL	"Promotion in the ministry based in managers recommendation and then the minister will make decisions based on this"	Limited opportunity
Ministry of DN	"There is no clear path, but if you work hard and the manager wants you, you will have a chance."	Equal opportunity
SA Corporation	"Whoever proves his/her self-presence and works hard is promoted regardless of gender. There is a clear career path for all employees for promotion."	Equal opportunity
OT Corporation	"Women are very to compete equally with others, and qualifications and abilities are to be decisive."	Equal opportunity
GS Group	"You should work hard to be promoted and get the roles, and we give women equal chances to compete in all positions unless there is a special gender requirement."	Equal opportunity
NA Corporation	"The organization has a clear strategy: who proves himself for leading will be selected regardless of gender."	Equal opportunity

Source: Author

The analysis of the interview data suggests that, as prejudice diminishes, there is an increasing number of demonstrations showing the ability to move and adapt.

“Whoever proves his/her self-presence and works hard is promoted regardless of gender. There is a clear career path for all employees for promotion; the work in the company is based on hard work and great sharing in company development; it is not based on the number of years you have worked.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

“Women are very capable of competing equally with others, and qualifications and abilities are very important to be decisive. Women should know that they will not be given quotas because they are women. They should work hard and make contributions to the company to be promoted.” (W: Bushra Said, OT Corporation)

“When we offer higher positions, women never say no. They want to be promoted and are willing to learn new things that could develop their skills and abilities; I have seen some women fight to be given the opportunity, and they work hard, especially young women.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

The statements from all private sector interviewees suggest that women never decline higher positions when offered and that individuals who demonstrate their presence and work diligently are promoted regardless of gender, indicating a desire for competence to be valued independently of gender. Deliberate insulation from traditional pressures is maintained through sector-established frameworks that assess participants' capability demonstrations regardless of gender. In contrast, the public sector representatives consistently highlighted women's domestic responsibilities and cultural conformity rather than competence when discussing hiring systems and access to opportunities. This indicates an unquestioned acceptance of traditional assumptions (Castilla, 2008).

“To be honest, promotion is based on the manager's recommendation, and no clear promotional criteria exist. If the manager wants you to be promoted, they will do everything that prepares you for the position. If they do not, you are neglected.” (W: Badria Khalfan, Ministry of FA)

“If you are close to the decision maker, you are more likely to be promoted; this is the fact in most ministries and government organizations. Promotion is based on the manager's nomination, and most of the time, the manager selects who he thinks would serve him with no questions.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

“Sometimes, I cannot understand why there are jobs suitable for both genders, but still, the managers ask for male candidates. They think men are more flexible and able to work harder and be available whenever they want them.” (M: Mujahid Ahmed, Ministry of RL).

Statements made by interviewees from the public sector indicate a consistent reluctance rooted in particular local customs that continue to restrict women from reaching positions of power. The interviews with representatives from public sector organizations acknowledge

shortcomings in well-defined competency-based promotion procedures. The explicit admission by managers that advancement is based on internal recommendation networks without clear and formal criteria confirms that the institutional structure promotes bias risks instead of preventing them (Reskin, 2000; Goodman et al., 2003). Similarly, the recognition of the advantages of being close to those in power, which allows for promotion without formal evaluation, highlights the engagement of cultural and cognitive biases that enable prejudice to be disguised as discretion. This occurs when progression is seen as a result of personal connections rather than personal ability (Sturm, 2001). Furthermore, this hinders women from being offered positions due to their lack of close networking with male decision-makers. Ibarra's (1993) research highlights how unclear and biased policies can put women at a disadvantage in gaining access to essential links. Although HR managers may seek personal connections and mentorship to advance professionally, evidence suggests that progress largely depends upon gaining access to male-dominated leadership circles.

The analysis reveals a masculine leadership 'habitus' that perpetuates gender disparities in leadership positions (Bourdieu, 1986). This habitus is maintained by exclusively masculine 'old boys clubs', which control access to cultural knowledge and use symbolic competence assessments that only recognise masculine leadership prototypes in the public sector. These biases often undermine women's rights to social and economic resources by failing to recognise the value of their skills, abilities, and knowledge. This hinders their career advancements, as individuals without recognised masculine qualities are automatically disqualified from advancing into managerial and leadership roles.

These organizational systemic deficits create a favourable environment for the development of gender bias in public sector models due to a lack of intentional structural oversight (Kalev et al., 2006). The weakness arises from using broad movement criteria to engage women at different managerial levels that are not aligned with HR equity guidelines. This, combined with the decision-making authority given to managers sinking with the local culture and having specific role responsibilities, increases the probability of unfair or equitable choices (Ferner et al., 2005). The conditions collectively maintain existing situations, continuing biases from generation to generation.

Lack of training and mentorship

Leadership training designed to enhance women's skills and abilities and their capacity to navigate professional environments is essential for increasing women's representation in upper management and leadership roles, which have historically been constrained by gender

stereotypes (Debebe et al., 2016). Training and mentoring programmes with a firm structure promote the development of skills by providing opportunities for talented women to gain visibility and engage in specialised learning experiences that enhance their readiness for managerial and leadership roles. Training can help to mitigate potential bias by objectively evaluating the abilities of women, who are frequently subjected to doubts regarding their qualifications and capabilities to lead, stemming from entrenched prejudicial assumptions (Ely et al., 2011). The analysis indicates a significant disparity between the public and private sectors in the presence and quality of coaching and advancement programmes for women. Although the private sector provides specific structured group mentorship and training, the public sector lacks specific developmental support for women. The significant difference in opinions, priorities, and results regarding women's empowerment in different organizational backgrounds between sectors reveals different approaches that either enhance or constrain women from achieving higher roles.

According to HR managers in private sector organizations, women with high potential have access to structured leadership programmes that focus on women's advancement. They emphasise that these initiatives gave women a renewed sense of motivation and enhanced skills to apply for decision-making positions previously held by men. According to McDonald (2011), such initiatives offer essential opportunities for women to meet senior role models who can guide them in overcoming systemic obstacles. This aligns with Durbin's (2011) demonstration of the significant value of programmes aimed at developing women's leadership.

“We created a program called Woman Leadership and even brought in female speakers from outside the company to educate women inside the company about the importance of leadership programmes and leadership positions for women, and that they must compete with men, and that they are men's sisters, and so on. Praise God; after this programme lasted for almost two years, we got better results. They began to accept and take on greater responsibilities and apply for higher positions.”
(W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

“The company provides courses for male and female employees on how to work together and how we can build a team to make the work more effective. These courses are beneficial; women are more engaged in the company after such courses. The company tries to utilise their full employees capabilities” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

Private sector companies acknowledge that implementing coaching programmes for women offers a distinct advantage in attracting talent. They signal a progressive environment for ambitious candidates and help retain women leaders, delivering growth otherwise hindered by embedded barriers. The emphasis on commercial interests allows for less tolerance of

systemic gender bias, which can negatively impact financial performance, compelling the need for action. In addition, the focus on collaborative learning enables meaningful peer coaching opportunities among women, while these are lacking in public sector settings due to the lack of an enhanced environment or the isolation of their women employees.

“The company provides courses for male and female employees on how to work together and remove the barrier between them to work effectively; the business could be affected if the employees are unable to work together harmoniously.” (W: Amna Yousuf, GS Group)

"We treat all equally. There is no discrimination and, as you can see, I am a human resources manager, and I was encouraged in every possible way; I think the organization does that for all women.” (W: Bahja Rashid, SA Corporation)

Although the details among private organizations may vary, the presence of these programmes indicates a recognition of development disparities and the allocation of resources to address them through tailored mentoring programmes for women's advancement. (see table 5.5). Equality and diversity training may enhance awareness of sexism; yet, in the absence of structural reforms, it risks devolving into a diversion from deep-rooted disadvantages (Yarrow and Davies, 2022).

Table 5.5 Types of training programs Offered by women in the public and private sector

Organization	Sector	Training Programmes
Ministry of FA	Public	Limited higher education seats
Ministry of CR	Public	None
Ministry of RL	Public	None
Ministry of DN	Public	None
GS Group	Private	Women leadership training, higher education seats.
SA Corporation	Private	Teamwork between women and men, women leadership courses.
OT Corporation	Private	Higher education seats, engagement training, women leadership training.
NA Corporation	Private	Committees for women’s special training needs, women leadership training, and rotations of positions.

In contrast, leaders in the public sector showed no awareness of any similar extensive coaching support being considered or put into practice. Their statements reveal a lack of specific training and mentorship opportunities to prepare women for managerial and leadership roles. The only mention of coaching is limited to informal initiatives where line managers provided general support and encouragement to young women graduates whenever feasible.

This focuses on improving grievances instead of actively empowering women to navigate daily challenges or aspire to higher leadership roles. No evidence exists of specialised training designed to enhance skills among women working in public institutions.

“Higher education seats and training were scarce for women, and competition for them was great compared to men. They avoid giving training to women sometimes as they think women cannot achieve due to family obligations. I do not think this is the fact, but this what they think” (W: Badria Khalfan, Ministry of FA)

“Men are more trained for higher positions compared to women. They are given more educational and technical training opportunities. Training is based on the department requirements, and they nominate the employee, and most of the time, they are men, Fewer women.” (M: Hamed Majid, Ministry of CR)

There is a lack of opportunities for women to receive higher education and training. This resulted in an unfair competitive environment where men are given preference for limited sponsorship and opportunities for career advancement. The data reveals an imbalance in resource allocation, resulting in men being equipped with more training for higher positions than women, and access to crucial career enrichment programmes promoting diversity in leadership is clearly lacking. This significant difference in leadership paths demonstrates the challenges ambitious women face in workplaces still influenced by outdated patriarchal norms (see Figure 5.3). Without deliberate movement and initiatives infrastructures that actively challenge restrictive mindsets and foster more progress opportunities for women, the established capacity to succeed does not transform into influence and active changes, thereby maintaining the ongoing trend of women's underrepresentation in management and leadership roles.

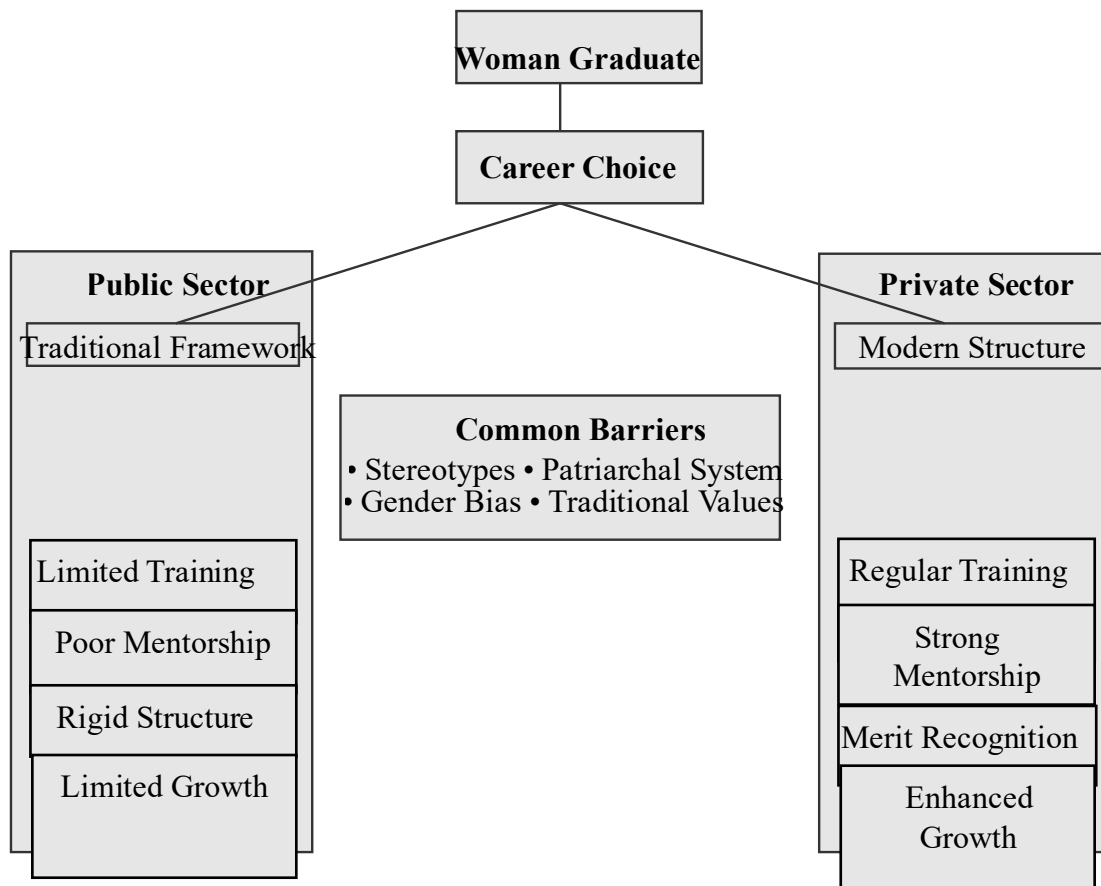


Figure 5.3: women's career bath in the public and private sector

The data illustrate how organizational training programs either challenge or reinforce existing gender hierarchies through the strategic distribution of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This is obvious in how public and private sectors approach women's professional development, which is what Bourdieu calls different "fields of power" operating under different organizational logics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the private sector, structured leadership programs are formal mechanisms for cultural capital acquisition. These programs align with Bourdieu's concept of institutionalized cultural capital, where formal training converts organizational resources into recognised professional competencies (Bourdieu, 1986). These programs convert cultural capital into organizational legitimacy and advancement opportunities (Bourdieu, 1993). The public sector illustrates what Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence" through the systematic exclusion of women from development opportunities. The maintenance of traditional power structures without development opportunities, where existing gender hierarchies are reproduced through institutional practices (McNay, 2000).

The difference in approach to training and development between sectors extends Bourdieu's theory by showing how organizational fields can either reproduce or transform gender inequalities through their approach to professional development. The private sector's structured programs have field transformation, where new rules of engagement challenge traditional gender hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1993). This is evident in the private sector, which has an institutionalised commitment to transforming traditional gender relations through capital acquisition mechanisms (Ely et al., 2011).

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to answer the second research question: *What policies and practices have Omani public and private sector organizations adopted to facilitate women's progression into management and leadership roles?* The analysis of data has provided substantial evidence that traditional patriarchal gender norms have a significant impact on organizational attitudes, policies, and structures and hinder women from advancing into management and leadership roles in both the private and public sectors. It reveals deeply ingrained patriarchal assumptions that link leadership attributes solely with masculinity while constraining femininity to narrow domestic personas that prioritise maternal and caregiving responsibilities. The analysis of the interview data consistently highlights the inherent conflict between professional and family responsibilities in feminine 'nature,' thereby raising doubts about women's capacity to manage their responsibilities effectively. Therefore, cultural biases activate internal self-control mechanisms and external penalties that encourage women to conform to gender expectations without explicit coercion (Mahmood, 2005).

Women may avoid non-traditional career paths due to their fear of social disapproval, which became evident through their actions, especially in the public sector. Furthermore, when women become mothers, they are immediately subjected to biased evaluations of their commitment and ability at work, resulting in limited chances of career advancement. The experience of becoming a mother is the crucial factor that activates hidden negative beliefs that overshadow a woman's dedication to her job. Therefore, subtle societal expectations regarding women's role in the home ultimately hinder their aspirations to take on other roles despite the rhetoric of empowerment that both sectors have pressed.

Although patriarchal obstacles were present in various situations, private sector organizations did exhibit greater openness towards competency-based systems. The deliberate insulation of high-potential women's talent from external barriers was achieved through meritocratic hiring and structured leadership programmes. Conversely, the organizational culture within the public sector led to difficulties in breaking free from patriarchal norms. The representatives from public sector organizations openly questioned the ability of women to hold high-level managerial positions, and clear policies to address the risks of bias were lacking. Therefore, there continues to be a divergence between the public and private sectors regarding an orientation towards change, where the public sector is far from making close changes. Although attempts to achieve gender equality in the private sector have been apparent, deeply ingrained patriarchal biases persistently hinder progress by imposing constricting domestic identities on their roles. There is significant evidence of such persistent stereotypes and traditional expectations which elicit women's obedience through psychological and social control, while the relatively more progressive policies in the private sector contrast with the public sector's explicit scepticism regarding women's leadership capabilities.

There are disparities in assessment between the two sectors' practices, where leaders openly commend the current achievements of women but express reservations when discussing their prospects for further advancement. This incongruity indicates the persistent impact of organizational environments that traditionally assign women to 'feminine-coded' roles that are supportive and nurturing while simultaneously resisting the authority that women possess. To summarise, public and private sector organizations have taken steps to enhance women's participation in managerial and leadership roles. However, the measures adopted by the private sector offer a more flexible environment for women to progress and advance in their careers, while the public sector presents fewer opportunities. Both sectors reflect the norms and culture of society; however, the private sector actively challenges these norms and implements initiatives to improve women's participation in managerial and leadership positions through training programmes, policy initiatives, and equal career advancement opportunities. These outcomes contradict the findings of Belwal and Belwal (2017), who emphasise that the public sector is more supportive than the private sector.

Chapter 6

Progress and Prospects for Change

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discusses the role of organizations in women's empowerment in attaining management and leadership roles. Therefore, it is important to understand women's roles and the factors that affect their efforts in career progression in both sectors. Over the past few decades, Oman has witnessed changes in women's participation in the workforce, as elucidated in chapter four, driven by changing societal attitudes, government policies, and economic necessities. This chapter explores how Omani women reconcile traditional values with their career goals, emphasising the intricate negotiations at individual, family, and societal levels. Furthermore, it examines the factors contributing to success in achieving career advancements, including social change, evolving self-perception among women, and increasing career aspirations. Twenty-one women from middle and lower organizational hierarchy levels were interviewed in both sectors, with a distribution of nine women from the private sector and twelve from the public sector. The chapter provides an overview of the current state of women's professional progression in both sectors and the prospects for further changes in the future. This chapter aims to answer the following research question: *What factors are driving the entry of more women into management roles in Omani public and private sector organizations and why do some women succeed in progressing their careers while other do not?*

6.2 Navigating through traditional values to career opportunities and ambitions

Balancing traditional beliefs with career ambitions is challenging for Omani women. In a society where traditional values have long identified women's roles primarily with home and childcare, pursuing career ambitions often requires significant negotiation of cultural, family, and personal expectations on many levels. The rapid socioeconomic changes in Oman over the last five decades have opened new doors for women in education, employment, and social recognition. However, these opportunities are often accompanied by the challenge of integrating modern career aspirations with traditional values that continue to shape societal and cultural expectations.

This navigation is not a simple linear progression from 'traditional' to 'modern' but rather a complex reinterpretation, adaptation and change process (Al-Barwani et al., 2007). The

analyses that follow clearly illustrate that the current main challenges that Omani women face is work-life balance, adjusting to traditional values to meet their ambitions, and increasingly finding ways to respect their cultural traditions while simultaneously pursuing professional goals.

Work-life balance

Balancing work and personal life is a universal issue for working women, but it takes on particular dimensions in the Omani context due to cultural expectations and societal customs. This complex interaction of factors creates a unique set of challenges for Omani women as they navigate their professional and personal responsibilities. In Omani society, as in many Arab societies in general, women are typically expected to be the primary caregivers for children and managers of the household. Therefore, this expectation can significantly impact women's career progression.

The analyses indicate that these challenges are evident across both public and private sectors, though with notable variations in how they appear and are addressed. Women face significant challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives, with many expressing their difficulties in managing work responsibilities alongside family obligations. The pressure to excel in both spheres often leads to stress and feelings of guilt. In addition, the analysis illustrates that work-life balance challenges are more influenced by the nature of the professional field and organizational factors rather than broad cultural factors alone. In the public sector, women often face intense pressures due to the conservative nature of the field.

"You cannot imagine how I have to work very hard to ensure that my job does not affect my family and my marriage; life is not easy for working women." (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)

"The job is important but not more important than family; there are priorities in women's lives, such as keeping my house safe. Society does not give mercy to you; if your children fail, they will say it is because mom is not free to take care of her children and house." (W: Noof Ibrahim, Ministry of RL)

These quotes illustrate women's struggle to manage their professional and personal responsibilities in public sector roles. The conservative nature of public sector organizations often reinforces traditional gender roles, unintentionally increasing the pressure on women to excel in both scopes simultaneously. The organizational culture in the public sector appears to increase societal expectations rather than ease them, creating a more challenging environment for women to achieve work-life balance. Moreover, the public sector's inflexible structures and hierarchical nature may contribute to these challenges.

"I used to be in the private sector, and I moved after marriage to here thinking this would be a better place; however, they are completely incompatible with women; women in government institutions struggle; sometimes I would come to work crying because my child was crying and wanted me to sit with him or to come with me, but I could not bring him. my children have been mistreated and suffered greatly because of my work and because there are no nurseries near me." (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

"My job in the company before applying here was much better. Yes, I worked from 8 am to 5 pm, but I got a break to return home and see my kids. I used to work some time from home, and I was able to manage my time; now, I have to work continually from 7.30 up to 3.00 pm with no break and understanding of my situation." (W: Safa Khalfan, Ministry of CR)

"I got married late because my interest was in work. I always said if I was married or had a family and kids, I do not think I would have the enthusiasm and strong zeal to work." (W: Ashjan Ismail, Ministry of CR)

The public sector is often perceived as a hub for women seeking rest and flexible treatment of work and life, seemingly adhering to societal norms (Al Lamki, 2007). However, this research indicates that such perceptions may be misguided. Noor Salim's statement, made by a woman who worked in both sectors, highlights how the inflexibility of public sector institutions can worsen the difficulties women face in balancing their professional ambitions with family responsibilities. This evidence emphasises how the public sector often fails to provide suitable support for working mothers despite its reputation for stability and flexibility. Moreover, the decision to move from private to public sector based on family considerations reveals how the public sector is perceived as more family-friendly, even when this may not be true. This misconception may lead women to choose public sector jobs expecting better work-life balance, only to find that the conservative nature of these institutions can make balancing work and family more challenging. In addition, the decision to delay marriage or prioritise career advancement highlights the complexity that women encounter regarding career motivation and life balance in the public sector.

In contrast, women in the private sector encounter more opportunities to solve work-life balance challenges. This is likely due to the private sector's nature, which often requires more flexibility and innovation.

"My husband and family are there for me; they help me take care of my kids, and I have a break for one to two hours a day and sometimes work from home. However, I still face some difficulties sometimes managing these things with my family, but so far, all great, and I am satisfied." (W: Dorah Said, OT Corporation)

"I have to go back home because I have family that I need to take care of when my kids go to sleep, I would continue working, and then I would come the next

morning and continue doing my work; I think we got flexibility, and the management understands our situation." (W: Ward Zaid, GS Group)

These perspectives suggest that private sector employment may offer more constructive conditions for balancing professional and personal lives. The organizational culture in private companies seems more adaptable to the needs of working women, allowing for greater flexibility and support. This flexibility enables women to fulfil their professional and family obligations without feeling overwhelmed or guilty. In addition, the ability to negotiate work arrangements and find creative solutions appears more common in the private sector.

"I was working in Suhar and fought to be transferred close to Muscat and my family, and the company has accepted. I always see family as a priority, but if there is a chance for me here in the organization or somewhere far from my family now, I will take it; I will not leave it." (W: Sharifa Harth, GS Group)

Sharifa demonstrates the continual negotiation women undertake between career opportunities and family responsibilities. The willingness to move or take on new challenges proves that women actively seek ways to advance their careers while still prioritising their families, where organizational support for such flexibility can impact women's work-life balance.

Table 6.1 The differences between sectors in work-life balance initiatives

Organization	Policies for women's life balance
Ministry of FA	Compliance with labour law
Ministry of CR	Compliance with labour law
Ministry of RL	Compliance with labour law
Ministry of DN	Compliance with labour law
SA Corporation	Compliance with labour law
OT Corporation	-flexible working hours and remote working from home. -health insurance for women's childbirth -kid's educations support
GS Group	-flexible working arrangements and remote working options once a week or up to six months in exceptional cases. -bringing children to work and hosting family engagement activities.
NA Corporation	-flexible working hours and remote working from home (up to 3 days a week) -health insurance for women's childbirth -kid's educations support

Source: The author based on information from organizational web sites

The concept of work-life balance can be understood as a struggle within different social fields, where individuals navigate challenging demands and attempt to accumulate various forms of capital. The public sector represents a more traditional field with established doxa that

often prioritise traditional gender roles. Therefore, the struggle for work-life balance is more evident as women attempt to resolve their professional habitus with societal expectations of their domestic roles. The field's structure often values presence and long-term commitment, which can conflict with family responsibilities.

Influenced by global practices, an open economy and modern management styles, the private sector represents a field with different rules. Here, the doxa may accept flexible work arrangements and result-oriented performance. This can create a more encouraging environment to balance work and family life. Achieving work-life balance is seen as symbolic capital in both fields but is developed and valued differently. In the public sector, successfully managing both spheres is exceptional, strengthening traditional gender roles. In contrast, it is viewed as a necessary skill in the private sector, contributing to overall employee and organizational productivity. The habitus of women in each industry adapts to these field environments. Women in the public sector develop strategies to inflexibly separate work and home life, while those in the private sector adopt more flexible boundaries.

The analyses clearly illustrate that work-life balance challenges arise from societal and cultural aspects, as well as from the organizational structures and specific fields in which women work. This is further evidenced by the experiences of women who have made strategic career choices. Despite its reputation for stability, the public sector often supports conservative practices that worsen work-life balance issues. In contrast, the private sector, driven by the need for flexibility and innovation, offers more opportunities for women to navigate these challenges successfully. In addition, many women have developed strategies to manage their dual roles effectively, often making personal sacrifices to succeed in both domains. These outcomes differ from the findings of Al-Lamky (2007), who suggests that the public sector is more flexible regarding work-life aspects for women. This is likely due to changes since she conducted her research just after the turn of the century.

Adjusting traditional values to the new work reality

In Oman, as in many parts of the world, workplaces have experienced change due to globalisation, technological advancements, and societal change norms. These changes present unique challenges and opportunities for women, who historically have been constrained by more inflexible traditional values that define gender roles and expectations. Women often find themselves trying to fulfil both traditional and modern roles simultaneously. Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) argue that this "double burden" of managing professional responsibilities alongside

traditional domestic duties can create significant stress and potential burnout for working women. This process involves complex individual, family, organizational, and societal negotiations. Despite ongoing challenges, numerous instances of effective adaptation and integration exist. The analyses reveal a complex relationship between traditional cultural values and the demands of modern professional life. These experiences illuminate the ongoing negotiation of gender roles, family dynamics, and societal expectations.

Traditional Omani values often emphasise gender segregation, but the realities of modern work environments necessitate mixed-gender interactions. Many women in both sectors illustrate this pressure more conservatively in the public sector.

"When I got the job, my family was concerned about the mix of men and women in the workplace. However, I told them that men and women are separated in different offices in the public sector. We have our privacy. This is the situation as of today. I knew how to address this issue diplomatically with my family." (W: Khuload Basam, Ministry of RL)

"We do have our own offices, and we do work together with no issues. Men need to offer women privacy." (W: Raqia Hamed, Ministry of FA)

These quotes reveal the complex challenge of navigating mixed-gender work environments. Khuload's approach to dealing with these issues "diplomatically" suggests a careful balance between stating her professional independence and respecting traditional expectations. Additionally, it illustrates the women's ability to manage these complex situations skillfully. The emphasis on careful and diplomatic navigation reflects the development of refined social strategies to balance professional responsibilities with societal expectations. However, this was not a significant issue for women in the private sector.

"We work with men together like brothers and sisters, the working environment which we are working in is an open environment where the offices with no walls, and they face each other, there are some privacies like locating some women together but not all the time." (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Corporation)

"I work with many men, and I attend meetings, and I do even travel with them sometimes in the same car to do the work job; I know my boundaries, and I keep them red lines." (W: Arwa Adam, SA Corporation)

These statements in the private sector indicate the differences between the experiences of women in the public and private sectors. Whereas the public sector seems to keep these traditional boundaries alive, the private sector shows that desegregation in the workplace is possible and desirable from a corporate perspective.

Many women are finding ways to re-explain religious and cultural values in a manner that supports their professional aspirations. Negotiating religious principles within the context of professional demands is critical for women's success and ambitions for higher positions.

"My husband is very supportive but prefers not to let me travel alone for work. If I have a business trip, he accompanies me; he drops me off and waits for me at the hotel but never tells me not to go. He is open-minded but very religious and believes a woman should be accompanied by a mahram (a husband or a person who cannot marry the woman and a close relative), such as a family member." (W: Ward Zaid, GS Group)

Ward illustrates how women successfully incorporate religious practices with professional requirements. By involving family members in their work-related travel, women are creating new models of professional engagement that respect traditional values while fulfilling career obligations. Furthermore, this adaptive approach demonstrates women's ability to reinterpret cultural norms to support their professional advancement.

"If I see conversations getting off track, I steer them back to work topics quickly. I do not engage too much in these conversations because that is not my personality." (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)

This tactic reflects women's proactive management of workplace dynamics. By consciously shaping their interactions, women establish professional norms that align with workplace requirements and cultural expectations. This also shows how women are shaping their work environments to align with their values and comfort levels. By establishing clear boundaries, they create a space where they can fulfil their professional roles while maintaining their sense of suitability according to traditional values.

A recurring code is the persistent influence of male authority in shaping women's professional choices and mobility.

"My husband supports me working, although he had some reservations about the workplace initially. But he understood that the work environment is conservative, which made it comfortable for him and me." (W: Arwa Yousuf, Ministry of FA)

Arwa illustrates how traditional values, particularly those related to a husband's authority over his wife's activities, can obstruct a woman's professional growth. The conflict between the woman's desire for development and her adherence to her husband's wishes exemplifies the ongoing struggle to reconcile traditional family structures with modern career aspirations.

"When working in Sohar, I planned to move to Al-Khaburah. My husband, who was my fiancé then, objected to this move because of the long distance and my lack of driving license. I tried to convince him, and eventually, he agreed, but only on

the condition that my driver would be a woman to take me to and from work." (W: Hasna Obaid, NA Corporation)

Hasna's arrangement demonstrates a creative adaptation of traditional values to modern work requirements. While adhering to the religious principle of male guardianship, Hasna's husband supports her career by accompanying her on business trips, thus enabling her professional development while maintaining traditional roles. This narrative underscores the complex power dynamics within Omani households, where women's professional aspirations are often subject to male approval. However, it also highlights women's adeptness at negotiation and compromise. The solution of a woman driver represents an innovative approach to reconciling career advancement with cultural norms, demonstrating women's capacity to find creative solutions that respect traditional values while pursuing professional goals. The ongoing negotiation between career ambitions and family life, with the comfort of a conservative environment, plays a role in facilitating this balance.

Table 6.2 The changes in traditions perceptions and practice

Traditional value	Traditional practice	New work reality	Method of adjustment
Gender segregation in the Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strict separation of offices. - limited interaction with male colleagues. -family concerns about mixed workplaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open environment offices -professional mixed-gender interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - public sector: Maintaining separate offices. - private sector: Open workspace with some privacy considerations. - setting clear professional boundaries.
Religious principles (Mahram)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - women not allowed to travel alone - required male family member accompaniment - limited mobility for work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - business travel accepted with conditions - creative solutions for travel requirements - maintaining religious compliance while enabling work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - husband accompanying on business trips - women drivers for transportation - finding a balance between religious values and work needs
Male authority in career decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - required husband's approval for work - restrictions on workplace choice - limited career mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negotiated work arrangements - conditional support from husbands - more freedom in career choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - choosing conservative work environments - compromise on working conditions - building trust through professional conduct
Professional interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited professional conversations - strict social boundaries - formal interaction only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional collaboration - task-focused interactions - maintaining appropriate boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - steering conversations to work topics - setting clear professional boundaries - maintaining personal comfort levels
Work location & distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limited to nearby workplaces - restrictions on working far from home - family nearness required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - possibility of working in different cities - negotiated arrangements for distance - balance between career and family location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negotiating transfers closer to family - finding transportation solutions - considering family priorities in location choices

Adjusting traditional values to new work realities is an ongoing process characterised by negotiation, compromise, and creative solutions. Women are shaping their professional environments while navigating family and societal expectations.

6.3 Factors driving change

Omani women have taken steps to overcome workplace challenges and advance to higher roles. Applying the Gioia method for analysing interviews, as in Table 6.1, I identify three main factors that facilitate the evolving role of women and support their career advancement ambitions: social change, evolving self-perceptions and career ambitions, and personal motivations. As societal norms evolve, women are increasingly empowered to seek leadership roles and challenge traditional gender expectations. Their shifting self-perception enables them to recognise their potential for higher-level success, which leads to greater career aspirations and ambitions. Fundamental motivations support these changes, including the desire for financial independence and family prosperity.

Table:6.3 Factors bearing on improved career prospect for Omani women

Illustrative quotations	2nd order themes	Aggregate dimensions
<p>“When I joined the organization 15 years back, I was criticised by many men, and some of them even refused to talk to me. Now, the generation is different; we work together and share everything.” (W: Iman Ali, SA Corporation)</p> <p>“I can see men are respecting women more nowadays, people have changed, and women are more empowered.” (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)</p>	<p>Generational change towards women</p>	<p>Social change</p>
<p>“Thank God, things have opened up a little bit, and people have become a little more understanding of women's importance.” (W: Safa Khalfan, Ministry of CR)</p> <p>“The society respects women with education and work.” (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)</p> <p>“I remember women who used to work in the private sector were finding difficulties to be accepted, now women are respected wherever they are working.” (W: Hasna Obaid, NA Corporation)</p> <p>"Men are looking now to marry working women unlike before." (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)</p>	<p>Growing societal perceptions of working women</p>	

<p>“My father refused that I work at the beginning, but I convinced him that I would help him; he is now happy that I worked.” (W: Sundus Badar, SA Corporation)</p> <p>“When I was employed in this company, I expected my brothers to refuse, but they did not; oppositely, they asked me to find jobs for my other sisters instead of staying at home with no jobs.” (W: Sharifa Harth, GS Group)</p> <p>“My father is always telling me that he is proud of me, and he wants me to compete for higher positions, he always says, I want you to be a minister.” (W: Khuload Basam, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>“My husband is a great supporter; he did not accept me at the beginning to work, and this was 12 years back, but now he is my great supporter and helping me a lot to manage the children.” (W: Safa Khalfan, Ministry of CR)</p> <p>“My family paid for my education, and they asked me to pay back once employed and thanks god, I was employed immediately after graduation and paid back the money.” (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)</p>	<p>Changing family attitudes</p>	
<p>“All women can lead if given a chance; there is no difference.” (W: Abrar Issa, Ministry of FA)</p> <p>“Women are more able to lead than men; women work from their hearts and succeed in their missions.” (W: Arwa Yousuf, Ministry of FA)</p> <p>“I am looking to head this department, and I know I can make changes; work needs somebody fresh and can offer change.” (W: Noof Ibrahim, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>“I am a good leader in my family; everybody is saying that you are a good leader and can manage the family aspects.” (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Corporation)</p> <p>“I am not worried about women's ability to lead and manage; I am worried if there will be a chance.” (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)</p>	<p>Confidence in leadership abilities</p>	<p>Self-perception and career ambition</p>

<p>“Education is the key to a better place in the job; I am planning to continue my education next year; I am taking courses now online and getting benefits a lot from them.” (W: Noha Zaher, OT Corporation)</p> <p>“The company is offering many opportunities for us to enhance our skills. This will help us in the future.” (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)</p> <p>“I am not planning to stay here forever; I am looking to work somewhere else better after some time.” (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)</p>	<p>Proactive career planning</p>	
<p>“I am working for money to help my family; life is difficult; one person cannot afford the living expenses, and wife and husband should work to have an affordable life for themselves and their kids.” (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)</p> <p>“Looking for a better life makes me fight for better income, either by getting a promotion or even starting a business; there are many successful women in business who are financially stable, and I want to be one of these women.” (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Corporation)</p>	<p>Financial independence</p>	<p>Personal motivations</p>
<p>“What drives my enthusiasm? It is my deep concern for my children. They often tell me, [Mom, you are always working. We want to be like you; we want to pursue our aspirations] Their words inspire me to strive harder.” (W: Dorah Said, OT Corporation)</p> <p>“I want to reach a higher position now because I want to develop myself, maybe for the life of my children. Frankly, I want their lives to be good; they must study in the best schools and live decent lives.” (W: Ward Zaid, GS Group)</p>	<p>Family prosperity</p>	

Social change

Over the past few decades, a change has occurred in how women are perceived in the workforce. This shift is not simply a change in individual attitudes but a generational change that has seen successful women entering and altering the workplace. Al-Barwani and Albeely (2007) highlight this generational change in their study of Omani women's educational and professional aspirations: The younger generation of Omanis, both men and women, demonstrate markedly different attitudes towards women's education and career opportunities compared to their parent's generation. This change is reevaluating traditional gender roles and expectations. This shift is characterised by increased respect for women, greater confidence among women themselves, and a more accessible approach to work relationships. However, the extent of this change varies between the private and public sectors, with the private sector

generally leading in progressive attitudes. The progressive private sector environment is characterised by more open competition, increased respect for women, and fewer gender-based boundaries. In contrast, the public sector faces more resistance and takes longer to manifest.

"Women have been allowed to compete openly, unlike in previous times. Men are more respectful to women nowadays compared to ten years back." (W: Sundus Badar, SA Corporation)

"I am working with around 11 boys in the department. They are very supportive, and I never hear anything against women or me; they always offer help if needed; you know our manager is a woman; they respect her and follow her decisions. I heard the older generation of women faced these issues, but not us." (W: Hasna Obaid, NA Corporation)

These quotes highlight the supportive attitude of male colleagues toward women in leadership positions, which was far less common in previous generations. Additionally, they highlight the significant improvement in gender relations and opportunities for women in private companies over the past decade. The lack of explicit mentions of ongoing traditional views or resistance to women's advancement in private sector accounts is notable. Instead, there are examples of cross-gender mentorship and competition based on merit rather than gender.

"My coaching primarily came from a male colleague, who had much experience and took on the main role in guiding me through my work." (W: Noha Zaher, OT Corporation)

This indicates a work environment where professional relationships are based on experience rather than gender considerations. In contrast, the public sector is experiencing a slower step of change, with more visible remaining traditional attitudes towards women in the workplace. While progress is evident, women face more resistance than the private sector.

"I see the men working in the private sector are more open to the women working with them, whereas, in the public sector, I still feel that men are stuck to the old mentality, but I think this is changing as I can see a newer generation coming to the work." (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

"There was significant opposition to my appointment as head of the department, which affected me greatly, making it hard to manage assignments and follow-ups. However, there has been a shift toward acceptance in the last year. Although it took four years to reach this point, we still have some of these samples of old mentality." (W: Ashjan Ismail, Ministry of CR)

Noor Salim, who moved from the private to the public sector, observes these differences. This comparison highlights the perceived delay in the public sector's adaptation to gender equality. Ashjan Ismail demonstrates that while change occurs in the public sector, it is slower, more challenging, and requires more effort to adjust. This insight reveals the complex dynamics

in public sector institutions, where the progressive attitudes of new employees can be influenced by the prevailing organizational culture, which may still encourage more traditional views.

This focus on individual performance rather than gender seems to be a critical factor in the more rapid advancement of gender equality in the private sector. The shift towards gender equality in the workplace is particularly evident in the private sector.

"We are now working together, and we are competing with each other to see who can do better. We are not looking at gender differences." (W: Noha Zaher, OT Corporation)

This perspective illustrates how the focus in private sector workplaces has shifted from gender to performance, creating an environment where women can compete on equal terms with their male colleagues. While both sectors show signs of progress, the elimination of boundaries between genders seems more pronounced in the private sector. The public sector, while evolving, still appears to maintain some level of gender separation or traditional views on gender roles in the workplace.

"There are fewer boundaries now. Work relationships between men and women have become more open and integrated. Things have progressed beyond just professional interactions, and their working relationships have a deeper development." (W: Abrar Issa, Ministry of FA)

"This generation cannot make huge changes as still the old generation is handling the high positions, and they keep the same mind in the workplace, but still better than before." (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)

These quotes emphasise the constraints faced in the public sector, where hierarchical structures and the longevity of senior officials can slow the process of attitudinal change. However, they also acknowledge that progress, although limited, is occurring. Women's increased confidence and assertiveness in the workplace is a prominent aspect of this generational shift.

"I feel there is a big change; I feel that the next generation are very confident; they are not afraid to discuss in meetings and present their opinions and speak; they have broken the fear of being women and can participate positively." (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)

This observation underlines the growing self-assurance of younger women in professional situations, indicating a significant departure from the more controlled attitudes of previous generations.

“I am not afraid of talking about my rights; we are in 2022; women are equal to men, and they have the right to make decisions and to be heard equally like men; the old mentality is very little in our company; we are only competing together to find chances and develop ourselves.” (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)

“I have been in the ministry for ten years, and I have seen changes in the generations; girls are becoming more open and confident in themselves; I see myself; I am not the same woman ten years back; the world is changing.” (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)

Despite the slower pace of change in the public sector, ongoing progress is recognised. Ahlam highlights that generational shifts are occurring even within more traditional public sector environments, with women becoming more confident and assertive over time. Yasmain's statement reflects not only the confidence of women in the private sector but also the perception that outdated attitudes towards women are less prevalent in their workplaces.

The generational shift in attitudes towards women in Omani workplaces is ongoing. It is characterised by increased respect for women, greater confidence among women themselves, and a more egalitarian approach to work relationships. While this shift is evident in both the private and public sectors, it is more pronounced and rapid in the private sector. Focusing on performance and results, the private sector environment appears more conducive to breaking traditional gender boundaries and fostering equality. The experiences shared by these women illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of this generational change. They reveal a new generation of women who are more assertive, confident, and willing to compete equally with their male colleagues. At the same time, they point to the ongoing challenges, particularly in more traditional institutions (public sector), where change is occurring but at a slower pace.

Changing societal perceptions of working women

The evolution of societal perceptions towards working women in Oman represents an important change in recent decades, profoundly impacting women's professional aspirations and opportunities. This shift has gradually changed from viewing women's employment as a simple necessity to recognising it as a vital component of personal identity and economic independence. Metcalfe (2011) notes that this evolution in perceptions is closely tied to broader economic and social changes: “The increasing visibility of women in various professional roles, from teachers and doctors to business leaders and government officials, has gradually reshaped societal perceptions of women's capabilities and appropriate roles” (Metcalfe, 2011, p. 132). Historically, societal attitudes posed significant obstacles to women's professional advancement. However, these same attitudes have now become sources of support and encouragement.

“A lot has changed, in contrast to before, when women were not given much confidence. Now, women can be on an equal footing with men, especially since the percentage of women is higher than men.” (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)

"Over the past few years, there has been a gradual growth, and society has changed. Previously, workplace relationships were stricter, and we had to set many boundaries to social constraints; these things are much easier now, and we can move freely in some areas like we could not stay late at work. Things have become almost normal, such as sometimes coming late or travelling for work alone." (W: Abrar Issa, Ministry of FA)

Jihan's statement emphasises the shift from a lack of confidence in women's abilities to recognising their potential to compete on equal terms with men. The progress has been gradual but steady. Additionally, this relaxation of social constraints has allowed women to engage more fully in their professional lives, taking on responsibilities that were once considered inappropriate or challenging for women to manage. Therefore, the changing perceptions have directly impacted women's ambitions for higher positions. As society becomes more accepting and supportive of working women, it creates an environment where women feel empowered to aspire to leadership roles.

“Women now have ambitions and strive to reach higher levels. Even the younger generations, and the generations following them, are ambitious. They no longer want to just sit at home.” (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)

“I am telling you that many families are looking to get jobs in the private sector; the work is great and beneficial.” (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)

Several factors have contributed to these societal changes. Economic considerations play a significant role as the financial benefits of having two working adults have increasingly become recognised. Additionally, increasing education levels have led to a greater understanding of the importance of women's participation in the workforce. As more women receive higher education, society's perception of their capabilities and potential economic contributions has evolved. However, it is important to note that this progress is not uniform across all segments of society. There are still concerns about women's employment and positions, particularly in rural areas, although such concerns are not felt uniformly across all segments of Omani society. Al-Azri (2013) points out that there are still significant regional and socioeconomic variations in attitudes towards working women. Urban areas, particularly Muscat, tend to have more progressive views than rural regions.

“Some families are very open with their daughters and sons, allowing them the freedom to live as they wish. However, some families are very conservative, restricting what their children, especially daughters, can do. This depends largely

on the environment and family upbringing.” (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)

The impact of these changing perceptions extends beyond the workplace. Women's employment status is increasingly tied to their social standing and respect within the community.

“When I was in a household, I was not respected that much in society; once I was employed and started working, people respected me more, and I feel that people value working women now more than any time before.” (W: Dorah said, OT Corporation)

While progress has been made, it is important to recognise that the journey towards full equality and acceptance is ongoing slowly. One interviewee observed, "Not everything has changed in society, but things have become more fluid over time" (W: Sundus Badar, SA Corporation). This fluidity in societal attitudes provides hope for continued progress.

Evolving social perceptions towards working women in Oman have created a more supportive environment for women's professional ambitions. Economic factors, increased education, and changing cultural norms contributed to this change. While challenges remain, particularly in more conservative areas, the overall trend is positive. As society continues to recognise the value of women's contributions to the workforce, it paves the way for more women to ascend to managerial and leadership roles, creating a worthy cycle of progress and acceptance.

Changing family attitudes

The evolution of family dynamics in Oman represents an important aspect of the broader social change regarding women's roles in society and the workforce. This change is characterised by changing attitudes of parents, siblings, and spouses towards women's education, career aspirations, and professional development. One of the most striking aspects of this change is the active encouragement that parents provide to their daughters.

"Honestly, my father always encouraged me to go out and see the world. From a young age, I was always the first to explore new things and challenge myself. If I ever fell behind in class or was not ranked first, my father would be upset, unlike my sister, who did not receive the same pressure. I felt he always trusted me to reach higher places." (W: Jihan Omar, Ministry of RL)

This demonstrates how some fathers are now actively pushing their daughters to excel, setting high expectations and encouraging them to challenge themselves. This change from traditional roles where daughters were often limited to domestic responsibilities to a mindset

that values academic and professional achievement is significant. The support extends beyond just encouragement, with many families actively facilitating their daughters' education and career pursuits.

“Before I entered the university, after I finished grade 11, my parents decided to send me to the UK for the summer to experience life there. This helped me decide whether to continue my studies abroad or locally. This was in 2014 when I was 16 or 17 years old.” (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Corporation)

This willingness to invest in international experiences for daughters, even at a young age, indicates a profound change in family attitudes. It shows that families now view their daughters' education and career prospects as worthy of significant financial investment and in terms of allowing greater independence. Eccles (1994), in her research on parental influence, outlines how parental expectations impact children's career choices and achievements. The study suggests that daughters whose parents have high career aspirations are more likely to pursue higher education and enter competitive fields (Eccles, 1994).

The role of mothers in this change is particularly noteworthy. Many mothers, even those without the opportunity for education or careers, are now staunch supporters for their daughters' professional ambitions.

"Praise God; my mother raised us with the best education. She taught me how to drive, let me work, and allowed me to go out with my friends. Sometimes, I wondered why my mother allowed me so much freedom, coming home as late as 10 at night. When I asked her why she trusted me so much, she said, 'Why not? If it is something you love, enjoy it.'" (W: Abrar Issa, Ministry of RL)

Abrar illustrates how some mothers actively break away from traditional constraints, granting their daughters freedoms they may not have experienced.

Family support is not limited to parents. Siblings, particularly brothers, who in more traditional settings might have been expected to restrict their sisters' freedoms, are now often sources of encouragement.

“My brother is blind, but he has always been one to encourage me. He supported me in every step, encouraging me to pursue whatever I wanted without hesitation. Even when I made mistakes, he would tell me to continue, saying, 'The important thing is to learn from it.' Whenever I faced a problem, I would go to him because I knew he would always give me the right advice.” (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)

“Asking family to travel alone or work late would be much more difficult than it is now to confront my brothers about these things. However, there has been a change in their mindset, and they have become more open-minded. They are even now

asking me about the difficulties in work and how they can help.” (W: Ward Zaid, GS Group)

These quotes show the stereotypical views of male family members as gatekeepers limiting women's opportunities rather than portraying them as allies in their sisters' professional journeys. The change in family attitudes is also evident in the increasing acceptance of women working late hours or travelling for work, behaviours once considered taboo. This indicates passive acceptance, active interest, and support from male family members in women's careers.

The support also extends to spouses, with many husbands supporting their wives' careers. This level of support from spouses is crucial in enabling women to pursue demanding careers and leadership positions.

“My husband never puts pressure on me. He always motivates and encourages me. Sometimes, he even waits three hours outside my workplace for me to finish.” (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

However, it is essential to note that while progress has been made, the change is not uniform across all families. There are still conservative families that hold reservations about women working outside the home or pursuing certain types of careers.

“My father once asked me, [If you were offered a job outside the country, would you go?] I told him, Why not? It would be a great experience, and I must develop myself.' He said, [But what about your house, husband, and children?] I assured him I was not leaving for a year or two; it would only be for a week, two, or three days, and then I would return.” (W: Khuload Basam, Ministry of RL)

Khuload highlights that while families are becoming more open to women's career advancement, there are still concerns about balancing professional ambitions with family responsibilities. However, it also shows that these concerns can be addressed through open communication and negotiation.

The changing family dynamics in Oman represent a profound societal shift (see Figure 6.1). From actively encouraging education and career pursuits to supporting long working hours and travel, families increasingly become enablers of women's professional success. While conservative families still have reservations, the overall trend is towards greater acceptance and support. This change is driven by various factors, including increased education levels, exposure to global perspectives, and recognising the economic benefits of women's workforce participation. As more women succeed in their careers and reach leadership positions, they serve as role models, further normalising the idea of working women and accelerating this societal change.

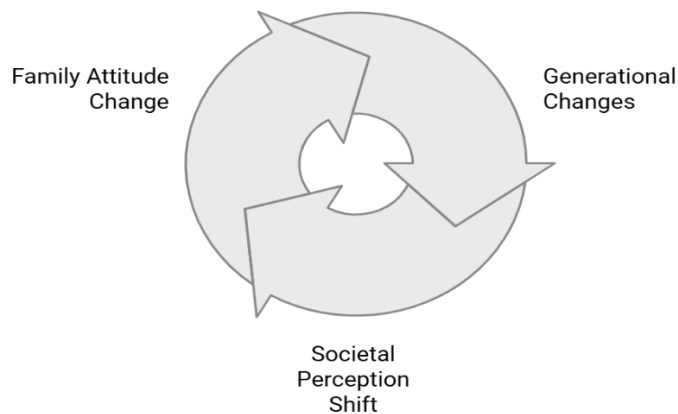


Figure 6.1: The cycle of family change attitude

Source: Author

Self-perceptions and career ambitions

The increasing confidence of women in their leadership abilities is a notable movement in both the public and private sectors. This growing self-assurance can be attributed, in part, to the evolving societal and family support for women's professional advancement, as discussed in the previous sections. The analysis illustrates a change in self-perception and ambitious attitude, indicating a broader change in the professional landscape for women.

“When I started work and was promoted, there was some verbal disagreement among all. Because I am confident, I made it clear that I would succeed, and I did, and now all say that I am doing well in my job.” (W: Arwa Adam, SA Corporation)

“I am confident in myself, and with all respect to men, I believe a woman's work is often more precise than a man's work and able to manage; we have qualities men do not have that if we worked, we work from our heart, and we try to make our work excellent.” (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

“I managed sections within my department and handled various challenges that arose. Whenever some events or situations required organization and coordination, I took the lead in arranging and organising everything men and women can complete each other on management work.” (W: Arwa Yousuf, Ministry of FA)

“Regarding my current job, I am looking to move beyond the role of coordination and follow-up. I want to specialise more and be promoted. Lately, I have been involved with the department's planning, and I feel that my abilities are greater and that I can manage. I am working to get this position.” (W: Ashjan Ismail, Ministry of CR)

Noor demonstrates self-assurance and the ability to overcome initial uncertainty through performance, reinforcing that confidence, when paired with skill, can lead to recognition and success. Arwa shows confidence and highlights women's unique qualities in leadership roles, suggesting that gender diversity in leadership can enhance organizational performance. Confidence in leadership abilities is not merely abstract but is often grounded in practical

experience and self-assessment. The growing confidence actively leads women to seek higher positions and more challenging roles. Women's growing confidence in their leadership abilities is both a result of and a contributor to the changing societal and family attitudes. As families and society become more supportive of women's professional ambitions, it creates an environment where women feel empowered to pursue leadership roles. Equally, as more women succeed in these roles, it reinforces positive perceptions and encourages further support. However, it is essential to acknowledge that challenges remain.

"Men seem to appreciate the work more when men do it. I have felt that a few times, but it does not bother me. I know who I am and what I stand for and believe in myself. Sometimes, there are just odd feelings about it, but not necessarily the reality." (W: Noha Zaher, OT Corporation)

Noha's observation shows the remaining biases that women may face in the workplace. However, the confidence to overcome these challenges and the ability to distinguish between perception and reality indicates the resilience and self-assurance many women are developing.

Proactive career planning

Women in both the public and private sectors are increasingly taking a proactive approach to career planning. The data analysis illustrated that the shift is particularly noticeable in the private sector, where the competitive environment and diverse opportunities have fostered a culture of continuous learning and ambitious career progression. In the private sector, women demonstrate a strong awareness of the skills and qualifications necessary for advancement.

"I have aspirations, but as I mentioned before, if a promotion requires additional courses, I need to take those first. English, in particular, is the most important skill to develop." (W: Sundus Badar, SA Corporation)

"I want to learn a lot because the company is large and has much to discover. I have learned quite a bit in just a year and would love to be responsible for a unit. Every part of the company affects another, and I want to understand the overall goals and how they interconnect." (W: Dorah said, OT corporation)

These quotes reflect a strategic approach to career development, recognising that specific skills, such as English proficiency, are crucial for climbing the corporate ladder. It shows that women are not merely waiting for opportunities but actively preparing to seize them when they arise. Darah's holistic approach to career development, focusing not just on immediate job responsibilities but on understanding the entire organizational ecosystem, indicates the strategic thinking many women in the private sector employ. It suggests a long-term view of career progression, where knowledge and understanding are crucial to future leadership roles.

While the trend is powerful in the private sector, women in the public sector also demonstrate a proactive approach to career development.

“I could not complete my education initially due to family circumstances, but I was willing to continue studying at my own expense. I enrolled in an institute, and thanks to God, I studied at various training institutes, which added to my experience and efficiency. I had previously worked in the private sector before joining the government.” (W: Arwa Yousuf, Ministry of FA)

Arwa highlights the determination and initiative shown by women in pursuing education and training to enhance their career prospects, even in the face of personal challenges. She also illustrates the mobility between private and public sectors, suggesting that women are strategically considering their career paths across different types of organizations.

The more obvious movement of proactive career planning in the private sector can be attributed to several factors. The competitive nature of the private sector often necessitates continuous skill development and a proactive approach to career advancement. Additionally, private companies may offer more diverse career paths and opportunities for rapid progression, incentivising employees to plan and prepare for future roles actively. However, it is essential to recognise that challenges remain. While many women take a proactive approach to career planning, they may still face structural barriers or biases hindering their progression.

Financial independence

The search for financial independence has emerged as a motivating factor for Omani women entering and advancing in the workforce. This desire for economic independence reshapes individual aspirations, family dynamics, and societal perceptions of women's roles. Many women view financial independence as crucial to personal empowerment and autonomy.

“Working gives you the power of money, which enables you to build your future independently and not depending on your parents and family; life is difficult for everyone now.” (W: Noof Ibrahim, Ministry of RL)

“Women should have a permanent source of money; no one will financially support us in the future. We have studied for more than 12 years and deserve to be employed and get well paid to depend on ourselves.” (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)

“One of the main reasons making me look for a job is to be financially independent; I do not like to ask my parents about money; I am old now to manage my own needs.” (W: Dorah said, OT Corporation)

These quotes emphasise the shift in mindset from traditional roles to a desire for active economic participation and financial self-sufficiency. They highlight how women increasingly view employment as a means to secure their future and navigate the challenges of modern life.

A sense of personal responsibility and maturity drives the desire for financial independence and reducing dependence on their families. Financial independence is not just about personal empowerment; it is increasingly becoming an economic necessity for many families.

“I am working for money to help my family; the life is difficult. One person cannot afford the living expenses, wife and husband should work to have an affordable life for them and their kids.” (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)

Azhar illustrates how the rising cost of living pushes more women into the workforce, making dual-income households increasingly common in Oman. Women's financial contributions are becoming crucial for maintaining family living standards and providing for children's needs. For some women, pursuing financial independence is tied to broader ambitions for professional growth and business success.

"Looking for a better life makes me fight for better income, either by getting promoted or even starting a business. Many successful women in business are financially stable. I want to be one of these women." (W: Sundus Sultan, OT Corporation)

Sundus' ambition demonstrates that financial independence is about meeting basic needs and achieving higher success and stability for some Omani women. The drive for financial independence also pushes women to invest in their education and professional development. Many are pursuing higher education, additional training, and continuous learning opportunities to enhance their employability and earning potential. Interestingly, pursuing financial independence also influences marriage dynamics in Oman.

“Men nowadays are looking to marry working women; if you are working anywhere, regardless of your work, your chance of getting married is high compared to the previous times. I remember, like 15 years back, many men who proposed to me asked me to leave my job; this is not the case now; they are looking for what they call house- commercial wife.” (W: Hasna Obaid, NA Corporation)

This change in marriage preferences indicates that women desire financial independence and that potential spouses increasingly value it. It marks a change in social attitudes, where women's economic contributions are now seen as an asset in marriage rather than a hindrance to traditional roles.

As more women achieve financial independence, they serve as role models for future generations, potentially accelerating this trend and further normalising women's active economic participation. This change has the potential to lead to more diverse and inclusive workplaces and, therefore, the acceptability of women in higher positions.

6.4 Organizational change factors

Women's participation in Omani workplaces is changing, driven by organizational support and transformational leadership, creating growing work environments. These themes emerge consistently across the interviews, revealing the complex interplay of organizational policies and leadership styles, reshaping women's experiences and opportunities in the workplace. Notably, there are distinct differences in how these themes are apparent in the public and private sectors.

Organizational support and transformational leadership

The support takes various forms, including mentorship, skill development opportunities, recognition of women's capabilities, and encouragement for career advancement. However, the nature and extent of this support differ between the private and public sectors. In the private sector, there appears to be a more structured and proactive approach to mentorship and skill development.

“The organization gave me three days of training in Muscat on dealing with the employees and managing teamwork. I like this thing; it greatly helps me; they offer us many courses.” (W: Sundus Badar, SA Corporation)

"I have no remarks regarding my manager; he gave me everything I needed. He educated me. I've learned the most from him; he granted me both freedom and confidence, shaping my ambition." (W: Dorah said, OT Corporation)

“My manager has always supported me. When he takes a vacation, he entrusts all the responsibilities to me, which shows he recognises my ability to manage them effectively.” (W: Ward Zaid, GS Group)

The private sector's commitment to investing in women's professional development, providing them with the skills necessary to advance in their careers, not only enhances women's capabilities but also indicates the organization's belief in their potential for growth. Also, effective private sector mentorship can significantly impact a woman's confidence and ambition, encouraging her to take on more responsibilities and aspire to higher positions. Moreover, delegating responsibility and providing hands-on leadership experience is crucial for preparing women for higher roles. It demonstrates trust in women's abilities and provides them opportunities to prove themselves. There is a growing recognition of women's capabilities in the private sector workplace.

“I work as a recruiter, focused on finding the right candidates. In my experience, no manager has ever expressed a preference for a woman or male candidate; they prioritise quality above all else. They assess genuine competence. If a woman excels, she is hired; similarly, if a man is exceptional, he will be chosen.” (W: Yasmain Sadaq, GS Group)

Yasmin indicates a change towards merit-based recruitment and promotion practices in the private sector, where gender is not a determining factor. Such practices create an environment where women have equal opportunities to showcase their skills and compete for positions.

In contrast, the public sector has a less structured mentorship and skill development approach. The lack of clear job roles and structured mentorship can hinder women's professional growth and satisfaction.

“I am the type who likes to learn and ask. Some managers do not give us a job and responsibilities.” (W: Ahlam Mohammed, Ministry of FA)

While there are examples of recognition of women's capabilities in the public sector, it is less consistent. In some public sector environments, women still face challenges in having their contributions recognised and valued, particularly in male-dominated settings.

“My manager is a woman whose contributions are often overlooked. Some men may dismiss her opinions in meetings, showing a clear bias against women participants. Even if her insights are valuable and could greatly impact the discussion, they tend to devalue her input work.” (W: Azhar Khalid, Ministry of CR)

Evolving work environments

The second vital theme that emerges is the evolution of work environments, which involves changing attitudes towards women in leadership roles and changing workplace dynamics and policies. The data analysis reveals evolving workplace dynamics and policies gradually becoming more accommodating to women's needs and ambitions but with notable differences between the private and public sectors. In the private sector, the workplace is evolving more rapidly. One of the interviews who has experience in both sectors, observes:

" In the private sector, there is a strong sense of accomplishment and reward in your work, along with a positive reception to new ideas and suggestions. Each day, you gain fresh insights and experiences, fostering a sense of active engagement. However, in contrast to the public sector, I did not sense the personal sensitivities I experienced in the private sector.” (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

This comparison suggests that the private sector may offer a more dynamic and meritocratic environment where women's contributions are more easily identified and rewarded. The leap of change appears slower in the public sector, and challenges remain. Noor also notes about her public sector experience:

“They are completely incompatible with women because they by nature love competition and love leadership positions and love to perform, so in government

institutions, they struggle because they have a home and a family, there is no support from anyone.” (W: Noor Salim, Ministry of RL)

A clear distinction emerges between women's experiences in the private and public sectors. Generally, the private sector appears more progressive and supportive of women's advancement. Gender plays a lesser role in how employees are treated and evaluated. In contrast, the public sector faces more challenges in implementing change and overcoming traditional attitudes. Bureaucrats' implementation and attitudes in the public sector may still challenge women's advancement.

To sum up, organizational support, transformational leadership, and evolving work environments are crucial factors driving changes for women in Omani workplaces. These themes reflect a complex interplay of organizational policies, leadership styles, and changing societal attitudes reshaping women's professional experiences and opportunities. The interviews reveal a generally positive trend towards more significant support for women's career advancement and recognition of their capabilities, particularly in the private sector. This is evident in the provision of mentorship, skill development opportunities, and the increasing trust in women to handle leadership responsibilities. However, the pace and extent of these changes vary between the private and public sectors. The private sector appears to be leading in creating more inclusive and stable work environments, with more structured mentorship programs, more deceptive career advancement paths, and a greater emphasis on performance over gender. Women in the private sector report feeling more valued, supported and encouraged to advance in their careers.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to answer the research question: *What factors are driving the entry of more women into management roles in Omani public and private sector organizations and why do some women succeed in progressing their careers while other do not?* The findings indicate a complex relationship between traditional values and contemporary career goals, emerging amidst swift socio-economic changes. The generational change in attitudes towards women in the workplace is characterised by increasing respect for women's capabilities, greater confidence among women themselves, and a more equal approach to work relationships. However, it is crucial to note that this change is not uniform across all sectors and regions of Oman. The private sector generally leads in progressive attitudes and practices, while change in the public sector and more conservative areas is slower and more uneven. This contradicts Al-Lamki's (2007) and Al-Barwani et al. (2007) findings.

The research findings identify three main factors driving change in women's participation and opportunities for higher positions: social change, evolving self-perceptions, and growing career ambitions. These factors are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, creating a positive feedback loop that accelerates change. As societal norms change, women are increasingly empowered to pursue managerial and leadership roles, challenging traditional gender expectations. This, in turn, leads to changes in self-perception, allowing women to recognize their potential for high-level success and fostering heightened career aspirations. Additionally, the importance of financial independence and family prosperity as motivators for women's career advancement is a significant finding of this study. These economic factors reshape family dynamics and societal perceptions of women's roles. The increasing acceptance of dual-income households and the recognition of women's economic contributions as valuable assets in marriage mark significant changes in social attitudes.

Organizational support and transformational leadership emerge as crucial in facilitating women's career progression. The private sector, in particular, demonstrates more structured approaches to mentorship, skill development, and recognition of women's capabilities. In contrast, while showing signs of progress, the public sector faces more challenges in implementing change and overcoming traditional attitudes. The evolution of work environments is another key theme, shifting attitudes towards women in managerial and leadership roles and changing workplace dynamics and policies. Again, the private sector appears more progressive, offering more dynamic and meritocratic environments where women's contributions are more readily recognised and rewarded. The public sector, while evolving, shows a slower pace of change, with lingering challenges in work-life balance and career advancement opportunities for women.

Following an analysis of women's experiences in the middle and lower organizational hierarchal levels, it is essential to understand how women in executive roles have navigated their career paths. The following chapter studies the journeys of women who hold senior management and leadership roles in the public and private sectors, analysing their paths to success and the various challenges they face during their work. It discovers the circumstances, techniques, and difficulties contributing to their advancement to top roles.

Chapter 7

Women in Senior Management Positions in Oman

7.1 Introduction

Omani women face numerous challenges rooted in the sociocultural context and organizational dynamics as they strive for career growth and leadership roles in the workplace. Although there have been significant improvements in women's rights and their involvement in various social domains, in-depth interviews with women in senior management roles highlight the widespread influence of patriarchal attitudes, the socialisation of gender roles, and the incorporation of these beliefs into organizational policies and practices in both the public and private sectors. This chapter discusses women's complex obstacles in attaining management and leadership roles.

This chapter seeks to answer this research question: *What career lessons can be learned from the experiences, tactics and strategies of existing women leaders in large Omani public and private sector organizations that might benefit women seeking career progression?* Therefore, this chapter analyses the complicated relationships between societal norms, organizational cultures, and personal dynamics that influence women's management and leadership experiences. It explores the strategies and resilience demonstrated by women leaders in navigating societal constraints, leveraging family support, and capitalising on the gradual shifts occurring within organizations and society, drawing on Bourdieu's constructs of field, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). By giving voice to the experiences of Omani women leaders, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the difficulties surrounding women's leadership within the cultural context of Oman.

Nine Omani women holding management and leadership roles in organizations in the public and private sectors were interviewed. Four of the nine women work in the public sector as general managers within various ministries. The other five women leaders work in the private sector, holding positions such as Chief Executive and Vice President in companies in different industries. All participants were in mid-career, had considerable work experience, and had been appointed to a senior management role within the last five years before the interview.

7.2 Barriers to career progression

The journey of Omani women to achieve career growth and leadership roles in the workplace is hindered by various challenges deeply entrenched in the sociocultural context and organizational dynamics. There have been notable advancements in women's rights and engagement in Oman's social, political, and economic aspects, driven by the educational revolution and economic growth, as illustrated in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, the challenges identified through interviews with women in the top roles reveal the widespread impact of patriarchal mindsets (Ridgeway, 2001), the socialisation processes that enforce gender roles (Eagly & Wood, 2011), and the incorporation of these beliefs into organizational practices and policies in different public and private organizations. (see figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1 Barrier to women's career advancements

Source: Author

Analyses indicate that women experience exclusion and isolation in predominantly male-dominated workplaces and industries. This lack of representation of women in managerial and leadership positions fosters a sense of isolation, worsened by their exclusion from decision-making, informal networks, and social gatherings (Ibarra et al., 2010; Kanter, 1977). Consequently, this situation obstructs their access to essential guidance, support, and opportunities for career growth. Furthermore, societal judgments and perceptions rooted in gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes pose additional challenges. In managerial and leadership roles, women often face isolation and opposition from subordinates and society members who question their authority, credibility, and decision-making abilities. These stereotypes make women less committed and lack the necessary skills for higher roles. As a result, women leaders contend with increased expectations and scrutiny, resulting in pressure

to succeed and prove their worth for promotion. The lack of mentorship and role models poses another barrier for women in management and leadership positions and those seeking career advancement progressions. Without women in leadership roles, access to valuable insights and advice is limited, impeding ambitions and self-confidence.

The inductive analysis highlights differences in the challenges faced by women in the public and private sectors, revealing commonalities and variations in practical powers. In the public sector, societal evaluations and perceptions increase the prevalence of exclusion and discriminatory practices. Conversely, the private sector fosters a more progressive and inclusive environment. The analyses identify three primary challenges women face in managerial and leadership roles across both sectors: isolation and exclusion, negative perceptions and resistance to women's leadership, and a lack of mentorship, role models, and support networks.

The exclusion and isolation faced by women leaders in the workplace appear to be a substantial barrier hindering women from attaining top managerial and leadership positions and exercising their power. In the inductive analysis presented in Table 7.2, through applying the Gioia method for analysing interviews, three main factors play an essential role in the isolation and exclusion of women in private and public workplaces, hindering women's career advancement.

Table 7.2: Challenges faced by women when seeking promotion

Illustrative quotations	2nd order themes	Aggregate dimensions
<p>“There is this perception in society and the workplace that women are not suitable for leadership roles, that we lack the commitment or capabilities required.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>“When it comes to women leadership, many people do not trust them, and you can see how women ministers are criticised compared to men; society is used to men leading, not a woman; this is a fact.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation)</p>	<p>Entrenched societal beliefs and expectations</p>	<p>Patriarchal norms and gender role socialisation</p>
<p>“Most of the working women's highest wish was to complete the years of working and retire as they believe they are not achieving anywhere to lead.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>“I had a woman who complained about the slowness of her promotions. I asked her the first question: How many children? She said three, with</p>	<p>Internalised gender norms</p>	

<p>a year and a half between each and the next. I told her, do not be upset with me; I am a woman like you; measure how much time you spent on leave during pregnancy and childbirth. How do you want to be promoted?" (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Corporation)</p>		
<p>"Society does not accept women to interact with men, even my husband, who has never remarked about it, but I do not think it is easy; building relationships outside the official framework is a big challenge." (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Corporation)</p> <p>"When I got married, I was at war with my husband for a long time; he did not want me to interact with males and was always talking to me about the boundaries I should make. I used to ask permission for everything." (W: Moza Rashid, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>"Women in our society are often not permitted to speak loudly or negotiate with men, as it is considered shameful and unacceptable. Many women fear raising their ideas or participating fully, tending to agree to everything instead. While not all women behave this way, many do." (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation)</p>	<p>Cultural resistance to cross-gender interactions</p>	
<p>"My family does not accept that I go with anyone from work for coffee even; they want me to work in what is accepted by society and on limits" (W: Hoor Essam, OT Corporation).</p> <p>"I had many issues with my brothers at the beginning of my work; they were not allowing me to attend work late, and they were refusing my travel outside the country alone to attend work meetings. I asked them why, and they said we do not want people to talk about you, and I think this still exists in many families." (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)</p>	<p>Family pressures and expectations</p>	
<p>"Being the only woman in a room full of men can be incredibly isolating and requires constant effort to assert your authority." (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>"When few women are in the top positions, no one will listen to them, and most of us sometimes just see ourselves as decorations in the organizations." (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation)</p>	<p>Minority status and isolation</p>	

<p>“In most of the meetings, there are only two girls in the halls, and the rest are men.” (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Corporation).</p> <p>“I am the only woman in the top meetings, and no one else. It is not easy. You need to be cautious about what you say and when you say it.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)</p>	<p>Underrepresentation of women</p>	<p>Minority status and symbolic representation</p>
<p>“Facing higher standards and scrutiny compared to male peers, women need to demonstrate exceptional competence and capability.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL).</p> <p>“If I want to continue my success, I have to keep working hard, and I do have to compete with men; they plot a lot against women.” (W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)</p>	<p>Discriminating inspection and pressure</p>	
<p>“I was the only girl from Oman who participated in the Earth Summit conference in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, and many questions arose because of that.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)</p> <p>“I believe some managers, not all, want us only numbers in papers; they do not want us to take positions and succeed, they try only to show others that we got women but reality women with no power.” (W: Muna Khalfan, GS Group).</p>	<p>Tokenism</p>	
<p>“Men usually meet even at homes, and decisions are made there.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL).</p> <p>“We as women have difficulties attending any gathering outside the working hours, you know the society, and we got other obligations at home.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation)</p>	<p>Lack of access to informal channels</p>	
<p>“For many jobs, women are much more qualified than men. However, we must consider that women are limited to attending outside work, which requires regular movement.” (W: Salma Yousf, OD Company)</p>	<p>Organizational barriers</p>	<p>Exclusion from informal networks and career advancement opportunities</p>
<p>“The idea of women mixing with men is not accepted yet by society; we have to keep the boundaries, and we should keep the relationship with men up to the formal level only.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)</p> <p>“Women who always talk to men and have no boundaries, as you know in our society and the workplace, are called Mustakhafa (Shameless), which affects women's reputation as there is a</p>	<p>Continuation of gender segregation</p>	

limit. We must be on the safe side.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA corporation).		
“They say that women have excuses, they are absent most of the time we need them, they are not capable of working more than the working hours, the work is delayed, etc., what are some even though it is the reality, but I tried to break this perception.” (W: Moza Rashid, Ministry of FA)	Stereotypes and biases	

Patriarchal norms and gender role socialization

The data analysis with the women in the top positions in both sectors (private and public) indicates that a major and widespread barrier for Omani women in their search for leadership roles is the dominance of patriarchal norms and the socialization processes that reinforce traditional gender roles. These societal forces support the belief that leadership and authority are naturally associated with masculinity, which creates an obstacle that limits and excludes women from these areas (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2001). The core of this aspect is comprised of deeply ingrained societal beliefs and expectations that oppose and weaken women.

“Society always requires men in positions of power; even when she went into the field [minister] during Hurricane Shaheen in 2021, she was never viewed positively; there was criticism regarding her presence as a woman among men at the site, and they condemned her simply because she is a woman and perceived as incapable of assisting.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR).

Reem's statement reflects the societal resistance and opposing reaction that women in positions of authority often encounter, especially when their roles violate traditional gender norms and expectations. During the crisis caused by Hurricane Shaheen, the minister's physical presence in the affected area was important. However, she faced criticism and negative opinions due to the societal belief that women are characteristically unsuitable for positions of power and making important decisions. These entrenched beliefs originate from enduring gender stereotypes and prejudices that show women as less capable, less driven, and placing greater importance on family obligations rather than professional ambitions (Heilman, 2012; Schein, 2007). Throughout history, in Oman and across the Arab world, leadership has been predominantly associated with masculinity, maintaining the perception that men are more skilled, capable, and appropriate for positions of authority and power.

The criticism directed towards the minister's physical appearance and her presence "among men" highlights the societal expectations and cultural norms that enforce gender

segregation and raise doubts about the suitability of women in traditionally male-dominated environments. This critique challenges her authority and credibility as a leader, exposing society's strong resistance to women who defy traditional gender norms. Furthermore, the assertion that "they criticised her because she is a woman and incapable of assisting" obviously challenges her skills and abilities only based on her gender. This highlights the widespread gender stereotypes and prejudices that represent women as naturally less capable, less dedicated, and unsuitable for leadership roles, especially in times of crisis or areas traditionally associated with masculinity.

The notion of habitus sheds light on how Omani women's aspirations for leadership are significantly affected by dominant patriarchal norms and gender role socialisation in their cultural context. These norms create a habitus that entrenches the idea that leadership is primarily a masculine domain and that women are naturally less fitted for leadership and decision-making roles. This habitus is formed through socialisation and personal experiences, subconsciously guiding individuals' thoughts, actions, and ambitions in line with prevailing norms and power structures (Bourdieu, 1990). Consequently, it leads to self-imposed limitations that weaken support and motivation for women's leadership goals. As a result, this habitus, shaped by patriarchal values and socialisation practices, becomes deeply embedded in individuals' views and behaviours.

Societal beliefs are reinforced through gender role socialisation, which moulds and solidifies expectations around appropriate behaviours, roles, and responsibilities for both men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The analysis shows that children adopt these gender norms early in family environments. When gender norms are internalised, they can lead to self-imposed limitations and impede the support and encouragement of women's ambitions to pursue leadership roles, even among their family members (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

“I do not see it as a concession. We were raised in an environment where a man is respected, regardless of position. There is nothing wrong with it if you give him a piece of respect, and he gives you ten instead. I feel this was one of my success factors. I did not let the men feel that I was challenging them.” (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Corporation).

“When we used to be young, we heard a lot about respecting men and not negotiating with your brother or father because he is a man and he is accountable for us even if he is younger than us; we should respect men, what they decide we say yes.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation).

“I think till now, we got families who do not accept women to take responsibility positions because they think it is a men's place, and women cannot take. Some of my female colleagues refused to take positions because their husbands or brothers did not want them to mix and compete with men. Maybe this is fewer nowadays, but it still exists.” (W: Moza Rashid, Ministry of FA).

These statements from women in high positions in both sectors emphasise the process of socialising children into specific gender roles and establishing hierarchies within family structures at a young age. The concept of respect towards men, irrespective of their age or expertise, and the belief that men hold responsibility and authority over women continues the perception that leadership and decision-making are exclusively masculine realms. The internalisation of gender norms can establish a deeply rooted mindset that hinders women's leadership ambitions and reinforces the notion that roles of authority and accountability are predominantly labelled for men. According to Zainab Hassan (SA Corporation), young girls are instructed to surrender to the judgements and power of their male relatives, which could weaken their ability to take action and display leadership qualities. This illustrates how internalized gender norms can manifest in family resistance to women's ambitions for leadership. Moza Rashid (Ministry of FA) recognises that there are families and societal environments where women are actively discouraged or forbidden from seeking leadership positions due to the belief that these roles are meant for men. In addition, she emphasises situations in which women reject or turn down leadership opportunities because of the influence and expectations of their male family members, such as husbands or brothers, who may not desire them to "interact and compete with men.” *The* resistance and opposition encountered within family settings demonstrate the profound influence of gender norms and expectations on attitudes and behaviours. These factors can impede women's aspirations for managerial and leadership roles and reinforce the notion that leadership and authority are inherently masculine.

The notion of habitus describes the deep internalisation of gender norms and expectations from childhood within Omani society (Bourdieu, 1990; McNay, 1999). The interviews demonstrate that women are socialised from an early age to respect men's authority, regardless of status or age. This develops enduring attitudes on gender roles and leadership, influencing women's perspectives on leadership and authority. This early socialisation produces unconscious predispositions that continuously affect women's navigation of leadership roles, often resulting in self-imposed boundaries and internalised limits. The habitus can be seen in women's feeling of complying with traditional expectations when seeking leadership positions,

demonstrated by their careful management of gender boundaries and career responsibilities (Wacquant, 2016).

The analyses underline the presence of cultural opposition to interactions between genders, especially in casual or social contexts. Shikah Sultan (OT Corporation) states, “*Society does not support building relationships outside the official framework, even if the person's husband has never expressed any objections.*” This resistance hinders women's access to meaningful networking and career advancement opportunities. It strengthens the idea that leadership is primarily for men, making it inappropriate for women to be present and participate (Ibarra et al., 2010; Kanter, 1977). These cultural norms are closely connected to family pressures and expectations that influence and limit women's career choices and ambitions for career advances (Whiting & Sayer, 2014; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007).

“I would get calls and talk to employees, or even from the management, at night and weekends. It was difficult for my husband, and he thinks this is not right, but he got used to the situation.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation)

“My husband is conservative in certain behaviours that he does not like, but the issue of socialising is something he does not like. On the contrary, my brothers support me.” (W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

Zainab Hassan recounts a scenario in which she would receive work-related phone calls at night, leading to her husband's discomfort or disapproval. The husband's initial response, “*he believes this is incorrect,*” implies a perception or belief that such interactions between genders, particularly outside of regular work hours, might be considered inappropriate or culturally unacceptable. This perception is likely a result of deeply rooted societal norms and cultural expectations that establish acceptable boundaries and restrictions regarding interactions between individuals of different genders, especially in professional or work-related settings. Interactions between unrelated men and women, particularly in informal settings or without the presence of family members, in Oman may be seen as a breach of societal norms or cultural values. The patriarchal norms and gender role socialisation processes have consequences as they are incorporated into organizational cultures, decision-making processes, and interpersonal interactions (Acker, 1990; Ridgeway, 1997).

The organization can also promote the notion that men are more suited for leadership. As mentioned in chapter five, Omani workplaces in both the public and private sectors continue to uphold patriarchal norms. Gender role socialisation processes are evident throughout organizational structures, influencing policies, practices, and mindsets, which foster

unwelcoming environments for women's career progression (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Metcalfe, 2008).

“The workplace reflects what is accepted and not accepted by society. No woman can challenge society; this is the fact we must accept. Men are still the ones who lead in the organization” (W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

“We can change workplaces if we change society's norms and customs. The Omani custom is not that close or inflexible; men are more respected as leaders in society and people. There is a change now, but still, this mentality is in the organization.” (W: Salma Yousef, OD Corporation)

Bourdieu's concept of field provides insight into the professional and organizational contexts in which Omani women operate. He defines a field as a structured system of social standings and power relations where individuals and groups compete for various resources, including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic assets (Bourdieu, 1986). Analyses show that male-dominated workplaces and industries exhibit patriarchal norms and processes of gender role socialisation that uphold the belief that leadership is primarily linked to masculinity. This belief reflects the symbolic significance of leadership roles in sectors with a predominance of men. The symbolic status tied to leadership roles is shaped by the patriarchal habitus, which often positions men as naturally more fit for power and decision-making. This symbolic capital is reinforced through social exchanges, organizational behaviours, and power relations within these fields, creating a persistent cycle that marginalises and excludes women from leadership and management roles.

Minority status and symbolic representation

The analysis reveals that the minimal representation of Omani women in predominantly male workplaces and industries creates barriers, leading to feelings of isolation, heightened scrutiny, and being perceived as tokens. The complex challenges Omani women encounter as they navigate environments where they frequently find themselves as the only or one of the few women representatives in senior positions. Therefore, women frequently encounter resistance and backlash from male colleagues and subordinates who struggle to acknowledge their authority and leadership, which deepens the difficulties they face due to their minority status and tokenism. However, this resistance creates an unfriendly environment and hinders women's ability to effectively carry out their leadership roles and responsibilities, undermining their roles and making their involvement seem superficial.

Tokenism refers to the practice of including a small number of individuals from underrepresented groups to create the appearance of diversity or inclusivity. The phenomenon

of tokenism is closely associated with the experiences of minority status and isolation. In this context, women are treated as symbolic representatives of their gender rather than being recognised as valued members of the professional community (Kanter, 1977). The statement *“I was the sole female from Oman to participate in the Earth Summit conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.”* (Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL) illustrates tokenism. Her presence as the sole woman representative highlights her perception as an anomaly and an equality initiative from the organisation rather than a common sight. Tokenism allows for the illusion of growing equality while continuing to exclude women from decision-making (Smolović Jones et al., 2020).

“We are few women in most of the ministry top meetings, and I often conflict with my male colleagues. I feel if I talk, they do not listen to me, and if I raise an idea, they will not take it; however, if the same idea arises by a male colleague, they appreciate it.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

“I was the first woman to take this position. I was under full pressure to prove myself. I worked very hard compared to my colleagues, and I used to leave work late and come early. I did much compromising in my life till I achieved this. I want to prove that women can handle this position and are not only numbers in the top positions.” (W: Salma yourself, NA Corporation)

Tokenism worsens the marginalisation of Omani women in spaces dominated by men and also exposes them to increased scrutiny and pressure to excel. They are required to demonstrate exceptional competence and capability, as demonstrated by Salma Yousef (NA Corporation). This added pressure arises from the belief that Omani women are seen as symbolic representatives of their gender. Therefore, their successes or failures indicate the capabilities of all women in their group. The analyses emphasise the widespread isolation that Omani women encounter in environments dominated by men, where their simple presence is uncommon. Being a minority not only causes psychological stress but also increases the level of scrutiny and pressure on these women to constantly demonstrate their value and validate their existence in these male-dominated environments. In addition, the lack of women in specific industries and sectors worsens their isolation. The absence of women in positions of power creates an inherently exclusive environment where Omani women's competence, authority, and suitability for leadership roles are often doubted or challenged by their male colleagues and superiors (Ridgeway, 2001; Starnski & Son Hing, 2015). Moreover, tokenism reinforces stereotypes and biases by portraying token individuals as different who turn from the typical characteristics associated with their group (Kanter, 1977; Heilman, 2012). This can create the perception that women in leadership roles are unusual or different from other women,

strengthening the belief that leadership is primarily a masculine domain and further marginalizing women leaders' experiences and contributions.

Exclusion from informal networks

One of the key challenges highlighted in the analyses is the lack of access to informal networking events and social gatherings, which serve as vital platforms for building professional relationships, establishing connections, and acquiring valuable information and insights. The issue's root lies in the organizational culture and norms that substantially emphasise informal interactions and relationship-building outside the formal office setting.

“Women are excluded from informal meetings; most decisions are made informally. In addition, exclusion from informal networking events and gatherings means limited access to professional networks and contacts and missing important information shared in informal settings.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)

Exclusion from informal networks represents a hidden barrier that continues gender inequalities in career progression, as these informal channels are crucial channels for accessing mentoring opportunities, exposure to projects, and participation in critical decision-making processes (Ibarra et al., 2010; Metcalfe, 2011)

“The big challenge is that men are familiar with doing much of their work outside the office. I was discussing this point with my former manager, and he used to say that one of the challenges is building relationships outside the formal scope. You must have informal relationships to succeed in this position; not everything is done officially and in meetings. My biggest challenge was this because our society does not accept.” (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Company)

Shikah Sultan emphasises that a significant portion of professional interactions, decision-making processes, and opportunities for visibility and career progression often occur within informal settings, such as social gatherings or casual meetings. These informal networks are usually dominated by men, mirroring the societal norms and gender dynamics that have historically suspended women from these areas of influence. She elaborates on this challenge by recounting her discussion with a former manager, who acknowledged that success in leadership positions is conditional, to a certain extent, on one's ability to navigate and participate in these informal networks, which serve as crucial platforms for building relationships, exchanging information, and gaining exposure to potential career advancement opportunities. However, the core challenge for women lies in the societal and cultural norms that hinder their participation in these informal networks. A complex interplay between organizational norms, societal expectations, and personal dynamics contribute to the exclusion

of women from informal networks. While the organizational culture may promote and rely on informal interactions, the societal norms and cultural expectations surrounding gender interactions can create barriers to women's participation in these spheres.

“Society does not accept, even with respect to my husband, who has never commented, but I do not think it is easy; building relationships outside the official framework is a big challenge.” (W: Shikah Sultan, OT Corporation)

Even within personal relationships, such as with a spouse, there may be unspoken resistance or discomfort with the notion of women engaging in informal professional interactions that exceed traditional gender roles and boundaries. At the same time, Shikah Sultan's husband may not have openly opposed her participation in such informal networks, there was an unspoken acknowledgement of the societal resistance and the challenges it posed. This exclusion from informal networks prevents women from valuable relationship-building opportunities, information-sharing, and career advancement.

The analyses uncover situations where the practices of the organization promote gender segregation, which consequently adds to the exclusion of women from informal networks and opportunities for career advancement.

“There are eleven general managers in the different governates across the sultanate. I asked once why there is no one woman among them where the work can be done by a woman perfectly. They said women could not interact with people informally as the job requires a person who attends meetings outside the formal time and interacts with local people, which women cannot do.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

This statement indicates that organizations may unintentionally preserve gender-based differences by assigning women roles or tasks that imitate societal norms and expectations rather than acknowledging their abilities and potential (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). The exclusion of women from informal networks and the resulting constraints on their career progression can be better understood by applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of field, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). Bourdieu argues that organizations and professional spheres can be understood as fields, which are organized systems of social positions and power dynamics. In these fields, individuals and groups compete for different types of resources, such as economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Access to informal networks and social capital is a crucial form of capital within these fields, as it enables career advancement and upward mobility (Lin, 1999). The organizational field in Omani workplaces operates as a structured social environment where power relations and

gender dynamics can be seen openly and anonymously (Bourdieu, 1990). The interview data indicates that this area is defined by a dual structure: the official organizational hierarchy and the vital informal networks where significant power is exercised. These informal environments, although appearing neutral, have been constructed around masculine norms and behaviours that systematically exclude women from essential decision-making roles (Acker, 2006; Metcalfe, 2011).

Women encounter systematic exclusion from these essential networking possibilities, illustrating "symbolic violence" inside organizational settings (Bourdieu, 2001; Kraus, 1993). In addition, organizational procedures institutionalise informal networks as male-dominated environments, while cultural norms rationalise the exclusion of women. Organizations continue patterns of gender segregation that are legitimised through cultural rationalisations (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Acker, 2006). The systematic exclusion from informal networks unfavourably affects women's professional success. The lack of access to these networks hinders women's social capital accumulation, constrains their ability to communicate with important decision-makers, and reinforces conventional gender inequalities inside organizations.

7.3 Resistance to the authority of women leaders

A significant theme in the interviews is the resistance and adverse reactions that women often face from men coworkers and occasionally from women peers when they occupy leadership roles within organizations. The resistance and unwillingness of male subordinates to accept women's authority and leadership arises from entrenched societal norms and expectations that associate leadership with masculinity. Consequently, women in managerial and leadership roles face pressure and scrutiny, with their ideas, decisions, and initiatives often met with resistance. In addition, it devalues women's credibility, decision-making skills, and leadership abilities.

"Work can be stressful; I feel that there are times that if I say, they will not accept what I say and suggest because I am a woman. The mentalities do not accept the culture of women leading, the culture of change, the application of any new system; This culture still exists around us." (W: Moza Rashid, Ministry of FA)

Moza reflects on the challenges women in leadership roles face, such as the credibility of decision-making, questioning their problem-solving skills, resisting change led by women leaders, and lacking support for their initiatives. This discouragement creates an unfriendly environment and hinders women's ability to effectively carry out their leadership roles and

responsibilities. Women encounter this issue with a substantial movement of resistance, which also harms their reputation, something very sensitive in Omani society. In Omani culture, discussing a woman's behaviour negatively can significantly affect her entire life, including her marriage and family life.

“Yes, many difficulties, to the extent that they distort my reputation. For example, if someone approaches me for marriage, they present a bad image about me; they damage my reputation because they are not satisfied that a woman is leading them.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Company)

“My direct manager was a man of limited educational background and loved domination and possession. He treated me cautiously and never let me take any responsibility or participate in any managerial work. He said to me once, directly to my face, [I fear you will take my place]. I told him, I am not taking your position. I am not looking after that; I respect you and your work.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

Resistance to the authority of women managers is primarily rooted in male insecurity and unwillingness to surrender what men regard as their position of natural authority over women. The phrase "I fear you will take my place" represents the deep-rooted societal belief that leadership and authority are naturally associated with masculinity, and the idea of a woman undertaking a position of power is seen as a challenge to the existing gender norms and power structures. This perception is impaired by the manager's limited academic qualifications, which might have contributed to his adherence to conservative gender roles and patriarchal attitudes. His limited formal education may have strengthened his unwillingness to embrace women in positions of power, as it contradicts his deeply rooted beliefs and perspective. The manager's behaviour, marked by caution, dominance, and ownership, demonstrates a wish to uphold control and assert his power. By denying Reem Ahmed chances to take on responsibilities or participate in managerial roles, he is significantly obstructing her professional growth and advancement, thereby continuing the marginalization of women in leadership within the organization.

“I encountered a man who was unwilling to work under my supervision. He repeatedly requested a transfer to another department. When I inquired about his reasons, he said he could not take direction from a woman, stating, [I am not a man led by a woman]. This mindset still exists today.” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Company)

The male employee's explicit refusal to work under the supervision of a woman and his statement, "*I am not a man led by women,*" reflects the deeply entrenched societal norms and expectations that associate leadership and authority with masculinity. Zainab also suggests this resistance is not an isolated incident; "*This mindset still exists today.*" This acknowledgement

implies that while such apparent resistance and refusal to accept women's authority may be less widespread, it persists within the workforce or society. Furthermore, the quote highlights the intersectionality of gender with other social identities and power dynamics within the workplace.

Interestingly, women face opposition in leadership and managerial roles, even from their female colleagues and subordinates, which raises numerous questions. This stresses the internalization of societal norms, gender role expectations, and stereotypes within the genders, creating barriers that challenge women's authority and career advancement aspirations. This resistance is rooted in the internalization of societal norms and gender role expectations that associate leadership and authority with masculinity. The women employees have internalized the belief that leadership is a masculine domain, and the idea of a woman as a manager challenges her deeply rooted perceptions.

“I had a woman employee who I transferred a while ago. She and I were employed together. She refused to be in the department because she refused to have a woman as her manager. She said, [There is nothing between you and me, but I do not want my manager to be a woman].” (W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

“We still have women who refuse to be led by another woman. They say it clearly to us. We face these issues every time, and if you ask most of them, they will say they want to be led by men.” (W: Moza Rashid, Ministry of FA)

The resistance from individuals of the same gender emphasises the widespread influence of societal beliefs and the processes of socialising individuals into gender roles, which have historically linked authority and leadership with masculinity. Women themselves can internalise these norms and contribute to the continued marginalisation of their fellow women in positions of power and decision-making. This paradox raises inquiries regarding the underlying elements contributing to this resistance and the potential disparity between preferences and actual actions. The resistance may arise from internalised prejudices, stereotypes, or societal norms that influence how women's leadership abilities are perceived and expected, even among women employees.

Even individuals who are aware of and acknowledge the discrimination, the resistance may still be subject to the impact of societal perceptions and the processes of socialising individuals into gender roles. Women can act as obstacles to each other's progress and achievements, especially in environments that are dominated by men and where traditional gender roles and stereotypes are deeply entrenched. Whether deliberate or unintentional, this resistance can appear in different ways, such as challenging a woman's power, diminishing her

trustworthiness, or perpetuating conventional notions about how women lead. This fact needs more investigation in future research as it provides insight into the effects of women on other women's efforts to attain higher options.

7.4 Overcoming challenges to achieve career progression

Navigating through societal resistance

Each woman interviewed has demonstrated remarkable flexibility and strategic adaptation, carefully navigating societal norms and family expectations while striving for career advancements and authority within male-dominated organizational hierarchies. Women carefully balance cultural norms with resisting societal constraints. Instead of being confrontational, many strategically adapt "with the wave," modifying their performance and behaviours to align with cultural customs while slowly fostering change and progress.

“He is conservative in certain behaviours that he does not like, but the issue of mixing is something he does not like. On the contrary, my brothers support me.”
(W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

Aish acknowledges her husband's cultural opposition while also highlighting the support she receives from her brothers. She skilfully navigates family dynamics, honouring cultural boundaries while utilising support from other family members to pursue her goals.

“As long as I maintain my religion, Suppose I go out sometimes for interviews as a team. I go out using my car and drive by myself. I do not mix with other males in the same car, and they go in their cars, so cultural limits surround me always.”
(W: Hoor Essam, OT Corporation)

This illustrates the careful negotiation of personal and professional boundaries within the context of cultural and family expectations. Adhering to certain limits and norms allows her to pursue professional opportunities while respecting the boundaries set by her cultural and family context.

“I go on official missions and insist I do not make exceptions regardless of society and other gossip. If there is a sleepover, I take a sleepover, I would stay overnight to prove that I am not inferior, and I would not refuse any official mission. In places where there was going and coming back, I would return home at 6 or 7 p.m., And I also work at the weekends. As far as I am not doing something wrong” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)

This exemplifies the strategic endeavours undertaken by women to establish credibility and highlight their dedication to their work, frequently surpassing societal perceptions and prejudices. Demonstrates the extent to which individuals demonstrate their dedication, competence, and loyalty to their work, even when faced with societal judgements and

prejudices that doubt their suitability for such positions. In addition, she acknowledges and discusses the possible societal perceptions and concerns regarding women travelling or staying overnight. She asserts her willingness to undertake such assignments and emphasises that she does not engage in inappropriate conduct. Omani women in leadership roles frequently encounter the challenge of surpassing expectations and challenging societal stereotypes that view them as "inferior" or less competent than their male colleagues.

Women try to secure family approval and support, particularly from their husbands and family members. This demonstrates assertiveness in negotiating with their husband and families, challenging traditional gender norms, and ultimately securing their support for professional aspirations.

“When I find any mistake made by my husband, I confront him about it and say, 'This is a mistake. You made it up.' He says, [Okay, I am a man].” (W: Aish Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

“We were raised in an environment where a man is respected, regardless of position. There is nothing wrong with it if you give him a piece of respect, and he gives you ten instead.” (W: Reem Ahmed, Ministry of CR)

Women leaders skilfully adjust their performance and behaviours to align with cultural customs while pushing for gradual change and progress, leveraging family support and challenging societal constraints through assertiveness and determination. Additionally, they establish credibility and challenge societal biases, consistently emphasising their dedication and skills. They carefully plan through their personal and professional identities, thoughtfully balancing the complexities of cultural, societal, and family influences. Aware of the generational changes and the evolving society, they see these as challenges and opportunities. This strategic approach's dynamics are essential in their leadership journeys, allowing them to attain influential positions while honouring and navigating the societal norms and family expectations that have traditionally limited women's leadership ambitions. By embracing these approaches, women created their own spaces within male-dominated organizational hierarchies.

Leveraging societal and organizational change

The analyses show, as discussed in chapter six, that Omani society is experiencing gradual change, with a growing acknowledgement and acceptance of women's capabilities. This is a vital factor in facilitating women's career advancements and leadership ambitions. It emphasises the interaction between societal changes, evolving perspectives, and organizational shifts in establishing more favourable conditions for women's progress.

“My manager was sensitive about department heads being women in the early 2000s; however, now things are much better, and people have started adopting the situation that women can lead.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL).

“I feel that minds have opened more, so thank God, since approximately 2011, things have been normal, meaning the new generation has now become more open-minded, unlike the old mentalities. It was a difficult time for women” (W: Zainab Hassan, SA Corporation).

“I worked under many male managers lately; there are managers who worshipped the woman. They feel that women have areas of superiority, and this is something we have not seen before.” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL)

Women are increasingly effective in the workplace nowadays, and their capabilities are recognised more through improved communication. The impact of societal progress, along with the role of media in shifting perceptions and highlighting the achievements of women in various areas, including leadership positions, has influenced generational changes and affected societal views and attitudes towards women's leadership. The younger generations exhibit greater open-mindedness and willingness to embrace women's aspirations for management and leadership, possibly indicating a gradual decline in traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

"I am optimistic based on 20 years of experience in 4 organizations. I tell you with complete confidence that the station is different. However, we still have some problems with some cultural norms. Yes, some beliefs have changed with the new generation, but still, we have some people with the same old mentalities. Culture does not die or disappear. It is inherited, but in different forms with different packaging, but it exists” (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL).

The generational changes also impact the dynamics within organizations and the expectations of younger employees. The younger generations may have distinct priorities and expectations regarding their careers, potentially impacting the cultures and practices within organizations. In addition to societal changes, organizations have been influenced by these changes and started adopting them. These changes involve adapting to shifting societal dynamics and implementing inclusive practices to promote the development of women's leadership.

“As a female in this company, you will be offered exceptional maternity benefits, including the most generous maternity leave policy. You have designated hours for feeding. The organization offers flexible and remote working options, providing numerous advantages for women employees to develop and thrive, contributing to the overall growth rate” (W: Salma Yousf, NA Corporation).

Acknowledging the advantages of diversity and the necessity of attracting and retaining highly skilled individuals influences organizational changes to some extent. Organizations

have enacted supportive policies and initiatives to promote an inclusive atmosphere and offer equitable opportunities for professional progression.

Family and spousal support

Family and spousal support have emerged as crucial factors in enabling and empowering women's career advancements. These supportive relationships are valuable sources of emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and motivation, allowing women to navigate societal norms, cultural expectations, and the challenges of pursuing leadership and managerial roles.

"Without my husband's support, I could not have accomplished my goals. I struggled to balance my home and professional life during overwhelming work pressure. He stepped in to help at home, assisted with raising our daughters, and offered constant support levels" (W: Hoor Essam, OT Company).

Hoor underscores the fundamental importance of spousal support in enabling her career success. Numerous studies demonstrate the positive impact of a supportive spouse on women's career advancement and leadership attainment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007). Supportive spouses can provide a range of emotional and practical support and shared responsibilities that can improve the "double burden" often faced by working women, enabling them to balance their professional and personal commitments more effectively (Voydanoff, 2005). Furthermore, supportive spouses can be crucial in respecting and validating women's personal and professional boundaries. They can create an enabling environment for women to navigate societal norms and cultural expectations while pursuing their professional aspirations. Spousal support has been recognised as a pivotal element in the progression and achievement of women's careers (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In their study, Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) argue that providing emotional encouragement and practical assistance with household responsibilities, as spousal support, played a crucial role in the professional progress of women in executive positions. Family encouragement impacts women's career advancement aspirations and achievements. Parental and family support can be a powerful source of motivation and inspiration, challenging societal resistance and stereotypes.

"My brothers, for example, were encouraging me, but the larger circle of neighbours and friends, for example, would say, [Why should she continue her studies?]" (W: Maryam Mohammed, Ministry of RL).

Family support serves as a protective barrier against societal criticism. Women who strive for career progression and undertake leadership roles often encounter disapproval and

adverse reactions due to their withdrawal from conservative gender expectations. Nevertheless, when women receive unwavering backing from their families, especially their partners and parents, it can be a protective barrier against societal disapproval.

"We were the first families to register in a school that admitted both male and female students, a decision that faced opposition from the community; how can females and males' study in the same school and classroom? My sister and I, because we had the support of our parents, we had their confidence, which was the greatest aspect. Therefore, we succeeded and achieved these positions" (W: Salma Yousf, NA Corporation).

Family support empowers women to overcome societal criticism and pursue their goals, even if it means challenging cultural norms. When women receive support from their close relatives, they are more capable of enduring the pressures and criticisms of the wider community. In addition to offering protection against societal condemnation, family support can help women validate their violation of cultural customs. Consequently, when receive the backing and motivation from their family members, it can function as a strong assertion of their decisions and ambitions. With the endorsement and affirmation from their close relatives, women can gain a heightened sense of assurance in their choice to pursue management and leadership roles, even in cases where it involves challenging cultural norms.

7.5 Conclusion

This in-depth exploration of the experiences of Omani women in senior management and leadership positions has offered critical insights into the complicated interaction of societal, organizational, and personal factors that shape their journeys toward positions of power and influence. This chapter has answered the following research question: *What career lessons can be learned from the experiences, tactics and strategies of existing women leaders in large Omani public and private sector organizations that might benefit women seeking career progression?* Women encounter obstacles due to the lasting impact of patriarchal norms and gender role socialisation processes that are deeply embedded in the sociocultural fabric of Oman society. These norms and have become institutionalised within organizational structures, practices, and mindsets, continuing an environment that marginalizes and limits the entry of women into management and leadership roles. These deeply entrenched beliefs and expectations are evident in various forms, including isolation and exclusion from work engagement, resistance to women's leadership, and the lack of mentorship and role models. Notably, there is an intersectionality of gender with other social identities and power dynamics within the workplace. The experiences of tokenism, scrutiny, and resistance faced by women

in male-dominated spaces highlight the complex interplay between gender, organizational culture, and societal perceptions.

Omani women in leadership positions demonstrate strategic navigation and resilience while confronting complex societal constraints, family expectations, and organizational hierarchies. By leveraging family support, challenging stereotypes, and embracing assertiveness, these women have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in creating spaces for themselves within male-dominated domains.

Significantly, there is the potential for societal and organizational change in fostering more inclusive and supportive environments for women's management and leadership aspirations. As younger generations exhibit greater openness to challenging traditional gender roles and organizations implement policies and initiatives to promote diversity and inclusivity, women's management and leadership opportunities are gradually changing. The findings highlight the necessity of comprehensive and ongoing strategies to tackle the entrenched challenges women face in seeking career advancement and management and leadership roles.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in this thesis on women's management and leadership careers conducted through a comparative analysis of Oman's public and private sectors. It provides an overview of women in management and leadership positions in Oman at multiple levels, from the national down to the individual. Engaging with the literature on women in management and leadership roles, particularly in the Arab Middle East, the main findings are examined in relation to each of the five research questions guiding this study. The research has adopted a systematic approach in examining Oman's broader socioeconomic and political context and analysing relevant organizational practices in both the public and private sectors. It has investigated women's experiences in middle and lower ranking positions and has explored the journeys of those who have succeeded in attaining top management and leadership roles. This multi-level analysis explains the differences between the private and public sectors in how women navigate cultural, organizational, and personal challenges to achieve management and leadership roles. It provides insights into societal changes occurring more broadly in large organizations and society in Oman.

The thesis shows how societal norms, organizational practices, and individual strategies differ across economic sectors and hierarchical levels and how these factors affect women's progression to higher positions in large organizations. It reveals how organizations differentially support women appointed to management and leadership roles while respecting cultural values, highlighting pronounced differences between the public and private sectors. In what follows, I first summarise and discuss the main findings of the research. I then highlight the various contributions made to the literature on women's careers in the historically culturally restrictive societies of the Arab Middle East. A short section on limitations follows before concluding with proposals for future research.

8.2 Overview of the thesis

Taking a qualitative approach, this research has examined the factors influencing Omani women's career progression into management and leadership roles across eight public and private sector organizations. It is based substantially on 38 in-depth interviews with women at various organizational levels and HR managers within the case study organizations. The study

provides an understanding of the experiences, challenges, and opportunities facing women across all organizational levels in Oman. My primary purpose has been to investigate how societal norms, organizational practices, and individual strategies interact to enable or hinder women's career progression to higher roles in large private and public sector organizations. Al-Lamky (2007) notes that Oman has experienced tremendous social and economic changes in recent decades. Sultan Qaboos's modernization renaissance has been instrumental in changing society from traditional to modern and expresses rising regional and international ambitions. Therefore, women's roles have evolved significantly, particularly in education and workforce participation. However, as Metcalfe (2011) argues, traditional cultural values and gender role expectations continue to influence women's career opportunities and challenges in all parts of the Arab Middle East.

The research employs Bourdieu's theoretical constructs of field, habitus, and capital as analytical tools to understand how gender dynamics play out in different organizations. This theoretical framework is valuable in illuminating how cultural beliefs and practices become authenticated in organizational structures and individual characters (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). As McNay (1999) suggests, Bourdieu's concepts help understand how gender inequalities are reproduced through institutional practices and individual behaviours, and in explaining the complex relationships between modernization and tradition in Omani society. As Al-Barwani et al. (2009) note, Oman represents a unique case of rapid development while maintaining strong cultural traditions. This context challenges women seeking leadership roles as they must navigate between modern career aspirations and traditional social expectations.

The study's methodology was developed to investigate women's experiences across different organizational types. Through semi-structured interviews, the study explored participants' personal stories, challenges, and strategies for success. This approach aligns with Creswell's (2013) emphasis on using qualitative methods to understand complex social phenomena from participants' perspectives. Examining both public and private sector organizations provided valuable comparisons and insights. As Kemp and Madsen (2014) suggest, these sectors often present different opportunities and challenges for women's advancement in the Middle East. The research discovered differences in organizational cultures, policies, and practices between sectors, influencing women's career progression opportunities and ambitions. The data analysis utilised a thematic approach, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) and Gioia et al.'s (2013) thematic methods for recognising and examining patterns in qualitative data. The research findings enhance many significant academic

discourses. First, the literature on women's management and leadership opportunities in traditional societies, supporting Metcalfe's (2011) argument that national cultural norms and values profoundly influences women's career opportunities in the Middle East. Second, in helping understand how organizational practices support or hinder women's advancement. Finally, in providing insights into how individual women navigate traditional expectations and modern career aspirations, extending Al-Lamky's (2007) research on women leaders in Oman.

8.3 Core findings, empirical contributions, and implications of the research

This research makes several significant contributions to the literature on women's management and leadership opportunities, particularly in Omani workplace development and women's efforts to attain management and leadership roles in the Middle East. The study extends current understanding in several essential ways. Firstly, this research represents the first comparative study of women's management and leadership career progressions across Oman's public and private sectors. While previous studies such as Al-Lamki (2007), Kemp and Madsen (2014), and Al Wahaibi (2020) examined women's leadership in specific contexts, this research provides a broader, more understanding of how different organizational backgrounds influence women's career progression. The comparative approach exposes essential differences in how public and private sectors approach women's management and leadership development. Secondly, the study advances understanding of how women in traditional societies navigate between cultural expectations and professional ambitions. This study reveals sophisticated strategies women develop to maintain cultural authenticity while pursuing leadership roles. This contributes to the literature about women's career development in conservative societies by showing how women actively shape their professional environments rather than simply adapting to existing constraints. Furthermore, the research contributes to the literature on organizational practices by identifying specific mechanisms that either support or hinder women's leadership advancement in both public and private sectors. This detailed analysis of organizational practices and their effects on women's career progression provides valuable insights into how institutional structures influence gender equality in leadership positions. These findings fill an essential gap in the literature about organizational development in the Gulf region. These contributions are particularly significant given the limited research on women's management and leadership in the Gulf region and Middle East and the growing importance of understanding how traditional societies can promote women's career progression while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The research makes several contributions to understanding women in management and leadership in the Middle East. The contributions are categorized into four themes according to the research questions posed. Each was addressed in a separate chapter, constituting the four empirical chapters of the thesis. In Chapter 4, I ask “*How do economic, cultural, and political factors influence women's participation in management and leadership roles?*” In answer, the chapter presents several original findings that contribute to understanding women's career advancement in Oman. It reveals complex dynamics in the journey toward women's career growth, highlighting achievements and challenges. The first significant finding is that Oman has achieved extraordinary success in women's education, with female students making up 63% of higher education graduates in 2022/2023. This achievement is notable in fields such as information technology (71% female graduates) and health sciences (80% female graduates). However, this educational success reveals a complex challenge. Despite women's academic dominance, their management and leadership participation remains disproportionately low. This disparity illustrates that while Oman has effectively promoted women's education, translating educational achievement into leadership and career advancement is hampered by deep structural and cultural factors, thus educational achievement alone does not guarantee women professional advancement into senior roles.

The research also reveals significant progress in women's workforce participation, which has increased from 3% in 1970 to 32% in 2022. This change demonstrates the success of government policies in creating employment opportunities for women and the rising desire of women to work as a means of increasing family income. However, the study finds that this increased participation has not automatically led to increased representation of women in decision-making positions. While women constitute 32% of the workforce - a significant achievement compared to other Arab countries - their representation in top decision-making positions remains limited, with only 17% and 13% in public and private sector management and leadership roles respectively. Women are often concentrated drawn to specific sectors and roles, particularly in education and healthcare, which are deemed culturally suitable for women who face more significant barriers to entry in traditionally male-dominated fields (Mosely,2023). This explains why the proportion of women in leadership roles is higher in the public sector, which includes the educational and healthcare fields.

The country has passed progressive legislation, including CEDAW endorsement (The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), constitutional guarantees of equal opportunities, and flexible and compatible working

conditions for women, demonstrating a strong political commitment to women's advancement in all aspects of society (Issan and Salah,2023). However, there is an implementation gap between formal policies and practical realities. While legal structures support equality, informal practices, and cultural norms often create invisible barriers to women's management and leadership opportunities. This finding highlights the complexity of achieving change in traditional societies, where more profound cultural changes must accompany formal progress. Despite creating essential foundations through education and fundamental workforce participation, less visible obstacles hinder women from reaching the highest organizational levels. This finding suggests that while formal barriers have largely been removed, informal obstacles affect women's career progression to senior positions. These findings contribute to understanding the complexity of promoting women's management and leadership opportunities in traditional societies. They demonstrate how, while necessary, formal progress in areas like education and legal rights must be accompanied by attention to subtle cultural and organizational factors that influence women's leadership advancement.

Chapter 5 answers the question “*What policies and practices have Omani public and private sector organizations adopted to facilitate women's progression into management and leadership roles?*” A detailed analysis of HR managers' perspectives reveals how organizational factors impact women's management and leadership career opportunities in both the private and public sectors. The research finds deeply embedded patriarchal norms within organizational structures. In public organizations, these norms appeared in policies and procedures. This institutionalization of gender roles created barriers to women's career advancement to management and leadership roles. While demonstrating more progressive attitudes, private sector organizations showed subtle but significant patriarchal influences. Even when women demonstrated strong leadership capabilities, they are frequently evaluated against gender-stereotyped expectations rather than objective performance metrics. This creates an invisible ceiling that was harder to identify but equally limiting to women's career advancement. In both sectors the negative influence of traditional gender role expectations remains strong. The research finds that these norms operate through multiple, interconnected mechanisms that collectively create barriers to women's career advancement. Unlike previous research (Lamki, 2007; Kemp & Madsen, 2014; Tlaiss, 2014) focused primarily on obvious discrimination, this study shows how patriarchal values become institutionalized in apparently unbiased organizational practices and operates through informal networks and power structures. Women leaders also reported systematic exclusion from critical informal decision-

making circles, particularly in the public sector. This exclusion is often justified through cultural norms about gender separation but effectively served to maintain male dominance in organizational power structures (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). The impact is significant because many vital decisions and opportunities were distributed through these informal networks, creating a parallel power structure that women found challenging to breach.

The data also show differences in professional development opportunities between sectors. Private sector organizations invested more resources in women's management and leadership development than their public sector counterparts. The private sector is more likely to have structured leadership development programs to support women's career advancement. These programs include formal mentoring arrangements, skill development workshops, and clear career progression pathways. In addition, the sector also shows greater flexibility in accommodating different leadership styles, where it is expected to evaluate performance based on measurable outcomes rather than adherence to traditional leadership stereotypes. However, even in the private sector women face complex challenges, often having to navigate through the minefield of conflicting expectations. They can be encouraged to develop management and leadership skills while simultaneously being expected to maintain traditional feminine behaviors. Public sector organizations especially lack structured development programs for women. Training programs are often general rather than targeted to management and leadership development. This lack of support is detrimental to women seeking advancement to senior positions.

The study reveals complex methods of cultural integration across sectors. Private sector organizations more successfully balance cultural sensitivity with professional development by creating women-only professional development spaces, implementing flexible work arrangements that respect family obligations, and develop formal mentoring programs. However, this balancing act sometimes reinforces gender segregation under the excuse of cultural sensitivity. In addition, organizations often struggle to distinguish between necessary cultural accommodation and unnecessary restrictions on women's professional growth (Jayachandran, 2021). These findings highlight continuing challenges in promoting women's careers in Oman. While private sector organizations generally showed more progressive practices, both private and public sector organizations continue to struggle to free themselves from deeply embedded cultural assumptions about gender roles.

In chapter 6, I addressed the research question, “*What factors are driving the entry of more women into management roles in Omani public and private sector organizations and why do some women succeed in progressing their careers while other do not?*” A study of interviews with twenty-one women in middle and lower-ranking positions reveals insights about the evolving of women's opportunities for management and leadership roles. The data shows different patterns of change occurring at societal, organizational, and individual levels while identifying challenges and developing opportunities.

First, at the societal level, the study reveals a generational shift in attitudes toward women's management and leadership roles, particularly obvious in the private sector. The younger generations demonstrate different perspectives on women in authority than older employees. This shift demonstrates in specific attitudes, behaviors, and organizational practices. The data shows that younger employees actively support and embrace women's leadership through supportive teamwork and environment, and young male managers demonstrate greater willingness to evaluate and promote women based on merit rather than gender, suggesting potential for enhanced progress in women's leadership advancement. Various factors drive this generational change. First, increasing exposure to global business practices through education and technology broadens younger people's perspectives on gender roles in the workplace (Qazi et al., 2021). Second, economic necessities make dual-income households more common and acceptable, leading to greater acceptance of women in professional roles. Third, government policies promoting women's education and employment create a new normal for younger generations who have grown up seeing women in professional and leading positions. However, the research also reveals that this generational shift occurs unequally across different sectors and regions. Urban areas, particularly Muscat, show more rapid development in gender role expectations, while traditional attitudes persist more in the rural areas. This is due to the openness culture that the country capital practice. In addition, the private sector young male employees demonstrate more progressive attitudes than the public sector, which shows slower adaptation to changing attitudes, where traditional hierarchies and gender roles remain more deeply rooted.

Second, at the individual level, the study further demonstrates that women develop strategies to balance traditional values with career ambitions. These strategies operate at multiple levels: At the professional level, women leaders demonstrate skills in adapting leadership styles to cultural contexts while maintaining effectiveness. They develop approaches that respect traditional values while advancing modern management practices. For example,

many successful women leaders maintain gender-appropriate workplace boundaries while building effective professional relationships and exercising authority. At the personal level, women show creativity in managing work-life balance expectations. Rather than simply accepting traditional role constraints, they negotiate new arrangements with family members, often involving spouses and extended family in supporting their career advancement (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). This clearly illustrates that women actively reshape traditional family dynamics rather than simply working within them. At the organizational level, women leaders strategically leverage both formal and informal power sources. They build alliances with male and female colleagues, carefully manage their professional image, and develop expertise in critical areas that enhance their organizational value. This strategic approach helps them overcome traditional barriers while respecting cultural sensitivities.

The data show the role of economic motivation as a powerful driver of change. Economic necessity often overcame traditional resistance to women's advancement. The research finds that financial factors influence family support for women's careers, increase acceptance of women in senior roles, and increase recognition of women's economic contributions. The financial independence appears as a force reshaping attitudes toward women's workforce participation and leadership roles. This economic imperative creates opportunities for women to involve actively in the work market and demonstrate their leadership capabilities through direct support from who are benefited from this economic gain such as family and spouse. Therefore, cultural barriers can be eliminated and change due through different factors such as economic necessities which is driving social acceptance of women's career advancement.

Third, at the organizational level, work-life balance is a critical area where organizational approaches and support significantly influence women's career progression (Allen et al., 2013). Private sector organizations show innovative solutions, such as: flexible working arrangements, remote work options, and comprehensive support for working mothers. These organizations recognize that enabling women to balance professional and family responsibilities effectively could enhance individual performance and organizational success. In contrast, despite their reputation for family-friendly policies, public sector organizations often maintain inflexible structures that undermine the work-life balance. These findings challenge those of a study by Belwal and Belwal (2017) suggesting the public sector is more sympathetic than the private sector to the needs of female employees. Indeed, it is suggested that public sector reform is needed to better support the careers of women..

The study illustrates that organizational adaptation patterns reveal variations between sectors supporting women's career advancement. Private sector organizations demonstrate greater flexibility in policies, merit-based evaluation systems, and structured development programs. These organizations often create innovative approaches to supporting women's leadership ambitions while respecting cultural values. In addition, the private sector demonstrates greater flexibility in accommodating women's leadership styles and creating supportive work environments. This adaptation is driven by market pressures and competition for talent, international business standards and practices, and recognition of the business benefits of diversity (McKinsey, 2020). Public sector organizations, however, maintain more traditional structures with inflexible hierarchies and limited adaptation to changing needs. This difference in organizational adaptability significantly affects women's opportunities for advancement and management and leadership role attainment.

Chapter 7 answers two research questions: *"What career lessons can be learned from the experiences, tactics and strategies of existing women leaders in large Omani public and private sector organizations that might benefit women seeking career progression?"* Through in-depth interviews with nine women in management and leadership roles in both sectors. The data illustrate that women's progress to success in management and leadership roles involves strategies for managing both professional demands and cultural expectations with forms of adaptation, resistance, and changes as women attain and preserve management and leadership roles in the public and private sectors.

The study finds that women successfully navigate the complex ground between traditional cultural expectations and modern workplace and leadership demands. Women leaders actively and strategically shape their professional environments while maintaining cultural acceptability. Rather than directly challenging cultural norms, they develop strategies to build and maintain their leadership positions while respecting cultural sensitivities. In addition, women leaders develop soft approaches to building and exercising authority that respect cultural norms while advancing organizational objectives. For example, they often create innovative ways to lead teams that combine traditional Omani values of respect and hierarchy with modern management practices focusing on empowerment and participation. Moreover, they carefully manage their professional relationships, strategically deploying cultural capital while gradually expanding their influence. They demonstrate skill in building alliances across genders, often finding ways to work effectively with male colleagues while maintaining appropriate cultural boundaries. These findings challenge previous studies

(Hakim, 2022; Alsubhi et al., 2017; Aldossari and Calvard, 2022) and assumptions about the limitations imposed by gender segregation norms, showing how women leaders actively create new ways of working within cultural constraints.

The research finds resistance to women's leadership, and that women have developed strategies to overcome such resistance. The resistance operates at multiple levels - individual, organizational, and societal - requiring women leaders to create multilayered responses. At the individual level, women face challenges to their authority from male and female subordinates, often rooted in deeply held beliefs about gender roles and leadership (Abadi et al., 2020). They respond by developing leadership styles that combine clear authority with cultural sensitivity, often drawing on traditional values to legitimize their leadership roles. Moreover, women in senior positions often find greater acceptance and support from younger colleagues, particularly in the private sector. This generational shift is accompanied by evolving expectations about leadership styles and workplace relationships.

At the organizational level, women encounter obvious forms of resistance to their authority. This includes exclusion from informal decision-making networks, higher performance standards compared to male colleagues, and persistent questioning of their capabilities (Eagly and Karau's, 2002). Successful women leaders respond by building strong professional credentials, developing expertise in critical areas, and creating their networks of support and influence. They often want specific projects or initiatives where they could demonstrate clear value to the organization, building credibility through measurable achievements. This navigation involves careful management of both professional relationships and public perceptions. In the public sector, women leaders face more structured resistance, often embedded in organizational hierarchies and formal procedures. They develop leadership styles that emphasize competence and professionalism while maintaining cultural authenticity. While facing similar challenges, private sector leaders find more flexibility in developing their leadership approaches. They often create innovative solutions that balance professional requirements with cultural expectations.

The research finds that family support is crucial to enabling women to succeed in leadership roles. Supportive family relationships are essential to women's advancement in management and leadership positions. This support is obvious in various ways, from practical assistance with domestic responsibilities to emotional encouragement and professional networking (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). This finding about family support systems

challenges traditional narratives about family obligations as primary barriers to women's advancement. Instead, they suggest that family relationships can be actively reconstructed to support women's leadership aspirations. Successful women leaders negotiate and adapt processes within their families that create new understandings of gender roles and responsibilities. These negotiations frequently result in more equitable distributions of home and family responsibilities and more significant family investment in women's career success.

Having examined the research findings across public and private sectors, I now address the main research question motivating this thesis: *how and to what degree are Omani public and private sector organizations empowering women to take up management and leadership roles?* The short answer is that the public and private sectors present different opportunities and challenges, each playing a crucial role in determining women's professional paths. While women have made considerable progress in educational achievement, workforce participation, and legal rights, there remains a gap in women's representation in the top roles, obvious obstacles for women who achieved top positions, and unclear career advancement paths with few differences between the two sectors. In addition, the findings reveal a complex relationship between organizational structures, culture, and individual activity that demands multi-level solutions.

The public sector is known as the women-friendly sector as it offers a stable and supportive environment for women's professional growth that is acceptable culturally, particularly in fields like education and healthcare. Women in these fields enjoy a level of societal acceptance and professional respect that encourages their participation (Alghamdi, 2022). However, this alignment with cultural expectations limits their representation in senior leadership positions in these fields and other public sector organizations, as hierarchical structures and deep-rooted patriarchal norms present significant barriers to advancement in this sector. Often dominated by men, informal decision-making networks further restrict women's ability to influence critical organizational outcomes. These barriers emphasise the need for changes to public sector practices to ensure that women are not only participants but also leaders in decision-making processes. In addition, public sector organizations continue to use traditional structures that adapt to societal expectations. Management and Leadership development programs, where they exist, are typically general in scope and fail to address the specific needs of women ambitious to higher and senior roles.

Public sector organizations require fundamental reforms in their promotion and evaluation systems. Reform should begin with creating clear criteria for leadership selection, establishing formal mentoring programs, and implementing regular management and leadership training opportunities. These changes must address visible barriers, such as a lack of clear promotion criteria, women's decision exclusion, and invisible obstacles, like informal male networks that influence career advancement decisions. Public organizations should establish specific targets for women's representation at senior levels, supported by accountability measures ensuring genuine progress rather than symbolic change.

In contrast, the private sector offers a more dynamic environment where merit-based evaluations and competitive pressures create opportunities for women to advance in their careers based on their capabilities, not gender. Many private organizations have implemented special leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, and flexible work arrangements supporting women's career progression. However, these opportunities often come with implicit challenges. Women are frequently expected to balance traditional cultural expectations with professional demands, navigating dual expectations that can be exhausting, limiting their ambitions and unfairly judging their work. Moreover, while progressive, the private sector also continues subtle forms of bias, such as evaluating women's leadership styles through a cultural lens that often prioritizes traditional feminine behaviors over competence and innovation, indicating the need for a broader cultural shift across society.

Cross-sector collaboration between the public and private sectors is an essential strategy for advancing women's management and leadership opportunities and eliminating the barriers to women's career advances. Sectors should share successful practices and lessons learned while working together to address common challenges. This includes creating joint development programs, sharing resources, and establishing common standards for women's advancement. Such collaboration can enhance progress. Obviously, government policies have established a strong framework for promoting gender equality in the country and provide a foundation for social changes. These policies reflect a commitment to equal opportunities for women in all aspects of society. However, the gap between policy and practice remains a significant challenge in the working sectors. While formal structures support equality, informal practices continue to invisible barriers that hinder women's career progression. Regular audits of organizational practices and accountability mechanisms are essential to ensure that policy reforms translate into real-world outcomes. Therefore, a national women's committee could

play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges and implementing solutions. Such a committee would monitor the application of gender equality policies across sectors, identify barriers, and recommend solutions to improve women's participation in society and representation in management and leadership. Additionally, this committee could serve as a compound for cultural change by promoting women's roles in the workplace and in leadership positions, supporting changes, and promoting societal acceptance of women in management and leadership roles.

Generational shifts in attitudes toward women's leadership represent a promising driver of change. Younger generations, particularly in the private sector, are more willing to evaluate and promote women based on merit than traditional gender norms. This shift is driven by several factors, including exposure to global business practices, economic necessities normalizing dual-income households, and government policies promoting women's education and workforce participation. Therefore, engaging younger leaders in shaping inclusive organizational cultures and policies in the public sector can accelerate this progress and ensure these shifts translate into tangible outcomes for women's career advancement.

8.4 Theoretical contribution

My research contributes to theory development in three main ways. First, it demonstrates that Bourdieusian social theory can be usefully extended to help in explaining the resistances encountered and progress made by women in management and leadership in conservative culture like that of Oman and other countries of the Arab middle east. While Bourdieu's theory has been widely applied in Western contexts, this study proves its relevance in a developing country where gender and patriarchal structures shape leadership opportunities. The study shows that capital accumulation alone does not guarantee women's leadership advancement unless recognised and legitimated through strategic alignment with dominant leadership norms.

Secondly, the thesis helps in refining the concept of habitus by adding gender as a primary axis of power. The habitus of Omani women is shaped by deep-rooted patriarchal expectations, which often limit their career aspirations. But through education, engagement, and policy change, many women have developed what might be called an "adaptive habitus", enabling them to navigate between traditional expectations and modern leadership role requirements. The adaptive habitus suggests that women strategically modify their behaviour, leadership styles and career decisions to gain legitimacy in male-dominated professional spaces while aligning with cultural expectations. Therefore, habitus does not necessarily lead to the passive

reproduction of existing norms and structures but might actively promote negotiation, adaptation, and resistance to dominant norms.

Thirdly, the thesis contributes to the refinement of Bourdieu's field theory by showing how power, gender and cultural legitimacy intersect to shape women's leadership opportunities. Organizational fields are contested spaces wherein women must navigate patriarchal norms, gender biases and exclusion from informal leadership networks if they are to increase their power influence. This demands high levels of reflexivity on the part of female managers and leaders of the type previously shown to exist by Maclean et al. (2012b) among culturally disadvantaged men. The practice of leadership is not static but dynamic because new policies, social movements and global influences are gradually changing gendered power structures and creating new opportunities for women's advancement. Reflexive women practitioners can ride these waves, potentially, incrementally leading to a permanent change in social arrangements in which women are readily accepted as managers and leaders of others, including men.

8.5 Limitations of the study

The thesis has limitations that require acknowledgment. These limitations include methodological, contextual, and practical elements, each affecting various aspects of the study process and results.

Methodological limitations

The qualitative nature of the thesis, while providing rich and detailed understandings, presents limitations in terms of generalizability. The research is based mainly on in-depth interviews with 38 participants, including women leaders and HR managers. While this sample size is suitable for qualitative research and provides rich data, it may not fully represent the experiences of all women in management and leadership positions across Omani workplaces. Furthermore, the study was conducted over a specific period, and participant experiences and perceptions cannot, therefore, adequately capture and examine the dynamics of social change in Omani workplaces.

Being a male researcher interviewing women about gender issues in a conservative society is another potential source of limitation. It may have influenced the comfort level of some participants when discussing specific gender-related issues. Some participants might have moderated their responses or been hesitant to share particular experiences with a male researcher, particularly regarding sensitive cultural or gender-specific challenges. In addition,

cultural sensitivity around gender issues in Omani society may have led to some self-censorship by participants. Despite assurances of confidentiality, participants might have been cautious about expressing views that could be seen as challenging traditional values. This potential self-censorship might have affected the completeness and openness of some responses.

Contextual and sample-related limitations

The study's timing matched with significant economic and social change in Oman, including the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic, changing Sultan, and ongoing economic diversification efforts. While this timing provided interesting insights into change processes, it also suggests that some findings may be specific to this particular period of transition rather than representing stable long-term patterns.

The study focuses primarily on women who had successfully achieved management and leadership roles, potentially creating a bias in the findings. The experiences of women who attempted but failed to reach management and leadership roles or were chosen out of leadership paths are not fully represented. This limitation means that some barriers to women's career advancement might be underrepresented in the findings. Furthermore, some industries were underrepresented within the organizational sample, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields like engineering and construction. This limitation affects the comprehensiveness of results about challenges and opportunities for women's career advancement across sectors.

Language and cultural translation limitations

Translating concepts and experiences between Arabic and English presented challenges in maintaining the full cultural and language tone of participants' responses. While care was taken in translation and analysis, it is possible that some understated cultural meanings may have been lost in the process.

8.6 Proposals for future research

The research findings suggest several areas for future investigation that could advance the understanding of women's management and leadership career development in Oman and similar cultural contexts such as the Middle East. These recommendations emerge from the limitations identified in the current study and the new questions its findings raise.

Examining the connection of generational change and leadership opportunities for women. While this study identifies differences in attitudes between younger and older generations, a more detailed investigation is needed to understand how these generational

changes affect organizational practices and career opportunities for women. Such research could explore how younger leaders, both male and female, approach gender diversity in leadership and how their attitudes translate into practical support for women's career advancement. This investigation becomes important as Oman's demographic change brings more young people into leadership positions.

The role of family support systems in enabling women's leadership success emerges as a finding that requires further investigation. Future research could explore how family dynamics evolve to support women's career advancement, examining the specific mechanisms through which families adapt traditional roles and expectations. This research could investigate how dual-career couples negotiate domestic responsibilities, how extended family networks contribute to women's career success, and how different family structures affect women's management and leadership opportunities. Such studies could provide valuable understandings for developing more effective work-life balance policies and support systems.

Cross-cultural comparative research emerges as another field to be investigated. While this study focuses on Oman, comparative studies with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries could illustrate how different approaches to modernization affect women's management and leadership opportunities. Such research could examine how changing interpretations of cultural and religious values influence women's career advancement and how different policy approaches affect outcomes for women leaders. This comparative perspective could help identify best practices and innovative solutions applicable to Middle Eastern cultures and countries.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139-158.
- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441-464.
- Adams, R. B., & Kirchmaier, T. (2016). Women on boards in finance and STEM industries. *American Economic Review*, 106(5), 277-281.
- Adams, S. M., Gupta, A., & Leeth, J. D. (2009). Are female executives over-represented in precarious leadership positions? *British Journal of Management*, 20(1), 1-12.
- Adkins, L. (2004). Introduction: Feminism, Bourdieu and after. *The Sociological Review*, 52(2), 3-18.
- Al Abri, K. (2015). Higher education policy architecture and policymaking in the Sultanate of Oman: Towards a critical understanding. Doctoral dissertation, The University of Queensland. The University of Queensland eSpace. https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:348658/s4254715_phd_submission.pdf
- Al Farsi, Y. (2022). Women's leadership in Oman: A sociological perspective. *Sultan Qaboos University Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 33(2), 45-62.
- Al-Ahmadi, H. (2005). Leadership and development: A practical vision to activate the participation of Saudi women in decision-making. Workshop presented at Women and the Millennium, organized by the United Nations Development Program, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- Al-Ahmadi, H. (2011). Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia. *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), 149-166.
- Al-Asfour, A., Tlaiss, H. A., Khan, S. A., & Rajasekar, J. (2017). Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement. *Career Development International*, 22(2), 184-199.
- Al-Azri, K. (2012). *Social and gender inequality in Oman: The power of religious and political tradition*. Routledge.
- Al-Barwani, T., & Albeely, T. S. (2007). The Omani family: Strengths and challenges. *Marriage & Family Review*, 41(1-2), 119-142.
- Al-Barwani, T., Chapman, D. W., & Ameen, H. (2009). Strategic brain drain: Implications for higher education in Oman. *Higher Education Policy*, 22(4), 415-432.
- Alhammedi, Y. (2022). Women's leadership in the Gulf: Breaking barriers and building bridges. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 12(1), 45-67.
- Al-Khalili, M. (2009). *Oman's foreign policy: Foundation and practice*. Praeger Security International.
- Al-Lamki, S. M. (1999). Paradigm shift: A perspective on Omani women in management in the Sultanate of Oman. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 2(2), 1-18.

- Al-Lamki, S. M. (2002). Higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: The challenge of access, equity and privatization. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(1), 75-86.
- Al-Lamki, S. M. (2007). Feminizing leadership in Arab societies: The perspectives of Omani female leaders. *Women in Management Review*, 22(1), 49-67.
- Al-lawatia, H. (2011). Women and economic development in the Sultanate of Oman. *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(1), 33-46.
- Allen, C. H., & Rigsbee II, W. L. (2014). *Oman under Qaboos: From coup to constitution, 1970-1996*. Routledge.
- Al-Nanhdhi, A. (2016). Omanization and the labour market: A study of labor policy and practice in Oman. *International Journal of Management and Applied Science*, 2(9), 132-134.
- Al-Sadi, R., Belwal, R., & Al-Badi, R. (2011). Woman entrepreneurship in the Al-Batinah region of Oman: An identification of the barriers. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 12(3), 58-75.
- Alsharif, S. A. (2018). The challenges associated with women career development at the state universities in Saudi Arabia: A ground theory approach. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 6(2), 18-30.
- Al-Sidani, Y. M. (1984). Women in Oman. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 8(2), 61-79.
- Al-Siyabi, H. (2016). Women's representation in the public sector of Oman. *Sultan Qaboos University Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 7(2), 85-96.
- Al-Sudairy, H. (2018). Modern Woman in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Rights, Challenges and Achievements. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 14(3), 351-353.
- Alvesson, M., & Sköldbberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Amzat, I. H., Al-Ani, W. T. K., Ismail, O. H., & Al Omairi, T. (2020). Women's empowerment and its effect on community development in Oman: predictive model and indicators for best practices. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 40(1/2), 114-132.
- Amzat, I. H., Al-Ani, W. T. K., Ismail, O. H., & Al Omairi, T. (2020). Women's empowerment and its effect on community development in Oman: Predictive model and indicators for best practices. *Journal of Community Development*, 51(2), 144-165.
- Anyikwa, V. A., Chiarelli-Helminiak, C. M., Hodge, D. M., & Wells-Wilbon, R. (2015). Women empowering women. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 51(4), 723-737.
- Arar, K. (2018). *Arab women in management and leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Aronson, J. (1994). A pragmatic view of thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 2(1), 1-3.
- Babbie, E. (2015). *The practice of social research* (14th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Barnett, A. (2020). Women's leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 10(1), 75-93.

- Bear, J. B., Cushenbery, L., London, M., & Sherman, G. D. (2010). Performance feedback, power retention, and the gender gap in leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(3), 545-556.
- Becker, S., Bryman, A., Ferguson, H., & Ferguson, T. H. (Eds.). (2012). *Understanding research for social policy and social work: themes, methods and approaches*. Policy Press.
- Belwal, R., & Belwal, S. (2014). Employers' perception of women workers in Oman and the challenges they face. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(20), 2798-2828.
- Belwal, S., & Belwal, R. (2017). Women entrepreneurship in Oman: Some barriers to success. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 23(6), 952-976.
- Benard, S., & Correll, S. J. (2010). Normative discrimination and the motherhood penalty. *Gender & Society*, 24(5), 616-646.
- Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1998). Covered by equality: The gender subtext of organizations. *Organization Studies*, 19(5), 787-805.
- Berg, E., Barry, J., & Chandler, J. (2012). Changing leadership and gender in public sector organizations. *Work, Employment and Society*, 26(4), 572-588.
- Berheide, C. W., Watanabe, M., Falci, C., Borland, E., & Anderson, C. (2014). Gender, type of higher education institution, and faculty work-life integration in the United States. In *Gender Transformation in the Academy* (pp. 991-109). Emerald Group Publishing.
- Billing, Y. D. (2011). Are women in management victims of the phantom of the male norm? *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(3), 298-317.
- Billing, Y. D., & Alvesson, M. (2000). Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: A critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 7(3), 144-157.
- Blake-Beard, S., Bayne, M. L., Crosby, F. J., & Muller, C. B. (2011). Matching by race and gender in mentoring relationships: Keeping our eyes on the prize. *Journal of Social Issues*, 67(3), 622-643.
- Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2017). The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), 789-865.
- Blum, T. C., Fields, D. L., & Goodman, J. S. (1994). Organization-level determinants of women in management. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(2), 241-268.
- Bosak, J., & Sczesny, S. (2011). Exploring the dynamics of incongruent beliefs about women and leaders. *British Journal of Management*, 22(2), 254-269.
- Boucher, C. (1997). How women socially construct leadership in organizations: A study using memory work. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 4(3), 149-158.
- Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon, J.-C., & Passeron, J.-C. (1991). *The craft of sociology: Epistemological preliminaries* (Originally published 1968). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 14-25.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature. *Columbia University Press*.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brass, D. J. (1985). Men's and women's networks: A study of interaction patterns and influence in an organization. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28(2), 327-343.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). Routledge.
- Brenner, O. C., Tomkiewicz, J., & Schein, V. E. (1989). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics revisited. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(3), 662-669.
- Brinia, V., Vasilaki, E., & Petridou, A. (2021). Developing women's leadership identity: The role of mentoring in Greek businesses. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 36(4), 487-508.
- Broadbridge, A., & Hearn, J. (2008). Gender and management: New directions in research and continuing patterns in practice. *British Journal of Management*, 19(s1), S38-S49.
- Broadbridge, A., & Simpson, R. (2011). 25 years on: Reflecting on the past and looking to the future in gender and management research. *British Journal of Management*, 22(3), 470-483.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*. 5th edn. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2015) *Business research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Burgess, Z. (2013). Breaking the glass ceiling: Women in corporate leadership. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 20(3), 232-251.
- Burgess, Z., & Tharenou, P. (2002). Women board directors: Characteristics of the few. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 37(1), 39-49.
- Busher, H. (2005). Ethics of research in education. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Research methods in the social sciences* (pp. 73-79). Sage.
- Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713.
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Cahill, A. J. (2000). Foucault, rape, and the construction of the feminine body. *Hypatia*, 15(1), 43-63.
- Carbajal, J. (2018). Women and work: Ascending to leadership positions. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 28(1), 12-27.
- Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2011). Gender and leadership. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of leadership* (pp. 103-117). Sage.
- Castilla, E. J. (2008). Gender, race, and meritocracy in organizational careers. *American Journal of Sociology*, 113(6), 1479-1526.
- Catalyst. (2019). *Women in management: Quick take*. Catalyst.
- Central Bank of Oman. (2024). *Annual report 2023*. Central Bank of Oman.
- Chapman, J. B. (1975). Comparison of male and female leadership styles. *Academy of Management Journal*, 18(3), 645-650.
- Cho, Y., Ghosh, R., Sun, J. Y., & McLean, G. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Current perspectives on Asian women in leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123.
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Sage.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2003). *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Collis, J., & Hussey, R. (2014). *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students* (4th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

- Conaty, F. J. (2022). Abductive research in management control: Making the case for case research. *Accounting, Finance & Governance Review*, 28(1), 1-26.
- Cook, A., & Glass, C. (2014). Women and top leadership positions: Towards an institutional analysis. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21(1), 91-103.
- Cornelius, N., & Skinner, D. (2008). The careers of senior men and women – A capabilities theory perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 19(s1), S141-S149.
- Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1297-1339.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Debebe, G. (2011). Creating a safe environment for women's leadership transformation. *Journal of Management Education*, 35(5), 679-712.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2008). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. Sage Publications.
- Derks, B., Van Laar, C., & Ellemers, N. (2016). The queen bee phenomenon: Why women leaders distance themselves from junior women. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 456-469.
- Devanna, M. A. (1987). Women in management: Progress and promise. *Human Resource Management*, 26(4), 469-481.
- Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016). Making the invisible visible: A cross-sector analysis of gender-based leadership barriers. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 27(2), 181-206.
- Dobbins, G. H., & Platz, S. J. (1986). Sex differences in leadership: How real are they? *Academy of Management Review*, 11(1), 118-127.
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L. E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553-560.
- Durbin, S. (2011). Creating knowledge through networks: A gender perspective. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 18(1), 90-112.
- Durbin, S., & Tomlinson, J. (2014). Female part-time managers: Careers, mentors and role models. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 21(4), 308-320.

- Durbin, S., Lopes, A., & Warren, S. (2020). Challenging male dominance through the substantive representation of women: the case of an online women's mentoring platform. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 35(2), 215-231.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2003). The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14(6), 807-834.
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business Press.
- Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (1990). Gender and leadership style: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108(2), 233-256.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598.
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2011). Social role theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 458-476). Sage.
- Eagly, A. H., Makhijani, M. G., & Klonsky, B. G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111(1), 3-22.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. (2012). *Management research*. Sage Publications.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2015). *Management and business research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Eccles, J. S. (1994). Understanding women's educational and occupational choices: Applying the Eccles et al. model of achievement-related choices. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18(4), 585-609.
- Eickelman, D. F. (2002). *The Middle East and Central Asia: An anthropological approach* (4th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Elamin, A. M., & Tlaiss, H. A. (2015). Exploring the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and organizational justice in the Islamic Saudi Arabian context. *Employee Relations*, 37(1), 2-29.
- Ellemers, N., Van den Heuvel, H., de Gilder, D., Maass, A., & Bonvini, A. (2012). The underrepresentation of women in science: Differential commitment or the queen bee syndrome? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 51(1), 131-148.
- Ely, R. J., & Meyerson, D. E. (2000). Theories of gender in organizations: A new approach to organizational analysis and change. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 22, 103-151.
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474-493.
- Ezzedeen, S. R., & Ritchey, K. G. (2008). The man behind the woman: A qualitative study of the spousal support received and valued by executive women. *Journal of Family Issues*, 29(9), 1107-1135.

- Ferner, A., Almond, P., & Colling, T. (2005). Institutional theory and the cross-national transfer of employment policy: The case of 'workforce diversity' in US multinationals. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(3), 304-321.
- Forbes. (2022). *Top 100 business leaders in the Gulf states*. Forbes Middle East.
- Gallant, M., & Pounder, J. S. (2008). The employment of female nationals in the United Arab Emirates (UAE): An analysis of opportunities and barriers. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 1(1), 26-33.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15-31.
- Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(1), 51-63.
- Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2020). Performative contortions: How White women and people of colour navigate elite leadership roles. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(6), 1232-1252.
- Goodman, J. S., Fields, D. L., & Blum, T. C. (2003). Cracks in the glass ceiling: In what kinds of organizations do women make it to the top? *Group & Organization Management*, 28(4), 475-501.
- Goveas, S., & Aslam, N. (2011). A role and contributions of women in the Sultanate of Oman. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(3), 232-239.
- Greene, J. C. (2010). Knowledge accumulation: Three views on the nature and role of knowledge in social science. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research: Readings in reflexive methodology and transformative practice* (pp. 63-77). Routledge.
- Grenfell, M. (2014). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key concepts* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research', *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2(163-194), p. 105.
- Hakim, C. (2006). Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 34(3), 279-294.
- Hallward, M. C., & Bekdash-Muellers, H. (2020). Women's leadership in Oman: An intersectional and transnational perspective. *Journal of Women in the Middle East*, 16(2), 45-67.
- Hallward, M., & Bekdash-Muellers, H. (2019). Success and agency: Localizing women's leadership in Oman. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 34(7), 606-618.
- Harding, N., & Ford, J. (2018). Is the 'F'-word still dirty? A past, present and future of/for feminist and gender studies in Organization. *Organization Studies*, 39(9), 1023-1043.
- Harel, G., Tzafirir, S., & Baruch, Y. (2003). Achieving organizational effectiveness through promotion of women into managerial positions: HRM practice focus. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(2), 247-263.

- Harriman, A. (2010). Women's rights and gender equality in Islam. *Gender and Development*, 18(3), 399-409.
- Harvey, C., & Maclean, M. (2008). Capital theory and the dynamics of elite business networks in Britain and France. *The Sociological Review*, 56(s1), 103-120.
- Harvey, C., Maclean, M., & Price, M. (2020). Executive remuneration and the limits of disclosure as an instrument of corporate governance. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 69, 102089.
- Harvey, C., Maclean, M., Gordon, J., & Shaw, E. (2011). Andrew Carnegie and the foundations of contemporary entrepreneurial philanthropy. *Business History*, 53(3), 425-450.
- Harvey, C., Yang, R., Mueller, F., & Maclean, M. (2020). Bourdieu, strategy and the field of power. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 73, 102199.
- Haslam, S. A., Ryan, M. K., Kulich, C., Trojanowski, G., & Atkins, C. (2010). Investing with prejudice: The relationship between women's presence on company boards and objective and subjective measures of company performance. *British Journal of Management*, 21(2), 484-497.
- Haynes, K. (2012). Reflexivity in qualitative research. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges* (pp. 72-89). Sage.
- Heilman, E. (2012). Sex bias in work settings: The Lack of Fit model. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 5, 269-298.
- Heilman, M. E. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 657-674.
- Heilman, M. E., & Parks-Stamm, E. J. (2007). Gender stereotypes in the workplace: Obstacles to women's career progress. In S. J. Corell (Ed.), *Social Psychology of Gender: Advances in Group Processes* (pp. 47-77). JAI Press.
- Heilman, M. E., Wallen, A. S., Fuchs, D., & Tamkins, M. M. (2004). Penalties for success: Reactions to women who succeed at male gender-typed tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 416-427.
- Helmich, D. L., & Erzen, P. E. (1975). Leadership style and leader needs. *Academy of Management Journal*, 18(2), 397-402.
- Hillman, A. J., Shropshire, C., & Cannella Jr., A. A. (2007). Organizational predictors of women on corporate boards. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(4), 941-952.
- Højgaard, L. (2002). Tracing differentiation in gendered leadership: An analysis of differences in gender composition in top management in business, politics and the civil service. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 9(1), 15-38.
- Hoobler, J. M., Masterson, C. R., Nkomo, S. M., & Michel, E. J. (2018). The business case for women leaders: Meta-analysis, research critique, and path forward. *Journal of Management*, 44(6), 2473-2499.
- Hourani, G. F., & Carswell, J. (1995). *Arab seafaring in the Indian Ocean in ancient and early medieval times*. Princeton University Press.

- Hoyt, C. L., & Burnette, J. L. (2013). Gender bias in leader evaluations: Merging implicit theories and role congruity perspectives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(10), 1306-1319.
- Huang, J., Krivkovich, A., Starikova, I., Yee, L., & Zanoschi, D. (2019). *Women in the workplace 2019*. McKinsey & Company.
- Hutchings, K., Metcalfe, B. D., & Cooper, B. K. (2012). Gender, globalization and development: A re-evaluation of the nature of women's global work. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(9), 1763-1787.
- Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *Academy of Management Review*, 18(1), 56-87.
- Ibarra, H., Carter, N. M., & Silva, C. (2010). Why men still get more promotions than women. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(9), 80-126.
- Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2013). Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(9), 60-66.
- IFC (International Finance Corporation). (2005). *Gender and growth assessment for UAE*. World Bank Group. Available at <https://documents.worldbank.org>
- ILO (International Labour Organization). (2019). *A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all*. International Labour Organization. Available at https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_674831/lang--en/index.htm
- ILO (International Labour Organization). (2023). *World employment and social outlook: Trends 2023*. International Labour Organization. Available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/trends/lang--en/index.htm>
- IMF (International Monetary Fund). (2013). *Labor market reforms to boost employment and productivity in the GCC*. International Monetary Fund. Available at <https://www.imf.org>
- Implementation Follow Up Unit 2040. (2023). *Vision 2040 progress report*. Sultanate of Oman. <https://www.oman2040.om/?lang=en>
- Jamali, D., Sidani, Y., & Safieddine, A. (2006). Constraints facing working women in Lebanon: An insider view. *Women in Management Review*, 21(5), 421-437.
- Javidan, M., Bullough, A., & Dibble, R. (2016). Mind the gap: Gender differences in global leadership self-efficacies. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 30(1), 59-73.
- Johnson, H. L. (2017). Breaking through the glass ceiling: Women in management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54(3), 461-483.
- Jones, J., & Ridout, N. (2015). *A history of modern Oman*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kalev, A., Dobbin, F., & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review*, 71(4), 589-617.

- Kandpal, E., Baylis, K., & Arends-Kuenning, M. (2013). Measuring the effect of a community-level program on women's empowerment outcomes: Evidence from India. *World Bank Economic Review*, 27(3), 425-457.
- Karam, C. M., & Afiouni, F. (2014). Localizing women's experiences in academia: Multilevel factors at play in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(4), 500-538.
- Kattara, H. (2005). Career challenges for female managers in Egyptian hotels. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17(3), 238-251.
- Kechichian, J. A. (2007). Oman: The Islamic tradition. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 30(3), 65-81.
- Kemp, L. J., & Madsen, S. R. (2014). Oman's labour force: An analysis of gender in management. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 33(8), 789-805.
- Kemp, L. J., & Zhao, F. (2022). Women's leadership in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Historical and contemporary perspectives. In *Research handbook on women's leadership* (pp. 257-274). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Kent, R. L., & Moss, S. E. (1994). Effects of sex and gender role on leader emergence. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(5), 1335-1346.
- King, B. G. (2008). A political mediation model of corporate response to social movement activism. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(3), 395-421.
- King, E. B. (2008). The effect of bias on the advancement of working mothers: Disentangling legitimate concerns from inaccurate stereotypes as predictors of advancement in organizations. *Human Relations*, 61(12), 1677-1711.
- King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257-270). Sage.
- Kossek, E. E., Su, R., & Wu, L. (2017). "Opting out" or "pushed out"? Integrating perspectives on women's career equality for gender inclusion and interventions. *Journal of Management*, 43(1), 228-254.
- Kotterman, J. (2006). Leadership versus management: What's the difference? *The Journal for Quality and Participation*, 29(2), 13-17.
- Krais, B. (1993). Gender and symbolic violence: Female oppression in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice. In C. Calhoun, E. LiPuma, & M. Postone (Eds.), *Bourdieu: Critical perspectives* (pp. 156-177). University of Chicago Press.
- Kumra, S., & Vinnicombe, S. (2008). A study of the promotion to partner process in a professional services firm: How women are disadvantaged. *British Journal of Management*, 19(s1), S65-S74.
- Lauring, J. (2013). International diversity management: Global ideals and local responses. *British Journal of Management*, 24(2), 211-224.

- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 97-128). Sage.
- Litzky, B., & Greenhaus, J. (2007). The relationship between gender and aspirations to senior management. *Career Development International*, 12(7), 637-659.
- Liu, H., Cutcher, L., & Grant, D. (2015). Doing authenticity: The gendered construction of authentic leadership. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 22(3), 237-255.
- Lopes, A., Durbin, S., Neugebauer, J., & Warren, S. (2015). *Mentoring professional women in aviation and aerospace*. CESR, University of the West of England.
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1982). Feminism, Marxism, method, and the state: An agenda for theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7(3), 515-544.
- Maclean, M., & Harvey, C. (2019). Pierre Bourdieu and elites: Making the hidden visible. in SR Clegg & M Pina e Cunha (eds), *Management, Organizations and Contemporary Social Theory* (pp. 98-114). Routledge.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Chia, R. (2012a). Sensemaking, storytelling and the legitimization of elite business careers. *Human Relations*, 65(1), 17-40.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Chia, R. (2012b). Reflexive practice and the making of elite business careers. *Management Learning*, 43(4), 385-404.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Clegg, S. R. (2016). Conceptualizing historical organization studies. *Academy of Management Review*, 41(4), 609-632.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Press, J. (2006). *Business elites and corporate governance in France and the UK*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., & Stringfellow, L. (2017). Narrative, metaphor and the subjective understanding of historic identity transition. *Business History*, 59(8), 1218-1241.
- Maclean, M., Harvey, C., Golant, B. D., & Sillince, J. A. A. (2020). The role of innovation narratives in accomplishing organizational ambidexterity. *Strategic Organization*, 18(4), 655-680.
- Madsen, S. R. (2010). The experiences of UAE women leaders in developing leadership early in life. *Feminist Formations*, 22(3), 75-95.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Mavin, S., & Grandy, G. (2016). Women elite leaders doing respectable business femininity: How privilege is conferred, contested and defended through the body. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 23(4), 379-396.
- Mavin, S., Grandy, G., & Williams, J. (2014). Experiences of women elite leaders doing gender: Intra-gender micro-violence between women. *British Journal of Management*, 25(3), 439-455.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- McElwee, G., & Al-Riyami, R. (2003). Women entrepreneurs in Oman: Some barriers to success. *Career Development International*, 8(7), 339-346.

- McNay, L. (1999). Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1), 95-117.
- McNay, L. (2000). *Gender and agency: Reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory*. Polity Press.
- Merchant, K. (2012). How men and women differ: Gender differences in communication styles, influence tactics, and leadership styles. CMC Senior Theses, Paper 513.
- Metcalfe, B. D. (2007). Gender and human resource management in the Middle East. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1), 54-74.
- Metcalfe, B. D. (2008). Women, management and globalization in the Middle East. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 83(1), 85-100.
- Metcalfe, B. D. (2011). Women, empowerment and development in Arab Gulf States: A critical appraisal of governance, culture and national human resource development (HRD) frameworks. *Human Resource Development International*, 14(2), 131-148.
- Metcalfe, B. D. (2021). Women's leadership in the Middle East. In *Research handbook on women's leadership* (pp. 275-292). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Metcalfe, B. D., & Mimouni, F. (2021). Gender, management and leadership in the Middle East. In *The Oxford handbook of management in emerging markets* (pp. 343-366). Oxford University Press.
- Metcalfe, B. D., & Woodhams, C. (2008). Critical perspectives in diversity and equality management. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 23(6), 377-381.
- Metcalfe, B. D., & Woodhams, C. (2012). Introduction: New directions in gender, diversity and organization theorizing – re-imagining feminist post-colonialism, transnationalism and geographies of power. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(2), 123-140.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Miller, T. (2021). Gender inequality in leadership: A critical analysis. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(2), 503-530.
- Ministry of Education & World Bank. (2020). *Education sector analysis in Oman: System performance and student learning*. Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org>
- Ministry of Education. (2022). *Annual education statistics 2022*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.moe.gov.om>
- Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs. (2023). *Religious freedom report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mara.gov.om/home.aspx>
- Ministry of Energy and Minerals. (2024). *Energy sector report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://mem.gov.om/en-us/Media-Center/Reports>
- Ministry of Finance. (2016). *State budget report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://mof.gov.om>

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2023). *Annual diplomatic report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mofa.gov.om>
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2024). *Higher education statistics bulletin*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mohe.gov.om>
- Ministry of Industry. (2014). *Industrial development report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.moind.gov.om>
- Ministry of Information. (2023). *Oman yearbook 2023*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.omaninfo.om>
- Ministry of Interior. (2023). *Administrative divisions report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.moi.gov.om>
- Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs. (2023). *Legal system overview*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mjla.gov.om>
- Ministry of National Economy. (2003). *Women in the Omani economy*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mone.gov.om>
- Ministry of Social Development. (2023). *Social welfare programs report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.mosd.gov.om>
- Ministry of Work. (2023). *Annual labor market report*. Sultanate of Oman. Available at <https://www.manpower.gov.om>
- Mirchandani, K. (1999). Feminist insight on gendered work: New directions in research on women and entrepreneurship. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 6(4), 224-235.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2013). *Modernizing women: Gender and social change in the Middle East*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Mohr, G., & Wolfram, H. J. (2008). Leadership and effectiveness in the context of gender: The role of leaders' verbal behaviour. *British Journal of Management*, 19(1), 4-16.
- Moi, T. (1991). Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist theory and Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture. *New Literary History*, 22(4), 1017-1049.
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., & Rudman, L. A. (2010). Disruptions in women's self-promotion: The backlash avoidance model. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34(2), 186-202.
- Mostafa, M. (2005). Attitudes towards women managers in the United Arab Emirates: The effects of patriarchy, age, and sex differences. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20(6), 552-640.
- Mujtaba, B. G., Khanfar, N. M., & Khanfar, S. M. (2010). Leadership tendencies of government employees in Oman: A study of task and relationship based on age and gender. *Public Organization Review*, 10(2), 173-190.
- Najd, M. A. S. (2015). Women and executive leadership in the Middle East: 21st century challenges and opportunities. Paper presented at the International Leadership Association Conference.
- National Centre for Statistics and Information. (2024). *Labour market statistics bulletin. Sultanate of Oman*.

- Navarro, Z. (2006). In search of a cultural interpretation of power: The contribution of Pierre Bourdieu. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6), 11-22.
- Nazzal, A., Stringfellow, L., & Maclean, M. (2024). Webs of oppression: An intersectional analysis of inequalities facing women activists in Palestine. *Human Relations*, 77(2), 265-295.
- Noe, R. A. (1988). Women and mentoring: A review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review*, 13(1), 65-78.
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327-344.
- Omair, K. (2008) 'Women in management in the Arab context', Education, Business and Society: *Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 1(2), pp. 107-123.
- Oman Government. (2024). *AHED Association annual report*. Sultanate of Oman.
- Omar, A., & Davidson, M. J. (2001). Women in management: A comparative cross-cultural overview. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 8(3/4), 35-67.
- Oppenheimer, V. K. (1994). Women's rising employment and the future of the family in industrial societies. *Population and Development Review*, 20(2), 293-342.
- Ostrow, J. M. (1981). Culture as a fundamental dimension of experience: A discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of human habitus. *Human Studies*, 4(3), 279-297.
- Patel, G. (2019). Understanding the gender gap: A critical review of why women's representation in leadership lags behind. *Leadership Quarterly*, 30(7), 101-117.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. London: Sage.
- Post, C., & Byron, K. (2015). Women on boards and firm financial performance: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(5), 1546-1571.
- Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (1979). The "good manager": Masculine or androgynous? *Academy of Management Journal*, 22(2), 395-403.
- Prasad, A. (2002). The contest over meaning: Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology for understanding texts. *Organizational Research Methods*, 5(1), 12-33.
- Pringle, J. K. (2008). Gender in management: Theorizing gender as heterogender. *British Journal of Management*, 19(s1), S110-S119.
- Ragins, B. R. (1989). Barriers to mentoring: The female manager's dilemma. *Human Relations*, 42(1), 1-22.
- Ragins, B. R., Townsend, B., & Mattis, M. (1998). Gender gap in the executive suite: CEOs and female executives report on breaking the glass ceiling. *Academy of Management Executive*, 12(1), 28-42.
- Rees, C. J., Mamman, A., & Bin Braik, A. (2007). Emiratization as a strategic HRM change initiative: Case study evidence from a UAE petroleum company. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(1), 33-53.

- Reichardt, C. S., & Cook, T. D. (1979). Beyond qualitative versus quantitative methods. In T. D. Cook & C. S. Reichardt (Eds.), *Qualitative and quantitative methods in evaluation research* (pp. 7-32). Sage.
- Ridgeway, C. L. (1997). Interaction and the conservation of gender inequality: Considering employment. *American Sociological Review*, 62(2), 218-235.
- Ridgeway, C. L. (2001). Gender, status, and leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 637-655.
- Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the gender system: A theoretical perspective on gender beliefs and social relations. *Gender & Society*, 18(4), 510-531.
- Riphenburg, C. J. (1998). *Oman: Political development in a changing world*. Praeger Publishers.
- Rizzo, H., Abdel-Latif, A. H., & Meyer, K. (2007). The relationship between gender equality and democracy: A comparison of Arab versus non-Arab Muslim societies. *Sociology*, 41(6), 1151-1170.
- Ruderman, M. N., Ohlott, P. J., Panzer, K., & King, S. N. (2002). Benefits of multiple roles for managerial women. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(2), 369-386.
- Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (1999). Feminized management and backlash toward agentic women: The hidden costs to women of a kinder, gentler image of middle managers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(5), 1004-1010.
- Rudman, L. A., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Nauts, S. (2012). Status incongruity and backlash effects: Defending the gender hierarchy motivates prejudice against female leaders. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(1), 165-179.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Salter, A., & King, B. G. (2021). When women disrupt organizational hierarchy: A study of status threat and resistance to women leaders. *Organization Science*, 32(6), 1609-1632.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2006) *Research methods for business students*. 4th edn. Harlow: Prentice Hall.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Schaumberg, R. L., & Flynn, F. J. (2017). Self-reliance: A gender perspective on its relationship to communality and leadership evaluations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(5), 1859-1881.
- Schein, V. E. (1973). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 95-100.
- Schein, V. E. (2001). A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), 675-688.
- Schein, V. E. (2007). Women in management: Reflections and projections. *Women in Management Review*, 22(1), 6-18.

- Shaya, N., & Abu Khait, R. (2017). Feminizing leadership in the Middle East: Emirati women empowerment and leadership style. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 32(8), 590-608.
- Sidani, Y. M., Konrad, A., & Karam, C. M. (2015). From female leadership advantage to female leadership deficit: A developing country perspective. *Career Development International*, 20(3), 273-292.
- Sidani, Y., & Al Ariss, A. (2014). Institutional and corporate drivers of global talent management: Evidence from the Arab Gulf region. *Journal of World Business*, 49(2), 215-224.
- Sikdar, A., & Mitra, S. (2012). Gender-role stereotypes: Perception and practice of leadership in the Middle East. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 5(3), 146-162.
- Simpson, R. (1998). Presenteeism, power and organizational change: Long hours as a career barrier and the impact on the working lives of women managers. *British Journal of Management*, 9(s1), S37-S50.
- Singh, K. (2014). Servant leadership in non-governmental organizations (NGOs): The head serving and leading the heart. *Journal of Strategic Leadership*, 5(2), 41-56.
- Singh, V., Vinnicombe, S., & Kumra, S. (2006). Women in formal corporate networks: An organizational citizenship perspective. *Women in Management Review*, 21(6), 458-482.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51-80). Sage.
- Smith, P. (2020). The slow death of the glass ceiling: A study of women's advancement in management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(6), 1109-1142.
- Smolović Jones, O., Smolović Jones, S., Taylor, S., & Yarrow, E. (2020). 'I wanted more women in, but . . .': Oblique resistance to gender equality initiatives. *Work, Employment and Society*, 35(4), 640-656.
- Stamarski, C. S., & Son Hing, L. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: The effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1400.
- Stringfellow, L., McMeeking, K., & Maclean (2015). From four to zero? The social mechanisms of symbolic domination in the UK accounting field. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 27, 86-100.
- Sturges, J. (1999). What it means to succeed: Personal conceptions of career success held by male and female managers at different ages. *British Journal of Management*, 10(3), 239-252.
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 633-642.
- Supreme Council for Planning. (2017). *Ninth five-year development plan 2016-2020*. Sultanate of Oman.

- Syed, J., & Van Buren, H. J. (2014). Global business norms and Islamic views of women's employment. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 24(2), 251-276.
- Taism, S. (2018). The evolution of traditional culture in modern Oman. *Middle East Journal*, 72(2), 282-299.
- Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. University of Chicago Press.
- Terborg, J. R., Peters, L. H., Ilgen, D. R., & Smith, F. (1977). Organizational and personal correlates of attitudes toward women as managers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 20(1), 89-100.
- Tharenou, P. (2005). Women's Advancement in Management: What is known and future areas to address. *Supporting Women's Career Advancement*, 31-57.
- Thompson, C. (2022). Abductive research in practice: Theorizing from data in qualitative analysis. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(4), 675-698.
- Thompson, M. (2020). Gender discrimination in the workplace: A structural analysis. *Academy of Management Review*, 45(3), 457-482.
- Times of Oman. (2019, March). *New Omanization regulations for private sector*. Times of Oman.
- Tlaiss, H. A. (2013). Women managers in the United Arab Emirates: Successful careers or what? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 32(8), 756-776.
- Tlaiss, H. A. (2014). Between the traditional and the contemporary: Careers of women managers from a developing Middle Eastern country perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(20), 2858-2880.
- Tlaiss, H. A. (2015). How Islamic business ethics impact women entrepreneurs: Insights from four Arab Middle Eastern countries. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 129(4), 859-877.
- Tlaiss, H., & Kauser, S. (2011). The impact of gender, family, and work on the career advancement of Lebanese women managers. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 26(1), 8-36.
- Toor, S. R. (2011). Differentiating leadership from management: An empirical investigation of leaders and managers. *Leadership and Management in Engineering*, 11(4), 310-320.
- UK Government. (2024). *Women in STEM: 2024 workforce statistics*. Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.
- UNDP. (2011). *Human development report: Sustainability and equity: A better future for all*. United Nations Development Programme.
- UNDP. (2020). *Human development report 2020: The next frontier: Human development and the Anthropocene*. United Nations Development Programme.
- US Energy Information Administration. (2018). *World oil transit chokepoints*. U.S. Department of Energy.
- van der Tuin, I. (2009). The arena of feminism: Simone de Beauvoir and the history of feminism. *Gender and Education*, 21(3), 297-310.

- Varghese, T. (2011). Women empowerment in Oman: A study based on women empowerment index. *Far East Journal of Psychology and Business*, 2(2), 37-53.
- Varghese, T. (2016). Women empowerment in Oman: A study based on women empowerment index. *Far East Journal of Psychology and Business*, 3(2), 1-23.
- Vousolini, M., Papadopoulou, V., & Kosmidou, K. (2021). Women leadership barriers in healthcare, academia and business. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 40(3), 314-336.
- Wang, G., Oh, I. S., Courtright, S. H., & Colbert, A. E. (2014). Transformational leadership and performance across criteria and levels: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of research. *Group & Organization Management*, 39(2), 139-185.
- World Bank. (2023). *World development indicators 2023*. World Bank Group.
- World Economic Forum. (2021). *Global gender gap report 2021*. World Economic Forum.
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global gender gap report 2023*. World Economic Forum.
- Wright, E. O., & Baxter, J. (2000). The glass ceiling hypothesis: A reply to critics. *Gender & Society*, 14(6), 814-821.
- Yarrow, E., & Davies, J. (2022). A typology of sexism in contemporary business schools: Belligerent, benevolent, ambivalent, and oblivious sexism. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31, 2019-2039.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Yin, R.K. (2018) *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. 6th edn. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Appendix (A)

Interview Questions to the participants

Section 1 (Demographics questions)

- Please, would you introduce yourself?
- How old are you? Optional
- What is your educational background?
- How many years have you been in this position? Years of experience?
- Where do you live? Your marital status?

Section 2 (General questions)

- How do you describe your work history?
- Do you think your history of success is worth to be told?
- Do you think the Omani women have received their full rights?
- Do you face any difficulties doing your work? What are these difficulties?
- What do know about feminism?
- Who are your role models?
- What qualities do you believe women have better than men do? In terms of leading
- Men in leadership positions provide equal opportunity to women to compete or do you think that the men want women to keep at the lower level?
- How do you feel your workplace is? are you free at the workplace?
- Do you feel that men are more treated well than you in the workplace are? How or why?
- Did you experience harassment or discrimination in the workplace? if yes what are they?
- Do you think your workplace is a good place for women to work and get a chance to be promoted?

Section 3 (Specific questions to the leaders)

- Describe to me your efforts to reach this position.
- Did you face any difficulties reaching this position? What are they?

- Are women in your organization have taken equal opportunities to compete for higher positions?
- Do you think you had an equal opportunity to compete for this position?
- What are the goals that made you work to obtain this leading position?
- Do you think that women have the quality to lead?
- Do you think that our society believes in that?
- Do you think society is supporting women leaders? IF YES How if NO Why?
- Do you think your gender has an effect on these difficulties?
- Are there any benefits to you as a woman in leadership?
- Why from your own perspective, women are less represented in the top positions?
- What do you think the quality you have men does not have in terms of leadership?
- In your opinion, is the Islamic religion have any effects on women's development in general? what about the workplace?
- Do you think the law is fair for women in the workplace? Why?

Section 4 (Future)

- Do you think that women's participation in management and leadership roles would change in the future? What leads you to this conclusion?
- Where do you see women in the future in this country?

Appendix (B)

Questions to the HR managers

Section 1 (Demographics questions)

- Please, would you introduce yourself?
- How old are you? Optional
- What is your educational background?
- How many years have you been in this position? Years of experience?
- Where do you live? Your marital status?

Section 2 (General questions)

- What do you know about feminism?
- What is the number of women in your organization? In addition, how many of them in the top positions?
- How you select employee top positions? What is the criteria?
- How you would describe woman's performance in the organization?

Section 3 (Specific questions)

- Do you think you have equal opportunity for women to be selected?
- What is the process of selection on the organization and what are the tools to make a sure equal selection?
- What are the policies that the organization follows to ensure that there is no discrimination in selection to higher positions?
- Do you think that labor law has given women their full rights? To what extent?
- Do you think that the law is fulfilled fully?
- What are the most common complaints and grievances of women at your organization?
- Do women have to work in themselves to increase the percentage?
- Do you think the organization will be more productive if led by women? Why

Section 4 (Future)

- Do you think that women's participation in management and leadership roles would change in the future? What leads you to this conclusion?
- Is there any chance that in the future women would reach the same number of men in organizations?
- Where do you see women in the future in this country?