Paving the Pathways for Black African Women into Management Echelons in the Private Sector in South Africa

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Abstract: The achievement of gender equality in all spheres of society is one of the aspirations of the South African government post 1994. The achievement of gender equality has been supported by the adoption of array of legislative prescripts that bars all persons to discriminate unfairly against women on the grounds of gender, sex, pregnancy, religion etc. Notwithstanding these legislative prescripts, the South African private has failed to adhere to these principles of equality due to existing glass-ceilings that bars black African women from participating fully in the South African economy. It is demonstrated in this article that the key sectors of the South African economy are hesitant to employ black African women in managerial positions. As such there is a striking perceptible under-representation of black African women in managerial and decision-making positions in private companies. It is argued that without multi-pronged strategies, the South African private sector would continue not to reflect the demographics of South Africa and ultimately the economic growth would be at a snail’s pace. The reduction of poverty in South Africa and economic growth is largely depended on the change of attitude of the private sector. The article accentuates that private sector should improve on its corporate social investment by identifying, developing and capacitating black African women through quality training and education that will position them to become astute managers in the sector.

Keywords: management, economic-growth, finance, black African women, South Africa

Introduction
There has been significant discourse in South Africa regarding the progress made in the public sector to accelerate black South African women in managerial and decision-making positions (Horwitz, & Jain, 2011). The private sector, however, lags behind in accelerating black women in decision-making position. Consequently, this article focuses on the private sector to ensure, strengthen and accelerate the representation of black South African women in these positions in order to promote equality and equity in the private sector workplace (Ponte & Van Sitter, 2007).

Notwithstanding the progressive strategies, measures and institutions established since 1996 that aim to proliferate the representation of black women in the private sector, the private sector remains resistant to sharing managerial and leadership positions with black South African women (Lewis, 2001). Black South African women are not yet accepted as an integral part of decision-making in the private sector contrary to the public sector that has progressed to place black women in key decision-making positions in government (Beall, 2005). It is well-known in South Africa that due to the astute management of the private sector, they contribute significantly to the economy and the development of the country. However,
the underrepresentation of black African women essentially denies them of economic participation and equality in the private sector workplace (Wing & De Carvalho, 1995).

Undoubtedly, the private sector is predominately dominated by white South African minority and black South African males. Because of this, this advantaged race to wit; white males and females enjoy more benefits emanating from high levels of recruitment to promotion opportunities as compared to black African women (Maphai, 1989). Therefore, this article assesses the extent of compliance by the private sector to the gender-related interventions and measures that promote equality and equity in the private sector workplace. It also promotes a radical improvement and acceleration of the representation of black women in the private sector by showing quantitative data that reflects their underrepresentation in decision making positions in the private sector.

Social justice, Diversification, Inclusivity of women in the Workplace
There are perceptions based on the theory that women particularly black African women do not have potential to fulfill management positions unlike their male counterparts (Heilman, 2001). These perceptions are influenced by both conscious and unconscious biases because there have been instances where women were afforded opportunities to occupy managerial positions and yet they performed very well to the best of their ability. Heilman (2001) explains the patriarchy discrimination tendencies against women in the workplace thus “the scarcity of women at the upper levels of organizations is a consequence of gender bias in evaluations. Gender stereotypes and the expectations they produce about both what women are like and how they should behave can result in devaluation of their performance, denial of credit to them for their successes, or their penalization for being competent. Because of gender bias and the way in which it influences evaluations in work settings, it is argued that being competent does not ensure that a woman will advance to the same organizational level as an equivalently performing man. This raises a concern as to whether black African women will be promoted to managerial positions in instances where the companies are compelled by circumstances to appoint black African women.

The failure to transform top management positions in the South African private sector has its genesis to the country’s historical classification of women as perpetual minors and secondary earners. Prior 1994 women were generally confined to household activities and if employed, they were generally provided employment that was linked to their household activities, these included work as domestic workers in wealthy family and working at the factories. Essentially women were not seeing as primary earners but rather secondary earners due to their status in society. Society limited women’s participation in societal activities. During apartheid, the South African private sector perpetuated the discrimination and abuse of female employees by also paying them low wages and post 1994 little progress was made notwithstanding the Constitutional imperatives that mandates the South African private sector to promote equality between men and women equally in the workplace. It is thus evident that significant progress has been made by South Africa by the adoption of key legislative frameworks, such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003, that seeks to ensure fair participation of women in the workplace and at
society at large. Notwithstanding these significant progress, the glass ceiling in the private sector continues to deprive women on equal opportunities in the private sector, particularly participation at managerial positions. Gupta defines “glass ceiling” as “the unseen, yet unreachable barrier that restrains women from rising to the upper step of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or attainment” (Gupta, 2018).

Essentially the glass ceiling, although it’s an unofficial and unwritten policy, seeks to limit women to occupy managerial positions, to the contrary, it provides women with traditional roles linked to their household roles. It is against this background that women in the private sector are predominately dominating unskilled positions which largely includes cleaners.

The Employment Equity Commission unearthed that white males in South Africa were over-represented in all economic sectors at the top management level, with notable representation in agriculture (72.7%), retail and motor trade/repair service (65.3%), manufacturing (64.2%), mining (62.4%), construction (60.9%), and wholesale trade/commercial agents/allied services (60.5%) sectors (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). The Employment Equity Commission determined that all the sectors were predominately dominated by males with only the electricity, gas and water supply sector that has an almost balanced racial and gender representation (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). Women were only featuring in the community, social and personal services sector (30.7%) which had a large representation of government employers, followed by catering/accommodation/other trade (29.5%) which is mostly service oriented. The Employment Equity Commission further determined that Black women (Africans in particular) feature prominently in the electricity, gas and water supply and community, social and personal services sectors at this level (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). The Employment Equity Commission observed that more still needs to be done to break the artificial barriers for the development of black African women (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016).

A brief Comparison and Contrast between the Public, Private-companies

According to the Employment Equity Commission white representation at the private sector, particularly top management level is 73.7% (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). Black people, the majority being African males are most represented in all tiers of government, i.e. (74.3% in National, 88.5% in Provincial and 87.7% in Local government). Government (especially the provincial sphere) and state-owned companies are leading with regard to the representation of females, with special emphasis on African women, while the same cannot be said for the private sector (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). White women seem to be preferred in the private sector, educational institutions and non-profit organisations. The private sector was also showing a significant representation of male foreign nationals at the top management level which was even more than the Black females (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016).
The white groups appear to be afforded preferential treatment in the private sector for recruitment, promotion and training opportunities at top management levels. This is an indication that the private sector has failed to ensure that adequate conceptualisation, implementation and reporting of gender mainstreaming and this shows that gender equality is not prioritised in the private sector. There seems that there are signs of resistance to transformation in the private sector and this included *inter alia*, racial favouritism in employment, gender wage gap, and insufficient measures taken to recruit and promote black African women. The underrepresentation of black women in the private sector arguably denies them of full economic participation.

This necessitates a stout question as to whether the strategic interventions and measures that are in place are being implemented in order to achieve their objectives to eradicate discrimination and entrench equity in the private sector. The private sector in South Africa continues to lag behind in terms of black women representation in the top management positions when compared with the public sector (Mathur-Helm, 2005). This view is also attested by the findings of the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE, 2013) during its public investigative hearings into the public and private sector in 2014. The purpose of the public investigative hearings was *inter alia* to assess the extent of compliance with the quotas prescribed for the public and private sector. The CGE findings revealed challenges in both sectors, although there was a more progressive picture in the public sector than in the private sector. In the public sector, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) observed that the public-sector departments failed to report adequately on Employment Equity as a result of lack of accountability within departments, and a lack of consequences with no punitive measures (CGE 2013). The DPSA asserts that the public sector has failed in the adequate conceptualisation, implementation and reporting of gender mainstreaming.

Some of the hurdles preventing women to attain managerial positions are lack of training, development and growth opportunities, lack of career pathing and succession planning and a lack of or ineffective mentoring and coaching are specific barriers to retaining black employees (Booysen, 2007). It is against the backdrop of this drawbacks that it is imperative that women should be availed high quality education and training that will equip and skill them to have the capability to attain managerial positions and perform very well. This is said against the backdrop that the principle of equality denotes that black African women in the South African private sector should be afforded same recruitment, training and promotion opportunities like white males, white females and black African males. Furthermore, the same recruitment, training and promotion opportunities that are afforded to black African women in the public sector should be afforded to black African women in the private sector. By so doing, there will be a careful balancing of interests in the private sector is required to ensure the advancement of women into management positions, attainment of profit and contribution to the South African economy. It is trite that both the public and the private sector often requires to an extent a level of education to all prospective employees to qualify for positions in the respective sectors. One of the fundamental reasons that serve as a barrier for black South women in both sectors, apart from the glass-ceiling that deprives women to assume leadership roles, is the fact that most black South African women have poor education background to enter the labour force. This results in minimal women who participating in the South
African economy. The below is a graph that illustrates the extent which black South African women are unable to acquire educations and ultimately fail to enter the labour force.

![Image of bar graph]

**Figure 1: Educational level of South Africans classified by race**  
*Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey - Statistics South Africa 2011*

Figure 1 gives detail on the educational level of South Africans classified by their race. A large proportion of black South African women 25 years old have no formal schooling compared to coloured, Indian and white women. Similarly, less than 10% of black women and coloured women and men have qualifications higher than Grade 12. It is deduced from this graph that a large proportion of black South African women are likely to be excluded from participating effectively in the South African economy due to lack of formal schooling. The lack of formal education consequently perpetuates black African women to continue to be employed in unskilled jobs. There is need to continue to encourage and motivate young girls to enroll and complete their education. This will surely be the source of recruiting young women to companies and workplace. This approach will increase the number of black African women who would, given all the necessary opportunities definitely attain the status of chief executive.
Figure 2: percentages of women and men aged 15–64 years within each South African racial population group who were employed in 2001 and 2011


Assessing the Impact of Employment equity on Managerial Positions in the Workplace

In recent times, due to mounting pressure by the government, the South African top private sector companies have reluctantly taken steps to appoint black South African women in very few management positions. In 2017, BP Southern Africa appointed the first black woman chartered accountant as its new chief executive officer. She became the first black African woman in the history of South Africa’s oil industry to head a multi-national company. Similarly, in 2017, KPMG South Africa also appointed a black South African woman amid widely reported scandals over audits and reports that affected the reputation and credibility of the company. The astute handling of the KPMG scandals by the newly appointed CEO displayed the competency of a black woman in an international leadership position. The appointments of these two black women in key managerial positions marked a significant milestone in the private sector. The public sector continues to perpetuate racial representation at these key positions. Due to the slow pace of improvement of representation of black African women for the period 2014-2016, the
Commission for Employment Equity Annual report 2016/2017 has indicated that it is highly unlikely to achieve equitable representation at top management levels in the near future in the private sector.

Nienaber (2007) postulates that employment equity is one of the most difficult processes experienced by South African managers of companies in the private sector. It is assumed that many companies undervalue the course of inaugurating “employment equity on different organisational procedures, practices and roles, as well as on organisations’ climate and culture.” This suggestion accords with a view that those tasked with implementing the interventions to promote employment equity in the workplace do not regard women emancipation as the company’s constitutional priority. Thus, the need to redress the legacy of discrimination against women in the workplace is often overlooked (Calitz, 2004).

The Commission for Gender Equality observed that it is easier for the private sector to transform in terms of race, but often very difficult to transform in terms of gender (CGE). This is influenced by the realisation that the interventions that task companies to promote economic transformation to enable meaningful participation of Black African women. The emphasis is thus more on race than gender participation. Lack of gender transformation in the workplace has its roots in the historical segregation of women in the workplace and patriarchy is a reason that hinders gender transformation in the workplace (Hacker, 2017).

Challenges, Prospects and Success of Women Occupying Managerial Positions in the Private Sector

The private sector in South Africa is burdened with challenges to increase the representation of black African women in managerial positions (Burger & Jafta, 2010). Recent data clearly demonstrates that black African women in leadership and executive positions are still under-represented in South Africa (Booysen, 1999). The private sector has relatively increased representation of black African women at the lower levels however similar representations have not been achieved in managerial positions (Mathur-Helm, 2005). To address this underrepresentation, it is critical for the private sector to understand from the onset that the employment of black African women into a leadership position is a corporate social investment (CSI). Undoubtedly, “most households in South Africa are headed by a woman who is usually the sole bread-winner” (Knight et al., 2017). It is against this backdrop that the “South African government encourages the appointment of women into leadership positions by giving tenders to companies that, among other things, appoint women into senior management positions” (Knight et al., 2017).

It is essential that the private sector understands that it is not sufficient to merely change the numbers of black African women in managerial positions, but additionally the private sector must change the organisational structure that is stereotype and patriarchal in nature (Bowmaker-Falconer & Searll, 1996). It is therefore critical for the private sector to make intentional commitment to fast-track the advancement of black African women in managerial positions by adopting clear and defined gender-sensitive policies (Moalusi, 2012). According to Mkhize and Msweli (2011), it is important to create a “supportive and enabling business environment for women to reach their full potential. This environment can be achieved
through support strategies such as women-tailored training and development, partnerships and networking, and mentoring and coaching.” Similarly training and promotion opportunities that are afforded to black South African women in the public sector should be afforded to black South African women in the private sector. It is often contended that qualified black women are not available to take up managerial positions, it is from this premise that the private sector must create a pool of competent black African women by for example, providing them with acting positions in management in the company. This measure will afford managerial skills to black African women which will be needed in such permanent positions in future.

In addition to the adoption of policies and creation of a suitable environment for black African women in the workplace, it is critical that the attainment of black African women in managerial positions be included in the performance contracts of the Human Resources departments in the private sector. The consequence of this will ensure that the recruitment processes specifically takes gender into consideration. Essentially, the private sector can ring-fence managerial positions to black African women when they are underrepresented.

SWOT Analysis
The private sector contributes significantly to economic development and therefore inclusion of women would not only eradicate poverty but has the propensity to boost the country’s economy. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) asserts that an increase in female labour force participation or a reduction in the gap between women’s and men’s participation results in faster economic growth (OECD, 2012). As such investing in women in the workplace is key to economic growth and social cohesion, especially in the private sector where women are underrepresented. Essentially interventions that target gender and economic inequalities will result in reshaped economic systems that promotes inclusivity and diversity. Conversely, the South African private sector seems not to fully embrace the diversity and inclusivity as part of growth strategy. Similarly, the private sector does not have an in-depth understanding of employment equity legislations that mandates to ensure fair representation of women in the managerial positions in the private sector. Consequently, lack of compliance with the employment equity legislations is prevalent in South Africa (Commission for Gender Equality, 2017-2018). It is observed that the failure by the Employment Equity Act to include a quota system that compel company to have a specific percentage of women at managerial positions exacerbates the underrepresentation of women at managerial position. The lack accountability to proliferate black women in managerial positions is further exacerbated by the fact that the private sector budgets for the possibility of fines for non-compliance with the EEA as these have minimal impact on the finances (Matotoka & Odeku, 2018). In other words, the enforcement of the EEA has not necessitated the private sector to ensure equitable representation of black African women in managerial levels in the workplace.

Against this backdrop, the underrepresentation of black African women in managerial positions in the private sector has been on the spotlight. It was unearthed by the Employment Equity Commission there has been a slight decrease of white males’ representation at top and senior management both in the
public and private sector (Employment Equity Commission, 2015-2016). Despite this decrease, the white males still dominate the managerial positions in the private sector. The slight decrease should be celebrated and be viewed as an indication that South Africa has come to the realisation that the overrepresentation of white males in the private sector needs to be addressed. The reduction of white males at top management positions should open opportunities to black African women.

Financial implication to achieve the inclusivity of black South African women to mainstream of the South African economy

Women in South Africa are reported to be 51% of the total population (Statistics South Africa; 2017). Essentially South Africa has more women than men and it is therefore expected that a large portion of women, should be employed and occupying top management positions. There is a growing understanding that addressing concerns to women economic empowerment is fundamental to lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction and to the advancement of gender equality (ANC). As such the inclusion of women in the South African economy could be the elixir to reduce inequality, unemployment and poverty in South Africa. It is argued that when more women enter the labour markets including employment in decision making roles, it results in gross results domestic product.

Figure 3: Key sectors that contribute to South Africa’s economic growth

Source: Statistics South African 2017, Economic sectors that contribute to South Africa’s GDP: Q3 2017

Figure 3 above indicates the key sectors that contribute to South Africa’s economic growth and these are manufacturing, wholesale, retail trade, financial services, transport, mining, agriculture and tourism. During the year 2017-2018, the Employment Equity Commission found that the black African women
were insignificantly represented at top and senior management levels of manufacturing mining, finance transport and communications and trade. (Employment Equity Commission, 2017). This essentially suggests that black African women are not partaking in making strategic decisions in the private sector that contributes to the South African economy due to their insignificant representation at managerial positions.

It is settled that patriarchy and the systems set during the apartheid era ensured that women, particularly in the private sector do not participate in the South African economy. However, post the advent of democracy women, particularly black African women continued to be economically marginalised, impoverished in the private sector. Consequently, South Africa needs to develop economic policies that will provide real opportunities, dignify and empower women, particularly in the private sector that contributes significantly to the South African economy.

It is a conceivable argument that the private sector is wary to employ women in general because of the financial costs associated with female employees. The financial cost is largely towards maternity leave which relatively results in disruption of work schedule and a career derailment for individual women. Women are different from men, but what increases their cost to a company is principally the clash of their perceptions, attitudes and behavior with those of men, which is to say, the policies of male-led corporations. (Schwartz, 1989). It is important to note that a company that reflects the demographics of a society enhances a company’s reputation. As such, a diverse workforce supports both credibility and trust of a potential customer base. Whilst maternity leave and breastfeeding facilities may have financial implications to the private sector, this cannot be used as an excuse not to employ women in managerial roles. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa bars the private sector to discriminate against a woman on the grounds of sex, pregnancy and gender. As such, the failure to employ women in general who meet the criteria for a vacant position would not pass the constitutionality test.

Conclusion
The key sectors that contribute to the South African economic growth insignificantly have black African women in managerial positions. The lack of equitable representation and slow pace of transformation at top management at manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, financial services, transport, mining, agriculture and tourism sectors raises concerns regarding the future sustainable economic growth of South Africa particularly because these sectors continue to not to be inclusive and representative of the demographics of South Africa. Interestingly white women seem to enjoy preference in managerial positions in the private sector over black African women. These demonstrate that women, notwithstanding the associated financial costs in the event of maternity leave, are employable at managerial positions however the private sector seems to prefer one race to the exclusion of the other.

To attain equity at managerial positions at these key sectors it is recommended that a quota system be introduced by the Department of Labour to compel key economy drivers in the private sector to have black African women in managerial positions. A quota system will essentially encourage the private sector to create opportunities and capitalise existing opportunities by training, recruiting and promoting
black African women at managerial positions. In creating opportunities, trained and qualified black African women the private sector should further create opportunities for the pool of candidates to act in managerial positions. This measure will enhance the managerial skills and experience which is largely required in the private sector.

To ensure that the targets for black African women become the integral of the private sector, the department of labour must compel the private sector to include targets of black African women in the performance contract of Employment Equity Managers and Directors of companies. A failure to attain these targets, there must be consequences that must be categorised as non-performance of contractual obligations.

References


Statistics South African 2017, Economic sectors that contribute to South Africa’s GDP: Q3 2017