RESILIENCE CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN IN DEALING WITH ADVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

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ABSTRACT

“I am firm believer in, if everything goes well, you never learn anything. You learn through adversity and failure and I always say the more I fail the more I succeed. It is about understanding, building that huge sense of knowledge. I often talk about the fact that you have got to build the tools in your toolbox, and then you can pull anyone out at any particular point. So for me it is all about every single obstacle and every single hardship has been and absolute blessing because it equips you for the future. You’ve seen it before, you’ve experienced it before” (P20-20:23, (139:139)).

In order to grow and develop as individuals we need our current state to be disrupted and in rising above adversity new personal competencies and capabilities are developed which cause our mental models to be challenged (Warner & April, 2012). Resilience has the capacity to provide growth in a person once they have rebounded from an adverse event (Richardson, 2002).

Women are underrepresented in top management and leadership positions throughout South Africa and face a myriad of challenges in rising to the top in the workplace. This research is a qualitative study focusing on the resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace and the personal approaches these women took in staying resilient under adversity. A phenomenological approach was adopted in order to explore the “lived experiences” of the participants.

Key focuses of this study include the various characteristics, qualities and attitudes these women have which they believed have supported, helped them bounce back from adversity and rise above challenges they faced in the workplace.

Key Words:

Resilience, women, adversity, workplace challenges, bouncing back.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 RESEARCH AREA AND PROBLEM

Our world is certainly out of balance. We currently have the largest group of educated women globally (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015), yet women are struggling to find work and rise to the top of organisations. Inequality among women and their male counterparts is still apparent as women on boards of South African companies in 2014 earned 17% less than their male counterparts (PwC, 2015). Women start out their careers at the same level of intelligence, education and commitment as men, yet few reach the top levels of their profession or business (Barsh, Cranston, & Craske, 2008).

Studies show that people have a tendency to rate women less competent than men across many domains. Biases about competency are often based on irrelevant attributes such as skin colour, body weight, religion and parental status (Raymond, 2012). One of the most cited limitations for women wanting to advance their careers is their situations at home (April & Dreyer, 2007).

There are obstacles in place that limit the movement of women into leadership roles (Budworth & Mann, 2010), however companies that include more women at the top levels of leadership tend to outperform those that do not (World Economic Forum, 2014). So why is it that globally so few companies have women leaders?

There are more females in leadership positions today than in previous decades which allows us to research these women and gain insight into their success. It is therefore possible to find the approaches these women have taken to rise above adversity and biases they may face in the workplace.

The concept of resilience in various fields, including business, has been gaining increasing interest. It has also extended into the broader society which is confirmed by the number of “self-help” books on the topic. There is, however, less research exploring resilience characteristics under adversity in an organisational context. Inevitably we all have to cope with the stresses of our normal everyday life. Hardship such as distressed relationships, financial worries, illnesses and death coupled with the fast pace of organisational change such as changes in reporting
structure, job function and responsibilities make it increasingly challenging to face everyday life (Warner & April, 2012).

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCOPE

The focus for this research study is:

Resilience Characteristics of Women

The main research question is: What are the resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace? The characteristics of resilience were assessed by looking at the following sub-questions:

- What types of adversities do women face in the workplace?
- What personal approaches are taken by women who stay resilient under adversity?
- What allows women to “bounce-back” from adversity?
- What does adversity mean to women?
- What have women learned about themselves and others by going through adversity?

Living is fundamentally about struggling and we develop as human beings during difficult times. Those who have risen above the struggle in the face of real challenges have been able to turn adversity into an opportunity to grow and develop and use the situation to leverage into new ways of being (Warner, 2012; Warner & April, 2012).

What does it take for women to rise above the challenges they face in their careers and lead? The intended focus of this research study is on the positive side to adversity – the phenomenon of resilience and bouncing back from adversity. The study aims to understand women’s personal approaches in staying resilient during adversity. These methods can provide women facing adversity in the workplace with insight into how to develop the tools and techniques to building resilience and nurture characteristics that will enable them to bounce back and thrive in their careers and lives.
The research is based on outcomes of “semi-structured” interviews conducted with a sample of twenty females within South Africa. The researcher has taken a qualitative approach which supports providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena. The study does not aim to find a single, ultimate truth but rather focuses on revealing multiple perspectives held by the participants which are all seen to have equal validity or truth (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Exploring events from people with differing situations supports developing theories and moves towards explanations (Sofaer, 1999). The phenomenological nature of the study makes it such that no right responses were anticipated from participants as the study took an explorative approach into their lived experiences. The fact that personal stories and individual experiences were shared, which are extremely subjective and situation-dependent, means that the generalisability of the data is fairly limited. However by looking at the multiple perspectives on the characteristics of women in staying resilient, the researcher can make some generalisations of “what something is like” from an insiders point of view (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). While theories exist on the constructs of resilience, there is little research into the characteristics specific to women where they face adversity within the workplace.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

On average women are better educated and the balance in population is equal yet women are under-represented in leadership and upper management positions throughout organisations in South Africa (PwC, 2015).

Not only do women face real obstacles in their career progression but the organisational landscape is becoming increasingly complex and the pace of change is accelerating (Warner & April, 2012). Gender biases (Nadler & Stockdale, 2012; Küskü, Özbilgin, & Özkale, 2007; Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008; Heilman, 2012; Budworth & Mann, 2010; Miller Burke & Attridge, 2011; Bowles & McGinn, 2008; Weyer, 2007; Heilman, 2001; Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015), gender pay-gaps (PwC, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2014), breaking into the “boys club” (Ridgeway, 2008; Smith, Crittenden, & Caputi, 2012; O’Bryant, 2015) and the most consistently cited work-life balance (Gill, 2014; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Bowles, 2012; Miller Burke & Attridge, 2011; Weyer, 2007; April & Dreyer, 2007; World Economic Forum, 2014; Shirey,
2012; Aguirre, Cavanaugh, & Sabbagh, 2011) are just some of the challenges women face in the lifespan of their career advancement.

Gender stereotypes are infused in every aspect of our lives, both work and life experiences. These perceptions play an important role in the career process and outcomes for individuals. Dealing with gendered perceptions is just a part of the complexity which needs to be addressed in order to tackle gender inequalities (Bourne & Özbilgin, 2008).

The gender pay gap for women on boards of South African companies in 2014 was 17% (PwC, 2015) and women who are joining the executive ranks and starting to exceed their spouses’ career development are finding resistance at home as they are often still the primary support (April & Dreyer, 2007).

Individuals can learn to build resilience in dealing with setbacks and obstacles (Warner & April, 2012). There is also less of a chance for resilient people to become mentally and physically ill during times of adversity (Siebert, 2005). It is really inspiring to know that resilience can be learned as it is not a fixed personality trait like hardiness and grit. It is an adaptive process concerning thoughts, feelings and actions in response to challenging circumstances (Warner, 2012).

Resiliency is very relevant to South African organizational leaders today (Luthans, Wyk, & Walumbwa, 2004). Leaders who are resilient cultivate employees who are resilient and these employees positively influence groups and departments (Shirey, 2012).

1.4 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions that motivate the main research topic was that all the participants would all have experienced some sort of adversity in the workplace and that they had risen above these challenges. Some of those challenges could be those cited such as gender bias, stereotyping, hitting “glass ceilings”, breaking into the “boys club” and struggling with work-life balance. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) point out that all the research participants need to have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied.
All the participants were informed about the content and form of the interview, prior to the interview and informed consent was obtained (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interview was put in context by the researcher reading the definition of resilience before the research questions were answered.

The number of interviews conducted will be significant enough to induce adequate data on the research topic. Twenty interviews were conducted, and Leedy and Ormrod (2010) confirm that between 5 to 25 individuals is a typical sample size for phenomenological studies. Not all the participants that were asked to participate in the study were available for interviews due to their busy schedules but others were approached and enough willing participants contributed to the research.

The generalisability (Bryman & Bell, 2011) of this study was fairly limited due to the context specific and subjective nature of the lived experiences of the participants and their individual stories.

1.5 ETHICS

The researcher received ethical clearance from UCT GSB and UCT Department of Student Affairs before undertaking any of the “semi-structured” interviews. The interview have also been conducted in a clear and thoughtful manner.

As suggested by Bryman and Bell (2007) all the participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and ensure their understanding of it before the interviewing process begins.

An informed consent agreement was explained to the participants at the beginning of each interview and was signed as suggested by Seidman (1998) a participants signature is the most effective form of consent. This agreement ensures confidentiality and was also done to promote honesty and sincere responses as well as reduce discomfort (Groenewald, 2004). Participants were also made aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and should they wish to withdraw at any time they may do so. The interviewee’s details will remain confidential and their identities will remain anonymous unless specific written consent was given.
The researcher understands the importance of maintaining confidentiality and safeguards the identity of those providing data, especially when conversations are of a sensitive nature.

**Table 1: Mitigating issues and challenges around the ethical issues in research.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Issues in Research</th>
<th>What was done to mitigate issues and challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Protection from Harm:</em> Study should not involve participants to be exposed to any risk greater than the normal risks from day-to-day living.</td>
<td>The interviews were done in a convenient location for the participant. Questions were open-ended to allow the participant to go into as much depth as they were comfortable with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Informed Consent:</em> Participation should be voluntary</td>
<td>Participants were told the nature of the study and given the choice of whether they would like to participate. They were also informed that they have the right to withdraw at any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Right to privacy:</em> the nature quality of the participant’s performance should be kept confidential.</td>
<td>Each participant was given a number and that number has been used for all reference to that person. Participants could choose to grant permission to reveal their identity during the conduct of the research, writing up of the findings or publication in an academic journal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Honesty with professional colleagues:</em> findings must be reported in an honest fashion and there should be no fabrication of data.</td>
<td>The researcher has used quotations from the participants to display the findings of the study. The conclusions made about the study have been done using the transcribed interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leedy & Ormrod (2010)
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to achieve personal growth and develop as individuals we need our present state to be disrupted. After a life-disturbing change we cannot go back to how things were. Hardship in the form of pain, struggle and difficulty provide a determining influence on life and initiate a change process (Howard & Irving, 2014). In rising above adversity new personal competencies and capabilities are developed which cause our mental models to be challenged (Warner & April, 2012). Resilience has the capacity to provide growth in a person once they have rebounded from an adverse event (Richardson, 2002).

2.2 DEFINING RESILIENCE

Resilience is the ability to cope in the face of challenges and emerge from adversity stronger and more resourceful (Warner, 2012; Richardson, 2002). It can be viewed as the life-force to overcome adversity, heal and strive towards self-actualisation and thriving (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). It is the ability to persevere and recover in the face of hardship and has the propensity to pull through despite arduous obstacles (van Wyk, 2014).

Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti and Wallace (2006) describe how resilience promotes an adaptive process that supports positive functioning and self-repair in dealing with challenges. Resilience adds to an individual’s effective control of a situation, dynamic sense-making during a crisis and the adaptation to and recovery from an adverse event. Resilience exemplifies being adaptive and an ability to recover despite difficult circumstances. The adaptation to live with change is fundamental in building resilience (Moe, 2012). More than enduring adversity, Christman and McClellan (2008) argue that one changes his or her personality to better endure through future encounters with hardship.

At work, resilience is the ability to remain productive and task- focussed while going through hard times. Most importantly, resilience enables one to continue experiencing joy, to grow and develop, even thrive in the face of life’s setbacks (Warner, 2012).
Resilience is not just a characteristic that shows up in extraordinary people (Warner, 2012). Early literature on resilience debated whether it is something that you are innately born with or if it is a quality or characteristic that can be learned and developed over time (Christman & McClellan, 2012; Coutu, 2002). More recent studies have concluded that everyone is capable of resilience and that there are tools and techniques that can be used to enhance our resilience in order to bounce back from adversity (Warner, 2012).

Resilient people experience emotional pain or distress as much as others (Warner, 2012). In a study by Bonanno, Wortman, Lehman, Tweed, Haring, Sonnega, Carr, and Nesse (2002) with individuals who experienced loss of a spouse, those who adapted well reported experiencing emotion pain but that this experience was transient rather than enduring. It was found that these individuals who exhibit little or no grief were not cold, unfeeling or lacking in attachment but rather capable of genuine resilience in the face of loss. Going through disruptions in life, resilient people choose the outcomes that will be positive in the face of these challenges (Richardson, 2002). They feel the pain as much as anyone else, but their resilience enables them to let go of issues and continue to function in other areas of their lives (Bonanno, 2004; Warner, 2012).

2.2.1 Phases of resilience

Warner (2012) has outlined four phases of resilience: Eroding, reconciling, navigating and thriving.

Eroding: At the time when we come across adversity in our lives there is an immediate eroding of resilience as one struggles to cope and manage the stresses and issues that arise. It may feel as if a dark cloud has obscured the sun and everything in life has become dark.

Reconciling: This is when the depths of the adversity is experienced and you become consumed in what has happened with all the negative consequences and impacts on your life. At this phase your resilience is at its lowest.

Navigating: As time goes on you are able to move on and deal with the impact of the adversity. This phase encompasses trying new things and navigating in a positive way forward. The movement in the direction of healing is important as you connect once again to your meaning in life. This phase signifies letting go of the past and living with a changed future.
Thriving: Rising above the adversity with enhanced resourcefulness and strength. Personal development and growth is achieved by experiencing a change in our status quo and adversity initiates this change.

Figure 1: Experiencing adversity with resilience


2.3 IDENTIFIED CONSTRUCTS OF RESILIENCE

There have been several studies into the characteristics of resilient people. Some of the early theories emphasised the role of genetics and that some people were just born resilient. More recently there has been a body of empirical evidence which shows that resilience can be learned (Coutu, 2002; Warner, 2012; Howard & Irving, 2014; Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Shirey, 2012; Richardson, 2002).

In 1993, Wolin and Wolin developed the challenge model in which they define seven characteristics of resilient people: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humour, and morality (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). Gupton and Slick (1996) included
persistence, determination, and optimism as resilient characteristics (cited in Christman & McClellan, 2012).

Coutu (2002) describes resilient people as possessing three defining characteristics: (1) a firm acceptance of the harsh realities that face them; (2) a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values; (3) that life is meaningful; and an uncanny ability to improvise, making do with whatever is at hand.

In 2012 Warner carried out interviews with 76 people from 7 organisations using interviews and focus groups to gather information about resilience characteristics. Through the research he summarised that (1) resilience is a process that you go through; (2) it is not a personality trait; and (3) resilience could be developed using the outcome of the research.

Out of this research 822 critical incidents were obtained. These were then categorised into three key areas (domains), seven categories (constructs) and each category was further broken down into subcategories (elements). The researcher has used these seven elements as a framework for further research into the characteristics of resilience.

In summary the three domains are the Core Domain, the Internal Domain and the External Domain. The Core Domain consists of meaning and life purpose, as well as understanding and accepting one’s self. The Internal Domain refers to the internal world of controlling and choosing thoughts, feelings and attitudes. The External Domain involves taking action and giving and accepting support. Figure 2 shows the model of domains and constructs which were developed to illustrate the findings (Warner & April, 2012).
Figure 2: Personal Resilience Building Blocks


2.3.1 Core Domain

This domain relates to the inner core of the individual and includes grounding and connecting, as well as understanding and accepting self (Warner & April, 2012).
**Grounding and Connecting**

Grounding and connecting is defined as recognising one’s life as having purpose, direction and meaning. Meaning moves us and enables people to discover what is important in order to push ourselves to the limit (Barsh et al., 2008). Warner (2012) states that connecting to one’s meaning in life underpins resilience, this can be found in people, causes and faith. In the face of adversity when life becomes really difficult, the personal meaning assigned to one’s life sustains and provides motivation to persevere (Warner & April, 2012). Resilient people build bridges from their current hardships to a fuller, better life by eliminating the sense that the present is overwhelming (Coutu, 2002). By persevering through hardships and tough times, the individual will emerge stronger, more resourceful and better for the experience. An additional feature of this construct is identifying goals to achieve meaning in life. It was found that a visualisation, planning and acting sequence appeared to be operating (not necessarily in a structured way) but driven by the need to make sense of and rise above adversity and in some cases disassociate from it (Warner & April, 2012).

Connecting to meaning is often found in the loving attachments and emotional bonds we have with other people. Reciprocal love helps to build the internal resources that are needed to deal with adversity. The connection to significant people in our lives gives us the strength to continue when times are really difficult. Significant causes are absorbing and become consuming in a person’s life. The significance is found when there is meaning beyond the activities where we are contributing to something bigger than ourselves which fuels passion and deeper sense of meaning. People with strong formal faith beliefs usually find it easier during tough times (Richardson, 2002). They fall back on their faith-based belief systems. Whether purpose is found in a formal faith or is created by the individual by their own sense of purpose, it is fundamental to life to believe in something larger than ourselves for life to make sense (Warner, 2012).

Positive psychologists (including Tal Ben-Shahar, Jonathan Haidt, and Martin Seligman) believe that purpose starts with happiness and have defined an evolution of happiness that leads from pleasure to engagement to meaning (Barsh et al., 2008). Being committed to finding a meaningful purpose in life has been described by Bonanno (2004) as a dimension to hardiness which helps buffer extreme stress.
Understanding and Accepting Self

People who have developed their own identity and are more self-aware demonstrate greater levels of resiliency (Howard & Irving, 2014). Developing and understanding self involves being realistic about our personal strengths and weaknesses. This is the basis for understanding what capabilities and limits we have when dealing with adversity. This is important as true self-insight ensures realistic expectations (Warner & April, 2012).

The particular combination of gifts that we all have form the basis of your character strengths and are the foundation of the ability to fulfil your purpose and mission in life. It is necessary to develop these character strengths in order to achieve your goals in life. More can be achieved in life by understanding and using character strengths (Warner, 2012).

2.3.2 Internal Domain

The three constructs in this domain are controlling and choosing thoughts, feelings and attitudes (Warner & April, 2012). Internal variables of resiliency are defined as personality traits, self-factors and individual resources (Ledesma, 2014).

The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the choice of how we respond to things that happen to us. Exercising choice is entirely under our control (Warner, 2012). When facing adversity we have the opportunity to choose the outcomes of the events instead of slipping into denial in order to cope with hardship (Richardson, 2002). You can prepare yourself to act in a way that enables you to endure but taking a sober and down-to-earth view of the reality of your situation (Coutu, 2002).

Our mind-set is what determines success and the perspective we choose influences our feelings and attitude which in turn impacts the actions we take (Warner, 2012). People who have higher levels of optimism and hope and those who believe they have the ability to reach their goals are more likely to experience growth (Ledesma, 2014).

Six themes which emerged in research done by Valentine and Feinauer (1993) included in these were “an inner-directed locus of control, which seemed to emanate from internal values rather than from expectations and directions of others; and a positive outlook on life.” This relates to
the inner core of resilience where those who show strong resilience characteristics took responsibility for their lives and demonstrated a sense of control over their thoughts and actions.

**Controlling and Choosing Thoughts**

Controlling and choosing thoughts are characterised by the ability to control negative thinking and choose positive thoughts. Incorporated in this is being aware of your own internal world and of the effect of these thoughts. To support building resilience it is important to understand our thoughts better and recognise that they are just concepts created and biased by who we are and our interpretation of the experience (Warner, 2012).

Controlling and choosing our thoughts is achieved by being aware when strong and persistent negative thoughts occur and being able to stop this thinking. It incorporated the ability to redirect negative thinking into positive thinking and avoid thinking which triggers negative thought. It is about striving to be in harmony with our thoughts. When negative thoughts appear we have three options: choose to accept the thoughts; reframe them; or distract yourself. Common mistakes include over-thinking or rumination, simplification and generalising (Warner, 2012). Believing that the future holds good things in store undoubtedly has an effect on the way people relate to many aspects of their lives (Scheier & Carver, 1993).

As championed Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) positive psychology focuses on positive features that make life worth living and understand and build the factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish. Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others is one of the 24 character strengths identified by Peterson and Seligman in their 2004 study positive psychology (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Immediate outcomes of disruptions that are categorised by hurt, loss, blame, or fear bring a mindfulness and opportunity to connect with one’s resilience. True resilient reintegration may be the strengthening with one’s union with her/his spiritual source of strength (Richardson, 2002).

We cannot stop our thoughts, but we do have the ability to choose how we interpret them and therefore influence our perspective (Warner, 2012). Repressors are inclined to avoid unpleasant thoughts (Bonanno, 2004) which is not conducive for recovery. Choosing to accept your thoughts whether positive or negative helps maintain perspective of the situation. The key is to
be mindful of the present and experience what is taking place in the moment. Reframing thoughts is a positive way of disputing negative thinking by assigning alternative meaning to the adversity with positive but realistic thoughts (Warner & April, 2012).

**Controlling and Choosing Feelings**

Controlling and choosing feelings concerns feelings and the role that emotions play in getting through difficult times. Controlling emotional impulsivity and choosing a well-thought-out response is key to building resilience (Warner, 2012). This does not mean that emotions are not felt or expressed (Bonanno et al., 2002) but when these emotions are being experienced it is important not to let them drive us but rather choose actions and behaviours rationally, which will assist in dealing with the issues at hand and achieving our goals (Warner, 2012). Positive feelings build the internal capacity that underpins resilience (Warner & April, 2012).

Positive emotions undo the destructive physical impact that lengthy and intense negative emotions can have on our body. Negative emotions taper our thinking and prepare our bodies for fight, run or hide responses, an ancestral function promoting survival. Positive emotions expand our momentary thought which builds enduring personal resources and has an undoing effect on the harm created by negative emotions (Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). Resilient individuals also show faster cardiovascular recovery following a negative emotion. This ability to bounce back to cardiovascular baseline may be fuelled by experiences of positive emotion (Fredrickson, 2001).

Positive emotions play a critical role in building and maintaining resilience (Warner, 2012). They also serve as indicators of thriving, or optimal well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). There is accumulating evidence that positive emotions are associated with beneficial physical outcomes. There is self-reported improvements in immune system functioning (Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004) due to the positive emotion produced by laughter and humour. Although humour has also been cited to help an individual cope more successfully with traumatic situations Kuipera (2012) suggest that although humour may play a role in resiliency, it has limitations and associated boundary conditions. Positive emotions have also been shown to benefit individuals with cardiovascular disease, and are key ingredients to longevity and psychological health (Tugade et al., 2004).
The profound implication of being resilient and having a happy life in the face of adversity is that we need to limit the intensity of our negative feelings, such as anxiety, disappointment, betrayal, distrust, guilt and fear, and generate genuine positive feelings to counter them. The implication is that while we need to deal with unwelcome negative feelings, creating genuine positive emotions will boost our coping ability (Warner, 2012). Not only do we feel better, but our internal buffering resources improve (Fredrickson, 2001).

Positive psychology has contributed to the development of a number of distinct exercises or positive interventions that can foster growth, resiliency, and well-being (Kuiper, 2012). Gratitude is an excellent way of generating positive feelings. Techniques cited include as explicitly savouring and sharing good news, reviewing one’s blessings, and expressing gratitude via written testimonials (Kuiper, 2012; Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, 2000; Algoe & Fredrickson, 2011; Warner, 2012).

**Controlling and Choosing Attitude**

At the core of this construct is the strong belief that one can influence to a large extent the direction of one’s life (Warner & April, 2012). Belief that an individual can influence the direction of their lives rather than be at the mercy or impulses of fate, despite being faced with adversity has been a constant theme concerning choosing to be proactive, resolve problems and endure and not give up despite difficult circumstances (Warner & April, 2012). Hardiness is a personality trait where individuals have identified possessing a sense of control over their environment (Ledesma, 2014). These individuals are considered to have a belief in an internal control (Rotter, 1966).

Another component of controlling and choosing one’s attitude is the principle of the belief that inevitable problems encountered along the journey of life can be solved. The interpretation of the world and what happens in their lives is essentially different between optimists and pessimists. In simple terms, the story we tell ourselves is the one we create in our lives (Warner, 2012). A shared belief about resilience is that it stems from an optimistic nature. This is only true as long as such optimism does not alter your sense of reality (Coutu, 2002). Individuals with resilience possess protective factors that assist them to recover from and thrive despite adversity, this includes optimism (Shirey, 2012). Optimism manifests in an outlook to expect positive outcomes.
and positive attributes towards future success. It’s a predisposition to attribute internal positive qualities and a rebuttal to surrender during adversities (van Wyk, 2014). Supporting the optimistic outlook is forgiveness which is the disposition to let go of the genuine right one may have to anger and hurt in order to rise above the ordeal (Warner, 2012).

The concluding element of this construct is maintaining a realistically optimistic attitude in order to prevent overload. To do this we need to recharge our batteries regularly by engaging in relaxing, enjoyable and re-energising actions, essentially self-care (Warner, 2012). Taking action to change the pace, scenery and people that surround individuals is important to providing counterweights to the stresses and strains of narrow focus that dealing with adversity brings out. The outcome is a disassociation from the stresses of adversity which provides recharging of one’s energy and returning with some degree of renewed energy to deal with the tension and difficulties (Warner & April, 2012).

2.3.3 External Domain

The external domain refers to the external world and includes two constructs: Action focus and giving and receiving support (Warner & April, 2012).

Action Focus

Action focused refers to being consistently action-orientated by using open and flexible approaches. The types of actions address both the causes and effects of adversity. The solutions to the issues often require a high degree of perseverance rather than accepting things as they are and giving up on the problem (Warner & April, 2012). The perseverance should be balanced with an open- minded and flexible approach. This enables one to still push for action, but in a creative way, listening to views dissimilar from your own, and being open to changing (Warner, 2012). When adversity strikes we should continually improvise and be inventive, making the most of the situation and putting resources to unfamiliar uses and imagining possibilities that other do not (Coutu, 2002).
Giving and Accepting Support

The final building block of personal resilience is giving and accepting support. A good way of building one’s own resilience is to assist others who are in need, even at the time of experiencing our own adversity. The value of giving support and help has been reported to enhance confidence and generate positive feelings (Warner & April, 2012). Social support seems to have both direct and indirect benefits on health. People with greater social support are less likely to be affected by stressful events and are more likely to maintain good physical and mental health (O’Leary, 1998).

Studies on external variables associated with resilience point to the importance of relationships as an important factor for the individual facing adversity. At the heart of a person’s ability to endure is intimacy with others, these relationships can often serve as a catalyst for transformation in one’s life and inside oneself (Ledesma, 2014). People matter, interacting with significant other people in your life is what brings the most happiness as well as the risk to cause the most pain (Warner, 2012).

2.4 WOMEN AND RESILIENCE

The focus of this research is to look at resilience characteristics specific to women. There has been limited research into specific characteristics in women although there has been an increase in the interest of resilience itself. It has been widely cited that women face various challenges in their daily lives while coming up against stereotyped roles specifically in the workplace (Heilman, 2001; Heilman, 2012; Powell, 2011; April & Dreyer, 2007). Gender bias is prevalent in our daily encounters as well as in the workplace (Nadler & Stockdale, 2012; Heilman, 2012). Barriers exist for women who are attempting to further their careers and climb to the higher echelons of an organisation (Oakley, 2000).

How other people perceive the leader’s gender and how the leader recognises the constraints and autonomy of his or her gender can be both a threat against and a catalyst for resiliency (McClellan, Christman, & Fairbanks, 2008).

McClellan, Christman, and Fairbanks (2008) have discovered that it is difficult for women leaders to fit their leadership into structured gendered forms. The notions of what resilient
leadership meant to the women in their research was complex and messy which suggested that the concept of gendered leadership is multidimensional. Most of who we are is defined by our gender and this identity is mostly out of our control. It is cultural, political and historical. It is perceived that women must work to become more like those in positions of power and men must avoid being perceived as feminine. This thinking initiates the “us versus them” acceptance of gender differences. Components and indicators aligned with terms like empowerment, teaching, openness, collaboration, working through people, listening, and emotional intimacy are classified in literature as feminine. The capability of individuals to have a more unsolidified use of gender has given them resiliency within their leadership roles. Their subconscious or conscious outlook on gender norms has helped them pass through fences that others build around them. Gender is a prominent characteristic that shapes our experiences in social settings (Christman & McClellan, 2008).

A few characterises of centred leadership which emphasise the role of positive emotions are predominantly distinguishable in women compared to their male counterparts in the workplace. Firstly, women can more often than not opt out of the workplace, easier than men can. Secondly their double encumbrance of motherhood and management drains energy in a particularly challenging way. Third they have a tendency to experience emotional highs and lows more intensely than most men do. It is important for women to balance their energy by basing their priorities on what energises them both at work and home and actively managing these resources to avoid dipping into reserves (Barsh et al., 2008).

Despite great gains made by women in attaining managerial positions in recent years, women in such positions still face significant challenges. If there is any doubt in their competence, they are likely to be labelled as incompetent and in instances where their competence is unquestionable they are susceptible to be socially rejected. Neither of these circumstances lends well for women’s advancement to higher levels of management and leadership. It appears that gender stereotypes can even disrupt the most competent of women’s ascent to the top (Heilman, 2012).

It is proposed by Heilman (2001) that gender bias is the primary cause of why women are so scarce at top levels of organisations. The “glass ceiling” can appear to be an impenetrable barrier at certain points in a women’s career. This is often viewed as a natural consequence of gender
stereotypes and the expectations they produce about how women should behave and what they are like. Because of gender bias and the way it influences assessment in work situations, being competent does not provide assurance that women will advance to the same organisational levels as evenly performing men.

Males and females come to learn what is expected of them when they observe what most men or women do in social situations (Mahalik et al., 2003). Gender stereotypes are often used to explain why women are not hired into positions which lead to organisational respect and power. These stereotypes continue to hinder women as they climb the organisational ladder. There are few exceptions, but most upper level managerial positions seem to be characterised by masculine terms. It is clear that the expertise and qualities presumed to be required to handle male sex-types roles effectively do not correspond to the qualities believed to characterise women as a group (Heilman, 2001).

Male-dominated atmospheres seems to preserve the gender segregated status quo formally and surreptitiously. Women have distinctive physical and work-life balance needs that challenge their ability to function easily in male-dominated environments (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Research has indicated that even through producing identical work as a man, a women’s work is often regarded as inferior. There have even been investigations in organisational psychology that confirm the fact that unless the quality of work is unquestionable – women’s achievements are undervalued compared to those of a man. Women who are effective at male sex-typed roles are personally devalued, viewed as counter-communal and are also disliked (Heilman, 2001).

Social relationships may be instrumental to women’s thriving. Women are encouraged to value close relationships even identify themselves in terms of those relationships. Throughout their life cycle women show superior tendency to rally social support in times of adversity than man. Women facing stress report that they have more support accessible to them than men and they are also are more likely to seek help. The relative effortlessness with which women mobilise support is advantageous: When confronted with the death of a spouse, women are less vulnerable to mental and physical health sequelae than men (O’Leary, 1998).
Martin and Barnard (2013) identified coping strategies and resources what build resilience in women. They include:

- appreciation of feminine advantage
- adopting male characteristics
- mentorship

Appreciation of feminine advantage: Some participants had noted a gratitude of, and dependence on, their femininity and incorporated that into their work identity. Others condemned the manipulative use of femininity and the use of sexual prowess to gain recognition. Whether positive or manipulative, it appears that women rely on their femininity to manage with the challenges of male-dominated occupations.

Adopting male characteristics: In order to fit in, participants regularly adopted male characteristics, like profane language and aggressive verbal and non-verbal behaviour. A participant also cited moderating her feminine appearance in an effort to circumvent unnecessary sexual attention or objectification by her male colleagues.

Mentorship: A legitimate way of gaining support and guidance was seen through mentorship. As an effective coping strategy all participants articulated a need for mentoring as a support system to alleviate their often-hostile environments. They expressed the particular need for women mentors.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The literature review provides and overview of viewpoints and the constructs of resilience characteristics present in resilient people. An in-depth understanding of resilience was developed through this review. The literature also provides a solid framework for understanding the constructs present in context to this research, such as, connecting to a purpose, self-awareness or mindfulness, choosing to be optimistic and accepting one’s situation.

The review of resilience characteristics was essential to frame the constructs for the research but mainly acts as an overview. It is important to understand that resilience can be learned and developed by enhancing these characteristics.
Table 2: Key ideas and concepts with associated authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main ideas and concepts of resilience</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a purpose, direction or meaning in life</td>
<td>Algoe and Fredrickson, 2011; Richardson, 2002; Janas, 2002; Coutu, 2002; Ledesma, 2014; Wright, Kiparoglou, Williams and Hilton, 2012; Fredrickson, 2001; McAllister, 2015; Bonanno, 2004; Warner and April, 2012; Shirey, 2012; Bonanno et al., 2002; O’Leary, 1998; van Wyk, 2014; Waller, 2001; Ong et al., 2006; Kuiper, 2012; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant loving relationships</td>
<td>Richardsaon, 2002; Janas, 2002; Fredrickson, 2000; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness/ mindfulness</td>
<td>Ong et al., 2006; Burke and Attridge, 2011; Tugade et al., 2004; Fredrickson, 2000; Christman and McClellan, 2012; Fredrickson, 2000; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Janas, 2002; Bonanno, 2004; Tugade et al., 2004; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redirect and stop negative thinking</td>
<td>Fredrickson, 2000; Fredrickson et al., 2000; Tugade et al., 2004; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercising choice</td>
<td>Richardson, 2002; Coutu, 2002; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic nature</td>
<td>Shirey. 2012; Richardson, 2002; Ledesma;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience characteristic</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal locus of control</td>
<td>Richardson, 2002; Valentine and Feinauer, 1993; Bogar and Hulse-Killacky, 2006; McAllister, 2015; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughter and humour</td>
<td>Shirey, 2012; Richardson, 2002; Janas, 2002; Coutu, 2002, Waller, 2001; Ong et al., 2006; Kuipera, 2012; Tugade et al., 2004;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing gratitude</td>
<td>Algoe and Fredrickson, 2011; Richardson, 2002; Kuipera, 2012; Fredrickson, 2001; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>Shirey, 2012; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting others in need</td>
<td>Janas, 2002; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Ledesma, 2014; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting support</td>
<td>Richardson, 2002; Janas, 2002; Bogar and Hulse-Killacky, 2006; Warner, 2012; Warner and April, 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND STRATEGY

The research methodology is the general approach the researcher takes in conducting a research project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) and can be described as a framework with assumptions that is used to conduct the research. The assumptions for this study are particularly subjective and interpretative therefore the research method that was adopted was qualitative and inductive in nature. Inductive reasoning begins with an observation and not with a premise of assumption and is guided by themes that emerge from the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2011).

There was fairly limited material relating to resilience characteristics specific to women facing workplace adversity, the research envisioned to contribute to theory rather than invalidate theory. With an inductive approach the emergence of themes in the data may not relate to the theories that have been identified in the literature review. This was due to the fact that the research was collected through semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to go into areas that may not have been covered in the interview questions. This is a logical outcome of using an inductive research strategy which aims to build theory rather than test it (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

“An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in discipline” (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p15). The main problem in context to the question is whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same procedures, principles and ethos as the natural sciences. The point that confirms the relevance of emulating the natural sciences is invariably associated with the position known as “positivism” which “advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond”. (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p15).

“Questions of social ontology are concerned with the nature of social entities” (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p20). The main concern of orientation here is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors and be considered social constructions build up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These positions are referred to as objectivism and constructionism (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
Table 3: Important differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle orientation to the role of theory in relation to research</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological orientation</td>
<td>Natural science model, in particular positivism</td>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontological orientation</td>
<td>Objectivism</td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p27)

3.1.1 Qualitative

Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena; following distinctive or unanticipated events; revealing the experience and understanding of events by people with various stakes and roles; giving power of speech to those whose opinions are seldom heard; conducting preliminary explorations to develop theories and to generate or even test hypotheses; and moving toward explanations (Sofaer, 1999).

Inductive approaches to research focus on the number of instances, which are relevant to the question. The aim is to identify concepts and variables which will be the focus of the research and will emerge through the process of doing the research. If the purpose of the research is to study phenomena as they unfold in real-life situations then an inductive, qualitative approach is required (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

The qualitative and inductive approach is best suited for this research based on the data that has been collected. The semi-structured interviews gave the researcher further insight and understanding into the phenomenon of resilience through the lived-experience of those interviewed.

Table 4: Comparative Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Quantitative Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses an inductive form of reasoning</td>
<td>Uses a deductive form of reasoning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Develops concepts, insights and understanding from patterns in the data</th>
<th>Collects data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses and theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Uses an emic perspective of inquiry: derives meaning from the subject’s perspective</td>
<td>- Uses an etic perspective: the meaning is determined by the researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is idiographic: thus aims to understand the meaning that people attach to everyday life</td>
<td>- Is nomothetic: aims to objectively measure the social world, to test hypotheses, and to predict and control human behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regards reality as subjective</td>
<td>- Sees reality as objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Captures and discovers meaning once the researcher becomes immersed in the data</td>
<td>- Tests hypotheses that the researcher starts off with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Concepts are in the form of themes, motifs and categories.</td>
<td>- Concepts are in the form of distinct variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seeks to understand phenomena</td>
<td>- Seeks to control phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Observations are determined by information richness of settings, and types of observations used are modified to enrich understanding</td>
<td>- Observations are systematically undertaken in a standardised manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data is presented in the form of words, quotes from documents and transcripts</td>
<td>- Data is presented by means of exact figures gained from precise measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The research design is flexible and unique and evolves throughout the research process. There are no fixed steps that should be followed and cannot be exactly replicated</td>
<td>- The research design is standardised according to a fixed procedure and can be replicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data is analysed by extracting themes</td>
<td>- Data analysis is undertaken by means of standardised statistical procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The unit of analysis is holistic, concentrating on the relationships between elements, contexts, etc. The whole is always more than the sum</td>
<td>- The unit of analysis is variables which are anatomistic (elements that form part of the whole)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Denzin & Lincoln (2000); Neuman (1994); April (2004)
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION METHODS, RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

3.2.1 Research Design

In the preparing to collect data, a sequence of steps should first be adopted. (1) Formulation of the research question, define the terms of this question; (2) conduct a literature review and uncover the original nature of the phenomenon of study; (3) develop conditions for selecting interviewees, establish contact with them, obtain consent, ensure confidentiality, agree to commitments and if applicable obtain permission to record and publish; (4) Develop instructions and guiding questions around topics that are needed for the phenomenological research interview (Cloonan, 1998).

The phenomenology approach was used to gather research about the resilience characteristics of women. The researcher was concerned with how individuals make sense of the world around them without holding onto her preconceived grasp of that world (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

A variety of methods can be used in phenomenological based research including interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings and analysis of personal texts (Lester, 1999) but in most data will have been collected through interviews (Limberg, 2008). The selection of participants is grounded by the interest to collect in depth material about the phenomenon of study with the aim of identifying and describing the variety of experiences associated with the particular phenomenon (Limberg, 2008). The researcher conducted twenty semi-structured interviews where through listening, observing and examining the participants own words, and their meanings, she aimed to explore the topic of resilience.

Interviews are directed by the research question and are semi-structured. Before preparing the interview questions, the researcher should thoroughly outline and infiltrate the phenomenon under study in order to determine its structure and the possible meanings of the phenomenon and the variety of characteristics that may be linked to it in different situations and contexts. One way of doing this it to contemplate previous research on the phenomenon within different contexts and fields. The intention behind this is not to impose a particular view on the participants but to rather suspend any assumptions and be as open as possible to the varying experiences that will be encountered through the narratives of the individuals (Limberg, 2008). The founding of a good
level of rapport and compassion is crucial to gaining depth of information, particularly where examining matters where the participant has a personal stake (Lester, 1999).

The interview questions should be articulated in a way that allows the participants to express their own views and perceptions of the phenomenon under study. These interviews are not intended to bring out attitudes or pre-formulated answers held by the researcher but rather as a means for the researcher to reflect on and convey ways of experiencing a specific phenomenon. Through this the variety of experiences pursued in the study are shaped through the interview for additional analysis by the researcher. The interviews are recorded and transcribed (Limberg, 2008).

3.2.1.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenography is a qualitative research method used to explore life experiences (Osteraker, 2002) and looks specifically at the way in which something is experienced by an individual (Limberg, 2008). The research method returns to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions of events. These descriptions provide the foundation for a reflective structural analysis to reveal the essences of the experiences (Cloonan, 1998).

Phenomenology involves us to look at things openly, unobstructed by the practices of the natural world (Cloonan, 1998). The point of departure comprised of gathering deep information of perceptions and raw descriptions obtained through qualitative methods such as interviews with open-ended questions and dialogue with individuals (Limberg, 2008; Cloonan, 1998; Lester, 1999). The aim is to receive a variation of qualitative different ways through these interviews to conceptualise a phenomenon (Osteraker, 2002). The experience is viewed by being aware of something as seen as a relation between an individual and the phenomenon that is being studied (Limberg, 2008). The difficulty is to describe things as they are, to understand the essences and meanings in the light of perception and self-reflection (Cloonan, 1998). The researcher then defines the construct of the experience based on reflection and understanding of the participant’s story (Cloonan, 1998). An association exists between what exists in conscious awareness and what exists in the world. What reflects in consciousness is an outright reality while what appears to the world is a creation of learning (Moustakas, 1994),
The objective is the uniqueness of human experience in the world (Limberg, 2008) and to determine what the experience meant for the participants and the general meaning they derived (Cloonan, 1998). It aims to detect phenomena through the perception of the actors in an event (Lester, 1999).

Phenomenology and phenomenography both study the experience of human individuals and their experiences as its research objective. The difference however is that phenomenography is aimed at studying and mapping the variation of experiences to a phenomenon while phenomenology is concerned with capturing the essence of a phenomenon (Limberg, 2008).

3.2.1.2 Underlying theory

Phenomenology is described as a philosophy of experience (Stoller, 2009). Phenomenologists are concerned with understanding the psychological and social phenomena from the perceptions of the people involved in the experiences (cited in Groenewald, 2004). Phenomenological methodologies seek to describe and search for the essence of experiences (Gill, 2014).

The research method of phenomenology is a qualitative research method established by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, often referred to as the father of phenomenology (Wertz, 2005; Laverty, 2008; Gill, 2014). The focus for Husserl was to study the phenomena as they acted through consciousness which he described as a co-constructed dialogue between an individual and the world (Laverty, 2008). He saw that building of our knowledge of reality should start with conscious awareness. This process is that of coming aware with the ultimate structures of consciousness (Koch, 1995). He claimed that minds and objects occur within experience, thus removing mind-body dichotomy. He saw entree to the constructs of consciousness not as a matter of generalisation and induction but as a direct outcome of grasping of a phenomena. This grasping was seen as an intentional process directed by human intention and not automatic causation. (Laverty, 2008). Husserl viewed essences and intentionality as fundamental to our understanding of phenomenology (Koch, 1995). Husserl proposed that phenomenologists could see the essences of phenomena through intuition or, more specifically, through the process of free variation. The process entails envisaging different variations of the phenomenon under study to see what remains as its essential or invariant aspect. For Husserl, essences are the underpinning for all other knowledge and phenomenological methodologies. (Gill, 2014).
It uses the principle that scientific knowledge starts with a fresh and unbiased description of its subject matter. Phenomenology attempts to eradicate everything that denotes a prejudgement or presupposition (Cloonan, 1998). The particular attribute of this approach to not start with a set of assumptions, but to gradually establish a position. This position represents a provisional safe vantage point rather than assuming that there is a world ready to be explored (Aspers, 2009). Husserl refers to his descriptive method as “reduction,” which supports the analytical process of several phenomenological methodologies (Gill, 2014). In order to get to this reduction he used two procedures called epochés which suspends all influences that could bias description. The first takes the researcher to the “natural attitude” before the scientific word, this is the unreflective apprehension of the world as it is lived and encountered. It comprises of setting aside prior scientific assumptions to be successful. The second suspension is to take our “ naïve” belief system out of influence in order to focus on the subjective manner of appearance and lived-through meanings the form human conditions (Wertz, 2005).

In the beginning of the 1970s the concept of experience within phenomenology has come under heavy critique although Stoller (2009) argues that the basic tenants of this poststructuralist critique does not apply to phenomenology. Even though experience is essential for phenomenology, it does not have recourse to experience as an undisputed beginning, it takes experience as a subject of phenomenological analysis by making the structures of the experience visible and recounting their phenomenological content.

Phenomenological research is similar to other principally qualitative approaches including ethnography, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism. Pure phenomenological research pursues essentially to describe rather than explain, and begins from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Lester, 1999).

3.2.1.3 Lived experience
A phenomenologist is interested with the lived experiences of the people who are involved, or who were involved, with the phenomena that is being researched (Groenewald, 2004; Lester, 1999). At the heart of phenomenology is the intention to understand the phenomena in their own terms and provide a description of the individual experience as it is lived by the participant in order to allow the essence to emerge (Groenewald, 2004).
The results of phenomenological research are about the meaning of lived experience and they can only be used to affect meaning of that lived experience (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The interest of the phenomenologist is how the people perceive the world (Osteraker, 2002).

Through lived experiences we participate in the world and through narratives we become aware of this participation. Narratives move us and give us insight when they shed light on our lived experience of discourse participation. Through this insight the essential meaning of participation is reviled. Being captivated by essential meaning leads us to the truth, the lived truth as opposed to correctness and this joins us to the ontological level of life in the world (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Impartiality is important to adopt in order to allow the participants’ own experiences to prevail (Lester, 1999).

In order to understand how people deal with problems, situations and life we have to make sense of the way in which they experience these events in relation to how they are acting (Osteraker, 2002).

As phenomenological methods bring the experiences and perceptions of the individual to the forefront they challenge the structural or normative assumptions. By adding an interpretive dimension to the research this enables it to be used as the basis for practical theory and allows it to inform or support or challenge action (Lester, 1999).

### Table 5: Characteristics and differences between phenomenological, ethnographic and grounded theory approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Phenomenological</th>
<th>Ethnographic</th>
<th>Grounded theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>“A qualitative method that attempts to understand participants’ perspective and views of social realities”</td>
<td>“A type of qualitative inquiry that involves an in-depth study of an intact cultural group in a natural setting”</td>
<td>“A type of qualitative research aimed at deriving theory through the use of multiple stages of data collection and interpretation”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims to gain people’s perceptions and meaning of an event.</th>
<th>Researcher looks at an entire group.</th>
<th>Aims to derive a theory from data.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collected through lengthy interviews.</td>
<td>Studies group for a lengthy time period in their natural setting.</td>
<td>Uses a prescribed set of procedures for analysing data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample is between 5-25 people who have direct experience of the phenomenon being studied.</td>
<td>Studies everyday behaviours of people.</td>
<td>Involves multiple stages of data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires site-based fieldwork.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Leedy & Ormrod (2010)

#### 3.2.2 Data Collection

Research data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour long. The interviewee encouraged the participants to provide stories of their lived experiences which provided descriptive and experiential data. A semi-structured interview guide identified main areas of investigation on which to focus.

Cloonan (1998) outlines some guidelines in conducting interviews with participants. (1) Engage the participant in the epoché process way of creating an atmosphere and rapport for conducting the interview; (2) “Bracketing” the question; (3) Obtain descriptions of the experience by using open-ended topical guided questions.

As cited in Groenewald (2004) it is regarded that two to ten research participants are sufficient to reach saturation and that the focus should be on long interviews which allow the data to emerge, this means capturing rich descriptions of the phenomena as they are experienced in their contexts.

Research members were from a mixture of roles, industries and seniority. Eight of the twenty participants were in executive positions with the majority of them being the Chief Executive of
large corporations. The other twelve were in senior management positions but not necessarily reporting to the Board of Directors.

During the interview participants were asked to describe in detail their experience to the topic of resilience characteristics which were being investigated. The questions were semi-structured and open ended in nature with follow-up discussion being led by the participant. A copy of the interview questions can be found in the appendices.

Openness is crucial and the conversations may be entirely open with few specific direct questions. This encourages the interview process to stay as nearby to the lived experience as possible. This is described as getting to what participants really experienced from their perspectives and not assumptions of what they thought they experienced (Laverty, 2008). It is also important to see what is not being said in order to “read between the lines” as verbatims do not always capture the essence of what the lived experience has been. Paying attention to silence helps identify these possible areas (Laverty, 2008).

The interview in phenomenological research serves a specific purpose. (1) It is used as a way of exploring and gathering stories or narratives of lived experience; (2) It is a means to develop a conversational relationship with the participant around the meaning of the experience in their perception. Interviews allow the participants to share their stories in their own words (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

There are various interviewing methods for conducting interviews, these induce structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are best for phenomenological research as they allow participants freedom to respond to questions and probes, and to share their own experiences without being constrained to specific answers. Another advantage of unstructured interviews is the ability to compare across interviews as some of the questions will be standard (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

**Table 6: Advantages and disadvantages of semi structured interviews.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of Semi-Structured Interviews</th>
<th>Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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| Semi-structured interviews give the interviewees the opportunity to organise their answers within their own framework and therefore increases the validity of their answers (Aberbach & Rockman 2002). | Due to the fluid nature of the interview conversation, data collected can be harder to process and analyse than a more structured approach (Aberbach & Rockman 2002). |
| Educated people do not like to be forced into the structure and rigidity of close-ended questions, and since all intended interviewees will be from a professional background, this observation is of relevance to and supports the adopted research methodology (Aberbach & Rockman 2002). | There is also a substantial cost associated with this approach as a result of the time required for the actual interviews, the transcribing and analysis (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). |
| Open-ended questions associated with “semi-structured” interviews allows the researcher to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features that arise during the course of the interview and examine them further with the interviewee (Eisenhardt, 1989). | The lack of standardisation in “semi-structured” and unstructured interviews may lead to bias of the interviewer or the interviewee. The researcher can reduce bias by preparing sufficiently for all interviews and explaining to the interviewee why the research is being conducted (Lewis et al, 2003). |
| “Semi-structured” interviews will allow the researcher to “probe” answers for a more in-depth explanation and have the potential to highlight issues that the researcher may not have considered, but may be of significance to the case (Lewis & Ormrad, 2005). | |

Source: Soomar (2012)

### 3.2.3 Research Instrument

An established and appropriate interview questionnaire will be setup and used to guide the “semi-structured” interviews. The “semi-structured” interviews will be based on framework of
resilience relevant to the research, resulting from the literature review. A copy of the interview questions can be found in the appendixes. Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder for transcription and analysis.

Table 7: Advantages and disadvantages of using a digital recording device.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of using a digital audio recording device</th>
<th>Disadvantages of using a digital audio recording device</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the recording is better than conventional cassette taped which can produce interference with the speaker’s voice. This improves the accuracy of the transcription.</td>
<td>The cost of the digital recorder is high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can be played back over without the quality of the recording deteriorating as did with conventional cassette tapes.</td>
<td>The files take up a significant amount of memory on the computer. E.g. An hour interview can consume around 6MB of memory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital recorders are small, easy to use, light and portable making them unobtrusive during the interviews as well as easy to carry around</td>
<td>With many changes in technology, choosing which device to buy can be difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The recording does not miss anything as compared with taking notes.</td>
<td>The risk of deleting a file is questionably easier to do than on a cassette.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bryman & Bell (2011)

3.2.4 Research Criteria

When considering the validity of a research study there are two questions to ask. First, “Does the study have sufficient controls to ensure that the conclusions we draw are truly warranted by the data?” And secondly, “can we use what we have observed in the research situation to make
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generalisations about the world beyond that specific situation?” These questions address the issues of *interval validity* and *external validity* respectively (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010. p97).

*Internal validity* relates mainly to the issue of causality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Triangulation through multiple data sources was used as a precaution to eliminate other explanations for the observed results. Data was collected, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, literature review as well as informal observations, in order to look for common themes that appear in the data which are present in all methods (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

For external validity the issue of how people were selected to participate in the study becomes crucial (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this particular research this is a limitation as the findings cannot be generalised over a broader population. However a second situation relative to reliability and validity in qualitative research can be distinguished and some researchers have suggested that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to different criteria from that of quantitative researchers. Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

According to Bryman and Bell (2011. p395) trustworthiness consists of four criteria which have corresponding criterion in qualitative research:

- *credibility*, which parallels internal validity;
- *transferability*, which parallels external validity;
- *dependability*, which parallels reliability;
- *confirmability*, which parallels objectivity.

*Credibility* is addressed through triangulation as well as through validation. Establishing credible findings entails both ensuring that the research is done according to good practice as well as submitting findings to the members who were studied for confirmation that they have been correctly understood and are in line with their envisioned meaning.

The researched undertook in-depth interviews where participants were encouraged to share detailed accounts of their responses which provides rich and “thick” details. Providing *think
description provides others with what Lincoln and Guba (1984) refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of the findings to other environments (Bryman & Bell, 2011). With this detailed account readers can draw on their own conclusions from the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

To ensure dependability of the study, the researcher adopted the “auditing” approach suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1994). This entailed keeping records of all phases of the research process. All documentation relating to problem formulation, planning, selection of participants, communication with participants, interview transcriptions and data analysis decisions has been kept electronically for the purposes of an audit should it be required.

Conformability entails objectivity by the researcher not to “allow personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research findings deriving from it” (Bryman & Bell, 2011. p398). The researcher has made an effort to ensure that her own personal views did not influence the research such that it will be confirmable. This was done through transcribing recorded interviews and using verbatim words by participants to report the findings of the study. As suggested by Leedy and Ormrod (2010. p141) the researcher listened carefully to participants and was attentive for subtle yet meaningful indications in participants “expressions, questions and occasional sidetracks”.

In addition to the four criteria for trustworthiness, Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest the following criteria for authenticity which raise a wider set of issues concerning the political importance of the research:

- fairness (representatives viewpoints)
- ontological authenticity (better understanding of the social environment)
- educative authenticity (better appreciation of other perspectives within the social environment)
- catalytic authenticity (motivation to change circumstances)
- tactical authenticity (empowerment to take action)
For the purpose of *fairness*, the researcher ensured that the viewpoints of the participants are recorded accurately and fairly, without allowing the researcher’s viewpoints to dictate the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By taking these relevant steps into account, the researcher believes that study is sufficiently authentic.

### 3.3 SAMPLING

The sample group comprises of the entities from which the researcher sources their data and the process of collecting the sample group is called sampling and identifying a sample should depend on the research question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In this study the researcher has been intentionally non-random in the selection of her data sources; the sampling is *purposeful*.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) also explain that in a phenomenological study the data collection is almost exclusively from interviews which are between one and two hours long, with a prudently selected sample of participants. The sample size is between 5 to 25 individuals who have all had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The researcher carefully selected 20 women, within her network which had overcome some sort of adversity within the workplace, as her sample group.

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The purpose of phenomenological data analysis is to transform the lived experience of the individual into a contextual manifestation of its essence in such a way that the effect of the communication is a reflective interpretation and adoption of something meaningful (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The analysis aims to identify and describe the variety of ways in which the phenomenon has been experienced. The outcomes are presented in a limited number of categories which illustrate the variations of experiences (Limberg, 2008).

Preliminary analysis is achieved during the data collection but also continues during the transcription of the recorded interviews as the researcher becomes comfortable with the material and identifies themes emerging from the stories of the experiences. The themes may form various aspects of the phenomenon under study, some of these themes may already have been
identified through the previous understanding of the phenomenon as it appears in the research material (Limberg, 2008). A theme is a thread of meaning that infiltrates the parts of the transcript. It conveys an essential meaning of the lived experience. The themes do not need to be formulated as abstract concepts in order to capture this essence of lived experience, but rather as summarised descriptions. It is essential to communicate them in a way that reveals meaning (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The process is an abducive type of analysis, shifting between imperial data and theoretical concepts to let one illuminate and contribute to the other (Limberg, 2008).

Categories outlining the phenomenon is the result of the researchers work on identifying, formulating and defining the significant features of the meaning and experiences as well as the relationship between the categories which form the structure (Limberg, 2008). Finding themes across participants may be possible in a small-scale project by using physical documents but an alternative way where a large number of participants are used is to enter the data into a database according to the analysis headings and use a merging facility to excerpt and equate entries. This enables data entered under different themes to be contrasted and related, this is particularly useful in uncovering relationships between the themes and characteristics (Lester, 1999).

The aim of the analysis is to find new facets and nuances regarding the essence and structure in the variety of ways the phenomenon has been experienced (Limberg, 2008). It is important to get to a place of understanding of the experience through the development of a cohesive statement about the experience (Laverty, 2008).

Validity is obtained in relation to the available data and the honesty in the researcher’s path through data analysis (Limberg, 2008). In phenomenography the use of quotations is crucial and makes the participant’s survive the analytic stage of a research process. The use of quotations shows the participant’s involvement to the research and transforms the role of the researcher into the role of a mouthpiece (Osteraker, 2002).

Quotations from the participants are used in two ways: (1) to demonstrate a critical feature of a category and (2) to explain the variance between one category and another (Limberg, 2008).
Hycner (1985) outlines a step-by-step process that may be used in phenomenological analysis, they include:

- Transcription
- Bracketing and the phenomenological reduction
- Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole
- Delineating units of general meaning
- Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question
- Training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning
- Eliminating redundancies
- Clustering units of relevant meaning
- Determining themes from clusters of meaning
- Writing a summary for each individual interview
- Return to the participant with the summary and themes
- Modifying themes and summary
- Identifying general and unique themes for all the interviews
- Contextualization of themes
- Composite summary

The researcher will use software techniques through Altas ti and use “open coding” and “axial coding” to analyse the data collected in the interviews with participants. Using a computer-aided content analysis takes over the manual process of printing out text, cutting it out, relating it to a code and pasting them together. The advantages are that we can code a large number of interviews and retrieve all the text to which the code has been attached quite easily (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The researcher still had to interpret the data and create codes and retrieve the data in order to draw meaningful conclusions.

Open coding is the process of breaking down, abstracting, and classifying data (Boudreau & Robey, 2005) where constant comparison is engaged (Scott, 2004). By comparing each event,
quote or occurrence gathered during the data collection of the transcribed interviews for similarities and differences (Boudreau & Robey, 2005).

During a process of open coding similar data is grouped and conceptually labelled. These concepts are then categorised. Categories are then linked and organised by relationship in a process of axial coding where conditions and dimensions are developed (Scott & Howell, 2008). This process is based in grounded theory research which is a qualitative practice built on compared concepts (McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe a “data analysis spiral” approach which was used within this study using the following steps:

1. *Organisation of the raw data:* Interviews were transcribed, labelled and uploaded into Atlas/ti in order to analyse.

2. *Perusal:* Reading different sections of data to get an overall sense and making notes of some preliminary interpretations.

3. *Classification:* Meaning in the data was found by first coding relevant quotations. This resulted in 40 sub-codes from 477 quotations.

4. *Synthesis:* The 40 sub-codes were then grouped into 7 family-codes which represented the overall themes from the data.

The data analysis spiral discussed above is graphically illustrated in Figure 3 below.
3.5 LIMITATIONS

Phenomenography has been condemned for not taking context into account, pronouncing the risk that the interviewee and researcher may not refer to the same phenomenon about concepts disconnected from a particular condition or context. This concern is a statement worth serious reflexion and concerns the validity of research findings. A way of dealing with this problem is found in instances of studies conducted in relation to real situations where the interviewees have been involved during the study. Another is to ensure that the interviews are conducted in ways that inscribe the phenomenon under study in situations or contexts that are familiar to the
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interview to form a basis for mutual understanding. When ways of experiencing the phenomenon are separated from the individuals through the themes of description, the variation described may be equated with findings from other contexts (Limberg, 2008).

In the process of phenomenological interviews the uncovering of deep issues are not always comfortable for clients, particularly when the research exposes assumptions or challenges a comfortable status quo (Lester, 1999).
4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research used an open coding process which produced a total of 40 sub-codes with four hundred and seventy seven quotations. These sub-codes represented resilience characteristics of women in the workplace and coping strategies for staying resilient. 7 Family-codes were then formed from these 40 sub-codes. These sub-codes are listed in Table 8 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to Purpose and Self</th>
<th>Understand and Accept Self</th>
<th>Self-care</th>
<th>Gaining Perspective</th>
<th>Internal Optimism</th>
<th>Action-focused</th>
<th>Support to and from Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal orientated</td>
<td>Authentic {4-0}</td>
<td>Mindfulness {11-0}</td>
<td>Accepting reality {11-0}</td>
<td>Choosing attitude {21-0}</td>
<td>Action orientated {18-0}</td>
<td>Accepting support {28-0}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life has meaning</td>
<td>Beliefs {3-0}</td>
<td>Nurturing body {14-0}</td>
<td>Being objective {15-0}</td>
<td>Choosing thoughts {1-0}</td>
<td>Adapt behaviour {6-0}</td>
<td>Having a coach {8-0}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life has purpose</td>
<td>Courage {7-0}</td>
<td>Taking time out {14-0}</td>
<td>Gaining perspective {21-0}</td>
<td>Control emotional impulses {6-0}</td>
<td>Determination {11-0}</td>
<td>Having mentors/ sponsors {15-0}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-belief</td>
<td>Self-accepting {10-0}</td>
<td>Learning from others {9-0}</td>
<td>Internal locus of control {4-0}</td>
<td>Improvise {8-0}</td>
<td>Relationships {30-0}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand strengths and weaknesses {11-0}</td>
<td>Learning from the past {18-0}</td>
<td>Optimism {8-0}</td>
<td>Independent {4-0}</td>
<td>Talking {13-0}</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding self</td>
<td>Letting go {12-0}</td>
<td>Positive outlook {7-0}</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Member of a group {4-0}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using intuition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Humour {6-0}</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Giving to others {7-0}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 40 open sub-codes were then consolidated into seven family-codes through the axial coding process. These family-codes were:

- Connection to Purpose and Self
- Understand and Accept Self
- Self-care
- Gaining Perspective
- Internal Optimism
- Action-focused
- Support to and from others

Figure 4 represents the frequency percentage of each family code that appeared from the data analysis. The family code Support to and from others was the most common factor to emerge and was identified by all interviewees.

**Figure 4: Breakdown of family-codes**

Table 9 lists the top 20 open sub-codes according to frequency along with their corresponding family code.
The sections to follow will unpack each of the top twenty sub-codes in respect to their family-codes.

### 4.1 CONNECTION TO PURPOSE AND SELF

The family code “Connection to Purpose and Self” captured how participants felt that the belief in themselves and a having a purpose or meaning to what they were doing drove them to
persevere through difficult times and challenging circumstances. There were four sub-codes in this family-group and Table 10 below lists these sub-codes and their frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-belief</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life has purpose</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal orientated</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life has meaning</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.1.1 Self-belief

The element of self-belief is about having self-assurance and having a positive self-esteem. It is concerned with having the confidence in your own abilities and trusting yourself enough to know what innate qualities will get you through tough times. It is about feeling a sense of security within ourselves and the willingness to rely on that belief.

Participant 17 said it was only through the belief in what she was doing that she was able to continue in the industry despite negative feedback: “Your confidence levels have to be high and you have to truly own what you are doing and believe in it, because if I didn’t I would have been crushed after the first year. I would never be in this industry if I had to take other people’s feedback. I had to live with my own personal feedback for myself, and I had something I had to achieve so that I didn’t take too much notice of the negative comments that I did hear around me, because I did hear a lot” (P17-17:1, (23:23)).

Participant 18 says she has always been self-assured and believes it is an important quality to have which also allows her to step back and admit when she does not know something or needs input from others without feeling intimidated: “I think it is very important for leaders to be able to have that innate sense of self confidence and self-worth. If you don’t have it then you are afraid to admit when you are wrong and you tend not to listen to people around you. I don’t know where it comes from but I guess I have always been secure enough to go: ‘I know nothing about this, you tell me and I am going to listen’. I suppose it is trusting yourself; it is that trust...
that you have that innate intelligence and skills, even though you are not an expert on something, to listen and figure it out, and not feel threatened that someone else knows more about something than you do” (P8-8:16, (76:76)).

Although participant 13 didn’t mention self-belief in particular. It was her unwavering confidence in her skill set and abilities as well as her capacity to bounce back and not be afraid to take risks and fail: “I am not afraid to fail. So failure is not something that scares the living daylights out of me. If I fail I will find something else. And if I don't do that, there will be something else. So maybe it is also a belief that I have different skill sets. I can teach, I can train, I can recruit, I can project manage; push-comes-to-shove I can sell. I will find something to do. I can make a plan” (P13-13:18, (131:131)). “I think the thing for me personality is that I can always fix something. I will always create an opportunity. I will always be able to fix it, even when things have looked like we have lost; when things have looked absolutely terrible” (P13-13:3, (47:47)). Her attitude towards herself and the belief in herself to overcome obstacles is clear: If I fail I will learn from that thing and I will come back. I have absolutely no doubt that I will bounce back. I have no doubt” (P13-13:16, (117:119)).

Participant 15 shared a similar view in that she had confidence in herself and her abilities which helped her overcome adversity: “I am very ambitious and competitive and I know I am good for what I do, I know I am good at what I do; I know I am smart and all that kind of stuff. I think that confidence and that drive” (P15-15:13, (57:57)).

Participant 20 drew similarities between self-belief and resilience stating that with a belief in yourself you can overcome anything as you still always trust that there is a solution to be found: “Sometimes if you take it a step forward resilience is akin to self-belief. You need to believe in yourself to be resilient. Then no matter what gets thrown at you will believe that you will get past it you will believe that there is a solution. You have to believe in yourself and know you can get there” (P20-20:16, (123:123)).

Speaking about dealing with challenges in the workplace Participant 14 felt that self-belief and having a focus on delivering on what could be achieved were her best methods for coping under adversity: “I found that the best way was to believe in yourself and what you could achieve, and
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to concentrate on delivery rather than being side-lined by other issues. I also stayed out of any form of corporate politics. I had a firm belief that if I delivered above expectations at the end of the day that will be recognised” (P14-14: 1, (17:17)).

The table below lists some more responses from participants who felt that self-belief was an important element of overcoming adversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>“I think I have a lot of self-belief” (P3-3:21, (125:125)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participant 4 | You have to find your own belief (P4-4:5, (52:52)).
“...but it is about believing in yourself it is about ... I know that I can do it” (P4-4:1, (46:46)). |
| Participant 18 | “I mean part of it definitely is a healthy dose of self-belief and not getting stuck on these things, but rather saying I will do this, I will move on” (P18-18:3, (43:43)). |

4.1.2 Life has purpose

Having a sense that you are contributing to something larger than yourself is the belief in the notion that life has purpose. Often significance is found in activities where we are contributing to something bigger than ourselves or towards a broader community or cause. Being committed having a purpose in life has been described by Bonanno (2004) as a dimension to self-assurance which helps buffer extreme stress.

The sense of purpose was something that drove Participant 17 to change industries and do something she felt would make a difference. This sense of purpose kept her going during times of adversity when obstacles presented themselves in her path: “That is exactly it. Exactly that purpose drove me through being told; I mean, if I even look back to everything I did, to being accepted into the Free State University to be able to study; there was no ways that they were going to accept me. There was always adversity getting me in, but it didn’t deter me because I had a higher purpose that I wanted to achieve” (P17-17:2, (25:25)).
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Staying strong during times of adversity Participant 1 speaks about the broader community she is a part of which made many sacrifices and efforts for the sake of others: “My role as part of a broader democratic movement has always been critical in keeping me strong during difficult times; knowing that there were millions who faced daily suffering and humiliation; knowing that there were many who remained strong and true to their ideals in the face of terrible suffering, including imprisonment, torture and death” (P1-1:11, (50:50)).

Participant 8 finds that the purpose (and adrenaline) keep her going during high stress situations where others might feel drained either physically or emotionally: “Usually in those high stress situations, you are working pretty long hours, typically tight deadlines on change projects and things like that. I personally find I don’t get as drained both physically and emotionally when it is a project that has a greater goal at the end and it is exciting, because that drives me. The adrenaline in a sense and the purpose keep me going and I don’t find it as emotionally or physically stressful” (P8-8:4, (26:28)).

Participant 16 notes that the day to day activities can become quite relentless and the negative feedback from those around one are a challenge, but by maintaining a purpose she is better able to cope with this feedback and lead others in a positive direction and concentrating on the bigger picture helps: “You have very autonomous, independently minded, highly intelligent individuals who often by nature and by training are very critical; the kind of people who don’t necessarily give much positive feedback. If everything is going well they will be silent, but they will be focusing on what is not quite right. So you really do need to have that sense of overall purpose to not get distracted” (P16-16:5, (20:20)). “Really to focus on the bigger picture that really helps me” (P16-16:26, (80:80)).

Having a broader impact on society is something Participant 19 felt many women had the urge to do and that this sense of purpose kept them going under adversity: “I think many of the women that I have dealt with in the workplace, have this higher purpose, that you almost want to have a bigger impact on society and leave the world in a better place than what we got it, where (and this is a very broad generalisation) but a lot of men that I have dealt with successfully, especially in corporate environment; they are almost organisational driven, numbers driven, target driven. And I think that is the key difference in terms of inspiring people. People are not inspired by
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numbers” (P19-19: 12, (69:69)).

The table below captures some more of the participant’s insights into the notion that having a belief that life has purpose drives us to overcome adversity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>“…and [I am] incredibly passionate about the media so there is a real sense of purpose” (P2-4, (18:18)).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>“So what is important is that I know why I am doing something. And also that the things you doing, there is something more to it” (P4-3, (48:48)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3 Goal orientated

Identifying goals and being goal orientated is a feature of the family-group connection and purpose to self. For many of the women it was about identifying specific goals and having a plan of what they wanted to achieve either in their lives or in their careers that motivated them especially during adversity.

Respondent 20 shared a few times through her interview how important having a goal and focusing on it was how she overcame adversity and she felt resilience had a lot to do with being goal orientated: “Resilience is all about having a goal and moving towards it” (P20-20:15, (119:122)). Speaking on how she had overcome some challenges in the workplace she reflected that having a goal and focusing on it helped her navigate difficult situations: “Have a goal, focus on the goal, as long as you are moving forward, just make sure you are heading towards the goal, or change the goal. That is another way of doing it. If you know you are not going to get there, change it, and change it seamlessly …obstacles are just problems waiting to be solved (P20-20:14, (116:117)). Being goal-orientated allowed her to be flexible when hitting obstacles but that whatever they were they would just need to be dealt with: “For me it is about having goal, focusing on a goal, focusing on what you need to get to; adapting your behaviour in order to get there no matter what you have to do. You will, it is like running a race. You will hit it well prepared, things go wrong you adapt you move forward, you do whatever you have to do to get around those obstacles. And as a female you have got to recognise patriarchal society and stuff will come your way, but you just got to deal with it” (P20-20:5, (68:68)). (P20-20:14, (116:116)).
Participant 15 had a very clear career goal which she is focused on achieving: “[having a goal] it means everything. I am very focused on it. My career is very, very important to me, maybe someone who was less focused, or less ambitions, or more I don’t want to say indifferent, but whose path could kind of go in any direction would maybe not be as resilient (P15-15:14, (65:65). It is pretty tangible, I want to get into an executive position” (P15-15, (67:67)).

Having an end goal in sight, not being distracted by the day-to-day noise and believing in your plan is something that participant 16 spoke about with regards to overcoming challenges: “…just knowing your plan; believing in your strategy; believing in your vision and actually sort of having that confidence if you have your eye on the ball you will prove what needs to be proved and not allowing yourself to get distracted by the noise that kind of happens along the way. Obviously one can’t be impervious, but you need to actually know where you are going and you need to have a belief in where you are going and that it is the right direction” (P16-16:4, (16:16)).

The most important thing for participant 8 relates to being goal orientated: “I mentioned before, very much keeping the end goal in sight. I suppose for me the core thing” (P8-8:22, (45:45)).

The table below highlights other respondent’s views of having goals and working towards them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 15</th>
<th>“So having a clear outcome and knowing what I want and being able to articulate that, it change a lot” (P15-15:7, (38:38)).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 20</td>
<td>“And you can overcome any obstacle once you have that mission in site” (P20-20:6, (74:74)). “I think self-belief, and focus on the end goal” (P20-20:17, (125:125)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 18</td>
<td>“I get bored very quickly and very easily. I have done this, come on, what’s next? So you can see there’s that kind of energy. I have never been happy to accept whatever it is. There is always more. I always want more and I always strive for more. That is just my way of looking at it yourself “(P18-1, (20:20)).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.1.4 Life has meaning

Meaning moves us and enables people to discover what is important in order to push ourselves to the limit (Barsh et al., 2008). In the face of adversity when life becomes really difficult, the personal meaning assigned to one’s life sustains and provides motivation to persevere (Warner & April, 2012).

Again participant 1 speaks about the sacrifices that those before her took in order for her to live in a better South Africa gives her meaning to life: “Knowing that I am taking forward the efforts of those who died so that South Africa could be a better place; contributing to addressing historical injustices and improving people’s lives” (P1-1:8, (33:33)).

Looking back on some of the challenges she has been faced with in her career and especially trying to maintain the balance of family and work life participant 3 has identified what the meaning in her life is and how her definition of success helps her navigate these challenges: “now I know for me success means enjoying my work, not being the CEO...., I actually don’t want that. I know what I want. I want to enjoy my work. I want to spend time with my family. I want time for me – whether that is walking up the mountain, doing yoga, rock climbing whatever, whatever. I have had to give up some things. I think also something that is sometimes very tricky is, often there are really exciting things happening at work. Things I know that I would be really good at and I have to force myself not to take it, which is hard. But you have to stand back and say “what is my definition of success and what is it that I want” because for instance I know this is going to mean travelling three days a week. It is going to mean something has got to give, so yah, that’s that” (P3-3:1, (25:26)).

Knowing that she is working in a place where she feels valued and having a sense of meaning to the work that she does was highlighted by participant 4 as a component of building resilience: “That I am not coming here just, because most of us have to work, but you want to be doing work with people around you that you really like and care about and they care about you. Do something there is a story around it for you. So when you are getting up every day it is that. And I think as long as I can find that” (P4-4:4, (50:50)).
Having a sense of why she was doing what she was doing and having a bigger picture helped participant 8 when she felt things were not working: “It sounds a bit trite but it is always keeping the end in sight. What is it we are trying, reminding yourself when you are feeling things are not working: what is it we are trying to achieve? Let's go back to why we are trying to achieve that. Why is it worth it? In a sense” (P8-2, (20:20)).

4.2 UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT SELF

The family-group code of “Understand and Accept Self” is about having an identity and awareness of ourselves and our thoughts, behaviours and actions. This family-group not only encompasses knowing our strengths and weaknesses but also accept ourselves and playing to our strengths.

There were eight sub-codes in this family-group of understand and accept self and Table 11 lists these sub-codes and their frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding self</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-accepting</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using intuition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Understanding self

Having an understanding of ourselves enables us to know how hard we can push and knowing where our limits and shortcomings lie. This understanding also allows us to choose the best possible actions based on what best suits us based on our individual personality and character.
Howard and Irving (2013) stated that people who have developed their own identity and are more self-aware demonstrate greater levels of resiliency. This is affirmed by many of the participants in this study who spoke about knowing themselves and being self-aware.

Participant 17 confirmed this by saying: “I think a lot of the time it was knowing myself well; and being prepared to have really difficult conversations with myself.” (P17-17:4, (39:39)).

Talking about navigating through adversity participant 16 thought: “it is very important to know yourself and to know your limits” (P16-16:14, (51:51)).

Looking back on her career participant 19 reflected that she started building up a self-awareness early on in order to understand herself better. This allowed her to truly understand herself in terms of her strengths and vulnerabilities. This gave her a sense of direction and a solid base to work from: “I think the first thing for me was that I need to be self-aware; so I started doing a lot of work early on in my career to get to know myself and my personality, what I struggle with, what I am good at, how I am perceived by other people. So that helped me a lot. That has helped me to understand who I am and what is really important to me and what I am not prepared to change and fudge on, and what I need to work on. So I think that was for me personally very important” (P19-1, (22:22)).

Participant 20 believes that self-awareness is an important component not only to help overcome adversity but also to be aware of the impact she has on others: I am a firm believer in leadership skills built on self-awareness because the more self-aware you are and understand yourself intimately the more you are able to check your impact on other people. That is what leadership about. It is about being able to manage people around you in a way that your own personal biases don’t impact on them. So for me, every single thing I do is very much about how I am feeling, how I am reacting, how I am perceiving other people to be reacting (P20-20:11, (98:98)). Sharing some of her knowledge about herself she goes on to say: “that comes from knowing that I talk a lot; knowing that I love to share. I am a helper. I love to help people. So if you have got a problem in a meeting my instinctive reaction is let me help you; because I have got views and opinions as well so I have to be so conscious that I talk a lot; that I am a helper. I am also action orientated. All of that comes from understanding who you are and observing
The adversities both personally and professionally that participant 13 has encountered has actually led her understanding herself better and accepting herself: “If it has driven me to self-mastery, so last year I did Landmark Forum, Landmark Advanced. It is a forum that helps you to deal with your past. I suppose you can call it a personal mastery program. It is an international program. So last year I invested quite a lot of time in that. I invested quite a lot of time in studying the Enneagram and understanding my personality and my personal space” (P13-13:7, 66:66).

The table below includes responses from participants who feel the adversities that have faced in the past have helped them grow, mature and develop a better understanding of themselves and what they are capable of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 15</th>
<th>“Just basically learning and growing really. I did a leadership course this year which has been really helpful. So really taking opportunities to learn and grow” (P15-15:9, 53:53).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>“I don’t think I navigated very well in the beginning but I think it forces you to know who you are” (P4-4:16, 46:46).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>“I think probably the last maybe three, four years of my career, I think I have matured. I think I know what I am capable of. I think I am very clear on what I can do and how I will do it and what I will not do” (P5-5:1, 27:27).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2 Understand strengths and weaknesses

Developing and understanding ourselves involves being realistic about our personal strengths and weaknesses or skills and vulnerabilities. Knowing this is the basis for understanding what capabilities and limits we have when dealing with adversity. This is significant as true self-insight makes sure of realistic expectations (Warner & April, 2012). The particular combination of gifts that we all have form the basis of your character strengths and are the foundation of the
ability to fulfil your purpose and mission in life. It is necessary to develop these character strengths in order to achieve our goals in life. More can be achieved in life by understanding and using character strengths (Warner, 2012).

Looking at challenges she had faced in the past and the learnings that she took from them, participant 1 highlights the insight into herself and what that achieved: “my response to these challenges can also be seen as positive, in that I have developed a better understanding of my own emotional and psychological make-up, strengths and weaknesses” (P1-1:7, (25:25)).

When speaking about strengths and weaknesses participant 6 felt it was important for her to focus and build on her strengths as opposed to developing her weaknesses: “Also as they say it is your DNA, you can't change your weaknesses. You can't improve your weaknesses. You can improve your strengths because those are inherent in you” (P6-6:14, (144:144)).

Knowing what she is comfortable with and where her strengths lie participant 9 used a perceptive analogy of a sporting midfielder to describe her strength of being a connection to the top and bottom of her organisation. Knowing this strength allows her to be comfortable with not wanting to be the person on top: “I enjoy sport and I have always excelled at team sport more than individual sport. Personality wise I think I am definitely a driver, bossy, a red person, with all its benefits. But despite that fact I think when I was young I used to excel at team sport and I was always the midfielder so to speak. I didn’t score goals and I wasn’t a good defender; so kind of midrange. And knowing that in my workplace, I know I am a bit of a midfielder. I fetch and carry. So I have got people that I manage under me in a certain way and I have got people at the top. And I am pretty comfortable being the midfielder. Often I find, I don’t know if I want to be the man on top. I am quite comfortable being 2nd in charge and I will probably stay 2nd in charge for a long time” (P9-9:6, (94:94)).

Reflecting on her career as a recruitment consultant, participant 12 felt that knowing what her weaknesses were helped her make positive decisions in her career path. She felt that she navigated to success rather by knowing her strengths and using them: “I think one of my benefits, or one of the benefits is recognising my weaknesses. And there were a lot of opportunities that came along to manage the branch; the CEO offered me general management of South Africa;
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there were a lot of opportunities that came along. And one of my weaknesses, I felt, was my dealing with people. And they were not necessarily always going to be politically correct, or careful or correct, so I thought being in a management position (except on a relief; I did do it for a couple of years on a relief basis) It was knowing my strengths and knowing my weaknesses and using those strengths” (P12-12:5, (62:62)).

Participant 15 spoke about the specific things she does well which help her and reflected that by knowing what she did well and succeeding in something encouraged her to further successes: “I have always been a confident person, I was a confident child. I think what helps is to be good at something. Success breeds success. So you know I was good at horse riding when I was younger; I used to ride, I still ride. And it is actually still an avenue for me. It is just a personal space. I write well and I speak well; public speaking and that kind of thing. So there are certain things that I do well and they help me” (P15-15:17, (85:85)).

4.2.3 Self-accepting

Self-acceptance is an important component of mental health and well-being. Being happy with ourselves despite vulnerabilities or deficiencies is the cornerstone of self-acceptance. Staying true to oneself is also an element of self-acceptance.

Navigating her career as well and her personal life participant 3 described that accepting who she was and what was going to make her happy relieved a lot of stress in her life. She has made peace with the fact that perfection is an unobtainable goal and it has had to accept this in order to endure: “I think it’s forced me to choose what I want out of life, and I have learnt the hard way. And what I mean the hard way I’ve suffered from really, really bad tension headaches for years because of all the things that you try and balance. So I have realised that you cannot be the best mother, the best person at work, the best rock climber, the best, the best, the best. So I have had to make peace with the fact that I am just going to have to be ok, which is extremely hard for someone who is a perfectionist. It is really, really hard. But it has also forced me to define what I want out of life” (P3-3:3, (23:23)). “I think what it tells you though is that we need to be more accepting. And we need to truly accept what we’ve said would make us happy, and not because you sort of do it but you still try and find a gap” (P3-3:6, (36:36))
Similarly participant 5 also spoke about the balance between being the best at home and the best at work and didn’t want others to be aware of the challenges she was facing. By accepting her situation she was able to see that it was ok: “I think for a long time I was trying to be apologetic for it. Because I didn’t want anybody to see she is a woman and she is a mom. I didn’t want them to ever, you know, any of my colleagues would think that. I was trying to keep up with them to my own detriment. I did not realise that it is actually ok” (P5-5:4, (45:45)).

Participant 4 spoke about the importance of staying true to herself and not being influenced by others perceptions of her: “And one of my other lesson have been “just stay true to yourself, always stay true to yourself. In the long term... do I want to be a mean person, because you are a mean person? No I don’t actually because I want to be able to look myself in the mirror every day and be ok with that” (P4-4:6, (62:62)). “I don’t have to be what everyone around thinks I am” (P4-15, (56:56)).

Again participant 7 also reiterated that staying true to oneself is going to lead to being happy with herself which is a component of self-acceptance: “Being true to myself and to go for what is going to make me happy” (P7-7:4, (62:62)).

4.2.4 Courage

Courage is not the lack of dread or fear but rather the internal strength which we have inside ourselves to endure. Kirsten (2011. p125) states that: “The only real failure is not finding the courage to try.”

Participant 6 highlights a few things that help her overcome adversity, one being courage: “and your courage to get back up” (P6-6:11, (107:107)).

Reflecting on rising above challenges the sense of achievement that participant 9 has felt has given her the courage to face adversity with a new perception: “I think overcoming them gives you a sense of achievement and some self-confidence, and courage. When it happens it seems big, but I must admit the adversities are actually quite small. Especially the past three years with little babies. I kept saying to myself, if I can survive this I can survive anything” (P9-9:9, (105:105)).
Similar to participant 9, participant 16 also reflects on overcoming adversities and learns that she has inner strength which has help her withstand the challenges: “In relation to coping with adversity I have learnt that I am pretty tough, I have actually been quite amazed by how I have been able to depersonalise a lot of the stuff. And that also gives you – to realise that you are tough it makes you more resilient” (P16-16:16, (57:57)).

Participant 19 also found that her inner strength helped her navigate adversities in the workplace: “And I think the other thing is that a lot of strength lies within you. In order to navigate through any issue in the workplace you need a huge amount of inner strength and I think what has helped me is that I have always been very clear about what I want to achieve, that has helped me put my current issues in context” (P19-5, (31:31)).

Participant 17 looks back on a particularly challenging time in her life and identifies the importance of just moving forward. The courage to keep going was highlighted in her story: “If I didn’t have resilience there is no way that I could have gone forward. Every single day you have to have resilience and you have got to carry on, and it is small baby steps. And you just keep going and keep going. I can sit back now, and now I realise, wow that was amazing. I didn’t feel like it sometimes” (P17-8, (59:59)).

### 4.2.5 Values

Values are the principles and standards that we judge the importance of our lives on. Understanding our values is akin to understanding oneself as values play a critical role in the choices we make and the actions we take.

Participant 1 talks about values being one of the things that has helped her overcome adversities in the workplace: “My intellect, my emotions, my values, beliefs and ideals; my self-identity as part of a broader social movement, as a mother and family member and my internal resolve” (P1-10, (40:40)).

Knowing what she stands for and establishing what is important to her, participant 4 says: “My identity isn’t attached to a label, or a title, or an office, or a parking bay, which I think it was when I was younger. And it is easy in an organisation for that to happen. But if forced me to look
at myself differently and those things aren’t important” (P4-2, (46:46)). “I know what I stand for and I know I am doing my best so I can’t do other than that and that is ok” (P4-14, (46:46)).

4.2.6 Authentic

Being authentic dates back to Greek philosophy of “To thine own self be true”. Authenticity is the congruency of our thoughts and feelings through our actions. To be authentic is to act in accordance with one’s true self, conveying oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings and being honest when conveying those thoughts and feelings to others (Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010; Michie & Gooty, 2005).

Participant 19 explains how being authentic is the most significant quality of resilience for her. She is able to make herself vulnerable to show the human side especially due to the face that she is perceived as strong and opinionated: “For me authenticity is by far the most important thing. You have to: what comes out your mouth; what you live; what you stand for; what you personify; the moment that jars then people won’t believe you anymore. And I think for me I have never been scared of making myself slightly vulnerable, to show the human side. And maybe to an extent I know because I am so damn strong and opinionated I have to show more of that (P18-18:2, (36:36)). I have to sometimes open up and show the real human being, and the care because that is there in plentiful buckets, but my view has always been I am not here to care for you, you have a job to do first, but then I do care for you. But when there is a choice this one comes before the other one. I am not without empathy, but there is deliverables that come first and that I think makes me a hard boss in that sense, but I also know that people that are close to me, absolutely feel the warmth and the love” (P18-18:22, (36:37)).

Martin and Barnard (2013. p7) identified “appreciation of the feminine advantage” as an element of resilience in male-dominated occupations. Women had noted an appreciation of, and reliance on their femininity and integrated into their identity at work. Participants 17, 18 and 19 also all spoke about the importance of embracing their femininity and accept that they do not want to be like men. They identified their unique qualities to being a women and believe the diversity it delivers in the workplace should be appreciated. The table below shows these three participants’ views.
| Participant 17 | You see I am very much of the opinion that I don’t want to be; I don’t want to act like a male so I bring my whole femininity to work. So have I found that males have treated me differently? I have actually found, if anything, my femininity has been an advantage. What they did add to, to give you examples, in the beginning it took them longer to trust me, because they saw me as something different, because I was female. My advice to women is always not to change to do it the male way, because then they are not being authentic (P17-17:13, (17:17)). |
| Participant 18 | “I have never ever wanted to be like a man, I have never wanted to be a man and I don’t want to dress like them. I don’t want to look like them. I place an incredible amount of importance onto how I groom, how I look. I am feminine and I am proud of it. I am a woman, I want to look like a woman. I have never compromised on that. Which means I look in the mirror three times to make sure I don’t – what is the impression I leave, what is the impression when I walk in the room. And it is all that stuff about if you don’t take yourself seriously enough to look the part, who else is going to take you seriously? And I absolutely believe in that” (P18-18:21, (133:133)). |
| Participant 19 | I think as a woman we do have certain unique advantages. So I had to realise that the fact that certain men find me attractive is, I initially experienced that as very negative because I don’t like to be objectified (and I still don’t like it, but I have learnt how to use it.) It is not flirting or charming your way into a situation. If you are nice to someone and they like you and you come across as professional and you make your point properly, they do listen to you. You will be heard. So I think for me realising that and realising the fact that women are different and we need to act as |
women in the workplace and not try to be like men. That for me was quite a strong breakthrough” (P19-19:2, (23:24)).

4.2.7 Using intuition

Intuition is an irrational function because a person does not use judgement in order to arrive at a conclusion. Richardson (2002) believes that one of the most influential human tools that will be developed, refined, and trusted in resilience interventions in time will be intuitive skills.

Three participants commented on listening, acknowledging and trusting their “gut” feelings about situations. There is also the inference that women tend to have a better intuitive sense than men and should learn to trust it more often.

Participant 10 recalls: “I really do listen to my gut and I am quite grateful that I have a good gut feel, for myself” (P10-1014, (68:68)).

Talking about what she has learned about overcoming adversity, participant 12 emphasises the intuitive skills which she has and the belief in following it: “Listening to the gut and following up on the gut. If you didn’t it would come back to burn you. I think with anything, hard work, just stay focused. I don’t believe in luck, so to me the only way it is going to happen is solid hard work. Luck is like you just can’t bank on it. There is nothing sure about it” (P12-8, (77:77)).

[Learn] to trust your instincts and I think good instincts was imperative for the job and being able to read situations. You had be able to read; walk into a company understand the manager, the structure, the culture of the company; the ethics and be able to then find the person that would then be able to fit that. So it was, yeah, you have got to be a very good listener; you have got to listen and have got to hear; good interpretation skills (P12-12:7, (20:20)).

Participant 19 has learned that she needs to act on her intuition which she reflects has always guided her and given her signs in the past: “… I think the other thing also is I have learnt probably to trust my own gut a lot more. I think as women we do have proper gut feelings. We have got strong intuition and we tend not to listen to it, which is a mistake, because when I look back at many of the things that happened, I had a very strong [warning signs] and I didn’t act on
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it. And I have learnt from it, I have to act on my intuition; you can’t always mentally think things through and rationalise it. It has shaped a lot of who I am” (P19-19:16, (84:88).

Participant 18 shares her experiences of bringing something different to the table than her male colleagues, one of them being her strong intuitive sense: “The intuitiveness with which I can read situations and what was even more scary for them [men] I wasn’t the quiet mouse in the corner. I was opinionated, I was outspoken and I fought for what I believed in” (P18-23, (29:29)).

4.2.8 Beliefs

Our beliefs are what we trust to be true of the world. They inform our perceptions and outlook on life as well as what is possible or not. Our beliefs are often formed from our past experiences and mental models. Understanding our beliefs enable us insight into our behaviours and often give us the strength to fight back when they are being challenged.

Participant 8 speaks about learning to engage with people on their level in order to overcome personal challenges which they may be facing together. She spoke about having to relate to people while staying true to herself and what she believes in: “That is exactly it. Relating to the person at where they are at, while holding true to what you believe in. That has to be unshakable and unwavering” (P8-8:7, (42:42)). She goes on further to say that being grounded in your beliefs does not mean being ridged and inflexible but knowing yourself enough to be able to relate to others and bring them along on the journey: “So without being [difficult]; you have got to remain true to your beliefs and values and that you have got to stay rooted in. But different people need you to deal with them in different ways. And if you want to bring people along on the change journey toward a goal, some people you are going to get on board in one way and some people you are going to get on board in another way. I struggled with that initially in my working career because I kind of felt, it feels devious, it feels manipulative but actually it isn’t” (P8-6, (40:40)).
4.3 SELF-CARE

The family code of self-care related to how we take care of our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs. Often during times of adversity our energy levels are depleted and we are not operating at an optimum frequency. Self-care relates to identifying when we are under high-stress and pressure and doing things for ourselves which assist us to cope better through the adversity. It may take different forms for different people, but the important component is having some type of signal or warning sign which we are aware of within ourselves that reminds us to support ourselves better, take some time out or bring our awareness back into the present moment. The three sub-codes in this family-group are listed in Table 12 below with their frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing body</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking time out</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Nurturing body

Nurturing body includes all the things that our body requires to stay strong and healthy; these activities included eating well, exercising and getting enough sleep.

Participant 3 speaks about the role that looking after herself and staying fit and healthy has had on her: “I also think something else is I look at myself I am healthy and I am fit. That also has also got to be a role. That is very important. There is no point being very successful and being unhealthy. You have got to take care of yourself” (P3-3:20, (117:117)). She also shares how regular yoga and in particular the breathing that is learned from that has incredible benefits to her: “…getting the benefits from breathing better and all the benefits that that brings; physiological benefits; and the huge emotional benefits. It is amazing because yoga works on all of that without you even knowing. So it is almost like the principles of yoga have all the principles of meditation and mindfulness and all of that. And it is absolutely amazing, you get
snippets of that, you get snippet of it over the years and you realise just how absolutely amazing it is” (P3-3:17, (108:108)).

For participant 16 it has been about getting enough sleep, eating regularly, taking breaks and exercising: “But what I have always done, I have always gotten up early. So for me it is about enough sleep and I generally try to eat regularly. I am not as good at exercising as I should, I am now trying to do more of that. It is the ability to switch off; getting enough sleep; and taking fairly regular breaks as in holidays. I cope with it that way” (P16-16:11, (44:44)).

Participant 6 emphasises the importance of supporting her body, especially during challenging times: “Support yourself. Support your system, for me I have had to learn to support my system” (P6-6:6, (68:68))

The following three participants all emphasise the importance of exercise in their lives. It helps them destress, get rid of tension, work through challenges. This is what they say:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>“I use exercise to get rid of tension and being a runner helped to destress” (P14-14:2, (20:20)). “Keeping fit” (P14-14:5, (24:24)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>“I exercise almost every day and so generally work through that and also [my husband] is great at getting me out of any thug. I get home and I am 'umm' then I am smiling in about two minutes” (P7-7:1, (45:45)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>“I had to really draw on family and friends support. I have to make sure I was exercising. I had to have an outlet for the stress. And I just kind of like, got on with it” (P10-10:1, (28:28)). “Exercising has to be a priority although recently being unwell (I mean I am much better now, I seem to have figured out a way to deal with it) I wasn’t able to run for months and it wasn’t great; but I am back on track now. Exercising is important” (P10-10:7, (53:53)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 Taking time out

Taking time out in one form or another is another element of self-care. Whether it be getting a pedicure, going on holiday, having some quite time without the children or taking the afternoon off half the participants in the study mentioned the importance of taking time out as element of being resilient.

Participant 2 shares how she takes a long holiday each year which allows her to switch off properly. She also uses reading each night to take her mind off the day: “I’ve learnt the importance of taking a break. For example, I take a three-week holiday each year — I also advise others to do it. Anything shorter than this means you don’t really switch off. I read — nothing to heavy — every night before I switch off my light. It helps to take your mind off work” (P2-2:1, (12:12)).

Participant 2 said that due to the physical nature of her work and dealing with people all day long can take its toll on her both physically and emotionally. She has started taking an afternoon off for herself every week which this helps her to break the emotional connections and identification which she feels for her patients: “I take an afternoon off now to just really take time for myself and I’ve got to constantly remind myself not to; like to put the emotional barrier in place; like cutting the tie emotional frequently. It is like a weekly thing, maybe even a daily thing” (P10-10:5, (46:46)).

Participant 6 said she has learned with hindsight to take time out for herself. She pushed herself quite hard in the past but now will even take time out to go for a pedicure: “But also taking time out for yourself. I would never go and do anything for myself. And I now go to Pilates twice a week. That is the best form of relaxation because you are so busy concentrating the left leg and the right arm, you don’t know what is going on, that you brain has got to switch off. In summer, the girls are really good, my youngest especially says “Mom it’s a beautiful day let’s go down to the beach” and once you there... Even little things like having a ‘pedi’, I would never bother with in the past” (P6-6:5, (64:64)).
Participant 8 shares how she can push herself quite hard for long periods of time but then once they are done she knows she needs an extended time off to recover: “So I personally can live off it [adrenaline] quite long. I think the longest; I did two consecutive very big changes things once, so it was about two and a half years. And then I took six weeks off” (P8-8:5, (33:33)).

Participant 9 feels that her “me-time” is an important component of staying happy: “For me to be happy at work and be happy at home I need to be happy. For me being happy I need my specific ‘me time’ and I need exercise. When I was in my twenties I used to train every day from five until nine at night, then go home and have dinner” (P9-7, (97:97)). Having young children and a full day job she finds her “me-time” early in the mornings: “I take that ‘me time’ now and the only time I can take that ‘me time’ now is between five and seven in the morning. So my alarm goes off at 4:30” (P9-9:8, (100:100)).

Participant 16 said that taking a break is a big element of being successful as the breaks allow her to take her mind off work and be engaged with something else: “I also think I do try and compartmentalize to some extent. I really do try and have, I mean I work crazy hours during the week, but I do try and have some respite during the weekend. I check my mails and all that, but I do try and have a fairly uncluttered weekend from a work perspective and I think it is really important to get relief from the stresses and demands.

So for me, the way our family life works: is that weeks are for working, we work long hours; everyone is kind of focused on work or school or whatever it is during the week and then weekends are for us, family time, and time where we take a break. And I think it is really important to take that break. The sign of the best weekend is when I am driving to work on a Monday morning and I am trying to think so what is on my desk this morning, I have to go back into my work mentally. That means I have had a great weekend. I think it is really important to have that time off, the time when your mind is otherwise engaged” (P16-16:10, 41:42)). She also reflects how in the past she was not always aware of what her limits were but that now when she feels she is coming close to them she can pull back and take time out: “I think you need to be self-aware, which I think comes with age and experience. I think when you younger you think you can go on forever. It is realising where your limits are and how close you are to them. And then pulling back and allowing yourself some time out” (P16-16: 15, (55:55)).
Participant 19 spoke about having something outside of work which has been an outlet and has helped her a lot: “another thing that is helping to navigate through the issues, you need some sort of outlet outside of work whether it is friends, or exercise or whatever and that has helped a lot” (P19-19:4, (29:29)).

Participant 17 recalled having pulled a hamstring recently and had to stay in bed for six weeks: “It was really my body needing a rest because I was driving myself to hard and that brought me back down to; you do need balance. There is not a rush to go out there and achieve all this. And I think as women we are quite hard on ourselves and I talk for woman especially. We have got something to prove, so we drive ourselves way to hard. So that is what I have learnt, there isn’t this major rush that I think there is” (P17-17:3, (35:35)).

4.3.3 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state of being where we are aware and conscious about our thoughts, actions and behaviour. It is closely related to staying in the present moment and being fully present in the here-and-now.

Participant 18 said that being mindful brought about the awareness of having choices to her reactions and behaviours: “But it had a lot to do with mindfulness. In a moment recognise your feelings, recognise the triggers, ok what is this? And the realisation that if you are not mindful about it your brain finds the shortest path to a response; but the moment you are you can go: “Ok, am I going to do this? Am I going to do that?” Actually I have a plethora of choices. It is like learning to walk, you don’t think about that anymore” (P18-5, (49:49)).

Participant 3 said that mindfulness course which she attended was amazing in helping her. “Yoga has been amazing. And I did a mindfulness course which has been amazing. So on the yoga side the two elements, there is definitely the moving part (I don’t want to call it exercise because it is not, it is definitely is but not seen to be) there is definitely a physical side” (P3-3:16, (106:106)).

Participant 6 said she tried to stay mindful of her ruminating thoughts and tries to get some perspective by pushing herself to do something that will take her mind off the cycle of thought she is in: “I try to be mindful of it and I also try to take a step back. So sometimes it is a beautiful
Participant 16 said that she has learned to be conscious of the “early warning signals” which come up for her in order to correct things before she reaches burnout: “But yes, you have to look after yourself and have to also, almost a system of early warning signals. So I know that I can feel when I am getting to the point of saturation, and that is when I know I need to take corrective steps” (P16-16:13, (49:49)).

Participant 12 also said that recognising signals before reaching burnout was an important awareness which kept her going: “I would recognise when I was in burn-out and I would say to myself; “Ok. Don’t stress; maybe instead of working 15 hours, work 12 hours today; get myself through that burn-out and then pick it up the next Monday or whatever” (P12-12:4, (38:38)).

Participant 8 believes that leaders and managers who are more self-aware have an easier time: “I think people who are very self-aware tend to have an easier time of leadership and management and if you have big, big blind spots. I have seen people in senior positions who have big, big blind spots, so it is not impossible” (P8-17, (78:78)).

Participant 9 says that breathing helps her to stay present and mindful of what is going on around her: “I do have an awareness of breathing; coming back to breath when I am feeling overwhelmed. I do tend to hold tension in my body so I preach that every day to breathe. So I try to listen to my own advice. I should meditate, but I don’t. I have the tools but I don’t always use them” (P10-10:9, (63:63)).

Participant 17 practices meditation which helps her tap into her internal strength and helps her connect to her purpose: “I meditate, because sometimes ... meditation is part of my daily ritual. Otherwise, I tune into my meditation, actually belief. I know we keep coming to the same answer, but that is really what kept me going internally” (P17-17:5, (43:43)).
4.4 GAINING PERSPECTIVE

Overcoming adversity involves preparing ourselves to act in a certain way by taking a sensible, down-to-earth view of the reality of the situation (Coutu, 2002). By gaining perspective on the situation we have the opportunity to choose the outcomes of the events instead of slipping into denial in order to cope with hardship (Richardson, 2002). Our approach is what determines success and the perspective we choose influences our feelings and attitude which in turn impacts the actions we take (Warner, 2012). The family-group gaining perspective has 6 sub-codes listed in table 13 below along with their frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gaining perspective</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from the past</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being objective</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letting go</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting reality</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from others</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1 Gaining perspective

Gaining perspective is the ability get a realistic view of the situation and get insight into the situations we find ourselves in. The attitude with which we approach situations is guided by our perspectives. Below are some of the quotations from women who have felt gaining perspective on their situations has assisted them in overcoming challenges that have faced in the past.

Participant 3 speaks about the times she has been anxious about things going wrong, but when she really looks deeper into it and puts it in perspective she has found that it helps to relieve the anxiety: “You have got to say, how many times have I been worried in a situation like this? How many times has it actually gone wrong, well maybe once; so one out of thirty? Maybe I shouldn’t
Participant 5 spoke about her journey of coming to terms with the different aspects of her life and trying to fit it all in, she had always felt like she could only reach a certain level but once took on the mind-set that it was a marathon and not a sprint it helped her put the challenges she was facing in perspective: “I almost felt like I had to give myself a ceiling, in terms of my career. I think I felt so really tough to balance different worlds. I think I felt ok, this is my ceiling. I gave myself a ceiling. But I think through the challenges that I have had, and through the various interventions that I have had and I think, talking to different people, I think I actually feel now ok. Actually it is actually doable. I can actually go as high as I want and because I also felt if I can’t cope at this level of the game how on earth am I going to go to a higher level and I gave myself a ceiling” (P5-10, (64:64)). “And what she taught me was you need to understand that it is a marathon, it is not a sprint. So what she did to get me there, she said to me... if you change your life around, what would be your ideal life?” (P5-5:6, (57:57))

Participant 6 actually found that having a psychologist at a certain point in her career helped her gain perspective of the situation and her ability to cope in it: “I had a psychologist, to be honest, because someone had to make me see what was going on” (P6-6:9, (83:83)).

Getting others view-point on a situation has helped participant 8 deal with challenges better: “Often getting perspective. You think this is a major disaster and they say: "No, we’ve had this before." (laughter). "We will get through it don’t worry." And just their take on how they would handle a situations helps me deal with it better (P8-8:11, (54:54)).

Reflecting on a situation where participant 10 was renovating her new business premises while still seeing clients in order to bring in an income, she spoke about how she adopted the mind-set that this was only a temporary situation which helped her to endure the stress and challenges as they came up: “I needed to be busy in order to pay for the renovations so I couldn’t turn work away. So I had to have full day and I just had to manage it; manage the stress as it came up. But you see it for what it is; it is temporary as well. It is not forever” (P10-10:4, (42:42)).
By speaking to other people who are in a similar position to her, participant 15 discovered that finding new perspectives on the challenges she faces helps her overcome them easier: “I have one or two contacts that are really in the same boat as me, but I have others who ...have leadership challenges. I think it is important to keep finding new perspective, not just your own path, whatever that is” (P15-15:16, (77:77))

Participant 16 emphasises how important it is to retain her perspective as this is something that has helped her rise above adversities she has faced managing a large national corporation: “And it is all about actually retaining your perspective. You have got to be able to retain your perspective. I think if you don’t retain your perspective however you get to retain it, then you get bogged down and it becomes very difficult to sustain the day to day wear and tear of a job like this” (P16-16:12, (45:45)).

Looking back at her career and the various challenges she has faced being a CEO of a large investment firm, participant 20 has a perspective that there is nothing that cannot be overcome in the workplace: “I think if I look back at everything, and you have to get really old to [see this] there was absolutely nothing ...I promise you there was not one thing in the workplace that was a catastrophe. And in fact there was nothing in the workplace that is broken that it can’t be fixed. And fixed may not mean that it goes back to the way it was... I particularly have this issue around managers that blow up and everything is a crisis” (P20-20:13, (110:110))

4.4.2 Learning from the past

Learning from our adversities is one of the characteristics that enable us to cope better with them in the future.

By having experience of rising above challenges in the past, participant 1 reflects how this has made her stronger and made her better at what she does: “Some difficulties have helped me to develop more confidence, knowing that I have endured adversity in the past. Like the saying goes, “what does not kill you makes you stronger”. I have also tried to learn from my mistakes and used adversity to become better at what I do; become a better manager, develop more innovative strategies, systems and teams to deliver quality products in line with desired
outcomes. I was also able to improve my work performance and study further” (P1-1:5, (24:24)).

Reflecting on a work situation in the past, participant 4 recalls how the lessons she learned through the challenging relationships have helped her face relationships differently in the future and by overcoming difficulties in her past she has become more confident as that learning takes her to a new level: “That was a really hard relationship, but it was one of the best things that happened to me because that was where I learnt ... first of all, can’t expect anyone to trust you. You have to earn it; every single time; over and over and over again and no one owes you anything. No one owes you anything. You have got to make it work, and those are great lessons. And they have stayed with me, and I wouldn’t have learnt them if people were always going we trust you” (P4-4:12, (21:21)). “I think there are changes because every time I am more confident about who I am. Every time I am starting from a different base” (P4-4:16, (81:81)).

Participant 18 describes herself as a “learning person”, using any opportunity to learn new things about herself and her impact on others: “I see these things as an opportunity to learn. I am definitely a learning person. I learn new things about myself and about my impact on people around me every day. It is something that you are either attuned to, or you are not. And I am. I am not a sleeper. I will lie awake for hours every night, going through meetings and what happened, and body language. When I said this how did people respond to that? I am a learning person. I learn, I don’t beat myself up too much; I am hard on myself; harder on myself than anyone around me; but you learn from it so that you can learn from it. I don’t get stuck” (P18-18:4, (45:45)).

Participant 9 keeps a journal and every year reflects on it to see what she has achieved and what she could have done differently: “I journal, so I keep a journal of my journey. So that every year I look back I can say, you actually have achieved something. Being an achiever I always look and see I could have done so much more. I read my journal at the end of every year where I was and what I have achieved. Then I can set the goals for the next year and look back and see what I have achieved. But if I wasn’t journaling I would only be looking at what I hadn’t achieve not what I had achieved. It is a very internal process, it is a journey within yourself” (P17-17:9,
4.4.3 Being objective

Both participant 16 and 8 describe themselves as “rational” people which allows them to take an objective view of the situation more easily: “I suppose that’s really dependant on your personality. I am quite a rational person so I seem to rationalise” (P8-8:9, (47:47))

Participant 16 says that maintaining an objective mind-set has benefited her and assisted her in not taking things too personally: “I think that probably one of the most important things I think is to be able to obtain an objective mind-set. I think one of the things that I have benefited from is the ability to rise above the situation and see it more objectively. If you take some of these things personally I think it is very difficult to be as resilient as you need to be. I am a very rational person so I think that enables me to take a helicopter view and see things from all sides. And find an objective rationalisation or basis that does not make it feel it is all about me. You actually need to be able to get some distance” (P16-16:1, (3:3)).

Participant 1 explains that when she is experiencing adversity she tried to do an objective analysis on the situation in order to help her navigate through it: In general, when I experience adversity, I try to conduct an objective analysis of the situation for myself, including the context, the source of the adversity, its duration and likely intensity, the role of various role-players including my own role and identify mitigating measures and strategies. This analysis is generally informed by my core values and beliefs, my ideals, my emotional responses, overall frameworks of understanding the world, role models etc., as well as literature and consultations with others” (P1-1:1, (17:17)).

Participant 3 agrees that the ability to step back and gain an objective view of the situation is something she uses in challenging times to help her rise above it: “But you need the ability to separate your mind; your thinking mind from your being to stand back and see it, otherwise you are not going to see it” (P3-3:15, (104:104)).
4.4.4 Letting go

Navigating: As time goes on you are able to move on and deal with the impact of the adversity. This phase encompasses trying new things and navigating in a positive way forward. The movement in the direction of healing is important as you connect once again to your meaning in life. This phase signifies letting go of the past and living with a changed future.

Participant 18 spoke about letting go of things that are not in her control and how often once that is done the gap which that thing may leave is filled: “You could stay there or you could say this is not in my hands, let it go move on. And it is amazing how tings fill that gap very soon, and very quickly. If you willing to say out into the Universe, I will embrace what comes at me and I think in that way. I won’t say that I am deeply religious, but I am very spiritual. I believe in the greater good out there, I believe that what I put out in the Universe will come back at me. I believe that wherever I go I drive right to the front door because there will be a parking there for me, and there always is. That is just how I am, I know it is going to be there and ‘taadaa’ there it is. A deep belief that I deserve it, I have worked hard for it, and I believe it will come and it does” (P18-18:18, (115:115)).

Participant 20 also spoke about how learning to let things go and by putting them behind you allows you to see the value in the situation: “You learn to let things go, but that for me was a big low moment and value that I got out of it was incredibly important to me” (P20-20:2, (24:24)).

The table below highlights some of the other participants feelings on the subject of “letting things go.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>“In the long term the right thing happens” (P4-4:7, (70:70)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>“And then I think also what I have learnt is that things that I would take personally or things that I would stress about because I couldn’t get them done which are out of my control” (P6-6:3, (34:34)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participant 13 | “That is how life goes, I guess. Take it as a compliment and move on. Allow yourself to feel the feelings, deal with it and then move on. Often we hold onto things too long” (P9-9:4, (80:80)).

“I think the biggest lesson in this whole period of time is ‘being vulnerable isn’t a bad thing’” (P13-13:14, (104:104)) |

### 4.4.5 Accepting reality

“With hindsight I am fortunate about that, because it is not an internal thing when you are six and you have got to make a whole bunch of new friends. It is just something that you have to do. You don’t debate it, you don’t philosophise it - you just do it. So by the time you twenty you can philosophise, but you just do it” (P4-4:21, (128:128)).

Participant 15 says that taking responsibility is a key learning and understand what she has influence over and not or what she can and cannot control: “I think that is the process of taking responsibility for it is the main learning and really understand what can I do; what can I influence; what do I have control over; and what don’t I?” (P15-15:6, (36:36)) She also speaks about how she speaks to other people in order to keep a check on reality: “A virtual board, I check in with people from time to time. ...So just to sort of keep your finger on your own reality where you are at; that is maybe something I would add, my personal network definitely; and to also just try and keep learning” (P15-15:8, (51:51)).

### 4.4.6 Learning from others

Participant 5 shares how she learns from others via a magazine where other woman share their journey and how they navigate through their lives: “For me that magazine, I subscribe to it. I read it religiously every month cover to cover because it has such useful handy tips from other fellow, you know, even more achieved and more accomplished woman than I am. They talk about their journeys; they talk about their friends; they talk about how they manoeuvre their careers in the corporate world or public sector or they have their own business for example. So for me, I really think, Destiny it is a powerful tool. It does help me, just going through that magazine very
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month, and they talk about different people. You learn so much, you pick something that you can use; practical stuff. So for me that was a very useful tool” (P5-5, (49:49)). She also reflects how sharing with others is a great opportunity to realise your situation is not unique and that speaking to others can help you learn from your situations: “I actually realised it is very, very powerful opportunity because you sometimes tend to think whatever challenges you are facing are unique to me only. And it is because maybe people don’t like me or whatever then you realise when you chat to other woman in the industry that actually no, they not unique to you only. You realise it is not personal. I think it is just the nature of the industry, the challenges are just universal” (P5-5:7, (79:79)).

Knowing that everyone has something you can learn from has helped participant 8 approach challenges with a more positive attitude: “It is what I learnt and to some degree that is also what gets me through tough challenges; although you grit your teeth at the same time. Even if it is a small challenge or a small challenge or a new person you have deal with: everyone can teach you something and make sure you become a bit more whole along the way” (P8-8:18, (85:85)).

Participant 9 says that role models have played a big part in her life and given her the motivation to know she can also achieve what she sets out to achieve: “I think I choose good role models. I purposefully look at my boyfriend at school. His mom was an architect; she told me that she does not think I am smart enough to be an architect. So that is not why I am one; ok that has made me go for it more. Hang on there. And I think, she is obviously 30 years my senior. She must have had a lot more. And she is well respected and well known. I have always had her as a bit of a role model – good and bad” (P9-9:2, (72:72)). “If they can do it, I can do it too. And my mother has always been a working mother and she also was an example, she didn’t feel sorry for me. And she is always there to support and cheerlead. And I think that helps. What else? Just recognize those incidents and not repeat it, or avoid it” (P9-9:3, (74:74)).

Participant 17 uses courses to learn and develop herself: “and I am a course girl. I go on courses. And I learn through reading so everything that I have done is been learning through books. So I pick up many, many books. I am an avid reader. And then if I find a book I love I fly to America or the UK or whatever and I attend their courses” (P17-17:7, (53:53)).
Participant 18 says she continuously learns from others and she is open to let them know as well: “I think those are the kind of things that you learn... it is good for anyone’s ego for you to say I think I can learn from you. Have the courage to do that. I have never had a shortage, I have never had anyone say well no actually it is going to take too much of my time. And for me it is a sound board thing, here’s a situation, I think I know what to do, but let me go and check. And you just learn so much” (P18-18:13, (90:90)). Her attitude to learning allows her to absorb perspectives and input from those around her: “and it is that, openness to learn, openness to say I would rather absorb what three or four other people; also by observing you know, ok I never want to do that. That is who I am and how I am” (P18-18:14, (91:91)).

4.5 INTERNAL OPTIMISM

The definitive freedom we have as human beings is the choice of how we respond to things that happen to us. Exercising choice is entirely under our control (Warner, 2012). The family-group internal optimism. Richardson (2002) believes that resilient people choose the outcomes that will be positive in the face of disruptions in life. Reframing thoughts is a positive way is a method of disputing negative thinking by giving alternative meaning to the adversity with positive but realistic thoughts (Warner & April, 2012).

Barsh, Cranston, and Craske, (2008) emphasise that the role of positive emotions are predominantly distinguishable in women compared to their male counterparts in the workplace. The double strain of motherhood and management drains energy in a particularly challenging way and they also have a tendency to experience emotional highs and lows more intensely than most men do. It is important for women to balance their energy by basing their priorities on what energises them both at work and home and actively managing these resources to avoid dipping into reserves (Barsh et al., 2008). Positive emotions disengage the damaging physical impact that drawn-out and intense negative emotions can have on our body (Fredrickson et al., 2000).

Warner (2012) outlines four pages of resilience and navigating is described as the ability to deal with the impact of the adversity as time goes on, it encompasses trying new things and moving
forward in a positive way. Table 14 below outlines the 7 sub-codes of internal optimism with the frequency of quotations in each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choosing attitude</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive outlook</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control emotional impulses</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal locus of control</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choosing thoughts</td>
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4.5.1 Choosing attitude

In simple terms, the story we tell ourselves is the one we create in our lives (Warner, 2012). Choosing your attitude is the principle of the belief that challenges which we are enviably will encountered along the journey of life can be solved.

Participant 18 believes that the way we approach situations in our life is all a choice: “...it is a choice and you choose; maybe also I am a learning person. I want to go home every day having learnt something” (P18-18:8, (68:68)). Her attitude about how she saw herself in the context of adversity was something that helped her: “I don’t take things for granted. I am still like: Wow, thank you that is amazing. And I think it comes through, there is kind of an innocence around there. I do not have a chip on my shoulder, well I am this person I deserve any of this. That is not to say that I am not demanding, when I really, really know I deserve certain things, that these inner qualities. I do, I fight my fight; but the amazing thing is that I have never really had to do it. I have never really felt that I needed, that there was a glass ceiling and you have to fight my way through it. It has worked without having to spend energy on trying to fight the system. I never really felt that. I am the system I can change the system. I am not going to spend energy on fighting it. I think that attitude...” (P18-18:7, (106:106))
Participant 3 also spoke about how she has leaned to choose what she wants out of life through the hardships she has faced in the past: “I think it’s forced me to choose what I want out of life, and I have learnt the hard way” (P3-3:2, (23:23)).

Participant 1 has used adversity to motivate her to do better: “I have used adversity to spur me to be a better manager, to plan better, to be more innovative, to work harder and smarter to deliver quality work” (P1-1:3, (19:19)).

“So sometimes you might really want to generate some more discomfort to learn more” (P4-4:22, (146:146))

Participant 6 recalls bouncing back from a place which she felt was “rock bottom” and her attitude in that time was one she must be on the way up from there: “I think the lesson is, whether it is to do with business, or anything – when you hit rock bottom (because I really, really did) there is only one way and that is up. So you have just got to plod through” (P6-6:7, (70:70)).

Participant 11 attributes her navigating through challenges partly to luck, this attitude has helped her be grateful for what she has: “I do feel there is some luck in life. Some people really do seem to have everything goes wrong. You feel sometimes it is because they haven’t managed things well but other times I am sure there has to be a little luck in it” (P11-11:16, (172,172)).

Participant 19 speaks about the attitude she adapted in trying to balance work with the rest of her life, by having the attitude that this needs to be flexible and that she has the ability to choose what she would like to make time for has been a learning for her over the years: “Then the other thing that I adapted a lot, was my view on this almost mythical work life balance. It does not exist. There is no way. It is your life. Everything is your life. And there will be some stages where you spend a lot more time and energy in your work, or in your studies, and there will be another time where you spend more time on your family, less time on your work. There is no balance between that. And I have had to learn to make time for everything that is important to me” (P19-19:8, (52:52)).

Participant 20 has completely reframed adversity into just problems that need to be solved, she has an unwavering belief that any challenges in life can be overcome and this is her outlook for
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everything for comes up against: “I don’t actually find anything challenging. For me everything is a problem waiting to be solved. And that is how I tackle everything: “Flip we have an issue now, how do we get past it?” I am also incredibly even as far as temperament is concerned” (P20-20:1, (11:11)).

4.5.2 Optimism

A shared belief about resilience is that it stems from an optimistic nature (Coutu, 2002). But having an optimistic does not mean burying your head in the sand or wearing “rosy-coloured-glasses”. Optimism manifests in an outlook to expect positive outcomes and positive attributes towards future success. It is having the ability to see things for what they are put choosing to see the “glass half-full” instead of it “half-empty”. It’s a predisposition to attribute internal positive qualities and a rebuttal to surrender during adversities (van Wyk, 2014). Gupton and Slick (1996) believed that optimism is an essential ingredient to being resilient. Optimism involves looking at the bright side to a situation and the things we can learn or grow from. Ledesna (2014) found that people who have higher levels of optimism and hope are more likely to experience personal development and growth. Shirey (2012) states that individuals with resilience possess protective factors that assist them to recover from and thrive despite adversity, this includes optimism.

Both participant 2 and 18 describe themselves as resilient people and attribute the fact that they are naturally optimistic to the ability to bounce back from adversity quickly:

“I think I am a very tough and resilient person. I am also naturally optimistic, so I bounce back from adversity quickly” (P2-2:4, (18:18)).

“I am very resilient, I bounce back from things…. I am an incredible optimist, I see the bright side of things and I think that is it. I also take responsibility very, very seriously” (P18-18:15, (96:96)).

Participant 13 says she is the eternal optimist, she attributes this quality to being born from immigrant parents who had incredible resilience and strength to make a life for themselves in South Africa after moving away from their home town in Italy: “I am the eternal optimist even when it looks like the economy is poor; the rand has gone to wherever; I don't have BEE creds
and it does not look like I am going to get business; somehow it just, the glass is always half full. And I think that view has stood me in such good stead” (P13-13:4, (56:56)). “So that optimism has been [important]. I am the daughter of immigrants and my parents were Italian and I think I saw their resilience. And I think, you know they didn't speak the language; they scrounged around and made it work in a country that wasn't theirs. There is something in that that you take away with you” (P13-13:17, (123:123)).

Participant 10 has an optimistic belief around finding safety in the face of risk and uncertainty, she reminds herself about this when she is fearful and it helps her to take a leap of faith: “I guess there are these sayings that stick with me, whenever I have to go through a tough time and that is: "Jump and the net will appear" and "Feel fear, but do it anyway." So you don't have to like excuse your feeling. You don't have to say, you don't have to not feel it. I was terrified to take the move but I just did it anyway. And "the only thing that is certain is that things will change". So if it was tough it would become better. I know they sound very cliché, but the "jump and the net will appear" has come up in all significant choices in my life” (P10-10:10, (66:66)).

4.5.3 Positive outlook

Positive outlook is very similar to being optimistic, it also does it is way of perceiving the world in a positive light but doesn’t alter one’s’ sense of reality (Coutu, 2002). Research done by Valentine and Feinauer (1993) included having a positive outlook on life as one of the six themes which emerged around resilience.

Participant 19 says that she has a positive outlook on life and even surrounds herself with positive people, she believes this attitude has helped her deal with adversities in the past: “I have a very positive outlook on things; and I hate negative people. If I have to deal with an issue then I would rather look at it positively and how do I make something out of it than look at it negatively and say: “Oh shit, I don’t want to deal with this?” I think that has made a major difference in how I deal with things” (P19-19:14, (75:75)).

“I think I am a positive person. I also know, yes sometimes I will have my self-doubts, but at the end of the day I know that I can do things. I know that I can make it happen. I know that if I
Throughout the interview with participant 11 she spoke about various adversities in her life which from an objective view were some of the most challenging situations we could possibly face as human beings, these included losing her husband to cancer and having to run their business alone when he went off to the army. Her comments around this adversities was always the acknowledgement that it was not easy but she definitely emphasised her “happy disposition” as a factor that helped her just keep going: “It was tough, but I think I am very fortunate that I am of a happy disposition” (P11-11:1, (32:32)). In a study done by O’Leary (1998) she found when women are confronted with the death of a spouse they are less vulnerable to mental and physical health consequences than men (O’Leary, 1998).

4.5.4 Control emotional impulses

Controlling emotional impulsivity and choosing a well-thought-out response is key to building resilience and play a crucial role in maintaining it as well (Warner, 2012). This does not mean that emotions are not felt or expressed (Bonanno et al., 2002) but when these emotions are being experienced it is important not to let them drive us but rather choose actions and behaviours rationally, which will assist in dealing with the issues at hand and achieving our goals (Warner, 2012).

Participant 7 says that for her it was important to unpack the underlying feeling of the emotions she was experiencing and not to just act on the first emotion she felt but to look deeper into understanding her emotions better in order to choose better responses to situations: “Looking at what is the underlying feeling. What is the real feeling, not just the immediate 'I am irritated' or whatever and then to act on that” (P7-7:3, (60:60)).

Learning not to take things personally is something that participant 16 felt was a core learning of developing resilience: “I think probably one of the things that I have learnt in the last year, is really to not take things personally. I think that has been one of the most significant. As soon as you accept that, this is not about you as a person, it is about it is a whole lot of other things. That
is probably one of the best tools for developing resilience is actually to realise that this is not personal” (P16-16:17, (59:59)).

Being aware of her emotional impulses, participant 18 has realised that she has the ability to change or choose her responses more appropriately and positively: “Emotionally it is the same way for us, the trigger comes and you do something without even thinking about it. Often, with me and my husband: “Aah I have just done it again, I know, I know, I know.” Now suddenly I can go: “Oh, ok, I can do this, I can do that. I can do my old response; I don’t like that one, I can try a new one.” I guess it is that. That is something that you learn. To me it is a technique that you learn and that is part of being a learning person” (P18-18:5, (48:48)).

4.5.5 Humour

A study done by Kuiper (2012) on how humour may fit within a resiliency perspective, the research clearly suggested that there is an important role for humour in a resiliency approach to stress and trauma.

There have also been self-reported improvements in immune system functioning (Tugade et al., 2004) due to the positive emotion produced by laughter and humour. Wolin and Wolin (1993) also include humour in their seven characteristics of resilient people. Three of the participants in the study specifically identified humour as a characteristic they found was positive to building resilience.

Participant 16 said that humour is a critical factor for her and having the ability to laugh will often provide a relief that is needed during times of adversity: “Humour is really important. I have, I think, a good sense of humour, and it is so important to be able to laugh, and to be able to laugh at yourself. Humour is critical. Sometimes it persists in keeping perspective” (P16-16:28, (109:109)). “Humour is actually critical. You have got to have the ability to laugh. I do think that I have that ability, even when I am at my most stressed. And it will often just provide you with that relief that you need” (P16-16:19, (111:111)).

Participant 15 believes that her good sense of humour provides her with staying power: “I have a good sense of humour, so I laugh at a lot of things. I laugh a lot of stuff off. I am very much an
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optimist. I am a very positive person definitely and the thick skin... so I think that also creates a bit of staying power” (P15-15:19, (93:93)).

Not taking life too seriously ha seen a helpful attribute which participant 4 believes in: “I don’t like to take life too seriously. On the one hand I like to take life seriously and do things well, on the other hand I like to have a bit of fun” (P4-4:9, (81:81).

Participant 18 also identified that she laughs a lot and likes to have fun and does not always like to be serious: “I do, I laugh a lot, I like fun, not to always be hard-assed and serious” (P18-18:7, (52:52)).

4.5.6 Internal locus of control

Warner and April (2012) believe that at the core of choosing one’s attitude is the strong belief that one can influence to a large extent the direction of one’s life. It has been a theme for those who chose to believe that they can influence the outcome rather than be at the mercy of fate. These people often choose to be proactive, find solutions to problems and fight not to give up despite arduous circumstances. Ledesma (2014) identifies “hardiness” as a personality trait where individuals have identified possessing a sense of control over their environment, Rotter (1996) considers these individuals to have a belief in an internal control.

One of the six themes which emerged from resilience research done by Valentine and Feinauer (1993) was “an inner-directed locus of control, which seemed to emanate from internal values rather than from expectations and directions of others.” This relates to the inner core of resilience where those who show strong resilience characteristics took responsibility for their lives and demonstrated a sense of control over their thoughts and actions.

Participant 20 identified that she has a very strong internal locus of control and how this has helped her face adversities: “I have a very strong internal locus of control. So for me it is analysing situations; being self-aware, understanding how I impact it, so that is how I navigate everything. So I never worry about external impact (P20-20:9, (94:94)).

Participant 15 shared the feeling of being marginalised as a women but believed that the
accountability to do something about it remained with her and not a blame on someone else. She believes that she can control what she wants and this creates resilience: “One other thing actually, I think what was really important for me, I have turned the corner a little bit, we never once had a conversation about feeling marginalised as women. So the accountability of it sits with me, otherwise you fall into a victim state and I think that is very dangerous. And that is why I say it is not something that you can call people out on and it is actually better to not go there. What is it that you want? Are you getting what you want? If you are not, then you need to go and find it somewhere else” (P15-15:22, (26:26)). “And controlling what you want and what you can get out of that, and that creates a resilience” (P15-15:5, (30:30)).

4.5.7 Choosing thoughts

Controlling and choosing thoughts are characterised by the ability to control negative thinking and choose positive thoughts. Incorporated in this is being aware of your own internal world and of the effect of these thoughts. To support building resilience it is important to understand our thoughts better and recognise that they are just concepts created and biased by who we are and our interpretation of the experience (Warner, 2012).

Participant 4 said she would reframe things in order to see them in a more positive way: “Sometimes I have had to; there are times of reframing things. I like to be direct and honest and some people don’t like me. Then I have to go, but I want to be direct and honest it is part of my self-image if you will” (P4-4:11, (97:97)

4.6 ACTION-FOCUSED

Action focused refers to being consistently action-orientated by using open and flexible approaches. The solutions to the issues often require a high degree of perseverance rather than accepting things as they are and giving up on the problem (Warner & April, 2012). The perseverance should be balanced with an open-minded and flexible approach. This enables one to still push for action, but in a creative way, listening to views dissimilar from your own, and being open to changing (Warner, 2012). When adversity strikes we should continually improvise and be inventive, making the most of the situation and putting resources to unfamiliar uses and
imagining possibilities that other do not (Coutu, 2002).

Table 15: Family-group: Action-focused

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action orientated</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvise</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt behaviour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>4</td>
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4.6.1 Action orientated

Identified by “doing” rather than “thinking”. Those who are action orientated prefer to keep going and push on especially during difficult times. It is often characterised by having high energy levels and moving forward consistently. This action often helps us to come up with more create ways of doing things rather than just ruminating on the problem at hand.

Participant 12 spoke about the nastiness she would face in her workplace by colleagues who were jealous of her success, this negativity didn’t deter her and she found that just getting on with what she needed to do was often the best thing for the situation: “I would generally just put my head down and work even harder. I didn’t entertain it. There were times, depending on how bad it was or the particular situation where I would confront it head on. And have a one-on-one with the person; or find a means to put them in their place in a sort of indirect way. But generally speaking they would either come round and lose that because they would get to know that they are individual or get to know me” (P12-12:1, (19:19)).

The realisation that she just had to keep going, no matter how trivial, by moving forward one step at a time participant 6 was able to move through adversity and come out stronger on the other side: “I think to be honest, at the time it was literally about putting one foot in front of the other just to move forward and to get out of that. So I don’t know. So I think maybe that is just internal strength. You don’t realise your strength until you are in that situation” (P6-6:10, (105:105)). “Moving forward definitely. So the head space wasn’t. I wasn’t really aware of
Participant 17 explains resilience as the continual moving forward and the strength to keep going. For her being action orientated was letting the need determine the action: “If I didn’t have resilience there is no way that I could have gone forward. Every single day you have to have resilience and you have got to carry on, and it is small baby steps. And you just keep going and keep going. I can sit back now, and now I realise, wow that was amazing. I didn’t feel like it sometimes” (P17-17:8, (59:59)).

Participants 10 and 11 describe moving through adversity as just getting on with it” For them it felt as if there was actually no other choice but to put their heads done and move forward.

“You kind of just get on with it. Let the need determine the action and I just kind of got on with it. I think subsequently there was an exhaustion the following year” (P10-10:2, (34:34)).

Participant 11 spoke about losing her husband to cancer and how she just kept thinking to herself that she just needed to continue, there was no other option for her: “Looking back it sounds how did I do it, but at the time I just got on and did it (P11-11:2, (37:37)). I mean it was a huge thing that he died last year, very unexpected, it was cancer. I have just and everybody says you are strong and I am thinking well what else do you do, you have to just carry on (P11-11:5, (111:111)).

Both participant 13 and 12 described themselves as having “high energy levels” and that this is something they contribute to having resilience.

“I have always been highly energetic, so I have always been known to do more than less. For me to actually lie in bed on a Saturday morning is quite unusual. So now and again because I have needed to, I have lain low. So it depends. Mostly I have been energised and am energetic: climbing mountains, swimming oceans; running races; you know getting into the action and excitement of the activity at the time, because it has given me the confidence and the power back
“...to cope with what hasn’t worked. And I am the most creative when I am active. I am the most uncreative when I am down and bored or when I am still” (P13-13:6, (61:61)).

“I am unbelievably resilient and not scared of hard work; so I am not scared of long hours. I wanted to be successful so I have an incredible amount of; I was very driven; my energy levels were incredibly high” (P12-12:3, (37:37))

4.6.2 Determination

Determination is about having internal resolve and perseverance to continue despite obstacles that come across your path. Gupton and Slick (1996) included persistence and determination as resilient characteristics (cited in Christman & McClellan, 2012).

Participant 12 was one of the top, internationally recognised recruitment consultants in her firm. One of the things she attributes to her success is her determination. Even through tough times she was determined to do her job well and be successful: “I was just incredibly determined, that every job spec that I got, I would go all out to fill it. This is why I had success through the recessions and all the bad times was because my clients acknowledged and often stated both to myself and my superiors that something they liked about me was that I never wasted their time. So if I didn’t have what I believed as the perfect person, I didn’t submit a candidate” (P12-12:6, (71:71)).

Participant 17 also attributes determination as a quality that she had which help her push on to fulfil the dream that she had for her life. She says it is a deep belief that drives her to stand up and keep going: “I think it is basically the determination; I didn’t always know clearly then I had a few life incidents that were harsh that happened to me. And I made a decision that I was going to make every day count. It was a defining moment in my life, because I had three bad experiences in one year that happened to me and I realised that if I didn’t make this life everything that I was meant to be then I was wasting my time being here. And that was when I made major decisions to fulfil this dream that I had and stop making excuses why I couldn’t.

And from that day I said that is what I wanted to achieve and that I am going to go for it, so it has been a belief. It comes deep. If we have experiences that happen in our childhood, if we have
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experiences that drive us to make changes to do things. It drives us so much, not from a superficial place” (P17-17:11, (72:73)).

Participant 13 speaks about perseverance and the belief that she could be something different despite what others were going around her: “That perseverance; it is like I can do this. I don't have to be the same as everybody else. Even when my formulas were not working; or I was beaten by someone and didn't get what I wanted; or my proposal wasn't being accepted for all the various reasons; it does not matter. I am sticking to my guns. I am not changing my model; this is what I want to do; this is where I want to be; and this is why” (P13-13:19, (165:165)).

Participant 15 says she has staying power and has an internal drive to prove people wrong which is activated when she is facing challenges: “I think for me I just have a drive to prove people wrong, that kicks in along the way. I think definitely here I have a staying power. I have been here for eight years” (P15-15:1, (17:17)). “I think I have quite a tough, I have got a thick skin. I am definitely, like I said I like to prove people wrong; but I can be defiant and so there is a bit of defiance in the stuff that you do to prove people wrong, whatever keep going” (P15-15:12, (55:55)).

Participant 8 says she is stubborn or tenacious and this is a quality that has stood her in good stead during challenging times: “I’m stubborn. I think it is one of those things you can put more favourably. You can call it tenacity” (P8-8:14, (72:72)).

4.6.3 Improvise

Improvisation is the ability to make do with a situation with whatever is at hand. It also talks to having flexibility in various situations and being open-minded to doing things differently. One of the defining characteristic that Coutu (2002) identifies in resilient people is an uncanny ability to improvise, making do with whatever is at hand. He believes when adversity strikes we should continually improvise and be inventive, making the most of the situation and putting resources to unfamiliar uses and imagining possibilities that other do not.
Participant 16 had three children during the course of her career. She reflects how women’s careers are often not straight line projectors to the top but that specifically with having children it may mean your career will take a different path to the top, like hers has. Being flexible and doing what was required at different times in her life and career has enabled her to be successful and get to the highest levels of the national business which she now co-runs: “I mean I had three children along the way; so I think one of the challenges was perhaps accepting that my career was not going to be one straight line curve; accepting the ebb and the flow and flexibility that was required of balancing a very young family. That is one of the main things for people, not just woman, to realise in the very early stages of your career is that careers don’t move forward at the same pace. And no two careers look the same, or should look the same. And people’s careers do move at different paces, in different spaces with different profiles and you have to be comfortable with that very early on.

There was definitely a time in my early career where my male peers were surging ahead unencumbered by pregnancy, maternity leave, etc. It is really important to keep the bigger picture in mind; and keep that bigger picture where you career is actually a very long period, probably extends for most people 40 years and if it does accelerate in a straight line it does not mean that you are not going to get there. It is actually having a more fluid approach to what a career path looks like and that actually it can take a few different routes” (P16-16:7, (24:25)).

She reiterates the flexibility again during the study stating that it is just not realistic to remain ridged and structured when life takes a different turn to what you have envisaged: “I think that you have to have some flexibility as well; you have to have flexibility and have a good dose of realism as well. Some women think I should be able to have three children and take six months off each time and that should have no impact on your career. And of course it has an impact on your career. 18 months out of the workplace has an impact on your career. The start-up time, the wind down time. The bigger point is actually that is only 18 months and that is fine over a period of a career you can absolutely deal with that; and you should be dealing with it; and your partner should be dealing with that and it should be a shared approach to how you deal with it. But you can’t expect to be out of the workplace over 18 months for a three, or four or five year period and for it to have absolutely no effect on your career. That is just unrealistic. So you need
to be realistic and you need to be able to see that it will kind of work out in the wash” (P16-16:21, (66:66)).

Participant 5 has also learned to be more flexible with time, as the rules and rigidity she created around herself created more stress: “I think also I have learnt to be flexible, I think, you know, there was a period where I was very rigid about some rules and it lead to so much stress. So I try and be flexible and learnt to ask people for help. Also I am a Virgo. I don’t ask for help. It is not natural for me. I do things by myself, but I have learnt. Like my mom always says I am here, give it to me. I have built a little support. If I can pull in my mom, for some reason my husband can’t or if I can ask my mother-in-law. So I have tried to also use that” (P5-5:2, (33:33)).

4.6.4 Adapt behaviour

Resilience exemplifies being adaptive and an ability to recover despite difficult circumstances. The adaptation to live with change is fundamental in building resilience (Moe, 2012). More than enduring adversity, Christman and McClellan (2008) argue that one changes his or her personality to better endure through future encounters with hardship.

Participant 1 says she attempts to adapt her behaviour in the face of adversity where it does not conflict with her principles: “I attempt to adapt my behaviour where this does not conflict with my principles” (P1-1:6, (17:17)).

Participant 19 believes that women have the ability to adapt their styles easier than men and is something she feels they do throughout their careers. She has adapted a lot of her behaviour pasted on how she was perceived and the feedback that she was given by her mentors, she gives some specific examples of this too: “I think what we do well as women generally, is we are much better at adapting our own personal styles; and I think women are much better learners throughout their careers than men. So I have been, if I look back on my ten year career, who I am now and who I was then is different.

From literally how I act in a meeting, so being a lot more conscious about tone of voice, body language, when you speak; how you communicate, but literally the words you use. I learnt to use different words with different people so that they understand what I am saying. I adapted a
lot in terms of my leadership style. So I realised very early on, for me it doesn’t work to be authoritative, controlling and tell people what to do. So I learnt very early on in my career how to involve people more in decision making and how to empower others to do things the way they can do it. I think that aspect I have adapted and I have learnt a lot – in terms of empowering others” (P19-19:7, (47:49)).

Participant 20 believes overcoming obstacles is fundamentally about adapting your behaviour. She spoke specifically about being a women CEO and having many men working for her, there were behaviours that would automatically get their backs up which she has learned to change over time: “But it is about adaptation... adapting your behaviour in order to get there no matter what you have to do. You will, it is like running a race. You will hit it well prepared, things go wrong you adapt you move forward, you do whatever you have to do to get around those obstacles. And as a female you have got to recognise patriarchal society and stuff will come your way, but you just got to deal with it” (P20-20:5, (68:68)).

4.6.5 Independent

Being independent encompasses being free from outside control and not being subject to an authority, it also involves not depending on someone else for your livelihood. Independence is also a characteristic that Wolin and Wolin (1993) have defined in their seven characteristics of resilient people.

Three participants (4; 11 and 18) described themselves as being independent and all of them identify how this characteristic was developed from a young age.

Participant 4 recalls her childhood and how her family moved around a lot empowered her to learn to be independent from a child: “So from an early age learnt to be independent. And I think when you learn to be independent from an early age, and alone and independent (of course I had my family around me, but I was going to a new school ever two years, with no friends and you have got to start all over again; say goodbye to, go to the next school). I think you learn resilience” (P4-4:19, (127:127)).
Participant says that before moving out to South African from the UK she was very independent, similar to participant 4 she attributes this to her family circumstances she was face with from a child: “I think in the UK I was very independent. My parents were divorced early on, and you have to fend for yourself quite a lot as it were and that makes one very independent. And I have got three very independent daughters as well. Who have also, are very independent, because that is what they had to do” (P11-11:4, (74:74)).

Participant 18 reflects on a conversation she hear between her parents as a young child where her mother was asking her father for an allowance of money to have just for herself so that she did not have to ask permission for everything she wanted to buy, she said this memory drove her to independence and many of the choices she has made in her life, including paying for her own studies and choosing a husband who supports her independence has been a consequence of this: “And I was as young as four or five years old when I just made myself a promise that I will never ask a man for money in my entire life. And I can tell you I have never; I have not even asked my dad. Not even my studies or anything have I ever asked a man for money in my life. That has driven me greatly; that thing to be independent. I have chosen my husband to be somebody that allows me all of that freedom and independence. That has driven me; that need to prove myself that need to stand on my own two feet. I often say to my mom, you know I am still doing this for you. That for me is a very important drive; at the core that is the thing that sits here in my stomach. Definitely it has been part of that. Again it is a self-fulfilling prophecy because the more successful you are the more you taste it the more that you want it. That is where you are and that is where you end up” (P18-18:16, (98:98)).

4.7 SUPPORT TO AND FROM OTHERS

Support to and from others is the most quoted characteristic of being resilience and overcoming adversity with 22% of the responses falling in this group. Every single participant in this study attributed support from others as a core factor to them in overcoming challenges they faced. At the core of a person’s ability to withstand adversity is relationships with others, relationships can often serve as a catalyst for change in one’s life as well as inside oneself (Ledesma, 2014). Accepting support from those around us, whether it is our spouse, friends, family and even
colleagues is one of the most significant attributes to resilience. The value of helping others has been reported to improve self-confidence and produce positive feelings (Warner & April, 2012). Social support seems to have both direct and indirect benefits on health. People with greater social support are less likely to be affected by stressful events and are more likely to maintain good physical and mental health (O’Leary, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accepting support</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having mentors/ sponsors</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Having a coach</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving to others</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Member of a group</td>
<td>4</td>
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### 4.7.1 Relationships

Relationships was the most quoted code throughout this study with 30 coded quotations. One of the most compelling and most consistent finding in a study done my Ledesma (2014) indicated the significance of relationships is a critical element to resilience. At the heart of resilience, people are an incredibly important component of facing adversity, interacting with significant other people in our lives is what brings the most happiness even though it comes with the risk of having the ability to cause the most pain (Warner, 2012). Social relationships are also instrumental to women’s thriving and they are encouraged, more than men, to value close relationships and even identify themselves in terms of those relationships (O’Leary, 1998). Relationships is also another one of Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) characteristics of resilient people.

Participant 2 emphasises the significance of having a strong team around her in the workplace and how important it is for each member to pull their weight in order to all work effectively together: “I believe in surrounding myself with the best. I believe in building strong teams that
are not only excellent at what they do but also incredibly passionate about what they do. That also means that I don’t suffer fools gladly. Any pressurised work environment is like an engine: every little part of that engine has to work 100%, otherwise the engine grinds to a halt. So if one part of the engine does not work, you either fix it or replace it” (P2-2:2, (14:14)).

Participant 16 also attributes the great people around her as a component of being able to navigate challenges smoothly: “I have got really great people around me” (P16-16:23, (72:72)).

Participant 19 speaks about surrounding herself with people she actually likes working with and that you can enjoy as this helps with not always having the problems front of mind: I think the other thing is if you surround yourself with people that you really like working with, mostly, and that you can have fun with. I think that helps put things in perspective a lot. So it is not only your issues that are always on the forefront” (P19-19:6, (33:33)).

Participant 13 says that she has learned to become more comfortable with being vulnerable and not perceiving this as a weakness. She is able to relax a bit more and open up to others about things she is worried or anxious about: “A sense of: I am not alone in this world and I don't have to fight so hard. And there are people that I can trust and support and there is something called sharing, and there is something called 'you’re ok to be vulnerable'; and I didn’t know that until, I suppose until I went into the self-mastery program. Now being vulnerable isn't so scary. And saying to someone" "I am actual worried about my turn over." Or "I am worried about this being easy, that I am making a mistake" (P13-13:11, (82:82)).

Eight respondents specifically mentioned the support they receive from their husbands and partners. This profound relationship in their lives has been a core strength in facing adversities in their lives. The table below shows their viewpoints in their own words:

<p>| Participant 11: | “My husband was very supportive. It obviously made sense for the two of us to be equal. He wanted me to, he saw me as being equal in the UK before I came out here, because he said he couldn’t do it by himself you see” (P11-11:3, (60:60)) |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 15</th>
<th>“And obviously my husband is really supportive as well” (P15-15:10, (53:53)).</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>“I really do think as much as I don’t like admitting it, but my husband has been really good. You know often he drives me mad because he often tells me how to do things differently, but if I just think about it he, I think - generally women can emotionally blow the whole thing out of proportion and I think that stabilizing thing about I know, that person knows you really well. And he will say to me, he was the one that really encouraged me to work an 80% day per week. He has said to me on numerous occasions and I guess we are very fortunate, if you don’t want to work at all you don’t have to” (P3-3:11, (85:85))</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 19</td>
<td>“I think linked to that having a husband who is a true partner (support isn’t the right word) we are equal partners, and I know that whatever I want to do and what I feel I can do, he will let me have the freedom to do it. And he is my biggest fan. He believes I can do a lot more than what I am doing. And I think that has played a major role. We don’t have kids yet, we don’t know if we can have kids who knows, especially if you go into a marriage relationship and you want to have kids and you want to have a successful business in life, then that I pretty cool. If my personal life is in a shambles, there is no way that I will be able to get it together at work. There is no way” (P19-19:11, (58:58)).</td>
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<td>Participant 20</td>
<td>“I also think that I just have an amazing husband. No matter how hard I kick him when I get home, he just bounces up” (P20-20:22, (137:137)).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Support from a partner is very helpful” (P7-7:2, (58:58)).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>“There is no ways I could have done all of this without my partner, if I didn’t have my family support; if I didn't have a cool base of friends, if I</td>
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### Participante 16:

"It is kind of trite, but the partner that you have at home is probably one of the most important factors. I know Hamburg said that. And it feels wrong that the success of a woman is who she chooses to be her partner, but in this society it is so critical that you are a team at home and it is about the team it is not about the individuals. You have to have an evolved partner. If you are going to be a successful, to be free to go for your career in the way that any man is free to go for his career. You have to have a partner at home who is not threatened by that and who is evolved in feeling that it is not a gender based decision. So look I am lucky to have that; I will say that we definitely went through some stages in our early marriage where we were still working out who was going to do what. It does not happen perfectly. You don’t sit down and say how are our careers going to pan out. It happens irregularly and evolves over time, but it is really important that; I don’t think it is only about your partner, it is about yourself, it is about your own upbringing, what you have been brought up to expect or to want. A lot of it is attitudinal" (P16-16:19, (63:63)).

Participants 4, 14 and 13 spoke about the various members of their family who have supported them through tough situations.

### Participant 4:

"I have a very supportive family, which I think I often take for granted. I think if you have a very, like my life is very stable. I suppose from the outside a bit boring, but that means when you change jobs and working hard, there is a core that you can always rely on” (P4-4:10, (93:93)).

### Participant 14:

"My family was always there to support me in tough times” (P14-14:3, (83:83)).

didn’t have a life outside of the challenges” (P10-10:13, (83:83)).
Participant 13: “So I think resilience has also come from my connection with my sister. I had a really poor relationship with her and I fixed that relationship. And that relationship has stood me in such good stead in the last two years. I think of even relationship with friends that were on the side. I mean I have really deepened and strengthened that. And that has been good for” (P13-13:9, (78:78)).

4.7.2 Accepting support

Women tend to show a larger tendency to rally social support in times of adversity than man. Women facing stress report that they have more support accessible to them than men and they are also more likely to seek help. The relative effortlessness with which women mobilise support is advantageous (O’Leary, 1998). Although some of the women interviewed found they had to learn how to ask for help, accepting the support from loved ones or professionals helped them thrive.

Participant 1 says she has used the support of friends, family and colleagues to help her navigate adversity and challenges in the workplace: “At a personal level, I have drawn on the support of friends, family and other colleagues, including those who have had similar experiences” (P1-1:4, (20:20)).

Participant 3 shares how going to therapy was really good for her to help get an objective view on her situation and help her process the challenges she faced: “As a result of a few things that have happened in my life I have had therapy. That has been very good for me, because it is an external independent objective view which has been very good for me” (P3-3:10, (85:85)).

Participant 10 also drew on the support from family and friends under adversity: “I had to really draw on family and friends support. I have to make sure I was exercising. I had to have an outlet for the stress. And I just kind of like, got on with it” (P10-10:1, (28:28)).

Participant 13 believes that it is not easy for women to ask for help but it is something she has
learned to do throughout her career: “Nothing is career limiting. If I was to share something important with you and you use it against me, it is not going to be career limiting. It does not actually impact you. That fear, it is ok if you know what is going on. Or, if I need help to say it: "I need help." It is hard for women to ask for help” (P13-13:13, (96:96)).

Participant 16 says she has a solid team in place both at home and at work and this allows her to what she does, she feels it is a worthwhile thing to invest in: “Both at home and in the workplace. I think the only reason, the real basis that allows me to do what I do, is that I have that team in place. In every sphere of my life I have a team. Teamwork is absolutely critical to this. And you have to have layers of teams, both at home and at work. So it is really worth investing in the time it takes to build up those” (P16-16:9, (28:28)).

Participant 6 recalls how she would never ask her husband for help, but at certain points in her career she was struggling so much she had to and she was surprised by his response so has not learned to ask for help when she needs it: “I never asked, I never asked. Men are interesting because they actually say why didn’t you just ask me and you say why didn’t you offer? You can see I am struggling. No, no just ask me and I will help you. So that was another good lesson - Learn to ask for help” (P6-6:8, (74:74)). “I think, all the lessons I have learnt. Ask for help” (P6-6:15, (155:155)).

4.7.3 Having mentors/sponsors

Having a mentor or sponsor is having the guidance and feedback from someone who believes in you and clearly recognises your potential. It gives us the ability to have someone to talk to openly about the experiences we going through and often clears the way to progress in our careers. Martin and Barnard (2013) identify mentorship as a legitimate way for women to gain support and guidance and as an effective coping strategy. In their study all participants articulated a need for mentoring as a support system to alleviate their often-hostile environments and they expressed the particular need for women mentors (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Six respondents in this study mentioned having a mentor as a specific benefit to dealing with adversity in the workplace. Others have spoken about having someone guide and support them
but have not called these people mentors: Their responses are in the table below:

| Participant 2: | “Mentors in many of the jobs I’ve held. I also have a personal coach who I used to see once a week, nowadays more like once every three months. It is very important to have someone to talk to — either a coach, mentor or friend. I have a friend I can phone at any time and who has had to listen to many sob stories over the years! Also, when you have a close knit team, there is always someone who will “pick up” the others during tough times. I work with wonderful people who make it all worthwhile” (P2-2:3, (16:16)). |
| Participant 9: | “But I do find I am happy where I am now, because I definitely see him as a mentor and he also committed to teaching me things that I lack and he is willing to confront me” (P9-9:5, (83:83)). |
| Participant 13: | “Certainly mentors. There have been a couple of business mentors. I think one or two who were really good for me and I could really trust. One or two of them are still can, yes on the mentorship side. There were people that I didn't mind opening the door” (P13-13:12, (88:88)). |
| Participant 15: | “I have had a mentor, this year I have been through coaching which has really being helpful. I think sometimes you can’t do it on your own, you need to check in” (P15-15:3, (20:20)). |
| Participant 18: | “I had mentors though, and they were all men, and that does not matter. I always had people that I found a kind of rapport with. It has never been a woman in this situation it has always been: “How can I be a better leader? How can I execute better? How can I influence? It is always much more. And then they gave me a great deal of respect and I always chose them. I thought I want to learn from that guy, it is amazing. I have never been in a company where we had these formal mentorship roles. At Allan Grey we actually have them. I have never had that. I would go to
someone and say: “I want to learn from you.””  (P18:18:10, (82:82)). “Often that became my ticket to the next opportunity. He is the boss, he is the ‘ouk’ that knows there is something going. Why? Just because he got to know me, otherwise he wouldn’t have. . I say that a great deal and I say that a lot if you sit quite mouse in the corner and you have an opinion and you don’t open your mouth, shame on you. Nobody is going to know” (P18-18:11, (84:84)).

| Participant 19 | “I have been very privileged throughout my career until now to work with men that have really helped me and mentored me and coached me and helped me navigate through these things, because they have valued me as an individual and as a woman. And they recognised my potential. 

So from very early on in my career I had someone who actually coached me on certain interactions. In this meeting you should have said it differently, or you should have waited a little bit. And I have had it in every single one of firms that I have worked with I have had that up until now. That has really helped me” (P19-19:3, (24:25)). |

Participant 20 says she has not had specific mentors in her like but describes these significant relationships as people who believed in her and this belief was something that motivated her as she did not want to let them down: “People often ask me if I have had mentors in my life, and I haven’t really had mentors but I have had a lot of people who believed in me” (P20-20:19, (128:128)). “You know I think just the belief of other people in me and that sense of not letting others or other people down. I think that was a very big one. When you think someone has put their faith in you, you’ve got to get to where you are going otherwise you let someone else down” (P20-20:21, (136:136)).

Participant 8 also identifies having relationships with people in the business who she could bounce things off of and able to get a lot of guidance from: “So I have been quite lucky though
my career in that in most of the tough jobs I have worked in there has always been someone in
the business who’s kind of been the wise old. So in my early days there was a guy ... when I
started working there, he had already been working there 25 years. So he just knew the business
and he had been around the block so many times, and he was the kind of guy who was actually
initially very intimidating but once you got to know him, very generous with his insights and his
time. We used to talk. And I have had people like that in a lot of the places that I have worked
which helps a lot” (P8-8:10, (52:52)).

Participant 16 says that the support of one specific individual who believed in her in the
organisation who looked out for her and had her corner, she also highlighted that it was someone
with a position of influence who saw her potential and it was important for her to have this
person in the workplace: “So I have always spoken about champions; how important it is to have
champions in the workplace: people who believe in you, people who mentor and in my
experience it was probably mostly one individual... and it was nothing formal; it was just
somebody who looked out for me; who negotiated on my behalf when I needed; for instance
flexibility; someone who had my corner and not in any formal way. Somebody who was in a
position of influence, who saw my potential and rooted for me. And I think that is so important to
have that person and I think sometimes you find that person and sometimes you don’t” (P16-
16:22, (72:72)).

4.7.4 Talking

Having someone to talk to is often helpful in gaining a better understanding and perspective on
our situation. Talking to others allows us to process the thoughts in our heads and often by
articulating what we are thinking and feeling we are able to navigate a way through challenges
more easily.

Participant 4 states how helpful talking to others is and believes that she thinks when she talks:
“Talking helps a lot. So I am a believer when you are talk you think” (P4-4:23, (122:122)). “So I
think being able to talk to people besides who they are is really helps a lot” (P4-4:24, (123:123)).
Participant 7 says that having friends to talk to has helped her a lot, in particular having people who are also in the workplace helps as they have a better understanding of the situation: “having a lot of good friends to talk to. A good friend ... who is also in a corporate environment where she really struggles also with inflexibility a lot. So having friends to talk to, helps a lot. Particularly a friend at the workplace helps” (P7-7:5, (66:66)).

Participant 19 highlights the big difference people make and having people who you trust and who you can talk to has been a big contributor for her. Again for her it is people inside the organisation which really have an impact: “People, made a huge difference. So having people that you trust that you can speak to, and who you know are not going to judge you for what you say. So that was a big contributor, to being able to deal with any kind of adversity in the workplace. And I think secondly, which is probably, and not necessarily people outside; it is having people within your work environment” (P19-19:9, (55:55)).

Participant 8 says that having people to talk to and “let of steam” is important for her but she indicated the opposite of participant 7 by saying that these are rarely people in your business or industry: “I said having people that you can talk to and that is in fact very rarely in your business, but kind of an interest; whether it is friends or peers in other business and industries that you can actually let off steam with” (P8-8:25, (22:22)).

Participant 9 finds that having a relationship with her boss where she is able to talk through challenges she is having, gives her more confidence in what she is needing to do: “I do find talking about it helps. I’ve got my boss, he’s got a very feminist wife, strong, corporate. She’s got a corporate career and he never lets it phase him and he supports me. So I have got no excuses if she can pull it off I can do it. And he respects me for doing that. So that helps. And if I run into problems he is always there to back me, which gives me that little bit of confidence” (P9-9:1, (30:30)).

4.7.5 Having a coach

Having a coach is a specific identifier which came up with participants of this study. Three
participants said that they used a coach which they identified was beneficial for them to build resilience. The table below outlines their specific responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 2:</td>
<td>“I also have a personal coach who I used to see once a week, nowadays more like once every three months. It is very important to have someone to talk to — either a coach, mentor or friend. I have a friend I can phone at any time and who has had to listen to many sob stories over the years! Also, when you have a close knit team, there is always someone who will “pick up” the others during tough times” (P2-2:6, (16:16)).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 5:</td>
<td>“I even started seeing a coach, a life coach because I just wanted someone to help me manage my life. I realised, she actually helped me realise that with all my own self imposed attacks, you are falling short here. It was nothing to do with this is my manager saying to me how come you don’t do this or how come you are not able to attain x, y, z. They were actually fine with it, but I beat myself up for it. That was where I had to learn this is ok you don’t have to do this. This is not negotiable you must do this. So there was a point where it actually did stress me. And there are some incidents where it probably will still stress me, but I think as I have matured I have learnt to forgive myself a little bit more. The fact you are not going to be able to do everything. There are some stages where my career takes the forefront and my family life back a little bit. And there’s some times, you know what, my family’s coming first and my career takes a little bit of a back side. I think, I think I am feeling better about it now” (P5-5:3, (39:40)).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant 15:</td>
<td>“The mentor was more like a sounding board and I kind of felt that I was getting to a point where it was really just perpetuating the way I was feeling. It wasn’t really helping me think it through versus when I</td>
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was at my coach she was really good at giving me a framework and structure and tools” (P15-15:21, (22:22)).

4.7.6 Giving to others

A good way of building one’s own resilience is to assist others who are in need, even at the time of experiencing our own adversity. The value of giving support and help has been reported to enhance confidence and generate positive feelings (Warner & April, 2012). Social support seems to have both direct and indirect benefits on health. People with greater social support are less likely to be affected by stressful events and are more likely to maintain good physical and mental health (O’Leary, 1998).

Participant 8 says she is actively involved in the community and believes it is a rational thing as it is easy in South Africa to see how privileged she lives: I do quite a lot of community stuff and social stuff which again it is a bit of a rational thing; You know what my problems are first world problems, theirs are not” (P8-8:21, (101:101)).

Participant 18 said how sharing her story with others and seeing how it inspires them has given her a sense of responsibly to others to share more: “Sharing the stories and also realising that there are so many people that get inspired by my little story. And again for me that is a responsibility and I need to share more of it. And I agree I really enjoy it. I am a giver. I am not a taker” (P18-18:19, (121:121)).

Participant 19 feels that she can be an example to other women who face adversity in the workplace as they will be able to look at her and say if she could do it so can they, this encouragement and giving back has shaped a lot of who she is: “I feel through every adverse experience that I have in the workplace, I grow more and I can almost become more of a (what’s the word not an ambassador) more of an example for other women, because I think the more women we have that can face adversity in the workplace that can overcome it and that can better after it, ;the more other women; it is encouraging. Hopefully that becomes an example for other younger women, or even just women in general. Geepeez if she can deal with it with and she can go beyond it and be successful, then maybe I can do it as well. And when they face a
situation like that hopefully I can give them advice on how to deal with it. So I think it has shaped a lot of who I am. And I think in a way, it has made me a lot more mature for my age” (P19-19:15, (78:78)).

4.7.7 Member of a group

Two of the women who were interviewed belong to the Business Women’s’ Association (BWA) and two have also started a group called “Women in Finance”.

Participant 15 says that it has been good exposure to be associated with the BWA: “I also have been a member of the Business Woman’s association. That has been good exposure without it being a woman or not” (P15-15:11, (53:53)).

Participant 19 and 17 have found it difficult in their career to not have had a group of women, especially in her industry, to talk to and network with. They have now started a group for women in finance: “I have only recently joined the Business Women’s Association about a year ago, and obviously we have started the Women in Finance network, so I think I would almost speak to the opposite of that. I have found it very difficult not to have a group of women earlier on in my career. I think things that exist are for women that are already successful in their own right and that was part of the reason why we started the Women in Finance Network is to help younger women get into the industry and to get more women into the industry” (P19-19:17, (105:105)).

“I haven’t had any groups, networks or clubs and that is why we started Women in Finance, because when I was doing all of this it was really lonely… Even in corporate world I found that women didn’t want to help women. I only ever had males that helped me…. It was males that I always went to that helped me, which for me is sad” (P17-17:6, (51:51)).
5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The seven family-codes that emerged from the research have been found to be similar with the framework of Warner (2012) in that the family-codes can be clustered together into three areas which Warner referred to as domains, these domains are core, internal and external domains. Figure 5 illustrates how the seven family-codes are represented in each domain.

![Figure 5: Resilience characteristics framework.](image)

Although the family-codes from this research differ slightly to Warner’s seven constructs, there are more similarities than differences. A comparison of seven family-codes to Warner’s seven constructs can be seen in Table 17. The one family-group which stands out from the research which is not evidently represented in Warner’s framework is that of Self-Care. There were thirty three quotations of the code for self-care mentioned in the researcher’s interview process. This was seen to be significantly important to create a family-group of this nature.

Self-belief was a code that came up twenty eight times in the interviews and was seen to be very closely linked to the sense of meaning and purpose in life. Warner does not speak to this element directly but the researcher felt that it was impactful enough from the interviews to include it in the family-group of Connection to Purpose and Self.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seven family-codes</th>
<th>Warner (2012) constructs where family-group is present</th>
<th>Similarities</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Purpose and Self</td>
<td>Grounds and Connects</td>
<td>Life has purpose and meaning. Having life goals or being goal orientated. Reframes adversity as having a meaning or purpose.</td>
<td>A strong element of self-belief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and Accept Self</td>
<td>Understands and accepts self</td>
<td>Understands strengths and weaknesses. Acceptance of self. Draws courage or strength from previous challenges.</td>
<td>Using intuition or trusting gut. Being authentic, staying true to oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>Controls and chooses attitudes/ Controls and chooses thoughts</td>
<td>Engages in enjoyable, relaxing and recharging activities or takes time out. Awareness of negative thinking is identified.</td>
<td>Practicing mindfulness (meditation, self-awareness). Engaging in regular exercise and healthy eating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Perspective</td>
<td>Controls and chooses thoughts / Controls and chooses feelings / Controls and chooses attitudes / Action-focused</td>
<td>Accepting reality. Being objective. Learning from the past. Learning from others.</td>
<td>Letting go of things outside of your control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Optimism</td>
<td>Controls and chooses thoughts / Controls and chooses feelings / Controls and chooses attitudes</td>
<td>Choosing attitude. Has awareness of and controls emotional impulses. Choosing thoughts and reframing negative thoughts. Internal locus of control or believes can influence life’s direction. Realistic positive outlook. Chooses to be positive rather than negative.</td>
<td>Not taking life too seriously and being humorous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to and from others</td>
<td>Gives and accepts support / Action-focused</td>
<td>Shares with others/talks to others. Accepts assistance and support from others around them. Listens and learns from others.</td>
<td>Having mentors/sponsors in the workplace. Having a coach. Member of a group or network.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven family codes were produced from the research and have been illustrated on an interrelationship diagram (Figure 6). The researcher looked at each family code and examined their relationships to each other. An arrow from one family-group to another, for example *Understands and Accepts Self* to another family code *Connection to Purpose and Self* signified that *Understands and Accepts Self* influences *Connection to Purpose and Self*. Family codes were labelled outcomes when more than three arrows were pointing towards them as this signified the result of many other family codes. The ones labelled drivers were the ones that influenced the most family codes and these were identified by more than three arrows pointing away from them. The codes left over were labelled links. Table 18 shows the consequence of this exercise.

![Interrelationship diagram of the seven family codes](Image)

**Figure 6: Interrelationship diagram of the seven family codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Driver</th>
<th>Link</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Understand and Accept Self</em></td>
<td>Action-focused</td>
<td><em>Connection to Purpose and Self</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Self-care</em></td>
<td>Support to and from others</td>
<td><em>Gaining Perspective</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Internal Optimism</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19: Connectivity matrix of the seven family codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Connection to Purpose and Self</th>
<th>Understand and Accept Self</th>
<th>Self-care</th>
<th>Gaining Perspective</th>
<th>Internal Optimism</th>
<th>Action-focused</th>
<th>Support to and from others</th>
<th>Sum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Purpose and Self</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and Accept Self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Perspective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Optimism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support to and from others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most prominent outcome of the interrelationship diagram is the family-code Connection to Purpose and Self. This group is also the third most commonly quoted family-code after Support to and from others and Gaining Perspective. This family-group had four open codes, namely, life has meaning; life has purpose, goal orientated and self-belief. This group is part of the core domain. Being connected to a purpose and your internal self is at the heart of being resilient and the interrelationship diagram has revealed as the main outcome of the research. Having self-belief was the second most mentioned code having 28 quotations, life has purpose was also well represented with 25 quotations. It was evident from the interviews that a large majority of the respondents felt that having confidence or belief in themselves and/or a vision and staying true to that despite what the external environment was presenting them underpinned being resilience. The sense of purpose was described in many ways from having a clear outcome or goal to feeling like there is larger purpose to what one is doing or knowing why one is doing something.

People feel significant when there is meaning beyond their daily activities where contributing to something bigger than themselves increases passion and creates a profound sense of purpose. Richardson (2002), believed that people with a strong formal faith usually find it easier during tough times, but none of the respondents cited this as their sense of purpose,
rather a couple (participant 13 and 18) mentioned the influence of spirituality as opposed to form religion.

Participant 19 felt that women tended to have a sense of higher purpose in the workplace opposed to men who were more results driven saying “I think many of the women that I have dealt with in the workplace have this higher purpose, that you almost want to have a bigger impact on society and leave the world in a better place than what we got it, where (and this is a very broad generalisation) but a lot of men that I have dealt with successfully, especially in corporate environment; they are almost organisational driven, numbers driven, target driven. And I think that is the key difference in terms of inspiring people. People are not inspired by numbers” (P19-12, (69:69)).

The second outcome of the interrelationship diagram was Gaining Perspective. Warner (2012) sites maintaining perspective as the third principle in building resilience and it came through in the research. Gaining perspective is part of the internal domain as it discusses the landscape of thoughts, feelings and attitudes within ourselves. It was the second most quoted group with 18% of the quotations being linked to it. Gaining perspective encompassed six codes which included: gaining perspective (21 quotations); learning from the past (18 quotations); being objective (15 quotations); letting go (12 quotations); accepting reality (11 quotations) and learning from others (9 quotations).

In order to build resilience negative thoughts and attitudes need to be reframed. Reframing is done by finding alternative ways of thinking about the situation such as how you can accept or learn from it (Warner, 2012). Gaining perspective on a situation allows you to reframe it in order to find ways to deal with the adversity. Respondents spoke about conducting objective analyses of the situations they were faced with and not taking situations personally. Others described themselves as “rational” which they felted assisted them in seeing and accepting a situation for what it is in order to overcome it or fix it.

An element of gaining perspective includes letting go. A couple of respondents indicated that perhaps women tend to hold onto things a bit longer than men and that by letting go of the past can build resilience. I always found it strange that guys can have a massive argument, a massive fight and the next minute they are having a beer and they have forgotten it. Women tend to brood about stuff, guys just let it go (P8-20, (87:87). “Allow yourself to feel the feelings, deal with it and then move on. Often we hold onto things too long” (P9-4, (80:80)).
Three drivers were identified out of the interrelationship diagram. They were *understand and accept self; internal optimism and self-care*.

The principle driver of *understand and accept self* is the second construct within Warner’s (2012) building blocks of resilience. It is part of the core domain which is the essential elements of resilience. This family-group contains eight codes. The first three contributed the most quotations to this group, *understanding self* (24 quotations); *understanding strengths and weaknesses* (11 quotations); *self-accepting* (10 quotations). The last five were characteristics or traits which some of the participants felt contributed to building resilience; they are *courage* (7 quotations); *values* (6 quotations); *authentic* (4 quotations); *using intuition* (4 quotations) and *beliefs* (3 quotations).

Overcoming adversity often presents us with a better understanding of ourselves and allows us to be more self-accepting when adversity strikes again. As participant 4 recalled “I don’t think I navigated very well in the beginning but I think it forces you to know who you are” (P4-13, (46:46)).

“The only real failure is not finding the courage to try” (Kirsten, 2011, p.125). Courage and internal strength are attributes which build resilience and allow one to bounce back from adversities as participant 9 articulated: “I think overcoming them [challenges] gives you a sense of achievement and some self-confidence, and courage” (P9-9, (105:105).

Talking about trying to be the best in all roles of her life participant 3 felt that we need to be more accepting and honest about what makes us happy because if we try to do everything and be the best at everything you can burn yourself out completely.

Once we have deeper understanding of ourselves an important element is then to stay true to this self and be authentic. A few respondents spoke about authenticity being a critical component of how they navigated adversities. A component of this authenticity which came to light was the acceptance of their femininity and differences from men. Ilies, Morgeson and Nahrgang (2005, p.374) explain how authentic leaders are “deeply aware of their values and beliefs, they are self-confident, genuine, reliable and trustworthy, and they focus on building followers’ strengths, broadening their thinking and creating a positive and engaging organizational context”

The second driver identified is *internal optimism*. This family-group is part of the internal domain as it deals with the internal world. This group has seven codes with *choosing attitude*
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

being the most quoted attribute with 21 quotations. The remaining six are optimism (8 quotations); positive outlook (7 quotations); control emotional impulses (6 quotations); humour (6 quotations); internal locus of control (4 quotations) and choosing thoughts (1 quotation).

Choosing attitude talks to the belief that one can influence the direction of one’s life and choosing to be proactive in order to resolve the problems (Warner & April, 2012). Another component is the fundamental belief that inevitable problems which are encountered can be solved (Warner, 2012). This was clearly illustrated by participant 20 who believes “Obstacles are just problems waiting to be solved” (P20-14, (117:117)), “and that is how I tackle everything” (P20-1, (11:11)).

Seven of the respondents felt that they were optimistic or have a positive as opposed to a negative outlook on life or were just “happy people”. Although optimism is an essential ingredient to resilience it is quite clear that it should not come at the cost of denial. An outcome to being an optimist is gaining perspective so it is essential that positivity is seen in light of reality. Kuiper (2012) identified humour as playing a role in resiliency and this was seen with the six quotations of humour from the interviews.

The last driver identified in the interrelationship diagram is self-care. Self-care is a broad concept encompassing physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Kirsten, 2011). This family-group has three sub-codes: nurturing body (14 quotations); taking time out (14 quotations) and mindfulness (11 quotations). The balance of home and work life is one that many of the women spoke about in the challenges they face within the workplace: whether it is dealing with the guilt of not being available to their children during the day or juggling duties at home after a long day’s work. The issue of self-care becomes a prominent one when looking at these specific circumstances as the factor of time becomes a real issue. Some interviewees spoke about learning to read the “early warning signs” of burnout and used certain indicators such as struggling to sleep to trigger a decision to take time out. For some staying fit and keeping their bodies healthy was essential for dealing with the daily challenges in the workplace.

In essence it is how well we care for ourselves that enable us to care for others. Self-care is interconnected to the balance we maintain in our lives between the relationship we have with ourselves and the relationship we have with others. Self-care is therefore part of the core domain as it is imperative that one pays attention to our bodies, minds and spirits; being
mindful assists with self-care. Brown and Ryan (cited in Richards, Campenni, & Muse-burke, 2010, p.247) found that mindfulness has a positive effect on well-being. If we are aware of what our bodies, minds and souls need we are able to fulfil these needs better. It also allows me to strike a balance of caring for myself and caring for others.

The two links from the interrelationship diagram are action-focused and support to and from others. Both these family-codes fall into the external domain, activities and actions that play out in the external environment. Warner (2012) refers to Action-focused and Gives and accepts support as the two external building blocks of resilience.

The action focus family-group has five sub-codes: action orientated (18 quotations); determination (11 quotations); improvise (8 quotations); adapt behaviour (6 quotations) and independent (4 quotations). It talks to the characteristics of being consistently action-orientated and using various approaches to tackling problems. Many of the respondents spoke about this as the ability to “just keep going” and “put one foot in front of the other”. Trying flexible approaches to challenges sometimes entails us to adapt our behaviour. One participant cited that once she has perspective on the situation and has understood the challenge “where necessary, I attempt to adapt my behaviour where this does not conflict with my principles” (P1-1, (17:17)).

Flexibility was discussed with specific reference to woman’s careers and how they cannot always be expected to be a straight line projection to the top, especially when starting a family. One participant spoke about “the fact that women take time off after giving birth presents unique challenges. I took 1 week off with my first child and 1 day with my second” (P-1-4-1, (11:11)).

In Wolin and Wolin’s (1993) challenge model independence was identified. Gupton and Slick (1996) included determination. Coutu (2002) described three defining characteristics of resilient people and the third was an uncanny ability to improvise, making do with whatever is at hand. All three of these elements are included in the family-group of action-focus and they were evident within the research.

The family-group of support to and from others was also identified as the most shared similarity among all participants with 22% of all quotations belonging in this group and every interviewee speaking about its importance. Support to and from others has seven sub-codes but the emphasis is on the importance of relationships. Relationships were the most quoted
code out of the research with 30 quotations. At the core of a person’s ability to persist is intimacy with others. As cited by Ledesma (2014) relationships often act as the catalyst for transformation inside oneself and within our lives. The bottom line is that people make a difference and that having others around us who we care for and who care for us often gives us the strength we need to endure.

In the research relationships ranged from friends, family, colleagues, mentors, role models, people in the workplace who believed in them to psychologists and coaches. The importance of teams and having the correct support structure in place was also particularly important especially to those women who had families. In terms of progressing through the ranks participants noted the importance of mentors either formal or informal who coached and guided them into higher echelons of the business. Having someone’s support and encouragement played a large role in the ability to overcome obstacles. Participant 20 stated: “but I think as a female, if “Mr Y” didn’t have that belief I wouldn’t be here. And even now I look back and think he may have made the wrong decision, because the business needed some desperate help and it needed somebody who knew the industry. And I will always say to him, you know you put me in that role, but you should have got a seasoned professional. And he says to me that I knew it would take you time to learn the business but I knew you were the right person to do it, to turn it around” (P20-20, (132:132)).

The other six sub-codes underlying the family-group of support to and from others are: accepting support (28 quotations); having mentors/ sponsors (15 quotations); talking (13 quotations); having a coach (8 quotations); giving to others (7 quotations) and member of a group (4 quotations).

Learning to ask for help is something some women learned after facing rock bottom, Participant 6 spoke about a lesson she learned after facing a debilitating illness and not having the ability to look after her children, when speaking about her husband she said: “I never asked [for help]. Men are interesting because they actually say why didn’t you just ask me and you say why didn’t you offer? You can see I am struggling. No, no just ask me and I will help you. So that was another good lesson - Learn to ask for help (P6-11, (74:74)).
6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 RESEARCH CONCLUSION

“There is no ways I could have done all of this without my partner, if I didn't have my family support; if I didn't have a great base of friends, if I didn't have a life outside of the challenges” (P10-10:13, (83:83)).

Having others around you that you can connect with and lean on during adversity is an absolute core to being resilient. Personal relationships give us all the perspective we need outside the workplace and the challenges we face and often give life meaning and purpose.

The research set out to explore the personal approaches that women took when facing adversity in the workplace. Women face a myriad of challenges including the specific challenge of motherhood and management which can be particularly draining.

In order to understand resilience better, the researcher embarked on a qualitative, phenomenological study to explore the personal stories of women who had risen above adversity in the workplace. The researcher conducted an extensive literature review to unpack the constructs of resilience and in particular what characteristics, if any, were more attributable to women in the workplace. Interviews with 20 women from various positions and organisations were conducted; they took a semi-structured approach in order to gain rich and detailed descriptions from the lives of the participants. All respondents participated out of their own will and were informed of the scope of the research and the objectives. A computer-assisted qualitative data software (CAQDAS) called Atals/ti was used by the researcher to code and analyse the data order to gain deeper insight and understanding into the constructs of resilience and the role these characteristics played in rising above adversity in the workplace. The 40 sub-codes that emerged from the data were then categorised into 7 family-codes which highlighted the themes from the research. These family-codes were: Connection to Purpose and Self, Understand and Accept Self, Self-care, Gaining Perspective, Internal Optimism, Action-focused and Support to and from others. The final component of the research was to contrast and compare these sub-codes and family-codes and present them in detail showing the main points which emerged from the research.

The main findings noted by the researcher were:
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

- All of the respondents highlighted the important fact that “people matter”, relationships were the most significant component of overcoming adversity with all of the participants noting its importance.

“So I think people around you. That is a cliché but it is so important” (P4-4:17, (120:120)).

- Significant people, whether it be a husband, mentor, family member or friend, provided support, guidance and in some cases just someone to talk with when these women faced adversity.

- Believing in yourself and having the confidence to achieve your goals, purpose or meaning in life was emphasised as an important characteristic of resilience.

- Many of the participants felt that taking time out and looking after their health and fitness was an important aspect of maintaining resilience.

- None of the respondents felt that it was useful to be connected to a group or club during particularly challenging times, they either said they did not have the time or the inclination.

- Gaining an objective perspective on the situation is vital to moving forward. Learning from the part, letting go, being objective and accepting reality were all elements to gaining perspective.

- Having a goal, purpose or finding meaning in life was also a common construct which was uncovered in the interviews as well as the literature.

Overall resilience is something that most women identified as becoming easier as their careers progressed and as they gained experience and learned to cope better with, often the same, challenges in the workplace. The data gathered provided rich insight into the different approaches to staying resilient but also highlighted some of the common themes on the subject.

The following limitations were identified by the researcher:

- Only 20 women were interviewed given the time constraints.

- The researcher carried out the coding based on her own interpretation, and therefore carries some researcher bias.
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

Despite the limitations, the research contributed deep inside into an element of resilience which has not been widely researched. More women are in the workplace now than any other time in history and the ability to deal with life’s inevitable challenges is a skill they will all benefit from. There is a real need for further research into this field to help both women understand resilience better and develop the characteristics that assist them in bouncing back from adversity.

The hope of the researcher is that whoever the reader of this study may be, that they are left with, at least one, learning about themselves and how they could better cope with adversity they face in their future.

6.2 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The field of resilience has gained momentum in the management fraternity over the last few years. Gender is also something that is attracting more popularity. For both men and women in the workplace it is beneficial to understand the unique challenges that women face, like childbirth and motherhood, and have the insight into how best to navigate these differences in careers in the best way possible.

Future research also needs to be extending to various industries and organisations. The researcher also feels that a comparison between entrepreneurs and corporate management would be a beneficial addition to understanding resilience as often the challenges by these two groups can be substantially different.
7. REFERENCES


Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace


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Resilience is the ability to cope in the face of challenges and emerge from adversity stronger and more resourceful (Warner, 2012; Richardson, 2002). It can be viewed as the life-force to overcome adversity, heal and strive towards self-actualisation and thriving (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). It is the ability to persevere and recover in the face of hardship and has the propensity to pull through despite arduous obstacles (van Wyk, 2014).

Questions:

1. Can you describe a situation where you were faced with adversity/tough challenges in the workplace?
2. Do you think your work experiences are unique to being a woman? Give two examples of your answer?
3. How did you personally navigate through adversity?
4. What impact did these challenges have on you? Emotional, psychological, physical, cognitive or even energy impacts?
5. What did you learn from these experiences? What has it caused you to do in the future (e.g., change working styles, work engagements, choices/decisions)?
6. What were the things that helped you overcome the challenges?
7. Who were the people who helped you overcome the challenges?
8. What internal resources kept you going during these difficult times?
9. What do those experiences mean to you today?
10. Do you feel that the nature of your work is gendered? Does that pose special challenges during times of adversity?
11. Have you found it useful to be connected to certain groups, networks or clubs, particularly during difficult times?
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APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

Completed online

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1: Characteristics of Women in Adversity Response</th>
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</table>

**Research Methodology**

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. Participants were selected through a convenience sampling method, ensuring a diverse representation of women from various industries and levels of experience. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a survey questionnaire, with open-ended questions allowing for in-depth exploration of resilience characteristics. The analysis involved thematic coding for qualitative data, while quantitative data was subjected to statistical tests to identify significant correlations. The findings highlight the importance of resilience in addressing workplace adversity and provide insights for future research and practical applications.
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

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APPENDIX 3: ETHICS CLEARANCE APPROVAL

Toich, Dube

From: webmaster@gsb.uct.ac.za
Sent: 26 September 2015 12:49 PM
To: Toich, Dube
Subject: New Ethics Approval Response

Dear Dubravka,

Thank you for using the Research Management System (RMS)

This serves to confirm that the project as described in your submitted Application for Ethical Clearance for Research has been approved by the GSB Research Ethics Committee. You may proceed with the research.

Please note that if you make any substantial change in your research procedure that could affect the experiences of the participants, you must submit a revised protocol to the Committee for approval.

Best wishes for great success with your research.

Kind regards,
RMS Admin
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research title: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace.

Principle researcher: Dubravka Toich

Contact details: tchdub001@gsb.uct.ac.za or 074 5299 159

Participant’s name: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Purpose of the research:
Women are under-represented in leadership and upper management positions throughout organisations in South Africa. Not only do women face real obstacles in their career progression but the organisational landscape is becoming increasingly complex and the pace of change is accelerating. What does it take for a woman to rise above the challenges they face in their careers and lead?

The intended focus of this research study is on the positive side to adversity – the phenomenon of resilience and bouncing back from adversity. The study will aim to understand the resilience characteristics in women who have risen above hardship.

The researcher aims to provide rich descriptions of complex phenomena by exploring the experiences from people with differing circumstances. While research provides theories on the constructs of resilience, there is little research into the characteristics specific to women where they face adversity within the workplace.

As a recognized women leader, you have been approached to participate in this study, which will examine personal experiences and how you dealt with adversity in the aforementioned context. Your participation in this research is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw from the research at any time. This research has been approved by the Commerce Faculty Ethics in Research Committee. The researcher acknowledges that the research is conducted solely for academic purposes as fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Business Administrations (MBA).
Conduct of the research:

Should you choose to participate in this research, you will be requested to attend one interview session lasting approximately 60 minutes. The use of an audio-recording device during the interview is to facilitate the efficient and accurate production of transcripts. All information obtained during the conduct of this research is confidential and the identity of all participants will remain anonymous unless explicit permission has been granted by a participant to reveal his/her identity.

Risks of the research:

There are no known risks in participating in this research.

Consent to participate:

I acknowledge that participation in this research is of my own volition. I understand that I may choose to withdraw from this research at any time. I understand that all information is confidential and that my identity will not be revealed at any stage during the conduct of this research, writing up of the findings or publication in an academic journal, unless I have given written consent. I agree to the use of an audio-recording device and understand that I may request copies of the interview transcript for perusal.

Participant’s signature: _________________ Date: _________________

Consent to use identity

Permission granted to reveal identity during the conduct of this research, writing up of the findings or publication in an academic journal.

Please tick

☐ Yes, I grant permission
☐ No, I do not grant permission
Research Proposal: Resilience characteristics of women in dealing with adversity in the workplace

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Job level</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>Marketing</td>
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