



The University of Sheffield

Leadership and Women: the *Space* between Us.

***Narrating 'my-self' and telling the stories of senior female educational
leaders in Malta.***

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*Life is a journey and it's about growing and changing and
coming to terms with who and what you are and loving
who and what you are.*

Kelly McGillis

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Thank you for what you did;
You didn't have to do it.
I'm glad someone like you
Could help me to get through it.

I'll always think of you
With a glad and grateful heart;
You are very special;
I knew it from the start!

These few lines by Joanna Fuchs gather my gratitude to many persons who in some way walked with me through this journey. As the phrase goes, “no man is an island”, and surely, I would not have managed without the tremendous help and support of these mentioned below.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my wife Josette,
and our three children John, Steve and Marija.

You are my love, pride and joy,
and make every second of my life worth living.

Abstract

The main aim of this qualitative research study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of senior female educational leaders in the Department of Education in Malta. Although Malta's laws relating to gender equity are in line with those of the EU, traditional beliefs and values, including those influenced by the Catholic church, mean that in many areas of social life, women and girls continue to be perceived to be inferior. It is also the case that the gender gap in Malta in many sectors is one of the highest in Europe.

The study is framed within the constructivist and interpretivist paradigm and took a narrative approach. I have looked at gender and leadership through a lens of social justice rather than feminism. Throughout 2017-2018 in-depth interview data was collected from the eight female senior leaders in the Maltese education department. Data were analysed manually using a hybrid approach method (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), to decide on the relevant themes. An autoethnographic approach was also employed, whereby I critically examined and reflected on my experiences of female leaders. Data was crafted into a fictitious staged drama script to present the findings from the interviews, and another fictitious radio drama script to present some key relevant experiences from my life. To the best of my knowledge no such study has been conducted locally using a similar approach, and focusing on senior female educational leaders.

The findings from the study demonstrated that women in educational leadership in Malta have to face challenges specific to them being females. Furthermore, the study contributes to understanding around women already in leadership posts, and also those aspiring to be leaders. The study recommends among other things, real family-friendly measures by organisations; organised professional development programmes for women in leadership and for those aspiring to be leaders; and training programmes focused on how to build healthy collegial relationships. Also, this thesis suggests some potential proposals for future research.

Robert Vella

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Chapter 1 – Setting the stage for senior female educational leaders in Malta and ‘my-self’

Ontological assumptions about social reality will focus on issues around being human within the world and on whether a person sees social reality, or aspects of the social world, as external, independent, given and objectively real or, instead, as socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language.

–Wellington et al., 2005, p.100

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the audience to my research investigation by presenting the various stages of my doctoral journey. I present a case study of senior female educational leaders in the Department of Education in Malta, where I consider senior leaders ranging from the Minister for Education to leaders at a directorial level. The main objective of this study is to investigate the perceptions and experiences of senior female leaders in the Department of Education in Malta. I have looked at gender and leadership through a lens of social justice rather than feminism. This investigation also explores some of my personal life events where I examine and reflect on my experiences of female leaders.

The title of the thesis is: ‘Leadership and Women: the *Space* between Us. *Narrating ‘my-self’ and telling the stories of senior female educational leaders in Malta.*’ Although whatever I say is obviously open to interpretation among the readers of this thesis, “the *Space*” and “Us” need clarification from my side. “Space” has different connotations, often referring to an unoccupied or available area. During the time of this investigation, there were 27 senior leaders in the Department of Education in Malta, of whom eight were females and

nineteen males. Space refers to whether there really is a gap for women when it comes to leadership. In a sense the gap I am referring to can be interpreted in different ways—whether there is a space that women could occupy, or lack of women in leadership posts.

Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, and Sikes (2005), quoted above, describe two ontological perspectives on ontological assumptions about social reality. It is important from the start that the readers know what my perspectives are—my beliefs. “The world”, “my world” is constructed from subjective experiences, one where multiple realities exist, and my desire is that social justice should prevail. Although I have quite a strong belief in God and I am a practising Catholic, I strongly believe in the Maltese idiom which says, “you must help yourself, so that God helps you”, in the sense that as humans we can make a change and improve social realities and remedy injustices. My belief in God is that God created us to love, and in this regard, I consider human beings as individuals having different perspectives, and one cannot say that one is true and the other not. In this respect, I try to find meanings in this research from and with others, since knowledge is constructed by society. All this leads to my thesis’s title and my research question/s, together with my whole doctoral journey, the decisions I took for my methodology and methods, analysis and interpretation, and the presentation of my study.

I set my study within the Maltese context by outlining the influence of Maltese culture with regard to women for the reader who is not familiar with the local context, followed by considering women in leadership positions, including some challenges women meet in order to advance to leadership posts, and possible solutions. I present my place in this investigation by focusing on my positionality, specific interest in educational leadership—particularly the place of women in leadership positions—and the motive behind this research which led to my embarking on my doctoral journey. I subsequently describe the purpose of my research by outlining my research questions and the scaffolding framework for this study. I then describe

some issues I encountered and justify the presentation of my findings in fictitious drama scripts. This is then followed by some clarifications for this research. The chapter ends with an outline of the thesis.

1.2 Setting for the study

This study is set in Malta, where for many years females have been considered as having a lower status to men, with the consequence that due to such cultural and traditional gender stereotypes, women face challenges which men do not have to face (Borg & Clark, 2007). Gender equity laws are in line with those of the EU, but traditional values and stereotypes seeing women as inferior to men and not as capable as men in taking decisions are still very persistent, with the consequence that we still find that women have to undertake a slower and longer path to leadership positions (Jourová, 2016), more so when it comes to senior leadership.

1.2.1 The Maltese context

This investigation was undertaken based on the premise of the uniqueness of Maltese culture. For many centuries, Malta was colonized by different rulers, each of which left their stamp on the culture and traditions, including how women are perceived. The gender stereotype that men are more able at being leaders and taking decisions is still very much in existence, and thus many decision-making positions in various areas of life in Malta are mostly occupied by males (NSO, 2020). Likewise, women are perceived to be at their best as mothers and as housewives, with the consequence that many believe that a woman cannot be both a mother and a leader, since otherwise she will fail in one of these roles and will not perform well. These perceptions and beliefs are not only harboured by men, but some women are also of the opinion that men are better leaders while women are at their best at home.

Furthermore, the patriarchal domination of the Catholic Church also has its influence. Compared to other European countries, Catholicism in Malta is predominant, with over 90% of the Maltese people declaring to be Catholics, and so the Church in Malta still holds a certain authority. Although on several occasions the Church has preached on equality and social justice, it is a known reality that it is ruled by men, and women have little to no say in any decision-making, though recently Pope Francis created a commission of experts to explore the possibility of having women deacons, a role which currently is reserved only for men (TMI, 2020). Interestingly, it is a known fact that in Malta it is women who mostly attend church.

These stereotypes, influences, dominations, and other challenges hinder women more than men in Malta to advance to senior leadership positions. Other obstacles, like family care and home chores, also impede women to advance with the same rate as men, and although some of these challenges are global, Malta has the highest gender gap in many sectors in Europe. As such, although gender equity laws and policies were adopted, particularly in the last ten years, and are in line with those of the EU, when it comes to gender equality, in several areas, Malta is still far behind many EU countries. Although rules are up to standard, many people still consider men to be superior and as being better leaders. Given all these notions, I explore the perceptions and experiences of senior female educational leaders in the Department of Education in Malta.

1.2.2 Women and leadership

The main focus and actors of this study are senior female educational leaders, thus, previous research on women in leadership and the effect of gender on leadership positions informs the setting for this study.

Leadership, including educational leadership, has been the focus of much research for many years. According to various scholars, leadership standards were centred around male models, where rules were made by men to accommodate men. Reasons for this vary, with some researchers arguing that it was, and in many cases still is, due to the autocratic influences of the Church, army and the State, which are dominated by males. Leadership stereotypes are associated with white, heterosexual males (Coleman, 2012; Showunmi, 2016), making it harder for women to reach leadership positions, a situation still in existence in contemporary leadership theories (Showunmi, Atewologun & Bebbington, 2016). Although women represent around half the population of the world, their involvement in several aspects of society are well below their potential (Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013; Shepherd, 2017), with the World Economic Forum (2016) asserting that the gender gap needs another 170 years to achieve economic equality. Although a change might still be unreachable for some organisations, the compiled knowledge produced on gender helps to bring about awareness and might help female leaders and those aspiring to be leaders by their being informed of the experiences of other female leaders.

The above-mentioned claims of how leadership is perceived, challenges women in leadership meet and possible suggestions, together with the Maltese context, places the background of my study.

I now present my positionality with regard to this study, focusing on myself as an individual as well as my interest in this study.

1.3 My place in the research – positionality

I believe that life is agreeable—my inclination is to see the glass as half full rather than half empty. I am commencing this section with this statement, so that from the start the readers of this thesis realize that this doctoral journey was and still is, from my side, one of

hope, where although some of the findings might convey some negative feelings, nevertheless, I am optimistic and hope that some of the outcomes from this thesis shed new information and help and inspire the readers. Yet, I have interpreted the different events in this thesis, and someone else could come up with a different interpretation. As will be explained in the 'Research Methodology' chapter, I began this journey with several biases and perceptions, and naturally I still have my biases. Even the investigated literature enforced some of my biases, but then, as an open-minded researcher, I am open to new knowledge, and will try not to allow my biases to skew the findings of this study. Nonetheless, I cannot ignore the fact that some of my biases will eventually emerge in this research, since after all I am the researcher, author, and interpreter of this study.

1.3.1 Positionality

As will be elaborated in the next chapter, my positionality as a researcher is one of a social justice inquirer.

Apart from being a male, husband, father, teacher of computing, and a head of department in a secondary school, I also acknowledge that my personal experiences both with the immediate relatives and at work, and in my social life, may give rise to some biases, in the sense that many times I meet males, and even females, whose beliefs are that men are superior and that women's place is at home. Furthermore, as a practising Catholic, I am aware that for many years, and even today, it can be argued that women are seen from a Catholic perspective as being inferior to men. Likewise, in particular when it comes to principles, although I am not active in politics, my political beliefs tend to be affiliated with the Christian democrat and conservative ideology, an ideology mostly embraced by the Nationalist Party. Since independence, Malta has been governed by either of the two major parties, the Labour Party (PL) or the Nationalist Party (PN). The stated aim of the PL is to

promote social democratic and progressive values, while the ideology of the PN supports human rights, particularly if they are in line with Roman Catholicism. In the last few years, the PN moved towards more centrist positions, while still complying with Christian democratic conservative values. These assertions may somehow influence this research. But, bearing all this in my mind, I hope that my research will make a difference in social justice.

1.3.2 Interest in the study

My passion for researching educational leadership, in particular the place of women in leadership positions, goes back many years. When I was promoted as a head of department—part of the Senior Management/Leadership Team (SM/LT)—back in 2004, this urge grew stronger, especially when looking back and reflecting on the impact several leaders had in my life—most of them were male leaders. This urge grew even stronger in 2015-2016 when I read for my MA, which explored challenging situations female primary heads of schools in Gozo have to face and how they confront such challenges as female school leaders. Back then, I came to realize even more that the situation is not that easy, that there is no one solution, and that there exist multiple realities—not one truth, but many. At that time, and even now, the number of female heads of school in Malta and Gozo, both in primary and secondary level, compared well with that of males, but this cannot be said about female educational leaders at a directorial level and above. I decided to carry out a case study of senior female leaders in the Department of Education in Malta using in-depth interviews as this gave me a first-hand opportunity to hear what these women had to say about their experiences. As executive members of the Educational Ministry's top management team, their main responsibility is to control and co-ordinate the work of their directorate and liaise with the Permanent Secretary and the Minister for Education by analysing, supporting, and giving advice and recommendations related to their directorate. Given that this was a very

personal ambition, blending my life accounts together with that of the participants helped me to further explore this phenomenon.

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of the senior female leaders in the Department of Education in Malta, with the hope of raising more awareness of women in leadership, the challenges women in leadership positions meet before being appointed as leaders and while in a leadership position, and possible suggestions and recommendations.

What follows is the research purpose of my study which outlines my research questions, together with their explanations and justification, and the framework for this project.

1.4 Research purpose

The purpose of my research is to obtain female senior leaders' first-hand experiences and their perceptions on women in positions of educational leadership. The main research question is: "How do senior female educational leaders perceive and experience their positions?" To address this question, three questions were asked during the interviews.

1. How did you arrive at your leadership position?

Here I gave the educational leaders the chance to share their life experiences in an open manner on how they achieved their leadership position.

2. Why do you think that there are fewer women in leading positions?

In this question, I investigated the perceptions of the participants about the representation of women in leading positions.

3. Could anything be done to change this situation?

Here I explored suggestions voiced by the participants on possible suggestions and recommendations with regard to females in leadership positions.

I investigated these questions while keeping in mind the unique Maltese culture, something which previous international literature on women and leadership did not necessarily bear in mind in relation to our setting. Furthermore, I kept in mind that, although all the participants are females, their experiences and perceptions are unique, and all have their personal story.

1.4.1 The framework for this project

According to Anfara (2008), in research, researchers bring “paradigmatic assumptions (ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological) to the design of their studies” (p. 870), which I acknowledge for this project and which are explained in Chapter 3. After discussing my positionality, it is also important to focus on the theoretical framework used for comprehending and interpreting the data.

As with most educational research, this research has to be interpreted against a theoretical framework. A useful theory is one which narrates “an enlightening story about a phenomenon”, it is a story which broadens one’s understanding and gives new insights about the phenomenon being studied (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 106). Theories are framed to elucidate, predict, and understand the phenomena being explored, and many times it challenges and extends existing knowledge (Swanson & Chermack, 2013).

This study was explored in the light of literature on women in leadership, with a strong background on the Maltese context, together with a consideration of leadership in general. Narrative inquiry was mainly used to elicit the stories of the participants. My narrative inquiry started by using the narrative interview as the main approach to obtain stories of experiences and perceptions of women in leadership. In accordance with Denzin (2016), stories help to provide insights about human experiences and to apply relational ethics. For this research, I kept in mind Ellis’ (2007, p. 3) description: “Relational ethics

requires researchers to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences.” I decided to apply a narrative (plot) format in my research in an attempt to achieve narrative complementarity between my investigation and my story, presented as a performance (as described in section 1.5) about the inquiry.

Approaching data analysis in a hybrid manner helped in focusing on which relevant themes to keep within the context of this study. That being said, the emergent themes informed the crafting of my theoretical framework.

Literature on conceptual frameworks is various. Since the main aim of this thesis is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of women involved in leadership, the hybrid model helped me to elucidate the stories of the participants. The voices from the field were given prominence by using lengthy verbatim quotes to narrate the experiences and perceptions of the participants on women and leadership.

The components for this thesis are incorporated within the narrative framework, and this includes the critical discussion of relevant literature throughout the different chapters.

1.5 Performance in research

Key issues in research include how the researchers place themselves in the text (St. Pierre, 1997), the voices these texts claim to represent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and the position of the audience for whom the researcher creates the textual representation (Denzin, 1994). I decided that the best way to present the findings for this thesis is in the form of dramaturgical praxis. As such, the findings from the participants’ interviews will be presented in a fictitious script for a staged drama, while my life experiences will be presented in another fictitious script for a radio drama.

Apart from my love and conviction that performance is the way forward to present my findings, other scholars are in agreement in following this path of presentation. Denzin (2003) asserted the importance of using performance to interpret events, while according to Conrad (2008) it is a way to offer a better understanding of real lives. My wish to present the findings in the form of a drama enables me to provide the audience with a sense of enjoyment in imagining that they are *listening* to and *seeing* my performance. My hope with respect to the audience for presenting the dramatized narratives of my findings is that they enter and enjoy this theatre with the possibility of feeling that these stories could be their stories, and so they can associate themselves more with these narratives.

Presenting my findings, I had to confront the inevitable problem of data representation, taking into consideration the link between lived experience, how the text is going to be presented, and the participants and the author. Koro-Ljungberg (2008) comments about the problems a researcher meets, “the tensions between the desire to know and the limits of representation” (p. 231). From this perspective, I consider that my representations will always be incomplete, as declared by Kuntz (2012): “despite our attempts to enact as thorough a study as possible – creating thick descriptions of our participants’ lives – representation will always remain incomplete” (p. 47). As such, I had to determine what was adequate for my theatre—it was my voice and my interpretations.

1.6 Setting the boundaries – Some clarifications

Before embarking on the rest of my thesis, I would like to clarify some issues in my research so that the readers will be aware of the boundaries of this study.

My study explores the perceptions and experiences of senior female leaders in the Department of Education of Malta at a particular timeframe, 2017-2018, which is when I conducted the interviews. Although I could have included others, such as assistant senior

leaders, in order to explore other aspects, this was not the intention of the study. The study covers senior leaders from the state educational system in Malta and does not include the same positional leaders from the church or independent school sectors. Although the study is about females, still I believe that some male leaders can associate with the stories of the female participants, in particular when it comes to barriers in leadership. While my intention is to come up with possible recommendations, this does not mean that although the participants are all females, there exists a single common truth, since everyone is a different individual, and I am seeking to represent multiple realities.

I now set out to give a brief overview of the next chapters which constitute my thesis.

1.7 The structure of the thesis

Together with this chapter, the thesis is composed of seven more chapters.

Chapter two, '*Inquiry Trail*', considers the literature which has influenced my thinking for the study and helped me in formulating better my research questions. The literature explored in this chapter considers the Maltese context, leadership in general, with a particular interest in educational leadership, women in leadership, and researching women and social justice. This literature helped me to expand on, compare, and contrast the findings in this study.

Chapter three, '*Research Methodology*', outlines my methodological and theoretical framework supporting my research. This chapter opens with my justifications and the importance of performance in research. My paradigmatic lens followed the qualitative approach, one taking into account multiple realities in order to explore the experiences and perceptions of senior female leaders in the Department of Education in Malta. Since I used the methodological approach of case studies and collected narratives obtained from the participants' experiences, next came the use of case studies for my research, followed by why

I chose narratives as my main data collection method. Given that I consider this investigation from a personal perspective, autoethnography served as a sort of scaffolding in supporting my exploration. Furthermore, this chapter outlines my philosophical assumptions and my view of trustworthiness for this research, the research design and the research sample, how I conducted the interviews, and the transcriptions. This is followed by how I analysed and interpreted the data, and the difficulties of translating transcripts from Maltese to English. Finally, the chapter outlines the ethical implications and limitations to this project.

Chapter four, '*Curtain Opening for The Butterfly – Act 1*', introduces main events from my life in the form of a fictitious script for a radio drama, where most of the events—which are presented in different scenes—are followed with my interpretation of the impact of the leader/s in that particular event, together with some scholarly literature to support my interpretations.

Chapter five, '*Curtain Opening for The Act of Voices – Act 2: Part 1*', introduces the participants of this research. Presented in the form of a fictional script for a staged drama with different scenes, this chapter explains the stage for my performance, the cast, the scenery, and the costumes, where through this chapter the audience can imbibe the ambience of the drama.

Chapter six, '*Curtain Opening for The Act of Voices – Act 2: Part 2*', presents the experiences of the actors, together with my interpretations, accompanied by some scholarly published literature. The drama was crafted to answer the question: "How do senior female educational leaders perceive and experience their positions?"

Chapter seven, '*Unveiling the Drama*', is an epilogue for my performance. I provide a discussion and the implications of the main points that unfold during the two acts of my play. This is then followed by the applications and proposed future research.

Chapter eight, '*Curtain Call: Raising the Curtain*', concludes my research. This chapter outlines my contributory general overview of this research, an executive summary, and my concluding reflections.

I begin my research with the 'Inquiry Trail', the literature which influenced my thinking for this research.

Chapter 2 – Inquiry Trail

2.1 Preface

I think good quality action research will show the way in which the writer has engaged with the literature and how the literature, whatever its source, has challenged the writer's view. [...] So, in writing up my work, I want to report on the literature that has really made a difference to my thinking, that has challenged my assumptions and supported me in exploring new ideas and finding new ways of looking at things from different perspectives.

–Winter, Griffiths & Green, 2000, p. 30

This chapter was written after much analysis and interpretation, since the explored literature had a personal effect on me. It was personal in the sense that my research helped me evaluate and interpret the impact leaders had on me throughout my life, and it also helped to explore and question issues related to my research project, namely the perceptions and experiences of women in educational leadership positions. This concurs with the concept proposed by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (2005, p. 16) that the literature should be considered as the “field-as-internal” rather than as the “field-as-external”. Before exploring the literature that has influenced me, I borrow Green’s statement quoted above in Winter et al. (2000), and acknowledge that the cited literature has somehow challenged my perceptions and assumptions, and “has really made a difference to my thinking”.

2.1.1 Introduction

Leadership has been perceived as being central in education as it has helped create and maintain successful schools; it has thus been the focus of extensive research, policies and

practices. Although the direct effect of leadership on pupils' achievement has been questioned (Hallinger & Heck, 1996), a substantial body of research and reports (OFSTED, 2003) clearly indicates the importance of leadership for successful schools and colleges. The intention of this thesis is to further contribute to the research field of leadership, focusing in particular on the role of women in educational leadership and emphasising the Maltese context. Deliberately and for different reasons, this chapter is named 'Inquiry Trail'. An "inquiry" is defined as "a seeking or request for truth, information, or knowledge" (Dictionary.com, 1995). Moreover, as Wellington et al. (2005, p. 75) observe,

An inquiry trail can explore how different types of literature [...] address a particular issue or focus [...]. It can seek out differences and similarities in definitions of particular concepts within a range of literature. It can compare the understandings that literature from different disciplines and different countries bring to a particular issue.

The research trail of this particular dissertation thereby follows the Maltese context; leadership in general with particular attention to educational leadership; and women and leadership, together with the challenges they face and possible solutions to the problem.

Defining leadership and identifying leaders can be both complex and confusing (Bush, 2011a; Yukl, 2013). Leaders have to face different challenges when leading and this is often even more demanding for women (NSO, 2007a; Bullough & Sully de Luque, 2015; Thorpe, 2018). The situation in Malta regarding leadership and women is not that different from the rest of the world and in many cases it is even worse than in most European Union countries (Jourová, 2016; NSO, 2020). This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the situation in Malta from a historical perspective before taking a look at the current situation in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Maltese context.

The next section offers a discussion of some of the major research contributions to leadership and particularly explores the concept of educational leadership in anticipation of

the following section, ‘Women in Leadership’. While most definitions and descriptions of leadership and educational leadership do not refer to gender, there are those who argue that leadership is not gender-neutral, even though the normative position is that leaders are males. Apart from the leadership definitions offered by scholars such as Stogdill (1950), Fiedler (1967), Dubin (1968) and more recent ones like Lashway (1999), Bush (2011a), Luft (2012) and others, the relationship between leadership and culture will also be analysed in view of how it has been said to affect the participants in this study. The concept of educational leadership will also be examined in some detail, with particular emphasis on the typologies explored by Bush and Glover (2003), which are a continuation of the study of Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999). This particular literature is of especial significance for the findings presented through an autoethnographic approach in Chapter 4.

This chapter will then go on to examine the literature about ‘Women in Leadership’. In contemporary digital societies and with many countries adopting gender-equality policies and legislations, research is still necessary to identify the reasons for the scarcity of women in leadership and the challenges they continually meet vis-à-vis gender equality. A growing body of literature highlights the underrepresentation of women in leading positions (Hoyt, 2013; Hellicar, 2013; Jourová, 2016; GiEL, 2017; Shepherd, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Guihen, 2018, 2019), which is addressed in the section entitled ‘Gender and Leadership’.¹ This is followed by an examination of the literature covering the topic of women in educational leadership, together with some barriers and solutions identified by different researchers.

The chapter concludes with reference to scholars like Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002), Matias and Zembylas (2014), López (2016), and Russell (2016) and their views on researching women and social justice from the viewpoint of a male researcher. This section also briefly explores the notion of truth and knowledge in the light of women and social

¹ GiEL – Gender in educational leadership: Where are we in research?

justice research, bearing in mind Russell’s (2016) assertion that “science has the potential to challenge or to reinforce social norms and cultural frameworks” (p. 9).

This research offers an alternative manner in which to articulate the position of female educational leaders in Malta. While a lot of research—like Cauchi Cuschieri (2007), Fuller, Cliffe, and Moorosi (2015), Fuller (2017), McKillop and Moorosi (2017), Thorpe (2018), Guihen (2018, 2019) and others—concentrates on the female headship (the role of principal or deputy head), research on senior leadership is scarcer, especially in the Maltese context. An innovative aspect of this research is that the study is being carried out by a male, and many studies concerning women are commonly conducted by females. Figure 2.1 below captures the main spheres of influence on this thesis, with leadership being at the centre of the research. As the diagram indicates, however, the idea of women in leadership roles in particular, and the relationship between its study and social justice are also explored within the Maltese context.

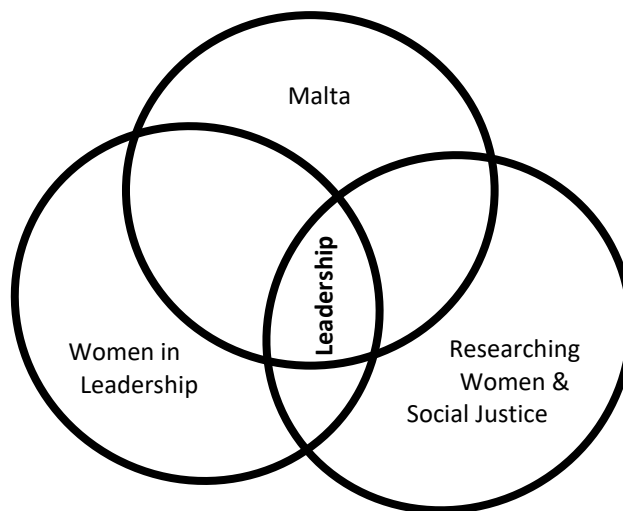


Figure 2.1. The research topics.

2.2 Malta

We are a small but great nation with a history that is a credit to us. We have managed to achieve a lot with very little.

– Zammit Marmarà, 2010, p. X

Before I delve into the literature on leadership, women and leadership, and social justice, it is best to provide an outline of the local context and the educational system in Malta. This section is not meant to narrate historical events but rather to show how history evolved into the current Maltese society and its cultural aspects. The historical events here highlight those changes which might have affected the political and social condition (Anderson, 1874) of Maltese society.

2.2.1 Maltese History in a Nutshell

Malta is the smallest European Union country with a population of around half a million and it consists of an archipelago of three islands, Malta, Gozo, and Comino. Malta is situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and its strategic position attracted different conquerors (Borg, 2001) who left traces of both positive and negative influence on the economy, politics, religion, and culture (MaltaUncovered, 2006). As a dynamic process, culture evolves (Steiner & Nauser, 1993) and it definitely affects the performance of society, which in turn influences the decisions which eventually shape culture (Hrebiniak, 2011). Thus, it is important to briefly explore the historical events of Malta together with the factors that have most affected the Maltese culture.

According to Blouet (2007), evidence shows that Malta was inhabited as early as 5200 B.C. In 2000 B.C. the islands were invaded by peoples of the Bronze Age, followed by the Phoenician colonisation in 800 B.C., the Carthaginian rule in 480 B.C., and the Roman

domination in 218 B.C. (Blouet, 2007). Each of these left their influence but a key date was the year 60 A.D., when Malta was still under the Romans, and St Paul was shipwrecked in Malta, heralding the beginning of Christianity (Blouet, 2007) whose far-reaching influence remained very powerful for hundreds of years. The Romans were followed by a series of invaders, namely the Arabs, the Knights of St John, the French, and others, with the final conquerors being the British. The Arabs left their most significant legacy in agriculture and language (Watson, 1983; Molinari & Cutajar, 1999; Wettinger, 2000; Briffa, 2001; Blouet, 2007). The French rule, although short, impacted the education and legal systems on the island (MaltaUncovered, 2006). During the British rule, Maltese culture, language, politics, law and education saw radical changes (MaltaUncovered, 2006; Blouet, 2007). All these events influenced the Maltese people and their culture, including how women were perceived during these times.

2.2.1.1 Timeline of the Maltese woman

Long before the ancient Egyptian pyramids were built, and before the great ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia were raised, there were monumental temples being erected on the island of Malta. Associated with them were carvings and an assemblage of figurines that speak to us today, though in a language not clearly understood. (Eneix, 2011, p. 1)

Some of the figurines, especially those of the mother or Goddess of fertility (Eneix, 2011), and the Goddess religion in itself were a primeval attempt by humanity to understand and live in harmony with the marvel of creation (Campbell, 1992). According to Eneix (2011), the temples reflected the existence of a culture tied with nature and some figures were purposely androgynous. These figures together with the temples of Malta revealed a respectful balance;

men and women were equally respected and power was shared, suggesting that in those times there was no gender struggle (Eneix, 2011).

Knowledge regarding the Maltese woman in more developed eras remains quite obscure but according to Camilleri's (2016) research on Maltese history between 870-1919, women suffered immensely, and women's sexuality was considered as a property of the family. Camilleri further added that the females were considered an asset to the family, since when they grew up to a marriageable age, they were obliged to marry the man offering the highest sum of money to the family, a practice that was also promoted by the church.

According to Borg and Clark (2007), the Maltese woman was constrained in various aspects, and within the Maltese cultural context, women met various challenges due to various reasons including domestic responsibilities and taking care of family members, time fragmentation, and even women's own perception that they had a duty to do this. The role of the woman in the Maltese culture was often perceived as being that of a mother, and thus dedicated to the home and deprived from many other pursuits (Borg & Clark, 2007). In their study, Borg and Clark claimed that women in Malta, unlike men, had to face several challenges, and this could be "attributed to cultural ideologies and maintenance of traditional gender stereotypes" (p. 74). Similarly, Boissevain (1972) declared that women faced many obstacles owing to domestic and parenting obligations. Abela (1994) asserted that the Maltese were amongst the most conservative in Europe when it came to the role of women, as many Maltese people still believed that woman was primarily a wife, mother and housekeeper. Borg and Clark (2007) further argued that these constraints were also derived from the potent influence of the Catholic Church in Malta, an influence which as reported by Bestler (1998) was similar to the legal system until lately.

Although over time there were relevant improvements to the position of women in Malta—with more women entering the labour market, more female graduates, and

improvement in the legal system—the underrepresentation of women in different areas still persisted (Borg & Clark, 2007; NSO, 2020). Several studies show that many young people believe in a marriage where the couple share household tasks (Borg & Clark, 2007), but in practice the traditional influence remains and it is usually the woman who is burdened by the majority of household chores, while the advent of children often forces women to abandon their employment (Roberts, 2006; Borg & Clark, 2007).

Similarly, Cachia (2012) stated that when women applied for what are traditionally perceived to be male jobs, they had to mediate the obstacles presented by working flexible hours and the lack of support to raise their children. Cachia also claimed that from an early age, girls were discouraged by peers, teachers and career advisors from engaging in subjects leading to traditionally male-dominated employment. In this context whilst legislation and programmes to eradicate gender discrimination are in place, the problem has not gone away but rather underground, especially when it comes to roles requiring long hours such as those in managerial and leadership positions. In fact, some organisations still make it extremely hard for women to even apply for the job. According to Cachia (2012), we are still influenced by an ancestral mentality based on Catholic values which holds that a typical family should be a bond between a man and a woman, with the family woman managing the household.

This mentality contributes to the misleading impression of women of the past as gentle family women, good wives and family carers. This is undermined by Vella's (2016) study on women in the 18th century. Vella acknowledges that legal rights for women were limited but she declares that the number of women committing crimes was nearly equal to that of men, suggesting that they were not the household carers portrayed by many. Notwithstanding the rate of female criminality, Vella asserts that women were often victims of crimes perpetrated by vicious males. Vella also highlights the impressive heroic struggles that some women had to go through to start legal proceedings against violent men, including

their husbands, which practice was not very common in those days. Moreover, the myth that women only worked at home was refuted by Vella who referred to several women working in business outside their home. While acknowledging the strong devotional Catholic attitude that women endorsed during those days, there were many cases of women who were brought in front of the Maltese Inquisitor's tribunal accused of experimenting in the occult. According to Vella, many women of the 18th century behaved like those of successive generations and acted within the accepted gender role assigned by society.

Grima (2006) warns that Maltese fiction and non-fiction literature was a mixture of real and fictive events, and consequently one should bear in mind that “even if contemporary Maltese literature provides us with the interesting perspectives on the realities of the Maltese family of the 21st century, one has to consider the influence that this new literature has on Maltese people and their perception of the family on the Maltese islands” (p. 2). Thus, while contemporary writers are experimenting with new perspectives by exploring unorthodox voices and experiences, there is still a scarcity of those stories that do not conform to the traditional model of the family as white, Catholic, and heterosexual. In his research, Grima explored the writings of various Maltese authors and poets of the 1900s and detected the pervasive influence of the traditional conception of the Catholic family, where the man was perceived to be the main bread winner and the woman was the housekeeper taking care of the children. Grima asserted that “the traditional family of Maltese literature is essentially a closed Christian unit with well-defined roles assigned” and confirmed the perception that this traditional unit expected women to teach their children rules that were laid down by “the colonial master and by the powerful, male-dominated Catholic Church” (p. 6).

In the 1900s, males, including politicians and priests, were often expected to play the role of the strict father, harsh and looking after his own, thus inspiring both respect and fear. On the other hand, women were expected to obey and follow the patriarchal culture (Grima,

2006). According to Grima, the Bishops' pastoral letter of the year 2000 indicated that Maltese men and the Church still retained the traditional view of women.² Nonetheless, Grima, concurring with Abela (2000), declares that the younger generations and women with a certain level of education did not adhere to this view, but apart from a few exceptions, "Maltese literature has as yet failed to 'tell' the stories of 'real' Maltese women" (Grima, 2006, p. 19). This failure in literature was compounded by the knowledge that women in Malta were still well behind in gender empowerment and economic participation, and most of the women who were economically active were mostly restricted to the so-called female jobs (Grima, 2006).

In 1998 and 2003, laws had been amended to provide gender equality in Malta, but as Cachia (2012) asserted, this is not enough, apart from the women themselves fighting for their own rights, Cachia (2012) insists that men need to be more involved in the progress of the gender equality ideology.

2.2.1.2 Gender Equality in Malta

This section explores public and private initiatives and studies that have been conducted to promote awareness and enforce gender equality in Malta. In this respect, one must bear in mind that particular studies on the local status of gender equality are quite scarce.

In 2004 the NCPE (The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality), an independent body, was set up with the aim of ensuring that Maltese society eliminates discrimination based on sex, gender, family responsibilities and other related types of discrimination by promoting equality and diversity (NCPE, 2016; Micallef, 2019). Apart from investigating complaints, it provides assistance and monitors the national laws and EU

² "Women in the life of the church." Pastoral letter by the Archbishop of Malta and the bishop of Gozo on the occasion of the feast of the assumption. Archdiocese of Malta - Press Release 2000/127e (2000, August 12).

directives to identify, establish, and update policies related to equality. The NCPE organises various activities to promote gender equality, such as the online directory of professional women to ensure that organisations appoint the right persons on their boards and committees.³ Another productive exercise conducted by the NCPE is the monitoring of adverts for vacant posts. In 2017 it identified over 50 entities who had published discriminatory adverts based on gender, race, or age, with the majority of these adverts discriminating against gender in particular, and apart from identifying such adverts, actions were taken to change the discriminatory content (Caruana, 2017a).

In 2007 the National Statistics Office in Malta conducted a study and published two reports, namely ‘Obstacles to the Participation of Women in Decision-making Positions’ (NSO, 2007a), followed by ‘Perceived Obstacles to the Participation of Women in Decision-making Positions’ (NSO, 2007b). In their study, it was found that men showed more interest in being promoted to increase their wages, while women were more inclined to seek job satisfaction (NSO, 2007a). However, this was not reflected in single persons, since single women were more interested than men in being promoted (NSO, 2007b). According to NSO (2007a, p. 6), “being a woman would place an individual at a disadvantage in the prospect of obtaining a decision-making or managerial post”. Furthermore, a higher percentage of respondents declared that long hours, age, and lack of support were also obstacles, while 84%, claimed that child-rearing responsibilities discouraged them from obtaining a decision-making or managerial position (NSO, 2007b). While acknowledging the importance of such findings, perhaps a follow-up of such studies by our national statistics agency would provide a clearer picture of the current situation.

A study prepared for the use of the European Commission in 2012 by Roland Berger Strategy Consultants GmbH in partnership with ergo Unternehmenskommunikation GmbH &

³ Directory found at ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Directory/Search.aspx

Co. KG revealed that the employment rate of women in the Maltese labour market on a full-time and part-time basis was considerably below that of other EU countries. In comparison with other EU countries, fewer Maltese women received tertiary education in areas associated with male employment, while the underrepresentation of women in hierarchical levels was significantly higher both in corporate boards and management positions. Similarly, Iversen (2018) and Sansone (2018b), quoting this year results from the NSO, add that only 3.8% females are members of boards in the largest quoted companies in Malta, which compares quite badly with the EU average of 21.7%. Although Malta had seen an upward shift in female participation throughout the years, the representation of women in most echelons was still lower than other EU countries (Jourová, 2016). This concurred with the findings of NCPE (2016), which acknowledged that while the participation of women in the labour market was increasing yearly by an average rate of 2.2% as from 2013, it is still very low. Grech (2017) claimed that in 2017 the rate of female participation in the work force increased by 16.7% from 2008, reaching 54.4%. Likewise, NSO (2020) asserted that in 2018 the total females in employment saw “an increase of over two percentage points when compared to 2013” (p. 1), which is still around 20% less than that of men.

According to GmbH (2012) and NCPE (2016), the main reason for low unemployment rates for women is the high dependence on women in households and childcare, and for this reason, in 2016 NCPE launched an awareness campaign on the relevance of men’s role in gender equality “in order to reach a fair and equal balance between work and private life” (p. 13). Although childcare facilities are available, many services are only compatible with schooling hours, forcing many women to either take on a part-time job or resort to opting out of work. Additionally, GmbH (2012) noted that private sectors rarely offered the option for flexible work agreements. This somehow contradicted NCPE (2016) in its claim that the increase of women in the labour market was mainly due to childcare

services, but one must bear in mind that as from 2014 the government has offered all employed women free childcare services in Malta for children till the age of three, following which children can commence their kindergarten education.

In 2012, GmbH acknowledged that during the last ten years, the employment rate for women, although still considerably low, has significantly improved, signifying that the employment rate gap between women and men has decreased. This was mainly attributed to those women in the 25-34-year age bracket who have a different attitude towards paid work and their role in the family when compared with earlier generations. GmbH (2012) also declared that the gender pay gap was significantly higher than other EU countries, and this persisted in subsequent years during which Malta placed second highest after Estonia with a gap of 11% (Caruana, 2016; NCPE, 2016). The gender pay gap is defined as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of male and female, including overtime, bonuses and other incentives, together expressed as a percentage of the average gross of the yearly earnings of men (Iversen, 2018; Sansone, 2018b). Although different studies have confirmed the gender pay gap in Malta, Attard (2016) insists that the wage gap is a myth because it is illegal to have a woman and a man working on the same job and being paid differently, which according to him this is due to a misinterpretation of calculations regarding this gap, which is primarily due to the life choices women and men make, rather than gender discrimination. Caruana (2017c) reconfirmed the pay gap in Malta. Quoting figures issued by the EC, Caruana asserted that women in Malta earn nearly half the amount that men do, making Malta the country with the second highest pay gap in the EU. Commenting on another report issued by the World Economic Forum, Borg (2017) and IoM (2017) acknowledged that although progress has been made in Malta in narrowing the gap between women and men, the situation is still the second worst in the EU. The report also shows that Malta has progressed in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and

political empowerment, but there still remains a 32% gap in terms of gender parity, putting Malta in the rank of 93 from 144 countries, with an increase of 15 point from the previous year. In this respect, Martin (2018) also reported how a female employee who had discovered she was being paid €500 less than her male colleagues had her situation rectified after investigations conducted by the NCPE discovered that the lack of uniformity was discriminatory. Likewise, according to Martin another female employee from another organisation raised the same issue and had to leave the company. Martin declared how difficult it was to prove such situations in Malta, since employment contracts prohibited employees from discussing the contracts between themselves. Furthermore, Sansone (2018a) claimed that a recent NSO survey found that the gender pay gap started from an early age and got worse after the age of 25.

According to GmbH (2012), to reduce the gender gap in Malta, six main fields should be addressed: raising awareness amongst graduates regarding the full spectrum of fields of education; attracting top talent irrespective of gender; strengthening the work-life balance; promoting the career advancement of women; evaluating the remuneration system from a gender perspective; and internally and externally communicating company activities aimed at tapping the talent pool in a better way (p. 14). NCPE (2016) declared that although there was a yearly increase of working women, the labour market was still gender segregated, with only 4% of female representation in public-listed boards and around 5% in the role of CEOs. This gender segregation was also very visible in female graduates, and although the last years saw more female than male graduates, still very few women chose the traditionally perceived male courses (NCPE, 2016). According to Galea (2018), using technology encourages more women to enter actively in the labour market, considering that while men occupy 80% of the workforce, only 57% of women in Malta are active. Due to this lack, many women have to work on a part-time basis as they have to deal with child-rearing responsibilities (Galea,

2018). He further adds that while improvements have been made in childcare centres, there are still logistical mishaps, such as those concerning nightshifts, which hinder women from entering the workforce. Galea thus claims that it is very difficult for women to apply for a leadership position. This calls for more family-friendly measures to help parents, in particular women, enter the workforce.

According to Gialanze and Naudi (2016), Maltese women are just as confident and ambitious as men, but they lack support from their employers to achieve their aspirations, and this demonstrates the need to create inclusive workplace cultures which would be free from bias to ensure that women of all backgrounds could progress to senior positions without encountering any gender-based obstacles. Gialanze and Naudi disagree that the way forward is through voluntary targets and quotas, as some suggested, but according to them, diversity would flourish with great leadership vision and transparency. Furthermore, a culture change is required to ensure that real meritocracy is nurtured, with the focus shifting to mentoring. Likewise, “champions of change”—like NGOs, the government, media and researchers—are required to sustain progress.

In 2017, the then Maltese Minister for European Affairs and Equality, Helena Dalli, declared that the setting of an ‘Advisory Council for Gender Equality’ in Malta will help to continue promoting equality between genders in all areas of the society in Malta (TMI, 2017a). This was reaffirmed by the President Emerita of Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca in her address at the 2017 ILO (International Labour Organisation) conference, where she claimed that the participation of women in all areas of society was a human right. Coleiro Preca further insisted that a good healthy future for all humanity is possible if everyone works together to ensure for a suitable education and honourable work opportunities for all women worldwide (ILO, 2017). According to Coleiro Preca, access to education and the opportunities it brings is key to empower women. Nations around the world should ensure

that women are given full and equal opportunities with regard to decision-making, be it in politics, economics, and public life (ILO, 2017).

Coleiro Preca insisted that the gap between women and men, including the challenges of culture and tradition should be tackled so that women are given full sovereignty over their own choices in the world of work (ILO, 2017). Another initiative inspired by the President Emerita of Malta called 'emPOWER' was launched in October 2017, where seventeen women's organisations came together with the main aim of ensuring that girls were empowered from childhood, this in order to break gender misconceptions and stereotypes, and ensure increased participation of women alongside men (TMI, 2017b). During a workshop focusing on the role of female directors in male-dominated boards, Minister Dalli claimed that studies suggested that companies having female representations in senior levels performed better, both as an organisation and financially. She further declared that the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes meant a loss not only for women, but for the organisations themselves (Carabott, 2017). This workshop was also addressed by Grace Camilleri, an executive director from Ernst and Young Malta.⁴ Camilleri asserted that boards that wanted to attain the best performance possible should recognise the value of diversity and include people from a broad spectrum. While studies have showed that companies with female representation performed better, she was not in favour of quotas, but rather agreed with meritocracy, as quotas lead to tokenism. Camilleri also claimed that in Malta more transparency and accountability are needed (Carabott, 2017).

As a faculty dean, Azzopardi (2017) welcomed the fact that in Malta there is a general consensus that gender issues should be the top priority of our social agenda.⁵ According to Azzopardi (2017), Malta's top score amongst all EU states in gender equality in health services is very satisfactory, complementing the increase of full-time employment for

⁴ Ernst & Young is a multinational professional services firm. It is one of the "Big Four" accounting firms.

⁵ Prof Azzopardi is the Dean of the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta.

women, and the steady improvement of women in the domain of knowledge. However, Azzopardi (2017) warns that gender equality is far from being a resolved issue and evidence suggests that there are several deteriorating sectors. Indeed, the fact that in the Global Gender Gap Malta experienced a downward trend—in 2006, it stood at 71 out of 115 countries, whereas in 2013 Malta ranked 84 out of 135 countries, and in 2016 it ranked 108 out of 144—is very alarming (Azzopardi, 2017). Another unsatisfactory indicator is that of EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), where in 2015 Malta scored 46.8 out of 100, placing it in the 16th position amongst EU countries. EIGE is a gender equality index measuring equality between women and men in six domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. A significant challenge is in the domain of power, where Malta scored 28.3 out of 100, placing last in Europe—women are alarmingly absent in decision-making positions, especially in the political scene and even more in the economic sphere (Azzopardi, 2017).

According to Simone Cini, Commissioner on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence, years of stubbornness and patriarchal Maltese culture have brought about abusive tendencies towards women (Hudson, 2018). This same culture dictated that for women to be at home is a norm. By abuse, Cini is not necessarily referring to physical abuse, but rather to the fact that women many times have to depend on their husbands since they are confined to the house. While Cini acknowledges that now there is some form of equality, and more women are independent since they work, the patriarchal situation is still very vivid, and sometimes—intentionally—women are referred to as multitasking, for the convenience of being the primary persons to rear children and do house chores (Hudson, 2018).

This evidence confirms that the gender gap in Malta is still very much in existence, even though the government and different entities are working hard to reduce this gap. According to Azzopardi (2017), the media is not helping either; in fact, worldwide “what is

reported mainly in the news is mostly male”. All this suggests an even taller agenda for “governments to make and take national initiatives to address the challenges that are holding women and girls back from reaching their full potential” (Azzopardi, 2017). The next section delves briefly into the education system in Malta.

2.2.2 Education in Malta

In Hogan’s (2012) words, while the role of women at home, in public life, and the workplace is important, the same can be said for women’s role in learning institutions, as the gender mix allows differing perspectives and consequently diverse ideas flourish. According to Hogan (2012), when women are given the same rights and opportunities without hindrance, including furthering their studies just as men, an equal society and better future becomes a reality. All this complements Maltese educational legislation and policies (MEYE, 2001). Darmanin (1992) claimed that in secondary schools some optional subjects are slated for girls for the labour market, suggesting that although girls are allowed to choose any subject, they in a way are conditioned in the choice they make. Similarly, Hogan (2012) argued that some university courses still restrain women in pursuing them, while the availability of distance learning would give women the opportunity to further their studies. An education system should be open to various possibilities, thus allowing women, including those with a family, to continue or resume studying.

The educational system in Malta is still quite centralised, especially with regard to state schools, and this has created a bureaucratic system, one with little to no space where schools can be imaginative and creative.⁶ Such controlled systems leave school leaders with difficulties in developing a distinctive vision for the school, since usually school leaders are

⁶ In Malta, there are 3 kinds of schools: state schools, which are totally run by the state; church schools, which are run by the Catholic Church (priests or nuns), but with the salaries paid by the state; and independent schools, which are totally run by lay people. Although by the age of 16 most students follow a national exam system to continue further studies, it is only the state schools which thoroughly follow an imposed syllabus throughout all state schools.

obliged to follow thoroughly the directives imposed on them by the government. The table below lists the milestones of the educational system in Malta:

Date	Educational development
1592	<i>Collegium Melitense</i> set up by Jesuits
1796	First proposal for basic education for all
1798	Napoleon's reform
1850	Beginning of an education system
1880	Keenan report – the language question
1890s	Movement for VET
1930s	First technical school
1946	Compulsory education ordinance
1966	Setting up of MCAST ⁷
1970	Secondary education for all
1972	Setting up of trade schools
1986	Massification of higher education
2000	Resetting up of MCAST
2005	College network

Table 2.1. Educational development in Malta: a background (Sultana, R.G.).

Education in Malta is compulsory from the age of five till the age of sixteen. The educational system is structured in different stages: 3-5 years – kindergarten (non-compulsory); 5-11 years – primary; 11-13 years – middle-secondary; 13-16 years – senior secondary; 16-18 years – post-secondary (non-compulsory); and tertiary. As for tertiary education, most Maltese students opt either for the University of Malta or MCAST, although

⁷ MCAST - The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.

very few prefer other institutions such as ITS (Institute of Tourism Studies) or other private educational institutions (NSO, 2011).

Another major contribution and big change in compulsory education in Malta was the introduction of the college system in 2005, which Mifsud (2017) described as “a structured, gradual but steady change in terms of decentralization and school autonomy, with the main aim being that of renewal in line with global development” (p. 2). This change happened with the establishment of 10 state colleges (colleges denoting a network of schools), as networking covered definite geographical locations, with primary schools feeding the secondary schools in that particular college (Mifsud, 2017). The college system meant to ensure that children had a smooth transition from primary to secondary by remaining in the same college. However, this change necessitated the introduction of new leadership roles, with a college principal being the educational leader for the whole college (Mifsud, 2017). The introduction of colleges was not welcomed by all, especially by some heads of schools, with the issue of decentralization and school autonomy not really resolved. Spiteri (2016) asserted that while the introduction of colleges was seen of inhibiting the freedom of heads of school, on the other hand the decision-making process was more evenly spread, even though the hierarchical system is still evident.

The next section explores the three main educational institutions in Malta, namely the Education Department which governs all educational institutions, the University of Malta, and MCAST.

2.2.2.1 ‘Top’ Educational Maltese Leaders

Education in Malta is administered by the national government, with the Minister for Education having powers to issue orders or legal notices relating to the administration of education (EC, 2007), which is done with the help of specialists. In fact, the minister is

flanked by a permanent secretary, directors general, directors, heads and other managerial officers—Figure 2.2 is an organisational chart of the educational department. With regard to the academic sector, the University of Malta was established in 1592, with the current administrative structure similar to one in place in 1771. The current structure of the university was established by the Education Act of 1988 (UoM, 2017). The university caters for students attending different full-time and part-time courses, ranging from diplomas to doctoral studies in different areas. The administrative set up for the University of Malta includes the Rector, Chancellor and Pro-Chancellor, Pro-Rectors, Registrar and other academics, together with the main governing bodies, namely the Council, the Senate, and the Faculty Boards (UoM, 2017). Figure 2.3 shows the organisational chart for the University of Malta. MCAST reopened its doors for students in 2001, and it is Malta's leading vocational education and training institution—it is spread over six institutes and offers different vocational certifications, diplomas, first degrees, and Master's degrees (MCAST, 2017). MCAST is administered by the President of the Board of Governors, the Principal/CEO, the Registrar, and different Heads and Directors (MCAST, 2017).

Although the leadership in these three organisations forms a collective team, it should be acknowledged that the educational department is run by the Minister for Education, the university by the Rector, and MCAST by the President of the Boards of Governors. Ministerial cabinets in Malta date back as far as 1921, and although different ministerial roles changed from time to time, the Minister for Education was always part of the cabinet. From 1921 to today (2020), there have been 28 Ministers for Education, of whom only three were females: Agatha Barbara in 1955 and 1971, and Dolores Christina in 2008—this amounts to 10.7% (VassalloMalta, 2015). From 1771 to date, the University of Malta had 31 rectors, and all of them were male academics (UoM, 2020). As for MCAST, from 2001 there were 5 Presidents of the Boards of Governors, and all five were males (MCAST, 2020). Considering

the ‘top’ leaders⁸ in the three institutions, the Department of Education has around 31% females (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017), the University of Malta has 24% female Principal Officers, and just over 29% female members in the Governing Bodies (UoM, 2017), while MCAST has less than 26% female leaders (MCAST, 2017), keeping in mind that the female population in Malta comprises slightly over 50% of the total population.⁹

⁸ The top leaders for the education department are: the Minister for Education, Permanent Secretary, Directors General, Directors, Heads, and College Principals; for the University of Malta: Principal Officers and Governing Bodies; and for MCAST: President of the Board of Governors, Principal/CEO, Registrar, Heads, and Directors.

⁹ Malta Demographics Profile 2019. (2019, December 7). Retrieved from https://www.indexmundi.com/malta/demographics_profile.html

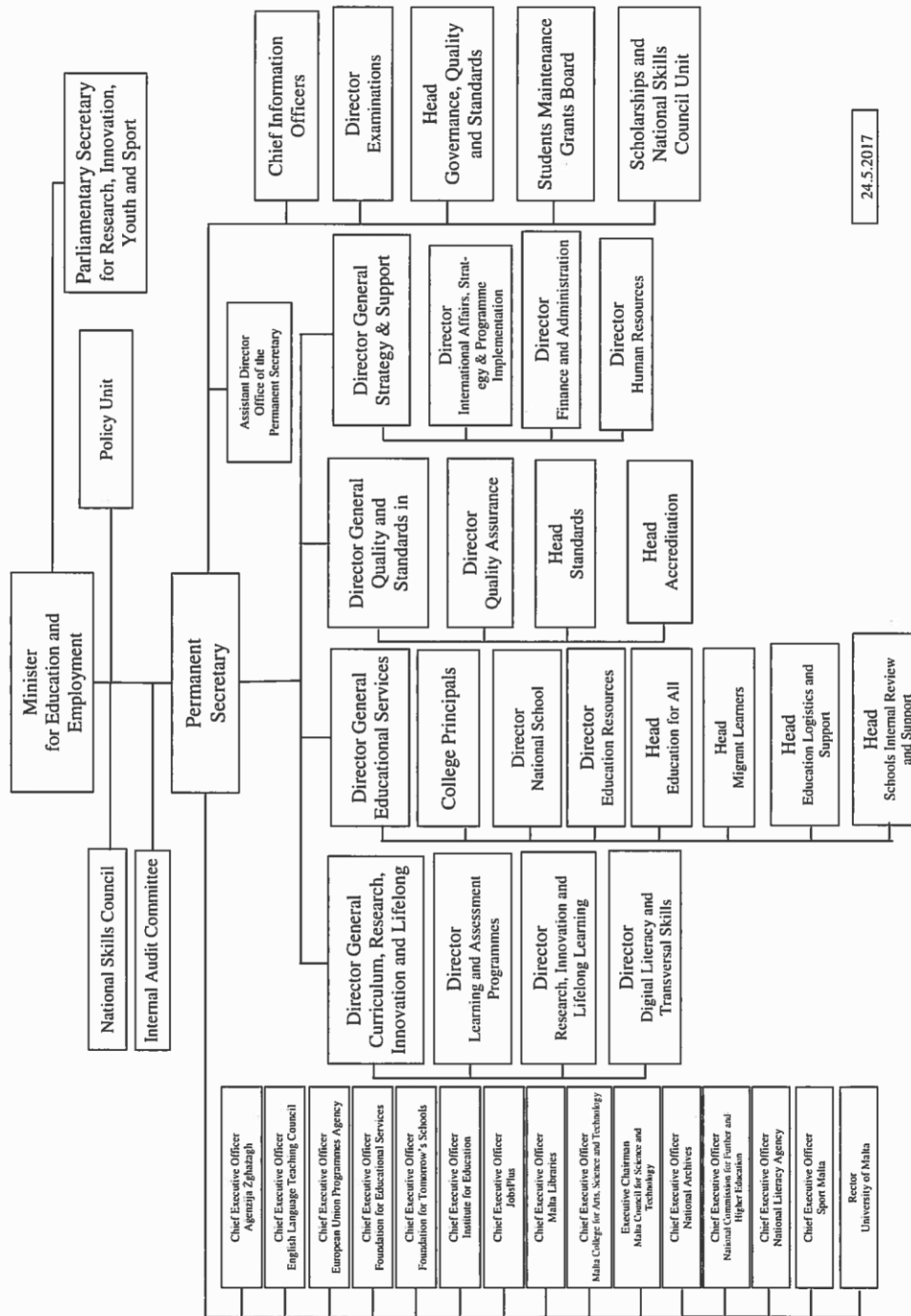


Figure 2.2. Organisational Structure - Ministry for Education and Employment.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ministry for Education and Employment. *Organisational Structure*. [Digital Image]. Retrieved August 5, 2017 from <http://education.gov.mt/en/Ministry/Pages/Organisational-Structure.aspx>

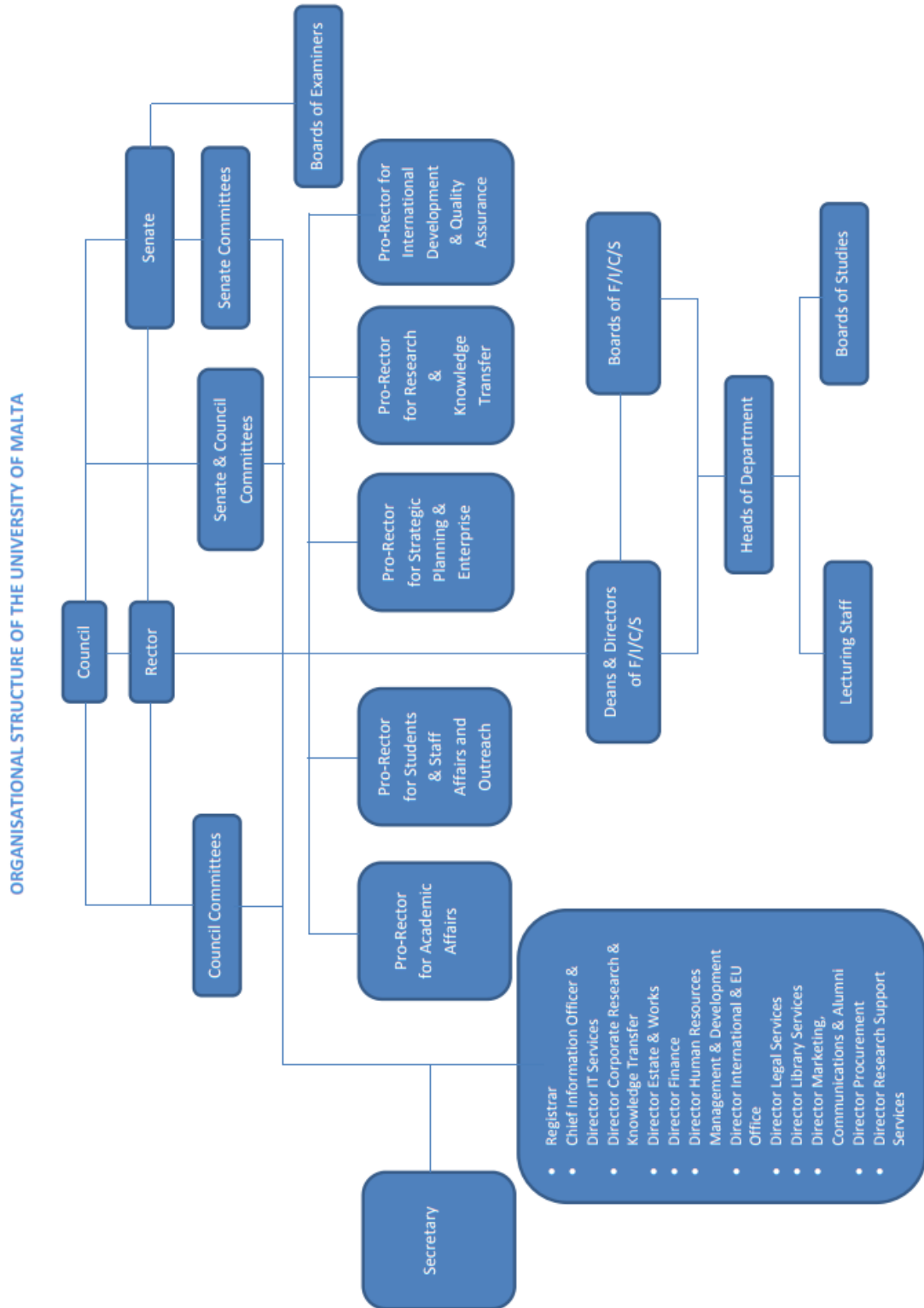


Figure 2.3. Governance Structure.¹¹

¹¹ University of Malta. *Governance Structure*. [Digital Image]. Retrieved August 5, 2017 from https://www.um.edu.mt/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/346753/UMgovernancestructure.pdf

The underrepresentation of females in the University of Malta and MCAST is not only present in the upper echelons. In Malta, female academic staff in tertiary education are the second least represented in Europe (Caruana, 2017b), although as from 2000 onwards slight increase was registered. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 represent academic staff at the University of Malta and MCAST respectively.

Post	Females		Males	
2016/2017				
Resident Academics				
Professor	14	13.9%	87	86.1%
Associate Professor	31	27.0%	84	73.0%
Senior Lecturer	58	28.2%	148	71.8%
Lecturer	78	38.6%	124	61.4%
Assistant Lecturer	70	51.1%	67	48.9%
Associate Academic	6	37.5%	10	62.5%
Visiting Staff (part-time)				
Visiting Professor	0	0.0%	6	100.0%
Visiting Associate Professor	3	37.5%	5	62.5%
Visiting Senior Lecturer	81	28.3%	205	71.7%
Visiting Lecturer	75	37.7%	124	62.3%
Visiting Assistant Lecturer	135	47.2%	151	52.8%

Table 2.2. UoM Academic Staff 2016/2017.¹²

¹² NCPE. (2016). *Annual Report 2016*. Retrieved August 5, 2017 from <https://ncpe.gov.mt/>

Post	Females		Males	
2016/2017				
Senior Lecturer 2	5	45.5%	6	54.5%
Senior Lecturer 1	60	49.2%	63	51.6%
Lecturer	109	47.2%	122	52.8%
Assistant Lecturer	38	44.7%	47	55.3%

*Table 2.3. MCAST Academic Staff 2016/2017.*¹³

2.2.3 Conclusion

Women in Malta are still facing several challenges in order to be at a par with men. This section explored the Maltese context from an historical perspective together with some policies and initiatives to further reach gender equality.

The Maltese Constitution and several laws are already in line with social justice and gender equality. Article 14 of the Constitution of Malta states:

The State shall promote the equal right of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and for this purpose shall take appropriate measure to eliminate all forms of discrimination between the sexes by any person, organisation or enterprise; the State shall in particular aim at ensuring that women workers enjoy equal rights and the same wages for the same work as men.

Likewise, the Equality for Men and Women Act (2003) introduced measures to eliminate gender discrimination with regard to working conditions. The Act states:

It shall be unlawful for employers to discriminate, directly or indirectly, against a person in the arrangements made to determine or in determining who should be offered employment or in the terms and conditions on which the employment is

¹³ NCPE. (2016). *Annual Report 2016*. Retrieved August 5, 2017 from <https://ncpe.gov.mt/>

offered or in the determination of who should be dismissed from employment. (Cap. 456, 2003:2)

Similarly, the 1988 Education Act of Malta declares that it is “the right of every citizen of the Republic of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, disability, belief or economic means” (Cap. 327, 1988:3). All these, together with other policies, suggest that in Malta the laws, for many years, supported gender equality, but studies show that there is still a long way ahead in order to reach gender equality in Malta. The next section delves into leadership in general, with a detailed emphasis on educational leadership.

2.3 Leadership

Leadership is about Vision, Direction and People; Management is about Process. But even with Vision and Direction you have to engage people to achieve it. So in the end Leadership is about people.

–Knights, 2012, p. 19

Leadership is not easy to define, and there is no standard uniform meaning. It can assume different formats and have various influences, and it is “increasingly [...] linked to terms like values, vision and mission” (Gibson, Shanks & Dick, 2017, p. 173). A valid start in describing leadership would be—Reflection... and necessary Action, and as Knights (2012) asserted, “leadership is about people”. One of the pioneers in tracing the development of “leadership theory” was Northouse (2007), starting with the “great man theory” (p. 15).¹⁴ Around two decades before, Van Seters and Field (1990) also traced the evolution of

¹⁴ The great man theory was an idea developed in the 19th century to describe the impact of “great men” or heroes who were highly influential and who, due to their leadership style, wielded their power in such a way as to have a historical impact.

leadership and, with the aid of a hierarchical chart, they traced leadership theory from the early 1900s, also starting with the great man theory. Throughout the twentieth century, the focus on leadership increased exponentially (Bryman, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Bennis, 1989; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden & Hu, 2014). There was a consensus amongst many researchers that leadership is about influence (Tannenbaum, Weschler & Massarik, 1961; Hollander, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003), as well as about values and visions (Richards & Engle, 1986; Bennis, 1989; Harris & Chapman, 2002). Nevertheless, different scholars utilised different meanings in their interpretation of influence, vision, and values (Yukl, 2013).

Yukl (2002) described this leadership influence as a process to “structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation” (p. 3), which is very similar to Stogdill (1950). Following the same idea of Donnelly, Ivancevich, and Gibson (1985), according to Tannenbaum et al. (1961) and Cribbin (1981), this influence comprised of a leader’s personal capacity used in specific situations to achieve a specific goal. More interesting was Cohen’s (1990) description of leadership influence. While Cohen (1990) acknowledged that the leader uses this influence to arrive at the desired destination, he described leadership influence as being the art of the leader. Harris (2002) claimed that the vision and values in leadership need to be communicated to all stakeholders effectively, while Wasserberg (2000) added that the primary role of a leader is to unify people by using key values.

While for many scholars vision is one of the fundamental aims in leadership, Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, and Weindling (1993) expressed doubts about how many leaders have the ability to communicate effectively the vision of the organisation. In turn, their position was challenged by Beare’s, Caldwell’s, and Millikan’s (1997) research, which supported the notion of leaders having a clear vision making them outstanding. Concurring with the importance of the vision, Dempster and Logan (1998) showed that the stakeholders

in 12 schools they studied expected that leaders would have a clear vision and a concrete plan to achieve this vision.

Influence, vision, and values are not the only characteristics for leadership—justice, accountability, and consistency (Knights, 2016) are also a few other characteristics for effective leadership. In tandem with these characteristics, a leader should always bear in mind that leadership is not a one-person show; rather it is a collective process occurring in dyadic, in threes or bigger groups (Bhatti, Maitlo, Shaikh, Hashmi & Shaikh, 2012; Steffens et al., 2014), and all this makes leadership “a complex phenomenon that operates across multiple levels of analysis” (Dinh et al., 2014, p. 37). The next section explores leadership definitions as constructed by different scholars and their interpretations.

2.3.1 Leadership Definitions

“Defining leadership is like defining love: [...] the words on paper [...] never seem to quite capture the experience.” (Lashway, 1999, p. 22). Leadership definitions have a long history, and many scholars have made efforts to define and interpret leadership, resulting in various definitions reflecting different beliefs and values.

There is a wealth of research related to leadership definitions; in fact, Cuban (1988) claimed that there are over 350 definitions of leadership, and Stogdill (1974) backed this assertion by insisting that there are as many leadership definitions as there are people who have attempted to define this concept. Consequently, the situation is one where different scholars offer different interpretations with no single interpretation emerging as the best one (Luft, 2012). Nevertheless, multiple scholars have presented different leadership definitions in their attempt to interpret effective leadership.

Stogdill (1950) defined leadership as that influencing process to achieve specific aims and objectives. Fiedler (1967) described leadership as task oriented intended to arrive to

specific tasks, while for Dubin (1968) leadership involved exercising authority and making decisions. Whilst Fiedler's (1967) and Dubin's (1968) idea of leadership was more aligned with the idea of management rather than leadership per se, Stogdill's (1950) earlier definition already pointed to the use of influence, power and knowledge by experienced people, which seems more aligned with the recent perspectives of distributed leadership.

In their definition of leadership many scholars referred to the influential process engaged in by leaders to direct followers to arrive at the required destination—it is that process which directs activities towards shared goals (Hemphill & Coons, 1957; Tannenbaum et al., 1961; Hollander, 1978; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Rauch & Behling, 1984; Donnelly et al., 1985). Tannenbaum et al. (1961) and Donnelly et al. (1985), while supporting the process of influence, highlighted the leader's interpersonal communication skills; this approach advocated the assumption of Stogdill (1950) for distributed leadership, embracing effective communication to engage expertise within the organisation (Bush, 2011a). Moving some years ahead, while many scholars still used the term “influence” in their definition (Yukl, 2013), many of them also embraced the idea of leadership revolving and articulating visions, creating healthy environments, and inspiring people to achieve a purpose (Richards & Engle, 1986; Bennis, 1989; Jacobs & Jacques, 1990; House et al., 1999; Northouse, 2007). More recent definitions have identified the importance of motivation, together with influence (Paterson, 2013), a process of involving all stakeholders, where “leadership involves goal attainment and these goals are shared by leaders and their followers” (Knights, 2016, p. 4). According to Knights (2016) one should be able to lead oneself, to be able to lead others.

Most definitions, rather than contradicting each other, complement each other by refining and strengthening the process of leadership. Although leadership is complicated, complex, confusing, and encompasses several qualities (Paterson, 2013), the fact that there is no unique accepted definition (Gregory, 2005) makes leadership more interesting and

embracing of diversity. While the definitions differ in many respects, “what matters most is how useful the definition is for increasing our understanding of effective leadership” (Yukl, 2013, p. 20).

2.3.2 Leadership and Culture

Culture plays a prominent role in every society and organisation. Culture is about beliefs, morals, values, knowledge, customs, and customary behaviours (Tylor, 1871; Linton, 1940; Schein, 1990; Lombaerts, 1998; Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2013). So, in exploring educational leadership, one cannot exclude the school culture and the context of where the research is being carried out (Michiels, 1998; Bush & Middlewood, 2005).

Culture was always important in education since its symbols representing human nature enabled people to create their own space, the institution, and the world they live in (Lombaerts, 1998). Lombaerts (1998) added that culture includes beliefs, rules, activities, and patterns of behaviour which represent a particular community. Culture is about the survival of a group of people, it incorporates their experiences for a meaningful life, and so culture is about ethics, politics, philosophy, and the lifestyle of a society (Long, 1991). Although there is no general agreement of what a school culture encompasses (Michiels, 1998; Prosser, 1999), according to Reid (1986), school culture refers to “patterns of behaviour, beliefs and values and physical environments which are to some degree different from those of other institutions in society” (p. 58).

Hrebiniak (2011) maintained that, in every institution, culture is important since it can affect people’s behaviours and decisions, and thus one should be well aware of the culture of the organisation they work in. This is even more crucial since culture is not static, it continuously changes, and is transmitted to the different persons in the organisation (Northouse, 2013). Knowing the culture of the workplace creates a strong stable group whose

members are ready to learn from each other (Schein, 1990), given that culture involves patterns created by the group to learn to cope in difficult situations. It is a process that the group develops and sees as valid to adapt and to teach it to new members to solve problems, and enhance the cohesion of the group and the organisation (Schein, 1990).

From an anthropological view, a school culture may include: norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, rules, school climate, and social behaviour of staff and students, all those activities which make the institution unique. While schools maintain different cultures, according to Quinn, Mintzberg, and James (1988), school culture includes the social and economic activities in the school, the endorsed relationships of the staff together with the leadership, the syllabi of the different subjects, together with the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. A school culture encompasses the explicit and implicit values and rules of that particular school, and helps individuals in the institution to grow together, acting as the cement that holds the school together as an organisation (Michiels, 1998). Covey (1992) claimed that school culture also impacts school leadership at a micro and macro level, while Bush and Bell (2006) maintained that it affects the work of the leader, together with the followers involved, and those agendas that make up the organisation. All stakeholders in an institution contribute to the ambience of the institution, and they not only shape the school culture, but they are simultaneously influenced by it (Michiels, 1998). Thus, every school should take care of its culture, since culture reflects the values the school endorses, how the vision is managed and manifested, as well as the social and pedagogical impact it has on the school (Grundy, 1994).

These assertions about culture, together with Yukl's declaration that "culture can influence leaders and followers" (2013, p. 360), lead to the assumption that when investigating leadership, in particular educational leadership, one should always bear in mind

the culture in which the study is immersed, the institutions, the persons' backgrounds, and above all gender which might possibly skew the findings and interpretations if neglected.

2.3.3 Educational Leadership

The early 2000s saw a paradigm shift in the perception of educational leadership in UK; in fact, leadership replaced management as the preferred term in educational administration teams (NCLS, 2001), and leaders rather than managers started being appointed. Eventually, the same shift occurred in Malta (MEYE, 2005), with the Education Department preferring the term leadership over management for administration posts. In spite of this move, many argue that, although different, both dimensions of leadership and management should be given equal or similar prominence (Glatter, 1996; Nienaber, 2010; Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2013). Whether educational leadership or educational management, the fundamental aspect should be the interactive social process involving relationships (Glatter, 2009).

Although there is a lack of a clear and comprehensive definition of educational leadership (Calvert, Harvey & Ramsdale, 2000), a valid definition should be comprehensive and thoroughly related to the school context (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Fullan (2002) is of the opinion that officially appointed educational leaders are those “who display palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope” (p. 16). Notwithstanding its prominence, there is no agreed definition of educational leadership (Bush & Middlewood, 2005), and Yukl (2002) even claimed that any leadership definition is very subjective, and thus no standard definition exists. However, a worthwhile starting point in describing educational leadership would be the definition of Bush and Glover (2003):

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes.

Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and

professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision. (p. 5).

This section investigates concepts of school leadership by exploring the typologies studied by Bush and Glover (2003).

2.3.3.1 Educational Leadership Typologies

Leadership typologies refer to styles and behaviours leaders adopt in their work environments. While in their studies Silins and Murray-Harvey (1999) concluded that styles of leadership might not directly affect students' learning outcomes, they certainly have an impact on the teachers, who in turn directly influence the students' performance (Silins & Murray-Harvey, 1999). Despite the concerns of Silins and Murray-Harvey (1999) and others like Bryman (1992) and Yukl (1999), educational researchers still persist in placing generic leadership theories in comprehensive educational themes and typologies (Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999; Bush & Glover, 2003; PwC, 2007).

According to Bush (2007, 2010) and Bush and Glover (2003, 2014), among several leadership conceptions, the best typologies are those identified by Leithwood et al. (1999) following their analysis of 121 articles. In their study, Leithwood et al. (1999) described six typologies (Bush & Glover, 2003), which Bush and Glover (2003) later extended to eight. The eight typologies presented by Bush and Glover (2003) are: instructional, transformational, moral, participative, managerial, postmodern, interpersonal, and contingent leadership, and they have been very influential and beneficial in educational environments

(Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). A summary of these typologies is provided, while also taking into consideration some alternative material by other scholars.

Instructional Leadership: The main focus in instructional leadership is that of leaders watching the behaviour of teachers attentively and giving instructions that will affect students' growth. For Greenfield (1987), such leadership develops an effective working environment for both teachers and students; for Calabrese (1991), it promotes the school's mission; and De Bevoise (1984) claimed that it helps the principal in promoting student learning. Blase and Blase (1998) underlined the importance of the leader talking with teachers to promote reflection and professional growth. This was strongly supported by the work of Southworth (2002), who suggested an approach which centred on modelling, monitoring, and professional dialogue of the leader with teachers. Southworth (2002) argued that instructional leadership can be effective in education as it is strongly concerned with teaching and learning both for the teachers and pupils. This claim can be contrasted with Leithwood's (1992) who argued that this type of leadership is not adequate since it heavily focuses on the classroom.

Despite these arguments instructional leadership remains a very important dimension in education since it targets the activities of the school, together with teaching and learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1986). Quinn (2002) determined that principals embracing strong instructional leadership can guarantee students' achievement. This ran counter to Leithwood's (1994) study where he claimed that instructional leadership is limited in producing change, since it is too much classroom-focused. In a previous study, Leithwood (1992) acknowledged the fact that instructional leadership has an element of transformational leadership but is inadequate for the development of schools due to its central focus on the classroom. In their empirical report on teachers' perspectives of how principals promoted

teaching and learning, Blase and Blase (2000) also claimed that teachers perceived instructional leadership as impacting on their practice.

Although this paradigm undervalues aspects of socialisation and students' confidence and well-being (Bush, 2007), in particular situations it is very effective, and consequently one of the most still-researched models (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). Furthermore, "both Transformational and Instructional Leadership are necessary for success" (Day et al., 2016, p. 251).

Transformational Leadership: In the late 1990s, the leadership world was dominated by the transactional leadership model (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000; Bottery, 2004), and apart from being particularly popular in the business world to create stability and predictable economic patterns, there were instances when it became the dominating leadership style in education (Bottery, 2004). Transactional leadership encourages obedience according to the needs and desires of individuals (Sarros & Santora, 2001), in this sense it operates on rewards and exchanges, and sometimes can be manipulative. According to Silins and Murray-Harvey (1999), the transactional model can work for organisations, but surely it will not develop the loyalty and trust amongst stakeholders which the transformational model is attributed with. While Sarros and Santora (2001) shared the same idea of Silins and Murray-Harvey (1999), Cardona (2000) had a somehow different view, as he clearly claimed that a transformational leader rather than the opposite is an enriched transactional one. Cardona (2000) argued that rather than being manipulative, the transcendental leader will be interested in results, and so develops transcendental motivation for their followers.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, it was realised that transactional leadership did neither meet the exigencies of leaders nor of followers (Day et al., 2000), and thus transformational leadership which was socially driven replaced the transactional type. It is

claimed that in adopting transformational leadership, followers achieve beyond their experience level of performance due to the influence of their leaders (Bass, 1985). Although it was first articulated by Burns (1978) through his work in the context of political leaders, the model was later included in different spheres, including education, since as Bass (1995) himself claimed this leadership style follows idealised influence, and inspires motivation towards individualised considerations and intellectual stimulation. These dimensions were further expanded in the model presented by Leithwood (1994), making it even more applicable to the education sector. Leithwood's (1994) model includes the dimensions of: vision, goals modelling best practices and organisational values, intellectual stimuli, individualised support, high performance and expectations, productive school culture, and participation in school-decision making. These dimensions are similarly acknowledged by Meuser, Gardner, Dinh, Hu, Liden, and Lord (2016) who claimed that, "while there are several conceptions of transformational leadership, the four-component model of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration dominates the literature" (p. 1385).

Many scholars promoted transformational leadership as one of the best leadership styles (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood, 1994; Bush & Glover, 2003) and, consequently, for many years this model gave way to widespread leadership research (Northouse, 2013; Dinh et al., 2014; Meuser et al., 2016). In their studies Silins and Murray-Harvey (1999), found that the predominant style of leadership in the 41 schools they studied was transformational. Yukl (2013) even mentioned that transformational leadership is effective everywhere, in every circumstance and culture.

While Meuser et al. (2016) asserted that due to its influence the transformational model will remain at the top for some more time, when it comes to research and applicability, according to Sutcliffe (2005), this model can be abusive and manipulative. Commenting on

the strengths and weaknesses of this model, Northouse (2013) claimed that it is very rich in research and therefore, as result, tested. Moreover, it is ideal for both leaders and followers, since there is a strong emphasis on the needs, values, and morals of the followers from the leaders' part. On the other hand, Northouse (2013) believes that this model lacks clarity, can be easily abused, and there is no concrete evidence that transformational leaders are able to transform people and organisations.

Despite the popularity of transformational leadership in educational literature, the contemporary climate within the current educational systems raises questions on the validity of the transformational model due to the fact that school leaders are usually forced and encouraged to adhere with the government's centralised and controlled prescriptions (Bottery, 2004).

Moral Leadership: This model was described in Leithwood et al.'s (1999) study as being focused on values and ethics, with the leaders' authority derived from what is good or bad. Sergiovanni (2001) is of the same opinion and argues that excellent schools should have leaders who endorse both values and beliefs, and that moral leadership is required to develop a learning community. This leadership style was the focus of the research by Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Collarbone (2003) who demonstrated the success of school leaders when driven by beliefs and moral values. Their study was complemented by that of Day, Harris, and Hadfield (2001) who argued that an essential hallmark of effective leadership required leaders to communicate clear personal and educational values. For Banerji and Krishnan (2000), the beliefs, values, and vision of the leader set the tone for an organisation and form a subset of transformational leadership.

Fullan (2003) argued that moral leadership can remake school leadership and lead to school improvement. Indeed, the moral purpose of school leaders is for all students to learn

equally, and that the knowledge obtained will help them to be good “citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society” (Fullan, 2003, p. 29). Although Fullan (2003) acknowledged the overload and hard work of school leaders, schools can only flourish if school leaders intensify their efforts to extend a moral purpose to the larger community by, for example, building professional learning communities.

Moral leadership focuses on good or bad, right or wrong, good or evil, something which can cause tension between the leader and the followers—a dilemma for the leader when the followers do not necessarily agree with the leader’s perception for the organisation. Conger and Kanungo (1998) pointed out this dilemma and argued that moral leadership can result in deception and manipulation of followers, in a sense that the leader will impose values which are not in line with those of the followers.

Participative Leadership: This type of leadership stresses the importance of democratic decision-making in schools (Leithwood et al., 1999). Some scholars compared participative leadership to democratic leadership (Yukl, 2013; Khan, Khan, Qureshi, Ismail, Rauf, Latif & Tahir, 2015; Meuser et al., 2016), since both styles motivate followers who share responsibilities with leaders and contribute to decision-making (Bhatti et al., 2012; Paterson, 2013).

In their study, Leithwood et al. (1999) concluded that participative leadership is based on three criteria: that participation increases effectiveness in schools, that participation is based on democratic values, and that leadership is available to any competent person. Participative leadership bonds staff together, which results in having more effectiveness in the school and less pressures for the leader (Bush & Glover, 2014). This kind of approach was also supported by Sergiovanni (1984), who claimed that shared tasks reduce the burdens of the leader.

Symbolically and on paper, participative leadership is very attractive, and although it has been researched for many years the evidence of its success in schools is very scarce (Bush & Glover, 2003). Nonetheless, together with distributed leadership, it is still one of the main types of leadership used in schools (Bush & Glover, 2003). This concurs with the position taken by Harris (2003), who argued that although currently the emphasis is on individual leaders, in today's complex and changing world, participative leadership is a must. This theory also conforms with a study conducted recently by Bouwmans, Runhaar, Wesselink, and Mulder (2017), who claimed that participative leadership does not imply participative decision-making reserved only for team leaders and few teachers, but for all stakeholders, ensuring that teachers are more willing to embrace educational changes and thus contribute to improvements in the school.

Managerial Leadership: Managerial leadership focuses on tasks, functions, and behaviours of leaders, and competence in this approach ensures that the goals of the institution are effectively met (Leithwood et al., 1999). This type of leadership can be controversial, particularly in light of the distinction mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, many scholars like Leithwood et al. (1999), Bush and Glover (2003), Sharma and Jain (2013), Witzel (2013), and others concur that both leadership and management are needed to run an organisation, including educational entities.

Definitions of leadership and management are numerous, but there is a broad agreement that the term leadership should be differentiated from management (Webb & Vulliamy, 1996; Leithwood et al., 1999; Daresh & Male, 2000; Day et al., 2001; Sharma & Jain, 2013). Nonetheless, the connection between them is intimate and interwoven, and the overlap is so deep, particularly in motivating people and running an organisation, that it is

hard to clearly distinguish between leadership and management (Fidler, 1997; Nienaber, 2010).

Evidently, both notions are required in the educational setting to achieve the desired aims (Bush, 2007). Vision is needed for the necessary changes, likewise for effectiveness, these changes should be implemented effectively (Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Although leadership and management are different, they are linked and complementary, and unless conjoined, more problems will remain unsolved (Sharma & Jain, 2013). According to Bolman and Deal (1997), over-managed organisations lose their spirit and purpose, while those which are poorly managed and strongly led ascend temporarily but eventually fall.

Postmodern Leadership: Postmodernist leadership is about considering different views for a solution and considering different options before taking decisions. The postmodern leader respects and gives attention to diversity, and considers the perspectives of different stakeholders (Bush & Glover, 2003). In their study, Keough and Tobin (2001) identified several features of postmodernism: language does not reflect reality; reality is multiple rather than single; and having multiple realities implies that any situation is open to multiple interpretations so that there is no one universal theory which explains the world and different situations must be considered. Sackney and Mitchell (2001) further argued that postmodern theories give rise to multiple voices and different cultures rather than those articulated solely by leaders.

Different scholars used various approaches to highlight the importance or the ineffectiveness of this model. Starrat (2001) maintained that postmodern leadership is effective since it follows the democratic style, stating that this concept boosts consultation, participation, and inclusion in school policies. Considering different views and acknowledging that what applies for one school does not necessarily apply for another one is

one benefit for the postmodern leader (Skinner, 2008). Bush aligned postmodern leadership with management (2007), but argued that this kind of leadership has no tangible ideas on how leaders should operate (2011a).

Interpersonal Leadership: Leithwood et al. (1999) described this style as focusing on the relationships leaders establish with stakeholders in the school. Interpersonal leaders have refined personal skills, and according to West-Burnham (2001) interpersonal intelligence is required for the interpersonal leader, and it is not possible to conceptualise any leadership model without interpersonal intelligence. West-Burnham's statement seems to be somewhat overstated, considering the fact that the previous mentioned styles do not depend on this concept.

In their research, Johnson and Pickersgill (1992) elaborated the idea of interpersonal leadership, claiming that in a stress-filled atmosphere of leadership, interpersonal relationships help in reducing stress and pressure. After all, in school the leader spends most of the time engaging in interpersonal interactions. Research shows that school administrators spend 80% of their day interacting with different people (Peterson, 1982). Tuohy and Coghlan (1997) referred to teachers as leaders, and these spend most of the day engaged in such relationships, and so it is appropriate and important that they develop personal and interpersonal skills. Thus, a skilled and effective leader should be able to interact and read both verbal and non-verbal signs of their stakeholders. Khetarpal and Srivastava (2000) argued that leaders who reflect on their own interpersonal behaviour create opportunities for their staff and pupils, and in a sense they are able to realise their capabilities, leading to high-quality performance in the organisation.

This type of leadership was praised by many due to the centrality of leaders' relationships with followers, in which the interaction between the leaders and followers is a

fundamental unit in the leadership process (Lamm, Carter, Lamm & Lindsey, 2017).

However, others argued that since not everyone possesses interpersonal skills, this can cause a problem of implementation (Yukl, 2013).

Contingent Leadership: The contingent model provides an alternative approach with the assumption that every school is different, and requires leaders to adapt themselves to particular contexts. On these terms Yukl (2002) added that effective leaders are endlessly reading and reflecting on a given situation and act accordingly. Leithwood (1994) considered this leadership as the extent to which a leader is capable of responding to changes and providing the necessary measures for that circumstance. Yukl (2002) supported this view and claimed that there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach, since an effective leader is one who can continually adapt to varying contexts.

Bush (2007) explained the effectiveness of this model by declaring that while many models are limited and deal with just one aspect, the contingency style considers different aspects. While Day et al. (2016) claimed that this style was not established in a school context, Bush (2007) maintained that this style provides a healthy aspect of leadership since it considers different aspects of school contexts with the advantage of applying that style which suits a particular situation. The concept of considering different perspectives in the contingency leadership was also considered as advantageous by Day et al. (2016), who further added that leaders are successful inasmuch as their ability to judge and respond to the circumstances and problems of the current situation. Many scholars acknowledged the validity of the contingency style, but Weill and Olson (1987) highlighted the defects of this style by declaring that it has “weak empirical support [...] criticized for being too macro and too micro in its approach” (pp. 3-4). Similarly, Betts (2011) claimed that this approach is assumed without explanation and any concrete evidence supporting this type of leadership.

At a Glance: The research of leadership theories shows that while some focus on the processes by which leadership is applied, the focus of others is more one-dimensional. I would argue that there is no one theory that gives a comprehensive picture of leadership, one that a leader can apply on a day-to-day basis in taking decisions—but then all theories provide essential practices which can be used in different contexts. Scholars like Bryman (1992) and Bush and Glover (2003) advised caution in applying just one approach for leadership effectiveness, and asserted that flexibility according to the situation at any given time makes for an appropriate type of leadership.

2.3.4 Conclusion

This section explored leadership and management in schools, which might not relate directly to leadership in the educational ministry—but it was helpful for some of the following chapters, namely the findings and discussion chapters. This section helped in the autoethnographic chapter which reflected on the approaches of those leaders who have impacted me through my life, by helping me to make sense of how the participants perceive educational leadership. The literature in this section enabled me to compare, contrast, and interpret how other scholars described leadership with the views of the participants. Also, it helped me to reflect better on the leadership style these participants endorse. Likewise, this section enabled me to interpret and comment on the different leadership styles which have impacted me through the journey of my life.

Though there are numerous definitions of leadership and a substantial number of models, there is no agreement on which one might be the most effective on a daily basis (Bush & Glover, 2003). Scholars agree that leadership exists by virtue of followers (Howell & Shamir, 2005). Since followers are invariably affected by the leader's style, several

scholars have devised different models for leaders. Although there is no unique model that leaders apply on a daily basis, the transformational style is the model mostly applied on a day-to-day basis (Day et al., 2000; Northouse, 2013; Meuser et al., 2016), probably because it applies both for leaders and followers by raising “one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Sergiovanni (2007) declared that the best leadership style which meets all stakeholders’ needs in education is transformational, with the leader being instructional. Bush and Glover (2003) suggested a wider spectrum, one incorporating several models according to the given situation.

The skill of a leader is that of knowing which style of leadership is best in a particular situation, and eventually adapting to the circumstances by applying the most appropriate model to take the necessary decisions. This also means that when necessary for the effectiveness of the organisation, the leader applies more than one style concurrently, according to the desired outcomes.

2.4 Women in Leadership

Some leaders are born women.

–Geraldine Ferraro¹⁵

This phase in the inquiry trail explores literature on women in leadership and takes into consideration perspectives of gender and leadership, women and educational leadership, and some barriers women meet in advancing in leadership positions, together with suggested solutions. As previously mentioned, culture has an important impact on research, and during an investigation the researcher must be very aware of the context and culture of studies being cited in their exploration. Given that the main focus in this research is the perceptions and

¹⁵ Geraldine Anne Ferraro (1935 - 2011): American attorney and Democratic Party politician. Ferraro, G. A. Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/349795-some-leaders-are-born-women>

experiences of women in senior educational leadership in Malta, it was important to note where the studies cited in this section were conducted, and for this reason Appendix E¹⁶ gives the author/s, the location of study, and some brief remarks.

According to Freeman (2001), leadership involves “behaviors, learned and learnable, that are largely defined by contextual needs” (p. 37). This statement on leadership, together with those previously described, illustrate that leadership is meant to be gender-neutral. Scholars like Ayman and Korabik (2010), and Eagly and Chin (2010), challenged this assumption that leadership is gender-neutral, and Ayman and Korabik (2010) further added that “gender and culture affect leaders’ style, behaviour, emergence and effectiveness in many complex ways” (p. 166). Likewise, Coleman (2012) stated that leadership stereotypes are associated with white, heterosexual males, and “the majority of leaders are ‘white and male’” (Showunmi, 2016, p. 63), which according to Showunmi et al. (2016), a reality which is still evident today. Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) noted that standards of leadership were established by male norms and cultures, making it more difficult for women than men to arrive in leadership positions. Similarly, Sinclair (1998) claimed that, historically, one type of leadership existed, and was identifiable as male, where rules were made by men to serve men. Likewise, Devnew and Storberg-Walker (2018, p. 38) asserted, that “the leadership *practices* driving research and theorizing on leadership have emerged from a male normed perspective because of the imbalance between men and women in leadership roles.”

In this context, Maki (2015) argued that developing competencies is a focus for those aspiring to a leadership role, which can be the reason for the underrepresentation of women in senior-level positions. Maki’s (2015) assumption had been countered twenty years before by Gibson (1995), who had shown that, even then, more women were graduating and becoming qualified and effective in leadership competencies. However, Maki (2015) also declared that

¹⁶ Those author/s cited in different sub-sections of this section are registered only once.

an important factor for the advancement of women in leadership positions is developing authentic leadership identity. This concept was reiterated in the study of Gill and Jones (2013), who declared that the women in their study developed a leadership style based on competence and trust. This approach was also supported by Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) who found that women in a leadership position enacted various styles of leadership, and valued responsibility and honesty.

Another aspect of “women in leadership” is female leadership, which may be considered a style apart, with different scholars emphasising certain aspects more than others. According to Palmu-Joronen (2009), some describe female leadership from the perspective that females can be and are leaders, while others described it from a feminist point of view and the right of equality and equal opportunities. In this respect, some argued that leadership should be neutral, and there should not be any such thing as female leadership, because it would be more of a drawback rather than a benefit; and that if leadership is to be delineated into women’s and men’s, this will mean that leadership is not gender-neutral (Piha, 2006). In contrast, Piha (2006) herself claimed that those favouring female leadership argued for its importance from the aspect of recognition, namely that there are still fewer female leaders than males, and that this requires a change of mentality. The fact that female leaders are in minority is sometimes advantageous, as some consider a woman as being an interesting choice or a new strength for the organisation (Piha, 2006).

Before I delve further into leadership and gender, some statistics from around the globe would be apposite here. “Women make up a little over half the world’s population,¹⁷ but their contribution to measured economic activity, growth, and well-being is far below its potential, with serious macroeconomic consequences” (Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, the World Economic Forum of 2016 reported that the gender gap needed

¹⁷ According to some sites (e.g. <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/world-population-gender-age.php>) this is not exactly the case, but the ratio is still very near to 1:1.

another 170 years to reach economic equality between women and men. Even when it comes to language, in particular in policies and laws, one still can find gender-injustice language. It was only recently that the European Parliament (EP) proposed guidelines to ensure gender-inclusive language (EP, 2018). One can still find words like mankind or manpower being used interchangeably with humanity and staff, respectively. According to the EP (2018), these commitments enhance gender equality and non-discriminatory grounds. Taylor (2017) claimed that 20% of people around the world still believe that men are superior to women, and that women should stay at home since men are more talented both at work and at school. Taylor's (2017) statement runs counter to Young's (2016) report which says that women have all necessary attributes to be effective leaders since they empathise and embrace change with a positive attitude. Moreover, several reports like Shepherd (2017), Devnew and Storberg-Walker (2018), and Chase and Martin (2019) demonstrated that those organisations having women on boards perform better. These reports indicated that women need to work harder to obtain equality, and as the Australian Human Rights Commission (2011) declared, "to make a difference, men and women need to work harder together on this issue" (p. 2), since this is not just a women's problem, but an issue of the whole society. Given the situation, a fundamental question, posed by Professor Louise Morley, "where there is power, women are absent?" (cited in Torrance, 2015, p. 4), still resonates.

2.4.1 Gender and Leadership

The purpose of this study is not to obtain numbers to strengthen the phenomenon that women are underrepresented in many leading positions, but rather to raise more awareness on women and leadership, the challenges they met and still meet, and to offer some suggestions and recommendations to address gender inequality in leading positions. Still, it is worth contemplating and acknowledging that, for various reasons women are still underrepresented

in different areas of life (Hoyt, 2013; Giel, 2017; Shepherd, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Chase & Martin, 2019; Guihen, 2019), and the world of leadership is extensively dominated by men in most strata (Fletcher, 2004; Bush, 2011b; Grech, 2015; Torrance, 2015; Chase & Martin, 2019), even though the proportion of female graduates in many echelons is proportional to that of men, and if the pool of leadership is to be widened, both women and men will benefit (Sinclair, 1998; Shepherd, 2017; Chase & Martin, 2019). Furthermore, Sinclair (1998) declared that since leadership is perceived as heroic, as one being better than others—and other characteristics associated with males—and that male leaders are eager to maintain their status quo by insisting that leadership is for privileged elites, it is in the interest of male leaders to have little change.

The study of gender within social sciences has been an important topic worldwide from the 1970s onwards, including that of leadership and education (Oplatka, 2016; Giel, 2017). Traditional models of leadership saw leaders as being white, males, publicly heterosexuals, and ethnically homogeneous (Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2005). These traditional models aligned leadership to a masculine gender role—one of assertiveness, competitiveness, and wielding authority, all characteristics stereotypically associated with masculine traits. This narrowness of leadership definition, together with the idea that women and men are different in achievement-orientation and social/service-orientation traits (Heilman, 2001), resulted in women being excluded from leadership positions for many years. There are several reasons and opinions as to why men dominated (and still do) leadership roles for many years. According to Garratt (1998,) reasons include the dictatorial influences of the army, Church and State which were (and still are) male dominated. Another factor is that, historically, leadership was associated with heroes of war, and these were mainly men (Burton & Ryall, 1995; Garratt; 1998, Hatcher, 1998; Sinclair, 1998). According to Sinclair (1998), this traditional attention to constructs of masculinity is not only

detrimental to women, but also fails men and boys, and it is therefore imperative to review and re-examine these traditional masculine constructs.

The experiences of women indicate that gender role expectations affect both their personal and professional relationships, with consequences in terms of career achievement and family responsibility (Shapiro, Ingols & Blake-Beard, 2008). Attitudes towards women are changing, but stereotypes still persist, and while women and men behave similarly, their actions are perceived differently (Haslett, Geis & Carter, 1992; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Even Cauchi Cushchieri (2007) conceded that, regarding stereotypes of how men and women operate in leadership and management, “a binary distinction is often made” (p. 99). Cauchi Cushchieri (2007) concurred with Shakeshaft’s (1987) view, that while women leaders are considered as being caring, tolerant, gentle, emotional and intuitive, men are supposed to be aggressive, assertive, analytical, and decisive, thus creating damaging stereotypes both for women and men. There is also the perception that men are better leaders than women, and this perception is universal, and held by many men (Schein, 1994; Giel, 2017). This stereotyping is nourished by both women and men, even though research acknowledged the fact that both women and men see themselves as nurturing, caring, and collaborative when in a leading position (Coleman, 2002).

Organisational hierarchies in the US, including those in education sector, are gendered and racialised, and dominated by men (Showunmi et al., 2016). The same pattern is evident in UK (Showunmi, 2016; Showunmi et al., 2016; Fuller, 2017; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), something which can also be said for most other countries (Torrance, 2015; Chase & Martin, 2019). Showunmi et al. (2016) conducted a study involving 130 women in senior management and leadership positions—the women were white, black, Asian, and of mixed ethnicity. In the study, white women identified leadership with gender and class barriers, while for minority ethnic women leadership barriers were linked to ethnic and religious

identities. Similarly, Elton-Chalcraft, Kendrick, and Chapman (2018) claimed that “issues concerning gender” (p. 176), and “lack of confidence” (p. 178) impacted negatively their participants in school leadership roles.

The potential of productiveness in having leaders from different sexes is great, and gender perspective offers creative and rich insights in the enactment of leadership (Sinclair, 1998; Shepherd, 2017; Chase & Martin, 2019). Sinclair (1998) maintained that diversity offers alternative ways of thinking and doing things, with a potential of expanding new ideas and achieving justice. Furthermore, gender diversity at workplaces generated positive effects in the work environment, values and visions of the organisation (McKinsey & Company, 2016), and “increasing evidence [shows] that the more women executives an organisation has, the better it perform” (Shepherd, 2017, p. 82). Scholars conducted studies to establish differences in leadership styles of women and men. As leaders, men are characterised by power, influence, control, aggressiveness and task-orientation (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002), while women are more caring, more focused on maintaining relationships, empowering others, and transforming individuals (Klenke, 1996; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Wilson, 2004). In accordance with this was Eagly and Carli’s (2003) study—focusing on whether women and men behave differently in leadership posts; whether women receive biased evaluations as leaders; and whether women in leadership roles might be more effective than by men in meeting organisations’ needs better—established that while female leaders tend to be more transformational, men usually focus on the followers’ mistakes and poor performance, indicating that female leadership can be more effective for today’s challenges. A similar study by Fine (2009) on 15 women leaders also concluded that female leaders have the key characteristic of caring in their leadership style. Grisoni and Beeby (2007) conducted a study including both female and male leaders divided in three groups: females, males and mixed—where they examined, “the nature of sense-making

processes in teams and consider[ed] the extent to which leadership as a sense-making process is impacted by gender” (p. 191). The widespread implication of their study to examine the extent of leadership as a sense-making process impacted by gender showed that women have the ability to be authentic leaders in traditional settings. All these studies suggest that while female leaders have various strengths, so do male leaders, and thus gender and diversity are of utmost important for effectiveness.

Hoyt (2013), and Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018) declared that studies showed small differences in leadership styles of women and men and their effectiveness. Consequently, academics, policymakers, politicians, and organisations have a responsibility in giving attention, merit and importance to a mixed-gender environment, since this will “encourage more women to participate in leadership roles [...] lack of attention to the role of gender in studying leadership can hamper business development” (Bullough & Sully de Luque, 2015, p. 37). In gender and educational leadership, an important factor is culture, and thus a researcher should take into account cultural factors since most of the research and writing about gender and educational leadership has its origin in the Anglophone world (Lumby, 2016). Lumby (2016) further claimed that when conducting a study, the researcher should be aware of the literature available and the backdrop of cited studies, since gender in different cultures could not be viewed universally. Concurring with Lumby (2016), and as aforementioned, the necessity was felt to include an appendix with the cited studies of this section.

2.4.2 Women and Educational Leadership

Conforming to the positions of Torrance and Arshad (2015), Cunneen and Harford (2016), and Chase and Martin (2019), research shows that, globally, educational leadership is dominated by males, and moreover, “the image of the leader continues to remain effectively

vested in the masculine” (Cunneen & Harford, 2016, p. 147), despite the fact that across the globe the teaching profession is dominated by females (Guihen, 2019). Cunneen and Harford (2016) added that although countries adopted gender equity policies and women are successful both in teaching and leadership, there is a scarcity of female educational leaders, equally detrimental to women and society at large, a statement supported also by Joslyn, Miller, and Callender (2018).

Studies confirm that more women are becoming heads, but although in certain countries female heads of primary school have reached representation rates of over 50% (Torrance & Arshad, 2015; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017), those serving in the secondary area are far fewer (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Guihen, 2018; Thorpe, 2018), and this phenomenon is one which has been present for a long time, as a significant unevenness exists (Fuller, 2017). In addition to this, culture and geographical locations significantly affect whether a head is a female or male (Fuller, 2013, 2017; Fuller et al., 2015). Despite legislations contributing to gender equality in education and employment (MEYE, 2001; Fuller et al., 2015), Fuller et al. (2015) claimed that underrepresentation in headships for women in secondary schools is a reality, a phenomenon which is also felt in higher educational positions (Giel, 2017; Shepherd, 2017). Likewise, Fuller (2017) stated that although girls outperformed boys academically in different ages, even at graduate levels, women still experience injustices and discrimination, and are less likely to hold leadership positions than men, including in the educational sector. Camilleri Zahra (2017) further argued that women with a disability are often even more victims—victims of double discrimination.

Till the twentieth century, the teaching profession was dominated by men (Ginn, 1989). Additionally, Ginn (1989) maintained that women gained monopoly in the teaching profession not because of equality reasons, but rather due to the low salary, which meant having fewer men in the profession, as well as the perception that women worked well with

children. According to Ginn (1989), this contributed in having a minority of women in administrative roles, especially in top education posts. Bush (2011b) claimed that the relevant literature demonstrates that, globally, women in educational leadership are underrepresented, with the reasons for this disparity are multifold, not least cultural ones. Likewise, Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018) claimed that, “women are underrepresented in all levels of leadership in schools” (p. 176). Smith (2011) further argued that women are not progressing to headship positions either due to obstacles in their way, or else they just opt out, but “it is important to note, however, that this potential explanation is not intended to blame women for their underrepresentation” in leadership positions (Guihen, 2018, p. 540). Surprising and worth investigating is the fact that in Gozo (Malta), from the eleven primary state schools, seven have female headteachers (2020), which can be attributed to the cultural norm that women are better in working with small children than men (Darmanin, 1992, 2007; Ellul, 2009).

Owing to international concern, there is a global drive to associate leadership and social justice in educational policies, so that the issues of fairness and equality will indeed be addressed (Torrance, Fuller, McNae, Rooft & Arshad, 2017). Despite these concerns, investigations and analysis are still limited, and thus school leaders have a central role to promote social justice. Torrance et al.’s (2017) claim would suggest that social justice would be better promoted in diversity by having administrative management/leadership in education equally shared between females and males.

Reasons for this disparity in educational leadership varies. Taking care of children and family members is one very common reason (Grummell, Devine & Lynch, 2009; Hebreard, 2010; Giel, 2017; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2018; Guihen, 2018; Oates, 2019), since women more than men take time out of work. Cunanan (1994) traced this disparity to the inadequate preparation of women for administrative positions, which gradually became an irrelevant cause even in the 1990s since, in his study, Glass (1992) found that female

educational administration graduates increased, and Cunanan (1994) herself also declared that women surpassed men in obtaining higher degrees, and yet the proportionality did not increase. In their study about American women school principals aspiring for superintendency, Sperandio and Polinchock (2016) claimed that women experiencing perceiving barriers hindered them from applying for such a role, as they saw it as “unappealing and inaccessible” (p. 177). Another difficulty for women in reaching higher positions in education was the career pathway which had to be followed to reach that position, one which is hierarchical, dominated by men, thus making it more difficult for women to reach such positions (Sperandio & Polinchock, 2016). Likewise, when speaking about empirical research on educational leadership, Hall (1993, p. 1) argued that:

Theories of educational management and administration [...] continue to be based largely on research into men as school leaders [...] Such studies have tended to use ‘no differences’ as a rationale for not focusing on gender as a potentially significant factor in understanding educational leadership.

Female leaders can be as equally outstanding as men in educational leadership, as gender has no influence on how to lead and manage. According to Cauchi Cuschieri (2007), female leaders in education in Malta are more likely to use discourse on shared leadership, and usually showcase more moral leadership, especially due to their belief that the organisation should offer spiritual guidance to its students. This corresponded with what Loden (1985) and Gilligan (1993) had reported about leaders in the USA, that women significantly prioritised values and spirituality in their leadership.

Women have valid interpersonal and social skills, offer different ways to problem-solving and decision making, and are caring, which is a top-quality mix for educational leadership (Grogan, 1994; Isaacson, 1998). Similarly, in a study on female superintendents, Greenfield (1994) in Amedy (1999) found that they are generally transformational leaders

who value care and nurturance, and make it known that the community should foster such values. Likewise, Mokaba-Bernardo's (2016) study revealed that women superintendents are inclined to transformational leadership, one which embraces values, understanding, and empathy. According to Burns-Redell, "transformational leadership is a style of leadership that successfully helps followers to be the best that they can be" (2013, p. 3).

There are several studies confirming that women are just as effective as educational leaders as men. In fact, according to Burns-Redell (2013), literature indicates that females are better when it comes to curriculum and instructional leadership, and "instructional leadership by school superintendents has emerged as the critical issue in reforming public schools" (Burns-Redell, 2013, p. 3). The mentioned characteristics suggest that female educational leaders are as competent as male leaders, but there still exist disparities. In her study on English female secondary head teachers, Fuller (2017) discovered that "the rate of increase is painfully slow at less than 1 per cent per annum" (p. 58). Moreover, she declared that the underrepresentation of women in secondary headship positions needed more than two decades to level out. Concomitant with other declarations and studies like Fuller et al. (2015) and the World Economic Forum (2016), Fuller (2017) suggested that the road towards women's equality with men regarding upper positions in the educational sector is tortuous and torturous.

The next section considers some challenges female leaders face in reaching leading positions in the light of the various reasons as to why they do not manage to overcome such barriers, together with proposed solutions by different scholars.

2.4.2.1 Barriers and Solutions

Barriers or obstacles are challenges that impede or hinder someone from arriving to a desired destination, and as Bullough and Sully de Luque (2015) claimed, "women around the

world face structural and cultural barriers” on a daily basis (p. 37). According to Giel (2017, p. 51), “research has previously shown, growth in numbers might indicate success in our long-term battle against gender inequality in leadership, but numbers alone do not necessarily remove structural and cultural barriers within the local authorities and within schools.” The key barriers outlined in this section are either experienced directly or are similar to those in the path of female educational leadership. Coleman (2007) showed how making women conscious of the existent perceptions and biases for advancement will empower and help them in developing career paths and develop approaches against discrimination. Further to this, Sperandio and Polinchock (2016) added that knowledge of gender discrimination helps women to advance according to their qualification and infuse leadership styles with new ideas and perspectives. Fuller (2017) classified the barriers faced by women in reaching leadership positions in secondary schools as follows: “(i) socialization and stereotyping; (ii) internal barriers; and (iii) macro (societal), meso (organizational) and micro (personal) level culture and tradition factors” (p. 55).

That the majority of leadership roles are dominated by males can be a barrier or challenge, to the extent that, consciously or unconsciously, they tend to emphasise the prevalent discourse and the benefits of masculine ways, making it even harder for females to reach top positions. This barrier can precipitate an institutional climate, which include those cultural assumptions and norms which make behaviours “appropriate” or “inappropriate” (Cress, 2002). According to Maranto and Griffin, a “chilly climate” means “informal exclusion, devaluation, and marginalization” (2011, p. 141) from a workplace based on gender. On the other hand, Cress viewed institutional climate as the combination of challenges and support available. In contrast, Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018) asserted that for some female leaders, gender is not at issue, but that they “would have to prepare for a

leadership role specifically linked to managing men and joining a male-dominated environment” (p. 181).

Women pursuing a leadership career have to come to terms with the caring of children (Grummell et al., 2009; Hebreard, 2010; Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011; Giel, 2017; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2018; Guihen, 2018). According to Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018), being a leader and having family commitments is like “coping with being a leader at home and at work” (p. 180). Indeed, having a career and caring for children is like having two full-time jobs (Zacker, 2004), while family responsibility is regarded as a main issue for women in headship, an issue which holds back women from advancing, rather than men (McKillop & Moorosi, 2017). Studies conducted by Metcalfe and González (2013) illustrated that while 26.8% of women interrupted their career path to take care of children and elders, only 4.4% of men did so. Similarly, a study concerning 549 women over a span of 27 years showed that work-to-family conflict affected their career patterns (Huang & Sverke, 2007), while Grummell et al. (2009) found that taking care of family members decreased opportunities for women applying for senior-level positions. The study by Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) also revealed that women without children achieved higher rates of promotion.

Another study conducted by Kim and Cook (2012) showed that since women have to balance family with career, their ascendancy path is often longer and slower—in fact from 1,662 college presidents, only 26% were women. In their study, Ackner and Armenti (2004) stated that, for a time, some educational academics planned their babies to be due in May/June, thereby giving them some time off in the summer to take care of their children. As this practice dwindled, the biggest issues pointed out by the participants in the study was the high level of exhaustion and sleepless nights, leading to fatigue and burnouts. Alternatively, other participants in the study declared that they had stabilised their career before having children, and some even decided not to have children. Adding to this, Fuller et al. (2015)

discovered that a high percentage of women in headship positions were divorced and/or did not have major responsibility for their children, suggesting that the barrier of working and having a family in some way or other is a challenge for women. Similarly, Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018) stated that some participants considered leadership roles when their children were old enough to be independent.

Lumby (2016) stated that, universally, the majority of women perform domestic chores, which is detrimental to the role of leaders in education. Likewise, although some individuals now adopt “‘living apart together’ (LAT) arrangements” (Lumby, 2016, p. 46), many women relocate geographically with their partner, being that the partner has better career prospects and higher pay, a move which invariably damages women’s career advancement. Torrance and Arshad (2015) acknowledged that challenges in the educational sector exist both for women and men, but for women the challenges are more complex. Women are still considered as the primary care-givers for children and are expected to play the traditional mother and wife figure regardless of how challenging their profession is, and these domestic demands add further limitations to the possibilities of networking after office hours.

A challenge revealed in the study of Inesi and Cable (2014) was that when women worked in a highly male-dominated environment, the accomplishments of women can have a negative impact on their performance evaluations. Likewise, according to Chase and Martin, “research has shown that female leaders must work to counter negative perceptions of their capabilities” (2019, p. 3) when ranks of leadership are dominated by men. Maume (1999) further argued that working in a highly male-dominated environment increased the chances of women leaving their job, and apart from job mobility, male-dominated environments resulted in different earnings (Cohen & Huffman, 2003). In their study, O’Brien and Rickne (2016) found that male-dominated organisations have the tendency to limit the availability of women

in authority, and that in such environments men tend to be more verbally aggressive and controlling. In some contrast to this is Smith's (2011) research cited in Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018, p. 177), where it is claimed that "aspirant female head teachers perceived leadership as a 'web' of relationships rather than typically male 'hierarchical' construction of leadership". Women who demonstrated competence and assumed leadership positions are not given support (Ballenger, 2010), and are commonly evaluated stringently for their work (Ritter & Yonder, 2004). Gibson (2006) argued that women working in departments offering supportive environments gain certain benefits, in the sense that they are more frequently promoted and equally supported in taking time off to begin a family.

In contrast, women who are denied the needed support usually receive negative assessments and are not recognised for their work which, more often than not, induces women to abandon their careers (Gibson, 2006). Showunmi et al. (2016) acknowledged the lack of support for women and added that their participants claimed that it was evident that this was not a challenge for white male colleagues, as they received the required support. Another barrier found in Showunmi et al.'s (2016) study was that women leaders also had the daily challenge of not being whomever they wanted to be, in the sense that the followers expected them to behave according to their religion or traditional native cultures.

Some researchers tended to focus mainly on issues of wages and promotions when it came to inequality, but a bigger barrier is the gender stereotype that women are less able to lead (Heilman, 2001; Guihen, 2018; Chase & Martin, 2019). Likewise, Vivienne Porritt, while affirming that the gender pay gap "horrifies everybody" (Oates, 2019, p. 92), says that people are ignoring more significant gaps like "confidence, career break, flexible working" (Oates, 2019, p. 92), and says that the gap seems to be at every level in the education sector. Gender stereotyping, with some jobs being attributed to men and others to women, still persist in many countries (Rudman & Phelan, 2010), creating another obstacle for women's

advancement. According to Paludi (2008), gender stereotypes begin in early childhood, and so this barrier is not easy to break. Similarly, Oplatka (2016) referred to the global stereotype barrier that women are not capable of leading—even if they have outstanding qualifications—and unfriendly family measures, as barriers that women still face in advancing their careers. Also, according to Thorpe (2018), there exists the stereotype of “homosocialibility operating in appointments creating a homogeneity in those holding leadership position in schools” (p. 136).

A very covert negative barrier is the so-called “glass ceiling”, which prevents women and minorities from moving beyond certain positions (Bateman & Zeithaml, 1993; Thorpe, 2018; Chase & Martin, 2019). It is a concept widely studied and constitutes an invisible barrier (Hede, 1994; Morrison, White, Van Velsor & the Center for Creative Leadership, 1994). A study by Murell and James (2001) showed that this phenomenon does not only exist for top leadership posts, but that women and minorities experience barriers at all levels. Since this term was introduced in 1984, great progress has been made in leadership equality (Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt, 2009), but women are well underrepresented in upper positions, and various literature shows that the advancement of women in leadership positions is much slower than that of men (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Pichler, Simpson & Stroh, 2008; Barreto et al., 2009). Oplatka (2016) argued that the “construction of glass ceilings is related most strongly to the patriarchal nature of many organisations, where male managers may dwell comfortably in a men-only world” (p.10), and thus resist the entry of women. According to Oplatka (2016), women who broke the glass ceiling phenomenon resist stereotyping attitudes and are not afraid of entering male networks. Adding to this phenomenon, other researchers discovered that some women also experienced a “psychological glass ceiling”, based on the perception of a female attitude of resignation and so undermining their chance of advancing in their career (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Furthermore, Chase and Martin (2019, p. 11)

claimed that apart from the glass ceiling, the participants in their study encountered “glass cliffs” within and throughout their careers in educational leadership, and according to them, glass cliff “refers to placing women who have broken through the glass ceiling into more precarious positions than their male counterparts, making it likely that they will falter, even after having achieved a new level of access and power.”

Several researchers have explored different solutions which can help in diminishing such barriers. Balancing life responsibilities makes it easier in developing skills and competencies, thus reducing workplace barriers and improving advancement possibilities (Turner, Norwood & Noe, 2013; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2018). Similarly, Ackner and Armenti (2004) acknowledge that a coping strategy involves division of labour with their partners, while working harder and longer helps them in coping with their challenges. Likewise, Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018) suggest equal access and opportunity for all as being linked to maternity. However, according to Ackner and Armenti (2004), a key solution is breaking the silence, as going without sleep to perform better does not change matters, but speaking out might make a difference. An important strategy for Devnew and Storberg-Walker (2018, p. 39) is adding “the voices of women in order to understand how to increase the number of women in leadership.”

Mentoring is considered a very important activity in improving women’s leadership positions (Torrance, 2015; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2018, Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Thorpe, 2018), and can be the reason for the dramatic increase in literature on women’s leadership. As early as 1987, Shakeshaft confirmed the significance of women’s mentoring. In their study, Cullen and Luna (1993) claimed that mentoring is an important approach that fuels women’s aspirations for career advancement, similarly Thorpe (2018, p. 136) asserted that “women often find mentoring supports their advancement”. Likewise, Akande (1993) declared that women participating in mentoring programmes are more likely to get promoted

and receive higher incomes. Apart from promotions, Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, and Marshall (2007), while evaluating mentoring programmes, found that mentoring is often a guarantee for career retention. Furthermore, Singh, Ragins, and Tharenou (2009) claimed that mentoring offers an exceptional contribution to advancement and success in a career, which is “above and beyond that accounted for by the protégé’s existing skills, talents, and abilities” (p. 58). In fact, mentoring accounts for 16% of the variance in promotions and 19% in advancement expectations (Singh et al., 2009). Supporting these figures, Ballenger’s (2010) study revealed that 79% of the women she surveyed reported that mentoring programmes helped them in their careers. Even the studies of Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011), Montas-Hunter (2012), and Gill and Jones (2013) indicated that mentoring contributed to leadership careers. Of the same opinion, Gibson (2006) further argued that for real change to occur in educational institutions, more human resources should be made available to provide mentoring individually, on a departmental level, and culturally. These studies suggest that mentoring effectively helps women in advancing in their careers.

Studies also indicate that women receiving support find it very helpful in their career. Montas-Hunter (2012) declared that women receiving encouragement and advice from supervisors, family members or friends, registered positive reinforcement and professional growth. Gerdes (2003) also explained the success behind the advice of experienced women leaders who urged new educational leaders to develop supportive relationships and be careful in choosing the right helpful person. Similarly, Ackner and Armenti (2004) stated that a coping strategy was identifying sources of help, and they advocated the importance of women finding other women in helping them and giving them advice. Supporting this notion is Eddy’s (2009) study, in which women participants valued the importance of healthy relations and the influence that these had on their leadership roles.

Leadership development programmes help in overcoming barriers and thus the underrepresentation of women in leadership. Such programmes boost competence and confidence in leadership (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Bonebright, Cottledge & Lonquist, 2012; Gibson et al., 2017; Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2018), help in identifying suitable training and mentoring, while providing opportunities for networking (Lafreniere & Longman, 2008), and “can help women to recognize and address [gender] biases” (Devnew & Storberg-Walker, 2018, p. 40). According to Gibson et al. (2017), Professional Development Programmes, although structured, must be flexible enough to support the needs of different individuals. For such programmes to be beneficial to everyone, Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018, p. 182) suggest the need for such programmes to “adopt a socially transformative discourse within social justice”. Also “women only leadership programme[s]” help in dismantling barriers (Thorpe, 2018, p. 137), but such programmes to be more fruitful need to “take into account the diverse motivations and life projects of potential [leader] aspirants” (Guihen, 2018, p. 540).

Leadership programmes, mentoring, education from early years and support all help in diluting the challenges women meet in their careers. While concurring with these measures, Hellicar (2013) suggested that policy changes and flexible approaches to work will reduce the gap in a shorter time, while training and mentoring of women will help them deal with male culture norms in organisations and develop a culture that will attract and support females working with them. Encouraging more fathers to take parental leave will also help in reducing the gender gap (CEDA, 2013). Grech (2015) further stated that those countries which have free education and free childcare systems have promoted women’s equality. Challenges and barriers require solutions and change, and according to Hoyt (2013), adopting new measures affords everyone with an equal chance for a leadership position. Thus, having women in leadership positions will not only help society, organisations, and the government,

but it will “also contribute to more ethical, productive, innovative, and financially successful organizations that demonstrate higher levels of collective intelligence and are less rife with conflict” (Hoyt, 2013, p. 363). Also,

It is important to acknowledge that structures and procedures are necessary but not sufficient to bring about a culture which supports diversity and equality. There need to be systems that support ethical practice to ensure that people are not treated in a discriminatory manner. Procedures should be thought through and based on shared values. One way in which the ethos of an organisation might be changed is through having a focus on equality/diversity/social justice at the heart of on-going professional development. (Showunmi, 2016, p. 76)

2.4.3 Conclusion

For social, political, and organisational reasons, women were underrepresented (Ginn, 1989) in many leadership positions, something which is still evident today (Jourová, 2016; Giel, 2017; Shepherd, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Guihen, 2018, 2019). In attempting to explain gender disparity, some researchers indicated differences between male and female leaders (Loden, 1985; Shakeshaft, 1987; Haslett et al, 1992), while others saw no difference or little difference in gender leadership (Bell & Chase, 1995; Chase, 1995; Grogan, 1996; Shepherd, 2017; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Strong evidence, going back to more than two decades, shows that top female educational leaders are very effective and demonstrate many strengths (Grogan, 1996). After all, leadership is about influence, values and visions, and every leader, irrespective of gender, shapes their role on their character, values and beliefs.

Despite resistance, a broad change is needed, a change in culture and society (Wilson, 2004) that ultimately promotes good, justice, and equality. Although the change can be still unreachable for some organisations, the knowledge produced by research of gender bias

could help to spread greater awareness of its ill effects (Heilman, 2001). An important aspect of women and leadership will be Torrance and Arshad's (2015, p. 2) declaration, that:

Research has shown women have developed a wider repertoire of approaches and may favour a more interdisciplinary, collaborative, problem solving, learned focus approach. The 21st century leader needs to be empathetic, critical, collaborative, agile, adaptive, creative, embrace entrepreneurialism and comfortable with diversity.

Along the journey of life, one carries both positive and negative influences, which upon reflection can be a useful asset in leading positions. Different people will leave an impact on one's life, but according to McLay and Brown (2001)—supported by McKillop and Moorosi (2017)—parents can exert significant influences on values and ambitions, and teachers can help in career choices.

2.5 Researching Women and Social Justice

We need social justice-motivated research to queer our scholarship so that we can be conscious of the ways that science may contribute to inequalities and normativities that constrain opportunities.

—Russell, 2016, p. 13

The main objective of this research is to explore the experiences and perceptions of women in top educational leadership positions in Malta. Although the investigation includes women, my starting point was not that of a feminist researcher but rather a researcher seeking social justice, especially for women in senior leadership who are lamentably scarce in Malta. According to López (2016), social justice researchers have a significant role in delivering intersectional knowledge and should commit themselves “to unravel the complex ways in which race, gender, class, and ethnicity interact at the individual, institutional, and structural

levels for social justice” (p. 133). In the words of Matias and Zembylas (2014), it is hard to “help someone realize they aren’t truly committing to a cause, if they refuse to admit that they are not emotionally committed on the first place” (p. 332), indicating that a social justice inquirer has a responsibility not only to discover new knowledge, but also to persuade sceptics about the damage of social injustice. Concurring with this declaration, Russell (2016) further asserts that “we need research that is conscious of biases, power, and privilege in science [...] research that attends to inequalities [...] and as scholars we need to question the ways that our research may unwittingly reinforce those inequalities” (p. 4).

Women were not always treated differently than men—there were times when they were somehow equal. However, there were times even in the remote past, when women were considered unknowledgeable. The Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 BC) suggested that since women originated from men, they lacked reason (Westmarland, 2001). Similar ideas were prevalent even in the seventeenth century, when Bacon (1561-1626) asserted “that nature is an object of knowledge, with men being the “knowers” and women the “knowable”” (Westmarland, 2001, p. 2). Despite change, with more importance given to equality, diversity, and gender, for some people “gender equality has already been accomplished” (Shepherd, 2017, p. 82), and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is still evident, a reality compounded by policies which distinguish males from females.

Every social research has its own importance, but researching women, including women in leadership, especially in view of the scarcity of women leaders, should not be taken lightly. Concurring with Ropers-Huilman and Winters (2011), some valid reasons for exploring women in research are that women have valuable unique skills to offer and “the oppression of diverse women should be alleviated so that their contributions can be understood and valued” (p. 678), and for many years women had been overlooked and were not always given a chance to be at par with men.

2.5.1 A male researcher exploring women participants

Social justice is based on concepts of human rights, opportunities, privileges and equality, and in social justice research one tries to delve deeper into concepts the inquirer deems to be important for them and society. On this view it can be argued that, every person be they a woman, man, trans or any other declared gender, can investigate issues involving women participants only. Nonetheless, some scholars argue that research of this type should only be carried out by women, since men can be biased and because the knowledge acquired by female researchers is different from that produced by men (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2005; Bowell, 2015). Similarly, but specifically referring to investigations declared as feminist research, Wadsworth (2001, p. 7) argues that it is supposed to have been carried out by women, and according to her, “a feminist is a woman who knows that she and other women are oppressed on grounds of gender from personal experience, [... and so] a man will not be in a position to either be a feminist or do feminist research.” Wadsworth (2001, p. 7) believes that men can only participate in “pro-feminist research”, and this as long as they fulfil the conditions laid out for feminist research and do not do it for their own empowerment and good.

However, there are others who oppose this claim, and argue that it depends on how well the research is carried out, on the knowledge obtained, and how it is interpreted and presented. Moffitt (2015) acknowledged the fact that feminist theories do not have gender, and stated that there are both women and men who identify themselves as feminists, suggesting that anyone of any gender can conduct research on any gender. Similarly, Van den Brink (2015) stressed the importance of including men in researching women in order to obtain different perspectives. According to Letherby (2003), when researching women, the inquirer should be committed to produce valuable knowledge that will make a social difference to the lives of women, indicating that as long as useful knowledge is obtained with

the intention of improving women's lives, there is no gender when exploring women. Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002), after an interesting discussion about gender, even from the point of view of transgender individuals, claimed that "feminist researchers cannot simply take 'women' as the subject of feminism, and cannot assume that the feminist is simply a woman" (p. 8). In this respect, researchers can be both women or men, otherwise one would have to ask if only women can research other women, as well as where intersexual and transsexual researchers fit.

While literature varies on who should or can inquire about females, as abovementioned a researcher is one who really embraces the principles of empowerment, justice, and equality, suggesting that anyone of any gender can conduct research on any gender.

2.5.2 The Concept of Truth and Knowledge in Research

In every research, but in particular in qualitative research including women, the notions of truth, knowledge, and power somehow arise. Galea (2008) supports the concept that a researcher who discusses power to represent the marginalised and give voice to the "other" is producing knowledge, indicating that knowledge leads to truth, and that truth is knowledge, and that both knowledge and truth can lead to power. Foucault's perception of power and knowledge was that they are envisaged not as a possession of individuals, but rather as a web, one generated by the diversification of many (Mortimer, 2012).

Hawkesworth (2006) claimed that unbelievers of qualitative research, referring in particular to those conducting feminist research, contested the reliability and validity of knowledge, and from where and how the knowledge was obtained, and this was often the case since for many years women were considered inferior to men. Although contemporary female research includes women from different areas of life, the validity and truthfulness of

qualitative research, in particular that involving only women, is still questioned (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Van den Brink (2015) further argued that knowledge obtained from females should not be considered objective, but that it is knowledge to discover different truths, which she described as legitimate knowledge—it is a knowledge of awareness, a social process used to discuss and negotiate gender, justice, and inequalities.

2.5.3 Conclusion

This short section was included in the inquiry trail with the main objectives of identifying myself and my positionality as a social justice inquirer clearly, as well as presenting contrasting views about males researching on women.

“Research can be designed so that as much as its power to express conclusions is its power to stimulate thinking” (Stake & Kerr, 1995, p. 56). Ramaekers (2006) agreed that subjective research is not an abdication of truth and knowledge, but rather a better way for researchers to understand the world and that this gives power to the researcher in the production of knowledge. This suggests that while the researcher exercises power when conducting a study, one has to be very careful so that this power is neither abusive nor manipulative of the participants; rather, it should be a means of empowering them. This necessitates caution in the interpretation and presentation of information, and when conducting research on women. Wadsworth (2001) recommended that women should be given voice to avoid disempowering or harming women by the approach taken. This power bestowed on the researcher must be used to add knowledge and understanding about women. Concurring with this, Sikes’ (2010) advice is “that the most important ethical concern is to do all that we can to ensure that we re-present lives respectfully and that we do not use our narrative privilege, or, put another way, our narrative power, to demean, belittle or to take revenge” (p. 16).

According to Wambui (2013), there is no specific method in collecting data when conducting research concerning women, but in qualitative research, interviews are mostly used, since she claimed that they are the best way of collecting data, due to the chance given to women for sharing subjective experiences, thereby giving meaning to knowledge. When it comes to interpretation, Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) suggest reflection on how to interpret data, and Van den Brink (2015) adds that, apart from reflection, evoking change in the presentation of findings is important.

2.6 Conclusion

The focus on women and leadership [...] refers to as claim for representational justice. Representational justice means that in any democratic society the lack of women in leadership is indicative of wider gender (and educational) inequality.

–Blackmore, 2013, p. 148

This inquiry trail showed some facets of leadership with emphasis on educational leadership and women in leadership, together with literature on the Maltese context and some insights about a male conducting research on women. The main objective of this thesis is to contribute to a wider and deeper understanding of women in top educational leadership in Malta together with possible improvements; and as Sen, Iyer, and Mukherjee (2009) claim:

In addition to the obvious benefit of deepening our insights into social inequalities and how they interact, the study of intersectionality [...] has the potential to provide critical guidance for policies and programmes [...] It enables policies and programmes to identify whom to focus on, whom to protect, what exactly to promote and why.” (p. 412)

The next chapter describes the methodology, including the theoretical framework and grounded theory methods guiding this study. The following chapters include an autoethnographic narrative of my life journey, with special reference to those leaders who have impacted my life. This is followed by a dramaturgical narration, emerging from qualitative interviews with top educational leaders in the Maltese Education Department in order to explore and understand the main influences which impelled them to their leadership position and their opinion about possible solutions as to the scarcity of women in leadership positions. The following chapter interprets the results in relation to existing literature. This is followed by a short concluding chapter including my final reflections.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As a researcher I am acutely aware that my own positioning within the relevant discursive frameworks is reflected in the choices I make in the selection of parts of the narratives, and in the meanings I dictate to them.

–van Stapele, 2014, p. 17

This chapter describes the process I followed to address my research question on the perceptions and experiences of senior female leaders in the Education Department in Malta. Choosing the best methodology and methods to conduct my research was always one of my burdens, even though in the opinion of some scholars there is no standard route for conducting research (Reinharz, 1992; Wadsworth, 2001; Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011). Before I delve into further detail about my approach, I borrow van Stapele’s statement, quoted above, to show that my positionality will influence my handling of the data both in terms of deciding what material to include or exclude, and its interpretation.

While the research design is often based on the notion of “fitness for purpose” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p. 270), one still has to identify and address several issues to ensure that the investigation is sustainable, practicable, and feasible. Without any doubt, previous research and scholarly literature has somehow affected my choice of methodology but in time I came to realise even more that every study is unique. In this respect the choice of my methodology was influenced by my personal beliefs, perceptions, biases, and in some way my life experiences.

Being a male researcher conducting such research somewhat bothered me in that the female participants could welcome me or see me as an intruder in the sense that my legitimacy to carry out this research could be questioned. On the other hand, as a fellow educator, explaining and clarifying my position regarding my investigation to the participants helped in gaining the participants' trust.

My first attempt was to investigate female leaders from different sectors but after much reflection and professional advice, only senior leaders from the Education Department in Malta were chosen. At the time of the investigation there were eight senior female educational leaders. This research used a qualitative case study approach, with the case involving senior female leaders in the Education Department in Malta, bound by a specific time period (2017-2018), studied in context (the Education Department), and involving a more in-depth study (through the use of interviews).

Given that this phenomenon interested me personally for many years, it was deemed fitting that some of my life experiences should be included as a framework for the study. My life narrative experience starts from my early years, beyond the time parameter of this investigation, and it takes into consideration those leaders that have impacted me through my journey, in particular considering the dearth of female leaders in my life.

I am very aware that people's experiences, including mine, are very subjective and depend on different factors such as time, gender, family, culture, hopes, opportunities, and visions. While the participants share a common factor, in that they are all senior female leaders, I was aware that their experiences are unique. Thus, this exploration, including my own life story, tends to construct a meaning to interpret the experiences of these senior leaders and my own account.

3.1.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 described my place in this research while Chapter 2 focused on the relevant literature I chose to ground my investigation in. This chapter describes and justifies my methodological approach and methods used in this study. This chapter explores my approach as a reflective and reflexive researcher in choosing the qualitative paradigm to conduct my research and progresses in explaining my case study. This chapter seeks to establish a rationale for choosing a narrative approach. It proceeds by describing and justifying the use of autoethnography in this thesis. To make more visible my experiences and engagement in this doctoral process, I included a chapter, the one which follows, to narrate some of my main life events. The life events in Chapter 4 focus on the analysis of personal leadership concepts blended with reviewed literature.

I will later also describe and justify my philosophical assumptions. I also explain the concept of trustworthiness in conducting a qualitative research that specifically searching for multiple realities. An explanation regarding how I used narrative inquiry in eliciting the stories from the participants follows, together with a justification of the selection of my participants, and an explanation regarding the manner in which I conducted the interviews. An important phase in research is how to analyse the data. For this reason, this chapter will also explain the approach I took in analysing the data to come up with my themes and the importance of interpretation in qualitative research. The chapter ends with the ethical implications for this research and some possible limitations in conducting the study.

Although this thesis is presented in what might be called a conventional way, Chapters 4, 5, and 6 can be considered as my plots, which is less conventional. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are in the form of a drama.

3.2 Crafting the Drama

Before I progress through the process of the methodology and methods I adopted in my studies, I will delve into the importance of drama in my research as this is the main pillar of my thesis since this is the form in which I have presented my findings. The presentation of the findings moves away from the perhaps more traditional approaches, but “with this comes a need to pay attention to the ethical considerations” (Showunmi & Fox, 2018, p. 3)—which are thoroughly discussed in Section 3.8 of this chapter. The drama I present in the following three chapters is the script of a fictionalised radio drama, a monologue representing my autoethnography, followed by the script of a fictionalised staged performance in two chapters representing the voices of the participants.

The decision to use the narratives and present them in a dramaturgical praxis goes back to my early years. The passion for drama grew stronger when I was in Ireland (1987-1989) and had the opportunity to follow a course in media and drama. As a student and in my early years as a teacher, it was very common for me to participate in theatre and opera; unfortunately, the place of drama in secondary schools in Malta has considerably weakened. Performance always gave me sense of fulfilment, as a distinctive experience from listening and seeing; the acting, including the backdrops, music, and lighting used, gave more meaning to the text, the story, and the characters. Sometimes, even my imagination was carried away, probably not always following what the author had in mind. My intention in presenting the dramatised narrative of my findings is to offer the audience the opportunity to “enter” and enjoy my “theatre”, by imagining the stage and the radio, being a part of them, and feeling that the crafted stories can be their stories.

In this performance I had different identities: a narrator or commentator, interpreter, and story-teller. Nonetheless, “no matter how we stage the text, we—the authors [researchers]—are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak

for them,” (Richardson, 1992, p. 131), and thus, I take full responsibility for this drama. Denzin (2003, p. 8) asserted that a “*performance* is an interpretive event involving actors, purposes, scripts, stories, stages, and interactions,” and from this perspective I acknowledge that I interpreted the different events in my drama. I view drama or performance as a means through which the audience can live, observe, and listen to the actor/s in particular events. From this perspective, the drama gave me the opportunity to share the leaders’ experiences and my life accounts in a way that the audience can feel, be part of, and reflect on *our* stories.

Presenting the findings as a performance helped me to provide better insights into real lives (Conrad, 2008), and facilitated the presentation of the participants’ lived experiences more credibly and vividly, and thus generated information on the phenomenon being studied (Saldaña, 2008). The case study presented in a performance rather than as a closing of the curtain has opened it up to further interpretation. The drama in this study consists of two acts. Act 2 is a polyvocal performance of the life stories of the participants in this study. To make it more “real” and for the audience to “live” and be part of this “theatre”, Act 2 is in the form of a dialogue between the participants, myself as the narrator/commentator/interpreter, and a fictitious actor who takes the role of “the devil’s advocate”. Not to lose context and meaning from what was said during the interviews, long verbatim quotes were used.

Act 1 (Chapter 4) is a monologue and represents events from my life journey where I re-lived my past and reflected on the impact several leaders had on my life, especially considering the scarcity of female leaders in my life—a fictionalised radio drama was chosen as the best way to present this chapter. Radio drama is a performance without a visual component and relies solely on acoustics like dialogue, sound effects, and music. Radio drama can be so powerful that Crook (1999, p. 8) asserts that: “It is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension,” and thus, the listener can imagine the characters and the story. An important feature in radio drama is

the actor's voice, the spoken word, the emphasis the actor places on her/his voice together with "sign systems": "language, voice, music, noise, silence, fading, cutting, mixing, the (stereophonic) positioning of the signals, electro-acoustical manipulation, and original sound (actuality)" (Huwiler, 2005, p. 51). All these generate meaning and better understanding for the audience. For this reason, italicised text is included in the chapter describing the tonality and emotions of the actor (reader). Although I must admit that words cannot really express the feelings and emotions I felt and still feel while I was writing and re-reading these events, they help immensely. Nünning and Nünning (2002) in Huwiler (2005, p. 51) further add that radio plays in the form of narratives are "not merely a literary form or medium of expression, but a phenomenological and cognitive mode of self- and world knowledge". Considering these assertions and the context being a monologue life account, I decided that radio drama—even though fictionalised—is the best option to present this phase of my thesis.

Both acts are infused with my comments and interpretations. In view of the fact that the findings are presented in a dramaturgical format, minimal reference is made to scholarly literature, but these concepts were thoroughly discussed in the "Inquiry Trail" Chapter and also in Chapter 7. Concurring with Barone (2007, p. 466), my aim as a researcher or storyteller in this dramatised narrative was not to look for certainties about "correct perspectives on educational phenomena but to raise significant questions [...] that enrich an ongoing conversation". Performance is an alternative way of understanding and knowing the participants in the research; it "engages participants in a process of knowledge" and is "a unique and a powerful way of accessing knowledge" (Conrad, 2008, p. 609). Transforming narrative texts from the interviews into a drama helped me to "construct meanings" (Norris, 2008, p. 631), and although it can be seen as different from traditional approaches, it is "a no less valuable way of creating understandings [...] The playbuilding genre recognizes that its processes structurally framework knowledge" (Norris, 2008, p. 631). The claims made by

Conrad and Norris constituted an epiphany, in the sense of a means of relief, satisfaction, and conviction that presenting my findings in a performance is the best way forward.

Now, I describe and justify why qualitative research was the way forward for my study.

3.3 Qualitative Research

Since I am a Computing teacher and Head of Department, and for several years I had been a Mathematics teacher, my initial view for research was the positivist paradigm where I considered that “truth” is found in numbers and can be quantified. Upon reflection, however, I questioned what the aim of my study was, what I hoped to achieve and learn, and what knowledge I was looking for. I quickly realised that life experiences, including mine, are not numbers and cannot be quantified as they are subjective and there is always room for interpretation. Initially, concurring with the views of some researchers, I thought that my life experiences should not influence my exploration, but I soon realised that this was impossible since this research is linked with my personal beliefs and perceptions. Thus, the collection of data that emerged from the interviews, its analysis and interpretation, were affected by my experiences.

Due to its vague nature, leadership is best investigated through qualitative research (Conger, 1988), and since educational leadership has different aspects and cannot be compartmentalised, qualitative methods are deemed to be more effective in the exploration of the experiences of leaders (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Hence, through qualitative research I offered the participants and myself time for reflection on our mutual experiences.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) offer a generic definition on qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalist approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

While many scholars define and describe qualitative research in a similar way, I chose this definition due to the approach I decided to take. The “natural settings” or “the world” of my research are informed by the concept of educational leadership, my experiences, feelings, and perceptions, together with the experiences of the senior female educational leaders. The social world is not an objective entity and qualitative research assumes the multiple realities of “the world” (Merriam, 1988). Although the main actors were all female educational leaders, I kept in mind that everyone is different, with different experiences, contributing “multiple perspectives and interpretations” (Wellington et al., 2005, p. 97). My attempt is to make *this* “world visible” by making sense of it and interpreting the perceptions and experiences of senior female educational leaders in Malta together with my experiences and perceptions.

Denzin and Lincoln’s line, “These practices transform the world,” generated some deep thoughts. Will my research transform *the* world? Will it transform *my* world? What and which is my world? Is the underrepresentation of senior female educational leaders a perception or a reality? Whatever the case, whose fault is it? Are we to blame men, women, both, society, or culture? Are men seen to be better leaders? Are women seen to be too soft to lead and take decisions? Reflecting upon these issues I came to realise that the transformation

of my world would make sense through my own experiences and perceptions, and how they fit in with the experiences and perceptions of the senior female leaders in the Education Department in Malta. While this research is somehow personal, it is also shared by the female leaders who were ready to narrate their experiences, and by those who would eventually read this thesis. My hope is that more people would benefit from this research, which is an addition to the academic literature on senior female leaders in the Educational Department and leadership in general through my own life experiences.

The next section explores the use of a case study in qualitative research, the approach I have taken in my case study, why narratives were important for my investigation, and the importance of including my life accounts for this reflective/reflexive study.

3.4 Case Study

Different researchers from different disciplines have contributed to strengthening case study research. The variety of disciplinary backgrounds, with variations in ontological and epistemological orientations, has added to its complexity, resulting in different definitions and descriptions of what case study research is and how to use it. While some researchers view case study research as a methodological approach with a rigid research strategy (Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017), my approach is more similar to the description offered by Stake (1995, 2006), as being less structural and closely identifying with the study by setting parameters and context of the research. Harrison et al. (2017, p. 8) describe Stake's case study research (1995, 2006) as one with a "strong motivation for discovering meaning and understanding of experiences in context", where the researcher's interpretative role is essential to the process, and "an interpretative position views reality as multiple and subjective, based on meanings and understanding".

Initially, I assumed that since the participants were all senior female leaders they were going to talk profusely and agree about the underrepresentation of female leaders and the challenges they met in the Education Department. However, I soon realised that Harrison et al.'s quote was more aligned to "reality" and to the aim of my study, and that there were different perspectives, agreements, and diversities which I could easily grasp during the data gathering permitted by the interviews. For my research, the parameters were female leaders in the Education Department in Malta holding a senior position. On the other hand, as a researcher I felt that my life experiences would contribute to this study, and for this reason I included a chapter with some of my life events highlighting the impact different leaders had on my life.

Harrison et al. (2017), citing several other scholars, state that interviews are methods used to achieve the goal of co-constructing data. They further assert that for Stake (2006), interviews and observations are the preferred methods, and since during the interviews the researcher bonds with the participant as a partner to discover and generate new knowledge, interviews are the main data collection method, and stress the importance of rigorous procedures to set the research process. Thus, identifying the key topics or research questions that affect the case study is of great importance (Harrison et al., 2017). These help in setting the context for the case study and are key elements for data collection, which in turn is used for the data analysis.

My main research question for this study was: "How do senior female educational leaders perceive and experience their positions?" To get reactions from the participants, three questions were asked during the interview:

1. How did you arrive at your leadership position?

This gave the educational leaders space to narrate their experiences and share key life factors which encouraged them in arriving at their current positions.

2. Why do you think that there are fewer women in leading positions?

This question invited leaders to voice their concerns or otherwise about the reasons why leading positions in Malta are mainly occupied by men rather than being equally distributed.

3. Could anything be done to change this situation?

Apart from the participants giving their views and recommendations, this question provided an opportunity for comparison with other studies, mostly outside Malta, which were cited in the “Inquiry Trail” Chapter.

3.4.1 Why Narratives?

According to Gibson et al. (2017), “narrative analysis treats stories [...] as knowledge, which constitutes the ‘social reality’ of the narrative” (p. 173), and as stated by Goodall (2008), “narrative epistemology” is a distinct way of understanding the world and a “way of knowing” (p.14). My narrative inquiry started by using the narrative interviews as the main method to elicit stories of experiences and perceptions of the senior female educational leaders. Concurring with Denzin (2016), stories can give insights into human experiences. A narrative is a story or account of connected events, real and/or fictitious, aimed at imparting a message. It is the “sequence and consequence” of organised selected text, which is eventually connected and evaluated as meaningful information, usually for a particular audience, which makes text narrative (Riessman, 2005). Indeed, that is what I tried to do with the purposely selected text from the transcripts. Following thorough analysis, I organised and connected the text to craft my drama. Narrative inquiry is about using field texts, in my case interviews and life experiences, to understand how people generate meaning in their lives as narratives; the focus is on human knowledge which I gathered from the female leaders in the Education Department and the extent to which this knowledge is

valuable. According to Goodall (2008), “narratives *are* our way of knowing” (p.15), and Sikes and Piper (2011) further assert that, narrative accounts are “the only ethically and methodologically acceptable and indeed the only possible way of getting any sense of the lived experiences that [they OR researchers in this field] wanted to investigate and re-present” (p. 298).

These quotes persuaded me even more that narratives were the suitable method to approach the study, since it gave participants the opportunity to providing enriching information. While there are different definitions of narratives, leading to different methods of analysis, all require the construction and selection of text from interview transcripts, which is then analysed and interpreted, since “narratives do not speak for themselves” (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). The participants’ / interviewees’ responses formed part of a relational activity during which they narrated their story at length, many times deviating from the original questions. Riessman (2012) describes such narratives as case-centred. In their narratives, the participants shared their personal troubles and great knowledge about social and historical process was obtained.

In the words of Riessman (1993, p. 2), “individuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives”. While conducting the interviews, and even during informal chats, I was aware that while narrating their story the participants chose what to emphasise and what to omit, something which could also be said of my own life narration. However, all this fashions one’s identity, since everyone is different, everyone has her/his experiences with different perspectives, and it is these agreements and diversities which make the story more interesting and “real”, since one can associate her/himself with the story being told.

The fact that the first question was open-ended induced the female leaders to talk at length about their experiences, about their “world”, in a *natural* way. Although the other two

questions were quite specific, most of the participants still answered profusely and digressively. Narrative analysis is about “interpreting things” and there is no one method how this is done (Riessman, 1993). Nonetheless, decisions about what to include in the drama and what to leave out were exclusively my doing, as were the interpretations of the participants’ stories. I always bore in mind that these interpretations are subjective and that others can create a different drama, but my belief is that this same subjectivity adds more value to the story.

There are several models of narrative analysis. As a researcher the approach I thought was best to *inform* the audience about my findings would be a combination of what Riessman (2005) describes as “structural analysis” (p. 3) and “performative analysis” (p. 5). According to Riessman (1993), the methodological approach is to examine and analyse the participants’ stories and put them together to persuade the audience of the validity of the chosen narrative method. These leaders’ experiences gave me the opportunity to understand the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that made and were made by them (Clandinin, 2013). From the selected transcription, I chose to tell the story the *way* it was told to me by quoting the participants at length. For me, performance was the best way to present the story to the audience, since it offered more persuasion and the audience could appreciate the “‘doing’ rather than telling alone” (Riessman, 2005, p.5). When *we* tell our story, we perform our preferred identities (Riessman, 2012). The dramaturgic praxis I offered has the participants as the main actors, with the setting of a fictional theatre where the actors engage in dialogue, with a response from me as the narrator, commentator, and interpreter, and every now and then accompanied by inputs from the “audience”. The drama I crafted from the interview transcripts exhibits a comparative approach (Riessman, 2012), where the interpretations consisted of similarities and differences from the female leaders’ life stories. The performance gave me the opportunity to explore the meaning of words and phrases and

to report in detail verbatim quotes, with the intention to make the drama more appealing to the audience.

In agreement with Crotty (1998), the justifications we make in our methodology and methods reflect how we view the world, which I relate to my way of thinking, my axiological positioning, and the choice of narrative methodology and methods. Of striking aptitude for this research would be the following observation by Plummer (1995, p. 87) : “For narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear; [...] for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics.”. The experiences of the senior female leaders in Chapters 5 and 6 and that of my life story in Chapter 4, in the form of a drama, are my/their/our story for this research - the presentation of leadership events - since concurring with Sandelowski (1991, p. 162), “lives are understood as and shaped by narrative”. The narrative-performance gave me the opportunity to “create a sense of feel and place” (Sikes, 2005, p. 79), in the sense that the audience can feel that I lived the narrated experiences first hand.

3.4.2 Autoethnography

As part of my findings, given that this study is also a personal one, on which I reflected for many years, it felt natural to include some major events of my life, in particular, the influence of several leaders. As part of this qualitative research I used autoethnography to explore my personal experiences in more depth within a framework of culture and social meaning and understanding from the perspective of leadership.

Before and during the writing of my life accounts, two statements which helped me through the writing were that of Sikes (2010) and Wall (2008). According to Sikes (2010, p. 13), “if you are investigating a life experience you yourself have had, then this has to be declared [...]”. Apart from declaring what I am doing, this statement made me realise, that

life journeys involve other people, and one has to be very cautious especially with regard to interpretation. Writing an autoethnography involves writing autobiographic narrative accounts of a person's life experience. This leads me to Wall's statement (2008, p. 38), that my narrative account "offers a way of giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding". This statement by Wall convinced me to include my life story in this research, since I believe it is a means of sharing knowledge with others even though it involves my personal experiences. My selected life events were treated as data, a story with a meaning, since life stories are "significant and understandable [...] our experience is a construction that results from the interaction of cognitive organizing processes with cues emanating from our external perceptual senses, internal bodily sensations, and cognitive memories" (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 135). "Cognitive organizing processes" meant telling my story, as well as interpreting and giving meaning to the experiences around particular events. My life accounts helped me to better relate to the context of the study (Clandinin, 2013), as I tried to connect my story, with the influence of several leaders I had during my life, together with the story of the participants in this study. Writing my life journey helped in relating more deeply to the study as it drove me to reflect on perceptions and personal experiences of how women in Malta and Gozo are often seen as less capable of leading and taking certain decisions. My life story is not meant to answer my questions but rather to open up and evolve into further questions, questions like: What if I had a diversity of leaders in my life? Would the influences have been different? Would my life have been different or the same?

I must admit that reflecting on my past experiences was sometimes painful and other times joyful, but that is part of life, and in every event, there is a story, one from which one can extricate a learning motif. The butterfly analogy mentioned several times in Chapter 4—apart from underscoring my special love for butterflies, as described in the initial scene of Act 1—confirms that one's life journey is made of different stages, which I compare with

different butterflies and their life cycle, sometimes colourful and energetic, and other times drab and dull. Writing my life story required time and plenty of reviewing and reflection. The data not only had to be interpreted but communicated effectively to the readers in order to lead to new knowledge and deeper insights, with a possibility of further investigation. As a researcher, I always tried to bear in mind all these concepts.

My life experiences in this research constitute just a minute part of my life, that which I wanted to share, in particular from the impact of leadership perspective. It is my interpretation of events which I tried to memorise and give meaning to. This meant going back through what I wrote and reflecting on what I was about to share. I kept in mind that stories, my story, are shaped by diverse factors, experiences, culture, historical events, and particularly, relationships. The experiences of the participants in this research also helped in shaping and reshaping what I wanted to tell of my life story. Mine is an attempt in creating, moulding, and reliving my life. Writing this story, I kept in my mind the advice of Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011, p. 3) to consider that my story might be similar to that of others, and thus, I tried to use my personal experience to “illustrate facets of cultural experience, and in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders”. This was done by comparing and contrasting my experiences to existent literature.

Although the autobiography/autoethnography chapter is my story retold, it involves people, and so the suggestions given by Sikes (2010) and Clandinin (2013) were meticulously followed, ensuring that the mentioned people are respected and by no means demeaned. As a researcher writing my story, I kept recollecting that the past is always open for revision, in a sense that a story retold and revisited might change depending on transitory moods, experiences, emotions, and other factors (Ellis, 2007). Sikes (2012, p. 135) claimed that “stories can end up in unexpected places [...] readers can find that they are reading about someone they know, [and] this can happen across continents and years”. From this

perspective, I endorsed Sikes's advice regarding the impact of writing my life-story and as a researcher I am ready to show my writings "to any one mentioned in the text" (Sikes, 2012, p. 135).

I now delve in the philosophical stance I took to carry out this project.

3.5 Philosophical Assumptions

An important aspect in every research is that the researcher reflects on and expresses her/his philosophical stance. This is done through the adopted methodology and any clarifications of the methods used and approaches taken within a framework of philosophical assumptions (Harrison et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2017) describe these using four philosophical assumptions. The ontological issue relates to the nature of reality, which is socially constructed rather than being a given. The epistemological assumption is the way knowledge is acquired, by getting as close as possible to the participants during the interviews. Axiological assumption is about the values in research, involving several statements on my positionality, including the values I endorse and my biases. Then, methodology and methods, are the procedures used in the process of the research, the main objective of this chapter.

Mills and Birks (2014, p. 18) define philosophy as "a view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view". This statement of Mills and Birks sparked several uncertainties in my mind since they first state that philosophy helps the researchers to fill gaps in knowledge, but then they add that qualitative research raises more questions than it answers. Raising more questions in my context, rather than closing-down an episode, was important. Philosophically, case studies can have both a realist or positivist perspective, where one single reality independent of the individual exists. Case studies may also have a relativist or interpretivist perspective, where multiple realities and

meanings exist (Harrison et al., 2017). My case study is a qualitative one, in which multiple realities exist around a phenomenon, where the ontological assumption about reality and truth is open to subjectivity and our experiences. Subjectivity does not invalidate experiences and truth, but rather strengthens the concept that multiple realities exist around a phenomenon, as confirmed in this research. Case studies have the benefit that they are not aligned with any fixed ontological, epistemological, or methodological position (Harrison et al., 2017). The approach I took was the interpretivist perspective, that of multiple realities and different meanings, bearing in mind that other scholars might have different interpretations.

As suggested by Harrison et al. (2017, p. 6), “Qualitative paradigms are broad and can encompass exploratory, explanatory, interpretive, [and/] or descriptive aims”. Mine is one motivated in exploring, seeking understanding, and establishing meaning from the experiences of the female leaders which I interviewed in-depth. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 9), three important characteristics of qualitative research are:

1. capturing the individual’s point of view;
2. examining the Constraints of Everyday Life;
3. securing Rich Descriptions.

As a qualitative investigator, the in-depth interviews gave me a chance to know, understand, interpret, and give meaning to the experiences of the female leaders in this study, those experiences which these leaders deemed important to share with me. Through their narratives I experienced the social world, their/my world, which helped me understand and reflect on the multiple realities emerging from the phenomenon being studied. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) emphasise how qualitative researchers believe and value the rich descriptions of the social world, an important aspect which I appreciated in the vast amount of text these leaders shared with me. While I acknowledge that all text which was transcribed was valuable, I had to take concrete, albeit difficult decisions on what to include in and exclude

from my presentation, so that I would stick to the context of the study, notwithstanding that much of the omitted text was of great interest.

Epistemology is a field in science concerned with the nature of knowledge, how to *understand* our world. Understanding is about how we interpret the knowledge acquired through experiences, which may be influenced through various factors like beliefs and perceptions. In this respect, the interview questions were posed to reduce my biases as much as possible, but it was nonetheless unavoidable that some of my biases would surface both during analysis and consequently in the findings.

The approach taken for this study was that of positionality and subjectivity, looking for different perspectives. I did not seek to verify facts but rather I sought to understand, interpret, and give meaning to the stories shared with me by these female educational leaders. I acknowledge though that several factors in this study are independent of the research. Concurring with Gibson et al. (2017), from the social constructionist lens, I accept that the narrators are somewhat interdependent and entrenched in various aspects such as their culture, context, understandings and experiences, and value that knowledge is obtained from people and experiences. For instance, I acknowledge the influence of factors like: culture, stereotypes, perceptions, different values, the time of data gathering, and “fear” of exposition, considering that we live in a small island and politics may have influenced the responses. However, even this is subjective, and it is up to the individual how s/he views her/his life story, even with these influences. An important statement which helped me in the approach I took was that of Riessman (2005, p. 6): “The ‘truths’ of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future.”

3.5.1 Trustworthiness?

Referring back to the previous section, my belief is in multiple realities, where I am seeking “truths” rather than “the truth”. Traditional views of validity and reliability relate to whether the study gives the researcher what s/he expected to find, in a sense “‘measuring’ what you say you are” (Mason, 1996 in Bryman and Bell, 2015, p. 400) and “the degree to which a study can be replicated” (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982 in Bryman and Bell, 2015, p. 400). Concurring with Bryman and Bell, this is difficult or impossible to reach in qualitative research and so my belief in this study emphasises the representation of the experiences of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In line with Riessman (2012), my approach to this study has been far from being an objective one, but rather one of positionality and subjectivity. Even when it comes to my autoethnography, my narrative truth is based on my life experience blended with the influences of several leaders, and thus I acknowledge what Ellis et al. (2011, p. 7) declare, that “memory is fallible”; “fallible” in the sense that it is impossible to recall and report the exact representations of my lived experiences and how I really felt at that time. Other people experiencing the “same” events would probably tell a different story and interpret events differently.

Verification of the facts regarding the lives explored in this study was not so important; more importantly to this investigation was understanding the meaning of events according to these leaders and how they described their experiences, which in turn I tried to interpret historically (their past events) and culturally (located in Malta). Therefore, I was not looking for faithful “truths” of the narrative accounts shared by these leaders, but rather my intention was trying to connect the past, present, and the future, bearing in mind that life events are not static but evolve continuously.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) view which I endorsed throughout this study is that the soundness of a qualitative project rested on four criteria: credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability. Credibility would be the extent to which results were believable from the perspectives of the participants, since they were the only ones who could legitimately judge such a criterion. Adding to this, I add the readers, and in particular for this study, female readers, as they would know if the stories are credible. To enhance credibility, I emailed the participants for further clarifications of what they had shared with me through the interviews, and when the transcriptions were ready, I sent a copy to the participants to check their shared experiences. Transferability referred to generalising capability of the research. While acknowledging the uniqueness of the participants in this study, all with their individual personal story, I endorse Ellis et al.'s (2011) description of generalisability in qualitative research. They refer to generalisability by how much the "story speaks to [readers] about their experience" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7), how much the story is able to "illuminate" the readers. Readers provide validity by comparing our story with theirs, by finding similarities and differences, and by the feeling of being informed by the story we write (Ellis et al., 2011). The crafting of the drama in two acts, one about my life journey and the other about the experiences of the female leaders in this study, gives the audience a story which they can immerse themselves in, explore, and thus become informed about unfamiliar people, their experiences, and their lives.

Dependability was linked to the researcher's emphasis on acknowledging the ever-changing context in the research. In this study, I acknowledge that although the participants were all female educational leaders, they had different perspectives, and in a different situation, their responses could have been different. By confirmability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) meant the extent to which the findings could be corroborated by others, which could be done in various ways, either by referring to other studies in the findings, and/or by playing the devil's advocate role and providing contradicting observations. A clear advantage of presenting the findings as a drama was the opportunity of not only having the research

achieve credibility and dependability, but also gain confirmability, given the two contrapositions of my performance in which I referred to other studies and where necessary acted as the devil's advocate.

Interpreting information in research is somehow influenced by one's perceptions and experiences, including this research. Biases exist in many formats.¹⁸ Confirmation bias is the tendency to interpret information in a way that confirms pre-existing beliefs and hypothesis, which may result in a skewed output, one totally seen from the lens of the researcher. For this reason, and for better trustworthiness and credibility, the transcripts were revisited several times. After the first visits, I could feel that I had unjustly represented some participant's answers as I was judgmental, probably because of their appearance, responses, and way of presenting their argument. In fact, in my first interpretation I tried to avoid or oppose their responses. However, consulting the transcripts several times helped me to treat data more equally. I tried to play the devil's advocate and looked at my hypothesis from the opposite side by listing my assumptions before I began my final interpretations. As much as was possible I tried to keep an open mind and really listened to multiple voices while accepting other insights.

Concurring with Plummer (2001), the importance in telling a story is to enable the readers to enter the subjective world of the researcher. That is my intention, to allow the audience to see the world from my point of view. For me, validity means "verisimilitude", where readers can feel that the experiences described are "lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 7.). Thus, I tried to represent the experiences of these female leaders, together with my life accounts blended with the impact of other leaders in my life, bearing in mind that "the "trustworthiness" of narrative accounts cannot be evaluated using traditional correspondence criteria. There is no

¹⁸ A simple search in Wikipedia results in a list of different biases. *List of cognitive biases*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cognitive_biases

canonical approach to validation in interpretive work, no recipes or formulas” (Riessman, 2013, p. 184).

The next section covers how I acquired data through narratives from the participants, how I justify the selection of the participants for this study, how I conducted the interviews, and the process of transcribing them.

3.6 Eliciting stories from the participants

Spoken language is considered as one of the most powerful tools humans use to communicate with each other, as language plays an important role “in bringing experience to understanding” (Freeman, 2008, p. 388). For this reason, to obtain a comprehensive idea of the main research question, in-depth interviews were used to gather data from the participants’ experiences, since interviews offer an excellent method to obtain a comprehensive picture of the participants’ experiences in their own words (Schutt, 2006). Interviewing allowed me to explore multiple perspectives and “explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own [...] [I]nterviewing helps reconstruct events the researchers have never experienced” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3).

3.6.1 Participant Selection

In research, data gathering is a crucial process and thus it is imperative that the best participants for the study are selected (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). To be in compliance with my study, the participants chosen followed the criteria of: being female leaders; holding a senior position;¹⁹ and working in the Education Department in Malta. During data

¹⁹ Senior or top educational leaders, as previously described, include the Minister of Education, going down to Directors, Heads (referring to a senior position on a directorate level and not Head of School), and College Principals.

collection there were eight top female educational leaders, amounting to less than 31% of the total cohort of top educational leaders in Malta. At the time of data collection, the female leaders included one Director General, three Directors, one Head, and three College Principals. All eight were formally contacted via email, five of them responded in three days about their willingness to take part in the study, while the other three were gently reminded after ten days to which they responded positively a few days later.

Purposive sampling was used to select the sample population, since my interest was in exploring women in senior leadership positions in education. The sampling for this study can be described both as a “homogeneous sampling” and a “total population sampling”, as described by Etikan et al. (2016). Although each individual has her/his own perspectives and experiences, this study involved chosen participants having similarities, that of being top female educational leaders and all senior female leaders in education. The description of the participants and their context of experience in their current position is found as part of my drama in Act 2: Part 1, Chapter 5.

3.6.2 Interviews

Piloting. The interview questions were piloted beforehand with some of my colleagues to make sure that the questions would be fully understandable and were refined accordingly. Piloting is very important in the research process since this “is crucial to its success” (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 260). Cohen et al. (2001) further add that piloting helps in removing uncertainties and ensures that the questions being posed to the participants are clear with no or the least possible room for misunderstanding. Overall, the feedback given after the piloting sessions was very positive and only minor changes were required to the original questions. Some piloting participants asked whether the personal data such as age range and marital status were necessary. However, I explained how such data would be useful in my

findings vis-à-vis women in leadership and other previous findings by other scholars on how female leaders could take a slower and longer route to arrive to their positions.

Interviewing. Interviews are a two-way communication between two persons “for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, p. 527). From this perspective, the interviews helped me to elicit what I considered to be the main topics under investigation in this study. Interviews allowed greater flexibility and freedom both for the participants and me. In-depth interviews offered “fitness for purpose” (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 270) since they were “exploratory” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 65) and “loosely structured” (Mason, 2002, p. 62). The interviews allowed me to generate knowledge (Kvale, 1996) and they permitted both the participants and me to discuss global concepts from a different point of view (Laing, 1967; Barker & Johnson, 1998). In line with Hughes (2008), I felt that while caution and sensitivity were of utmost importance for the participants, for my own benefit I had to draw a line to avoid becoming intimately embroiled in the participants’ stories, in the sense that as far as possible I left the participants to narrate their story—this did not mean that in certain cases I did not share my story, since as stated by Oakley (1981), an important aspect in in-depth interviewing is that there should be “no intimacy without reciprocity” (p. 49).

I adopted narrative interview as my main data-collection method since this provided the opportunity for the participants to “voice” their experiences and perceptions as female leaders in education. Narrative interviews employ a post-structural approach in research where the interviewer respects the participants’ stories. It is a method where the interviewer neither agrees with nor contradicts the answers (Rolling, 2010). Rather, narrative interview as a method looks for what is possible and makes apparent what the interviewer would otherwise have classified as certain (Rolling, 2010). Considering this, such views helped me

in obtaining as many narrative experiences as possible from the participants and at the same time not taking anything for granted.

The interviews were scheduled after a critical review of the literature, a pilot study, and an eventual reformulation of the research questions. This meant reviewing and redrafting the interview questions to capture the best experiences of the educational leaders. Finally, to be faithful to the research endeavour investigating the perceptions and experiences of senior females in educational leadership in Malta, the three above-mentioned questions were asked during the interview. The three questions served as a framework to underpin the research question by obtaining different answers, ideas, and experiences from the educational leaders.

The events in each interview were very similar, with each interview lasting from an hour to an hour and a half. Following some rapport building with the participants, the information sheet (Appendix A) which had been sent before was reviewed, and the participants were asked if they had any reservations before the information sheet was signed by me and given to the participants, together with the approval letters from the Education Directorate in Malta and the University of Sheffield (Appendices C and D). With the participants' consent (a signed consent form was obtained prior to each interview, as is evident in Appendix B), the interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken to record facial expressions and other signs which could not be captured on the audio recorder. As a precaution, the interviews were recorded on two devices, a digital audio recorder and a laptop.

Most of the time it was the participants who did the talking as they were very willing to share their experiences. As suggested by McCracken (1988), on the few occasions that the need arose, I used prompts or probes which gave the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their life experience in their own voice. Finally, the participants were thanked and an agreement on future contact for possible clarifications was reached. As Cohen et al. (2001, p.

279) alleges, “it is often after the cassette recorder or video camera has been switched off that the ‘gems’ of the interview are revealed, or people may wish to say something ‘off the record’”. The same happened with most of my participants but that is part of the confidentiality pact in the research process, and as a researcher I made sure that for these declarations no notes were taken and their assertions are not included in my findings. Immediately after each interview I scribbled further notes on other observations. This gave me the possibility to remember as many details as possible which otherwise would have been missed. For clarification purposes, some participants were contacted again to elaborate on some details emerging from the interview.

Transcriptions. After the interviews were conducted, I revisited the recordings and notes, and the transcription process started in a very short time to give me enough time to remember what was said and make further comments as required. Transcribing was a crucial step since there is the chance that some data will be lost or distorted (Cohen et al., 2001). Inevitably, the originality of data is lost in transcriptions, since transcription involves translating from the oral and interpersonal into the written language (Kvale, 1996).

A large amount of data was obtained and although recordings were transcribed in their entirety, I had no choice but to be selective about what to include and what to leave out, and which direct quotes to use or not to use to support my arguments (Nisbet, 2006). After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, and comments according to the notes taken during the interviews were inserted, data analysis commenced.

I progress into explaining how I analysed the data together with the importance of interpretation in research.

3.7 Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organising the gathered data by reducing it into themes through a coding process, with the purpose of describing the events to which the data refers, and even going beyond: “we want to interpret, to explain, to understand—perhaps even to predict” (Dey, 1993, p. 31). My data was generated from senior female educational leaders through interviews. While I considered these experiences narrated by these leaders as one big story, the story was broken down into and analysed as smaller stories with different themes to craft my performance. Although each experience of these leaders was unique, in my drama I attempted to draw general conclusions according to themes, which involved both commonalities and diversities expressed by the participants.

Some scholars disagree about the generalisability across the larger population in qualitative research and argue that the focus should be in representing the experiences of the participants (Clandinin, 2013; Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant & Rahim, 2014). While I agree about the representations of the experiences of the participants in qualitative research, I also agree with how some other scholars describe generalisability in qualitative research. Scholars like Leung (2015) and Carminati (2018), argue that with the “rising trend of knowledge” (Leung, 2015, p. 326) obtained from qualitative research such as in narrative/life stories, generalisability becomes relevant. I view generalisability in this study as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Ellis et al. (2011), as described in section 3.5.1.

There are several ways to analyse the data gathered and it is the responsibility of the analyst to choose the best approach to interpret and find meanings from the data according to the phenomenon being investigated. Data gathering, data analysis, and presenting the findings are not three distinct processes but they are interrelated and they frequently intertwined. For this reason, the best approach I found suitable for this study was “The Data Analysis Spiral” as described by Creswell and Poth (2017). The first loop in the spiral is “managing and

organizing the data”, where the data was gathered through the interviews, and with the participants’ permission it was audio recorded and saved. The data was then fully transcribed and notes were taken. The second loop involves “reading and memoing emergent ideas” and this was done by reading the transcripts several times, each time taking notes and memos. The third loop is “describing and classifying into themes”, where the data is described, classified, and interpreted. To do this, after highlighting text with different colours to distinguish codes, I used a spreadsheet to collate the emergent themes from the codes, together with descriptions and selected quotes from the participants to provide clear distinctions between similarities and differences according to the theme.

Literature, my experiences, and the three interview questions established pre-existing codes, but I did not limit myself to these, as other codes emerged through analysis. When the final themes were developed, “developing and assessing interpretations” followed. While acknowledging that the leaders’ experiences were unique, I used the literature as described in Chapter 2 to compare and contrast it to the experiences of these leaders. The same was done for my life story. The final loop is “representing and visualizing the data”, and this was done by presenting my findings in a drama with two acts, one narrating my life story and the other that of the participants in the study.

An important decision in research is what to leave out and what to include when presenting the findings. To do this and to use what I considered to be the most *relevant* information for my presentation, I used a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding process as described by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). By *relevant* I am not implying that text left out was irrelevant, but rather I had to make a choice which according to my interpretation best suited my study. Having revisited the transcripts and notes several times, I decided on seven main themes. The first three themes were deductive as they were related to the interview questions. I felt that it was a natural decision to include the journey to

leadership, the scarcity of female educational leaders in Malta, and possible solutions, as the interview was based on these themes. The other four themes emerged using grounded theory following suggestions made by Braun and Clarke (2006), including the need for the researcher to familiarise her/himself with the data, coding the data to search for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally doing the writeup. The four themes are: the participants' definition of leadership, the Maltese culture, obstacles women meet during their leadership career, and the importance of relationships in leadership. These themes together with a portrait of the participants, their workplace setting where they spend most of their time, and their "costumes" are presented in a drama in two separate chapters as Act 2: Part 1, found in Chapter 5, and Act 2: Part 2 found in Chapter 6.

Translation. While some data was provided in English, some participants preferred to share their experiences in our mother-tongue, Maltese, and in a way, this presented another complexity in taking the right decisions. My initial choice was to transcribe and translate all, but finally I decided to translate those quotes used verbatim in the narratives. Being bilingual, with both English and Maltese recognised as the official languages, and the interview questions posed in English, there still existed the problem posed by Phillips (1960, p. 184) that "almost any utterance in any language carries with it a set of assumptions, feelings, and values that the speaker may or may not be aware of but that the field worker, as an outsider, usually is not". Therefore, the transcribed translated text was reviewed repeatedly, allowing for any modifications on the advice of relatives or close colleagues. Nonetheless, there were struggles to find the correct equivalent of phrases. In a way, this gave me the opportunity to understand some traits of the participants better, especially when they switched to the Maltese language to express themselves better.

Interpreting the Data. Merriam (1988) asserted that the world is highly subjective and for this reason interpretation is much more desirable than measuring, and according to

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), interpretation is itself an art relating different skills including one's perceptions. Immediately after each interview I spent time reflecting on and taking notes of what I had observed and could not record. This also meant that during the transcriptions I was reliving the moment when the participants shared their experiences. The transcriptions were read and reread, and memos and descriptions were taken each time, since each time fresh information was attained (Krathwohl, 1998). I kept Gay et al.'s (2009) in Castle (2012, p. 127) advice in mind and began data interpretation by answering the questions: "What is important in the data? Why is it important? [and] What can be learned from it?"—according to the context of the study established by my chosen perspective.

Following deep reflection and further readings, I came to the conclusion that silence was very important and relevant, and worth interpreting. Interpreting words required the utmost consideration, but interpreting silence was more difficult and one should be even more guarded against any assumptions. Thus, in my interpretations, I did not just focus on the spoken "voices" of the participants but I also explored their silences. The interpretations I obtained from the interviews were grounded in the literature explored along the 'Inquiry Trail' chapter and other observations which I had discovered from the voices of the participants.

Before I conclude this phase of my thesis, I now explain my ethical concerns and how I approached them, and also some limitations for this study.

3.8 Ethical Implications

Having declared what my place is in this research in Chapter 1 and how I position myself as a social justice researcher in Chapters 1 and 2, together with my philosophical assumptions earlier in this chapter, I must also take into account the ethical issues in this research.

The most important ethical concern is to do all that we can to ensure that we re-present lives respectfully and that we do not use our narrative privilege, or, put another way, our narrative power, to demean, belittle or take revenge (Sikes, 2010, p. 16)

Researching, writing about and re-presenting lives carries a heavy burden regardless of whatever methodology [...] our own stories usually implicates other people as there is very little, if anything, that we do in total isolation (Sikes, 2015, p. 1)

The two quotes of Sikes gather the fundamental ethical innuendoes for my research. Doing what you can to ensure that the people mentioned in a study would not be harmed in any way is crucial and since my findings, apart from reporting the participants' narratives gathered from the interview, also include my life accounts which as declared by Sikes "implicate other people", great caution was taken throughout the whole research process (Kvale, 1996). Ethics also included that I as a researcher formally declared through my positionality (in particular in Chapter 1), biases, and perceptions, as no matter what, these would affect the interpretations and the presentation of my findings.

Research ethics implies applying moral principles so as not to harm anyone even after the research process and it requires the promotion of respect and fairness (Sieber, 1992; Kahakalau, 2004). For me this meant that during the whole process, but in particular during interpretation and writing the narrative-drama, responsibility and accountability of what I was to write were continuously on my mind. The human aspect was never taken for granted or overlooked at any point in the process of my research (Borg & Gall, 1979), thus the usual ethical issues were not disregarded in my research process: that of not forcing the participants to take part; guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity as far as possible; posing questions in a way that does not harm the participants; and upholding the participant's right to

withdraw at any time without any consequences (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Cohen et al., 2001; Schutt, 2006).

Official approvals from the University of Sheffield ethics reviewers and from the Directorate for Curriculum, Research, Innovation & Lifelong Learning in Malta to commence the data collection were sought and gained, but this was just the initial stage. Before the interviews, the participants were safeguarded by being provided with a detailed information sheet, signing of the consent form, and conducting the interview in a safe environment according to their desires. The participants were also given the approval letters from both entities. These procedures would usually be carried out in every research, but as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted, gaining signed informed consent, which according to Cohen et al. (2001) and Schutt (2006) also implied informed refusal, was not enough, since anonymity throughout the whole inquiry was a great issue. I was well aware of the small size of Malta and Gozo where many people know each other, a setting which Damianakis and Woodford (2012) described as a “small connected community”. Louisy (1993) acknowledged the fact that living on a small island—St. Lucia, similar to Malta—had repercussions. In a way, in presenting my findings, I was aware that I “cannot realistically offer anonymity and definitely can’t” (Sikes, 2012, p. 135).

Apart from this, I was very conscious that the participants in the study knew each other very well and this presented me with an ethical dilemma: the risk of unintentional disclosure of the participants and others involved in their narratives (Schutt, 2006; Kaiser, 2009; Tolich, 2010). I chose to present the data collected as a drama consisting of different scenes and this somewhat resolved the ethical dilemma. The leaders’ names and any other means of identification gathered during the interviews did not appear in the study, and so fictitious names were given to the participants in the drama. However, participants were still made aware of the limitations of anonymity and possible risks. Notwithstanding all this, I

abided by the advice of Ellis (2007, p. 24) regarding “the ethics of what to tell” as I scrupulously left out transcribed data which in some way discriminated or harmed the participants or any other mentioned persons.

As inquirers it is very important to think about our stories, others’ stories, and all that relates us together in our shared lives. This calls for relational ethics and it “calls us to social responsibilities regarding how we live in relation with others and with our worlds” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30). As Kimmel (1998) asserted, “whatever the ethical stance one assumes and no matter what forethought one brings to bear on one’s work, there will always be unknown, unforeseen problems and difficulties lying in wait” (cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 88). Although I have attempted to cover all possible ethical issues, I am aware that there will always be risks, despite my best intentions.

3.8.1 Limitations

Being a male researcher investigating female participants, the argument for gender biases would be expected, especially in relation to the position taken by some scholars who insisted that such research should be conducted by female researchers (Kolmar & Bartkowski, 2005; Howell, 2015). In this sense, I wonder whether one of the eight participants saw me as an intruder, since her answers were very tense, even when I prompted her with other probing questions. However, this only happened with one participant. Nonetheless, my investigation is a search for social justice and my intentions are to gain valuable knowledge that could make a difference in society.

3.9 Conclusion

The aim of research is to obtain knowledge, and using any methodology would be to present “a body of knowledge about the other” and a “deconstructive research is that it is not

obsessed with getting to the truth but to highlight epistemological and ethical inadequacies in the attempt to know the other” (Galea, 2008, pp. 25-26). Tierney (1998, p. 68) further added that, seeking “new epistemological and methodological avenues demands that we chart new paths rather than constantly return to well-worn roads and point out that they will not take us where we want to go”, and according to Goodall (2008), when we write or tell a story, “we create alternative pathways to meaning that are imaginative and analytical” (p. 14), that connects the teller to the listener or reader. That is my intention, to make sense of my data and try to “chart new paths”, to produce knowledge by crafting the play in two acts.

This study investigated experiences of top female educational leaders related to how they achieved their goals, their perception of scarcity of female leaders, and possible suggested solutions/recommendations to this underrepresentation. The findings of the study follow in the next three chapters, a drama divided in two acts. Act 1 is the story of my life in different scenes. Almost each scene ends with my interpretation of the leader/s who influenced me during that scene. Act 2 is presented in two chapters, the first an interpretation of some statistical information, followed by the drama of the “voices” of the female educational leaders together with my interpretation.

This chapter presented the purpose of my study by portraying the approach I took to conduct this study. Wellington et al. (2005, p. 96) declared that “justifying methodology and methods is an extremely important part of any research account since it is on the match between methodology and methods and research focus/topic/questions that the credibility of any findings, conclusions and claims depends”. For this reason, choosing the methodology and method/s is crucial in research, as I illustrated in this chapter.

Stories give the possibility to readers to interpret them differently (McCormack, 2004) but this widens the perspectives rather than limiting them (Lather, 1991). In fact, by presenting my findings in the form of a narrative-drama, readers have been given the

opportunity to follow their interpretation and construct a meaning. Although the autoethnography chapter is presented in scenes in the form of a performance, it is still a monologue where I am the author, narrator, interpreter, and storyteller. The following two chapters are a polyvocal drama crafted from the voices of the different leaders blended with my comments and interpretations, and other citations from scholars. “Theatre” gave me the opportunity to perform my experiences and those of others on stage (Norris, 2008). The three chapters, the dramatization of my life, and that of the educational leaders in this study, are a performance about “living”, “telling”, “retelling” and “reliving” experienced stories, since people live and tell stories (Clandinin, 2013). I end this chapter by appropriating Sandelowski’s (1994, p. 61) quote and applying it to my study:

[W]hen you talk with me about my research, do not ask me what I found; I found nothing. Ask me what I invented, what I made up from and out of my data [...] I am not confessing to telling any lies about the people or events in my studies/stories. I have told the truth. The proof for you is in the things I have made—how they look to your mind’s eye, whether they satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart.

Chapter 4 - Curtain Opening for The Butterfly - Act 1

*Autoethnographers [...] typically use the construction of personal experience as more than a framing device, as the whole of the story is most often drawn **entirely** from personal experiences.*

–Goodall, 2008, p. 33

Preface: Introducing Act 1

This chapter reflects more on myself in relation to the dissertation's subject matter and it represents scenes from my early childhood to adulthood. As Goodall (2008) claims, writing up one's story reveals things that were missed or forgotten. This personal narrative emphasises the leaders I have encountered in my life and the impact they have had on me. Writing this story not only helped me in gaining a "personal narrative epistemic" (p. 15), but it will hopefully serve as a legacy where other readers can relate to my story, a story which echoes with their own and empowers them to come to grips with their own story. Although "I have more questions than answers", as Goodall states (2008, p. 16), the result of my narrative journey helped me learn more and let others learn too.

Many scholarly writers, as depicted in the previous chapter, value the importance of autoethnography in research but Goodall's view about the scholarly worthiness and importance of personal stories convinced me more that this chapter is valuable to my research, both for my own self-knowledge and also for those reading this dissertation.

At the end of most scenes in this chapter, there is a "reflexive passage" (Goodall, 2008, p. 42), where I comment on and interpret the impact the leader/s in that scene had on me. According to Goodall, this is very important in autoethnography as this explains the reason for and the manner in which that experience was constructed. According to

Malinowski (1961), as cited in Goodall (2008), writing a good ethnography requires a three-part research, where the author needs to immerse, detach, and re-immerses in the text.

Likewise, I immersed myself in writing the first draft of this autoethnography, which took a long time to write, read, and re-write. I had to leave it on the shelf for some time and finally I re-immersed myself in it again to revise it in terms of accuracy, interpretation, and also for ethical reasons.

Having given some justifications for this chapter, some of which had already been presented in Chapter 3, the script of the fictitious radio drama of my life journey follows.

Behind the curtain

Thursday, October 1st, 2020 at 10:00:

Josette, the presenter of 'Sharing Our Lives' programme from ABC radio station contacted Robert by phone to remind him about the radio drama on Friday 23rd October. They discussed the time of arrival and the scenes in the drama. It was decided that Josette would introduce each scene, and speak the quotes at the beginning of each scene and those in the middle. Josette asked Robert about the possibility of sending her an email with the names of some music tracks and indicating in which scenes they should be included. Robert agreed.

Friday, October 16th, 2020 at 19:30:

Gradual crescendo of instrumental music. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: While thanking Marija for sharing her exquisite life story and experience, we meet in a week's time at six in the evening for another story. For our second programme, Robert will be joining us. I, Josette, say bye and God Bless.

Friday, October 23rd, 2020 at 17:30:

Robert enters ABC Radio station and is welcomed by the studio floor manager who shows him the way to the waiting room. The programme starts in thirty minutes.

At 17:55 Robert is shown the way to the studio. The final tune from a 1980s music programme is aired. The presenter shakes hands with Robert and the two have a short chat. Adverts are aired for two minutes. Josette and Robert wear the headphones and arrange the microphones.

The presenter is signalling the downward count with her fingers: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. 'On Air' red light on. Crescendo of instrumental music. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the second programme in our series of programmes called 'Sharing Our Lives'. Joining me in the studio today is Robert Vella, a doctoral student, who will be presenting some of his life events concerning the theme of leadership, and in particular the impact of the leaders he has encountered on his life. When I met Robert some days ago to discuss the programme, he mentioned how the life events which he is going to narrate revolve around the fact that very few leaders in his life were females. So dear listeners, please bear this in mind. The drama begins!

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 1: Me, myself and I

“I am not trying to give an image of a fairy tale, perfect, everything else, I am just being myself.”²⁰

Robert: (*Gleefully*) “Laughter [...] is one of the most wonderful things ever created. Not only does laughing make you more likeable, less stressed and will probably even help you live longer [...] but it makes you happier and your life more awesome all the way around.”²¹

Thus, I open this drama by reading the message from a meme I found recently on the Internet (*Showing meme to Josette / reading the message gleefully and emphatically*).

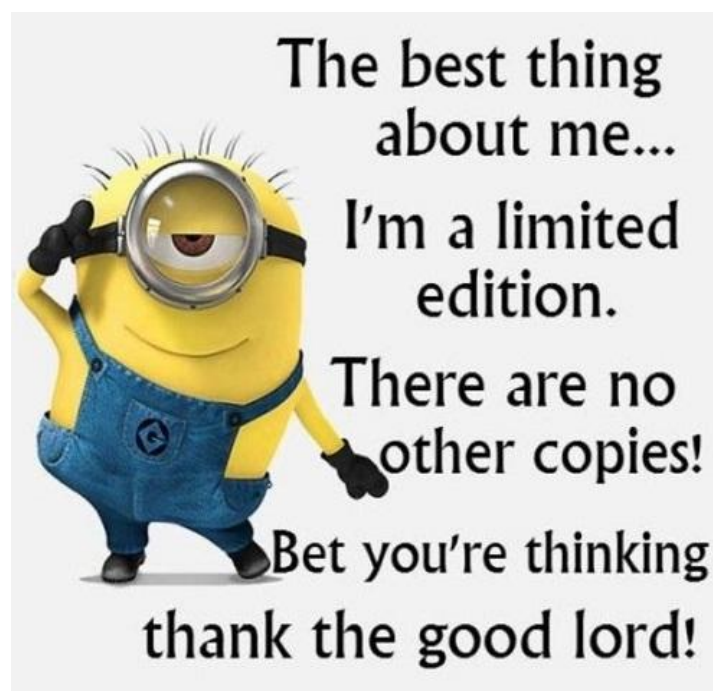


Figure 4.1. The best thing about me.²²

²⁰ Rebecca Loos (b. 1977): former Anglo-Dutch model and media personality. Loos, R. Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/rebecca_loos_213939

²¹ McCombs, C. (2013). *17 Reasons Not To Take Life Too Seriously*. Retrieved from <http://chrismcombs.net/17-reasons-not-to-take-life-too-seriously>

²² Meme. (2016). *The best thing about me*. [Digital Image]. Retrieved from <https://me.me/i/the-best-thing-about-me-im-a-limited-edition-there-2833634>

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 2: Preface - The Voice

As we engage in narrative inquiry with ourselves, and with our participants, we need to inquire into all the kinds of stories, stories that have become intertwined, interwoven into who we are and are becoming. These stories live in us, in our bodies, as we move and live in the world.²³

Robert: (*With a tranquil voice*) Life stories excel in breaking silences and at the same time acknowledging that ignored events can be of great importance. In telling this story I am giving voice to myself, following tremendous reflection and continuous re-writing and amendments. My main concern is that this drama is communicated to the audience in the best possible way, without harming anyone in the process, as I have been conscious throughout the entire procedure that these subjective narratives can be misinterpreted by others. The process has been much more intense and sometimes emotional than I had thought it would be, and as the Canadian poet Margaret Atwood asserts (*Assertive voice*):

When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes a story at all.

When you are telling it, to yourself or someone else.²⁴

²³ Clandinin, 2013, p. 22.

²⁴ Atwood, 1996, as cited in Wellington et al., 2005, p. 19.

(With a tranquil voice) This self-narrative gave me the opportunity to explore important events in my life. At times there were instances of pain and unanticipated occurrences, while others were moments of joy and amusement. Although many events have occurred throughout the years, I am narrating this story as it appears to me now, from the point of view of a grown-up. This story deals with my personal experiences and sometimes it also extends into commentary detailing a sociological understanding of past and present Maltese culture, leadership and perceptions. “Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)”.²⁵ This autoethnographic approach will serve to highlight different events in my life and focus in particular on those that have left a mark on me, and in addition to this, it will also include at the end of most scenes an interpretative description of those *(with emphasis)* leaders that had a particular effect on me. I depict the different scenes in this autoethnography as the different *(pause)* stages of a butterfly’s metamorphosis, where a cycle ends and another one begins. Different scenes do not necessarily represent one cycle but can incorporate different cycles.

Writing one’s story involves writing about other people and interpreting events, and thus, *(with emphasis)* “Autoethnographers and those who use other auto/biographical approaches do need to think very carefully about the potential harm when writing lives”.²⁶ For this reason, in writing this story I took particular care to avoid harming the people mentioned; I was constantly aware that this story exposed family members in addition to outsiders, and so I was very conscious of confidentiality; I always kept in mind that once published this will become public, permanent and thus subject to future liabilities, and I did not ignore the fact

²⁵ Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1.

²⁶ Sikes, 2015, p. 1.

that the persons referred to can someday read this text.²⁷ This process meant looking back on the past and giving it new meanings that probably differ from the objective nature of the events that are mentioned. I would like to open the scenario using the words of the French philosopher Georges Gusdorf: (*With inspiration*) “The [wo/]man who takes delight in thus drawing [her]/his own image believes [her]/himself worthy of a special interest [...] I count, my existence is significant to the world [...] and so can preserve this precious capital that ought not disappear.”²⁸

Gradual crescendo of Hannah Montana’s ‘Butterfly Fly Away’. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 3: Metamorphosis

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”²⁹

Robert: (*Inspirational tone*) Research starts with curiosity, with the “whats”, “ifs”, and “whys”, (*pause*) and my story begins with that of a butterfly hovering from one flower to another (*pause*) in search of nectar.

The butterfly’s life is a cyclic and metamorphic one consisting of four stages. The butterfly’s life starts with a very small, round or cylindrical egg, depending on the type of butterfly, laid on a leaf. Some time later, the egg hatches and gives life to a caterpillar, the larva. The life of

²⁷ Sikes, 2015; Tolich, 2004; Sikes, 2015; Ellis, 1995.

²⁸ Gusdorf, 1980, p. 29.

²⁹ Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978): American cultural anthropologist. Quote Investigator. (2017). Retrieved from <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/11/12/change-world/>

a caterpillar is quite short and is spent mostly eating from the same kind of leaf. As soon as the caterpillar reaches its full age, it changes into a pupa or chrysalis. Inside the pupa the caterpillar seems apparently dormant but a remarkable transformation or metamorphosis is taking place; from the stubby caterpillar the new gorgeous parts that make up the butterfly start forming. Finally, when all the parts are formed, the butterfly emerges from the pupa. First the wings are soft and folded, but after some rest, blood is pumped into the wings and it is time for the butterfly to master the art of flying. In this last stage of the cycle, the butterfly is ready to reproduce and the female butterfly lays eggs—and another cycle begins.³⁰

I compare my life to that of a butterfly; sometimes it is very thrilling and special, but occasionally less so; sometimes it involves flying onto scented beautiful flowers which provide me with food and life, at other times hopping on weeds and thorny plants which offer me venomous nutrients. Such is my life! Every event of my life is like a new butterfly with a new life and different experiences. I *die* and begin another cycle; I hatch into a caterpillar and moult *daily*, then I form my chrysalis and *hibernate* for some time, until it is time to emerge from my pupa. At first, I might be soft and delicate, but eventually blood pumps into my body and I begin to *fly*. A new life begins until the next end, (*pause*) and a new butterfly will remerge! This life was greatly inspired by some and less so by others. The leaders I have encountered who gave me nutrition, gave me direction and life, but there were also others who somehow misdirected me and showed me hypocrisy.

At the beginning of this scene, Josette the presenter quoted Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, where she claims that every person can be a catalyst of change as

³⁰ Learn about Nature. *Butterfly Life Cycle / Butterfly Metamorphosis*. Retrieved from <https://www.thebutterflysite.com/life-cycle.shtml>

long as we are organised and focused.³¹ There are different opinions and interpretations for this quote, but in my opinion, the life of a leader may take different forms just as that of a butterfly. Many times, a leader may feel lonely and has to take difficult decisions, but with reflection and the help of her/his followers, even if the team is small, together they can make a change. (*Short pause*)

Gradual crescendo of Hannah Montana's 'Butterfly Fly Away'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Like a Butterfly

The capital of life

...

Full text of the poem is found at:

<https://reflectonthis.com/like-a-butterfly-a-spiritual-poem-about-truth-life-and-change/>

...

And all the Saints that know this! (Aaron Sellars)³²

Gradual crescendo of Alice Merton's 'No Roots'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

³¹ According to Alec Nevala-Lee, it is not proven that this is Mead's quote. Nevala-Lee, A. (2010). *As Margaret Mead never said...* Retrieved from <https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2010/12/15/as-margaret-mead-never-said>

³² Sellars, A. *Like a Butterfly*. Retrieved from <https://reflectonthis.com/like-a-butterfly-a-spiritual-poem-about-truth-life-and-change/>

Presenter:

Scene 4: Pa, Ma & Co

“So God made man like his Maker. Like God did God make man; Man and maid did he make them. And God blessed them and told them, ‘Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it’.”³³

Robert: Like many, I believe that my parents, sisters and brothers have in some way or another impacted my life. Thus, I felt it imperative to shortly narrate to the audience my family background, where I came from, (*pause*) or where I had my first saps of nectar.

(*Emotional*) Guzepp Vella, my dad, was born in 1922, a few years after World War I. As can be imagined they were hard times and poverty prevailed. In the prevalent culture dominated by war, education was not just unimportant, but it was meant for well-off people, and so Guzepp hardly had any schooling. At a very tender age Guzepp had the first taste of hard work, first in the fields and then digging shelters. At the age of around twenty-one he began dating Pawlina, a sixteen-year-old relative of his, who lived opposite his house. After a few months dating, always accompanied by a chaperon, they got married when he was nearly twenty-two and Pawlina was just seventeen years old. It was quite tough beginning a family during World War II but that was their destiny! Pawlina was quite young but this was not uncommon during those days, and Guzepp, for (*with emphasis*) unknown reasons, always treated her as a child, even in her older years.

(*Emotional*) Pawlina, my mother, whose maiden name was Muscat, was born in 1926 and as was the custom, she stopped going to school after primary to help in the family affairs.

However, Pawlina was always very eager to learn and she continued reading both in English

³³ Genesis 1: 27-28, The New King James Version.

and Maltese; although her English was not proficient, she still could keep up a conversation and her writing was acceptable. She managed to teach her husband how to read simple words, to write his name, and write words phonetically.

Guzepp and Pawlina married in January 1944, and for them marriage and making love implied procreation: (*with emphasis*) “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth...”³⁴ They had children in three batches, with seven years separating the first from the second, and five years between the second and the third. Jokingly, once we—her children—asked Pawlina what had happened during those years, since contraception was not part of their syllabus, and her response was, (*cheerful*) “Well God did not provide any during those years!” In November 1944 they had their first daughter, Maria, and in less than one year they had a son, Leli, who unfortunately died a few minutes after birth. Apart from the tremendous anguish of losing a child, the fact that it had been a boy was even harder. On 1st January 1947 they had another daughter, Helen, and in March 1948 they had twins, Pawlu and George, followed by another son, Anton, in 1949. After a resting period they had another daughter called Rose in 1956 and in 1958 a son called Vince, followed by Marlene in 1961 and Noel in 1962. The cocoon was dormant for another five years. In 1967 another daughter was born, described as a “beauty of an angel from heaven,” but Josephine also died a few minutes after birth. Their last son was me, Robert, born in 1969.

Gradual crescendo of Alice Merton’s ‘No Roots’. Music fades out and remains in the background.

³⁴ Genesis 1:28, The New King James Version.

Presenter: “The confidence of individuals and their self-awareness, along with the ability to share and learn from each other, makes the development of shared leadership an effective means of improving the leadership of those individuals involved.”³⁵

Robert: (*Sad*) My father always had a strong character and no one dared contradict him. As the breadwinner, the man of the house, Guzepp many times played the role of the strict father and this acquired him more respect. At the same it was important to make it clear that he was the boss. For this reason, displays of affection were sporadic, both to his daughters and sons, and even to his wife. One rarely saw him hugging or kissing. Somehow, he made sure that St. Paul’s message when writing to the Ephesians was observed: (*with great emphasis*) “You wives must submit to your husbands’ leadership [...] For a husband is in charge of his wife,” (*tearful*) and this was adhered to by his wife Pawlina.³⁶ Maybe he knew no better or it was simply part of the *culture* of that time. (*Upset*) He died in 2010, two days before his eighty-eighth birthday.

Talking about Pawlina, in a way I can be somewhat biased. While the bond between my father and I was never that close, the opposite can be said of the relationship I had with my mother, especially when I was young. While Guzepp’s character was strong, one might refer to Pawlina’s as weak, although I would rather call her character endearing. (*With pride*) I probably associate my first example of leadership with my mother. Although like any other person she had her faults, the goodness she radiated amply superseded the imperfections she might have had. She was a very spiritual and religious person. For her God and the Catholic Church meant a lot. She endorsed deep beliefs and high moral values, and tried her best to instil in us the obligation of being good citizens. (*Worried*) Due to her religious perception

³⁵ Watson, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council 2008, p. 42.

³⁶ Eph. 5:22-23, Living Bible (TLB).

that wives should be *submissive* to their husbands, she often suffered in silence and rarely did she have a decisive say in any matter. For me she was a humble person, and above all she was loving and a very good leader. Pawlina passed away in 2013, exactly on the day of her patron saint, St Paul.

Due to the age gap, the relationship I had with the first batch of sisters and brothers cannot really be described as sisterly or brotherly. Maria, my eldest sister, was twenty-four years older, and so, having an affectionate character, she was more like a mother to me. Helen was married before I was born and she was twice pregnant at the same time as my mother. Since her two eldest children were nearly my age, as a young boy I used to spend a lot of time at her house, and while I used to call my mother “ma”, I used to call my sister Helen “mummy” like her children till the age of ten. George, Pawlu and Anton married in the same year when I was just four years old. My recollection of George when I was young is minimal, but over the last years we met more often. I perceived my relationship with George, as with Pawlu, as one based on a fatherly manner rather than brotherly dynamic. I recall some nice memories when Pawlu and his wife would take me to their home and allow me to sleep between them, and give me Mars chocolate bars in bed! Since Anton worked in my father’s business and the business was managed at my parents’ house, Anton was always around. (*Remorseful*) Owing to the age gap and his character, Anton and I were never on good terms and our relationship further deteriorated over time.

Rose married young when I was six years old and soon emigrated to Canada. (*Regretful*) Although for many years my relationship with her was very strong, in due time, our relationship somehow cooled down. Vince was always quite eccentric; he is quite religious and somewhat introverted. For many years we were not that close either. Eventually my

relationship with him flourished even though we have different opinions and disagree on many matters, but then again, who do we totally agree with? (*Glowing*) He has the qualities of a real brother: honest, sincere, and invariably generous even when he is in need himself. Marlene, on the other hand, is a different story. A very lively character, she got married and soon emigrated first to Canada and then to the US, where she settled down. (*Sorrowful*) For many years our relationship was very strong, but when family trouble erupted, although we remained on speaking terms, our sisterly-brotherly bond cracked.

(*Very emotional*) The name Noel means Christmas, connoting the idea of joy, peace, and love; and indeed, for several years my bond with Noel was Christmassy, but in retrospect I am not sure whether it had been just a one-way brotherhood all along or whether there was a drastic change at some point that compromised our relationship. He was my support, my *real* brother, my *friend*, my *leader*, and I opened my heart and confided to him on many affairs. (*Resentful*) I used to trust him blindly, and considering later events, this was my fault. Some of our confidences were eventually used against me but then again, that's life!

(*Calm voice*) If one looks up the definition of a family, one can find millions of descriptions and definitions pertaining to anything from the traditional family to a more contemporary one. However, my definition of family consists of a group of people who are somehow related, and not necessarily by blood, who love each other in a special way, and who try to resolve any disputes that might arise. (*Very determined*) Furthermore, my definition of parents in terms of their relationship with their children is one that is based on unconditional love, sacrifice, and (*with emphasis*) above all, loving each of their children equally and without favouritism.

(With joy) Being a big family has its advantages and disadvantages; there were times when we laughed together and times when we cried together. Admittedly, I regret some events which I am however still happy to have been a part of. It is not my intention to discuss the different leadership styles of all my siblings but they all, in their own way and either positively or negatively, possessed and manifested their own values, visions, ideas, and aspirations, which might have not been the same as mine.

Gradual crescendo of Jonas Blues' 'Mama'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 5: Inside the Cocoon - From Zero to Five

“A baby is born with a need to be loved—and never outgrows it.”³⁷

Robert: *(Reflective)* Memory can be deceptive and I must say that the early years of my life are quite fuzzy. Therefore, for this scene I have to rely on the stories told by my mother and siblings, and sometimes by other relatives or friends, besides referring to old photos which I immeasurably treasure.

(Honoured) February 1969, I, the youngest son of the Vellas, was born. As was the custom, after a few days I was baptised and given the name of Robert since my mother had fallen for my twin brothers' craze for the Manchester United star football player, Bobby Charlton. I have no regrets even though my passion for football is minimal. Although I am proud of my name and despite the contested association between one's name and identity, I prefer to think

³⁷ Frank A. Clark (1860-1936): American politician. Clark, F. A. Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/frank_a_clark_106520

of names in Shakespearian terms (*Shakespearean voice*): “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet.”³⁸

(*Calm voice*) The first five years of my life were chequered with both pleasant and less attractive events. By the time I was five, my sisters—Helen and Maria—and my brothers—Anton, George and Pawlu—had got married. I was an uncle of seven, with a niece and a nephew born before myself. My maternal grandfather and uncle died when I was two. All these events brought many changes in my family and also had different effects on me.

Although in those days it was not particularly common, I was taken to a nursery school when I was around one year old. The fact that such services were offered by nuns meant that children put in such care were assumed to be (*sarcastically*) *safe*. I think that more than today, fifty years ago, there was the belief, that children up to schooling age should be reared by their mother. However, due to the different circumstances posed by situations involving big families or social difficulties, some had no alternative but to resort to these religious nurseries if they did not have relatives to take care of their children. Together with my niece and nephew I went to a Franciscan Sisters’ nursery for a year. My cloudy recollection consists of just a blue uniform and is probably inspired by a photo from the time.

We attended another nursery belonging to the Dominican Sisters in the year that followed. A nice memory is that of Sr Eugenia, a caretaker nun, who really loved us all, but for some reason gave me special attention and our friendship persisted for many years. When I was eighteen, I had the opportunity to visit her, then a cloistered nun, in Ireland. I always had the

³⁸ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.2.

impression that Sr Eugenia was very humble, honest, and trustworthy, all of which are values that I truly admire in leaders.

Gradual crescendo of Jonas Blues' 'Mama'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Transformational leaders set out to empower followers and nurture them in change. They attempt to raise the consciousness in individuals and get them to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of others.”³⁹

Robert: It might be presumptuous of me to interpret the leadership styles that impacted me during my first five years but I concur with the position taken by many that the first five years are fundamental in shaping a child’s growth, happiness, development, and learning. I am of the opinion that during the first five years, parents are very influential and can greatly motivate their children with an impact possibly lasting a lifetime.

(Cheerful) My mum was always beside me, supporting me, and giving me love. Nonetheless, I remember a particular episode during my formation for priesthood, as an eighteen-year-old novice in Ireland.⁴⁰ *(Pause)* One day I was chatting with my novice master about the concept of trust and he spontaneously asked me, probably knowing what I was going to answer, which person I trusted most. Without hesitating I answered that it was my mother but he then referred to the consequences of Isaac’s blind trust in his father Abraham.⁴¹ Although his intention had never been to undermine the trust I had in my mother, he also wanted me to realise that one should be very careful of trusting someone blindly and this advice has remained in my mind ever since.

³⁹ Northouse, 2013, p. 199.

⁴⁰ Refer to Scene 8: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*.

⁴¹ Genesis 22: 2-10, The New King James Version.

My father's leadership style was autocratic and he would take decisions alone without any consultation or interference. On the other hand, my mother's style was less authoritative and more supportive. She was always available to help us achieve our goals, facilitate our individual development, and empower us, and she always considered our well-being as her children. Many times, she used to go out of her way without ever considering her own self-interests, an approach which can also be argued as a weakness.

3-minute advertisement break.

Josette and Robert take off the headphones and chat a bit.

20 seconds to commence. Josette and Robert wear the headphones and arrange the microphones.

The presenter is signalling the downward count with her fingers: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. 'On Air' red light on.

Presenter: Welcome back to the second part of today's 'Sharing Our Lives'. For those of you who have just switched on your radio, today we have Robert Vella narrating how some figures he considers leaders in his life have had an impact on him.

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 6: Outside the Cocoon - Primary school

“The school was not the end; it was rather the instrumental means for improving the way of life.”⁴²

Robert: (*Joyful*) Over forty years ago, very few five-year-old students used to take the bus to go to school since most villages in Gozo have their own primary school, but it was decided that I should attend a Salesian church school which was far from home. Being so young, going to school by bus was in itself an adventure and I have never regretted going to *Laura Vicuña School*.

Most Salesian nuns really shared Don Bosco’s charisma based on “loving-kindness”. Two particular sisters whom I still hold in high esteem are Sr Therese and Sr Nazzarena. Sr Therese really knew how to get along with students both inside and outside the classroom. It was amusing to watch a nun in habit and veil playing football with students, like Sr Therese did. According to Hans Christian Anderson, “where words fail, music speaks,” and apart Sr Therese was also particularly talented at playing the guitar and this ensured that we students enjoyed ourselves while learning.⁴³ Unfortunately, I lost all track of Sr Therese.

Sr Nazzarena was another story and she seemed to have been especially fond of me. She was the community chef, and although as students we were required to take our own lunch, it was typical for her to take us into the kitchen and give us some goodies. The kindness and love

⁴² John Bosco (1815 – 1888): known as Don Bosco – Italian Roman Catholic priest, educator and writer. *What We Do-Old*. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.salesiansmalta.org/salesian-houses/>

⁴³ Hans Christian Anderson (1805 – 1875): Danish author – prolific writer of plays, travelogues, novels and poems. Andersen, H. C. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/90636-where-words-fail-music-speaks>

she demonstrated to children was immaculately endearing. Even in her seventies, she has remained affectionate towards me.

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Leadership [...] a type of human activity which is directed towards persons, searching for direction and for ultimate goals with the help of principles and criteria.”⁴⁴

Robert: (*With pride*) Attending a Salesian school often means becoming part of a family which possibly lasts a lifetime, as is indeed my case! The Salesian primary school was my first taste of Salesian spirituality which influenced me through my whole life. The Salesians were founded by an Italian priest from Turin in the mid-1850s, during a turbulent time for Turin. Due to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, many young people were forced to migrate to Turin in the hope of finding work and a better life. However, this turned out to be an illusion as many young people found work that subjected them to exploitation while others who remained unemployed were condemned to vagrancy or joining street gangs. Moved by this predicament, Don Bosco dedicated his life to these young people despite the difficulties posed by both the state and the church itself.

The Salesian concept of spirituality is based on what is called the Preventive System. This educative method inspired by Don Bosco's own pedagogical experience is built on three pillars: reason, religion, and loving-kindness. In short, this system is about disposing pupils towards obedience not through fear and coercion but rather through persuasion, and

⁴⁴ Vojtáš, 2016, p. 48.

continuous love for those in need and the poor. This methodology has deeply affected me and changed my life for the better.

All classes were taught by nuns during my primary school. The Head of School was also a nun and passed away while I was in my last year. (*Discontent*) While I relished the loving-kindness of Sr Therese and Sr Nazzarena, I could not express the same sentiment for my Head of School. The consensus among students was that she was immensely strict, and I did not consider her as one who adhered to the Salesian spirit, at least as a head of a primary school. She was an extreme disciplinarian and although very astute, her skinny figure used to push me away. Although she was not abusive, she used to punish disobedience and the fear this instilled in students was colossal. However, her values and principles were constructive in the sense that she nonetheless wanted what was best for her students.

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 7: Taking flight - Secondary school

“Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good.”⁴⁵

Robert: Up till a few years ago, to enter a secondary church school in Malta meant sitting for exams in mathematics, English and Maltese, and in the case of Gozo, only the top sixty students had the opportunity to attend the only church secondary school on the island, *Sacred*

⁴⁵ Ciulla, 1998, p. 28.

Heart Minor Seminary.⁴⁶ Therefore, what this meant for the students in Gozo was immense pressure before the exams and then an anxious wait for the results. Consequently, when the results were out and I was one of the sixty, I was tremendously happy, even though adapting to the new system during the first few days at the new school was hard. Now as a teacher myself, I can sympathise with those students who in the first days cry or feel sad, and sometimes it is a pity that some of us tell them to behave like adults rather than supporting and encouraging them in this adjustment period.

Being of a timid character meant being very obedient in class and causing trouble was something that never crossed my mind. Still, two clear instances of school punishment for a reason I cannot remember have remained clear in my mind. (*Angrily*) Physical punishment was still allowed at the time! In one particular situation I was given ten smacks with a wooden ruler and the worst part of it was that I was punished in front of the class. Worse than the priest hitting hard on my reddening and aching hand was the shame inflicted by the other students loudly calling out the number of smacks until the *game* was over. Another dishonourable punishment which I once received was being made to kneel for half an hour in the corner of the class with my hands under my knees (*pause*) and yes, my hands got numb and really stiff.

However, life at the Seminary was not always like that, even though it is true that for some years I could not stand the rector and the master of discipline.⁴⁷ The rector was aloof but his intentions were very honourable. In my last year I had a different rector who was completely different. I had the same master of discipline for the whole five years and as the role suggests,

⁴⁶ There were times when Religious Studies and Social Studies were also examinable.

⁴⁷ The rector was in charge of both the minor seminary (secondary school) and major seminary (which trained students for priesthood). During my time the master of discipline, who was also a priest, was more like the head of school.

he did in fact act like a typical war sergeant. The last year in secondary was a turbulent one, especially with regard to the restless political situation within Malta that dominated those times.⁴⁸

Gradual crescendo of Enya's 'Caribbean Blue' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Transformational leaders possess good visioning, rhetorical, and impression management skills, and they use these skills to develop strong emotional bonds with followers.”⁴⁹

Robert: Apart from the political turbulence, which had a great impact on me during my secondary school years, the leadership style of the two rectors had an extensive influence on me. The first rector followed instructional leadership traits by promoting the school’s mission and the education of its students. He was also a moral leader, endorsing values and beliefs that helped develop a learning community. Undoubtedly, education was a top priority for him and he made every possible effort to give students a holistic education and instil in them a sense of responsible citizenship.

(With great passion) Though the second rector’s term of office was short and came during a time of political ferment, I cannot find the right words to describe him. He was one of those few leaders who exerted a positive influence on those around him and who had a great talent for sharing his singular capabilities with others. For these reasons, I will remember him throughout my whole life. The first talk he had with us as fifth formers, known as the

⁴⁸ Refer to Scene 11: *Influence of Politics*.

⁴⁹ Masood, Dani, Burns & Backhouse, 2006, p. 942.

mischievous students of the school since it was our last year, remains a lucid memory. The first thing he did was to politely ask all the staff to exit the hall, and with a calm but determined voice he told us that we were men and not children, and it was up to us whether we wanted to be treated as men or children. In this manner, he turned the usual lecture into a discussion between students and their superior. I still try to imitate the manner in which he used to deal with different incidents. He had a clear vision and was able to share this with others, his management skills were so great that it was easy to bond with him, and he also exuded loyalty and trust. He exhibited excellent leadership skills when needed and this contributed to the growth of students and the staff. He was inspirational and considered each one of us as an individual. Moreover, he was spiritual and when necessary focused on values and beliefs. In addition to being competent himself, he was able to share responsibilities and listen to others' opinions, putting his interpersonal skills to good use. Above all, he was able to assess a situation and take the necessary actions it required. Indeed, he was one of a kind!

Dear audience, it is important to note that to date, in *the Sacred Heart Minor Seminary*, which remains a boys' school run by the bishop, there has never been any female in the senior leadership team (*pause*) and there will probably never be! However, the mission statement of the school is one that encourages priestly vocation so maybe it is assumed that a male priest will always be in charge.

Gradual crescendo of GrEst Salzano's 'Da Mihi Animas'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 8: Da mihi animas caetera tolle

“Without confidence and love, there can be no true education. If you want to be loved [...] you must love yourselves, and make your children feel that you love them.”⁵⁰

Robert: (*With pleasure*) Apart from attending a Salesian primary school which gave me an early taste of Don Bosco’s spirituality, from the age of ten onwards I began attending the summer camps in Malta organised by the Salesian priests and this gave me a better understanding of Salesian life. At the age of sixteen, I decided to give it a try and this meant that from Monday to Friday I used to stay with the Salesian community in Dingli, Malta. Like myself, there were other young people called aspirants also experiencing the Salesian lifestyle. By the beginning of the second year, only three had lasted to start the so-called pre-novice phase. Becoming pre-novices, we had our own room and not a dormitory, and this gave me more time to myself for further studies and reflection. (*Calm*) At the end of the two years with the Salesians in Malta, I decided to go a step further and begin the novitiate, which meant leaving Malta and going to Ireland. Two other Maltese pre-novices and I joined four others, two from England and another two from Ireland.

During the year, four novices left and each time this caused me to reflect if I was on the right trail. Religious vows were taken after one year and were valid for three years, but one could still renounce the vows, albeit through a bureaucratic process. (*Tormented*) Before commencing the novitiate, I was informed about my novice master, the priest in charge of the novices, who was described as strict, non-communicative and senseless, so I already had

⁵⁰ John Bosco (1815-1888), known as Don Bosco, an Italian Roman Catholic priest, educator and writer. *Don Bosco: 7 quotes from the saint who taught by kindness*. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/don-bosco-7-quotes-from-the-saint-who-taught-by-kindness/125105.htm>

some biases. (*Pleased*) The time for our profession arrived and the three of us, two Maltese novices and an Irish one, accepted the Salesian motto *Da Mihi Animas Caetera Tolle*, “Give me Souls, Take Away the Rest”. It was a day of joy and feasting.

Following the profession, we moved to Maynooth, Co Kildare, to continue with our studies. Life in Maynooth was different from Crumlin. Now as professed Salesians we were given more freedom, and the community included those in their early years of studies as well as those striving for their final vows before being ordained priests in the near future. The move also brought a new superior, the rector of the community, who was a very intelligent person and careful in what to say. It was a year full of challenges and adventures.

Gradual crescendo of GrEst Salzano’s ‘Da Mihi Animas’. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than seeking this only through formal position or role.”⁵¹

Robert: (*Tense*) The impression I had formed of my novice master in my first year in Ireland was one with the stick and ready to punish for every mistake. With this picture in mind, I feared him and was very cautious of what to do and say during the first few weeks. I was not really being myself. Eventually, as the water settled down, it turned out that I had been given a false impression and while he was portrayed as a strict man, deep down he was open-minded and good-hearted. Being a novice meant engaging in a period of deep contemplation about one’s life. It was the novice master’s task to ensure that *his* novices were on the right

⁵¹ Harris & Muijs, 2005, p. 28.

track, he was like the devil's advocate and with his method, he made sure that each one of us developed our talents fully in order to eventually be able to help the young, mostly the poor and needy. He treated us as individual leaders while also mindful of the fact that our tasks should be accomplished as a group. The leadership skills I mastered from his approach are countless, but the most important lesson I had from this experience was to be cautious about judging others based on their appearance and the gossip of other people.

The most appropriate word to capture the character of the rector in Maynooth was the word revolutionary, as he was innovative, unafraid of change, and dared beyond established procedures. Although my first impression was that he was the laissez-faire type, he was more the sort of leader who grants autonomy to his followers and even allows them to grow through making mistakes. He never abused the power of his position as a rector, was open to ideas from others and banked on the expertise of others in taking decisions, even at the expense of being viewed as unaccountable and indecisive. He was a real gentleman, one who was able to influence others and help them excel and prosper.

Studying for priesthood means that most of your mentors are priests so the leaders who influenced me during this time were all males.

Gradual crescendo of The Next Step's 'Flying' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 9: Flying Out - The University

“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.”⁵²

Robert: (*Pensively*) Mid-year in Maynooth, I began doubting if I was in the right path and if this was really my vocation, and I went through moments of despair and loneliness. It was a time when I frequently referred to my spiritual director and a Salesian brother for guidance.⁵³ Both were very helpful and recommended I take some time to reflect before eventually deciding, an advice which I still use in many situations. I spent the summer in Malta and as a Salesian I was assigned duty at St Patrick’s, an orphanage for young boys. The time in St Patrick’s was indescribable, and although tiresome, it was very satisfactory. However, I came to realise that this was not my calling after all, and so I had decided! Having told my superior about my decision, I had to apply for my release. The worst part of it was telling a mother who was so proud that her last son was becoming a priest. However, I plucked up the courage and told her of my intentions. (*Very contented and relieved*) What follows next remains ingrained in my mind: in tears she gave me a big hug and quietly told me, “Better a good married man rather than a bad priest. Whatever your decision our doors are always wide open,” and I was so relieved! Surely my time with the Salesians was a lifetime experience and one which I still treasure. It was a time for the butterfly to explore one set of flowers and weeds, but still, another butterfly had to emerge from the pupa to roam around a different patch of flowers and weeds.

⁵² Margaret J. Wheatley (b. 1944): American writer and management consultant. Wheatley, M. J. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/margaret_j_wheatley_283925

⁵³ In the Salesian society there are brothers who opt to go for the priesthood or remain as brothers.

Leaving the Salesians meant applying to university in Malta. University life in Malta was totally different from the one in Ireland, in terms of both the academic and social spheres. The first year in itself became a struggle between deciding to continue or not, and were it not for my girlfriend and my mother, who encouraged me and were always by my side, I would have probably stumbled.

Gradual crescendo of The Next Step's 'Flying' (Instrumental Version). Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Let us in education dream of an aristocracy of achievement arising out of democracy of opportunity.”⁵⁴

Robert: Many people had an impact on me during my university life but the most influential were my girlfriend Josette, my mother, and the faculty dean.⁵⁵

As explained earlier, my mother set the example of the leadership skills of respect and love. Saying this, I did not always agree with my mother and I would not say that she did not have any defects, but through the close relationship I had with her I learned (*pause and reading with emphasis*) to empathise with others, be kind, and be a good catholic and citizen.

(*Angrily*) The same cannot be said of my dean. (*Still angry*) In my last year he was the assigned tutor for my dissertation project. It was over twenty-five years ago, when technology was still at its inception in Malta, so imagine printing the dissertation about ten

⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826): American Founding Father who was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson, T. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://quotefancy.com/quote/919168/Thomas-Jefferson-Let-us-in-education-dream-of-an-aristocracy-of-achievement-arising-out>

⁵⁵ Refer to Scene 12: *Crowned Hairstreak - My Rock, My Life*, for Josette’s leadership influences.

times because it had got lost or you were told to go look for the draft in his office and wonder if it was the office of a hoarder! In my opinion, he was without principles and values, or perhaps they did not concur with mine. His leadership style could be considered as the laissez-faire type in which others were given complete freedom and allowed to take their own decisions, but without any guidance offered for the real benefit of the student.

Senior leadership roles have changed at the University of Malta but it is still dominated by males, and this is more evident in subjects traditionally associated with males. (*Cynically*) Without a doubt, my university life was mainly influenced by male leaders since I only had male lecturers.

Presenter:

Scene 10: Teacher and Learner

“Education leaders create and sustain a developmental culture for their students and themselves by building a range of relationships with colleagues, parents, students, administrators, and community leaders.”⁵⁶

Robert: (*Calm voice*) My formal teaching career commenced in 1992 and although I had not covered any modules pertaining to the teaching of early middle year students, I was first posted in a primary school and after three weeks I was asked to go to the Boys’ Secondary School in Gozo.

I must admit that the first few months teaching within the secondary school education system were full of anxiety and fear, in particular with the older students seeing me as a new young

⁵⁶ Bowman, 2004, p. 188.

teacher that they did their utmost to test. (*Anxious and angry*) To make things worse, on my first day I was instructed by the Head of School that my teaching load comprised 15 lessons mathematics and 8 lessons Italian. I was going to collapse and when I pointed out that I only had ordinary level Italian, he did not mince his words and told me to look elsewhere if I was not ready to take on the assigned role. I had few alternatives and accepted the position, spending my first year of teaching practically learning Italian with the students I was teaching.

The eagerness to learn, a general sense of willingness, and the experience I eventually accumulated helped me through the years. Since my first day of school and up to the present moment, I have had six heads of school and only one of them was female. All had their personalities, characters, values and visions, and as with most people, there were times when I looked up to these heads and other times when I just accepted their word as my Head of School. One particular head was quite a perfectionist and although in my opinion he did his utmost for students to learn, his relationship with us teachers was not one that I would emulate.

The female Head of School had a very strong character and most of the teachers during her headship were males, although there is a more even distribution nowadays. Irrespective of her personal character, the fact that she was a woman in a male-dominated environment meant she had to react and was probably expected to behave in a manly way. Two of my Heads of School were precisely the *laissez-faire* type and seemed rather dissatisfied with their job. Another Head of School had the weakness of being preferential, not so much towards the teachers but more towards the students with high-status backgrounds. A particular head inspired army-commander-like fear in teachers and students alike, especially in his first years.

However, he was a born delegator, he acknowledged our abilities, and while insisting on accountability, he would allow freedom when delegating tasks and would only ask for feedback. Even if one failed, he would encourage the person to take on the task again. Despite his military attitude, he was my biggest inspiration as a Head of School.

In 2004 there was a vacancy for the position of subject coordinator (now called Head of Department) of Computing which I applied and was accepted for. This meant that together with the Head of School, I also had to report to an Education Officer (EO). The four I had since were all males. One of them was the laissez-faire type that I never really could relate with, although we were never on bad terms! Another one gave the impression that he was strict and unsympathetic, but perceptions sometimes led you astray. He was a hard worker and I learned many skills from him. He used to trust me so much and we have remained very good friends. Another EO was a real perfectionist and a stickler for detail, but he was also open to suggestions and he knew when to accept them. (*With satisfaction and compassion*) The other EO was one of a kind and I cannot find enough words to describe him; he was a friend, companion, confidant, and a leader.

Gradual crescendo of Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “Leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation.”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Bennis, 2009, p. 233.

Robert: Without a doubt, every Head of School and EO left some kind of mark on me, acting differently on my metamorphoses, but apart from the EO I mentioned last, I cannot really relate to any of these leaders as ones who empowered their followers and tried to help the followers to grow and excel in their abilities. Many of these leaders did not inspire the same development, growth and learning experiences which I obtained from the Salesians or from the rector of my secondary school.⁵⁸

I believe a leader is someone with vision, ideas, who gives direction, and is inspirational, but the mentioned EO was much more. (*With compassion*) Apart from having a long-term vision and steady values, he was one of us and one of his objectives was that we learn and grow together. His leadership influence was an active source of inspiration based on principles, values and beliefs, and for him, respect, justice, honesty and helping others were embodied in his daily life. He was a patient listener and very reflective, and yet at the same time he was able to take decisions. With his calm character, he had excellent managerial skills. He could adapt to different situations, and as an educational leader he always fought for the rights and benefits of both teachers and students. He was unique and it would not be easy to find a leader of his calibre.

Three-minute adverts.

Josette and Robert take off the headphones, drink some water and chat.

20 seconds to commence. Josette and Robert wear the headphones and arrange the microphones.

⁵⁸ Scene 8: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*; Scene 7: *Practicing flying – Secondary school.*

The presenter is signalling the downward count with her fingers: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. 'On Air' red light on.

Presenter: Once more, welcome back to the last part of today's 'Sharing Our Lives'. Today we have Robert Vella speaking about the impact of the leaders in his life.

Gradual crescendo of Toddzero's 'We Will Win'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 11: Influence of Politics

“Her leaders are like roaring lions hunting for their victims—out for everything that they can get.”⁵⁹

Robert: Maltese society is known for generosity and kindness, (*With emphasis*) but then people are also known for their biting tongues! Two elements of the local social realm which have proven to be very divisive are soccer and politics. Football is not my game, so it has never really troubled me. However, from a young age politics has always fascinated me for various reasons, even though I am not a politician. During my teens, the political scenario in Malta was very tense, with lots of clashes and brawls between rival supporters and the police forces, and even political homicides. These tensions influenced me a lot.

For as long as I can remember, Maltese politics were dominated by two political parties, the Malta Labour Party (PL) and the Nationalist Party (PN), and so many families are either

⁵⁹ Zephaniah 3:3, (TLB).

labourites or nationalists. When I was growing up, Malta was under the Labour Party until 1987 with Dom Mintoff being the Prime Minister for most of this period. Although his introduction of the welfare state should be commended, it was shocking to witness his authoritarian leadership. It was an era during which the education system was failing and many basic needs were not being addressed. In 1981 Mintoff managed to get the majority of seats in parliament but not the absolute majority of votes, implying that constitutionally he could form the government but leading to even more disputes in the country. (*Disturbed*) In the same legislature Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici took Mintoff's place as Prime Minister, but the situation worsened with the killing of Nationalist activist Raymond Caruana, attacks on the Bishop's curia and media houses, and also severe bloody attacks during political meetings. Ultimately, a change in the constitution was approved and the party with an absolute majority of votes would rule. Eventually, in 1987 the Nationalist Party came to power.

Eddie Fenech Adami took over as Prime Minister in 1987. Through his legislatures many reforms were made. Obviously, it was not always plain sailing during the long Nationalist rule, particularly during their last legislature when corruption claims featured frequently in newspapers. Fenech Adami was elected with the slogan "Employment. Justice. Liberty." and upon being elected one of his major tasks was national reconciliation.⁶⁰ He was very pro-EU and in spite of many obstacles he managed to successfully steer Malta towards EU membership in 2004. In my opinion, Fenech Adami will be mostly remembered for his visionary traits as a leader.

Gradual crescendo of Toddzero's 'We Will Win'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

⁶⁰ Fenech Adami, E. (2016). *L-aktar elezzjoni kruċjali fi 52 sena ta' sovranià*. Retrieved from <http://eddiefenechadami.org/l-aktar-elezzjoni-krucjali-fi-52-sena-ta-sovranita/>

Presenter: Leadership “[...] gives purpose, meaning, and guidance to collectivities by articulating a collective vision that appeals to ideological values, motives, and self-perceptions of followers.”⁶¹

Robert: (*Calm voice*) It is worth mentioning that from 1974, since the first constitution of the Republic, Malta has had ten presidents, two of whom were females: Agatha Barbara (1982) and Marie Louise Coleiro Preca (2014). In Malta the president is just a figurehead and has no real say. We have never had a female prime minister and neither the PL nor the PN have ever had a female party leader or deputy leader. Following Mintoff and Fenech Adami, we had five more prime ministers, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici (PL – 1984), Alfred Sant (PL – 1996), Lawrence Gonzi (PN – 2004), Joseph Muscat (PL – 2013)—due to pressure from street protests in relation to the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, Muscat stepped down on January 13, 2020—and currently Robert Abela (PL – 2020), and although they influenced me in various ways, it was Mintoff and Fenech Adami who really had the greatest impact on.

Mintoff, often called Dom Mintoff or “il-Perit” (the Architect), was also referred to as “is-Salvatur” (the Saviour). His leadership style provoked many disputes with the Catholic Church and led to the Church’s interdiction of the party. Still he was loved by many and with his socialist principles, he expanded the public sector, created the welfare state, revised gender equality laws, and under his government Malta also became a Republic. In my view, his leadership style was that of an authoritarian who endorsed transactional leadership. He was the strict *father*, concerned with what had to be done under strict supervision, with punishment and total control being his forte.

⁶¹ House, 1995, p. 413.

Fenech Adami was more of the charismatic type. Although he also wanted things done, he had a more seemingly democratic way of going about it. Particularly during his first years as Prime Minister, he made his best to inculcate social justice; with the help of his team he understood social issues and crafted new policies to solve problems which were left on the shelf for several years. With his charismatic character he made every attempt to raise awareness about ethical issues and used his power for the common good. In general, he had strong values and led by example.

Due to dearth of local female members of parliament, current discourse suggests the need for a quota to amend this discrepancy. The idea is not welcomed by many people and this intervention may not be needed in the near future, although this may give the possibility of having a female prime minister for the first time in Malta.

Gradual crescendo of F. R. David's 'Words don't come easy'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter:

Scene 12: Crowned Hairstreak - My Rock, My Life

“Chains do not hold a marriage together. It is threads, hundreds of tiny threads, which sew people together through the years.”⁶²

Robert: (*Calm voice*) Reaching the end of my story, I cannot overlook a female who has influenced me throughout these last thirty years. She has guided, sustained, and directed me, as well as given me love. This particular person is Josette, my wife, the crowned hairstreak

⁶² Simone Signoret (1921 – 1985): French cinema actress. Signoret, S. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/06/10/thread/>

who flew with me to flowers, weeds or thorns.⁶³ She is the mother of our three children—John, Steve and Marija—who themselves strive to be authentic leaders. Although as a parent leader I try to empower, nurture, and help them to achieve their dreams, many times they reciprocate much more than I actually give them.

Gradual crescendo of NF's 'If You Want Love'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”⁶⁴

Robert: (*With passion*) Commitment, compassion, courage, fairness, friendship, helping others, honesty, love, sincerity, trustworthiness, truth, and hard work; these are a few words to describe effective leadership. I attribute many of these qualities to Josette, whose leadership style is ineffable. Her kindness, hard work, determination, straightforwardness, helpful disposition, and above all, her love, are traits which she enshrines. A study found that women are much better than men at multitasking and this holds well for Josette.⁶⁵ She is very efficient at switching between tasks and organising things according to priorities. She is always there to help when this is needed. (*Slow and affectionate*) She is a friend, a mother, a wife, a leader, and above all, she is love.

Gradual crescendo of Celtic Women's 'The Call'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

⁶³ *Eveus coronata*, the crowned hairstreak, is a butterfly of the Lycaenidae family.

⁶⁴ John Quincy Adams (1767 – 1848): American statesman who served as the sixth President of the United States. Adams, J. Q. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.passiton.com/inspirational-quotes/6728-if-your-actions-inspire-others-to-dream-more>

⁶⁵ Morgan, 2013.

Presenter: Dear listeners we have come to our last scene.

Scene 13: Epilogue – The butterfly in me

“You can never regret anything you do in life. You kind of have to learn the lesson from whatever the experience is and take it with you on your journey forward.”⁶⁶

Robert: Life events are various: some nice, some a little less and others are a little nicer. In my view, they are all noteworthy as long as they are a means to grow and learn. Self-belief is an important aspect in one’s life and as with the life of a butterfly, most events are a means of change and growth.

Growing up, and despite being quite timid by nature, I always involved myself in leading positions. At school I was chosen as class prefect several times, for some years I led the Salesian vocation group in Gozo, while at university I formed part of the GUG (Gozo University Group). As chairperson for various groups, I coordinated different European projects and assumed other leading positions. All these and other experiences contributed to the formation of different butterflies in me. The people mentioned in this story were the key figures who helped me through my journey.

(Sad) Since this is a study concerning women and because of my beliefs as a social justice researcher seeking multiple truths, information and knowledge, I could not leave unnoticed or forgotten the tragic car bomb which occurred in October 2017, during the journey of this study, and which stole the life of Daphne Caruana Galizia, a Maltese journalist and blogger

⁶⁶ Audrey O’Day (b. 1984): American singer-songwriter and reality television personality. O’Day, A. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/audrey_oday_496389

known for her anti-corruption writings and reports about political events in Malta.⁶⁷ I was in Norway on a school project when my son, John, phoned me—immediately after the explosion and gave me the news. I could not believe what had happened in Malta. She was very controversial and although I was not always in agreement with her writings, I still considered her to be very influential and admired her for not being afraid to give voice to the truth. She was a woman of guts, and surely, she did not deserve to die in this way, especially because of speaking out. Indeed, no one deserves to die in this way!

I cannot end this story without mentioning a female leader who really impacted me during this doctoral journey. I have never met Professor Sikes, my tutor, face to face as we communicate by emails and Skype. She was a pillar in every step of the way. Without having even met her, she made me feel welcome. I remember the first time I sent her the first draft from a literature review section and she answered to the tune of, “This is a journalistic piece. Start your literature review from scratch.” It is not difficult to imagine the frustration that this sort of reply provoked in someone who had spent hours writing up a literature review. After some time, however, I realised what her intentions were and that this was after all her job. Professor Sikes is very critical but in a constructive way. She is straightforward and strict but maintains a positive attitude. This particular manner of hers has impressed me and I have learned so much from her.

Before closing the curtain for this drama (*pause*), which I would rather refer to as yet another metamorphosis, an opening, I would like to narrate an episode that occurred during this doctorate journey. The whole family—my wife, the three children and myself—decided to spend a weekend in Bratislava. Bratislava is nice but what I want to share with the audience

⁶⁷ This event was also mentioned by one of the participants in this study. Refer to Chapter 6.

is a photo I took at the Malta International Airport before our holiday started. The photo is of a quote by an unknown author (*showing the photo to Josette*) and since the audience cannot see the picture, I will read it.

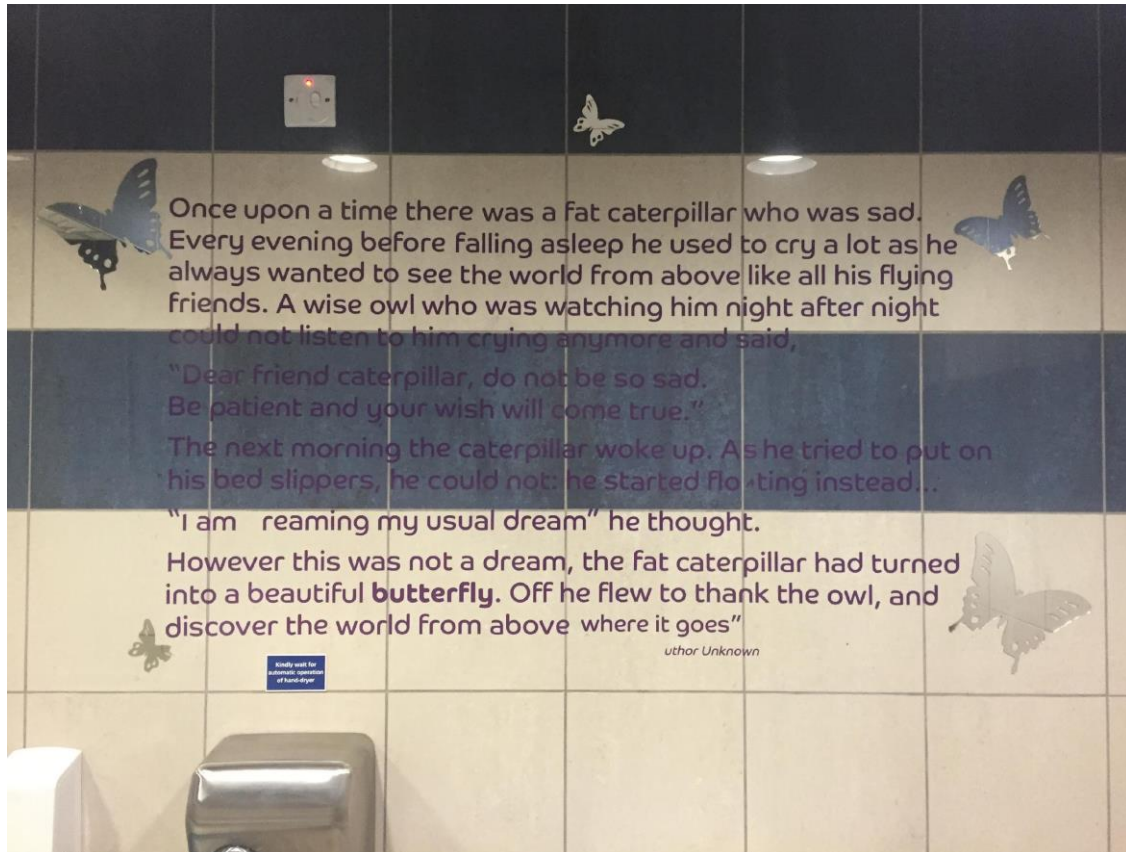


Figure 4.2. Photo taken at Malta International Airport.

Once upon a time there was a fat caterpillar who was sad. Every evening before falling asleep he used to cry a lot as he always wanted to see the world from above like all his flying friends. A wise owl who was watching him night after night could not listen to him crying anymore and said, "Dear friend caterpillar, do not be sad. Be patient and your wish will come true." The next morning the caterpillar woke up. As he tried to put on his bed slippers he could not: he started floating instead... "I am reaming my usual dream" he thought. However this was not a dream, the fat

caterpillar had turned into a beautiful butterfly. Off he flew to thank the owl, and discover the world from above where it goes.

I will let the audience interpret this quote but I will say that (*pause*) it is nice to dream (*pause*) and that our lives are also like a metamorphosis; like the life-cycle of the butterfly, our lives are sometimes dull and sometimes full of colours.

Much of this memoir was written while conducting the interviews for this study, analysing them, and writing the narratives of the participants. Narrative inquiry is a dynamic process and writing this story together with that of the participants in this study helped me to better appreciate the participants' different perspectives.

Although several females have had an impact on my life, this story clearly shows that most of the leaders in my life were males, and from this perspective, the story speaks for itself.

Would life have been different if I had had a combination of leaders?

Gradual crescendo of Celtic Women's 'The Call'. Music fades out and remains in the background.

Presenter: "There are lots of people I admire and respect, but I don't necessarily want to be like them. I'm too happy being myself."⁶⁸

Robert: Each event in our lives represents different stages of a butterfly's metamorphosis. So, fly, fly butterfly, fly, and roam. Sometimes it's downhill, on other days it's uphill.

⁶⁸ James D'Arcy (b. 1975): British actor. D'Arcy, J. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/james_darcy_233746

Sometimes it's on flowers and at other times on thorns. Whatever it may be, never cease to fly and roam.

A Butterfly I Will Be

When I Fly

...

Full text of the poem is found at: <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/451767406361505544/>

...

days a Butterfly I will be. (Lonnie Horsey)⁶⁹

(Reading slowly) Life is full of memories, sometimes of sadness but many a time of joys and blessings, it all depends on which side of the coin we look at. *(Pause)* These were just flashes of my life journey, sparks which have marked my existence. Some were somewhat bitter but most of them were sweeter than honey. With the curtain closing on this Act, I cannot but refer to a quote by the American actress Kelly McGillis: "Life is a journey and it's about growing and changing and coming to terms with who and what you are and loving who and what you are."⁷⁰

Presenter: Wow! You will agree with me that this was a great story. This brings us to the end of this second programme of 'Sharing Our Lives'. We meet again in a week's time at the same time at six in the evening with another life story. John and Steve, who are brothers and business partners, will be joining us for the third programme. Until then, I, Josette say good-bye and God Bless.

⁶⁹ Horsey, L. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/451767406361505544/>

⁷⁰ Kelly McGillis (b. 1957): American actress. McGillis, K. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/kelly_mcgillis_460119

Instrumental music fading in. 'Off Air' lights on. Josette and Robert exit the studio and have a chat. Robert exits the radio station.

Concluding Note

This chapter helped me remember and share some of the events in my life which I hope the audience can relate to. The events recalled are related to the theme of leadership and involve those leaders in my life who have impacted me either positively or negatively. My narrative has also taken into consideration the scarcity of female leaders I have had in my life.

Although my intention in this chapter and the two that follow was to begin with a humorous picture vignette and end with a reflective one, for this particular chapter I could not choose between these two vignettes. The first one is by Richard Bach and its quote succinctly encapsulates the different scenes in this chapter.⁷¹ The second one is by Courtney Peppernell and is also a description of one's life journey.⁷²

⁷¹ Richard Bach (b. 1936): American writer. Watts, D. A. (2017). "*What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly*" is a saying from the book "*Illusions*". *What does it actually mean?* Retrieved from <https://www.quora.com/What-the-caterpillar-calls-the-end-of-the-world-the-master-calls-a-butterfly-is-a-saying-from-the-book-Illusions-What-does-it-actually-mean>

⁷² Courtney Peppernell (b. 1991): Australian author. York, M. (2019). *Learning To Read Each Chapter Of Life's Story*. Retrieved from <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/read-each-chapter-life-story>

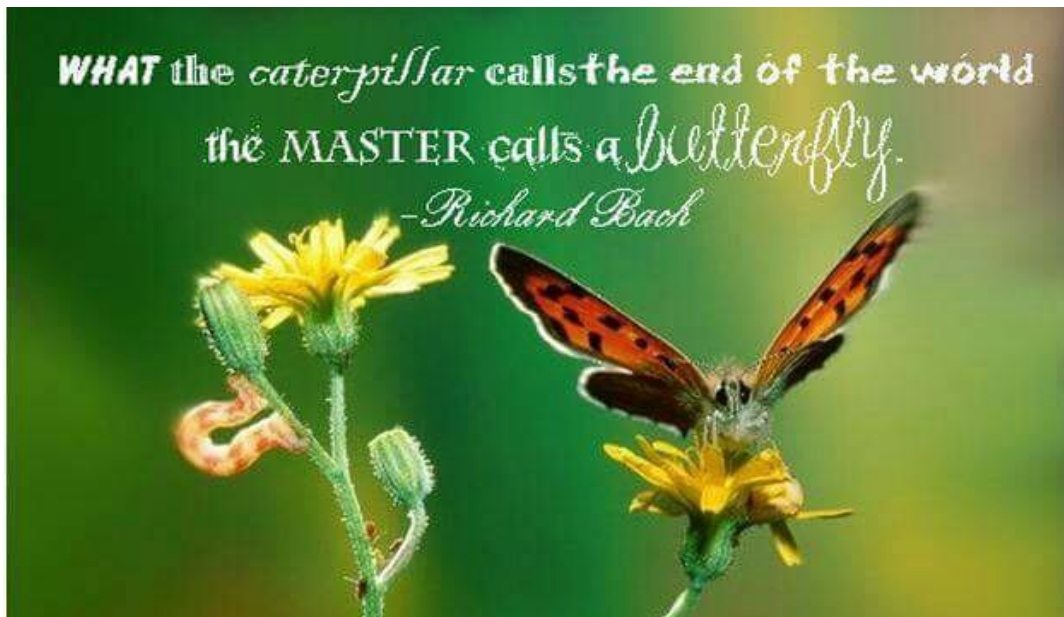


Figure 4.3. The caterpillar and the butterfly.⁷³

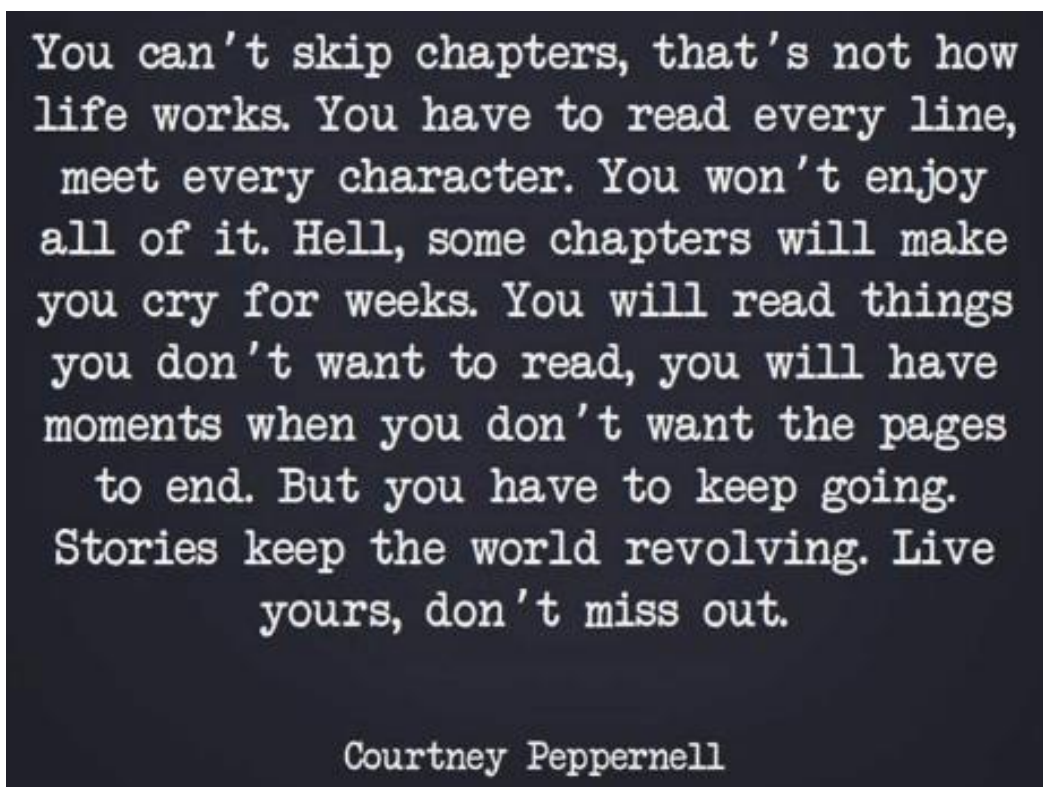


Figure 4.4. Chapters.⁷⁴

⁷³ butterfly... [Digital Image]. (2012). Retrieved from <https://yellowstaressentials.wordpress.com/2012/09/12/butterfly-quote-of-the-day/>

⁷⁴ Meme. [Digital Image]. Retrieved from <https://me.me/i/you-cant-skip-chapters-thats-not-how-life-works-you-6fb8cca9a3094843b765bdbefa4b02ac>

Chapter 5 - Curtain Opening for The Act of Voices - Act 2: Part 1

Preface: The Stage

All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.

–William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*⁷⁵)

According to Steeves (1994), “Narratives represent a world in motion as mediated by some voice relating a story of the world to an audience” (p. 25). Having related the story of my experiences, Act 2 follows, presented in two chapters and with the main actors being top female educational leaders, since as Steeves (1994) asserts, it is then that the audience will understand the story better. Using theatre as an art form, I crafted this narrative drama from my collected data to give voice to the leaders (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Using drama in social research embraces the Shakespearian notion that “All the world's a stage, / And all men and women merely players”, from the standpoint that “people can be seen to actively manage their social performances to construct impressions and evoke desired responses in their audience” (Cook, 2008, p. 233).

While conducting the interviews, taking notes, transcribing and then analysing the transcriptions, it soon became clear that while some points of view / observations / opinions were shared by all the eight actors, simultaneously, there were many contrasting details, making the drama even more interesting. These similarities and incongruences convinced me even more that the narrative drama was the way forward to *tell* and *show* what I was doing; it was a “moment of epiphany” (Mifsud, 2014, p. 139), as I was released from the pressure and tension of how I really wanted to present my findings.

Again, I feel the need to stress that the exact details are not important, in the sense that although the narratives refer to a particular person or experience, the narratives are my

⁷⁵ William Shakespeare (1564-1616): English poet, playwright and actor.

interpretation of the collected data. Different persons can interpret them differently, yet all stories are written to provide some kind of knowledge and are used “to create the truths of professional and personal lives” where “the purpose [...] is to tell the truth as one sees it” (Clough, 2002, p. 17). In light of Clough’s (2002) position, one must bear in mind that in research “a *version* of the truth” is presented from the perspective of the researcher (p. 18).

The performance I present here, together with the process of self-reflexivity I applied throughout my research, helped me to acquire “truths” from polyvocal actors (van Stapele, 2014). This performance presents an analysis of the data in my project after conducting in-depth interviews, and exploring the careers of top female leaders and how they managed to achieve their head position. I followed the notion of epistemology which defines the acquisition of knowledge from social relations and interactions, where knowledge is understood to be related to the world “that is determined historically, locally and personally” (van Stapele, 2014, p. 14). After carrying out the “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5), I focused on seven main themes from the transcribed interviews, namely: how these leaders arrived at their positions; their interpretation of leadership; the Maltese culture regarding females in a senior position; the obstacles in the way to becoming and being a female leader; their perception of the scarcity of female leaders; suggested solutions to reduce this underrepresentation; and the importance of relationships from a leading position. Following the identification of these seven themes I moved from being the inquirer to the storyteller (Clandinin, 2013) by way of a drama divided into two parts. Act 2: Part 1 represents my observations and interpretations together with the data the leaders gave me before the interview commenced, with the participants being fully aware of the intended use of this data. The three scenes that follow in Part 1 of Act 2 are intended to draw the audience into the atmosphere of this drama and thus visualise the drama clearly. These scenes describe ‘The Cast’, ‘The Scenery’, and ‘The Costumes’. Part 2 of Act 2 follows in the next chapter,

which dramatises the seven themes from the interviews. Transcribed verbatim quotes and translations from Maltese to English, depending on how the actors responded during the interview, were used to craft the drama, complemented by observed gestures, facial expressions, my own imagination and interpretation, and some material from published documents.

Presenting data in a narrative account may raise issues of trustworthiness (Polkinghorne, 2007). To address these issues, I used direct quotes from the interviewees together with views from published documents, and my own interpretation, including observations which could not be audio recorded during the interviews.

Play Conventions

The conventions used for Act 2, Parts 1 and 2, presented in two chapters, are as follows:

- **Bold typeface** represents the name of the actor;
- **Actor's name in bold typeface followed by normal typeface after the colon** indicates the participants' verbatim quotes from the interview, some of which had to be translated from Maltese to English;
- **Italicised text** indicates the participants' reaction but is not verbatim. Long quotes were paraphrased, in particular when the participants were speaking out of context as they referred to a different episode before returning to their original experience;
- **Ellipsis or description within a square bracket, [...]**, represent an omission from the transcript for anonymity purposes;
- **Three dashes, ---**, represent a pause (silence) and more dashes indicate a longer pause;
- **Capitalised text** represents the speaker's emphasis;
- **Italicised text in brackets, (XYZ)**, represent the actors' feelings or expressions.

Poster for the Drama



Figure 5.1. Marketing poster for the drama.

Act 2: Part 1

Audience: (*Chuckling and chattering*)

Yiruma's track 'River Flows in You' plays. Gradual crescendo of music. After one minute, music fades out and remains in the background.

Screen slides down in front of curtain and the narrator takes his place in front of the microphone next to the screen.

Narrator: Please take your seats so we may commence...

Recorded voice introduces first scene.

Scene 1: Leadership

Recorded voice: “To have any real effect at local level, school leaders must know how and why the system operates as it does and exactly how some interests win out over others.”⁷⁶

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, we open the curtain for Act 2 – Part 1 by showing you the importance of influence in leadership, together with the leader’s vision --- Projector.

Narrator exits the stage.



*Figure 5.2. Leadership and Vision.*⁷⁷

Audience: *(Giggling and clapping)*

Projector switched off and screen slides up after two minutes.

⁷⁶ Starr, 2017, p. 40.

⁷⁷ [Digital Image]. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/515662226061690733/?lp=true>

Gradual crescendo of music. Curtain slowly opens. Music fades out and remains in the background.

We see sofas around a coffee table. A bright light is lit on the stage. The narrator slowly comes out with a head-mounted microphone facing the audience and walking slowly around the stage.

Recorded voice introduces the second scene.

Scene 2: The Cast

Recorded voice: “I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.”⁷⁸

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, the American actress Stella Adler once declared that “The theatre was created to tell people the truth about life and the social situation,” and that is what I am going to present to you, the “truths” of the lives of THE female educational leaders in the education department of Malta, leaders who dedicate themselves at a great cost, and as most of them insist repeatedly, all for the benefit of our students.⁷⁹ Before the actual play begins, together with the actors I will present the cast, the various stage settings, and the costumes of the actors.

The cast is composed of the voices of the eight leaders, who for anonymity reasons have been given the fictitious names of Anne, Belle, Cate, Deb, Emma, Fae, Gail, and Hayley. At the

⁷⁸ Oscar Wilde (1854-1900): Irish poet and playwright. Wilde, O. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.dramaonlinelibrary.com/content/media/New%20bookmark%20-%20students.pdf>

⁷⁹ Stella Adler (1901-1992): American actress and acting teacher. Adler, S. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/stella_adler_284615

end of each interview, after the record button was turned off, there was always an informal chat with the participant. Admittedly, this would have elaborated on their contribution, but to retain privacy, such information was totally excluded.⁸⁰

Ida comes out and sits on a sofa, she has a cup of coffee in her hand.

Narrator: Together with these eight leaders, I present Ida, the ninth leader. Ida was *allowed* to observe and take notes during the interviews. Ida is an “extra”, she’s the devil’s advocate. Ida will help by inserting literature excerpts from different publications which I deem important to a particular scene. She will also present some of my interpretations. In this way, I hope that the drama *speaks* louder, thus making it more easily understandable.⁸¹

The other eight actors come out on the stage, all with head-mounted microphones, some chatting amongst themselves. All of them have a drink in their hand, either coffee, tea or water. All except for Anne take a seat on the sofa around the table.

Narrator: Our final actor for this drama is myself, Robert, a doctoral researcher playing several roles in this project; Robert is the researcher, inquirer, author, producer, narrator and interpreter, whose presence pervades the whole process. However, for this particular act, I am taking the role of NARRATOR. As a narrator or commentator, my running commentary on events will be supplemented by critical observations, analysis and interpretations. Before plunging into our story, it is essential to present some of the main actors --- Anne had never

⁸⁰ Schutt, 2006.

⁸¹ Gallop, 1997.

thought of holding her current leadership role. In fact, she had not even thought of becoming an Assistant-Head⁸², or a Head of School...

Anne: *(Interrupting and addressing the audience)* I believe it was the encouragement of one of my Heads of School [...] when I was an Assistant-Head who pushed me to further my studies in leadership --- and suddenly I found myself ideally placed for leadership roles. Nonetheless, when I was still a teacher I spent [...] years teaching and one of my heads had encouraged me to apply for the post of an Assistant-Head, but I was not interested at that time.

Anne sits down next to the others.

Narrator: Belle is full of enthusiasm and she commends me warmly for my doctoral research. She says that's one of her dreams, which she is fully intent on achieving. Belle describes herself as...

Belle: *(Sitting and talking to the other leaders)* Well ... I'm [Belle] and in brief this is who I am. *In my life I had the opportunity to move from one different job to another. This meant I had the chance to come across different professions. All these opportunities infused me with strength, energy and thirst to strive and aspire, particularly in consideration of the fact that I started my employment from a lowly position.*

Cate: *(Very enthusiastic with an air of self-satisfaction)* Well, from an early age, even from the tender age of kindergarten, and then primary and secondary, for some reason or another I

⁸² Deputy-Heads in Malta are normally referred to as Assistant-Heads.

was always given leadership roles. Even when it came to drama, I was always chosen for a main part. Many times, I chaired meetings and was always a smart organiser, maybe since I was always available for others, and it was always a great satisfaction for me.

Narrator: In a similar way to Cate, Deb enthusiastically narrates how from an early age, she was always interested in leadership positions, and this is how she recalls her student years...

Deb: *(With her hand on her head, narrating passionately and trying to remember all the details)* Look --- --- even when I was young, and I was still a student in primary and secondary school, I was always the sort of student who would take the lead, okay. I was often involved in a leadership role, be it to get elected as class prefect, or to be in charge of the class library, perhaps to take names of students, or collect money for photocopies --- and this inclination for leadership roles was replicated in organisations outside the school, like when I used to attend religious groups, for example [...] I always had some sort of key position, whether it was taking care of the financial aspect of the group or else taking minutes of the meetings held.

Narrator: Emma barely refers to her early years and the only aspect she mentions about her previous experiences is that before her present post she had served for several years in a lower grade in the education department.

Fae: *(It's seems that Fae has many things on her mind)* I never planned --- --- never planned to take this position as [...] but as a young girl I always wanted to be in education, I always wanted to be a teacher. That's where my journey started. My situation right now is very demanding --- --- ---.

Gail: [Name of School] --- that was my career path as an Assistant-Head, then Head of School --- I applied for Head of School --- It was challenging but I never found any problems --- --- real problems --- --- (*Excited*) maybe because of my leadership skills --- I think because of my attitude towards my profession and even towards my clients, MAINLY the children and students --- I always maintained a positive rapport with the students and even with the staff, so that makes things easier for a person in a leadership position.

Narrator: Hayley is a person of few words, and it is very clear that she is overloaded with work, but at the same time it is even clearer that she is an effective manager. In a few words, this is how she describes herself:

Hayley: (*Cautiously*) *Over the last few years I was working in the education department, but before I had several roles in different departments.*

Ida stands up and moves around.

Ida: It seems that all our actors come from different realities. They are all travelling their own journey and each one of them tries their best to carry their heavy baggage, maybe lightening it up somewhat with the help of others.⁸³ Some of them have always worked in the educational sector but others have passed through different routes. It is debatable whether leaders are born or made, and while some studies confirm that “leaders are born”, others claim that “leaders, especially outstanding leaders, are developed over time through hard work and lived experiences”.⁸⁴ Apart from these assertions, it also transpires that people sometimes happen to be in the right place at the right time, giving them the ideal opportunity

⁸³ Miller & Brimicombe, 2004.

⁸⁴ Boerma et al., 2017, p. 58.

in their lives. Evidently, some actors are readier than others to expose and share their life story, while others are more reserved and sometimes prefer silence. While observing and interpreting silence is not always an easy task, it is worthwhile to bear in mind that, “silence is a salient part of the learning process”.⁸⁵

Gradual crescendo of music for a while. Actors exiting while curtain slowly closes and the screen is lowered. Music fades out and remains in the background. Narrator and Ida enter in front of the curtain and take place on either side of the screen.

Narrator: Projector please...

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) Although it is not my intention to annoy you with statistics, the following four slides are meant to add colour to the portrait of our leaders, allowing for a deeper appreciation of their role in this drama. The first slide⁸⁶ represents the age range of our actors, while the one that follows⁸⁷ shows the number of years in their present appointment.

⁸⁵ Armstrong, 2007, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Figure 5.3.

⁸⁷ Figure 5.4.

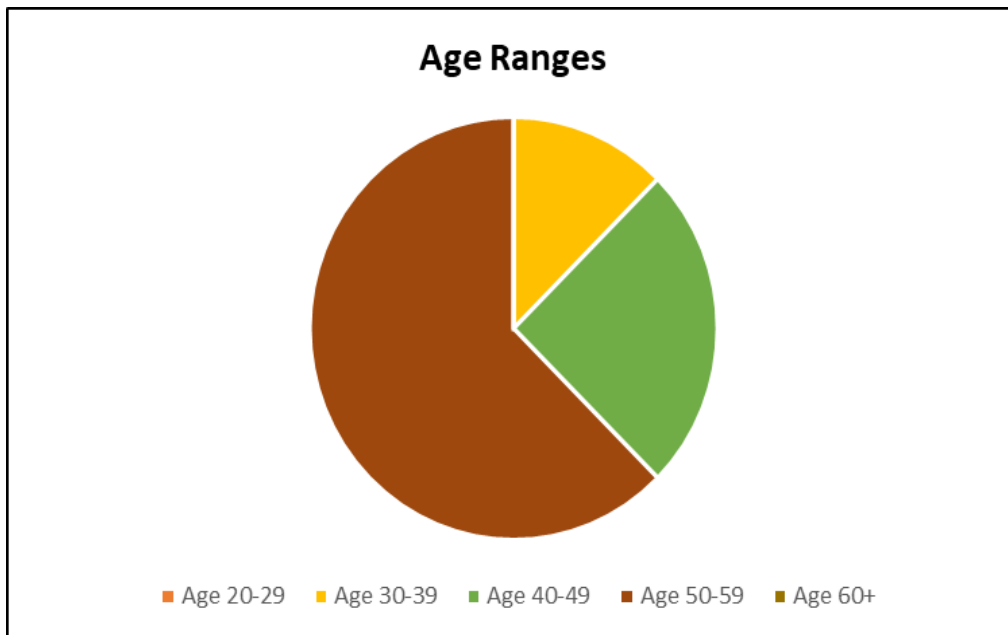


Figure 5.3. Age ranges of leaders.

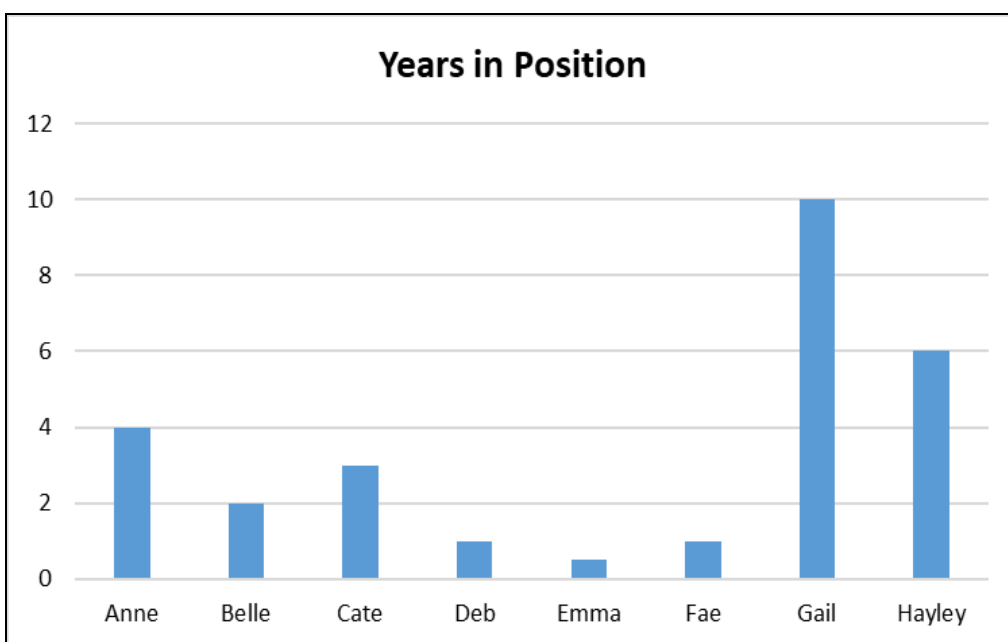


Figure 5.4. Years in position.

Ida: (First addressing the narrator and then turning to the audience) As can be noticed from the first slide, while there are no leaders in the range of 20-29 and 60+, out of the eight leaders, one is in the 30-39 age range, two in the 40-49 age range, and those in the range 50-

59 years amount to five. Also, in the second slide it can be observed that apart from Gail having occupied her position for ten years and Hayley for six years, the other six leaders have been in their positions for not more than four years. The main fact which emerges from both charts is that the majority of these leaders had reached their current position at the age of 45 or over. This observation is worthy of further consideration.

Belle comes out in front of the curtain in a fast pace and addresses the audience.

Belle: (*Interrupting*) It is not the education but --- but do not forget that at university there are often more females than males, so it is not the education level --- it is when you decide if you are going to get married or not, it is then that something happens which impedes women from going into top management. They stop for a period and maybe that is why research reveals that some women in top leadership posts are over 45-50. So that means that for a 20-year period they offered their service to the family and only later when the family had been established and moving on did they look for higher positions.

Ida: (*Sarcastically*) No WONDER some women nowadays decide not to marry or have children! This observation on the effect of family life on women's careers concurs with many studies. Grummell et al., when conducting a study in Ireland about gender and leadership, confirm that rearing children and taking care of family members is a challenge for women.⁸⁸ Likewise, Hebreard, in her paper entitled "Women with Children Leaving Mid-level Student Affairs Positions", confirms this phenomenon about American women.⁸⁹ Some other studies confirming this phenomenon are those of: Metcalfe and González in USA, McKillop and

⁸⁸ 2009.

⁸⁹ 2010.

Moorosi in UK, and Huang and Sverke in Sweden.⁹⁰ In Malta, Boissevain Abela, Borg and Clark, and Cachia also confirm this trend.⁹¹ Following these assertions, Kim and Cook then argue that for these reasons, women take a longer time to reach leadership positions.⁹²

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) The next two slides⁹³ show the marital status of the leaders and whether they have children or not.

Gradual crescendo of music while audience has some time to look at both slides. Music then fades out and remains in the background.

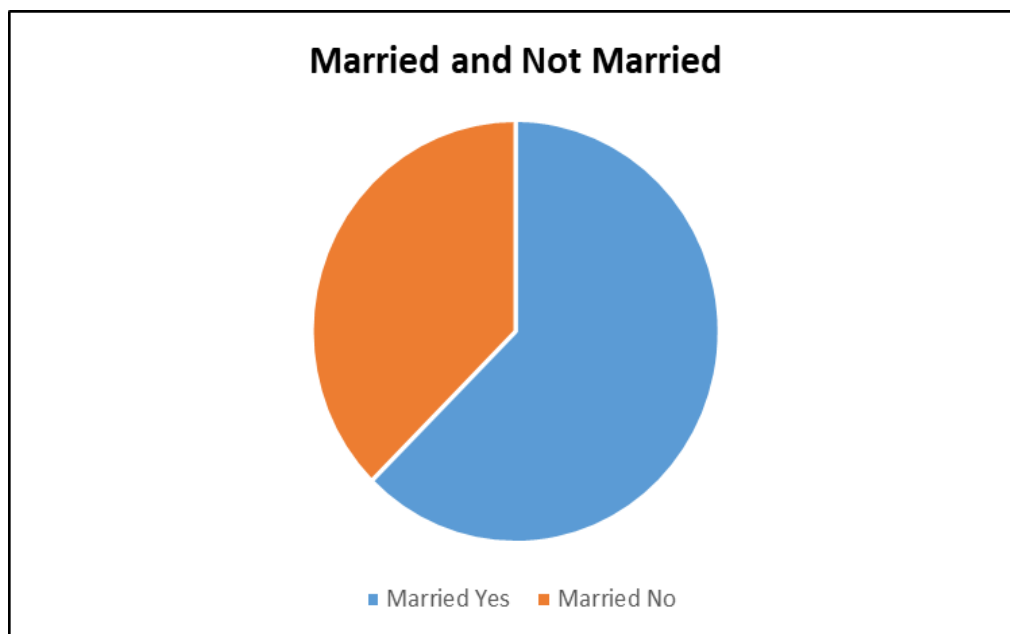


Figure 5.5. Married and Not Married.

⁹⁰ 2013; 2017; 2006.

⁹¹ 1972; 1994; 2007; 2012.

⁹² 2012.

⁹³ Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6.

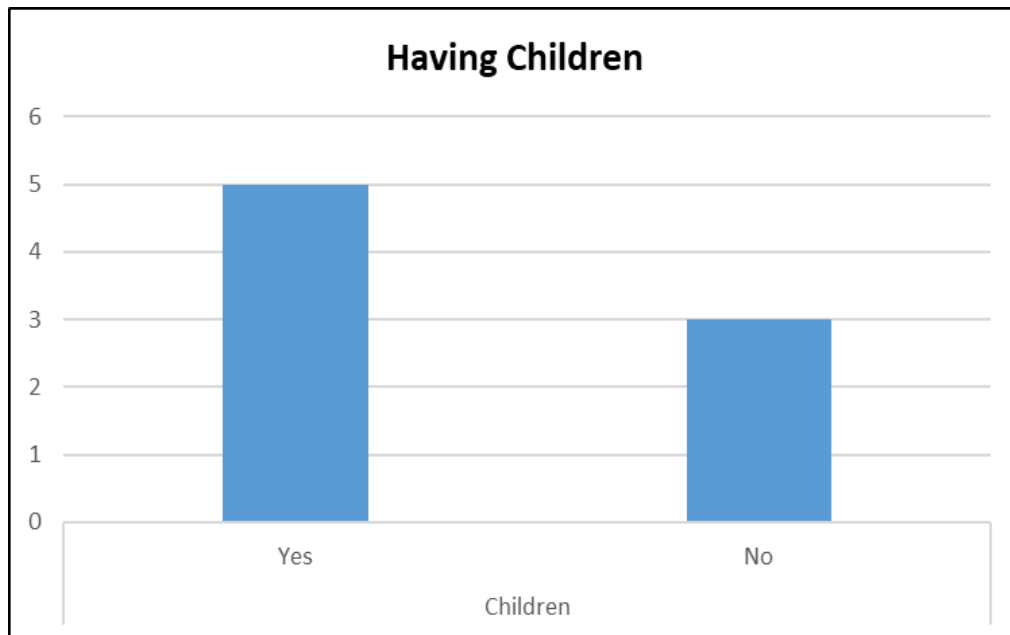


Figure 5.6. Having Children.

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) Five of the eight leaders are married and the same number have children. Some of the unmarried leaders have children. Two of the married leaders who have remained without children claim that not having children was their conscious decision, as otherwise, it would have been difficult rearing children while simultaneously furthering their career. The children of the majority of leaders are over 18 years of age and are thus now independent adults.

Ida: (*Looking at the narrator*) All these numbers and percentages speak for themselves. This suggests that the aforementioned claims that the path for women is often slower and longer due to family affairs somehow affects the promotion of women to higher positions in society, including those in the educational sector. Also, it appears that like UK, women in Malta are disadvantaged because of their age when it comes for their future professions.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Guihen 2018.

Narrator: This scene has presented the cast for this drama. The next scene briefly describes where the actors spend their time between managing their duties and leading their followers.

Gradual crescendo of music. Screen tilts up slowly. Music fades out and remains in the background. Narrator and Ida remain on stage with a spotlight on both of them.

Recorded voice introduces third scene.

Scene 3: The Scenery

Recorded voice: “A poet or prose narrator usually looks back on what he has achieved against a backdrop of the years that have passed, generally finding that some of these achievements are acceptable, while others are less so.”⁹⁵

Narrator: (*Addressing audience*) I proceed to give a brief description of the eight different backdrops where the actors spend much of their time acting out their drama. These settings are the ones where I interviewed these leaders to craft this performance. This brief description permits the audience to gain a clearer picture of the environment where these leaders carry out much of their work. By this I am not implying that these leaders spend all their time in their office, since I am sure that to perform their work, they spend a lot of time elsewhere. These settings will however help me to introduce the backdrops of the different scenes in Part 2 of this drama. According to the Cambridge dictionary, a backdrop is the background “at the back of a stage during a performance” or “the view behind something”, and that is the intention of this concise narration: to set the scene for the drama.⁹⁶ Also, the

⁹⁵ Eyvind Johnson (1900 – 1976): Swedish novelist and short story writer. Johnson, E. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://images.brainyquote.com/quotes/eyvind_johnson_352032?src=t_acceptable

⁹⁶ Cambridge Dictionary (online). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/backdrop>

environment creates a sense of collegiality in terms of how these backdrops reveal the nature of the interactions these leaders have with their immediate colleagues at work. I then leave it up to the audience to imagine and reflect on each scene.

Ida: (*Addressing audience*) In 1974, Eyvind Johnson in the banquet speech for the Nobel Prize in literature described how a narrator would look back onto the past and re-live the main episodes, some with great satisfaction and others less so. He insisted on the importance of self-criticism, a suggestion to leaders also acknowledged by the educational authors Blase and Blase in promoting reflection for professional growth, a concept recognised by our actors.⁹⁷ Following an oratorical speech in praise of teachers as the centre of his achievements, Johnson ended with the words: “And this we should believe: that hope and volition can bring us closer to our ultimate goal: justice for all, injustice for no-one”, which encapsulate one of the main objectives of this project.⁹⁸ In a way these eight leaders are all narrators of their own story, and their *backdrops* supplement their narrative, sometimes carrying a heavy baggage and at other times a lighter one.

Narrator: Backdrop_Anne. Inside the well-organised office, one could smell the welcoming air: a very well-equipped office, large enough to host board meetings, well-kept and neat. Anne applies a knock and wait policy but is friendly with her colleagues and always has a ready smile.

Narrator: Backdrop_Belle. The second backdrop is a small cosy office, and although the shelving is full of files, it is still very organised. Belle acknowledges the small dimension of her working space, but the small office belies a big heart. She welcomes everyone with open

⁹⁷ 1998.

⁹⁸ Johnson, E. (1974). *Eyvind Johnson Banquet speech*. Retrieved from https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1974/johnson-speech.html

arms, and one can easily feel the warmth radiating from this office, she is always ready to help. For her colleagues she adopts an open-door policy, and in spite of her position, one is by no means made to feel belittled.

Narrator: Backdrop_Deb. The smell of fresh salad fills the air on my entrance to this office, and Deb excuses herself as she has had no time to grab something to eat even though it is late afternoon. As the inquirer, I assure her of my gratitude for accepting me in her office and there is absolutely no need for her to excuse herself. It is a very small office, but very welcoming and well-organised, and although it has limited space, it is still designed to allow for a small informal sitting area with sofas for some meetings, I am informed. Although a very welcoming leader, she does not support an open-door policy even with her immediate colleagues and applies the knock and wait policy.

Narrator: Backdrop_Cate. The fourth backdrop presents an office large enough to hold meetings for several people. The very brightness and warmth of the open space are complemented by the presence of this leader who is very proud of offering an open-door policy to her colleagues and who is very open to helping everyone. She passionately encourages her colleagues, both in advancing in their career and when necessary even in personal matters.

Narrator: Backdrop_Emma. Another quite spacious office, the smell of newly-installed furniture is palpable; very nicely furnished with colourful walls and frames to add to the warm atmosphere. As Emma recounts, she was given the chance to be included in the decisions on how to furnish the office, something not very common in state offices. In fact, usually once you are given an office you are expected to keep the furniture, but she explains

that the office was stark naked. The leader is a very friendly person, and the relationship with her colleagues is closely-knit creating a collegial atmosphere. Although her colleagues knock to show respect - this is my impression - they open and enter without too much formality.

Narrator: Backdrop_Fae. The smell of green tea flavours the room as I enter this spacious office: a very well-equipped office with plenty of room to have a personalised working corner and also space to hold board meetings. I am not given information about who furnished this office or if Fae had any say in the design, but everything matches in a blended incorporated setting: curtains, walls and furniture. This leader does not support an open-door policy, but in her politeness, she still makes me feel welcome.

Narrator: Backdrop_Hayley. A very small office with a small desk and another small table and a few chairs. Owing to the restricted space there are files on the chairs, and bags on the floor. There is no window in the office, so the only light is electricity.

Narrator: Backdrop_Gail. Our last backdrop is a medium-sized office. From outside the corridor I can smell the aroma of brewed coffee! The office is very well organised and Gail supports an open-door policy. Her colleagues are more like a team or family. I arrive several minutes before my appointment and while waiting, two of her colleagues twice ask me if I want something to drink: “Water, coffee, or tea?” When the leader arrives the first thing she asks is whether I want something to drink or if I was offered anything.

Ida: (*Addressing the narrator*) All backdrops offer points to ponder and all leave a deep impression of the leaders’ workplace, even though I’m not sure whether the office is their only workplace. (*Addressing the audience*) I cannot overlook the management concept

mentioned at the end of the other scene, as management plays an important role in leadership. These female leaders, being top leaders, have to lead and simultaneously manage, and most of them commented on their double role as both managers and leaders, even though sometimes these concepts overlap. “‘Managerial leadership’ may appear to be a contradiction”, and although it is agreed by many that they are distinct, “management and leadership are inextricably interwoven”, and competent leaders should have management competencies, while managers should be able to lead their team.⁹⁹

Blackout with simultaneous gradual music crescendo. Ida exits, and narrator takes position at the middle of the stage. Curtain still closed, music fades out and remains in the background, while spotlight is lit on the narrator.

Recorded voice introduces fourth scene.

Scene 4: The Costumes

Recorded voice: “L’abito non fa il monaco,” an Italian proverb which literally translates to “The habit does not make the monk.”

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) In one of her blogs, Pat Thomson a Professor of Education in UK describes dress as “an assemblage of clothes, makeup, hair, accessories, piercing, tattoos, facial hair, perfume (...and the list goes on). These are all choices we make, to varying degrees.”¹⁰⁰ In another blog, Thompson citing Professor Becky Ropers-Huilman,

⁹⁹ Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 10; Nienaber, 2010, p. 670; Sharma & Jain, 2013; Witzel, 2013.

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, P. (2019). *Women, wardrobes and leadership: researching how wardrobe choices shape and are shaped by school leadership practices*. Retrieved from <https://womenwardrobesleadership.home.blog/>

further claims how female academics affirm that students comment on what they wear.¹⁰¹ The same can be said many times for these leaders, who because they are women are judged on the basis of how they are dressed. Being that they are women and in a leadership position, some people assume that, “they are separate from the rest of society, rather than being part of it. [... they] seem to live in the [office] rather than this being their place of work, [... they] are somehow different from everyone else.”¹⁰²

Ladies and gentlemen, the intention of this last short scene of Part 1 of Act 2 of this drama is not to describe and judge how our actors were dressed when I interviewed them, as this can be *seen* during their performance, but it is to shed some light on the fact that there still exist stereotypes and there are still people judging how women dress, especially when these women hold certain positions, a phenomenon not too common for men in the same position.

Ida comes out and goes near the narrator. Another spotlight lit on Ida.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience*) Thompson recalls how she felt the importance of wearing high heels as part of her costume as a leader in schools, since by doing so she gained a certain height which was hard “for a lot of senior male bureaucrats to look down on”.¹⁰³ Since, “we don’t yet have a society in which there is gender equality”, it seems that some people, still judge the appearances of females in terms of how they dress, in the sense that some people feel that they can ridicule and belittle women for this particular reason, something not as

¹⁰¹ Thompson, P. (2013). *clothes do not make the scholar?* Retrieved from <https://patthomson.net/2013/02/21/clothes-do-not-make-the-scholar>

¹⁰² Thompson, 2013.

¹⁰³ 2019.

common amongst male leaders.¹⁰⁴ This is because our society is still gender unequal, with the effect that “we don’t know what a ‘free woman’ looks like.”¹⁰⁵

Narrator: Thomson¹⁰⁶ further compares and questions the different suggestions of dress codes for female and male administrators (principals) offered by a supposedly renowned “Executive Leadership Centre”.¹⁰⁷ For women it is suggested to avoid “highly feminine clothing” as this encourages male counterparts to see them more as a woman rather than a professional. It is suggested not to wear shirts that are tight, low cut or drawing attention to one’s bosom, since it presents a negative image, with the ethical and moral standards for males and females being different. Another suggestion is to “look good”, since attractive and appropriately dressed females are more successful than those who are not so. --- When it comes to males, the dress code suggestions are briefer and suggest items or features like conservative suits, regular haircuts, the removal of facial hair, and black or brown shoes depending on the suit colour.

Ida: (*Interrupting*) These suggestions prompt Thompson to ask several questions, like for example “how it is possible to be feminine but not a woman”?¹⁰⁸ Additionally, she questions how possible it is to wear discreet clothes that make feminine features more subtle. She further asks why women should try to look like men, and not the other way around, and also why women need to choose between being a woman or a professional. Another important issue she contends regards the expectation that women avoid drawing attention to themselves

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson: Executive Leadership Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urleaderline.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=42:dressing-for-the-interview-guidelines-for-male-administrators-p&catid=17:career-principals&Itemid=119

¹⁰⁸ 2019.

when as principals, they are in fact meant to be visible, and significantly, why such rules apply much less to men.

Audience: (*chattering and murmuring*)

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) Very INTERESTING points.

Ida: Cutting a fine figure is expected in many jobs, but being a woman in a leadership position is even harder: “This includes the body, and how it is framed and publicly appears through dress, clothing, insignia, and other accoutrements, in a context where image has become yet another powerful commodity of exchange”.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, while women are commonly judged by how they dress, this is not the same for men.¹¹⁰ Male and female colleagues working with these leader actors scrutinise their image, causing unwanted pressures, even monetary pressure, and it is not just the dress that counts but all the accessories, hair-style, shoes, jewellery and make-up. As our actor Cate claims, keeping up the image is felt to be compulsory, and “the financial package is not attractive, and so as a woman one has to consider if it’s worth the hassle”. Male leaders are also required to have a dress code but while for them it is usually a suit, it is not the same for women. Women are expected to have different dresses, clothes which make them *womanly* for the occasion, and even so, they are still criticised for their attire!

Narrator: “L’abito non fa il Monaco,” and although it is not THE DRESS which makes you a leader, many female leaders want and need to look professional and many times the perception and the existing stereotype is that your appearance can make you more

¹⁰⁹ Clare, 2003, p. 212.

¹¹⁰ Grech, 2016.

professional.¹¹¹ Likewise, “the image of the disorderly does not always function to keep women in their place”.¹¹² In a contradicting attitude, however, Thomson claims, “Clothes aren’t going to change the world, the women who wear them will.”¹¹³

Ida: While agreeing with this last statement of Thomson, some literature still indicates that when women take leadership roles, although they maintain the attire of women, their wardrobe changes to take aspects from men’s fashion in structure, fabric and colour.¹¹⁴ A reason behind this might be, that “women [are] motivated to assimilate male vestiges of power through fashion change and simultaneously to drop symbolic liabilities, thus on balance they acquired symbolic advantages and gained status in the workplace”.¹¹⁵

Narrator: These four scenes have introduced this drama together with a description of the cast, their backdrops and costumes. Act 2: Part 2 delves into first-hand experiences of these leaders: it is their voices which will be represented for the audience, together with interpretations and other voices from other sources by Ida and me.

Ida exists and screen tilts down.

Narrator: Before our short intermission I’m projecting some food for thought. Projector please...

Gradual crescendo of music.

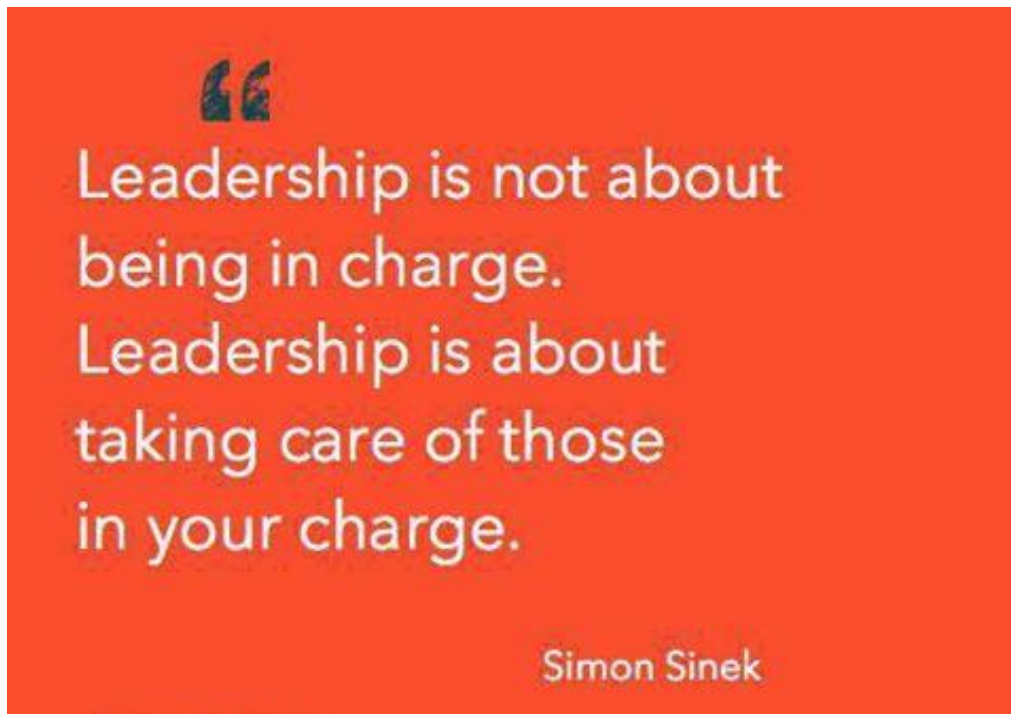
¹¹¹ Thompson, 2019.

¹¹² Davis, 1975, p. 131.

¹¹³ 2019.

¹¹⁴ Thompson, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Lynch & Strauss, 2007, p. 65.



*Figure 5.7. Leadership.*¹¹⁶

Lights in the theatre switched on. Fifteen-minute intermission.

¹¹⁶ Meme. Retrieved from <https://me.me/i/leadership-is-not-about-being-in-charge-leadership-is-about-5726993>

Chapter 6 - Curtain Opening for The Act of Voices - Act 2: Part 2

Audience: *(Chuckling and chattering)*

Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. After one minute, music fades out until the narrator begins to speak.

Screen slides down in front of the curtain and the narrator takes his place next to the screen.

Narrator: Please get back to your seats so we may commence.

Recorded voice introduces the first scene.

Scene 1: Born Leaders

Recorded voice: "Leadership traits are intrinsic, meaning that great leaders are born and will emerge when confronted with the appropriate situation."¹¹⁷

Narrator: Ladies and gentlemen, --- --- leaders are born and not made. This is clearly medically justified. --- Projector.

¹¹⁷ Boerma et al., 2017, p. 1.



Figure 6.1. 'Natural' Born Leaders Exist?¹¹⁸

Audience: (*Amused, clapping, chuckling, and chattering*)

*Presentation starts after a few seconds.*¹¹⁹

Audience: (*Clapping, chuckling, and chattering*)

Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. After a few seconds, music fades out.

Screen rises. Ida takes her place near the narrator. Spotlight on both figures.

Recorded voice introduces the second scene.

¹¹⁸ Do 'Natural' Born Leaders Exist? [Digital Image]. (2012). Retrieved from <https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/2012/09/05/do-natural-born-leaders-exist/>

¹¹⁹ See Appendix F / Provided also as softcopy.

Scene 2: Preface: Female Leaders Expose Their ‘Voice’

Recorded voice: “Whilst acknowledging that the notion of representation—and what constitutes under- and overrepresentation—is both complex and contested, this relative dearth of women in senior positions reflects a failure to maximize female talent.”¹²⁰

Narrator: Before introducing this second part of Act 2, Ida asked to comment on the claim made in the first quote.

Ida: It is of utmost importance to remind you that the authors of this quote also assert that while there are those who believe that leaders are born, there are others who claim that leadership is a skill which can be learned. With regard to the second quote about the complexity of under- or overrepresentation, it is to be noted that some people still believe that gender equality is a closed chapter and of no concern since for them, equality has been accomplished.

Narrator: Interesting avowals. The purpose of the following scenes is to hear from the top leaders in the Education Department in Malta about their journey to leadership and their ideas with regard to women and leadership. This drama was crafted to answer the question, “How do senior female educational leaders perceive and experience their positions?” and I hope that the audience does not approach it indifferently. In contrast, my intention is to “‘jump in’ [the story] and adopt a horizon appropriate for understanding”.¹²¹

Ida and the narrator exit.

¹²⁰ Shepherd, 2017, p. 82.

¹²¹ Steeves, 1994, p. 30.

Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. After some time, music fades out.

Curtain opens slowly. We see a large office with a round table and eight chairs at the centre of the stage, six of which are occupied by six leaders. By the side there is a coffee table and three armchairs. Ida and the narrator are sitting in two of them.

Cast's Costumes. Anne is in a black skirt suit and black mid-heel shoes; Belle wears a colourful patterned dress and matching vamp loafers; Cate is dressed in denim jeans, a flowered shirt, and ballerina shoes; Deb is wearing a navy-blue skirt suit and matching high-heeled shoes; Emma sports a striped coloured dress and comfortable black shoes; Fae is in a striped black and white dress adorned with a matching scarf and jewellery, and black high-heeled shoes; Gail wears a flowery dress and comfortable brown shoes; Hayley is dressed in denim jeans, a white shirt, and light blue running shoes; Ida is wearing a blue dress and mid-heel blue shoes; and Robert is in black trousers, a white shirt, grey blazer, and black shoes.

Recorded voice introduces the third scene.

Scene 3: The ladder to success

Recorded voice: “You wanna [*sic*] know what scares people? Success. When you don't make moves and when you don't climb up the ladder, everybody loves you because you're not competition.”¹²²

Narrator: (*Stands up and moves around*) I open this scene by citing Arnold Schwarzenegger and his recipe for reaching a milestone: “Just remember, you can't climb the ladder of

¹²² Onika Tanya Maraj k/a Nicki Minaj (b.1982): Trinidadian-American rapper, singer, songwriter, model, and actress. Maraj, O. T. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/nicki_minaj_500415

success with your hands in your pockets,” and as our actors are going to tell us, they have also rolled up their sleeves, and many times faced, and still do, a lot of barriers.¹²³ This scene depicts how our performers reached their current leadership positions. --- --- Having served as an Assistant Head for some years, Anne decided to further her studies, and after deliberating on which area of study to pursue, she decided to focus on Administration and Management. Afterwards she was eager to continue...

Anne: (*Interrupts and stands*) And from then on, I embarked on a leadership course, --- specifically in educational leadership, --- --- --- and I have not regretted my decision. As an Assistant Head I think I was privileged to work with two other Assistant Head colleagues who were MY MENTORS. WE LEARNT A LOT TOGETHER.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience*) Is Anne doubting her decision to further her studies in educational leadership? Maybe she is contemplating what could have happened if she had chosen a different area of study. Having experienced what it means to be in a leadership position and in particular, having colleagues as mentors helped Anne develop an aptitude for effective leadership.

Narrator: Together with the other SM/LT, Anne was relocated to a “very difficult school”, and although working here was a strain, when Anne and her staff settled down, they were very HAPPY since they had the “SUPPORT of the staff”.¹²⁴ They were also very fortunate in having the support of the leaders in the Education Department, in addition to that of the staff.

¹²³ Arnold Schwarzenegger (b.1947): Austrian-American actor, director, filmmaker, businessman, investor, author, philanthropist, activist and politician. Schwarzenegger, A. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/arnold_schwarzenegger_737771

¹²⁴ SM/LT – Senior Management/Leadership Team.

Ida: They were really lucky since not everyone always gets the support needed from their leaders, and a supportive environment is essential for leaders to succeed. Those without support find it very hard to cope in their role.¹²⁵

Anne: (*Interrupting*) A number of years later, I moved to a Junior Lyceum school, still in my capacity as an Assistant Head, but very shortly after, the then director asked me to take up headship position, --- as Head of School in another school. I was a bit, you know, taken aback. --- I was very very busy with my studies and exams, --- but then I decided to take it on. I DON'T REGRET IT! --- It was a girls' school and for me it was such a big change, A VERY BIG CHANGE, and I had to employ different leadership skills there. Years later I applied for my current leadership role and replaced a male predecessor.

Ida: Change can be difficult, as it not only affects one's personal life but also that of one's family and colleagues. However, as Anne asserts that although change is difficult, it can many times serve as a learning experience. Anne states, "I never felt that it was a disadvantage personally. I'm proud to be a woman, I'm proud to be a female leader. I always had very positive feedback from my Heads of School, who in the great majority happened to be women, except for one. I would have preferred a better mix, to be honest, but I'm happy with all the Heads of School... We worked very very well together."

Narrator: Even Belle's journey consisted of a variety of changes. Belle did not always work in the Education Department and thus, it was initially very tough. Very soon after her first appointment in the Education Department...

¹²⁵ Gibson, 2006; Showunmi et al., 2016.

Belle: (*Intervening*) I was approached to apply for a higher position, which after reflection I did, and got the promotion. (*in a low voice*) --- --- --- Things were hard. --- I mean it was too much. --- Eventually I came to like my career and I do not intend to pack up. Thanks to God and the help of my family I have always managed.

Ida: Again, support seems to be a key factor here. Whether it comes from colleagues, other leaders, or family, support is an extremely important asset in one's career, especially for a position of great responsibility and accountability.

Belle: *Before becoming an educational leader, I was a leader in another department.* This was very interesting for me, being a woman in leadership in particular. I was not the first woman in this position, but I took over from several men who had had this important role before me. I had the opportunity to travel a bit --- and grow a lot.

Narrator: And how did Cate arrive at her current role? From an early age, in her teenage years, Cate was already involved in what she calls "leadership roles". She was deeply involved in her parish church and the parish priest during that time asked her to take care of the youth centre. Her role as a representative of the youth section also involved attending meetings with adults. So, let's hear Cate herself telling us her experiences...

Cate: (*With great satisfaction and pride*) I always considered myself a leader and was never afraid of challenges. I tried to involve every youth in the parish, even those considered MARGINALISED, --- --- --- and this meant that sometimes I got into trouble since not everyone agreed. --- During that time that was my vision, narrow by my standards today, but still wide for a teenager...

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Does Cate's long pause indicate a regretted decision?

Cate: I always had that something in me telling me I had to contribute. --- This concept of leadership grew inside me. Even then, at school, as a teacher I always occupied several leadership roles: --- I chaired different committees, I was in charge of the school development plan, and others. I always felt the need for improvement and as a teacher I furthered my own studies. I felt the need to spread my wings and fly. I was confined so I had to have more space to contribute more, and so I applied for the post of Education Officer. *Eventually I applied for my current post.* Things were not easy at the beginning but I'm always ready to take on challenges; this is part of my character, --- you are born with it.

Ida: Vision is about being imaginative, innovative, creative, and inspirational, and Cate knows it. From an early age she thought about and planned for her future, always in the belief that self-improvement could help her and those around her.

Cate: (*Interrupting*) From an early age I had been aware of my leadership skills and I believe that even my tone of voice projects such skills, even though I have gradually learned that I have to control my voice as one might sometimes feel intimidated. --- Being very task-oriented, I have developed a great sense of time management and YES, I am very task-oriented. --- I am very COMFORTABLE in this position.

Ida: To be a leader Cate believes that she has to be assertive and tough, otherwise others might see her as weak and incapable of leading. Does Cate distinguish between managing and leading? While admitting that they are both important, she is perhaps confused about whether she should be a leader or a manager in certain circumstances. While being

comfortable in your position might help, sometimes being over-confident and in your comfort zone might generate negative feelings in colleagues, even if they do not always show it. --- Sometimes it's like a dormant volcano which can cause lots of damage when it erupts. ---

Door knocking. Ida approaches, opens the door, and politely asks Deb and Emma to enter. They find a place next to the other leaders.

Narrator: (*Addressing Deb*) Some of the leaders have shared with us their journey to their leadership role, Deb, how did you reach your current leadership position?

Deb: It took quite a number of years as well as life experiences, studies, and academic work to arrive at my present leadership position. --- Besides school, I was the one who took the leadership role in the family setting as well. --- In some way or another, my cousins always considered me as some sort of role model, --- first when I was young --- and then as I got older. --- A born leader, --- but experiences help to make you better and stronger. Anyways, on the threshold of university I had a dilemma in choosing between education and law, and finally I settled on education as I had always wanted to be a teacher. --- As a teacher I always regarded myself as a leader in my own classroom. I emphasise this concept even now and when I speak to teachers, I tell them, "Look, you are now leaders in your own classroom, so you have to shoulder that responsibility and make decisions yourselves, rather than taking everything to the head-office."

Ida: Very insightful observation, teacher leadership!

Deb: As a teacher I always held leadership positions. However, my interest in leadership didn't just stop at the technical level. I loved studying and I decided on furthering my studies. --- Look, I ALWAYS knew from the start that I wasn't going to remain a teacher in the classroom my whole life. --- I wanted to move on...

Narrator: All our actors emphasise the importance of the struggle and the difficulty in deciding to opt for a change. But then, this is a growth process, as the author Mandy Hale asserts: "Growth is painful. Change is painful. But nothing is as painful as staying stuck where you do not belong."¹²⁶ In this respect the fact that our performers are more than satisfied in their position confirms that although many times it is challenging to take a leadership position, if you embrace the role with enthusiasm, then with the help and support of those around you, the task will somehow be facilitated.

Deb: *I agree.* --- In the meantime, I had the opportunity to apply for the post of an Assistant Head. *After some time, there was a vacancy and I was appointed my current educational leadership role.*

Narrator: And what about you, Emma?

Emma: *(Looking at the leaders) As my colleagues have stated, the road to my current leadership position had its ups and downs. I occupied different positions until some time ago, I submitted an application for a post and I was chosen. I have a strong character, and as early as my primary and secondary school days, and later in sixth form and university, I always had a leading position in sports or other activities. Before applying for my current position, I also*

¹²⁶ Mandy Hale (b. 1992): American author and blogger. Drew Downs, (2017). *Growth is painful*. Retrieved from <https://drewdowns.net/2017/04/04/growth-is-painful/>

was a leader in another department. At that time, a big reshuffle in that department was underway, which included employees coming from different sectors. So, I made it a point that they would be welcomed and well trained, not like in some of my previous experiences. Having worked hard in that position I was approached to apply for my current position. This was not the first time that I was approached to apply, but before I had not been convinced and prepared. To tell you the truth, after being approached --- I was still undecided about what to do. --- Then I settled quite nicely in the job. --- --- Looking back on my career path, it seems that there always came a time when I had to leave my comfort zone and move on.

Narrator: Do you regret the decision you took?

Emma: Looking back, there were moments when I struggled for my well-being --- and even now. I try to find a balance between my job, my personal life, and my family. I cannot deny that I work long hours, sometimes with sleepless nights, --- --- ---- but I must say that I found much support and help from some of my superiors.

Ida: Emma's silence reminds me of those Canadian female academics who lamented the stress resulting from the interaction between career and family, which causes lots of anxiety and fatigue, and how they coped with the situation and resisted by helping and supporting each other.¹²⁷ However, sleepless nights do not change anything; speaking out might make a difference.¹²⁸

Narrator: And what about you, Fae?

¹²⁷ Ackner & Armenti, 2004.

¹²⁸ Ackner & Armenti, 2004.

Fae: *Even I occupied various positions.* When I was a teacher, --- I thought of continuing my studies. --- NOTHING IMPEDED ME FROM PURSUING MY CHOICES IN LIFE. --- There were times when my mother pushed my brother rather than me to continue studying. Nonetheless, she always believed that education would make our life better. --- That's the best investment one could make, --- whatever we chose to study.

Ida: Fae's emphasis suggests disagreement with her mother, the basis of which disagreement is a clear indication of stereotyping that is still manifested in some parents today. --- Some parents, either the father or the mother, still try to dissuade their daughters from furthering their studies, or else they impose a choice of subjects which eventually interferes with their children's career. It is still sometimes believed that girls should choose subjects leading to female-environment careers, with the intention that when they marry the WIFE would take care of the children and most domestic chores.¹²⁹

Narrator: (*Addressing Ida and the audience*) Ida, it's important to acknowledge that some women AND men decide to stay at home and look after their children, AND feel that this is worthwhile, --- with which I totally agree!

Some leaders and the audience approve by nodding.

Fae: After some years teaching, I applied for the position of an Assistant Head. It was almost a natural succession, ONE THING FOLLOWING THE OTHER. However, I think that it is in my character, that every few years --- I need a new challenge.

¹²⁹ Darmanin, 1992; Cachia, 2012; Belle, Deb, & Gail (participants).

Narrator: Very interesting. Many of these leaders were always open for new challenges and believed that a change would boost their career.

Fae: From teacher to Assistant Head, and then Head of School for a number of years. After that, I applied for and was chosen for the position of [...], until [...] when I became a [...], my current position. As I said, it was almost a natural succession, one after the other. It wasn't easy leaving the previous position for the current one as I was very happy, VERY HAPPY indeed, but when my superiors encouraged me to apply for this post, --- I REFLECTED well on it until I decided that I should apply.

Ida: I'm sure Gail has other exciting stories...

Gail: *The road to my current leadership position is similar to that of my friends and consisted of different steps.* My career path started as a teacher, and after some years I was appointed Assistant Head, and then, again, after a few years I got the position of a Head of School. --- It was challenging, it was never that easy. --- Yes, quite challenging! In spite of SEVERAL obstacles, I found the courage to apply for [...] and I got appointed, --- I must say, with flying colours.

Narrator: And you, Hayley, how did you arrive at your current position?

Hayley: *(Guarded in her response)* Through a public call for applications.

Narrator: Can you please elaborate a little?

Hayley: Well, I worked in different sectors and had different positions, and when the application was issued, I gave it a go, and I was chosen.

Narrator: Thank you ALL for sharing your stories about how you arrived at your current positions. Ending this scene on a different note, Winston Churchill once said: “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”¹³⁰

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a small office with plenty of shelves full of files. A desk with a laptop is by the side and in front of the desk there are three chairs. Deb is behind the desk, and Anne, Belle, and Cate are sitting on the chairs. The narrator and Ida are sitting on two armchairs around a coffee table in the middle of the stage. The other four leaders are standing and chatting among themselves.

Recorded voice introduces the fourth scene.

Scene 4: Leadership!

Recorded voice: “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.”¹³¹

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) The number of leadership definitions is nearly as big as the number of scholars who attempted to investigate leadership.¹³²

¹³⁰ Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965): Prime Minister of UK from 1940 to 1945. Choquette, S. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/311029917987376274/>

¹³¹ John Calvin Maxwell (b.1947): American author, speaker, and pastor. Maxwell, J. C. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/john_c_maxwell_383606

¹³² Stogdill, 1974.

Ida: (*Addressing the narrator*) So why not explore how our actors describe leadership?

Narrator: This scene portrays what our leaders think about being a leader and how they define leadership. There are several claims about leadership which I endorse, and a particular one is that of the American political activist Ralph Nader: (*With emphasis*) “The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not followers.”¹³³ This assertion, in my opinion, gathers some characteristics which I deem vital for leadership: values, vision, influence, reaching the required goals, and cooperation between leaders and their followers.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience*) Apart from the mentioned characteristics, Nader’s assertion also highlights the importance of distributive leadership, where a leader is not afraid that someone else will eventually take their place.

Narrator: While our audience contemplates Nader’s quote, let’s see what our actors have to say.

Deb: For me, leadership is having a vision, making others believe in it, owning it, and working towards its achievement. It means being able to take difficult decisions while keeping the whole situation in mind, and assuming full responsibility for these decisions. It means not fearing to tread where others won’t and standing out from the rest. Leadership means always staying at the back while being fully aware of what’s happening at the front. Leadership is making your voice heard while remaining silent.

¹³³ Ralph Nader (b.1934): American political activist, author, lecturer and attorney. Nader, R. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1339922/Ralph-Nader-The-function-of-leadership-is-to-produce-more-leaders-not-more-followers>

Fae: A leader is a person who is able to build healthy relationships that enable him or her to better understand the qualities and potential of his or her team members. Thus, he or she can tap their potential for the benefit of the task. Leading by example and being a leader with vision, clear direction, and presence are key. A leader develops over time through experience, knowledge, training, and a lot of humility.

Belle: Well, for me leadership is the art to motivate your staff to work and achieve a common goal. The leader must be able to inspire the team and be prepared to do so. Effective leadership is based upon ideas that are communicated to the team members while engaging them so that they act and work accordingly. The leader is the inspiration and director of the action. He or she is the person in the team that possesses the combination of personality and leadership skills that makes the team members want to follow his or her direction.

Gail: Leadership, --- I believe, also includes management. Being a leader --- sometimes means that you have to be at the bottom of the pyramid. Really you are on top but you have to put yourself at the lowest level so that you CAN UNDERSTAND the other stakeholders. You have to have a VISION, a clear vision, --- you have to have the objectives of your organisation, which means you have to have your goals clear, but not only your goals. YOU ARE A LEADER OF PEOPLE. Being EQUAL and FAIR is important in leadership.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience and interrupting*) Does FAIRNESS mean EQUALITY?

Sometimes people confuse fairness with equality, and there are many circumstances in which being fair does not necessarily entail treating everyone equally.

Gail: Leadership is about empowering people to take decisions --- and delegating duties. If you do not delegate you gradually fail, and sometimes we make the mistake of not delegating work because we believe no one can do it as good as we can, but **YOU ARE EMPOWERING PEOPLE WHEN YOU ARE DELEGATING**. As leaders we enrich people by allowing them to take decisions; we guide them, we do not breath down their necks either. --- Once I give you the job, I have to give you some freedom, freedom to do it as you deem fit.

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Gail's view of leadership resembles the transformational style, where leaders and followers work together to motivate each other, and the leader empowers the followers and encourages them to achieve goals beyond their level of experience.

Gail: I believe that in leadership an imperative factor is the **HUMAN ELEMENT**. Also, one needs to have management skills and time management. --- However, the human element in leadership should prevail and be the number one priority.

Narrator: Your observations dovetail many comments on leadership. What about you, Anne?

Anne: Leadership for me is the art of building healthy relationships with all the stakeholders within one's organisation. The leader has a vision and a mission which she or he cannot accomplish alone. Thus, the leader who manages to build, cultivate, and sustain good working relationships within a culture of genuine care, support, and trust will bring people on board to discuss and decide on ideas, and to collaborate and cooperate on their implementation. Neither of these actions are easy tasks, especially when considering the decisions that need to be made and the tasks that need to be assigned. Healthy relationships

ensure a healthy working ethos, which together with a caring and supportive environment, empower all stakeholders to own the leader's vision and mission, and together they strive to achieve their goals.

Emma: Leadership is about one's vision and this incorporates reflection, work balance, sharing, and support. It is an ongoing process where one learns managerial skills with reflective practice. Leadership is about believing in people and trying your best to exploit their potential to grow together. Perseverance and flexibility are two defining characteristics in leadership. We need to distinguish between managing and leading—we have to have a clear distinction—but we have to be both a leader and a manager without distinction. The results of our actions should be tangible, --- but people are NOT MACHINES.

Cate: Leadership is being able to communicate a change and an innovative vision through empowering, developing, leading, and building effective teams who will own and achieve the shared vision with a clear commitment to quality improvement. --- When you are a leader, you have to have a vision --- and you have to share it, --- but you need to be very attentive to how to share this vision, because sharing it does not mean imposing it. If you impose such a vision, how can you expect to implement it?

Hayley: Leadership is a position that involves leading a section or organisation with the main purpose of reaching the objectives proposed by the department or organisation.

Ida: (*Curiously*) What about the leader's vision, --- the team, --- and her or his influences? Must leaders be informed by any particular values?

Hayley: *Well, to add to this,* I am a very democratic person, I'm not authoritarian and I allow my colleagues liberty. I love dialogue.

Narrator: *(Standing up and moving around, addressing the audience and the leaders)* Very interesting descriptions! A stimulating assertion made by both Emma and Gail regards the relationship between managing and leading, but most exciting is the way Emma clearly asserts that leadership and management are distinct. Another interesting fact is that most leaders mention the importance of vision in leadership, as well as the importance of relationships and the human aspect: --- "people are NOT MACHINES." If one filters the main phrases spoken out by our leaders, one can gather some interesting terms like: VISION --- MISSION --- HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS --- NOT ALONE --- EMPOWERMENT --- CARE --- SUPPORT --- TRUST --- ART TO MOTIVATE --- COMMON GOALS --- INSPIRATION --- COMMUNICATION --- DIRECTION --- ACTION --- EFFECTIVE TEAMS --- SHARED VISION --- OWNERSHIP --- STAYING AT THE BACK --- REFLECTION --- BELIEVING IN PEOPLE --- EXPLOITING THEIR POTENTIAL --- FLEXIBILITY --- PERSEVERANCE --- DELEGATION --- GUIDANCE. It would be instructive if the audience were to come up with its own definition of leadership after carefully considering the ideas that have emerged so far. --- --- --- Reflecting on these terms I came up with this definition: Leadership is a process of building healthy relationships through the art of motivation; where a leader that inspires trust, reflects on their decisions, and offers their care, support, direction, and guidance to their colleagues, inspires collaboration to achieve a shared and well-communicated vision; while such a leader must also be ready to empower their followers and exploit their potentials without necessarily taking centre stage.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience and the leaders*) Very stimulating catch-phrases for leadership. Despite the attention to nuance paid in the observations shared above, I still doubt whether the distinction between leadership and management is being made to an adequate degree. Or maybe --- are they separate for their position? I must commend our actors for their views on leadership, views which are insightful and require proper reflection. Roosevelt once declared: “It is terrible to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead—and find no one there,” but I’m sure it’s not the case with our leaders.¹³⁴

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a desk with some files. Two chairs are on both sides of the desk. At the centre of the stage is a small table with four chairs around it. Deb, Emma, Fae, and Hayley are around the desk eating some salad. The other four leaders are by the desk. Ida and the narrator are standing next to each other.

Recorded voice introduces the fifth scene.

Scene 5: Malta and Us – The Space between Us?

Recorded voice: “We soon learned that we were in the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to us [...] As Paul gathered an armful of sticks [...] a poisonous snake [...] fastened itself onto his hand! The people [...] said to each other, ‘A murderer [...]’.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882 - 1945): 32nd President of the United States. Roosevelt, F. D. (n.d.).

Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/quotes/3114/>

¹³⁵ Acts 28:1-6. The Way (Catholic edition), An illustrated edition of *The Living Bible*.

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience and walking around*) Although the population of Malta is around half a million, it is well documented that around the globe there are thousands of Maltese, who, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, are known for their kindness, although sometimes they are also notorious for being double-faced in many ways to gain an advantage. This scene illustrates our actors' views with regard to Maltese culture and the underrepresentation of female leaders. Cate will open this scene...

Cate: A new leader always inflicts some anxiety among followers, but being a woman, and in Malta, the concern seems to be greater. I was the first female leader in this department; --- it took SOME TIME for my staff to get to know me, and it was after having established a solid relationship with me that they told me how much they had been afraid of having me as their head. --- They already had some biases about me being a workaholic and they pictured me as a monster, --- but I was prepared for it since I had already been through similar experiences.

Ida: A change always brings some kind of anxiety; “Change is never pretty. There is always blood on the floor, but having a woman do it – that offends the natural order of things [...] there is the idea that women should not seize power.”¹³⁶

Cate: Referring to what I said earlier, I believe that we have made some advances in Malta --- but we still need to work much harder. What I mean, for example, is that you hardly find a senior woman involved in taking important decisions in Malta --- so the road is still VERY FAR. --- I don't know, --- maybe I'm saying this because I'm a woman, but I believe that

¹³⁶ Harrison, 2012, p.4.

there are real effective women capable of taking decisions and shouldering responsibilities,
--- and many times they are left out.

Audience: (*Cheering and applauding*)

Ida: Well said Cate, without any doubt, --- there ARE as many effective women as there are men.

Deb: In Malta, it is still males who occupy the majority of leadership positions, and so (*emotionally*) it is not easy being a female leader on many counts. --- The position is challenging in itself, but it is a challenge I take on readily, because I LOVE challenges. --- ---
--- Nonetheless, being a female leader is NOT EASY. --- Because you are female, they think that you do not have the right to be there, --- or else they say --- that because you are a woman you cannot say that. --- You have to take lots of tough decisions and sometimes you do not have enough time to reflect upon these decisions. Often male leaders seem or pretend to be SURPRISED that you have the ability to arrive at such decisions; --- they think that only they are capable of taking such decisions.

Ida: I agree, Deb. Some men still believe that they are the only ones capable of taking hard decisions, and such men can give a very hard time to female leaders.

Deb: At the beginning they ALL try to test your limits and do everything they can to show resistance, --- (*Smiling happily*) --- but that all comes with the leadership package.

OTHERWISE IT WOULD BE BORING!

Audience: (*Cheering and applauding*)

Ida: I like your sense of humour!

Narrator: Well Malta is so small, the opportunities are very limited, and as the saying goes, “for every bone there are a hundred dogs,” but then it is up to the individual, female or male, to work hard on career aspiration. --- However, it seems that for females the road is steeper! Let’s listen to Hayley’s opinions.

Hayley: In Malta we have come a long way, and it’s normal for a female to be in a leadership position, a position traditionally occupied by men. From my experience, in the last twenty years things have changed a lot, and even though various sectors are still led by males, the impetus for change is still going strong.

Narrator: It’s nice to hear that we are moving forward...

Ida: (*Interrupting*) One might say we moved forward. --- but I don’t think it’s natural to have a population where the percentage of females and males is approximately equal; female graduates outnumber male graduates, and the number of senior female leaders in the three main educational institutions in Malta is about 27%? Also, it is sad to have female representation in public-listed boards and CEOs much less than 10%, or that the global gender gap as from 2006 is continually rising?

Narrator: (*Awe-struck*) Okay! And you Emma?

Emma: As a female, --- it is sometimes felt, --- and at other times it is not, depending at which table I'm sitting and with whom I'm sitting. Sometimes I have to make a real effort to make my point. This always depends on who the males in the dialogue are. Saying this, I worked a lot with males for whom I can really "take off my hat," as we say in Maltese. --- But with others, --- you feel it in the air: ---- she is a WOMAN, she's *EMMA*, and even the discussion is totally different. Even during conferences, sometimes, when I speak up as a female educational leader, --- I feel demeaned by the general attitude. Still I must say that somehow, gradually, the mentality is changing, --- always depending on the male figures present!

Belle: (*Interrupting*) An interesting case in point was when I used to receive phone calls in my office, and they used to ask, "can I speak to the [position held by Belle]?" and I used to answer, "Yes, tell me," and their answer would be, "NO, I need to talk to [...]," and again I used to tell them, "Yes, tell me," but they always thought that the [...] had to be male and most of the time they refused to talk to me. (*Hesitantly*) --- --- I mean it was somewhat of an issue, but recently I can see that things have changed in Malta. --- It's not an issue anymore!

Ida: I really doubt that!

Audience: (*Murmuring and whispering*)

Belle: My creed is that women have every right. --- I mean, for example, there should be no quotas for a woman to be effective in her work as much as a man. Speaking now as a woman, I believe that a woman is better in multitasking, even though nowadays a family man takes care of kids and helps in house chores, --- not like twenty years ago.

Ida: While agreeing with you Belle that EVERYONE has rights, I have my reservations that “IT’S NOT AN ISSUE ANYMORE”, as I stated earlier STATISTICS say the opposite.

Narrator: Belle’s hesitations invite reflection on the fact that there are men AND WOMEN who still associate certain positions only with males.

Gail: In my opinion, it all depends on the person. --- I know both male and female Heads of School who either inspired me or did not inspire me at all. What I’m saying is that --- as a woman I NEVER had any difficulty here in Malta. --- I say a strong character in leadership helps. I am ready to help everyone, but at the same time I don’t want anyone to put wool on my eyes. As a woman I cannot recall any instances that I felt disadvantaged, but as I told you, it is HOW STRONG YOU ARE, HOW DETERMINED YOU ARE. I also believe that knowledge is power, so as a leader you need both leadership and management skills.

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Having a STRONG character helps but having a milder character does not mean that one can ABUSE your position.

Gail: Another fact I believe is important as a female leader in Malta is that if you want to be a leader you need to have some control, since control is important in leadership.

Ida: (*Addressing Gail*) In using the term CONTROL, are you referring to some kind of authority --- or dominance, --- rather than the ability to control oneself?

Gail: *Yes, exactly.* This is the issue of POWER; power in the sense that you don't let anyone pull your leg. --- You also need knowledge on how to lead and then delegate, and not the other way round.

Narrator: Interesting. (*Humorously*) A definition of power struggle I once heard is, "When your boss has the power and you have the struggle."¹³⁷ What do you think, Fae?

Audience: (*Smiling and clapping*)

Fae: I think we are still lagging behind but not as much as we used to. --- This past decade or so, there was a great push towards enabling women to take these kinds of positions, these high posts, --- most of the time. --- Maybe we have not been prepared as much. Perhaps women are not aware of all the assistance available nowadays, not only --- measures like flexihours and those sorts of benefits, but assistance to guarantee equality for married women with children, --- such as childcare centres. I think that most of the time we are not maybe liaising so efficiently. Indeed, this support can help us continue to work towards progress on the same level as males.

Narrator: (*Addressing the audience*) Is Fae underlining the fact that women are not qualified enough for leadership or that they are not ready to take such responsibility?

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Some of Fae's claims contradict Cate's. Cate clearly told us that in her position one could not even think about asking for flexihours. I agree with the actors that things have changed, --- if compared to, say, twenty years ago. --- But then again,

¹³⁷ Martin, J. R. (n.d.). *Boss, Jobs and Leadership Jokes*. Retrieved from <https://maaw.info/GadgetsandGames/BossJokes.htm>

“ASSISTANCE TO GUARANTEE EQUALITY FOR MARRIED WOMEN,” --- --- as if the children belong to their mother only. And where do the fathers enter the equation?

Fae: Yes, maybe we still take the responsibility of going home and doing the house chores and things like that. There is a Maltese saying about how it lies with the woman to instruct her husband accordingly, --- --- but anyway, it is about how you coach your husband.

Ida: I recall a Maltese idiom, Fae: “Il-fsied iħassar l-ulied”, translated literally as “pampering ruins the children,” --- which can be applied to everyone. --- And it is true that some Maltese women still believe that men should be well pampered --- for VARIOUS REASONS! What is your opinion, Anne?

Anne: I was the first woman to be appointed as an Assistant Head in this area of Malta where the school was known to be difficult. I remember the Minister of that time --- --- --- telling me, “you are going to be the first woman that I am going to trust in leadership there, because we never had a woman in administration,” *in this particular area of Malta*. It was a boys’ school, --- an area secondary school. --- Obviously, I was not flattered by the comment --- at that time --- but it turned up to be a VERY VERY positive experience.¹³⁸

Ida: (*Addressing the audience*) My impression of Anne’s hesitation, in spite of the Minister’s trust, indicates a lot about the perception of her new duty. Was the Minister doubtful of entrusting this position to a woman? But then, even for Anne herself it seems it was natural

¹³⁸ Until 2010 there were two types of Secondary State schools in Malta: Junior Lyceum (JL) and Area Secondary (AS). Students proceeded to the JL if they passed their exams in English, Maltese, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Religious Knowledge in year 6 (last year of Primary). This meant that the AS schools were for low achievers and many times associated with mischievous students. For many years, students at JL could be distinguished from those at AS because of a different uniform, which compounded the matter.

for a Minister to address a woman like that! Was Anne expected to PLAY that role and just OBEY WITHOUT ANSWERING BACK, given that she is a woman and he the Minister?

Anne: When I was at the boys' school, --- I had to endure a lot of disrespect from the students themselves: you know, --- vulgar gestures towards me AS A WOMAN, vulgar language and sexual innuendo, and sexist attitudes, things that never happened to me afterwards when I was at the girls' school. I believe that in that school they always had a male Head of School.

Ida: Gender stereotyping begins from early childhood, and so from a very young age education is of utmost importance; --- we MUST educate against gender discrimination, I'd say, starting with toddlers from home, then in childcare centres, and schools.

Anne: In many sectors in Malta we do not give importance to female leadership. For example, it is common that even in the interviewing boards, the interviewers are ALL males!

Narrator: For several years, legislations and policies have been amended to establish gender equity. Still there are places where women are treated as the OTHER, and it is these "thousand TINY elements" that constitute the difference --- and which are still very apparent. There are still people believing in the long-held leadership assumption that to be a leader you're ALWAYS supposed to act as a man: purposely aggressive, assertive, and authoritarian, and RARELY caring, gentle, and nurturing, which are attributes associated with women.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Heilman, 2001; Shakeshaft, 1987; Coleman, 2002; Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007.

Ida: Similarly, females are encouraged to continue their studies in careers associated with women. For example, WOMAN-AS-TEACHER is a very familiar career route for women, (*sarcastically*), this helps in being with children, behaving as a housewife-in-waiting --- CARING and GENTLE.

Narrator: This ends this scene. --- The next setting will expose challenges that some of our actors have met or still meet as women in leadership.

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a very large office with a long table and twelve chairs, several shelves, and big windows flooded by sunlight; the door is open. All leaders, together with Ida and the narrator are sitting around the table, chatting amongst themselves.

Recorded voice introduces the sixth scene.

Scene 6: Barriers or Perceptions?

Recorded voice: “Women’s disproportionate responsibility for childcare and domestic arrangements, and direct and indirect discrimination [...] among workplace peers has [*sic*] been well-documented.”¹⁴⁰

Narrator: (*Stands up and walks while addressing the audience and leaders*) Around the world, women have to confront and face different types of barriers. Have our leaders met and

¹⁴⁰ Fuller, 2017, p. 58.

still meet challenges because they are females? This scene represents their voices with regard to these barriers.

Emma: (*Interrupting*) To SHOW OFF and try to IMPRESS, some leaders, and in particular male leaders, send their emails during the night; --- you'd be receiving emails all through the night and late in the evening, all this at the expense of your privacy. The thing is that sometimes, to avoid being labelled as lazy, you have to answer them, and as I said many times, to the detriment of myself and my family.

Ida: This is very challenging, and although not necessarily a barrier exclusively for women, it's still an obstacle. More awareness of this problem is required --- but maybe a better solution is to adopt a policy like the French law, --- the "right to disconnect", --- where companies are obliged to establish hours when to send and answer emails.¹⁴¹

Emma: (*Agitated*) Very long hours, and I need to emphasise it, --- VERY LONG HOURS are detrimental for our position. --- In my current job as a leader, --- I believe having children would have been a barrier. It would have been impossible, yes IMPOSSIBLE, and I would have been deceiving myself and my family if I had had children. Surely it would have affected my relationship with my husband. Taking care of our elderly parents is also very demanding, even though my sister and I support each other a lot.

Audience: (*Total silence*)

Narrator: Does this silence represent a disapproval of Emma's claim?

¹⁴¹ BBC News. (2016). *French get right to avoid work emails*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38479439>

Ida: THERE ARE female leaders who have children and still cope, but we must acknowledge that for many females, having a career and taking care of children is like having two fulltime jobs.

Narrator: (*Pointing to Gail*) In a previous scene, you mentioned how you had to face SEVERAL OBSTACLES to reach your current position. Can you tell the audience what you meant by this?

Gail: (*With an ironic smile*) Well, some male applicants tried their best to put us, *female participants*, off, even from going to the interview --- I do not know whether you are aware of that.

Ida: Well, NO. --- I had the impression that such things DID NOT exist anymore!

Gail: *You're very wrong Ida.* --- There were lots and lots of people applying for this job --- but I said NO, I AM NOT GOING TO GIVE UP. I said, "Oh God, I AM going to put my name there, I AM going to make it, and I will do my best and let God do the rest."

Audience: (*Applause*) Well done, Brava.

Gail: (*With great satisfaction and pleasure*) So, you know, I had the interview, and I was one of the first to be chosen, so it was a bigger challenge because the responsibility weighs you down. Time is also a barrier.

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Now is that the same for any gender?

Gail: *Well, I understand Emma's point very well.* --- Late at night I usually go through all my emails, but then you wake up at five in the morning and you find a new batch of emails. This means people do not sleep!

Narrator: And what about you Anne? Have you faced any obstacles?

Anne: *(With hesitation, slowly, and with a broken voice)* I wished to further my studies, but you know, with family commitments and children... Now they are grown-ups. --- It wasn't that easy for me. --- Sometimes, --- you know, --- sometimes, --- I look back and say that I could have done it.

Narrator: As an Assistant Head in a boys' school, Anne had to confront a male teacher who was not doing his mid-day supervision, a shirking of duty which he denied.

Anne: *(Interrupting)* He first insisted that it wasn't true. Later he refused to apologise for being so arrogant towards me and accusing me that I was favouring others, --- --- because I was A WOMAN, HE SAID.

Narrator: Another challenging experience Anne had to deal with as a woman was during one of her interviews for a leadership post. The panel was made up of two males and a female, and the last question posed by one of the male members was...

Anne: "So you are married, you have a family," --- this is true, --- "You have a family, you have it in your CV that you are married and that you have [...] children," and he told me, "how will you cope as an Assistant Head of school as a married woman?" I answered and I

REMEMBER ANSWERING VERY SINCERELY, as I always do, --- I am always very committed to my work and I will definitely do my utmost in my role as an Assistant Head. However, I am also committed to my family as a mother of [...]. --- My children are a priority in my life, my family is a priority. Going back home I recounted everything to my husband and he answered: "You have signed your own death warrant, dear," and when I asked why, he said, "I am sure you are not going to make it this time round," (*with a broken voice*) AND IN FACT, I DIDN'T MAKE IT.

Ida: Well said Anne! You could not have answered any better even if it cost you the post. Sometimes women can also be a pain in the neck for other women, and this in itself is a barrier. Having a female in the interviewing board should have helped, --- she should have stood up and challenged the member of the panel for asking such an arrogant, rude, and illegal question. Surely this woman behaved differently from the one you mentioned in Scene 2 where she encouraged you and helped you to apply for your current post.

Narrator: Belle's leadership career took a more torturous route, but she has never regretted the decisions she made to reach her leading position.

Belle: When I had my child, I had to choose (*without hesitation and promptly*) and I chose to take care of my child. *However, this meant that during that time I had to choose a different kind of job, one which did not involve long hours. However, being ambitious, I did my utmost to learn from every opportunity, even in doing tasks which were above my scale, and still I took advantage of these instances to learn something new.*

Ida: As many women, Belle's main challenge was the family, and such a challenge hinders women from applying for leadership roles. Consequently, such issues hold women back from advancing in their career.¹⁴²

Belle: Yes, Maltese women still --- --- --- shoulder a lot of family responsibilities, and so I believe that this factor is hindering women from reaching top positions. Also, we still have the culture that women search for jobs matching their kids' demands. In fact, if one looks at the statistics comparing male and female teaching grades, the gap is big, --- REALLY BIG.

Cate: *I agree. I remember that as a teacher I had applied for the post of an Assistant Head. Being a separated woman with [...] child/ren, the interviewing board asked me, "But you are a separated woman. How are you going to cope with this position while rearing your child/ren?"*

Ida: And your response?

Cate: Well, being a straightforward person, I told them that the interview was not about my personal life but rather we should be discussing and evaluating my skills as a prospective Assistant Head.

Ida: And the result?

¹⁴² McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Grummell et al., 2009; Fuller, 2017; McKillop & Moorosi, 2017; Guihen, 2018.

Cate: After listening to that question, I immediately realised that the place was not for me, and so I just stood up and having been so OFFENDED, I said that I felt that this post was not suitable for me and just left.

Audience: (*Loud clapping and cheering*)

Cate: Some women find it difficult to work in a male-dominated environment, but personally, I do not find any problem. If I'm on a board and I am the only female, I'm not going to be overwhelmed or keep silent, since I make sure that I make myself heard. But that's my character. --- This does not mean that there aren't times where I feel demotivated, especially when I dedicate so much time to my work --- without any appreciation.

Ida: Being appreciated and supported are beneficial and can influence women in retaining and advancing in their posts. Appreciation motivates us and keeps us going.¹⁴³ What about you Hayley?

Hayley: The barriers and challenges I have experienced aren't related to me being a woman. The challenges I face are due to the nature of my job. --- But then I have other challenges due to personal commitments, and so the daily challenges in my personal life and in my career need to be mediated.

Ida: What do you mean Hayley?

¹⁴³ Gibson, 2006.

Hayley: Well, my job entails dealing with males for most of the time, and they sometimes try to under-rate my competence and discredit my work because I am a woman.

Ida: And your reaction to this?

Hayley: Well, I'm crystal clear. When there's a technical task that I'm not able to do, I ask for help and admit my inability as I'm not presumptuous. However, then I also clearly show them that they're not going to take me for a ride, in the sense that --- I believe that everyone can offer a valid contribution and everyone can learn from each other, and in this way, we create a chain that links us together, and thus valuing each other's job and treating everyone respectfully.

Ida: (*Addressing the audience*) Very assertive, analytical, and decisive—traits associated with male leaders.¹⁴⁴ However, given that Hayley works in a male-dominated environment, is she supposed to act like this? Maybe she prefers this style when working with males, or maybe that is simply her character!

Narrator: What about you Deb? What are the challenges you have encountered?

Deb: *I agree with my colleagues.* --- Working in a male-dominated environment is sometimes hard and you have to stand up for your rights, which most male leaders do not have to do. Sometimes, male leaders try to talk you down; even the way they answer the phone or address you and so on, --- it is as if YOU DO NOT EXIST. A particular instance happened

¹⁴⁴ Shakeshaft, 1987; Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007.

just recently, [...] phoned and because of his rudeness I ignored him. He is older than me, he is a man, and HE THINKS he can just talk me down. NO WAY!

Audience: (*Clapping and cheering*) WELL SAID DEB!

Ida: Without too much elaboration, I finish this scene with a quote from David Henry Hwang's play, *M. Butterfly*: --- "only a man KNOWS how a woman SHOULD act."¹⁴⁵ And in Hwang's own words, "Women behave in ways that are culturally prescribed, and those who prescribe their conduct are men."¹⁴⁶ I leave it up to the audience to interpret and reflect on Hwang's claims.

Narrator: This brings us to the end of this scene, with our actors having discussed the challenges they have met on their journey. --- And now to Scene 7.

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a very spacious office with brand new furniture. The walls are painted lilac and featuring a modern painting. The sea can be seen from a big window. A computer desk is situated at the left-hand side, while in the middle of the room there is a large table with ten chairs around it. Six leaders, excluding Hayley and Belle, are around the table. Ida and the narrator are standing up near the leaders.

¹⁴⁵ Hwang, H. & DiGaetani, J. L. (1989, p. 146). David Henry Hwang (b.1957): American playwright, librettist, screenwriter and theatre professor; My emphasis.

¹⁴⁶ eNotes Publishing Ed. eNotes Editorial. eNotes.com, Inc. eNotes.com. (2019). *M. Butterfly - The Western Ideal of Romantic Love*. Retrieved from <https://www.enotes.com/topics/m-butterfly/critical-essays/essays-criticism>

Recorded voice introduces the seventh scene.

Scene 7: The Gap

Recorded voice: “It seems women are still not progressing to headship in great numbers, suggesting that they either face too many obstacles to progression, or that they are *opting out*, choosing not to pursue school leadership positions.”¹⁴⁷

Narrator: (*Moving around and addressing the audience*) Ladies and gentlemen, different people perceive challenges differently. This scene illustrates what our actors generally think about the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

Anne: (*Addressing the other leaders*) A major obstacle is the family. --- I mean, women with a family prefer not to take on any more stress, --- even though I see in them a lot of potential and a lot of interest, and they have very valid leadership skills. In spite of shifting patterns, I still think that women take the main parenting role, --- and it shouldn't be like that. --- There are also some men whom I consider very suitable for the job, but they are not ready to go for leadership, for example, so as not to lose their summer or mid-term holidays.

Hayley knocks and enters together with Belle and both sit next to the other leaders.

Narrator: Hayley, we were discussing the gap between female and male leaders. What is your opinion?

¹⁴⁷ Smith, 2011, p. 8.

Hayley: *Sorry for being late, but Belle and I had another appointment (Belle nods in acknowledgement).* I believe that it's because some women are not ready to take up certain positions, they choose other priorities in their lives, they choose to dedicate their time and energy to these priorities, and so it is more a personal choice.

Ida: I agree that some women have priorities which might prevent them from taking certain decisions such as that of committing themselves to leadership positions, --- but sometimes it's not because they are not ready to commit themselves; rather, they have no other option but to dedicate themselves to other priorities, such as the family.

Belle: I firmly believe that it's the culture. YES, it is in the culture.

Narrator: Globally, and maybe even more in Malta since it is amongst the most conservative countries in Europe, many people still believe that the mother rather than the father should be the one taking care of the children.¹⁴⁸ Belle, even you referred to the gap between female teachers and males, since being a teacher is an EXCELLENT and CONVENIENT career which allows one to be a professional and at the same time take care of the children.

Ida: Behind the curtain Deb mentioned how sometimes, "Some people tell you, sort of --- don't even mention it. --- Don't talk about this underrepresentation. --- Even some women who are known in their leadership positions," which is something I totally disapprove of. Keeping our mouth shut won't solve anything!

Narrator: So, Deb, why do you think female leaders are underrepresented?

¹⁴⁸ Abela, 1994.

Deb: Lack of support. (*with pride*) I had a lot of SUPPORT from home, --- which I still enjoy, otherwise I would not be able to do this job. Another issue that in some way impelled my advance, --- because otherwise I think I would not have been able to dedicate time for my job, was the fact that I did not have kids. I think that somewhat restrains you because if I had my own kids, I would have wished to bring them up myself rather than giving them to my mum to babysit. --- It was a conscious decision.

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Many are of the opinion that having children is a challenge to career advancement, but I disagree with Deb. What about high-achieving women with children?

Narrator: Gail, you mentioned earlier that as a female leader you have never encountered any difficulties. So how do you explain the phenomenon of this underrepresentation in female leaders?

Gail: NOT BECAUSE OF MEN? --- WHO CHOOSES THEM [female leaders]? IT STANDS TO REASON, NO? Most interviewing boards only consist of men!

Audience: (*Astonished and whispering*)

Ida: WOW! That's a strong claim!

Audience: (*Clapping and cheering*)

Gail: Also, women need to be more assertive and have more trust in themselves. --- Sometimes we harm ourselves, since there are women believing that men can perform better.

Narrator: This performance barrier has been an obstacle for many years; the belief that women operate on a poorer level than men. And some women themselves still believe this.

Gail: Although the stereotyping regarding what a woman can and should choose as a career is changing, it is still an issue. I remember once when I was still a teacher, the Minister of Education visited our school and asked who was teaching Computer Science, and a male teacher and I raised our hands. I can still remember the Minister's face, and so I asked him, "Do you have a problem, Minister?" He answered in the negative but I answered back, "Is it because I am a woman?" and he replied in the affirmative, and honestly admitted that he was not expecting a woman to teach the subject. Things change, --- but you see, --- some PERCEPTIONS --- STILL EXIST. --- I remember telling him, "Minister you have the wrong idea of what we women are capable of," but I still can't believe how a Minister could have these perceptions. --- No wonder females are rarely appointed to senior positions.

Audience: (*Loud clapping and cheering*)

Ida: Well said Gail, especially considering the fact that you had the guts to answer a politician like that, --- who is expected to lead by example. --- People like him ARE the policymakers!

Narrator: And Fae, what is your opinion on having fewer women than men in senior positions?

Fae: Most of the time it is fear, --- the fear that we wouldn't manage to juggle all these commitments --- the fear, --- which I sometimes find stupid --- and ridiculous, that we are not

up to it as much as men in leadership or in high leadership positions. Also, time mismanagement hinders females from taking leadership positions. However, we are as efficient and sometimes maybe as clinical as men are, because that is part of our character. So, time mismanagement could hamper us, and we have to be more clinical, more focused, and maybe more organised.

Narrator: And Cate?

Cate: *Deb is right*, SUPPORT is fundamental. When I needed help, I found a shoulder to rest my head upon, and not finding enough support is a reason why females do not advance. Human life is very complicated and sensitive, --- and someday or other everyone is overcome by a time of crisis, and so support is essential. Indeed, I want to always be THERE for those in need, a SHOULDER for others, like when I found one to lay my head upon.

Ida: (*Happily*) Glad to hear of your disposition towards supporting others. When leaders help and support others it is very beneficial, and having women assisting and supporting other women helps them to cope better and advance in their careers.¹⁴⁹

Emma: As a female I have always endorsed fairness. --- Justice for me is of extreme importance, --- so I must say that INJUSTICE is a major obstacle.

Ida: Injustice is a barrier for women who wish to advance in their career. It has been declared that “women’s underrepresentation in headship is a matter of social injustice, with women’s

¹⁴⁹ Gerdes, 2003; Ackner & Armenti, 2004; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018.

lack of parity of participation resulting in lack of recognition for their capacity for leadership and from lack of resources with which to achieve it”.¹⁵⁰

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma’s ‘River Flows in You’. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a spacious office with a desk at one side and a small table next to some hanging picture frames. The walls are coloured pale green, with plenty of frames. Green striped curtains cover the windows. A nice well-lit chandelier hangs above the middle of a long table. All leaders together with Ida and the narrator are sitting around the table chatting among themselves and drinking tea or coffee.

Recorded voice introduces the eighth scene.

Scene 8: Panacea?

Recorded voice: “Promoting a richly diverse group of women into leadership roles will not only help make societal institutions, businesses, and governments more representative, but it can also, potentially, contribute to more ethical, productive, innovative, and financially successful organizations that demonstrate higher levels of collective intelligence and are less rife with conflict.”¹⁵¹

Narrator: *(Standing, moving around and addressing the audience)* This scene deals with some of the solutions offered by our actors in an attempt to reduce the gap between male and

¹⁵⁰ Fuller, 2017, p. 55.

¹⁵¹ Hoyt, 2013, p. 363.

female leaders. As for this scene, Ida and myself will refrain from commenting until all our actors have shared their opinions. (*Sits again and looks at Belle*)

Belle: Prioritising is very essential. In your life, in everything you do you work by priority, and if you really want something, you have to work for it --- VERY HARD, and sometimes harder. --- No one is going to roll over for you. So, I believe that we should be more aware of our priorities.

Emma: *Also*, a change in culture is required, where partners support each other and help each other in the sense that they balance each other and help each other in house chores and family affairs.

Anne: Our society needs to strike a balance between men and women in leadership, and unless we try to inculcate this type of culture, where both parents get involved in family matters, --- women in Malta will NEVER make it to the top leadership roles. If we are not going to build on a culture of dual parenting, --- and PROPER dual parenting, where both parents are present in their children's life, we will never reach the desired goal.

Gail: *Yes*, --- a change in culture, education, and breaking stereotypes are the main requirements to reduce this scarcity. First of all, the idea that a woman's place is in the kitchen --- NEEDS to change. Having a family does not mean that you are relegated exclusively to rocking the cradle. --- It is fundamental that WOMEN THEMSELVES resist this prejudice.

Fae: We NEED to break this mould, this stereotype that women are the main child carers. It's not easy. We need to encourage more young women to further their studies and take different roles, --- as I did! I think it is OUR DUTY, --- that we are here ---- not only to act as role models, but also to SPEAK about it, to encourage other people and coach them and assist them. --- That's the satisfaction of being here now.

Belle: *Yes*, the family should NOT be a hinderance for women. A compromise should be struck.

Anne: We DEFINITELY need support.

Emma: My superior also happens to be female, and the fact that we support and mentor each other helps a lot.

Fae: Support is an essential element, not only in leadership. The fact that whatever I decided on my mum supported me—she never kept me back from continuing my studies—this helped immensely.

Emma: *Adding to this*, let's be plain, it is USELESS to say we need families to strike a balance between work and family life, --- or that we want HEALTHY couples. --- --- I'd rather say GIVE THEM SUPPORT, especially in time of crisis, and then you will get the healthy families and lessen family crises.

Gail: Support, like family-friendly measures, also help. However, (*sarcastically*) can you have a female leader that benefits from maternity leave and vacation leave? (*Still*

sarcastically) Can the office close for three or eight months? NO! That is why we need support. WE DON'T EVEN HAVE AN ASSISTANT, which is so unprofessional. --- As if we were indispensable!

Belle: It will take time --- but the fact that more women are participating in the work force is already a big step. --- Childcare facilities are also of great help.

Deb: It is only recently that we have childcare facilities but having them nearer to the workplace, like, for example, the one in the University of Malta, helps a lot. --- We also need prolonged maternity leave or even parental leave, --- in such a way that the husband would be able to afford a break in his career advancement and help his wife. --- A change in mentality is required; we are still too male-dominated, for example, in parliament or in private companies. --- Some of my friends even say that when it comes to pay, males get a better deal than females.

Cate: Family-friendly measures are a must and have to be REAL applied to all echelons. It is something that I really suffered from as a mother. --- These family-friendly measures exist, but for women occupying a position like ours, THEY ARE ONLY FICTION. If I had to ask for family-friendly measures, SURELY, I would lose my job, --- FULLSTOP, --- NO NEED TO ARGUE ABOUT THIS.

Gail: Help and support are essential. Given that our nature permits having babies, we cannot be penalised for it, but this means that we need help, if we really care for the progress of our country, with ALL these FAMILY-FRIENDLY MEASURES. I know that these measures are very taxing on the country, and for this reason organisations prefer to choose a man rather

than a woman, since they say the hassle is less, and this perception is replicated in panels of interviewing boards. Nowadays, we have more women pursuing their studies and gaining expertise, so we ALL know that women are as effective and capable as men are: --- (*with pleasure*) I'd say EVEN MORE!

Hayley: Family-friendly measures help a lot, and these have to be logistically available, as, for example, childcare centres near the workplace. Also, the childcare centres in Malta are for children under three, so we need clubs for older children. There are some available but very few, so basically these services need to be extended and be more accessible.

Emma: Another factor is the need to reduce working hours; in fact, if I'm not mistaken, in Sweden it was found that reducing working hours made people more productive.

Deb: *Agree! In addition to this,* --- having more incentives for females to go out to work is a big help, even though some would argue that this will be discriminating against males! (*With conviction*) Really, I don't think so, because after all, males already have a lot of incentives! Another solution is the opportunity of flexihours, --- which is currently NON-EXISTENT!

Emma: *Yes,* other important factors are flexihours and teleworking, even for positions like ours, both for the public service and private companies. There are several instances that we can work from home.

Fae: Assistance and certain measures like working from home, *as Emma mentioned,* also help. Nowadays, even using technology is an option. --- You do not have to travel. --- Some women are afraid of taking high-level jobs because these entail lots of travelling --- and this

could easily be replaced nowadays by videoconferencing. --- We are NOT using them enough!

Emma: Another possible solution is to offer employees a sabbatical time. Procedures regarding sending and receiving emails should also be introduced. --- More communication with authorities is required. --- Additionally, the leadership application needs rewording; --- surely the way it is now is not helping females, with phrases such as “you have to work under pressure” or --- “you are available 24/7”. When I was applying, I was very sceptical about these terms and to tell you the truth, I’m not sure what exactly they are there for and what their true meanings are. The financial package also has to be reorganised.

Cate: *True*, I believe that our salary is inadequate.

Anne: We also need more human AND financial resources. We have no financial resources at all, AT ALL, AT ALL, --- so that is another issue. These issues create the impression that our positions are stressful, which in a way they are, and this is not a healthy example for our colleagues who see us in this stressed out state and it discourages them for applying for such posts.

Emma: Another barrier, --- and this concerns both females and males, is the public service. The leader does not choose the staff, and so you have to work with the provided personnel. So, we are working on standardisation and then I cannot choose my own people, the ones I have to work with on a daily basis!

Gail: In addition to this, the perception that women perform less needs to be done away with. In these days I believe that roles have been changing. I believe that today [the partner] must help. The days that HE IS LIKE A GURU are now over --- and coming from work HE IS TIRED and DOES NOTHING. What I mean is that responsibility at home has to be shared; -- today, both men and women work and have a career.

Belle: Policymakers, the government, NGOs, and others need to work hand in hand to tackle such problems in particular. --- They need to see how to address this gap for the long term. I see tremendous loss in women in the age range of 25 to 45 years --- a 20-year period where they dedicate themselves to the family. Some REAL STUDY must be conducted on how to solve this problem and involve more women in taking leadership positions. This is not going to happen in a decade; it will take years because of the prevalent culture. Telework is a short-term solution. There needs to be more awareness --- and promotion of the role of women by giving incentives --- like more childcare centres at the place of work, *as suggested by my colleagues*. --- Awareness and cultural shifts can cut down the waiting time for this reform.

Cate: *And what about meritocracy?* Women should be recognised as much as men for their qualifications. Nowadays we have CREATED a ministerial post for such issues, --- but PLEASE, how long are we going to drag our feet? --- TAKE DECISIONS, and if you really want women to retain their leadership roles, give them something tangible. --- We CANNOT drag our feet any longer. --- Women should be given more recognition for their studies, for caring for their family members, and keeping up with their leadership position.

Gail: Also, women need not be fearful and they need to be in the front line when it comes to careers. --- The issue of who chooses them is something else! My message to women is

APPLY *for leadership positions*, since many times the difficulty is that few women apply to be appointed leaders. --- Women need to have more courage in themselves so that other people will trust them, and then it doesn't matter whether you are a woman or a man. But WE, --- WE HAVE TO STRIVE HARDER --- TO ASSERT OURSELVES MORE. We have to be assertive and say, YES, I AM AS CAPABLE A MAN IS.

Deb: Something else which I would like to see is continued professional development opportunities: courses, seminars, and conferences targeting women, but where action is really taken. --- For example, before the department used to organise a seminar once a month for female leaders who were either Directors, College Principals, or Heads of Section, where we used to discuss the issues which kept us back from advancing, and how to deal with co-workers and people you are responsible for, especially difficult males.

Emma: *Yes, I remember.* They were so helpful and lively. Unfortunately, they were only for a short period of time.

Deb: Another aspect is EDUCATION, even at the primary school level and even in terms of the perceptions of teachers themselves. --- When it comes to the choice of subjects, some parents interfere in the choice of subjects for their kids, both at middle school level and even later, at sixth form level, AND EVEN when it comes to university. So, I think the mentality has to change. --- We need more EXPOSURE and more AWARENESS. --- The number of opportunities has increased from when I was younger --- but there is still A LOT to be improved.

Audience: *(Cheering, loud clapping and standing ovation)*

Ida and the narrator stand up, move to the centre of the stage, and look at the audience.

Narrator: WOW! Very healthy suggestions. Thanks to our actors for being so open and sharing what they think is necessary to reduce the underrepresentation of female leadership. Making women aware of these barriers helps them more to advance.

Ida: That is what our actors did in this scene; they unveiled their views and voiced their concerns.

Narrator: If we look at the main proposals our actors suggested, we can come up with the following. SUPPORT, CHANGE OF CULTURE, and MENTORING are the most common suggestions. Moreover, according to Fae, SPEAKING OUT also helps in making up for this scarcity.

Ida: Very valid suggestions! These solutions have also been discussed by international scholars. Women receiving support achieve better professional growth in coping with their career, while women who lack support from their employers are hindered from progressing to senior positions. Mentoring is a solution suggested decades ago, since it keeps women's ambitions of advancing in their career alive, while it also helps women retain their jobs, it improves their leadership skills and careers, and it is considered instrumental in one's development.

Narrator: PRIORITISING, FAMILY-FRIENDLY MEASURES like prolonged maternity and parental leave, INCENTIVES like flexihours, reducing weekly hours and teleworking, and the FINANCIAL PACKAGE were also mentioned.

Ida: Non-family-friendly measures are obstacles which stand in the way of women advancing in their careers.¹⁵² Also, as our actors claim the financial package is discouraging for leaders in the public service, be they male or female.

Narrator: ELIMINATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES, AWARENESS, JUSTICE, and LESS MALE-DOMINATED environments are also regarded as solutions by our leaders, but another interesting solution suggested by Belle is RESEARCH.

Ida: The obstacles for women in reaching leadership positions are several, but STEREOTYPING is very common and it is a global reality.¹⁵³ The sexist stereotype that women are less able to lead than men is a big barrier, as is the fact that certain jobs are primarily associated with men, and such stereotypes are engendered in early childhood, making them even harder to break.¹⁵⁴ Thus, all this suggests that awareness and education are required from an early age. Likewise, workplaces with a high male-dominated environment have a negative impact on the performance of women.¹⁵⁵

Narrator: Other very important suggestions are PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES and EARLY EDUCATION, as mentioned by you, Ida.

Ida: Professional or leadership development programmes help people become more competent and also more confident in their leadership position.¹⁵⁶ In addition, these

¹⁵² Oplatka, 2016.

¹⁵³ Fuller, 2017; Thorpe, 2018; Chase & Martin, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Heilman, 2001; Oplatka, 2016; Rudman & Phelan, 2010; Paludi, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Inesi & Cable, 2014; Chase & Martin, 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Lafreniere & Longman, 2008; Bonebright et al., 2012; Showunmi, 2016; Devnew & Storberg-Walker, 2018; Thorpe, 2018.

programmes identify the best training one requires and also provide networking opportunities.¹⁵⁷

Narrator: According to the American author Grenville Kleiser, “To every problem there is already a solution whether you know it or not.”¹⁵⁸ The fact that as from 2014 the Maltese government has been offering free childcare facilities to all working women is of great help. However, more incentives and facilities are required to make these counter-underrepresentation efforts more tangible.

Ida: All these suggestions indicate the way forward, --- even though MUCH MORE IS NEEDED. It’s not enough to increase the economic stability by having more women working, when it is well known that women in Malta are paid much less than men, when women are CRYING OUT for SUPPORT, where mentoring programmes hardly exist, and the majority of the interviews are conducted by men, as also claimed by our actors. Even when it comes to key decisions concerning women themselves, these are mostly taken by males. Unfortunately, we still live in a time of questioning why it is that “WHERE THERE IS POWER, WOMEN ARE ABSENT”.¹⁵⁹

Narrator: This reflective question brings us to the end of this scene, during which our actors have provided suggestions for the problem of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions.

¹⁵⁷ Lafreniere & Longman, 2008.

¹⁵⁸ Grenville Kleiser (1868 – 1935): North American Author. Kleiser, G. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/grenville_kleiser_158313

¹⁵⁹ Prof Louise Morley, cited in Torrance, 2015, p. 4.

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Yiruma's 'River Flows in You'. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a very small office with a small table at the centre and four chairs around it. A small computer desk is full of files, some of which are open. The walls are covered with filing shelves, with some files out of place. There are bags and files on the floor. Cate, Deb, Emma, and Gail are browsing through the files. Anne, Ida, and the narrator are in front of the computer desk chatting. The other three leaders are not on stage.

Recorded voice introduces the ninth scene.

Scene 9: Relationships

Recorded voice: “The art of effective listening is essential to clear communication, and clear communication is necessary to management success.”¹⁶⁰

Narrator: (*Moves to the centre and addresses the audience*) “A trusting relationship with followers” is a very important aspect in leadership, and a key component which distinguishes educational leaders is “the ability to improve relationships”.¹⁶¹

Ida: Relationships in an organisation are of extreme importance, “since lack of connectedness breeds loneliness, low self-esteem, isolation, low achievement, low motivation and low productivity [... and] the organizational climate which will pave the way for such interaction is determined by the leadership”.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ James Cash Penney (1875 - 1971): American businessman and entrepreneur. Penny, J. C. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/james_cash_penney_226548

¹⁶¹ Yukl, 2013, p. 351; Fullan, 2002, p. 16.

¹⁶² Bhatti et al., 2012, p. 194.

Narrator: This scene shows how some of our actors consider relationships as one of their priorities in their daily work.

Cate, Deb, Emma, and Gail stop browsing. Anne moves next to Cate and remains standing.

Cate: As a leader I firmly believe that healthy relationships also entail helping others in improving and upskilling their talents. It took me some time to build positive relations with my colleagues, as I had come from a different department and no one knew me. However, after a few years, we made real progress. --- I feel we have grown together, --- I feel we have built a very good relationship. --- But still there is space for improvement. I try my best to help my colleagues to progress; --- they are MY TEAM. I take pride in their career advancement or academic achievements and have never regretted giving them my help and encouragement.

Narrator: Thanks Cate. And what about you, Deb?

Deb: I believe leadership is about relationships and have a sound relationship with my colleagues. --- Because I respect them as human beings regardless of whether they are the janitors or have the highest positions in the ministry, --- and they respect me, --- I must say that we have built a very good rapport. The most important quality is LISTENING to people, because NO, being a leader is not easy, but if you show people that you understand, --- you LISTEN to them and tell them “I am going to listen to you”, the rapport will be stronger.

Ida: Many times, people do not need advice, BUT they only need someone who REALLY LISTENS to them, as Deb is saying. And sometimes, “when you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.”¹⁶³

Emma *My colleagues and I* spend a lot of time together and we treat each other very well, but unfortunately, the workload is so big—it is always DO DO DO—that often the human dimension suffers. --- There is no time for reflection and sometimes you do not see the person as a person, but as a production machine.

Ida: “Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.”¹⁶⁴ That is why it is vital that every now and then the team gets out of the office for team-building experiences, because “teamwork begins by building trust,” and it is often in those informal occasions that people get to know each other better.¹⁶⁵

Gail: *I agree!* Whatever position I had, I always had a very healthy rapport with the staff, so that makes things easier for a person in leadership. I AM NOT authoritarian, DEFINITELY NOT, --- but I always fought to have my way after discussing with the stakeholders. --- However, if other people’s ideas are better than mine, I am ready and willing to change.

Narrator: (*Pointing to Gail*) So, for you, relationships in leadership ARE fundamental?

¹⁶³ Dalai Lama XIV (b.1935): Dalai Lamas are important Buddhist monks. Quotespedia. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.quotespedia.org/authors/d/dalai-lama/when-you-talk-you-are-only-repeating-what-you-already-know-but-if-you-listen-you-may-learn-something-new-dalai-lama/>

¹⁶⁴ Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC): Greek Philosopher. Aristotle. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/aristotle_377765

¹⁶⁵ Patrick Lencioni (b. 1965): American writer. Hubspot Follow. (2016). *Teamwork begins by building trust*. Retrieved from https://www.slideshare.net/HubSpot/31-quotes-to-celebrate-teamwork-and-collaboration/16-Teamwork_begins_by_buildingtrust_And

Gail: (*Without hesitation*) *Very important.* Showing appreciation is a leadership quality, and when you appreciate people they give you more than you ask of them. --- When you show them that you understand their situation—not being weak, I do not want to be misunderstood—but when you are there for people and you listen to them, --- they appreciate it, because communication in leadership is vital. WE COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE. --- They are not afraid of me or of the power that I endorse, AND THAT MEANS A LOT TO ME. They expect that I appreciate their work --- and when they have problems I am available to listen.

Ida: COMMUNICATION --- is a very important process in which people SEND and RECEIVE UNDERSTOOD information. Leaders cope better and are more effective if they are able to understand and know how their colleagues are feeling, and are able to intervene when they are discouraged.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, effective leadership is a communication process, it is the attempt of followers TOGETHER with the leader to reach THEIR goals through communication.¹⁶⁷

Narrator: What about you, Anne? How do you think that relationships impact your leadership role?

Anne: You acquire respect by building healthy relationships with the people around you. When people see and understand that you mean well, that you have their welfare, the well-being of the students and the staff at heart, --- you win people over. *Speaking about feelings and trustworthiness*, as a team we have several meetings to discuss various matters,

¹⁶⁶ Cherniss & Goleman, 2001.

¹⁶⁷ Tannenbaum et al., 1961; Donnelly et al., 1985.

brainstorm for activities, and many times they improve our COLLEGIALITY. This gives me satisfaction and a better understanding of their feelings.

Narrator: Our performance is coming to an end. --- But before the curtain comes down, our actors asked for a concluding scene to share their last reflections...

Ida: (*Interrupting*) Before this last scene, --- I would like to share a comment on a humorous note. --- Former President Clinton, referring to the importance of listening to leadership, said that running a country “is like running a cemetery: you’ve got a lot of people under you and nobody listening”.¹⁶⁸ I’m sure it’s not ALWAYS the same for our leaders.

Audience: (*Murmuring and laughing*)

Blackout to change backdrop. Gradual crescendo of Pentatonix’s ‘Hallelujah’. Music fades out after some time.

Lights back on. We see a medium-sized office with a desk opposite the door, in front of which there are two armchairs. Next to the desk there is a table with a coffee machine and a water dispenser. By the side there is a round table with eight chairs. Ida is serving coffee or water to the leaders, and when served they find a place round the table.

Recorded voice introduces the tenth scene.

¹⁶⁸ Bill Clinton (b.1946): 42nd President of the United States. Clinton, W. J. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/william_j_clinton_454934

Scene 10: Epilogue –Top Female Leaders

Recorded voice: “In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will just be leaders.”¹⁶⁹

Narrator: (*Exits from behind the curtain and moves to the middle of the stage*) Both Ida and I will refrain from commenting in this scene, before delivering our final comments at the end.

--- The floor to Anne....

The narrator goes next to Ida and both remain standing, listening to the leaders.

Anne: The fact that I continued working and raising a family at the same time helped me not only on a professional level, but also on a personal level. I think that women in leadership have a lot to give but they need to be SUPPORTED. --- I’m sure this is why only a few women are in leadership positions, because they do not get the support that they need. Like men, they need support in leadership positions. I think this involves a major overhaul of society, --- and more RESPECT, definitely. (*Emotional, angrily and with tears*) The murder of DCG, without even commenting about why the event took place... I felt VERY, VERY hurt as a woman. --- I felt hurt... I felt like screaming my head off. WHY are women looked at in that manner?¹⁷⁰ WHY? WHY? I mean, are men looked at in that manner? Again, this is ingrained in our culture and to change it, it is not easy. The same argument applies to all women who appear on screen or posters. WHY is it ALWAYS a woman? WHY? I know that females are considered the fairer sex—I mean, that is how we are made—but why is our

¹⁶⁹ Sheryl Kara Sandberg (b.1969): American technology executive, activist, and author. Sandberg, S. K. (2013). *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/754671-in-the-future-there-will-be-no-female-leaders-there>

¹⁷⁰ Daphne Caruana Galizia (1964 - 2017): was a Maltese journalist, writer, and anti-corruption activist who reported political events in Malta, in particular investigating and reporting government corruption, nepotism, patronage, and so on. She died in a car bomb attack close to her home.

image always sexualised? --- I DO NOT consider myself a feminist, but it irks me when someone passes a sexist comment regarding women who have leadership roles.

Gail: I tend to disagree with positive discrimination, so I will not choose a woman for a job just for the sake that she is a woman. It's good to have a harmony of ideas and having inputs also from women, --- but if a man is more suited for the job, I will choose him. I MEAN, --- I HAVE TO FIND THE BALANCE WITHOUT DISCRIMINATING AGAINST ANYONE.

Hayley: Personally, I am totally against quotas, since I see the practice as privileging someone, and I believe that if I AM around a table or on a board, I am there because of my competences and my skills and NOT because I'm a woman.

Cate: I am a strategic person, very thoughtful, I reflect a lot, I am a person with deep sentiments, --- meaning I believe that everything builds up on feelings and I give great importance to attitudes. I believe in the saying that when you have obstacles, it's how you go around them that counts, --- in the sense that it is only 1% of what happens to us and the other 99% is how we react to the events in our life. --- I also try to project this message to those around me.

Belle: To be in top management you have to be really STRONG, otherwise you will not make it. I'm not implying that women are NOT strong, but --- there needs to be a change in mentality. Women must have more SUPPORT, AND ALSO interviewing boards must be fair and not incline towards a preference for males when it comes to top management. --- --- We are moving in that direction, and there have been positive changes, but it's a LONG WAY to

go! It takes time to change culture, --- it takes time for women to have more support, so I think we have to work harder, --- work harder.

Fae: Sincerity --- and honesty --- are very important for me. For example, when I decided to apply for my current position, I approached my colleagues and informed them about my intention. I was clear and everybody was aware of the step I was taking. I felt much better not to have it on my conscience. Apart from myself, Mr [...] had also applied, and if I had known beforehand, I think that I might have stepped back. But then again, it could have been an injustice not only to myself but to the female cohort. --- THAT'S WHY WE ARE HERE, AS FEMALE LEADERS!

Deb: We are women, --- so it is not that easy! We work as much as our male counterparts. We do the same hours. We are giving the input, --- the same input. --- Most of the time our minds have been conditioned to accept the fact that we won't make it. Are we different from men? NO, we are NOT! We should be treated the same. GIVE US the same wage, GIVE US the same conditions, and we will deliver the same as our male counterparts. --- That's how I see it!

Emma: As a female I have always valued justice. For me, JUSTICE is very important. --- Despite all my shortcomings, I always try to give voice to the voiceless. --- Our job is a VOCATION; I look at it as honest voluntary work. All this does not only give me personal peace, but also COMFORT and SATISFACTION, and it gives me a certain stamina to keep going without stopping to help others. Let's discover and appreciate the bright side of people. --- We MUST appreciate and value people in management; --- that is my greatest wish!

Audience: (*Cheering, loud clapping, and standing ovation*) Bravi! Bravi!

On the leaders light dims, and Ida and the narrator move to the middle of the stage with a spotlight on them.

Ida: These scenes have explored the perceptions and experiences of these female leaders vis-à-vis leadership. I would say that a dismantling of those elements which project leadership as heroic, aggressive, macho, and masculine is required. Women should no longer be seen as soft human beings, unable to take decisions: a perception which --- renders them incapable of even applying for positions in decision-making, leadership, or management. Meritocracy should prevail, and everyone should be given the same chance to apply for any position and be appointed accordingly without any irrelevant hindrance, obstruction, and pressure which make it difficult for women to be at par with men in leading positions.

Curtain comes down slowly while Ida moves next to the leaders. Screen tilts down. Narrator takes place near the screen.

Narrator: Following Ida's comments, my greatest gratitude goes to our leaders, who with great enthusiasm, passion, and love do their best in offering their services for the progress of our educational system, and who have helped me create and present this drama. In alphabetical order: --- Anne, --- Belle, --- Cate, --- Deb, --- Emma, --- Fae, --- Gail, --- and Hayley. --- --- And last but not least, --- I would like to thank Ida, who although sometimes seemed somewhat of a nuisance, tried to make this performance more reflective, reflexive,

and lively. We end this drama with our last quote from Lao Tzu (*who assumes that leaders should be men!*).¹⁷¹ (Pause) Projector...

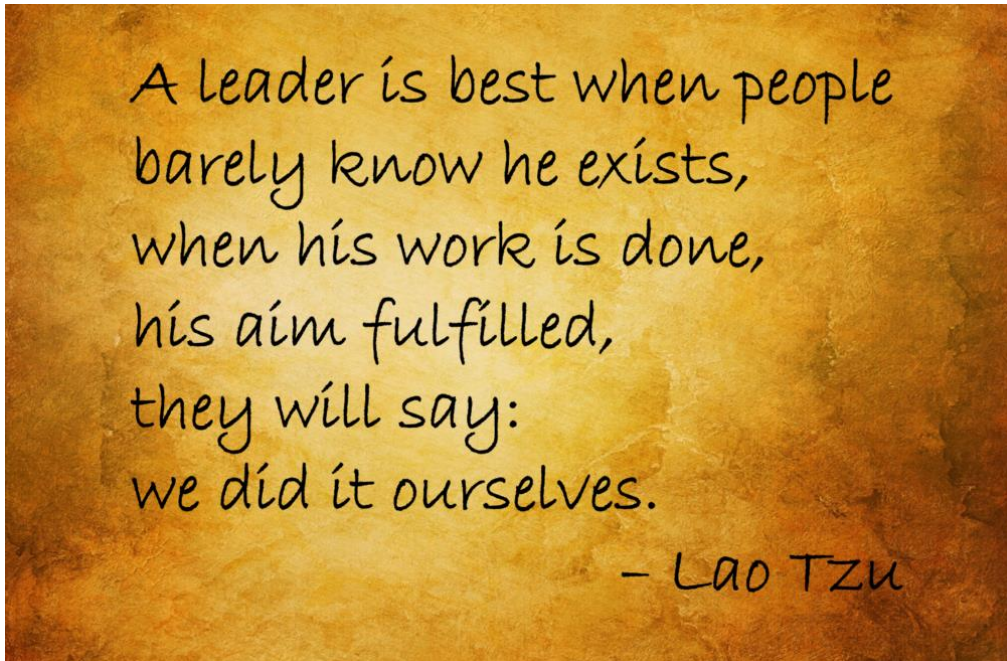


Figure 6.2. Leaders empower their followers.¹⁷²

Gradual crescendo of Pentatonix's 'Hallelujah'. Theatre fully lit.

Concluding Note

This chapter and the preceding one helped identify convergences and discrepancies in leadership literature, in particular that referring to women in leadership, and how women leaders are currently performing their roles in the male-dominated environment in which they are underrepresented. Despite the vast amount of literature on leadership, according to Bennis and Nanus, “no clear unequivocal understanding exists as to what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders, and perhaps more importantly, what distinguishes *effective* leaders from

¹⁷¹ Lao Tzu (likely 6th or 4th century BC): Ancient Chinese philosopher and writer.

¹⁷² *Leaders empower their followers*. [Digital Image]. Retrieved from <https://josephsononbusinessethics.com/2017/01/leaders-empower-followers/>

ineffective leaders” (1997, p. 4). Also, according to Place and Vardeman-Winter (2018), evidence shows that the differences in leadership expertise between women and men is insignificant. Many times, leadership role models—such as politicians, business people, or famous sports personalities— are depicted as male and it is very rarely that the same exposure is given to female leaders unless the context is specifically related to women and leadership. This complements the fact that in Malta only 4% of females represent the public-listed boards, around 5% are CEOs, and fewer than 30% occupy leadership positions in the three main educational institutions.

Although some literature considers women and leadership as a closed book, and some academics/authors are of the opinion that all the pieces of the puzzle are set, both historically and contemporaneously it is evident that the pieces are well out of place, and particularly so in terms of the comparison between female and male leaders. It may be understandable that some people *wish* to protect traditional values and practices maybe in the belief that they constitute historical and cultural aspects, but it should be even more understandable that these same traditions, cultures, and practices are discriminatory and no longer appropriate. While they privilege some, they are simultaneously marginalising many others.

The next chapter will discuss the findings from this research, together with some conclusions, implications, and applications of this study, while also making recommendations for future research.

Chapter 7 – Unveiling the Drama

Discussion [...] critically examine your own results in the light of the previous state of the subject as outlined in the background, and make judgments as to what has been learnt in your work.

–Evans, Gruba & Zobel, 2014, p. 12

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the research study, discusses the findings and implications, interprets the data, draws conclusions, suggests some possible applications, and provides some recommendations for future research. Although the performance presented in the previous three chapters was covered accordingly in corresponding sections, the need for this chapter was still evident as a means to highlight the main findings. Throughout this doctoral process, I kept in my mind Green's claim that at the heart of this project and every other scholarly research "lies the search for better questions and, once found, these form part of the outcome of research rather than its starting point." (Winter et al., 2000, p. 30)

7.2 Summary of the Study

The main aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of senior educational female leaders in the Maltese Educational Department concerning women in leadership posts. Another aim was to explore the influence several people had in my life, in particular through their leadership styles, this while bearing in mind the lack of female leaders I had throughout my journey. I investigated these objectives by using the data gathered from the interviews with eight senior female educational leaders, which was translated into a fictitiously staged drama script, a polyvocal performance where verbatim and non-verbatim quotes were complemented with my interpretations and scholarly

documents to craft the drama. Furthermore, another fictitious radio drama script was crafted, highlighting the major experiences in my life and interpreting the effect several people had on me in exercising various leadership roles.

Women have assumed various leadership posts in several educational strata, including in senior positions. Narrative inquiry, together with my story, was used to elicit the stories of the participants. A hybrid approach using both inductive and deductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of senior female educational leaders. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight female leaders in the Maltese Educational Department. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and, where necessary, translated by me. Having reviewed the transcriptions several times, together with the three deductive themes, I focused on four other themes. The first three themes corresponded to the three interview questions: the journey to leadership, the scarcity of senior educational female leaders in Malta, and possible solutions. The other four themes emerged from grounded theory following Braun's and Clarke's (2006) suggestions. The four themes were: the leaders' definition of leadership, Maltese culture, obstacles related to female leadership, and the importance of relationships in leadership. Apart from these seven themes, the data gathered before the interviews with regard their age, marital status, years of service in senior leadership roles, and whether they had any children was also used for comparison with previously investigated data by other scholars.

7.3 Discussion and Implications

As discussed in the 'Inquiry Trail' chapter, throughout their career women meet several obstacles in their work, and the advancement of women to senior leadership positions seems to be even slower and longer than that of men. The obstacles can be anything from gender stereotypes, culture, family care and new managerialism, and although this

phenomenon is a global one, literature indicates that in Malta the gender gap is one of the biggest in Europe. In contrast to Young's (2016) paper 'Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century', the women leaders in this study believe that anyone can be a successful leader, depending on the person. Furthermore, the literature indicates that although different styles of educational leadership exist, there is no appropriate style that can be applied for all circumstances, and effective leadership suggests applying the style which is most suitable for that particular situation. As asserted in Chapter 3, using one's life story in research is a means of connecting one's journey with what is being investigated; it is a way of sharing one's personal voice to explore sociological understanding, culture, and knowledge.

Before commenting in some detail on the discussion and implications of this research, it is imperative to comment on the unique culture of Malta, a culture influenced by various conquerors, something which also impacted on the way women are supposed to behave and act. The perceived stereotype that women are best placed at home and should be *good* housewives and mothers is still very real. Furthermore, the patriarchal influence of the church is still ever present. Although laws and various policies were adopted and are in line with principles of gender equity, Malta is still far behind many Western European countries when it comes to gender equality in several echelons, with the consequence that although rules may be up to standard, many people of different genders still believe that men are superior and are better at taking decisions. This is easily verifiable by taking a look at the top leadership posts in the Civil Service, Parliament and private entities, with most entities having an absolutely male-dominated environment. Even when it comes to literature and research, one can notice a difference from other countries. Malta is still quite a conservative country, and although we now host several immigrants from various countries, one rarely finds any leader who is not Maltese, and whiteness is still very much prevalent. Owing to this, Maltese literature and research is quite unique. While the trend in international research seems to have progressed

even further, such as women in leadership of different race, this is non-existent in Malta. As such, the thematic discussion and implications on women in leadership posts in this section, as well as possible applications in the next section, are taken from these standpoints.

The findings from this investigation supported several aspects taken from previous literature with regard to writing on women in leadership, leadership, and one life's journey. This section outlined these aspects, while the following section refers to some themes from the previous three chapters.

7.3.1 Maltese Culture

Culture is perceived as a predominating factor in affecting the reactions and actions of people. Culture determines the values, beliefs, customs, knowledge, and morals of a society. In a small island like Malta, culture seems to be very influential when it comes to choosing female leaders, in particular leaders in senior positions.

The findings in this study with regard to Maltese culture are quite consistent, in the sense that while the participants agree that Malta has advanced in equity and equality of gender, we still lag behind the rest of the EU. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the prevalent Maltese culture and traditional gender stereotypes of seeing women as being mothers who should stay at home and dedicate themselves to the life of a housekeeper create challenges for Maltese women to advance. Likewise, Maltese women still find obstacles in applying for traditionally male jobs, and girls are still discouraged from doing so by peers, parents, teachers, and career advisors. Concurring with the mentioned literature, these leaders are against quotas, and instead believe in meritocracy, social justice, and cultural change.

Confronting People: Six out of the eight participants acknowledged that as female leaders they had to, at some time or other, confront people, mostly males. The other two said that they never had any difficulty in being a female leader in Malta. The problem is not

exclusively restricted to male-dominated educational institutions, but also to women themselves, including mothers, who have to accept the fact that their sons treat them as inferior, instilling in their children, being males and females, a perception of male superiority; he is the one to take decisions in the family and sometimes even in other contexts. On the other hand, women are perceived as those who should behave as caring mothers, those whose opinions matter less than men's, making it harder for females in key positions to voice their views.

Quota: Since in Malta there are ongoing discussions on possible female quotas in different strata, it seemed natural for these leaders to mention this phenomenon. While they admit that there are pros and cons with regard to quotas, they are largely against and rather believe in meritocracy and justice. Although quotas are a measure of positive discrimination with resulting social effects, they still apply to women, and unfortunately, as in many other cases, they are mainly discussed by men without giving women the opportunity to raise their voices and their own concerns, including in the Maltese Parliament, which is largely composed of men with fewer than 12% being female members of Parliament.

Parents: Most of these leaders have worked in the education sector for many years, and as such for them teaching and learning and the subsequent benefits to students are familiar. As educational leaders, establishing awareness and teaching parents to support female children without forcing them not to choose traditional male-oriented subjects is of great importance. Likewise, they believe that parents should be trained to avoid the damaging distinction between their daughters and sons and to treat them in the same manner, at school, in society, and most importantly, at home.

The Way Forward: While research suggests that in Malta the gender gap is still very wide, most participants are of the opinion that although we still need a culture change, it cannot be denied that women in Malta have made considerable advancements in the last few

years. Although we have moved forward, the path to reducing female underrepresentation is still a very long one. In contrast, one of the participants is convinced that we have moved forward a lot, and that it is normal that a woman holds a leadership position, even if she admitted that in Malta leading positions are still dominated by men.

7.3.2 Age, Years in Service, Marital Status, and Having Children

Every event and person has a story to tell. The same applies for the age of these leaders, their years in service, marital status, and whether they have children or not.

Literature and research show that school management and leadership is dominated by men, and this underrepresentation of women is a social injustice in that negates the fact that women are just as capable in leadership positions. Indeed, age, marital status, and offspring affect the advancement of women to senior positions. Women without children or who do not bear responsibility for children are more likely to be promoted. In addition, literature reveals that the road to leadership positions for men is much faster than that of women.

Age and Years in Service: Apart from one leader, all the others were over forty years old, with the majority being over fifty years. It was not difficult to establish that most of the women obtained senior positions when they were over forty-five, which contrasts with some men who get appointed at a younger age. This indicates that, as in many other countries and due to different challenges (some of which are discussed below), the progression of women to senior educational positions in Malta takes a long time, even though in Malta we have more female graduates than males.

Marital Status and Children: According to literature, the path to advancement for unmarried women and those without children is shorter and faster, a fact asserted by most of the interviewees. Most of them are married, and some of them indicated that it was their decision not to have children, as having children would have interrupted their career

advancement. Otherwise, most of them had grown-up children, and it was when their children were independent that they were appointed to their current posts. This suggests that the path for married women regarding promotion to senior-level positions is longer and slower.

7.3.3 The Obstacles and Potential Mentioned Solutions/Suggestions

Global literature shows that the underrepresentation of women in leading positions is an international issue, and this can be attributed to various obstacles women meet throughout their lives. Malta is no exception when it comes to the position of female leaders.

For these women, solutions are a priority, even though they acknowledge that Malta has moved forward and is different from the time of their upbringing. Nonetheless, we are still way behind, and it will take many years to reduce this underrepresentation.

The findings from the participants regarding challenges are well-supported in international literature. The barriers are often indicative of solutions in the sense that, for example, if a lack of support hampers progress, then support is the natural solution.

As the literature suggests, taking care of children and family members as well as house chores is a global issue for women who wish to advance to senior leadership positions, as having children and a career is like having two full-time jobs. As was declared by the participants, women are still considered as the primary caregivers, and according to them this is a key barrier. These obstacles cause a lot of stress, both in the family and the women's careers. As was pointed out in the second chapter, balancing life responsibilities through the division of labour between partners helps in improving advancement and provides coping strategies. Likewise, family-friendly measures help women in advancing, and changes in policies allowing flexi-approaches to work diminish the cause of this underrepresentation. Most participants are in agreement that family-friendly measures must be really effective and not just remain on paper—such as more geographically situated child centres, prolonged

maternity/parental leave, flexi-hours, reduced working hours, sabbaticals, and teleworking. Such incentives are very helpful, even though many of the participants are sceptical with regard to the positive outcomes of parental leave, since in Malta it is mostly benefitted by women.

Some of the interviewees assert that male-dominated environments are a challenge in their work. Sperandio and Polinchock (2016) claim that such environments make it more difficult for women to reach high-level roles. Male-dominated environments exert a negative impact on women's performance, and the chances of women leaving their job are greater (Chase & Martin, 2019). O'Brien and Rickne (2016) further add that such environments, apart from limiting the availability of leadership positions to women, tend to promote and replicate aggressive and controlling male attitudes. Gender stereotyping is also a global barrier, one which represses women and precludes them from leadership positions. Many countries, including Malta, still associate certain jobs only with men and others with women.

Speaking out is a way of counteracting such challenges, creating awareness, and helping women in advancing to leadership positions, while according to Ackner and Armenti (2004), breaking the silence is a key solution. Internationally, the association of leadership and social justice investigates educational policies in order to address social injustice and inequality, but remedies and improvements are limited. For this reason, Torrance et al. (2017) call on educational leaders to promote social justice and see to it that, as far as possible, educational leadership positions are occupied equally by females and males.

Lack of support is a barrier holding women back from advancing, an obstacle frequently mentioned by the participants. Departments offering support to women help in promotion, positive reinforcement, professional growth, and in providing coping strategies. Some of the participants underline the support of professional development programmes and the importance of mentoring. As the literature shows, such programmes help in making

leaders more competent and confident, as well as in identifying the right training and mentoring programmes. Professional development programmes are seen as a means of taking care of the wellbeing of female leaders by giving them time to reflect and share their concerns by supporting each other.

Mentoring is considered an important action in improving women's advancement in leadership. It provides a timely impetus for advancing women to retain career aspirations, contributes in career advancement and success, and is considered very influential for one's development. The participants believe that having women leaders supporting them in their work is an extra asset. Furthermore, they claim that mentoring, speaking out, and a culture change are possible solutions.

Another obstacle these leaders face is that they hardly make use of their vacation leave and are often subjected to long working hours. Interestingly, they see women as shooting themselves in the foot as some believe that men are better leaders and fear that they are not as up to it as men. Furthermore, they believe that some women have low self-confidence and so they prefer a man as their boss. That women are sometimes not assertive enough is also seen as a barrier, as is the fact that there are others who are not ready to work long hours.

Other suggestions by the participants are awareness and the promotion of the role of women, education, and a change in mentality, including among parents and teachers, that women can choose to opt for any career, including those traditionally considered as the preserve of males. Another mentality change is for partners to share the same responsibilities at home and in raising their children, as well as banishing the stereotype that women perform less.

These leaders acknowledge that an effective leader should possess managerial competencies, but according to them they must be separated and should not be their everyday

tasks as educational leaders, in the sense that another person should be available to handle some managerial tasks. The fact that they are open to various solutions and/or suggestions indicates that they are ready to speak out and offer ideas, but it also shows that they acknowledge the problems of having fewer women in senior educational leadership positions.

The participants acknowledge that some solutions are not gender-oriented and apply for anyone in a leadership position, but still they believe that these can help more women advancing in their careers. Anne, Cate and Belle claim that as leaders they must be given the opportunity to choose their own staff, that is to say, those who will work with them on a daily basis. Furthermore, the financial package for their posts should take into account that women leaders are expected to dress smartly every day, since in Malta most senior leaders are expected to follow a smart dress code. According to them, while for males it is the usual suit that is required, females in Malta are expected to change their wardrobe more frequently. Cate and Gail insist on meritocracy and mixed gendered interviewing boards to remedy the scarcity of women in leadership positions. According to Belle, women leaders need to learn more on how to prioritise, while Deb, Emma, and Fae are in favour of a revision of their contract conditions. Additionally, Emma suggests a rewording of their job description issued with the application if authorities truly want more females to apply for such jobs. Phrases such as “work under pressure” and “required to work late or on weekends” (Appendix G¹⁷³, p. 3; Appendix H¹⁷⁴, p. 4) cause uneasiness and scare off many women from applying for such positions. According to Emma, it is true that such statements are true for all leaders of any gender, and that several senior leadership positions require work which is done under pressure seven days a week, but a rewording of the application might encourage more women to apply for such jobs. This concurs with the study conducted by Thorpe (2018, p. 138) claiming that “the placing of great importance on long hours, strong competitiveness and

¹⁷³ Appendix G is the position description for a Director General within the Public Service in Malta.

¹⁷⁴ Appendix H is the position description for a Director within the Public Service in Malta.

intense organisational dedication mitigates against those with caring commitments especially prime care responsibilities.”

A very interesting solution suggested by Belle is an intensive study involving women between the ages of 25 and 45 years who are aspiring to be leaders as she believes that such research can help women become more aware of what is happening in that age gap and why women are usually being promoted to senior levels at around the age of 45 or later.

Women not speaking up for their rights is seen as a barrier. There are those who suggest that some women in high senior positions are so proud of themselves that they do not care about other women’s advancement, and some even hinder their prospects of progress. According to Fae, time mismanagement is an obstacle in leadership positions. Hayley is of the opinion that some women are not ready to take on commitments due to other priorities. She insists that in Malta there are still wives/mothers who pamper and spoil their husbands and sons but not their daughters, thus fuelling the long-standing stereotype that men are superior and that females should do the house chores and take care of children. To Gail’s great disappointment, the fact that most interviewing boards are composed of men is a major cause for having such underrepresentation.

7.3.4 Leadership

Immediately at the beginning of the interview, most female leaders narrated what they understood by leadership without being prompted. The interview unfolded with the story of their leadership journey, some in chronological order and others randomly, as they explained the route they took to attain their current position. Although some of them felt that from an early age they were already inclined towards leadership, they expressed their belief that through learning and experience, their leadership qualities have improved, in particular the values they endorsed, as well as the priorities and strategies they used. Most of them

indicated the importance of bridging theory with practice as both are very essential for effective leadership.

Many of the leadership definitions and descriptions in the findings of this study support previous research and definitions by different scholars. A main aspect in leadership is a shared vision to achieve common goals through good communication. Likewise, in defining leadership, some scholars maintain the importance of the influential process to arrive towards shared goals. Delegating, empowering, and maximising others' potential to help them grow without considering one's interests shows links to the way some researchers describe leadership. Shared goals and empowering others are achieved through healthy relationships and teams. Motivating followers is also seen as essential in leadership, and the significance of caring, supporting, and guiding others, as well as being able to lead oneself first in order to be able to lead others, are also crucial.

The Journey to Leadership: Many participants commented that from an early age they aspired for and accepted leadership posts and held leading positions in various settings. In this respect, leaders need knowledge and practice. Apart from their studies and experiences, observing and reflecting on other leaders, how they treat people, as well as their actions and strategies, have also helped them in being more effective leaders. Incorporating what they had observed with their own goals and values facilitated their decision on what to incorporate or discard. Having leadership qualities from an early age helps but it is not enough to enable one to become a leader. Reflecting on other leaders' knowledge and experiences is extremely beneficial in becoming a better leader.

The Definitions: Defining leadership is not that easy, but for these leaders the importance of listening and good communication with their colleagues is fundamental for aspiring leaders.

Different leaders have different versions and interpretations of leadership but applying suitable styles according to different situations is the most recommended approach. The descriptions given for leadership can be grouped in three: leadership style, relationships with colleagues, and maximising employees' potential. Most leaders view the importance of vision in leadership, a vision which requires action to reach the common goals, but they emphasise that this vision cannot be imposed. They see leadership as a mission, one requiring flexibility and delegation. The importance of reflection, perseverance, and staying at the back are also seen as necessary ingredients. In creating effective teams and ownership, healthy relationships prevail throughout, as one cannot lead in isolation. They consider their leadership role as one of service and thus empowering others, caring, supporting, guiding, motivating, giving direction, believing in people and furthering their potential are vital.

7.3.5 Relationships

The participants have a sound level of self-awareness, and this enables them not only to realise the importance of healthy connections in leadership, but also to develop relationships based on integrity and trust. By serving as a mirror of their successes and failures in leadership, these relationships can help them improve their competence. Although some of them have taken longer to build strong relationships, establishing honest relationships helps people around them to be comfortable to talk frankly with them, even when it comes to disagreeing with their decisions. The networking of most of them with their colleagues is so strong that they refer to their office as a team; for them, being able to communicate is one of the main requirements for leadership.

They consider relationships as one of the greatest assets for leadership. This is something which is also affirmed by the study of Gill and Jones (2013), who claim that women tend to develop leadership based on competence and trust, a concept which is also

supported by Gonzalez Sullivan (2009). Eddy (2009) also claims that women value healthy relations which influence their leadership roles. Glatter (2009) further adds that educational leadership is an interactive social process: it is about relationships. The claims of the participants about the importance of relationships in their position enforce suggestions that women are more caring, entrust and transform others more frequently, and work harder at maintaining relationships.

7.3.6 The butterfly

Assuming the role of a butterfly in a metaphorical way, I investigated the salient events of my life as if I first were a caterpillar passing through successive stages to eventually develop into some kind of butterfly.

My life experiences crafted as a radio drama helped in transmitting self-knowledge by including others in the drama. It helped me to become more aware of my exploration. The interpretation of leadership traits in my story blended well with sociological information.

One life's journey: Sharing and revealing personal events is sometimes hurtful and emotional, as one not only reflects on pleasant experiences, but also on distasteful ones, and this naturally happened to me when sharing some major life events. Nonetheless, this epistemological method helped me in exploring and sharing information by incorporating others and thus giving more context and identity to my life story.

Parental/Familial Leadership: Parents, guardians, sisters, brothers, and other family members influence their young children both negatively and positively, in particular at a young age when dependent children are highly impressionable. Upon reflection, each experience, both pleasant or hurtful, is a learning experience, and although it also depends on the influence of other persons, it is mainly the subject her/himself who has to grab each opportunity and turn it into knowledge of life.

Inspirational Leaders: Great leaders inspire others, but we can obtain knowledge even from less charismatic ones. Leaders who treat followers as humans, with affection, walk the talk, and are of service are the ones whose paths I aspire to follow. These leaders are able to apply different styles according to the situation, but they never lose their human touch.

Immediate Family: While acknowledging individuality and that every person develops into different butterflies which can hatch in varied and difficult environments, healthy relationships with the partner and offspring develop into deep attachments which are difficult to explain verbally. Such experiences may have effects on one's leadership behaviour and values.

Women Leaders in My Life: In retrospect, I came to realise even more that, through my different metamorphoses, very few women leaders walked along with me through my journey. Yet, the most two influential leaders in my life have certainly been my wife and my deceased mother.

7.3.7 Conclusion

The previous sections outlined the main findings that emerged from my drama related to women and leadership, the representation of females in senior educational leadership positions, and leadership in general. As envisioned, the main discussion points emerged from the interviews conducted with the eight female educational leaders in Malta. Although the three questions asked established three themes, the interviews gave rise to other issues involved in the exploration of the perceptions and experiences of female senior leaders in education in Malta. The implications of being a woman in a leadership position, age, marital status, and having children were also considered. With regard to my life story, the main themes were conveyed via the analogy of the butterfly, and the influences of several leaders in my life were discussed.

Women leaders, as these women assert, have challenges—sometimes stemming from the fact of being leaders, and sometimes from the fact of being women in leadership positions. The strategies employed by these women are related to the way they perceive leadership, and speaking out and being wholly dedicated can serve as an inspirational model for other women to take up leadership roles with courage and perseverance.

7.4 Possible Applications

As mentioned in the previous section, these applications were based on the unique cultural conditions found in Malta. I also acknowledge the fact that some recommendations are not that straightforward to implement, in the sense that some claims require the involvement of people from higher echelons, such as policymakers, the education department, and other governmental entities. However, given this, I am doing my utmost to disseminate the findings of this study by submitting my research to journals and local publications, sharing my information with policymakers at the education department in Malta—which, given that I am a head of department myself, means that such opportunities will be more frequent—and sharing my findings at international and local conferences.¹⁷⁵ I already had the opportunity to share such findings at the annual conference organised by BELMAS in 2019, on a similar topic which was part of my MA in Leadership and Management, as well as the abstract for this particular study was accepted for the 2020 conference, but due to Covid-19 the conference was cancelled.¹⁷⁶

This study focused on the experiences of women in senior level leadership positions in education in Malta. In order to effect a positive change, stakeholders recruiting senior leaders in any area of life should make it easier for women to apply and persevere in their

¹⁷⁵ First published manuscript with regards this study. Doi: 10.1177/1741143220929034

¹⁷⁶ Abstract for 2020 found at: <https://www.belmas.org.uk/Latest-News/accepted-abstracts-belmas-annual-conference-2020-/249982>

leadership roles. This can be done by introducing factual initiatives such as family-friendly measures, rewording of applications, more human resources, and better financial packages. A work-culture change is needed where one is not expected to prioritise work over the family or the well-being of the person. Curbing practices of androcentrism and gender polarisation which still seem to be persistent in higher-level educational environments can also help women in applying and advancing in leadership roles. Furthermore, as from an early age, gender education should be increasingly emphasised as this may help future generations in not distinguishing between gender when it comes to leadership roles and jobs—in a way this can easily be implemented, since PSCD (Personal, Social and Career Development) is part of the curriculum in Malta as from the early age of five.

Applying theory with practice is a necessity in many areas, including that of social justice and the representation of women in senior leadership positions. Given that institutions such as NGOs, government entities, and others are implementing new policies and legal frameworks, they should evaluate and make more use of research findings, both locally and internationally, in order to tackle problems and offer possible solutions. The claim that women progress to leadership positions at a slower pace should be taken on board even from the standpoint of age, marital status, and having children, all of which impinge on their choice of career path.

Leadership/professional development programmes should cater for women in leadership and those aspiring to be leaders. Lafreniere and Longman (2008) assert that such programmes serve to enhance competence and confidence while helping in the choice of the best training required. These programmes can have foundational components of self-reflection together with sharing and discussing daily challenges, solutions, and good practices. Such meetings can help in identifying weaknesses and strengths which can be applied in their leadership roles. Apart from meeting and discussing informally, such

meetings can be used to engage in evaluating professional publications to learn from other women leaders and their investigations. When required, these programmes can be used to identify mentoring programmes and the sources of the greatest support. However, as Gibson et al. (2017) assert, while professional development programmes should be structured, they must be flexible enough to allow support for individual learning journeys. “Great leaders are not alike!” (Devnew & Storberg-Walker, 2018, p. 40), and so, as suggested also by Guihen (2018), such programmes should take into consideration that “one size fits all” programmes do not help. Likewise, Thorpe (2018) suggested that leadership programmes only for women help in dismantling barriers. Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2018) further emphasise that development programmes should adopt a discourse of change within social justice in order to be beneficial to individuals and organisations.

Networks are fundamental to leadership positions, and as such training programmes focusing on the value of how to build healthy collegial relationships are recommended. The leaders in this study place immense value on the importance of relationships, seeing them as central to their leadership. In fact, providing formal programmes focused on developing healthy relationships can be beneficial.

Roth (2005) declares that autobiography is a justifiable way to arrive at intersubjectivity as it gives the researcher the opportunity to use their life story blended with that of others for the purpose of sharing information. Very often, research within the social sciences relates to one’s life story, as reliving the past helps in connecting and giving meaning to the present and the future. In view of these perspectives, researchers should be more forthcoming when it comes to using one’s life story, in part or in full, to enlighten readers with alternative insights.

This section considered some possible applications for this study. I acknowledge that although all senior female leaders in the educational department were interviewed, everyone

is unique and that what might be valuable for someone is not necessarily so for others. Furthermore, I was the one who interpreted the data, and other researchers might have a different interpretation to mine. As previously mentioned, I also recognize that, as with other countries, Malta has a unique culture and that when it comes to gender equity, although it has made advancements, it still lags behind most other EU countries, and for this reason much of the research into female leadership reported elsewhere does not adequately address the Maltese scenario. The next section explores possible potential future studies to complement this research.

7.5 Future Research

This study suggests four potential proposals for future research.

As one of the women leaders herself suggested during the interview, it would be interesting to investigate aspiring women in senior leadership positions between the ages of 25 and 45. Such research could investigate possible challenges women are faced with in this age range and the difficulties they encounter when applying for leadership posts.

Another interesting study could be similar to this study, but would instead only focus on male senior educational leaders. Such a study could investigate the perceptions of male leaders with respect to the representation of women in senior leadership positions. A future research study could be conducted using the same three questions to compare the findings made.

Challenges and barriers are common to all senior leaders of any gender in education. Future research could involve senior leaders of any gender investigating the obstacles they meet throughout their journey and the approaches used to face such challenges.

Underrepresentation of senior women leaders in Malta is not only a lacuna in education, it is also evident in Parliament, private companies and other institutions. This calls

for a future research study involving women from different sectors and using a similar methodology. Such a study could be used to compare findings and see how the responses from different sectors relate to or contrast with each other.

7.6 Conclusion

Like men, there are women who, for various reasons, opt out from considering the possibility of being senior leaders. With all the challenges these participants encounter, they engage fully in their careers and are open to professional development for themselves and their colleagues. In the early stages of their careers, some of these women did not aspire to their current role, but as they grew professionally and with support from others, they considered senior leadership positions. These women pursued their advancement according to available opportunities, mostly after moving up within their institution, but for most of them the opportunity came up at a certain age when they did not have family commitments, or when their children were independent.

The evidence gathered in this research supported previous research on leadership in general, women in leadership, challenges and possible solutions for women in senior leadership, and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Furthermore, this study shows how one's life story can be used and blended into an investigation to produce information. In addition, this project provided some unique insights that Maltese leaders deemed important to share. The findings of this study mostly paralleled those of previous studies conducted with other women leaders in the education field in different parts of the world.

As continuously mentioned in this chapter and the ones before it, research opens horizons rather than merely providing definitive conclusions, with the result that sometimes the researcher will end up with more questions than answers. Although the next chapter will

conclude this thesis, rather than bringing this project to a point of closure, it will set open the path for further research on the subject.

Chapter 8 – Curtain Call: Raising the Curtain

Every soul, the philosopher says, is involuntarily deprived of truth; consequently in the same way it is deprived of justice and temperance and benevolence and everything of the kind. It is most necessary to bear this constantly in mind, for thus you will be more gentle toward all.

–Aurelius, 1997, Bk. VII, No. 63

8.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter is an attempt to give some form of closure to my doctoral journey, which rather than a “curtain call” I consider as a “raising of the curtain”. It is an attempt to recount my personal journey in this research, where I consider self-reflexivity as an important component in research. So, this chapter compiles the main points of my research, and for this reason some repetitions from previous chapters may occur.

My belief is that knowledge is subjective, positional, and incomplete, and always subject to be reviewed and revised. Concurring with Bell and Nutt (2002), I acknowledge that through this research I “could not avoid being the same person who wore both [different] hats” (p. 75), in that it became clear to me that it is not possible to separate the different roles that I have in this study, that of a researcher and at the same time a professional, a teacher, and head of department, with my own perceptions, experiences, and biases. Concurring with Macbeth (2001) in Lichtman (2011, p. 288), for me reflexivity is a “deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself.” As such, I have put on the reflexive robe by continually evaluating the whole research process: by critically evaluating the literature; considering the methodology and methods chosen and the subjective responses; what I decided to include in

my drama, these being my life story and the experiences and perceptions of the participants; the analysis of the data; and the whole process in textualizing this thesis.

Upon reflection, I realised that my viewpoint is derived from my own position of different discourses: the perception from youth which still exists that women are second-class, most suited to be mothers and housekeepers; that men are better leaders than women in taking decisions and giving instructions; that women as mothers do not have time, or cannot devote the necessary time to be leaders since they either will not be good mothers or else they will not be good leaders. Yet, my journey of self-reflection, together with the encounters with the eight female leaders made me more aware that everyone is different, that everyone carries their own baggage differently, that stereotypes can dismantle people, but that, above all, some of the most important characteristics in leadership are trust, love, collegiality and healthy relationships.

This concluding chapter will briefly sum up my project. First, I will begin with what I believe are the important contributions of my work, and why I think they are important. Following this, I present a summary of each chapter. The final section will be my concluding reflections.

8.2 Contributory General Overview

This project investigated leadership from two perspectives, namely, the experiences and perceptions of the participants with regard to women and leadership in Malta, and the impact of some leaders I had throughout my life. The experiences and perceptions of the eight female senior leaders in education provided information and awareness on how female leaders face challenges, the effect of Maltese culture with regard to women and leadership, how much they value relationships for healthy leadership, and possible proposals these participants think are important to help women in leadership positions as well as those

aspiring to be leaders. My life story was a means of reflecting back on those leaders in my life who have influenced me both positively and negatively.

This project explored information related to the Maltese context, leadership in general, women in leadership, and how some female leaders have to take a longer route to attain certain positions due to the different challenges they meet as women. It shed some more light on women in senior leadership in education posts in Malta. The exploration also provided a basis for potential suggestions. As Heilman (2001) had declared, producing knowledge on gender may help in making people more aware of some existent injustices, and thus with the possibility of having more justice and less inequalities (Van den Brink, 2015).

My life journey, apart from making me more conscious of this case study—that is the role of senior female educational leaders in Malta—also helped me realise the impact that many leaders had on my life, and in particular the scarcity of women leaders throughout my life.

As proposed in the previous chapter, I believe that this study offers some potential contributions to research and literature. It also offers some possible practical applications and suggestions which may help policymakers, NGOs, the educational department in Malta and other entities, both by raising awareness about women in senior leadership and the challenges they meet, and by considering some of the suggestions when drafting new policies. Moreover, the crafted dramas may offer readers a new way of thinking about the issues of women and leadership.

8.2.1 Revisiting the Research Question

The core research question for this study was “How do senior female educational leaders perceive and experience their positions?”, and this was tackled by eliciting the respective stories of senior female educational leaders in the Department of Education in

Malta through narrative inquiry. The narratives gathered during the interviews were crafted into a fictitious staged script in order to present the findings. Furthermore, from my autoethnographic life experiences, another fictitious script for a radio drama was crafted.

The findings of this research showed that women in leading positions in Malta have to face certain challenges simply because they are females. The main findings discussed in the previous chapter considered the effect of culture in Malta, how women in Malta take a longer route than men to attain senior leadership positions, some obstacles and potential solutions suggested by the participants, how the participants view leadership, and the importance of relationships in leadership. Furthermore, autoethnography in research was explored. The main observations derived from the study are: that family-friendly measures by organisations, such as flexi-hours, childcare centres near the workplace, and prolonged maternity/parental leave, help women in leadership posts and those aspiring to be leaders; the importance of professional development programmes organised specifically for females in leading positions and those aspiring to be leaders; and organised training sessions focused on how to build collegial relationships.

8.2.2 Originality

The study provides insights and further understanding on women in leadership posts and also for those aspiring to be leaders. The approach taken in this study was not to look for “the truth”, but rather to acknowledge that different “truths” exist, since the world is very subjective and different persons interpret things differently. Therefore, it was no surprise that the participants had different views, and while they sometimes agreed, at other times they had divergent opinions.

I believe that this study offers some original insights. The fact that local research was very limited on this topic means that this research is, ipso facto, quite innovative, in the sense

that it sheds new insights on perceptions and experiences of women and leadership derived from female leaders themselves. Furthermore, presenting the findings in a dramaturgical format offered a different insight into the issue than that which may be provided by conventional research writing. Blending the experiences of the participants together with the impact of other leaders in my life also helped in the originality of this study.

8.3 Executive summary

Apart from this concluding chapter, this thesis consisted of seven more chapters.

Chapter one, the introductory chapter, set the stage for my drama. It outlined my place in this research, what my positionality is, and my interest in this study. Next came the purpose of my research and the framework for this study, then my justifications for using performance to present the findings. Finally, it covered some clarifications to set my boundaries for this study, followed by the structure of my thesis.

Chapter two, the 'Inquiry Trail', explored the literature review. This chapter had four main sections. The Maltese context was explored, with particular attention given to how women are perceived in Maltese culture and gender equality issues in Malta. The education system in Malta, together with senior educational leadership posts, were also investigated. Leadership followed, with special attention to educational leadership being given. The next section focused on women in leadership, taking into consideration the issues of gender and leadership, together with women and educational leadership. This section focused on the barriers women meet in leadership positions and possible solutions for such obstacles. Finally, given that I am a male conducting research on women, a section was dedicated to researching women's lives from a social justice perspective.

Chapter three covered the methodological approach. Since my findings were presented in a dramaturgical manner, the importance of crafting a drama in research was

initially explored. The benefits of qualitative research and case studies for my project were then investigated. Next followed the research design from the narrative perspectives since I collected narratives through interviews to acquire the perceptions and experiences of the participants. As one of the chapters in this thesis is about my life journey, chapter three presents a justification for autoethnography. In every research, it is imperative that the researcher conveys their philosophical assumptions, and so my philosophical assumptions for this research were delineated. Next came the issue of trustworthiness in this project, the choice of my sample population, and the importance of interviews for my research. The final sections explored the importance of data collection and analysis, ethical implications for my study, and some possible limitations.

Chapters four, five, and six are the findings of this project. I crafted fictitious scripts for a performance to present these chapters, chapters five and six for a staged drama, and chapter four for a radio drama. Chapter four is essentially my life story retold, taking instances from my life together with those of leaders who had influenced me, this while taking into consideration the absence of female leaders in my life. Chapter five covered some information about the participants, their age, number of years in a leadership position, marital status, and if the participants had children. This offered the audience a better view of who the cast for my drama was, and enabled them to better engage with the ambience of the performance. Chapter six is a drama made from the voices of the participants. The drama was crafted from the themes I focused on in the context of my study.

Chapter seven, 'Unveiling the Drama', is the discussion chapter. It comprised a summary of the study and the discussion and implications of my findings according to the themes of my research. The applications for this research were also included in this chapter. The final section tackled potential future research which I believe could be possible in accordance with this investigation.

8.4 Concluding Reflections

At the beginning of this journey, I had many questions, unclear assumptions, and beliefs of what would be involved, and although I admit that many questions remain unanswered, I will now revisit all this through reflexivity. Sometimes, research attempts to provide closure, but I decline this, since this project, rather than presenting me with concrete conclusions, provoked many questions. Taking Mifsud's (2014, p. 293) statement and applying it to my study, "This research story does not seek to be judged by the standards, myths, or 'masks' of validity valorized and distributed in the discourses of the human sciences and social sciences"—rather, my belief is that knowledge is subjective, that is, open to various interpretations, that there are no final truths, or better still, some things are false and others not, and thus it is always open for review and revision.

As a final statement, I propose to comment on myself as a researcher and explore some of my own learning in relation to this study. At the time of this research I had been in the education profession for more than twenty-five years, and for more than fifteen years as a head of department. As such, education and educational leadership are very close to my heart. Likewise, social justice is very important for me, and I strongly deplore injustices, particularly those which are perpetuated to accommodate certain groups of people.

Prior to this study, I was not that aware of what such research would involve, and, maybe naively, I did not anticipate the levels of emotion that the participants in this study, including myself, would exhibit. This required much reflection, sensitivity, and delicateness in handling the data. I learned that research had expected and unexpected events, and that while planning for the expected is simple, for the unexpected it is altogether different. Unexpected events in a way are a greater challenge for researchers. Research cannot always be controlled, and so I learned that I must rely on flexibility, and this offered me the chance to be more creative to respond to predicted and unpredicted events.

When I began my doctoral studies, I was clear about my topic: women and leadership and social justice, a topic which for many years was, and still is, very close to my heart. The findings in this thesis are provided in the spirit of the research: to be beneficial and to raise more awareness about senior female educational leaders in Malta, especially for those having social justice close to their hearts. Despite the many challenges these female leaders meet throughout their journey, I learned that they are very committed, they embrace education and the well-being of students, they are very good leaders, and are very capable in handling challenging situations, even with all else that is brought to bear upon them for the mere fact of being women leaders.

My doctoral journey is nearing its end, but I hope it can serve as a catalyst for further research in academia. The last few years of my life were overtaken by my PhD, but most of the time it has been a positive learning experience. I cannot say that this journey was without struggles and risks, I had my ups and downs, but overall, looking back and without regrets, I admit that the rewards gained well outweighed my sufferings.

Although the writing of my research story has come to an end, its transformative effects will always remain with me. My final thoughts on the matter are best expressed in the words of Usher and Edwards (1994, p. 207): “This final chapter is therefore not so much a finality, a bringing down of the curtain, an ending, but instead an opening, a raising of the curtain. A refusal of totalising explanations must necessarily involve a refusal of totalising conclusions.”

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Appendices

Appendix A – Information Sheet

Educational Leadership and Women: the *Space* between Us.

A feminist perspective of Top Educational Leaders in Malta.

You are being invited to take part in this doctoral research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

The aim of the project is to obtain knowledge on how ‘top’ female leaders¹⁷⁷ in education in Malta arrived to their position, what challenges did they meet before arriving to this position and challenges they are still facing, and how they overcame them. The research will also explore the views of these leaders with regards to the under-representation of female leaders in Malta, and their opinion on what could be done to improve this current situation, vis-à-vis the under-representation of female leaders in Malta.

The sampling of this research is purposive. You were chosen for this research due to the fact that you are a female top leader, and the research is on female educational top leaders.

Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary, and if you refuse to agree to participate will not involve any penalty or disclosure to any other participant. At any time during the study you can still withdraw without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way, and without giving any reason. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Your involvement in the research will be in taking part in an interview, which will be audio recorded. The interview will take around one hour, and will be held in a place that suits you best. The audio recording of the interviews will be analysed, along with responses from other top leaders. All recordings will be kept secure and will not be made available to third parties. The data gathered and subsequent findings will be presented in a narrative¹⁷⁸ way in my thesis. Apart from your time dedication, the study will not be of any detriment to you as a participant.

While there are no immediate benefits for the female leaders participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will shed some light and help other females as regards the challenges met by female leaders, and how they overcame them. The study will help me in providing

¹⁷⁷ By ‘top’ female leaders I am implying: Director Generals and Directors in the Education Department, and College Principals.

¹⁷⁸ Narrative – your interview together with the other interviews will be analysed and the findings will be presented in a story.

some recommendations on how to overcome the under-representation of female leaders in education. Also, it might serve for further research in this area.

If in the future you need further clarifications, you can contact me on the email or mobile number below. If you are not satisfied with my response you can contact my supervisor Prof Pat Sikes at p.j.sikes@sheffield.ac.uk. And if you are not satisfied with either information given you can also contact the Registrar and Secretary Dr Philip K Harvey at the University of Sheffield at registrar@sheffield.ac.uk.

All information collected about you during the course of research will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used both for your names and office/college, so that as far as possible you will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. After one year from the publication of the thesis, all data, being softcopy or hardcopy will be destroyed. This project has been ethically approved by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee, and also by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Malta). It is estimated that the results of the research will be published in the thesis around 2020. After the publication of the thesis you can obtain a softcopy from the University of Sheffield website at <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/>. The findings of the research, including data and analysis, may be used in future publications.

While thanking you for accepting to take part in this study and dedicate some of your precious time for the interview, do not hesitate to contact me or anyone involved in the contacts given in this information sheet.

Robert Vella
Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Email: rvella1@sheffield.ac.uk

Mobile: 99228430

Appendix B – Consent Form

Title of Project: Educational Leadership and Women: the *Space* between Us. A feminist perspective of Top Educational Leaders in Malta.

Name of Researcher: Robert Vella

Participant Identification Number for this project: _____

Please initial box


- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated _____ for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |
| 3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |
| 4. I agree to take part in the above research project. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |
| 5. I agree to be audio-recorded. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |
| 6. I agree that the research may be used in future publications. | <input style="width: 80px; height: 30px;" type="text"/> |

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Robert Vella		
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix C – Approval (Education Directorate in Malta)

DIRETTORAT GĦAL
 KWALITA' U STANDARDS FL-EDUKAZZJONI
 FURJANA VLT 2000
 MALTA



DIRECTORATE FOR
 QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATION
 FLORIANA VLT 2000
 MALTA

Request for Research in State Schools

A. (Please use BLOCK LETTERS)

Surname: Vella Name: Robert

I.D. Card Number: 4469(G)

Telephone No: 21563632 * Mobile No: 99228430 *

Address: 'Nwar', Triq Patri Anton Debono S.J.

Locality: Victoria, Gozo Post Code: VCT2252

E-mail Address: robert.vella@ilearn.edu.mt

Faculty: Education Course: PhD Year Ending: 2020

Title of Research: Educational Leadership and Women: the Space between Us
A feminist perspective of Top Educational Leaders in Malta.

Aims of research: Long Essay Dissertation Thesis Publication

Time Frame: Oct. 2016 - June 2020 Language Used: English

Description of methodology: Transcribed interviews and findings in Narratives

School/s where research is to be carried out: All 'top' female educational leaders
i.e. Director General, Directors and College Principals

Years / Forms: N/A Age range of students: N/A

* Telephone and mobile numbers will only be used in strict confidence and will not be divulged to third parties.
 I accept to abide by the rules and regulations re Research in State Schools and to comply with the Data Protection Act 2001.
Warning to applicants - Any false statement, misrepresentation or concealment of material fact on this form or any document presented in support of this application may be grounds for criminal prosecution.

Signature of applicant: R. Vella Date: 12/6/2017

B. Tutor's Approval (where applicable)

The above research work is being carried out under my supervision.

Tutor's Name: Prof Pat Sikes

Signature: Pat Sikes

School of Education
UNIVERSITY OF
SHEFFIELD

Faculty: Education


Faculty Stamp: _____

C. Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education - Official Approval

The above request for permission to carry out research in State Schools is hereby approved according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the University of Malta Ethics Committee.

Raymond Camilleri
Director

EU Affairs, International Relations
Research and Policy Development Directorate
Official Stamp


Director
(Research and Development Department)

Date: 22 106 2014

Conditions for the approval of a request by a student to carry out research work in State Schools

Permission for research in State Schools is subject to the following conditions:

1. The official request form is to be accompanied by a copy of the questionnaire and / or any relevant material intended for use in schools during research work.
2. The original request form, showing the relevant signatures and approval, must be presented to the Head of School.
3. All research work is carried out at the discretion of the relative Head of School and subject to their conditions.
4. Researchers are to observe strict confidentiality at all times.
5. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to withdraw permission to carry out research in State Schools at any time and without prior notice.
6. Students are expected to restrict their research to a minimum of students / teachers / administrators / schools, and to avoid any waste of time during their visits to schools.
7. As soon as the research in question is completed, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education assumes the right to a full copy (in print/on C.D.) of the research work carried out in State Schools. Researchers are to forward the copies to the Assistant Director, International Research, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.
8. Researchers are to hand a copy of their Research in print or on C.D. to the relative School/s.
9. In the case of video recordings, researchers have to obtain prior permission from the Head of School and the teacher of the class concerned. Any adults recognisable in the video are to give their explicit consent. Parents of students recognisable in the video are also to be requested to approve that their siblings may be video-recorded. Two copies of the consent forms are necessary, one copy is to be deposited with the Head of School, and the other copy is to accompany the Request Form for Research in State Schools. Once the video recording is completed, one copy of the videotape is to be forwarded to the Head of School. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education reserves the right to request another copy.
10. The video recording's use is to be limited to this sole research and may not be used for other research without the full consent of interested parties including the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

Appendix D – Approval (The University of Sheffield)



Downloaded: 14/07/2017
Approved: 13/07/2017

Robert Vella
Registration number: 160210415
School of Education
Programme: EDUR33 Education (Malta)

Dear Robert

PROJECT TITLE: Educational Leadership and Women: the Space between Us. A feminist perspective of Educational Leaders in Malta

APPLICATION: Reference Number 015885

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 13/07/2017 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 015885 (dated 07/07/2017).
- Participant information sheet 1034101 version 1 (07/07/2017).
- Participant consent form 1034102 version 1 (07/07/2017).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

I suggest that amendments be made as outline by the other reviewers - that 'a narrative way' be expressed differently on the form. Further that institutions are anonymised as well as as participants in case the interviewees can be identified.

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

David Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix E – List of Author/s and Place/s of Study

Women in Leadership		
Author/s	Location	Notes
Ayman & Korabik (2010)	USA	Leadership in general – ‘Leadership: Why Gender and Culture Matter’
Chase & Martin (2019)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘I can’t believe I’m still protesting: choppy waters for women in educational leadership.’
Coleman (2012)		Leadership & Education – ‘Leadership and Diversity.’ Review of coverage of leadership and diversity in the journal ‘Educational Management Administration & Leadership’ on 40 th Anniversary
Devnew & Storberg-Walker (2018)	International	Leadership in general – ‘Women and Leadership – How do Differences Matter?’
Eagly & Chin (2010)	USA	Leadership in general – ‘Diversity and Leadership in a Changing World’
Elborgh-Woytek, Newiak, Kochhar, Fabrizio, Kpodar, Wingender, ... Schwartz, (2013)	International	Leadership in General – ‘Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity.’
European Parliament (2018)	In general	Leadership in General – ‘Gender-Neutral Language in the European Parliament.’
Gibson (1995)	Norway, Sweden, Australia, USA	Leadership in General – ‘An Investigation of Gender Differences in Leadership Across Four Countries.’
Gill & Jones (2013)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Fitting In: Community College Female Executive Leaders Share Their Experiences -- A Study in West Texas.’
Gonzalez Sullivan (2009)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Informal Learning Among Women Community College Presidents.’
Maki (2015)	USA	Leadership & Education - ‘A Grounded Theory of Women’s Leadership Experiences in Higher Education: Navigating from the Director Level.’
Palmu-Joronen (2009)	Finland	Leadership in General – ‘Nokia Years. What Leadership Can Learn.’
Piha (2006)	Finland	Leadership in General – ‘The Mother of the Director.’
Place & Varneman-Winter (2016)	USA	Leadership & Public Relations – ‘Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations.’

Shepherd (2017)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Why are there so few female leaders in higher education: A case of structure or agency?’
Showunmi (2016)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Diversity and Education in England.’
Showunmi, Atewologun & Bebbington (2016)	UK	Leadership in General – ‘Ethnic, gender and class intersections in British women’s leadership experiences’
Sinclair (1998)	International	Leadership in General - ‘Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture.’
Taylor (2017)	International	Leadership in General – ‘One in five believe women inferior to men: global survey.’
Torrance (2015)	International	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender perspectives on leadership: A message from India.’
Young (2016)	International	Leadership in General – ‘Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century.’

Gender and Leadership		
Author/s	Location	Notes
Bullough & Sully de Luque (2015)	International	Leadership in General - ‘Women’s participation in entrepreneurial and political leadership: The importance of culturally endorsed implicit leadership theories.’
Burton & Ryall (1995)	Australia	Leadership in General - ‘Enterprising Nation: Renewing Australia’s Managers to Meet the Challenges of the Asia-Pacific Century: Managing for Diversity.’
Bush (2011)	UK, Israel, New Zealand, Australia	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender, Leadership and Academic Writing.’
Cauchi Cushchieri (2007)	Malta	Leadership & Education – ‘The View From the Top: A Study on Leadership & Education in Roman Catholic Schools in Malta.’
Coleman (2002)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Women as Headteachers: Striking the Balance.’
Cook, Heppner & O’Brien (2005)	USA	Leadership in General - ‘Multicultural and Gender Influences in Women’s Career Development: An Ecological Perspective.’
Eagly & Carli (2003)	USA	Leadership in General - ‘The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence.’
Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001)	USA	Leadership in General - ‘The Leadership Styles of Women and Men.’

Eagly & Karau (2002)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders.'
Fine (2009)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Women Leaders' Discursive Constructions of Leadership.'
Fletcher (2004)	International	Leadership in General - 'The paradox of postheroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change.'
Fuller (2017)	UK	Leadership & Education – 'Women secondary head teachers in England: Where are they now?'
Garratt (1998)	EU	Leadership in General - 'Women Managing for the Millennium.'
Grech (2015)	International	Leadership in General - 'Managing diversity and the glass cliff – creating women leaders.'
Grisoni & Beeby (2007)	UK	Leadership in General - 'Leadership, Gender and Sense-making.'
Guihen (2019)	International	Leadership & Education – 'Gender and Leadership in Education: Women Achieving against the Odds.'
Haslett, Geis & Carter (1992)	USA with reference to Western	Leadership in General - 'The Organizational Woman: Power and Paradox.'
Hatcher (1998)	Australia	Leadership in General - 'Making the Enterprising Manager in Australia: A genealogy.'
Heilman (2001)	International	Leadership in General - 'Description and Prescription: How Gender Stereotypes Prevent Women's Ascent Up the Organizational Ladder.'
Hoyt (2013)	International	Leadership in General - 'Women and Leadership'
Klenke (1996)	International	Leadership in General - 'Women and Leadership: A Contextual Perspective.'
Lumby (2016)	International	Leadership & Education – 'Culture and Otherness in Gender Studies: Building on Marianne Coleman's Work.'
McKillop & Moorosi (2017)	UK	Leadership & Education – 'Career development of English female head-teachers: influences, decisions and perceptions.'
McKinsey & Company (2016)	International	Leadership in General - 'Women Matter 2016: Reinventing the workplace to unlock the potential of gender diversity.'

Oplatka (2016)	International	Leadership & Education – ‘The Research on Gender in the Field of Educational Management: A Journals-Based Historical Overview of an Area of Study.’
Schein (1994)	International	Leadership in General - ‘Managerial sex typing: A persistent and pervasive barrier to women’s opportunities.’
Shakeshaft (1987)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Women in Educational Administration.’
Shapiro, Ingols & Blake-Beard (2008)	USA	Leadership in General - ‘Confronting Career Double Binds: Implications for Women, Organizations, and Career Practitioners.’
Thorpe (2018)	UK, Ireland, USA & Australia	Leadership & Education – ‘Educational leadership development and women: insights from critical realism.’
Wilson (2004)	International	Leadership in General - ‘Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World.’

Women and Educational Leadership		
Author/s	Location	Notes
Burns-Redell (2013)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘The Examination of Four Illinois, Female Superintendents and Their Transformational Leadership Practices’
Camilleri Zahra (2017)	Malta	Leadership in General – ‘Disability and Women’s Rights’
Cunanan (1994)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘A Comparative Career Profile in 1985-1990 Female and Male Graduates of Educational Administration from Midwestern Research University.’
Cunneen & Harford (2016)	Ireland	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender Matters: Women’s Experience if the Route to Principalship in Ireland.’
Darmanin (1992)	Malta	Leadership & Education – ‘The Labour Market of Schooling: Maltese girls in education and economic planning.’
Darmanin (2007)	Malta	Leadership & Education – ‘Catholic Schooling and the Changing Role of Women: Perspectives from Malta.’
Ellul (2009)	Malta	Leadership in General – ‘Investing in Women.’
Elton-Chalcraft, Kendrick & Chapman (2018)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender, race, faith and economics: Factors impacting on aspirant school leaders.’

Fuller (2009)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Women Secondary Head Teachers: Alive and Well in Birmingham at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century.’
Fuller (2013)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender, Identity and Leadership & Education.’
Fuller, Cliffe, & Moorosi (2015)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Women’s Leadership Preparation Within The Senior Leadership Team.’
Gilligan (1993)	USA	Leadership in General – ‘In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development.’
Ginn (1989)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘A Quick Look at the Past, Present, and Future of Women in Public School Administration.’
Glass (1992)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘The 1992 Study of the American School Superintendency: America’s Education Leaders in a Time of Reform.’
Greenfield (1994)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Strands of Leadership from the 38 Women Superintendents in Massachusetts, 1992: Creating a tapestry.’
Grogan (1994)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Voices of Women Aspiring to the Superintendency.’
Grummell, Devine & Lynch (2009)	Ireland	Leadership & Education – ‘The Care-Less Manager: Gender, Care and New Managerialism in Higher Education.’
Guihen (2018)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘The career experiences and aspirations of women deputy head teachers.’
Hall (1993)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Women in Educational Management: A Review of Research in Britain.’
Hebreard (2010)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Opt out: Women with children leaving mid-level student affairs positions.’
Isaacson (1998)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘The Development of Professional Identity of Women Who Attain the Superintendency.’
Joslyn, Miller & Callender (2018)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Leadership and diversity in education in England: Progress in the new millennium?’
Loden (1985)	USA	Leadership in General – ‘Feminine Leadership, or, How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys.’
MEYE (2001)	Malta	Leadership & Education – ‘For All Children to Succeed.’

Mokaba-Bernardo (2016)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘An examination of women and Leadership & Education: A postmodern feminist analysis of the leadership styles of women superintendents.’
Oates (2019)	In general	Leadership & Education – ‘Vivienne Porritt – 10% Braver: Inspiring women to lead education.’
Smith (2011)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Agency and Female Teachers’ Career Decisions: A Life History Study of 40 Women.’
Sperandio & Polinchock (2016)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Roads Less Travelled: Female Elementary School Principals Aspiring to the School District Superintendency.’
Torrance & Arshad (2015)	UK	Leadership & Education – ‘Where are the women leaders in higher education.’
Torrance, Fuller, McNae, Roofe & Arshad (2017)	International	Leadership & Education – ‘A social justice perspective on women in Leadership & Education.’

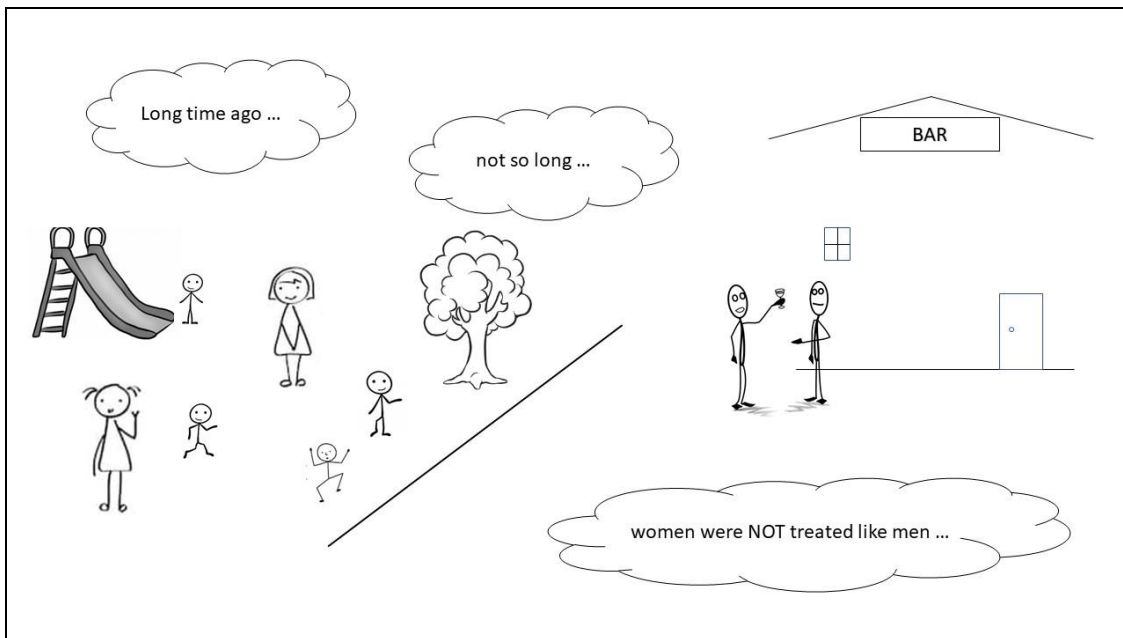
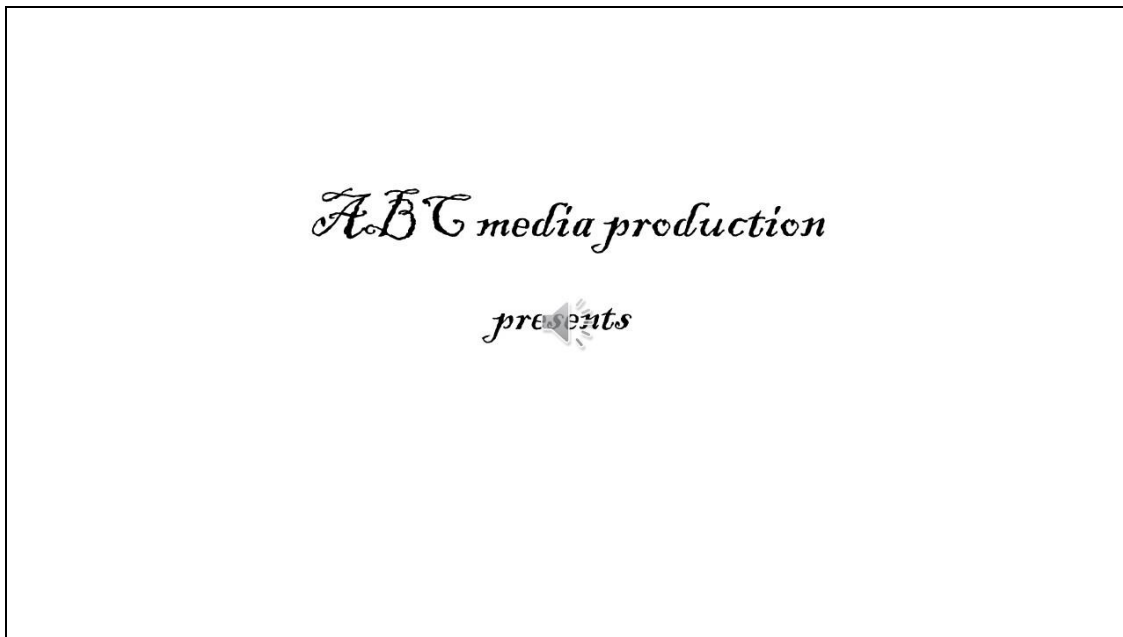
Barriers and Solutions		
Author/s	Location	Notes
Ackner & Armenti (2004)	Canada	Leadership & Education – ‘Sleepless in academia.’
Akande (1993)	International	Leadership in General - ‘The Glass Ceiling: Women and Mentoring in Management and Business.’
Ballenger (2010)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Women’s Access to Higher Leadership & Education: Cultural and Structural Barriers.’
Barreto, Ryan & Schmitt (2009)	International	Leadership in General - ‘The Glass Ceiling in the 21st Century: Understanding Barriers to Gender Equality.’
Bateman & Zeithaml (1993)	International	Leadership in General - ‘Management: Function & Strategy.’
Bell & Chase (1995)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Gender in Theory and Practice of Educational Leadership.’
Bonebright, Cottledge & Lonnquist (2012)	USA	Leadership & Education – ‘Developing Women Leaders on Campus: A Human Resources-Women’s Center Partnership at the University of Minnesota.’
CEDA (2013)	Australia	Leadership in General - ‘Women in Leadership: Understanding the gender gap.’

Cohen & Huffman (2003)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Occupational Segregation and the Devaluation of Women's Work across U.S. Labor Markets.'
Coleman (2007)	UK	Leadership & Education – 'Gender and Leadership & Education in England: a comparison of secondary headteachers' views over time.'
Cress (2002)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Campus Climate.'
Cullen & Luna, (1993)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Women Mentoring in Academe: addressing the gender gap in higher education.'
Eddy (2009)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Leading Gracefully: Gendered Leadership at Community Colleges.'
Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns & Marshall (2007)	Australia	Leadership & Education – 'Show Me the Money! An Empirical Analysis of Mentoring Outcomes for Women in Academia.'
Gerdes (2003)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Do It Your Way: Advice from Senior Academic Women.'
Gibson (2006)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Mentoring of Women Faculty: The Role of Organizational Politics and Culture.'
Grant-Vallone & Ensher (2011)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Opting In Between: Strategies Used by Professional Women With Children to Balance Work and Family.'
Grogan (1996)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Aspiring to the superintendency in United States public school systems: Women's perspectives.'
Hede (1994)	Australia	Leadership in General - 'The Glass Ceiling Metaphor: Towards A Theory Of Managerial Inequity.'
Hellicar (2013)	Australia	Leadership in General - 'Increasing the Number of Women in Senior Executive Positions: Improving Recruiting, Selection and Retention Practices.'
Huang & Sverke (2007)	Sweden	Leadership in General - 'Women's occupational career patterns over 27 years: Relations to family of origin, life careers, and wellness.'
Inesi & Cable (2014)	USA	Leadership in General - 'When Accomplishments Come Back to Haunt You: The Negative Effect of Competence Signals on Women's Performance Evaluations.'

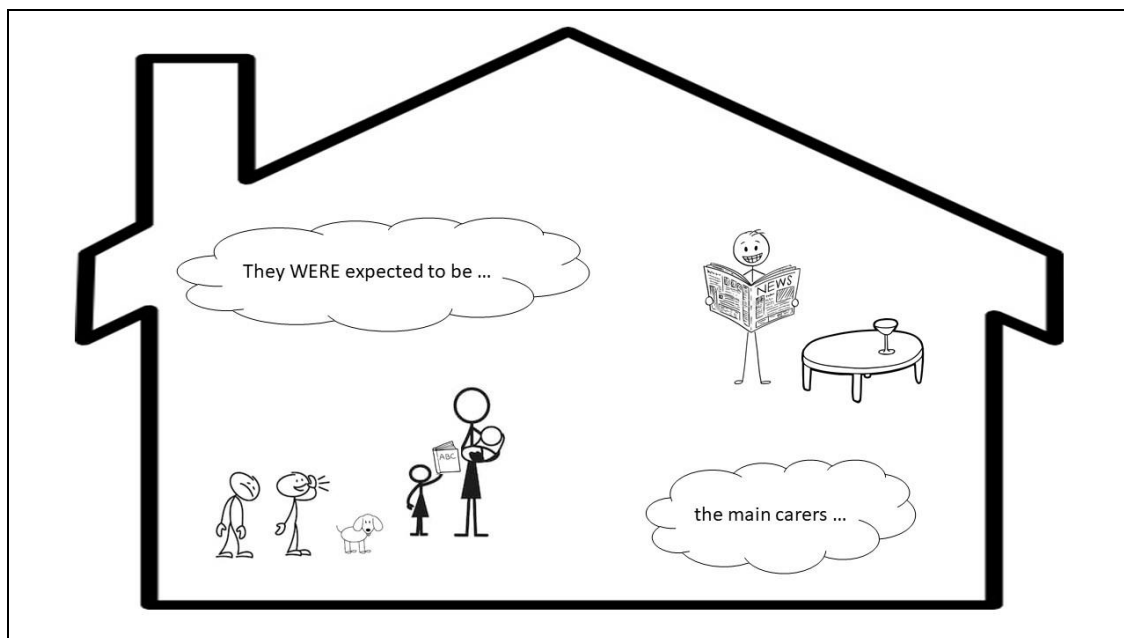
Jourová (2016)	EU	Leadership in General - 'Gender balance on corporate boards: Europe is cracking the glass ceiling.'
Kellerman & Rhode (2007)	International	Leadership in General - 'Women & Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change.'
Kim & Cook (2012)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Diversity at the Top: The American College President 2012.'
Lafreniere & Longman (2008)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Gendered Realities and Women's Leadership Development: Participant Voices from Faith-Based Higher Education.'
Maranto & Griffin (2011)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'The Antecedents of a "Chilly Climate" for Women Faculty in Higher Education.'
Maume (1999)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Occupational Segregation and the Career Mobility of White Men and Women.'
McLay and Brown (2001)	UK	Leadership & Education – 'Preparation and Training for School Leadership: Case studies of nine women headteachers in the secondary independent sector.'
Metcalfe & González (2013)	USA	Leadership & Education - 'Underrepresentation of Women in the Academic Profession: A Comparative Analysis of the North American Region.'
Montas-Hunter (2012)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'Self-Efficacy and Latina Leaders in Higher Education.'
Morrison, White, Van Velsor & the Center for Creative Leadership (1994)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Breaking The Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach The Top Of America's Largest Corporations?'
O'Brien & Rickne (2016)	International	Political Leadership – 'Gender Quotas and Women's Political Leadership.'
Paludi (2008)	USA	Leadership in General - 'The Psychology of Women at Work: Challenges and Solutions for Our Female Workforce.'
Pichler, Simpson & Stroh (2008)	USA	Leadership in General - 'The Glass Ceiling in Human Resources: Exploring the Link between Women's Representation in Management and the Practices of Strategic Human Resources Management and Employee Involvement.'
Ritter & Yonder (2004)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Gender Difference in Leader Emergence Persist Even for Dominant Women: An Updated Confirmation of Role Congruity Theory 1.'

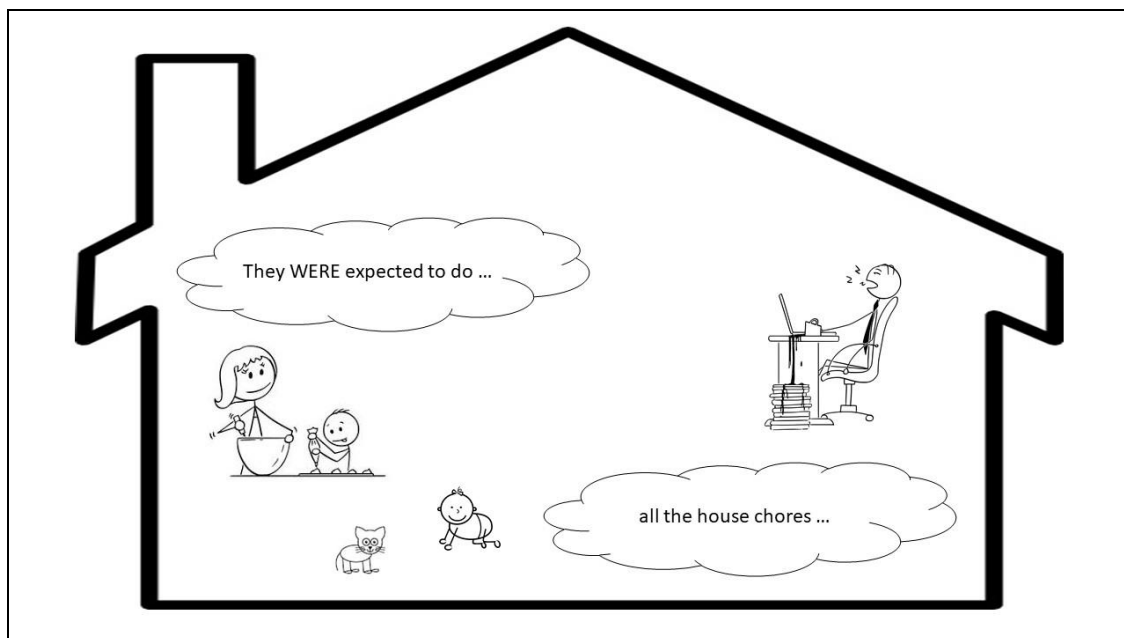
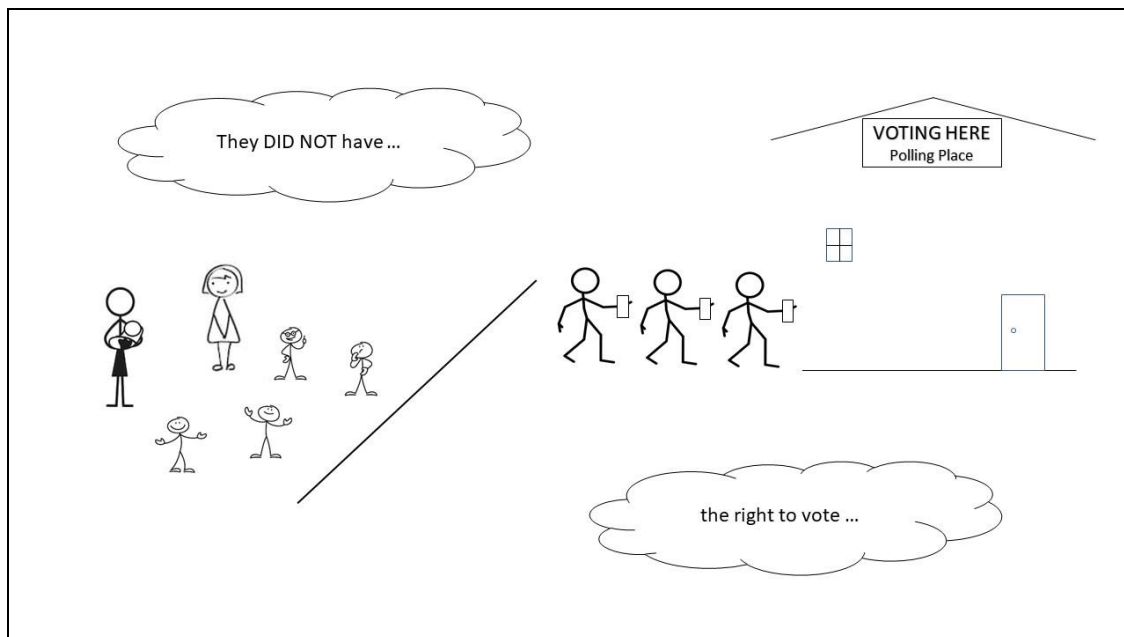
Rudman & Phelan (2010)	USA	Leadership in General - 'The Effect of Priming Gender Roles on Women's Implicit Gender Beliefs and Career Aspirations'
Singh, Ragins & Tharenou (2009)	Australia	Leadership in General - 'What Matters Most? The Relative Role of Mentoring and Career Capital in Career Success.'
Turner, Norwood & Noe (2013)	USA	Leadership & Education – 'A Woman With a plan: Recognizing Competencies for Ascent to Administration in Higher Education.'
Zacker (2004)	USA	Leadership in General - 'Motherhood With A Briefcase: Working Two Full-Time Jobs.'

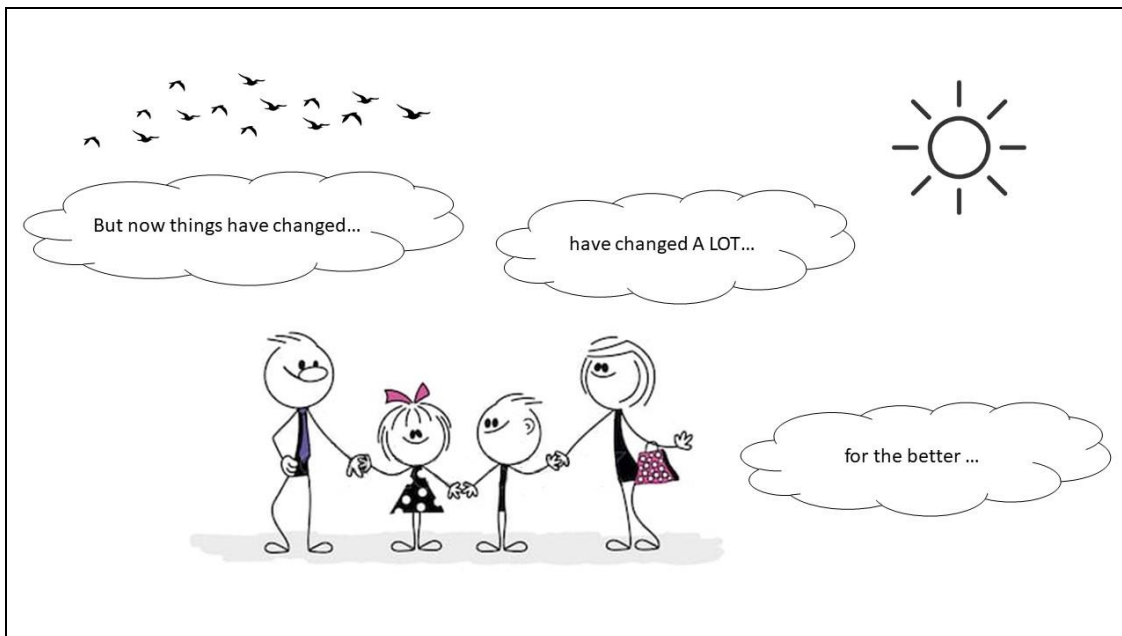
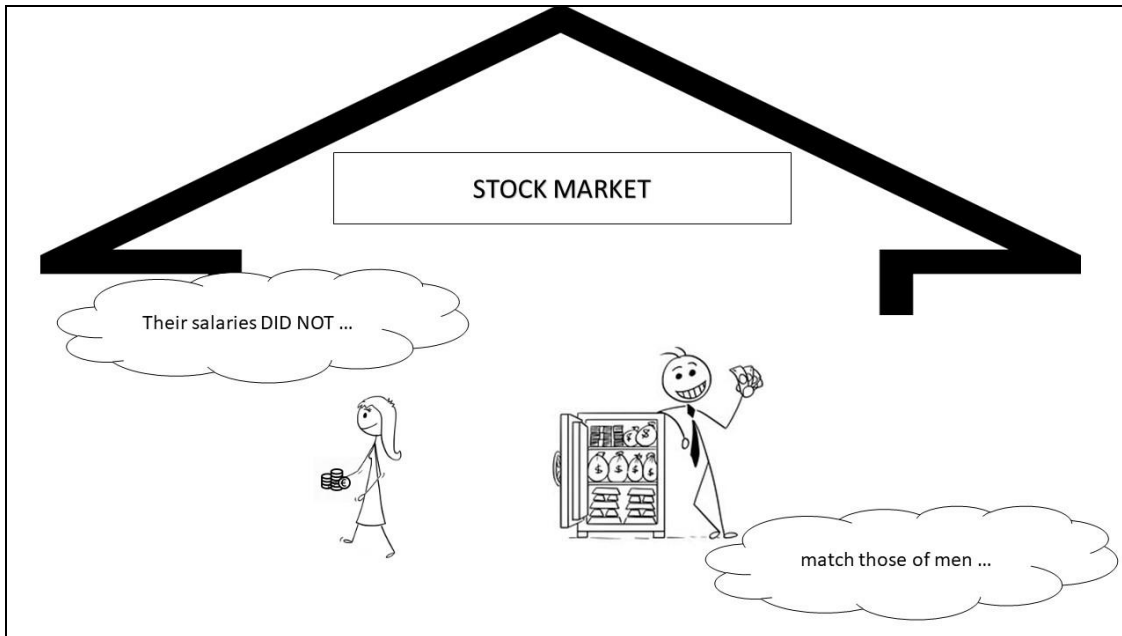
Appendix F - Presentation



The space between us?







Directed, produced & written by

robert

Music

river flows in you - yiruma

hallelujah - pentatonix

The End...

Appendix G – Position Description (Director General)

Position Description



Position Title:	Director General (Continental Shelf)	Grade:	3
Ministry:	Office of the Prime Minister		
Department:	Continental Shelf	No. of Posts :	1
Responsible to:	Principal Permanent Secretary	Grade:	1

Overall Purpose of Position

The Director General is a senior executive member of the Ministry's Management team and is accountable to the responsible Permanent Secretary for overseeing the regulation and promotion of the upstream oil exploration sector in Malta and on Malta's continental shelf, for monitoring the contractual obligations of licensed oil companies operating in Malta and for giving technical advice on continental shelf issues. S/he will be responsible for the implementation and administration of the Petroleum (Production) Act (1958), Continental Shelf Act (2014), Petroleum (Production) Regulations (2001) and Continental Shelf Regulations (2015).

Main Responsibilities

Plans and Objectives

- o Set the strategic direction and oversee the preparation and delivery of the Department's contribution to the Ministry's Strategic Plan and Budget for approval by the responsible Permanent Secretary;
- o Planning, developing and ensuring the implementation of work standards within the Department to ensure quality, timeliness and results in relation to plans;
- o Liaise with the main stakeholders, to monitor and where required, facilitate the effective, efficient and timely implementation of the Ministry's endorsed policies, strategies, standards, regulations and change programmes;
- o Give advice and make recommendations to the responsible Minister and responsible Permanent Secretary on matters of legislation, policy, strategy and overall direction to be adopted by the Ministry;
- o Work closely with other directors and heads within the Ministry, Government entities, authorities, service users and other stakeholders in order to be in a position to develop strategy and provide support to other Departments within the Ministry;
- o Monitor performance and outcomes, and ensure that effective self-regulation and quality assurance systems are in operation by the Department;
- o Provide leadership and support for the implementation of relevant Public Service reform initiatives in the Department;
- o Identify and propose measures to enhance efficiency gains and savings in the management of the Department.

Specific Responsibilities for the Position

- Administer, implement and make recommendations to Government to amend, if and when necessary, the provisions of present and future Maltese and EU petroleum legislation including the Petroleum (Production) Act, the Continental Shelf Act, the Petroleum (Production) Regulations, the Continental Shelf Regulations, the Model Production Sharing Contract and Model Exploration Study Agreement, and legislation related to the granting of exploration and production licences and to health, safety and environment for offshore oil and gas installations;
- Generate and promote exploration opportunities in Malta and offshore Malta to attract further exploration activity either through bid rounds or promotional campaigns or direct negotiations with oil companies or by participating at international conferences and exhibitions;
- Negotiate the contractual terms of Exploration Study Agreements and Production Sharing Contracts and provide support to Government in the form of advice and analysis of the contractual terms and make recommendations to Government for the award of new petroleum exploration licences to oil companies;
- Monitor the contractual obligations of oil companies and geophysical companies licensed to operate in Malta;
- Maintain a geological and geophysical database of all data acquired over the years from oil exploration activity and from research and other surveys and ensure that suitably qualified oil companies are given the required technical data during data-room visits;
- Maintain samples from exploration and research activity;
- Identify, evaluate and assess oil and gas prospects in Malta's offshore acreage;
- Issue authorisations for marine scientific research and for the surveying and laying of submarine cables and pipelines on Malta's continental shelf and for authorising any other continental shelf activities as required through the Continental Shelf Regulations (2015);
- Monitor oil exploration activity in neighbouring states for the surveillance of exploration activity on Malta's continental shelf;
- Participate in EU projects and other initiatives concerning the gathering and assembling of marine data;
- Assist Government to examine, protect and propagate Malta's sovereignty, sovereign rights, control and jurisdiction as recognised under international law;
- Assist Government by providing advice and appropriate expertise and technical and legal support in negotiations on boundary delimitation with neighbouring states;
- Manage the staff within the Department and take initiatives to ensure capacity building in oil related subjects.

Consultation

- Represent the Ministry as necessary in continental shelf matters and oil exploration and production matters;
- Maintain a close liaison with oil companies and other stakeholders to ensure commitment to contracts, agreements and other initiatives;
- Represent the Department as required in EU and international forums;
- Contribute to the collective management of the Ministry;
- Liaise with other senior officers in the Ministry in the formulation of the Ministry's objectives and specific performance criteria to be applied within the Ministry;
- Develop and maintain contacts with senior officials in the Ministry, other Ministries, government entities and the private sector to ensure a cross-cutting approach to policy making and service delivery, and the identification and resolution of problems in a fully co-ordinated way.

Self Improvement

- Keep well informed and up-to-date on emerging policy, scientific, technical and legal matters related to oil exploration and continental shelf matters;
- Take every opportunity to acquire additional leadership and management skills.

Other

- Manage or discharge such other responsibilities as may, from time to time, be assigned by the Permanent Secretary.

Working Conditions

- Ability to work under pressure;
- May be required to work late or on weekends to meet deadlines;
- May be required to be present offshore during exploration operations;
- May be required to travel abroad on official business.

Management Knowledge / Skills / Qualifications

- Must have outstanding managerial and administrative skills together with a strong academic background that such a specialised position requires;
- Strong leadership skills, strategic thinking and methodological awareness, particularly assertiveness and decision-making to facilitate timely implementation of policy directives especially where problems of an operational nature are encountered;
- Proven experience in regulating and promoting the upstream oil exploration sector and a profound understanding of relevant Maltese, EU and international legislation related to the oil and gas sector and to the continental shelf;
- Experience in negotiating and monitoring contractual arrangements with oil companies, particularly Production Sharing Contracts and Exploration Study Agreements;
- A sound understanding of international maritime legislation, and its applicability to Malta's and the central Mediterranean maritime boundary situation and its impacts on oil exploration activity;
- Experience in managing promotional bid rounds and data-room sessions;
- Knowledge of legislation relating to health, safety and environment as applied to oil exploration activity;
- Knowledge of Malta's hydrocarbon prospectivity;
- Knowledge of Government's public procurement regulations;
- Demonstrate strong experience in a senior management position;
- An understanding and commitment to quality management;
- Ability to foster and cultivate effective working relationships with the other members of the management team of the Ministry, the Authorities and entities falling within the portfolio of the Ministry;

- In-depth knowledge and experiences of government structures, public service norms and regulations;
- Extensive experience in project, change and conflict management;
- Strong focus on driving short and long-term projects/programmes;
- Ability to mediate and resolve conflict;
- Demonstrate ability in providing strong leadership and the ability to direct, manage and control staff under his/her direction;
- Seasoned judgement and the ability to take sound decisions;
- Excellent communication (oral and written), and interpersonal skills;
- Fully computer literate.

January 2018

Appendix H - Position Description (Director)

Position Description



Position Title:	Director (Human Resources)	Scale:	4
Ministry:	Ministry for Education and Employment		
Department:	Strategy and Support		
Directorate:	Human Resources		
Responsible to:	Director General (Strategy and Support)	Scale:	3

Overall Purpose of Position

The Director (Human Resources) is an executive member of the Ministry's top management team responsible for directing, controlling and co-ordinating the work of the Human Resources Directorate and to provide the Director General (Strategy and Support) with analysis, advice, recommendations and support on the Ministry's functions related to all strategic and corporate aspects of human resources, including recruitment, the issuing of internal calls, contracts for service and letters of extension, discipline, absence management for non-teaching grades, and deployment of staff in non-school environments.

The Director (Human Resources) will be expected to coordinate related activities of a strategic and corporate human resources nature, and to seek standardisation and simplification in procedures related to this remit. He/she will also be required to ensure uniformity in the implementation of policy directives issued by the Ministry for Education and Employment and any other competent authority. Furthermore, he/she will also be required to ensure that the functions falling under the remit of the Directorate are managed in conformity with any pertaining legislation, regulation and/or policy.

As part of the Ministry's top management team, he/she will be expected to demonstrate collegiality towards other Departments and Directorates, directly and by promoting cooperative interaction between the staff in his/her Directorate and those in other Departments and Directorates.

Main Responsibilities

Planning and Budgeting

- o Participate in the coordination and preparation of the Ministry's annual Financial Estimates and conduct preliminary analysis of estimate proposals.
- o Participate in the coordination of the setting of the strategic direction and the administration of the Ministry's Budget.
- o Co-ordinate the preparation and delivery of the Directorate's strategic and business plans.
- o Co-ordinate the provision of senior policy direction on the preparation and implementation of operational plans and budgets within the Directorate.

Management and Technical

General

- o Participate fully as a member of the Ministry's top management team, managing the Human Resources Directorate.
- o Ensure the delivery of the strategic and operational plans of the Directorate within approved budgets.
- o Provide leadership to the staff of the Directorate, and manage their performance, in part by agreeing personal performance plans with them, evaluating their performance, providing regular feedback, and pointing out areas for improvement.

- Review at a strategic level, the utilisation of the resources of the Directorate, and ensure that these are used fully and effectively in a manner encouraging client confidence.
- Alert the Permanent Secretary and the Director General (Strategy and Support) to any issues, problems and unmet administrative requirements that require their attention and make appropriate recommendations.
- Advise the Permanent Secretary and Director General (Strategy and Support) on the operational implications of new administrative policies or changes to existing policies.
- Undertake longer term policy and operational planning and carry out any research as may be required.
- Assist the Permanent Secretary and Director General (Strategy and Support) in the running of the organisation by providing timely and accurate information and tendering appropriate advice as required.
- Make proposals to the Permanent Secretary and to the Director General (Strategy and Support) to enable the Directorate to achieve better performance and to improve accountability.
- Participate fully in the successful implementation of approved reform initiatives throughout the Ministry.

Strategic Human Resources Management

- Coordinate the compilation and implementation of a strategy for human resources management in collaboration with senior management within the Ministry as well as external and internal stakeholders, with a particular view to:
 - driving organisational development;
 - determine in detail the strengths and weaknesses of human resources within the Strategy and Support Department, and subsequently that of the whole Ministry
 - making optimal use of training and development of staff to cater for competency building and continuous professional development;
 - facilitating organisation-employee communication, and ensuring the well-being of employees within the Ministry;
 - establishing best practices in human resources management;
 - development of policies and procedures;
 - achieving optimal HR data management.

Capacity Building and Recruitment

- Ensure that Capacity Building requirements are met for Departments, Directorates, Colleges and Schools within the Ministry, to enable them to fulfil their targets and meet their objectives.
- Monitor and review capacity building of entities within the Ministry to ensure that corporate targets and objectives are met.
- Manage and maintain staff records, which are also to be used as a basis for establishing requirements in the Capacity Building exercise.
- Direct and oversee the drawing up of Human Resource plans for Departments, Directorates and entities within the Ministry.
- Manage all recruitment processes, including the issuing of the relevant calls for application, including calls issued internally within the Ministry.
- Direct and oversee deployment of staff in environments falling under the Ministry other than Colleges, Schools and other educational institutions.
- Provide the necessary support to the Permanent Secretary on the restructuring of Departments and Directorates as may be required, and assist in addressing mismatching of duties in relation to the respective substantive grades.
- Assist Departments and Directorates in determining the complement, deployment and control of their staff.
- Seek any opportunities for redeployment of human resources within Departments and Directorates to ensure that they have adequate workforce to perform their tasks.

Employee relations

- Ensure workers are motivated by flexible working schedules as may be required and in line with prevailing regulations and procedures.
- Promote work-life balance, amongst other things through the use of family friendly measures, including teleworking.
- Take any possible steps to contribute to the improvement of morale, performance and professionalism within the Ministry.
- Ensure the implementation throughout the Ministry of the Performance Management Programme and any other appraisal systems that may be applicable.
- Ensure that equality policies are adhered to by the Ministry.

Staff data management

- Promote best practices in the management of staff data within the Ministry, ideally through the establishment of a single database, and ensuring that the necessary collaboration with the Public Administration HR Office takes place.
- Ensure that all data, including access to personal files, is administered in full adherence to legislation, including the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act.

Training and development

- Promote training programmes and opportunities across the Ministry and liaise with the Institute for the Public Services and other stakeholders as necessary.
- Organise internal training through the year by means of seminars, induction courses and other activities to provide interaction and networking.

Administrative HR management

- Provide direction with regard to the implementation of the disciplinary function.
- Issue contracts for service, progressions, promotions, extensions, increments, confirmation of appointments and any other HR-related administrative processes as may be required.
- Direct and oversee the Gozo HR Section.
- Direct and oversee absence management for staff in non-teaching environments.

Consultation

- Develop and maintain contacts with senior officials in the Ministry, other Ministries, parastatal bodies and the private sector to ensure a cross-cutting approach to policy making and service delivery, and the identification and resolution of problems in a fully co-ordinated way.
- Represent the Ministry and, where and as appropriate, exercise a strategic role on inter-Ministerial or inter-governmental policy development or planning teams.
- Liaise with officials in foreign jurisdictions to ensure that, where necessary, agreements or protocols are established.

Continuous Professional Development

- Keep well informed and up-to-date on all matters in the area of human resources management, and on any national or international obligations affecting this area.
- Take every opportunity to acquire new leadership and management skills.

Others

- Manage or discharge such other responsibilities as may, from time to time, be assigned by the Permanent Secretary.

Working Conditions

- Ability to work under pressure.
- May be required to work late or at weekends or public holidays to meet deadlines.
- May be required to travel abroad on official business.

Management Knowledge / Skills / Qualifications

- Excellent and up-to-date knowledge in matter related to human resources management and corporate administration.
- A thoroughgoing knowledge of legislation and policy on human resources management and corporate administration.
- Knowledge of regulations, structures and practices pertaining to the Public Administration in general and the Human Resources Directorate in particular.
- Proven leadership skills, especially the ability to get the best out of people, and a strong focus on delivering results.
- The ability to reach sound, supportable and independent conclusions on policy issues, and to produce innovative recommendations and effective solutions.
- Seasoned judgement and the ability to take sound decisions.
- Excellent communication (oral and written) and interpersonal skills; and
- Full computer literacy.

26 January 2018