Barriers and Biases: A case study of women's experiences of underrepresentation at senior management levels.

Master in Strategic Human Resource Management and Labor Relations

Department of Sociology/ Department of Business Administration

Spring Semester 2017

Author: Antigoni Nikolaou 901228

Supervisor: Gabriella Elgenius

ABSTRACT

Essay/Thesis: 30 hp

Programme: Strategic Human Resource Management and Labor Relations

Level: Masters /Second Cycle

Semester/year: Spring /2017

Supervisor: Gabriella Elgenius

Examiner:

Report No:

Key words: barriers, challenges, experiences, senior management, gender inequalities, under representation.

Purpose: The main focus question of this study is to investigate and identify the challenges and barriers that female employees face in being promoted to senior management roles. The researcher will ascertain barriers and challenges women perceive and identify the key issues that females' employees claim to be the reason for the low number of women in senior roles.

Theory: In this studythe dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities were analyzed by looking at macro and micro perspective. Rutherford's model of gendered organizational cultures and institutional theory was used to explain the dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities within a workplace from a macro-perspective. At a micro perspective, the study looked at the role of social relationships between people and positions within organizational contexts as direct causes of inequalities.

Method: Qualitative case study in a global context with semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Results: Traditional view of women, the different style of leadership, gender stereotypes, unconscious bias, sexual harassment and lack of confidence are the perceived challenges and barriers reported by female employees hold them back from promoting to senior management positions and are been shaped by socio-cultural differences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms below are defined in the context of the current study:

Barrier: a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress (Oxford Dictionary). In the context of this study we refer to barriers as obstacles that prevent women to hold and promote to senior management roles.

Challenge: a task or situation that test someone's ability (Oxford Dictionary). In the next chapters the researcher will refer to challenges as difficulties that female employees face during their career journey and advancement to higher positions.

Bias: Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, especially in a way considered to be unfair (Oxford Dictionary).

Senior management: the highest level of managers in an organization, immediately below the board of directors (Oxford Dictionary). In the context of this thesis, the terms senior management, senior management position and senior levels refers to positions in the top hierarchical level of an organization.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Formulation of the problem

A study of the 600 largest companies in Europe by the European Commission in 2014 indicates that women in Europe, despite being 45 percent of the labor force, occupy on average only 19 percent of the corporate board seats, 14 percent of senior executive positions and 4 percent of the chief executive positions (European Commission, 2014). The underrepresentation of women in senior management levels is problematic in view of the growing number of women with high educational attainment and background that hints towards continuing discrimination (Hegewisch and Hartmann, 2014).The existence of a gender imbalance at the top hierarchical level of organizations, raise questions about business and academia and how they influence the distribution of corporate, social and economic benefits, and how women holding leadership roles are able to identify and approach barriers in companies, social networks and jurisdictions (Schwanke, 2013), preventing them from such benefits. These questions are crucial to address, because the absence of women in senior management positions makes work life more difficult and challenging for women further down in the organizational ranks (Cohen and Huffman, 2007). According to Acker (2009), in cases when women are promoted to senior management roles other women in the organisation benefit, since these promoted women, actively contribute towards promoting equality within the organization. In addition, previous studies show that when women occupy high managerial positions, the gender wage gap at lower hierarchical levels tends to be lower than when women are not present at the top (Cohen and Huffman, 2007). However, currently companies do not make full use of the existing female labour force potential.

This thesis aims to identify the barriers, biases and challenges that women face in being promoted to senior management roles by providing insights from a case study in an international setting. The obvious paradox of an organisation that aspires to be seen as frontrunner in providing equal opportunities for all the employees regardless of gender, though simultaneously showing patterns of under-representation of women at senior level was the reason in selecting the particular company to be the focus of this study. The aim is to ascertain the perceived barriers and challenges that female employees come across and identify the key issues females' employees claim to be reason for the low number of women at senior levels within an international organisation.

Background of the research

This study touches upon equal opportunities and equal representation of genders in senior management positions. From the late eighties' demographic changes and the growing number of women in the labor market lead to organizational restructurings. As a result, equal opportunity legislation forced organizations to review their management practices and develop new and creative approaches to managing people. Consequently, equal opportunities became part of a broader term, called diversity management. However, managing diversity is about more than equal employment opportunity and affirmative action (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998). According to Thomas (2001), managing diversity is a comprehensive process for creating a work environment that includes everyone. A similar definition given by Seymen (2006) focused on cultural diversity management and saw it as "an organizational answer or reaction to the need for competitiveness and to the increasing variety of the workforce". In the context of this study, diversity management is defined as part of HRM practices, including recruitment, performance appraisal, reward, employee development and managerial behaviour in delivering competitive advantage through leadership and team work.

One dimension of diversity, gender, has become a priority in organizational diversity initiatives in recent years since the number of women entering the labour force has increasingly growing in the last decades (Razavi, 2016). Gender equality and women's empowerment was the third of eight in Millennium Development Goal published in 2015 (UN, 2015). It seems that nowadays organizations starting to realize the benefits that gender equality and equal representation could bring to a company and are taking some initiatives to promote diversity. One example is a study by Hastings (2011), who interviewed 321 executives responsible for diversity and inclusion programs and highlighted the improvement of gender diversity programs. In according to this, since 2008 the government in Norway vote for a gender quota law that required a minimum of 40% of each gender in all listed companies (Teigen, 2012). Many other countries have passed similar laws to promote gender equality and explicitly pursuing equal representation of both genders in top management positions. However, these policies did not really make any difference in the top hierarchical levels since women are still underrepresented according to official statistics worldwide. A study by Berrey (2013) that analyzed successful diversity program in big organizations shows that even if the program was conscious of and worked to eliminate closure mechanisms that prevented women from reaching top management positions, the senior executive positions that were traditionally taken by men were excluded from the program. In addition, a recent study by Christiansen et al (2016), shows that few senior positions are held by women and even fewer executive positions are

taken by women. Based on these facts and figures, itis still unclear why women are still underrepresented in senior management positions, despite the recognition of the advantages that women bring in the business and the efforts that have been made for gender balance in the corporate boards. Therefore, it is worth asking, what are the barriers women are facing in their promotion to senior positions? Why is it that women are still under represented in these positions, and what are the hurdles preventing them from taking equal advantage of career opportunities?

Objectives and research questions

The main question of this study is to investigate and identify the challenges and barriers that female employees face in being promoted to senior management roles. Therefore, the researcher will ascertain barriers, biases and challenges women perceive and identify the key issues that females' employees claim to be the reason for the low number of women in senior roles. In order to reach these objectives, the researcher will attempt to identify female employees experiences in accessing work relate opportunities and promotion to senior management roles and the extent to which these self-perceived barriers and challenges are accentuated by social conventions of gender roles or organizational practices.From the main overarching question, we may identify two sub-questions guiding the analysis:

- How do women perceive barriers, biases and challenges of underrepresentation in senior management positions?
- In which ways do they experience and assess their work-related opportunities for promotion to higher hierarchical levels?

Contribution of the research

There is a growing discussion about the promotion of women in senior roles and many studies focus on female labor participation and women in leadership roles (e.g. Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001 and Haslam and Ryan, 2008). Previous studies that look into the career progression of women in organizations, focus on how family factors, organizational cultures, and access networks have an impact in their career advancement (e.g. Knorr 2005, Schwanke2013).In addition, despite the fact that there have been many discussions about how women perceive barriers and challenges to their career advancement, little is known about possible ways in which female employees could be encouraged to assert those positions. In accordance to this, the current study attempts to fill in some gaps in the existing literature on gender and leadership and gender inequality regimes in an international context. Therefore, this study contributes to the emerging understanding of women's work and career advancement in senior management positions. The

importance of this study leans on the international context that the research was undertaken, the number of the samples and the inclusion of both genders within the sample. Previous similar qualitative studies that look into gender and leadership focus in particular sectors or locations and investigate perceptions and experiences of female employees (e.g. Richie et al 1997, None maker 2000, Liu 2013, Lee Cooke& Xiao 2014, Peterson 2016). This study was undertaken in a global organization with a number of related practical implications for international HRM. The main contribution of this study is that sample saturation was achieved despite the challenge that comes with investigating an international context. An important point is that the findings of this study have direct impact on the organization. Since this study is under the umbrella of a broader project regarding gender equality opportunities, the overall findings of the research support the project with deeper data and shed light about female employees' perspectives. In the long run, the findings will make a meaningful difference at the company by planting a very important seed in the organization, which will help transform its culture and ultimately improve the lives of many employees and customers around the world. However, the limited scope and time of this thesis makes it impossible to touch upon all the aspects that deserve to be mentioned. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that a thesis at a master's level aim to observe and analyze behaviors and processes and evaluate them rather than act as a consultancy report giving explicit recommendations to companies. However, Corley and Gioia (2011), encourage researchers to produce academic papers with greater scope that combines both scientific and practical utility. Taking the above into consideration, the researcher contributes to the scientific community but at the same time has an influence in organizations and their management by understanding, describing, explaining and improving current practices on the topic under study.

Setting

In this thesis, the researcher aims to study the persisting gender inequities embedded in an organizational culture. The empirical base consists of a case-study in a global company with 31 percent of employees and 80 percent of customers being women. The company recognizes the overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the business benefits of gender diversity and has already made great natural progress when it comes to gender equality issues. The gender balance in the board of directors exemplifies that they are outperforming other global companies around the globe. The management team acknowledges that gender equality can be a driver to help outperform the competitive market landscape. However, particular units within the organisation demonstrate that female employees are underrepresented when it comes to senior positions. Therefore, the management team of a particular unit, where female employees are underrepresented in the senior

levels took the initiative to run a project to empower female employees in order to be even more successful with a more diverse structure from a gender perspective. The objective of this program is to increase gender diversity on all levels with a focus on senior roles. The program aims to develop and support female employees as well to improve gender balance. This particular program will be launched for the first time in the particular unit under study; though similar initiatives and programs were launched in other departments within the organization.

The idea for this thesis came partly from the Human Resource VP, who had requested to identify the hurdles and challenges that female employees perceived as prevent them from achieving senior positions. This study will not attempt to evaluate the program or to compare it with similar programs in other departments or companies. The main aim of the study is to support the program with deeper data and identify gender based barriers that could explain the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles. Much of the organisation initiatives in the area of diversity and equal opportunities had traditionally focused on policies, code of conduct and formal practices therefore, the necessity to take a more comprehensive approach and look at the employee perspective had been identified.

In the next chapters the researcher will provide further information about the case study as well as some information about the company and the several wide concepts that this thesis will touch upon.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a literature review on diversity management, gender diversity and women's barriers to position of power. More specifically it attempts to describe the importance of gender diversity within organizations and the benefits of equal representation of both genders in workplaces. Moreover, literature about women's barriers in management positions, glass ceiling, inequality regimes, second generation bias and labyrinths are provided and finally the earliest research on the role of networks, role models and structural issues in society and organizational settings are pointed out.

Diversity Management

A Background

The future workforce involves more new immigrants, more women, more special-needs working employees; in short more diversity. This creates a need to draw a guidance line for organizational action regarding the management of diversity and conceptual the framework that unify theory and practice (Hall & Parker 1993). According to Esty et al (1995), diversity is considered to be the acknowledgment, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating the differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status. Bassett-Jones (2005) discusses the advantages and disadvantages associated with workforce diversity that put organizations in a complex dilemma. On the one hand, diversity leads to a competitive advantage for companies that creates space for creativity and innovation whilst at the same time advance the competitiveness of a company. On the other hand, diversity can lead to workplace conflict.

According to Davis et al (2016), nowadays legislation in most western countries protects potential and actual employees against discrimination in the workplace based upon differences such as gender, age, national origin, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability marital status and pregnancy. However, the national regulatory contexts in each country allow diversity practices to vary from country to country. In the UK, diversity management is based on voluntarism and multiculturalism which in Germany exists largely as a voluntary strategy separated from the notion of ethnicity and allowing other forms of difference to be accommodated in workplaces (Davis et al 2016). In Sweden, public policies reflect a strong commitment to gender equality based on the idealsthat women and men equally share paid work and family responsibilities (Oláh, and Bernhardt, 2008). A different example is Canada, where employers must not only prevent

discrimination, but also to take proactive actions to eliminate any barriers that risk the equality in the workplace (Davis et al 2016). Therefore, one could easily argue that diversity practices resonate differently across the countries. In the same way that diversity practices resonate differently across countries different approaches on diversity and its management take place in multinational organisations (e.g. Davis et al 2016 and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2011).

Strategic responses to diversity management

Today's globalization of the labour market proves that there is still a need for enlightenment on managing diversity issues. A report by Cisco (2011) discusses that organizations must find ways to integrate diversity into their work structures since diversity is still more of a buzzword than a fact for many organizations. A major globalisation survey reveals that the boards of many global companies do not embody the diversity that these companies will need in the future. Most companies fall short on the diversity of thought and culture and many global companies admit that they had only a couple of foreign nationals on their boards (Ernst & Young, 2010).

A theory exists that there is no single best way to manage workforce diversity in organization because it depends on management approach, outside and inside pressures for diversity and how different types of diversity are considered among the company (Dass and Parker 1999). According to Makowe (1995), despite the growing recognition of its importance, truly and complete acceptance of diversity does not come naturally to managers or employees especially those who had limited exposure outside of their own culture, racial, sexual, generational or socioeconomically circles. Dass and Parker (1999) argue that it exist different approaches of strategic responses towards diversity and ways to implement it. However, managing diversity is also influenced by different social-historical contexts. According to Omanovic (2009), different ideas and conclusions can be drawn by different actors in different social environments about managing diversity. People from different social environment or different roles can perceive the meaning and the importance of managing diversity in different ways. According to Kossek et al (2006), it is not only important to study the strategic responses and practices towards diversity but different forms of diversity and how these interact with other organizational characteristics such as top management composition, leadership, representation across functions, industry and culture.

Gender Diversity

One dimension of diversity, gender, has become a priority in diversity initiatives by organizations in recent years. Women's advancement in the workplace has been impressive the last years;

According to Laff (2007), in the banking industry between 2003 and 2006, the number of women who held senior level management positions increased from 19 percent to 31 percent. However, despite optimistic views that women have broken through barriers to senior positions, they are, in fact, still underrepresented in governance, directorship, and executive leadership and some sectors which still remain male dominated (Schwanke2013). Why does this still exist, and what barriers do women still face in becoming top leaders of organizations?

Equal Representation Benefits

According to Badal, and Harter (2014) more women are going to hold senior positions and businesses as well as society will realize the economic and competitive advantages of gender diversity in the workplace. Those organizations that will manage to succeed in adapting to the shifting demographics will be able to benefit from representative and inclusive workforces (Toossi, 2002).

A diverse and inclusive workforce, regardless of size and industry, generates tangible benefits, such as increased efficiency, productivity, innovation, creativity and improved employee engagement (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016). According to a study by Credit Suisse, one of the reasons that gender diversity has a positive impact on company performance is that well managed diversity brings together varied perspectives, produces a more holistic analysis of the issues a company faces and spurs greater effort, leading to improved decision-making (Credit Suisse, 2012). The rise in female employment since 1974 has boosted Australian economic activity by 22% and that a 6% increase in the female participation rate would boost the level of GDP by 11%.4 (Toohey et al, 2009). Similarly, increased access to childcare and tax benefits would act as incentives for women to enter the workforce and increase the size of the Australian economy by $25 billion annually (Daley, J., 2012)

From an organisation perspective, women's participation in the workforce has positive impacts on organisational culture and on operations (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016). In addition to this, workplaces that promote gender diversity equally attract men and women and as a result, organisations have access to a larger talent pool. A study by Herring (2009), argues that an equal representation from both genders is associated with increased sales revenue, more customers, and greater relative profits. Similarly, a study by Francoeur et al (2008) indicates that firms with a high proportion of women in both their management and governance systems generate enough value to keep up with normal stock-market returns.

From an employee perspective, according to Kaplan et al (2011), workplace policies that support gender equality are an important tool to help retain talented personnel. Employees are more likely to remain with an organisation where there is a proactive diversity environment as they perceive a concrete payoff to themselves by staying in an organisation they view as fair. Employees value positive workplace cultures and environments that offer gender equality policies and practices, flexible working arrangements and support for employees with family and care responsibilities. (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016). Similarly, they are attracted to companies who have a positive reputation for promoting gender equality (Charlesworth et al, 2005). Therefore, emphasis on gender diversity programs was expected since over the last decades. The female labour supply in Europe has shown a large increase. However, although the benefits of equal representation of two genders in the workplace are obvious it is recognized that there is still an underrepresentation of female employees particularly when it comes to senior management roles.

Women's Barriers to Position of Power

The traditional view of women, pay (in)equity, glass ceiling, the different style of female leadership perception about gender issues, unconscious bias, sexual harassment and gender stereotypes are the main arguments when the discussion is about the relationship between gender and leadership (Wu, 2006).According to research from Cornell University, the term "glass ceiling" was first mentioned in 1984 to explain the invisible obstacles women and minorities face after they attain mid-management positions; they advance to the top of middle management but are unable to pass through this barrier (Schwanke2013). Powell and Butterfield (1994) discussed the glass ceiling concept and argue that it is commonly used to describe women's difficulties to be promoted from middle management to senior roles and that the barriers for career advancement are more distinct for women than for men. There is a transparent barrier that prevents women from reaching the highest part of the corporate ladder regardless of what qualifications they possess (The Economist 2009). However, the term was criticized since it was pointed out that barriers exist only when women try to promote to senior roles and not when they already hold senior roles (Acker, 2009).Therefore, further concepts of the glass ceiling phenomenon are surfacing in new forms such as glass escalators (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009) and glass cliffs (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

According to Guerrero (2011), another term that has been suggested for the barriers that women are facing before, during and after their promotion to executive positions is the labyrinth. The term signifies the complicated and exhausting challenges that women must handle on their way to senior roles (Eagly and Carli, 2007). The women who achieved promotion in senior positions still

experience prejudice, stereotyping, sexual harassment, isolation and tokenism. Thus, women still struggle and face challenging times even after they reach senior positions (Barreto, et al 2009).

A different concept to capture the complex, interlocking practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in workplaces, including at the top levels of management is inequalities regimes (Gottschall, 2016). Acker (2006), define inequality regimes as "loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations." Acker (2009) discusses that although organizations and their practices may appear fair, inequities are far-reaching throughout organizational policies, practices, and ideologies. The characteristics of inequality patterns include the bases of inequality, the shape and degree of inequality, organizing processes, the invisibility of inequalities, and the legitimacy of inequalities.

Another term that is more recently used is the second generation gender bias. The term refers to a kind of indirect bias and invisible barriers for women that come from cultural assumptions and practices as well as organizational structures that put women at a disadvantage and make it almost impossible for women to reach their full potential while they benefit men (Swartz, et al 2016). As a consequence, women find themselves less connected to their male colleagues, being advised to take administrative roles to take care of their family and find themselves excluded from consideration for top positions. All these situations reflect work structures and practices that put women in downside (Ibarra et al, 2003). According to Ibarra et al (2003), second-generation bias is embedded in stereotypes and organizational practices and is more unconscious that make it hard to detect, but when people are made aware of it, they see possibilities for change.

The previous terms were discussed by many scholars to describe women's experiences in the workplace. In real terms, however, the primary causes of gender inequality in senior positions are less detectable or well defined (Schwanke2013). This part of the study aims to examine the barriers to women's advancement to executive positions and to clarify the complexities of why women hold few leadership roles in male dominated workplaces. Prevailing perceptions of gender and leadership, prejudices and discrimination as well as society and corporate settings are considered to be a sociological framework to analyse and understand the barriers that women are facing in the workplace and by holding or aim to hold leadership and executive positions.

Prevailing Perceptions of Gender and Management

Many explanations given by researchers and practitioners that aim to explain and understand the low numbers of females in upper management rely mostly on the assumption that being woman is

incompatible with being a leader (Hoobler et al, 2011). Although research does not support the suggestion that leadership style is different between the two sexes, these perceptions still remains (Guerrero, 2011). Gender biases that consider leadership characteristics to be most closely related to male qualities and specific masculine characteristics are difficult to overcome in some organizational cultures (Schwanke2013). Role congruity theory reach beyond social role theory and touch upon the connection between gender roles and other roles, especially leadership roles, and identify the key factors that lead to prejudice and prejudicial behaviours (Shortland, 2009). The theory supports that there is a prejudice toward female leaders that follow from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leadership roles (Eagly& Karau**,** 2002).

On the other hand, a study by Eagly and Carli (2003), shows no significant differences between the behaviours of male and female leaders even though differences exist in perceptions of these behaviours. According to their study women leg up in typical leadership style but endure disadvantages from prejudicial evaluations of their competence as leaders especially in male dominated workplaces (Eagly and Carli, 2003). Another study by (Wang et al, 2013) argues that female leaders could be as effective as their male co-workers when they adopt the same leadership style. However, females and males are different and women in executive positions need to have a different model of leadership rather than using the ones that were associated with male characteristics. According to a study by MacKinsey (2009) the leadership style that is adopted by women is considered to be more effective when addressing global challenges post-crisis. Women's style can be described as people-based, role modelling with clear expectations and rewards (Mckinsey, 2009). Similarly, Eagly et al (2003), mention that women are considered to be more collaborative and willing to increase their co-workers and their team's self-worth. However, although women's leadership style is considered to be ideal and aligned with the expectations of a leader image nowadays, women hardly succeed into higher positions. If it is not leadership skills that causes the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, other barriers must exist that keep women from their advancement to senior positions.

Prejudices and Discrimination

In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was introduced to prevent segregation and discrimination by race, ethnicity and religion, and it is extended the equal opportunity principle to employment explicitly mentioning sex as a protected category (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback 2007). Important legislative changes followed related to disability, gender and racial equality like the Equal Pay Act

1970 (EPA) and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (SDA) in 1976,) Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations of 2003 and the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations which was also passed in 2003. The most recent legal regulations are the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 and the Gender Equality Duty (GED) in 2007. Despite these regulations according to IMF (2013: 4-6) women's input to the economic activity measured by the growth and well-being is below their capacity even if they represent more than one half of the world's population According to Farris and De Jonh, (2014), the term of discrimination varies according to the contexts but generally it indicates the subordination and segregation that are experienced by individuals on the basis of certain characteristics that they develop or bring with.

When it comes to the labour market employment segregation in groups, gender and minorities can clearly be seen. According to Bradley and Healy (2008), women found themselves as part time employees or having temporary contracts while men tend to be self- employed. In addition, the gender pay gap and the current pension gap between men and women disadvantages women as far as the quality of their lives is concerned (Bradley and Healy, 2008). Bradley and Healy's study shows that gender segregation is more obvious than ethnic segregation. In the same way, the sex role theory supports that women are less likely to enter male disciplines (Shortland, 2009). Social role theory and role congruity theory are used by many researchers to explain and analyse gender diversity in the workplace and female underrepresentation in management roles (Shortland, 2009). According to the social theory certain characteristics are perceived according to gender. Thus activities that men and women usually do in their typical social roles are related to personal qualities that are required to carry out these activities. Therefore, gender stereotypes are created, men are considered to be providers with higher status roles and women are seen as caretakers in the house with lower status roles (Shortland, 2009).

It is critical to study the main reasons of the genesis and persistence of inequalities in order to find ways to deal with them. Bradley and Healy (2008), claim that discrimination can be reproduced, shaped and rationalised by those who have high control positions in the recruitment process with legislations failing to deal with these issues. Likewise, according to (Tomaskovic & Stainback, 2007) employment segregation is considered to be an outcome of well-known social systems and structures like prejudice, cognitive bias, statistical discrimination, social closure around desirable employment opportunities, and network-based recruitment. These mechanisms create mutual expectations about the suitability of different types of people for different jobs as well as to the value of those jobs to the organization creating and reproducing workplace inequality (ibid). Tomaskovic & Stainback (2007), claim that formal rules and legal shifts in equal opportunity law

create pressures in society and in workplaces that highlight and increase discrimination behaviour. To be more specific, based on cognitive and prejudice bias employment discriminations resulted from the decisions to include or exclude job candidates that are linked to the status characteristics of job, or promotion candidates with many decisions are linked to cognitive bias, stereotyping, and in-group preferences (ibid). Statistical discrimination explains the way that employers are using stereotypes to exclude minority job candidates or to demand higher skills before hiring them (ibid). Again the law fails to deal with these issues since employers justify their decisions in terms of economical rationality although it is clearly discrimination under the law, since individuals are denied employment because of their status group membership. Social closure is about the exclusion of out-groups from opportunities with the "powerful" groups attempt to maintain the most desirable jobs (ibid). Stereotypes and group preferences are built on role models and identity (ibid).

According to Bradley and Healy (2008), the existing codes of practice and legislations are given the shape and degree of segregation but with no possibility to challenge discrimination. The law sets only the framework and is up to employers' trade unions and employees the implementation of it and the policy. Therefore, it is not sufficient for an organisation to just have equal opportunity policies. Policies act like empty shell symbols of good performance and expressions of commitment but nothing more, if they are not implemented (Bradley and Healy 2008). In that event, despite good practices, there is limited action and lack of implementation by governments, organisations, employers and trade unions. Therefore, one should look the interconnection between society and organisations to understand the barriers that women are facing to their career advancement and particularly in their promotion to senior leadership positions.

Societal structures

Societal issues apply to practices, activities, behaviours and policies which are deeply rooted in culture and public policy. Some contributing factors to the limited career advancement for women include some aspects of social programs and policy and the societal expectation of female participation in service industries such as education, health services, and social and community services (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). According to the study by Hoobler et al (2011), a main reason that women in US companies do not have management roles is because of the family-work conflict bias that mainly exists towards female employees. Similarly, Hakim (2000), discuss, based on preference theory, that the majority of women are adaptive or home-centred, in comparison with men who, in the majority, are work-centred. The author argues that women make choices and

prioritize according to their family situation. As a result, they have fewer years of job experience and fewer hours of employment per year, which slows their career progress and reduces their earnings.

Organizational context

One challenge for women in male dominated organisations is the "old boys' networks," that increased the ambiguity about advancement, and limit the opportunities for networking (Schwanke2013). According to Fitzsimmons et al (2014), women and men need to ensure that they have appropriate time available to invest in establishing and maintaining meaningful networks within the organization. However, women found networking difficult and uncomfortable and they are unable to commit the extra time build beneficial strong ties outside work hours due to their home commitments (Broughton & Miller, 2009). Men are therefore more effective in creating career-relevant, "hard" social capital and create relationships with powerful people within or outside a company (Lutter, 2015). Research finds that job-seekers in white/male networks receive more relevant job information than do those in minority/female networks, because of the white/male networks' higher-status contacts (Lutter, 2015). Therefore, men have better opportunities to advance their career in top positions since they are given more opportunities to do so. In addition to this, women who aspire to be promoted to senior roles are often struck by stress that leads to the fear of failure and as a result they often quit (Schwanke, 2013). It is therefore clear that the support network around women at higher levels of leadership is superficial and unhelpful.

Another important aspect that is related to the supportive environment is whether or not women within an organisation hold leadership positions. In 2016 Fortune *500* includes just 21 companies with women as CEO. That means that women hold 4.2% of CEO positions in America's 500 largest companies (Fortune, 2016). These figures indicate that there is a barrier to advancement for women in executive positions. According to Ibarra (2013), if women do not see themselves mirrored in top positions, then others do not see women there either. Role models are important to motivate women to take the lead; fewer female leaders mean fewer role models. That might be discouraging to them, viewing senior women as an example to follow and get motivated (Ibarra et al 2013). A study by Latu et al (2013) indicates that successful women close the gender gap in performance. Role models inspired women's behaviour in leadership, women who were exposed to highly successful female politicians displayed more empowered behaviour which in turn lead to women being perceived as more empowered by others and to women having more confident about their own performance. (Latu et al, 2013).

In this chapter, several theoretical approaches were mentioned to enlighten and provide readers with a deeper understanding on why women are still underrepresented in senior level positions and what barriers are that they encounter. According to Ayman and Korabik (2010) it is important when you look at the relationship between gender and leadership to distinguish between the way in which the research has been carried out and the way in which it has been interpreted. As already discussed, previous studies on gender and leadership have been carried out by applying the socio demographic definition of gender, thus most studies were looked into how men and women differ from one another in their leadership style, behavior, and effectiveness (Schein 1973, Schein 2001, Wu 2006, Eagly& Johannesen-Schmidt 2001). Following the findings of previous studies that drew upon a number of different sociological theoretical perspectives this thesis will analyze the dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities within a workplace by using concepts and models that focus on organizational institutional perspectives in macro and micro level.

CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will engage with the theoretical approaches useful for analyzing the ways in which gender inequalities are being reproduced in organizations as discussed primarily by Rutherford and Tomaskovic-Devey. The dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities could be analyzed by looking at macro-perspective and micro perspective.

Rutherford's model of gendered organizational cultures

In the early 90s Acker argued that organizations are not considered to be gender-neutral and gender inequalities are not just reproduced, on the contrary organizations are gendered, generating and reflecting male advantage (Acker, 1990). Gender inequalities within organizations might not be clear in the formal policies, practices and procedures of an organization but reflect divergences between men and women, femininity and masculinity in ways that reproduce and maintenance gender inequalities (Acker, 2006). Building on the same theory Rutherford (2011), argues that ethnic minorities and women are being excluded from power and privilege. Rutherford discusses in her studies that organizational cultures may act as means of patriarchal closure to women managers in organizations (2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2011). According to the model of gender organisation cultures by Rutherford, organisations are shaped by the environment that they operate, as well as from the location, ownership, industry sector, the nature of business and their future inspirations

(Rutherford, 2001c, 20011). The particular model represents nine different components that have been embedded in the organisational culture, which presents, reproduce and hide gender inequalities (Rutherford, 2011). Two of the nine constituents of the model are the physical layouts and artefacts of the organisation and the dress code of the employees. These two represent the organizational culture from an outside perspective, while the other six constituents reveal the organization's attitude towards women (ibid). The third constituent is gender awareness and is mainly associated with the behaviours and norms within the organisation and in which way equal opportunities policies and practices are implemented and followed. The management style is also a critical component since it reveals hierarchies and the kind of attributes and skills that are valued as well as the style of leadership and to what degree they are associated with masculine or feminine characteristics. The next constituent is the public and private divide that is basically the balance between work and personal life. According to Rutherford (2011), women's role in the family as caretakers and motherhood, is used by organisation to discriminate, exclude and question women's professional skills. In addition to this, the long hours' culture is in many organisations considered to be a prerequisite for senior management positions. However, it is not gender neutral because it affects women and men differently (Rutherford 2001c, 2011). For example, since women have dual responsibilities and they are the main caretakers of their families they need flexibility in terms of when and where they work. Hence, a long hour culture might work as a barrier for their career advancement. Rutherford include in the model another very important constituent that is not always obvious in organizations' but is considered to be a key issue for career development and access to promotions or the necessary information employees need to get there. This constituent is named by Rutherford as informal codes of behaviors and socializing and basically refers to networks inside the organization from which women are excluded. Thus, female employees have fewer opportunities to build relationships with key employees and access important information necessary for their career advancement (Rutherford, 2011). Closely linked with the informal codes of behavior and socialization is the language and communication within organization that convey social meanings and reflect the existence of informal networks that exclude women through communication and language such as the sport language, the military language and the sexual language(ibid). Last but not least, Rutherford (2011), refers to the sexuality culture within the organization that is often an unconscious normative behavior embedded in the culture. That might be expressed through sexual comments or dress-codes and practices that underestimate women's professionalism and organizational status and might lead to sexual harassment (ibid).

Considering the fact that the current study was undertaken in an international context, Rutherford's model of gender organisational cultures cannot explain how gender inequalities are being reproduced differently among the countries that the company is operating. The researcher applies an institutional perspective to analyse the dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities and understand the cultural norms and local environment that shape the female employees' perceptions about the barriers and challenges for promoting to senior level positions.

Institutional Perspective

There are significant coercive or normative pressures for change in workplaces to a more equal and diversity environment (Tomaskovic & Stainback, 2007). The organizational theory leads one to expect that change will occur as empirical changes in human resource practices become legitimate and spread because of coercive and mimetic isomorphic pressures from the firm's environment and the need for legitimacy (ibid). There have been a lot of definitions from social researchers about legitimacy. Suchman (1999) defines legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs and definitions". Scott (2014) argues that organizations are legitimate when they are understandable and able to survive rather than when they are desirable. Organizations strive for legitimacy is for many reasons not only about gaining certifications and avoiding prosecution, but also about recruiting an outstanding workforce and have high reputation as a successful player on the organizational field (Stryker, 2000). Thus, isomorphic institutionalization is an effect of a mandatory universal legitimacy that signifies legitimating, evidencing structural elements conferring legitimacy, and encouraging organizations that lack these elements to conform and adopt in order to encage legitimacy and to survive within the organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Stryker (2000), refers to the differentiation of the institutionalize ideas, by describing three bases for legitimacy allowing multi-functionality in the legitimacy processes; legal rules provide a regulative basis for legitimacy, adhering to moral governance standard provide a normative basis and standards of cultural support provide a cognitive basis for legitimacy (Stryker 2000). From an institutional perspective it can be argued that multinational companies accept various pressures both internal and externals in order to gain and maintain legitimacy. Farndale and Paauwe (2007), study shows that multinational companies face these drivers at the same time, external global competitive isomorphic pressures (e.g. universal "best practices"), external national, institutional isomorphic pressures (e.g. legislation) and internal pressures of strategic choice and competitive differentiation (e.g. corporate strategy, structure and culture).Based on that we can be claimed that a fundamental issue that is crucial for HRM is the

tension between the needs for global coordination and local responsiveness. Multinational companies face a pressure to adjust based on the universal "best practices" among multinational companies and external national, institutional isomorphic pressures like adjust to local legislations and local legal environment. Some examples are labour law, employment regulations, equal opportunities policies and diversity practices.

Rutherford's model of gendered organizational cultures and institutional theory could explain the dynamics of reproduction of gender inequalities within a workplace from a macro-perspective. In particular, the Rutherford model provides an insight of the central role of organizations in producing those inequalities, where the institutional theory helps to explain the variances in different cultural contexts. However, a micro perspective looking at the role of social relationships between people and positions within organizational contexts as direct causes of inequalities is also relevant and critical in an analysis of female employees' perceptions. The next two concepts illustrate how social relationships within a workplace might act as barriers or challenges for particular groups to access resources, and rewards.

Opportunity hoarding and claims-making by Tomaskovic-Devey

Two important concepts that are relevant to the current thesis and the investigation of addressed research problem are opportunity hoarding and claims making. Opportunity hoarding refers to resources or positions that can be accessed by people with similar characteristics (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014). Accordingly, particular jobs and professions are associated with particular educational background, genders, ethnic groups, networks or families (ibid). Therefore, people without particular characteristics are considered to be an out-group and have limited opportunities to access particular jobs resources or promotions. The exclusion of particular groups and particularly white women, black men, and black women from particular jobs prior to the 1964´Civil Rights Act is an example of opportunity hoarding (Stainback &Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). Nowadays, a recent example could be the sex and race segregation of jobs but an even more suitable example is getting a job through a racially homogeneous personal network (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012).

Claims for respect, resources, and rewards are also relevant with the reproduction of inequalities. Resources are usually given to employees who make successful claims on those resources (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). Claims-making is embedded in social relations and reflects the power and status dynamics in those relationships(ibid).For instance, employees' claims are commonly

based on task competence, job applications are claims of competence in doing the job, competing for a promotion is a claim of superior performance relative to others(ibid). According to Tomaskovic-Devey (2012), the more dynamic and persuasive employees will tend to make more ambitious claims and gain more respect and rewards. On the other hand, less confident and humble individuals and groups will make fewer claims on respect and resources and their claims are less likely to be approved by more powerful actors (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). An illustrative example is a study by Säve-Söderbergh (2003), in a Swedish college were female graduate job applicants ask for a lower starting wages than men and while Swedish employers calculate all wage claims despite of gender, at higher wage levels, they discount women's bids more than men's (Säve-Söderbergh 2003). In addition, the ability to make particular claims depends on the local social relations that might limit what can be considered possible (Tomaskovic-Devey 2012).

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research methodology and research strategy undertaken for this study, with specific reference to the sample and the techniques used for data collection and analysis. This study follows a qualitative research design and data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analysed by help of qualitative coding and thematic analysis**.** The sample consists of twenty interviews with female employees from the unit under study. The researcher conducted six additional interviews with male employees in the same unit to strengthen the results of the study. Subsequently, the interview schedule, the way that interviews were transcribed, the thematic analysis of the data and the way that sample was selected are described. Furthermore, some validity issues and ethical considerations about security and confidentiality of the participants are mentioned.

Research area and research strategy

For the completion of the purpose of the research a qualitative method approach was selected. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), mention that qualitative methodology enables the researcher to examine social behaviour in a realistic context, to play an active role in the research and to pay attention to participant's actions and words. As Bryman (2012) points out, characteristic to qualitative research is both the inductive connection and the theoretical component, constituting the research part and the interpretative point of view about the social world, which in this case will be

females' employee's perception and experiences in work related opportunities to promote to senior management roles. Moreover, qualitative research is naturalistic and aims to study the behaviour of people in a more natural and interactive way between the researcher and the participants (Punch, 2005). Since the purpose of the study will be to examine perceptions and experiences the selection of the qualitative method is justifiable. The researcher follows a procedure of triangulation in which data is based on using qualitative interviews within a unit in a global organization, observations of behaviours within the organization and access to written empirical data that were provided by the organisation. According to Hakim (2000), the combination of two or more different methods with multiple sources of evidence can more clearly present the changes of a social issue and strength the evidence of the study. This is a way of assuring the validity of research through the use of a variety of methods to collect data on the same topic; though the purpose of using triangulation in this case will not be to cross-validate data but rather to capture different dimensions on the same phenomenon (Hakim 2000).

Case study

As already mentioned in the introductory chapter, the empirical base of this paper consists of a case-study in a global organization that demonstrates pockets of excellence when it comes to gender equality but still shows patterns of discrimination when it comes to gender balance at senior levels. This thesis touches upon several wide concepts, such as discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion and gender equality. However, the limited scope of this thesis makes it impossible to touch upon all the aspects of these themes that deserve to be mentioned. The focus of this study is the persisting gender inequalities, gender and leadership.

Qualitative research design and case study design are often linked with each other. However, case studies can be seen as a case of qualitative research rather than as a methodological choice (Starman, 2013). The focus in this study will be on organisational context and the purpose is a detailed and intensive analysis of a single explorative case within a unit in one company. In the unit under study although the number of women is higher when it comes to senior levels the underrepresentation of women is perceptible. Thus the reason for choosing to carry out this study in just one organisation instead of a benchmark study with a small number of companies is that the researcher is interested in having holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003). The gender homogeneous organization with 69 percent of the employees being men, made the case interesting from a gender perspective study point of view and gave a holistic image of individuals in reference with situations they have experienced (Hakim, 2000).

Case studies are conducted to answer questions on "how or "why" or when a researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life contexts (Yin, 2003). Since the researcher's interest is to identify barriers and challenges female employees faces while struggling to advance their career to a higher managerial level, the choice of this particular context using a single case study is justifiable. However, although case studies have various advantages, in that they present data of real-life situations and they provide better insights into the detailed behavior of the subjects of interest, they are also criticized for their inability to generalize their results (Yin, 2003).

Case company

The study will be conducted at a global company with its headquarters in Sweden. The company was founded in the early 90's and currently has more than 40,000 employees. Sales are conducted in approximately 100 countries under many strong brands. Their sales in 2015 amounted to over ten billion euro (company homepage). The company has grown steadily over the last decade and is almost exclusively based on acquisitions. Therefore, and because of the global nature of the organization, diversity is considered to be an integral part of this business, how they operate and how they see the future. Formal policies, practices, behaviors and the code of conduct give evidence that the organization takes into account gender equality and diversity. In addition, the company values the business benefits of gender equality and takes initiatives to make it possible for women to participate in areas normally reserved for men. With about 80% of the customers being women, the management team recognizes that gender diversity facilitates business understanding of how to appeal to women as customers.Overall, in the whole organization from 2007 to 2015 the proportion of women has increased from 25 percent to 31 percent. When it comes to management roles the proportion in women has increased from 15 percent to 29 percent. In 2017, among the total number of board members 50 percent are women, something that exemplifies that the company out performs other competitors and international companies. However, those numbers can partly illustratethe flat organizational structure that allows all the employees to reach management roles. A study shows that flat team structures enable professional women to have more equal opportunities than hierarchical level structures. However, masculine-stereotyped patterns still exist in with-the-job behaviour and that means that women must adapt to and to which they are uncomfortable to meet those expectations (Acker 2006).

The context of this study concerns a particular unit within the company where employees are based in Germany, France, Sweden and the USA. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the study is

under the umbrella of a project to empower female employees. The initiative started from the management team of the particular unit with the aim to plant important seeds to the whole organization in a long term. The total number of employees in the department is approximately 650 and the proportion of women in the unit is currently quite higher with women holding the 57 percent of the whole unit. However, due to the flat structures within the organizations, females hold the 40 percent in senior and middle management roles, where the proportion of women in the top management team is 45 percent. Thus, the glass ceiling at senior levels is obvious and this particular unit is representative to identify the barriers and challenges that female employees perceive stand in their way in their promotion to senior management roles.

Sample

Sampling Approach

The sampling approach that was followed in the current study can be described as purposing sample or more specifically as a critical case sampling. Thus**,** the researcher was in contact with the HR Vice President of the unit that indicates the key-employees that works in a company for couple of years and that their experience and career journey within the company will give better insight on the questions under study. However, to avoidlow level of reliability and high levels of bias that consider to be main disadvantages of purposing sample method, the researcher set some criteria for the selection of the sample. Particularly the researcher aims to achieve a spread in organizational levels, years of tenure in the company, working location and civil status among the participants. The reason to choose a purposive sample derives from the need to contact a specific group that has deep knowledge about the research topic (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2007).

Description of the sample

The sample of the current research consists of twenty semi-structure interviews with female employees working in the unit under study; ten of them have no managerial responsibilities and ten have managerial responsibilities and direct reports to them. In addition, six men employees are interviewed; three of them with managerial responsibilities and people report direct to them and three do not have employees report directly to them. Since the focus of the study is on women and the barriers and challenges that they are facing in their career progression to higher managerial roles, the researcher opted for a larger proportion of women than men in the sample. The inclusion of men in the sample does not make this thesis a comparative study; on the contrary is considered additional and serves the purpose of strengthening the results of the study with another perspective as well as explore the level of awareness of male employees about the low number of women in

senior roles. As far as possible, the researcher ensures a spread of organizational levels among the participants; although the flat structure of the organization is considered to be a limitation that affects the chosen sample.

Among the female participants, eleven have child care responsibilities, three of them are single mothers and six of them do not have child care responsibilities. The average age of female participants is 43 years old and the average working experience within the company is 14 years. Among the male participants, three of them have child care responsibilities and three don't. The average age of male participants is 46 years old and the average working experience within the company is 14 years. The interviewees are based on different working locations including Sweden, France, Germany and United States and one male participant is based in Austria. However, in the context of this thesis the exact working location, the exact unit within the organisation as well as the country of origin of the participants is purposely not mentioned in order to protect the anonymity participants and the organisation.

Data collection

Interviews

Semi-structured face to face interviews as well as online interviews are carried out during the course of this project. The reason to select interviewing as the method of data collection is connected to the prior aim of the study. Kvale (1996) describes the interview research as a way to understand the social world from the viewpoint of the people that are engaged in the situation that the researcher aims to study. Moreover, the semi-structured interview allows to the interviewer to probe and expand the respondent's answers to the questions (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The reasons that online interviews will be applied is due to the travel and time costs that could be avoided by using Skype instead of travelling to different sites that the unit is spread; although face to face interviews would have been a more direct and interactive choice. However, compared with phone interviews, Skype interviews have several advantages. One is that the interviewer can get visual clues and thus to experience the interview as it was a face to face discussion (King and Horrocks, 2010).

Interview Guide

The interviews were conducted and based on an interview schedule which includes questions that aim to reveal knowledge about the topic under investigation and vary in types according to their usefulness in the completion of the interview (Kvale &Brinkmann, 2009). Since the researcher interview different groups of knowledge bearers in the organization adequate questions for each

target group lead to different interview guides. However, basic themes and structure was followed by the researcher to all the interviews. The researcher includes during the discussions with the participant introductory questions, follow-up questions, probing questions and specifying questions as well interpreting questions to make sure that he got the exact meaning and assure the validity of the data. However, each interview was differed in the kind of questions that were added and the researcher was more open to listen to the experiences and the perspectives of the interviewees and absorb as much information as possible, rather than insisting on the prior interview guide. The final structure of the interview guide was readjusted after the pilot interview that was carried out in order to test the reliability of the questions and the level of understanding. In the pilot interview the researcher with the help of an HR professional who was willing to take part in the pilot study checked the reliability of the questions. After that, the researcher ascertained that some questions had to be reformulated, in order to achieve better results. The interviewing phase took place in the first four weeks of March. The total duration of each interview ranged between 45-60 minutes for female employees and 20-30 minutes for male employees and was carried out as a private conversation.

Transcribing the interviews

After the completion of the interviews, the post-interview phase followed. It is considered to be an important step in the analysis of the data. Transcribing the interviews is time consuming, according to Bryman (2012), the transformation of speech into words has to be exact and precise. Due to moral issues, at the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were asked if they accepted being recorded by a digital voice recorder. None of the participants rejected the use of a voice recorder so all the interviews were recorded. The interviews were transcribed following a word by word transcription, with some explanatory comments in brackets about the facial expressions of the interviewee in cases that it was relevant for the meaning of the statement. The transcriptions were done by the researcher, as researchers who do the transcriptions themselves is more common to start analyzing the meaning during the transcription phase (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A precise and word by word translation was applied in order to retain the meaning of the quotes while transcribing and thus protecting the validity of the results.

Data analysis

The data that were derived from the interviews were analysed in a step by step thematic analysis that included reading the transcriptions several times, coding, generating codes, reviewing and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The selection of the thematic analysis as the method of data analysis is highly connected to the research questions of the current study and is influenced by

the amount of collected data and the people that were involved in the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), the process of thematic analysis implicates looking deep into data, detecting patterns in them and in general trying to find out what the data is about and what can be derived from them. A theme is demarcated as an important pattern in the participants' answers which is connected to the research question and it shows a common trend within data, but as there are not strict rules a researcher's argument in recognising the themes is crucial (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The huge amount of data that was derived from the interviews supported the aim of the research to reveal female employees' perceptions and experiences, and then compare and find common themes and trends among the female employees; it made the thematic analysis the fitting choice. The themes can be identified in three ways: by the inductive approach that data are coded without any prior coding patterns, by the deductive approach were themes are driven by the researcher's interest and the need to discover specific aspects of the data and by the abductive approach which was the one implemented in the current study. In the abductive approach coding is done by working back and forth between theory and the empirical data. The researcher's objective was to discover new knowledge and generate new concepts and development of theoretical models, rather than confirming the existing theory. However, theabductive approach is considered to be closer to an inductive than a deductive approach. Thus the researcher has built the patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up (Bryman 2008); even though the empirical data were used interactively and the aim was not to confirm existing theories but to discover new patterns. After repeatedly reading the data, some initial ideas that were regularly appearing in the entire set of the data were written down and generated into initial codes in order to make it easier to sort relevant data from the entire set. After the first analysis, the initial codes were sorted into potential themes and sub-themes and then all the relevant data to each theme were separated while the codes which were not relevant to any of the themes were aside. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), the intention of coding and categorising the data into themes is to explore the interconnections within data to find out meanings and to begin with the initial analysis. The next step was the reviewing of the themes, to check the interconnection between the data and the themes and to make sure that all the themes are substantial, coherent and directly connected with the research questions. The last stage in the process was the definition and the naming of each theme.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research and especially in interviewing, due to the possibility of multiple interpretations of the results, of misunderstandings or a tendency of the researcher to seek specific

answers and interpret them in a biased way, validity issues are frequently raised (Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2007)**.** Though in qualitative research it is almost impossible to control all the issues that may cause inaccurate interpretation of the results, there are some practical ways that can reduce the amount of bias. For example, while carrying out a pilot interview and at the same time being clear, consistent and precise in the duration of the interview as well as in the transcription and interpretation of the results (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007)**.** In the current study, maximum validity of the results was pursued by applying a pilot interview which allowed the researcher to check the quality and the understanding of the questions.

Ethical considerations

A considerable ethical issue that appears when conducting social research is the researchers' need to find a balance between their target as scientists to search for the truth in their results and their sample's fairs and values (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Certainly, in ethical research, the willingness of the people to take part, trustworthiness and confidentiality among the researcher and the participants has to be assured (Silvermann, 2005). The ethical dimension of the interviews stems from the existence of the active communication between the researcher and the interviewee and can be detected in the following ethical issues: confidentiality, informed consent and consequences of the interviews (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In the case of this study, interview invitations were sent to the participants by email prior to the interview, explaining the aim of the study, the nature of the interview questions and a concise description of the procedure that the interviewer will follow during the collection and the analysis of the data (see Appendix, p.65-69). According to Silvermann (2006), potential participants should be given clear and useful information. Consequently, at the start of each interview short opening statements which included a brief introduction about the background of the researcher and purpose of the study were used. Anonymity which is an important fact in the reassurance of the protection of the participants can be verified by the elimination of all the clues or details that could potentially reveal interviewee's identity (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Methodological weaknesses and reflections

The researcher is aware of the different factors that may have affected the results and the weaknesses of the chosen method. Although the topic of the current thesis is not considered to be sensitive, certain interview questions had the potential to cause distress and discomfort among participants and researchers. Since the interviews were the main source of analysis, it was important to build trust and confidence between participants and interviewer. Therefore, the researcher thought that questions that concerned the private life of the interviewee and the topic of

discrimination could be perceived as sensitive and difficult to speak openly about. For this reason, the researcher was laying the foundation for a relationship and for conducting interactions and planning for disengagement before the interview process itself. However, during the interview process there were participants who became emotional. The researcher, despite the challenging situation, implemented techniques that might have been helpful to continue the interview process. However, it was difficult to implement the interview as planned. Nonetheless, it was important that the participants felt comfortable with the researcher and any emotional moments during the interview phase were carefully treated and at the same time were critical to the identification of specific themes when analysing the data.

Another important issue that needs to be mentioned is the language limitation that may have, to some extent, impacted the interviews process. The interviews were held in English and neither the respondents nor the researcher are native English speakers. Although, there were no complications during the interview phase the researcher is aware of the fact that participants may have had difficulties developing their arguments thoroughly in a different language. The final results that emerged from the analysis will be presented and described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

This chapter presents and describes the results of the current thesis. From the data analysis three themes emerged according to the research aim of the study. The interconnection between the research aims of the thesis and the themes that derived out from the interviews is presented in Table 1. A description of each theme is presented in the following pages of this chapter. In addition, a brief analysis of the control group with male participants it is pointed out. At many times, the exact words of the participants are quoted in order to keep the authenticity of the results and thus to contribute to the readers' better comprehension.

Research Aims	Description	Themes
Basic aim	Investigate and identify the challenges and barriers that female employees face in being promoted to senior management or leadership positions	**All themes**
Objective 1	Female employees' perceptions about challenges and barriers that exist in their way to executive leadership	**Theme 1: Perceived barriers of promotion to leadership roles** **Theme 2: Perceived challenges of promotion to leadership roles**
Objective 2	Female employees' experience in work related opportunities	**Theme 3: Experiences in work-related opportunities**

Table 1: The interconnection between the research aims and the themes

Theme 1: Perceived barriers of promotion to leadership roles

The first theme that derived from the data collection brings to the surface the perceived barriers that women identified as standing in their way to achieve senior management roles. Figure 1 shows the further analysis of the first theme.
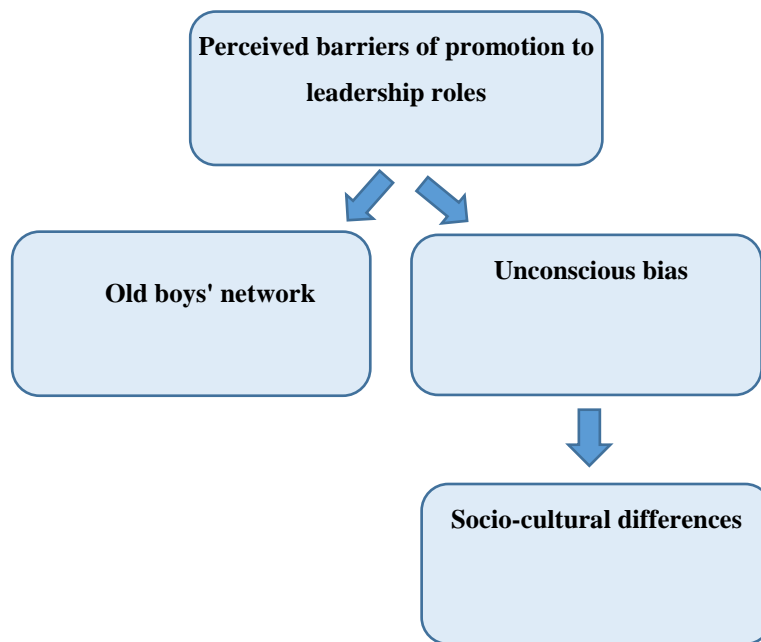
Figure 1: The analysis of the first theme of the research

Old boys network

It is impressive that all the female employees, without any exception mentioned the existence of an informal network as a basic impediment that discourages or does not allowed them to reach higher positions. *"Men are always sitting together like sometimes like animals like ships all sitting together. They like to be in this group thinking. This is exactly a kind of network, the network. And is not only in meetings but is happening outside the meetings (…) Most of the men they are doing this (getting higher positions) through the network and the women need to work a bit harder."*

According to Combs (2013), there is a strong relationship between career advancement and informal social networks *"You kind of sense sometimes that there is a network that happens around you that you are not part of. And sometimes when there are promotions you kind of at least think that is that due to the network that I am not. (**Network? Do you mean like a male network?**) A little bit yes. I think it's a credibility thing within the organization and it's to get partly into this not formal network that I am not partly in. I think that is needed to connect with the right persons to build my credibility."*

The majority of the interviewees mentioned that male colleagues get together more easily and by participating in certain activities they get to know each other. As a result, they develop personal relationships that help them promote their careers at the same time. 6 out of 20 women mentioned that they found themselves following their male colleagues to the coffee rooms between or after professional meeting since they acknowledged that things are happen in this context concerning promotions and career advancement. However, entering the "guys club" is not easy for women and they are rarely able to follow up. One illustrative example follows:

"I think it is actually easier if you are a man to be honest. Yeah ehm I think it might be more difficult take longer time getting into positions especially if you have a lot of male colleagues because if you are the only women in a context of a couple of 10 guys, I mean this kind of hanging on a bar late at night drinking beer together and talking about a football game that's perhaps not what I would like to do but a lot of things are happening in this context so I think that. ...That's part of getting to know each other as well and I think this is perhaps more natural things that guys like to do, you know to get drunk together or having a couple of beers together and that's not part of my interests at all. (...) my based attitudes has always been that I want to do be there due to my capabilities not to that we are drinking beer together in the bar or that I know and have special connection to you or because.... I think that this can be ways to get into the positions as well but that's not my core values."

Furthermore, more than half of the female interviewees report the tendency of the company and the people in executive positions to hire or promote certain types of people with similar characteristics. Since the higher positions in the organization are occupied by male managers, male employees are advantaged over women. Almost 15 out of 20 female interviewees mentioned that people usually choose others that are similar to them in terms of characteristics because they feel more comfortable to work with them; thus men usually hire men. In addition, this comes with stereotyping and certain characteristics that people might have, that help them grow and advance their professional life. *"My current manager he is hired two men he is about to hired a third one and one of those two he has hired especially the one I really have my doubts about his qualifications but he is tall, he is white, he is middle- aged, he had broad shoulders and he is good looks and I really wonder if that why he got the job. You know tall white men earn more money and get higher positions. And I just think that he is not that clever and he is not a good talker and I just wondered a bit why he gets the attention of my manager. Why he is given those responsibilities. There is a saying that A people hired A people and B people hired C people."*

Socio-cultural differences

Another important aspect that emerged from the interviewees responses is how the cultural background of the different countries that the company operates in affects the role of women, how they are perceived among their male colleagues, as well as different forms of discrimination against them. The cultural and society background of each country is considered to be the main barrier that female employees perceived as standing in their way to achieve executive leadership positions. From the interviews it was clear that female employees in Sweden are considered to be in a better position as far as considered the balance between their private life and their career progress. Female employees who work at the site based in Sweden seem to face less cultural barriers in their way to achieve executive positions than women in Germany, France and the United States. The particular conclusion is also being supported by the fact that in the department unit under study women, who have senior management positions, come from Sweden. The majority of interviewees in Germany France and the United States mention that whether they have children or not, the view of women as the main caretaker of the family and children in their countries is considered a restriction for their career progress and their willingness to take senior positions. *"It depends really on the country, here in Sweden I didn't feel that this is an issue. I always feel supported. In Germany this is different. In Germany some colleagues change their behavior when I become director. When I got promoted they changed their behavior which I found it very interesting. Some colleagues are jealous so they behave very obnoxious."*

According to Ferner, et al (2005), thenational regulatory contexts in each country allow diversity practices to vary from country to country: *I am not sure about Gothenburg versus North America. But the culture in US is a little bit more work heavy. I think there are times that there no work life balance (..). There are lot expectations. I come to office around 6:00 or 6:15 in the morning and I usually leave around 6pm or sometimes even 7pm so sometimes can be quite long day. So there is no balance on that.*

According to Chung et al (2012) it is difficult for organizations that operate in different national contexts to manage the balance between the global integration and local responsiveness throughout their policies and practices: *There is a big difference in different countries we operate and I think Sweden is the most advanced (...) Here the childcare and the role of women is much more advanced and is in a stage were we have been in Germany, my home country. You are twenty years faster I would say. Is much better organized and is also recognized that a woman that if you work you are not seen as a bad mom. There is a special world in Germany which describes you that you*

are not a good mom if you don't focus full of your child for certain years and especially 3 years after birth. So it's not acknowledged by the society yet if you work full time and focus on the job.

Another noteworthy aspect is different regulations each country has and what the company role and approach to this is. The cultural background of every country is one of most significant barriers according to female employees and that has a lot to do with the society and how the society has an impact on the organizational culture and structure. However, the majority discuss how the company could at least work to eliminate some challenges that have to do with national regulations in each country and make it easier for women to access higher positions. One paradigm was: *"It depends on the country very much. In a country like Sweden no. In a country like Germany for example where you do not have to take day care for children or other countries like Italy or so, this is where... I think as company you should have the responsibility to say if you want to give equal chances then what should as company try to do is to support your executives in such a way that if she is a women and she doesn't have a day care and she has 2-3 kids then I have maybe a company owned kindergarten. Find a solution that she doesn't need to stay home. I know a lot of colleagues in (company name) that they have taken the decision to not have children because of this."*

Unconscious bias

The cultural background of the location where female employees work has an impact on female employees' awareness about the barriers and challenges to senior level positions. Swedish female employees were more aware of the second generation gender bias than employees in France, US and Germany. Although, awareness might not be considered a direct barrier that female employees face in being promoted to senior management or leadership positions it was obvious from the interviews that by being aware of the existence of gender bias that is mainly covert could be a barrier to their promotion in higher positions. According to Ibarra et al (2013), most women are unaware of having personally been victims of gender discrimination and deny it even when it is objectively true and they see that women in general experience it. *"I would hate to apply for a position and they choose me because I am a woman instead of choosing the best man. If the man is better than me I accept that. But I am the same, you know then they need to decide from a perspective of what's the best for the group or for the unit and so on. But if I am a better I should have it and I should be pay the same as expected from men."*

Women, who have a high level of awareness are able to trace certain behaviors within the organization that lead to signs of second generation bias within the organization and have strategies to deal with that in order to promote themselves. *"They get to these positions whereas to be a woman and end up there I have to fight for it. I really have to work to end up there. I would really have to make sure that I am taking the right steps and I absolutely think that we need to evolve the men in these."*

Swedish female interviewees reported working hard to take gender out of the equation and to be recognized for their skills and talents. They all referred to salaries as an example of gender inequality *"Men get the positions faster but I think the most annoying part is that they get paid more. I do the same work and I know people having paid more than me and I think this is annoying."*

On the other hand, women in France, United Stated and the majority of female employees in Germany do recognize some form of unconscious bias but claim that the organizational policies and practices established equal opportunities and fair treatment. Therefore, these women considered themselves to be very comfortable with their roles and how they are perceived and they are not really aware of any barriers and how to overcome them for promotion to senior management positions: *"Men get more attention. And honestly I think that most of the women that I work with are better performing that the men but I think that men get the visibility. With that said I am quiet... I have the gender glasses always on me... I almost never felt treated in a bad way and I feel that men have good attitudes but I think that they get away with more and I think that they claim more attention and they get more attention and I don't think that they really deserve that (...) Men in general they are better in looking after themselves."*

To conclude, the first theme discloses the barriers that female employees perceived standing in their way to achieve executive positions with emphasis in the cultural background of each site and the networking of male employees.

Theme 2: Perceived challenges of promotion to leadership roles

The second theme of the current thesis presents the interviewees' perception about the challenges that are faced when aim to promoted to senior management levels. The distinction between barriers and challenges was fairly confusing when the researcher was initially analyzed the data. A barrier could also be a challenge and vice versa. Therefore, based on the interviewees responses, challenges and barriers were segregated based on the interviewees experiences and perceptions.

The analysis of the theme corresponds to the analysis of three subthemes that consequently contribute to the challenges according to female employees' perceptions (Figure 2).
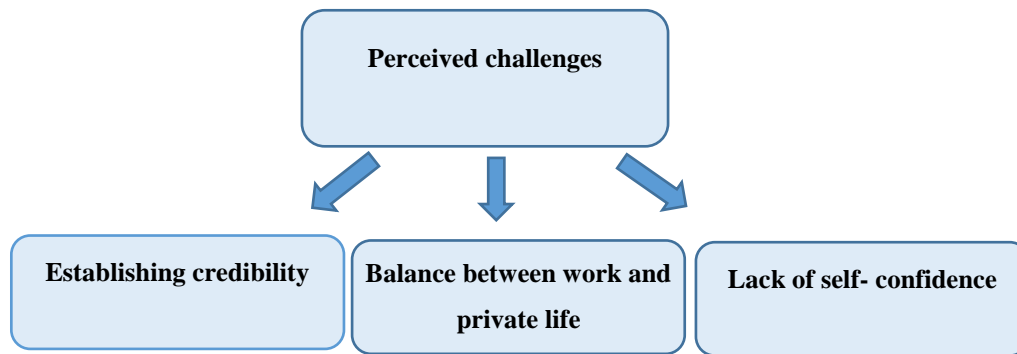

Figure 2: The analysis of the second theme of the research

Establishing credibility

An interesting perception emerged from all the female participants referring to their efforts to establish their credibility within the origination. Female employees mentioned in order to do so among your colleagues, women and men but mostly men, is an important challenge that takes time and energy. *"I spend 17 years to build my credibility I think I might not need to do that if I were a man."* and *"It's like a journey I was working in (company name) I am an engineer and I am a woman and then you know you have male marketers for example so you have to build your credibility in more areas than just the technical one. Now I have also need to prove my technical skills but also that I understand the business implications of the environment so I think I am still on that journey on building the credibility in the org (..). People see me they see a little girl you know I have to prove myself from the first sight they have on me and I have to be conscious of what I am wearing what I am saying you know... should I wear high heels or should I have a dress or should I have trousers?"*

According to the study by Kakabadse et al (2015), female directors who make it to the board level need to gain credibility before they can be accepted: *"I think that when I talked to male colleagues I have a reflection that I always need to be conscious of this process and how I am going to go through and how I am going to build my credibility so I need to have a plan and be conscious about that, where my male colleagues they kind of taking that for granted. They will receive that very easily whereas I need to have a strategy for that and consciously work on that and how I perceived in different forum which I don't think they spend so much time on as I need to do. That's the reflection...".*

According to a study by Rosener (1995) women in upper level positions were subject to competency testing much more frequently than their male co-workers. In particular, fifteen out of twenty participants report that if you do not achieve credibility establishment and show your skills it is impossible to be promoted to senior positions and this is something that takes longer time if you are a woman. *"Men they do this more naturally they have this natural authority if they say something of course and this and this so it's more like... yeah of course the kings in the past have always been men, now women you have to fight more, you have to make extra effort you have to work I think double as hard than men to show that you can do it and you are always get less money. They don't necessary do a better job but they have one piece more on their body."*

In addition, female participants reported that sometimes they feel that their colleagues, both men and women but mostly men, question their skills and ability to manage higher position. *"I don't know but I suspect that. There is a saying that men get positions based on their potential whereas women have to prove themselves first. So in some ways yes I feel that maybe if I would have been a man I would have been given those opportunities because you would have seen the potential on me growing into that role. Whereas, now I am woman and I have a great track of what I have been doing with my department so I have enough credibility and still I am not given those possibilities and I wonder a little bit why..."*

Balance work and private life
Finding the balance between work and private life was one of the most significant theme that came to light from the interviews. All the female participants argue that finding the right balance between private and work life is one of the largest hurdles in women's careers. Female participants with family and children have to go through difficult compromises to balance both and in many cases women feel that they need to choose between family or work. *"When we have a big reorganization here a couple of years ago and I was pregnant my first child, I actually think that had something to do with the kind of position I was receiving in that reorganization (...) That I think I at I think if I hadn't been pregnant I think I would have gotten this job on the first place. (....)I think I put my ambition a bit lower that I would have otherwise, so for sure is a balance where I think of if I dint have my children I would maybe have higher ambitious that I have currently. So it's a balance."*

From the interviews it was obvious that those who had higher positions either did not have children or choosed to reallocate time from their family and focus on their work. Participants mention that that it is always a dilemma to choose between their private life and their career aspirations. *"Me*

personally I would say no because I prove... but I think that has to do with making compromises on a personal level that also affecting...and I acknowledge that I did less maternity leave as others in Germany and women in my home country will do and I am very ambitious and I don't let excuses that I have a child to make any differences in the working style (..)Of course then you compromise on your personal living style. This means less time for yourself as you choose to focus on your job and your making some compromises in your private life."

Another interesting conclusion is that women who have higher positions and aim for promotion to senior positions, usually need a support system which comes either from family members or a house helper. Otherwise, according to the participants, as a woman, is very difficult to combine family a position that requires a higher responsibility. One examplefollows:

"At least what I hear when I talk to my friends and colleagues that the see it kind of a sacrifice from the family you choose kind of something either or and you for example when you see successful women that go very far in their career is like "Yeah but her husband is retired so he takes care of everything" you know it's like or she doesn't have kids that's why. So I think that it is the perception that it is very difficult to combine both and that you have to wait to make your career when the children are older."

Among the discussions, female interviewees mention how they are perceived as women and especially as mothers when they apply for a job or when they apply for higher position. Their age, whether they have children and the age of their children are considered to be important questions in the selection process. According to the interviewees, women have been judged by employers as to whether they are able to handle all the responsibilities and requirements of certain positions especially if they have family and young children. On the other hand, men are not prejudiced by the same and are usually promoted based on their potential. The female participants reported that in general men think about their careers prior to their family much more than women and probably the company recognizes that and therefore it is easier to pick men forhigher positions since the company can rely on them more in terms of being able to travel more and so on.*"I think that there are differences in the possibilities for men and women and I can't say it that has to do with me having kids or not I think that actually Its consider an advantage for me compare to not having had kids that I have already have kids. Because a woman that is 35 and don't have kids then you assume that that person will have kids quiet soon whereas if I apply for a position, yes I have kids, I have to do with it in my everyday working life but at the same time they are not that small anymore. I pass the hard times I thing that the employees can see that. So yes I have to leave in a reasonable*

time to fetch them from school but you know there are not sick that much and is not that short days so I think it does affect my working ability for a few years more but I hope that employees see that its passing period and its more behind me than in front of me"

One interesting perception that was emerged only by one respondent was the challenge that women may face in getting promoted to senior positions is how they prioritize their career over their personal life but at the same time the expectations that a company might have from them and how they perceive and understand the role of a woman and what are the acceptable compromises that are allowed. From the above it can be concluded that single women and especially the childless face the same challenges when it comes to balancing their private and professional life and being able to achieve higher positions since they are often perceived as they not really having personal lives and always needing to prioritize their work. *"No, that was not part of my story because I did not have children on my own that I was responsible for (..) I had a manager that took me aside and said "It's not like you need to go to your child piano rehearsal or like you need to take time off for a sick kid so this is the last time I want to hear about anything you have to do for your education and to get this degree that will impact your job (...) You know I have been for most of my career a single woman who didn't have children and I feel that there is almost a double standard in a way. If you have kids is ok if you missed time and you are not here and the people that don't have kids have to always pick up the additional work and be there and not complaint and not let... you know there are other personal goals or personal things that impact them like want to get an advanced degree so it's like ok for...you know its honorable for somebody to raise children but if you just, you know... if you don't have kids you should be at work all the time and nothing should impact on you."*

Lack ofSelf- Confidence

Without any exception all the 20 female employees that were interviewed mentioned that the lack of confidence is a major challenge that stands in their way to senior roles. Their need to prove their skills and establish their credibility is also connected to their confidence as well. The majority of female employees' state that they feel less confident, and that they need to be sure that they have all the requirements and prerequisites to apply for a new job or a higher position. They are often strict with themselves over how much responsibility they can handle and if they are not completely certain that they can perform a task perfectly or they can offer full dedication to a new role they feel that they should not actively pursue promotion. *"I think we put more pressure in ourselves than men do, I think we think that we should be good wives, we should be good moms, we should be good friend, we should be all over the place and I think we put so much pressure on ourselves."*

An interesting viewpoint about why women lack self-confidence emerged from one of the participants:"*They***(women***) don't get the same challenging and important tasks or positions and they take more responsibility for children and homework so they have a higher pressure, they are more self-critical. A lot of women that I know they are confident and they have a lot of self-efficacy but they maybe, they have less, you know in Sweden they talk about short elbows. They see... Like I said I could have taken this role if I have you know support at home or things will have been different. I think that women restrict themselves more, not that they think they could not do it but they are more self-critical and they see the boundaries or restrictions and stop themselves.*"

According to *Oakley* (2000), Women are less likely to show off or seek attention therefore they are less likely to be recognized. *"The company should encourage women more because their less confident and less good in pushing their own agenda they are more humble."*

All in all, the third theme reveals the challenges women face in promotion to senior positions with emphasis on the balance between private and professional life, their overall confidence and their efforts to establish credibility.

Theme 3: Experience's in work-related opportunities

The third research theme is connected with the third objective of the current research and investigates the female employees' experiences and gender specific challenges to access work related opportunities. Female participants reported their experiences in accessing work related opportunities and whether they face any gender-specific challenges on their way. The analysis of the third theme is presented in Figure 3
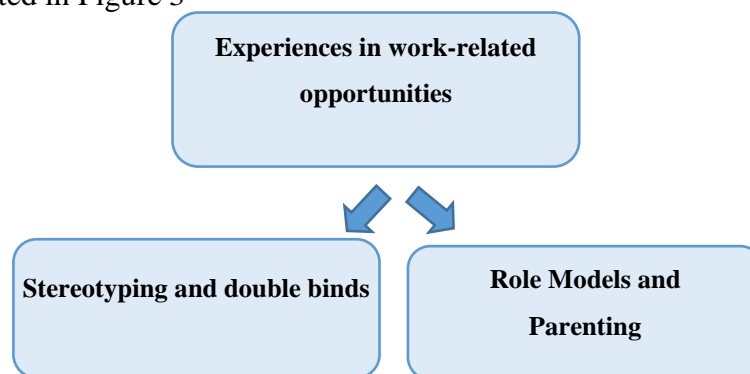

Figure 3: The analysis of the third theme of the research

Stereotyping and double binds

To begin with, the participants referred to the stereotyping that they face as women in leadership positions and how they perceived other women, who have leadership roles. Almost all the participants referred to the efforts that women make to be keep abreast, and that sometimes they

need to adopt a male attitude: *"I guess that... I think that women are trying hard on their professional attitude. There are different strategies of how to become a career women and acting male is definitely one."*

The above statement was an interesting point that was emerged by the majority of the participants. In particular, fifteen out of twenty women mention that adopting a male behavior is a strategy to access work-related opportunities and promote to leadership roles. *"Yes, I think that the women who make it, not all but some have had to become more male in their approach."*

However, twelve out of twenty women they stated that they are not willing to adopt this approach in order to get a higher position or access work-related opportunities. They reported that it is important to be yourself and authentic rather that adopts a role that does not fit your personality and personal characteristics. *"If I look internally here, you can see some women that have went very far in the organization and they are of course women but they are more behaving like a man so that is something that we discussed my female colleagues and we are kind of thinking ok if that what it takes then maybe we are not interested because we want to be ourselves still. It's a conscious choice that you can do if you want to continue be yourself or if you want to go more in your role that is more accepted in the environment your working. "*

According to the literature, a double-bind for women in leadership positions is that they must be tough and authoritative in order to be taken seriously, but they will be perceived spiteful by other women if they behave too aggressively (Oakley, 2000) *"Yes, I would say that. I personally... This might sound very strange because I am woman but my experience tells me, I like working more for men than for women. Out of the simple reason that the majority of women if they make career they become more... let's say executive they try to be like men and we cannot be like men even if we try to be tough I don't think we should be like men, we shouldn't copy. I think we have our own way and I think you can be successful as woman if you have this way. But very often these executive women they become like. They are like barging dogs like really like men and then they are not very approachable anymore. Not very nice and you also don't think that they are authentic. And then you start to mistrust then and we also have these cases here in the company."*

Another interesting point that was surfaced is that women and especially women who have higher positions often feel pressure between their feminine qualities being more emotional and empathetic and the qualities that required for leadership positions. This is in line with the literature that argues that the existence of toughness and femininity in one personality are difficult qualities for our

culture to reconcile and digest. One illustrative example follows: *"I often have the feedback that I am not loud enough in the meetings and I think this is more male area. It's natural to speak up for amen and women are more silent and usually more listening and concluding in the end. And men would even speak up if they don't have even a point. So I got this feedback."*

This is an important statement that will be discussed in the next subtheme. Briefly, women agreed that showing role models with the same characteristics has obvious effects on how young generations form their style and behaviour in order to promote to higher positions." *Girls are trying to find role models but what happens is that women that born in the 40s were climbing in their career but they were quite lonely with men and what they are doing became too male focus and male acting so they took the same features and same style as a male and I think sometimes they needed to do that to fit in because they were so lonely with all this kind of group of men and I still think is kind of existing that kind of style you need to be you know…tougher so therefore I think.. and I think that happens especially in my generation you more becoming a bitch to be earning respect or people think that they need to be tough to be gaining respect and be you know… quiet aggressive as a leader, as a woman."*

In general, women often feel that their feminine qualities and characteristic are stereotyped and in order to get a higher position and a leadership role they should adopt some male characteristics. Thus, female employees with leadership roles are often perceived as having male behaviour and are seen as not trustworthy or authentic. However, although the majority of the employees would like to access work-related opportunities and be promote to senior roles, they do not seem willing to make this kind of sacrifice and they prefer to remain authentic keep their personal characteristics and their feminine qualities. This leads to the next sub-theme and the importance of role models.

Role models and parenting

Seventeen out of the twenty women interviewed, mentioned the importance of having role models as means of promoting women's positions in working life and increase the number of women in senior roes. Role models are important to inspire women into believing that higher positions are attainable. *"In many companies and here as well there are many women in middle management positions but they never reach the next level so I can hear from friends and colleagues that "yeah but it's not worth it because if those very good super skilled women only reach this level why is should even try to have a higher ambition? You know... (*So you think that it is more the need for role models?*) Yeah, we have a few examples and I know when especially one of these leaders were promoted it was like "oh but if she could, maybe it's not impossible then" And she is still behaving*

like a women and she does not transform to a man and she has a family. I think it is good to have more examples that show that it is possible.”

Another interesting perspective from the interviews is how women who hold senior positions are perceived other female employees and the impact on their personality, behavior and leadership style. The majority of participants mentioned that is important to find your style and be inspired by different people with different capabilities and characteristics. Making efforts to copy a particular style of women in leadership positions may not be conducive to authenticity of character. Therefore, role models in the organization should reflect a variety of people with different characteristics, capabilities and leadership styles so that women can identify and be inspired by them and not showing only one particular style. One example follows:

“Yes unfortunately. That is what I mean by being more aggressive, a bitchy leader and I think that is a danger because if you only recruit those and I see many in my generation been like that, the younger ones see that and think that's the style to go for, so then you will get there. And I think we shouldn't put all of them and show case of all of them that are the same kind of style because that will be that the younger will copy that because that will show “she has the position I can get it, if I do the same I get it” and I think that's a danger.”

A supporting environment was an important topic that was emerged in the discussion with women. While most of the women agreed that they feel more comfortable with female managers and colleagues because they could identify with the same issues and challenges that they face throughout their careers, eight out of 20 women mentioned that personality before gender is vital when it comes to whether they feel supported to access work-related opportunities. *“I have more women supporting me and pulling me up than male.”* In addition, the majority of women mentioned that the need of female network or mentorship with women could be instrumental in eliminating challenges and barriers towards senior positions.

A participant pointed out that sometimes a female manager can be stricter and not supportive. This perception is associated with the "Queen Bee Syndrome" that refers to women who have achieved success but are not willing to share information or encourage other women to advance (Schwanke, 2013). *“In Germany I would say is a mixture I wouldn't say I feel harassment what I would do feel harassed, this might be strange to you not so much by men more by women(..) to give you a concrete example, two colleagues have been promote at the same time, a male colleague and myself. The male colleague got a sign in bonus, got this, got money, money, money - a lot of money. I didn't get any of these. Yeah now you could say why didn't you ask for it? Because I knew I*

wouldn't get it. But you know and this is and is not only the money but the person who is taken the decision was actually a woman so this is why I would say... harassment is maybe too strong world but I would say that women don't support you as much as they should do. Absolutely not... Yeah... I am sorry."

To summarize, a supportive environment could help women access work related opportunities to advance their careers in leadership roles. In addition, eliminating stereotypes of how women should be addressed and perceived is connected with showing role models with different leadership styles and personalities that allow women to be themselves and avoid the pressure of double binds by finding their own personal leadership style.

Control Group

Six additional interviews were conducted with male participants to strengthen the results of the study. Since the focus is on female perceptions, the purpose of conducting interviews with male employees was to reveal their awareness about the research topic rather than point out itself. So, specific themes were not drawn upon. Despite the small sample of male participants, the basic aim of having a control group was achieved.

In general, male participants reported that there is progress in the role of women in the work place and that how professional life is structured today is reflect the society norms and beliefs. The majority, five out of six, reported that female employees are equally represented at senior management positions. In particular, male participants stated that the company has good policies and their female colleagues have equal opportunities in promotions and access to higher positions *"Honestly I think there has nothing to do with the gender is only about the skills and personality to get there"*.

Another important aspect is that male participants refer to the outside changes and how society is transforming and forces organizations adapt. That was an important issue that was mentioned by five out of six interviewees: *"But I also think this is obviously also little bit by nature. It's you know... women want to work so we organize of the family life a little bit different than 15 years ago... so it's a little bit happening by nature and on the other hand is also been a bit forced...and here at the company especially if you look into some senior levels positions... here there is a little pressure on the company since is mainly…. is basically good to make the move and be more earlier rather been late and to evolve more women"*

Is important to mention that male participant stated that they are readily prepared to take positions with a higher salary and responsibilities and could imagine themselves as deputy head or head of the department. Another important point that was critical was that five out of six participants do not perceive any difficulties or obstacles towards promotion to these positions. It was an obvious contradiction compared with female interviewees, whose answers state that they lack the confidence to consider and apply for jobs at higher hierarchical levels and they perceived challenges and barriers to promotion. Male participants were also asked about the balance between their private and professional life and how this could be seen as a challenge or a barrier to their career advancement. Three out of six replied that they believe that this is not a fundamental issue and they could have a balance since their partner could take more responsibility at home in such instance. Male interviewees' statements reveal signs of unconscious bias and second generation bias that reproduce gender inequalities within the organization. On the one hand, men supported that there are equal opportunities for access and promotion to senior positions between women and men, on the other hand, they do not recognize any barriers or challenges to get to these positions, whereas women reported several barriers and challenges standing in their way.

Another important conclusion that emerged from the interviews it is the cultural background of the different countries that associated with their viewpoint. As with the female interviewees, male participants have different perspectives and attitudes based on the national context and cultural norms of where they are located. Specifically, male participants in Sweden were more aware and conscious of the underrepresentation of women at senior level positions and the barriers and challenges women face: *Sometimes I think that women automatically take the responsibility of the family, and sometimes as an excuse to be honest. Sometimes because their partner is a man...is more the German style to be honest (laugh) but I feel I would like to have more women pushing on the family front as well and say "Well actually I want to do this, you need to take more responsibility at home because I can't struggle" (...) Sometimes I feel women take on things they are like the garbage bin and they shouldn't be that. They should be of course equal but they need to take the discussion sometimes and say to the other "you need to manage your staff and I manage my staff I can't be always the safety" (..) there are so many really good women out there but they think they need to take the major role at home and everywhere"*

To conclude, male participants were not fully aware of the underrepresentation of women at senior level positions or possible challenges and barriers female employees are facing. The fact that male participants aspire to be promoted without recognizing any challenges or difficulties standing in their way confirms that women experience gender specific challenges and barriers. In line with the

findings from interviews with women, Sweden seems to be advanced compared to other countries when it comes to the awareness about equal opportunities, gender inequalities and gender and leadership

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

_____

In this chapter, the most important results of the research will be further discussed and linked to the research questions of the present study. Furthermore, the results will be discussed in relation with the relevant literature and theoretical framework, and some significant convergences or divergences will be pointed out.

How do women perceive barriers, biases and challenges of under representation in senior management positions?

The first two themes revealed female employees perceptions on the barriers and challenges hold them back from promoting and hold senior management positions which were linked with the main research question of this study. Generally, female employees reported that the balance between private and working life is one of the main challenges that they deduce as standing in their way to achieve senior management positions. This is in line with previous studies and how society puts constraints on women and their dual responsibilities as family caretakers and as professionals. Women in most countries are the ones who interrupt their careers, take more days off, and work part-time in order to balance between family and working life (Cabrera, 2007).That was a significant conclusion that emerged from the interviews and which at the same time, is interlinked with the other two challenges that female employees feel that they should overcome to get into senior positions. The majority of the female employees reported a low level of confidence and the need to establish their credibility and prove their qualifications within the company and among their colleagues. The challenges that female employees perceived standing in their way are in accordance with the relevant literature and theoretical framework which argues that promotion opportunities given to employees who make successful claims. In addition, based on the theory, less confident and introverted employees will make fewer requests and their requests are less likely to be taken seriously (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014).Therefore, a conclusion to be drawn is that female employees confirmed this theory; i.e. it seems as if they underestimate their skills and find it

challenging to push their careers and apply for a promotion or more challenging tasks, and thus end up being underrepresented in senior management positions and unable to break the glass ceiling. One could argue this is a challenge that is derived from personal choices. However, this behavior stems from prejudices, stereotypes and society structures around the role of women in the society and in the professional life. Even today, society norms expect women to take more administrative roles and professional occupations with less responsibility or pressure as well as work part time after the birth of a child since the social perception is that it is more appropriate for women to fulfill the commitment to family responsibilities than for men to do so (Schwanke, 2013). These kinds of pressures act as mental restrictions for women and stir them to ask for less in their professional life. Therefore, these pressures act as barriers that eliminate women's opportunities for promotion to senior management roles.

An important barrier that female employees perceived standing in their way to promotion is informal networks within the organization. Female employees reported that they sometimes sense that there is a network that they are not part of and in particular an informal network of male colleagues who meet outside the work and have the opportunity to know each other better. In addition, female employees comment that in these kinds of contexts their male colleagues exchange work related experiences and critical information that are related to promotions or challenging tasks that are beneficial for their career advancement and the improvement of their professional skills. However, women are excluded from these networks and as a result, they have fewer opportunities to take challenging task and advance their careers. This agrees with Rutherford's model of gender organizational culture and two of the nine constituents of the model; the informal codes of behaviors and the socializing language within organization. Female participants confirmed that are excluded from informal networks that have their own language, a "male language" and communication behavior'. The exclusion of women from these networks reproduces gender inequalities within an organization and is considered to be an important barrier for female employees to advance to senior management positions (Acker, 2006). According to the literature, in the world of upper management where men are the majority, women are forced to change their linguistic style and be more direct in order to be perceived as strong, decisive and in control (Oakley, 2000). Based on the female interviewees even if women communicate and adopt behaviors and language in order to fit in with the environment around them, this is seen as not authentic and they are perceived as "too aggressive" by their male colleagues. In addition, their dual responsibilities restrict them from investing time in participating in social activities and networking outside the work settings with their colleagues or business contacts. Atypical male networks within

an organization have an impact in female employees' motivation on how they see themselves portrayed in leadership roles. In particular, female employees perceived that any efforts to access resources and build relationships within the company that would be beneficial in their career development and advancement to higher positions are worthless due to the networks that are not in. Therefore, this interlinks with the lack of confidence and self-efficacy of women and end in their under representation in senior management positions.

Another important finding from the interviews is the cultural differences between the different locations that the company operates. In the context of this thesis, interviews were conducted with female employees located in four different countries with different national contexts, labor law regulations and society norms and beliefs. An interesting finding is that, not only each of the site is shaped and structured differently according to the local regulations and the society norms and beliefs in each country but the awareness of female employees about inequality regimes and second generation varied significantly based on the working location of the participants. To be more specific, Swedish participants have less societal pressures, and the way that the family life is structure in Sweden allows women to balance in an effective way their private and working life. Therefore, female employees in Sweden are more supported and find less societal structure obstacles and they have an advantage when it comes to their efforts to pursuing a promotion in higher positions, compared to women in Germany France and United States. That could be confirmed if one look up the organizational structure of the unit and notice that female employees located in Sweden are the ones that hold senior positions. An interesting angle that arose from the interviews is the connection between the cultural differences of each site and the awareness of second generation bias. It was clear that Swedish female employees do not only benefit from the norms, values within the society and the local law regulations but they also being more conscious and aware about behaviors that generate inequalities or patterns of second generation bias. Swedish female participants could detect unconscious bias signs and this was obvious based on their answers and how they reflect upon behaviors' within the company and how they perceived issues as stereotypes and prejudices, promotions, gender pay gap, the professional opportunities and so on. The way that Swedish female employees reflect and understand inequality regimes is explicit show that they don't stand on the formal policies and practices within the company but the unconscious bias that is hidden. This is compatible with the relevant literature that argues that gender inequalities can be shaped and formulated differently in different organisations, even if itis understood as constructs generated by the cultural environment and the societal norms and values. Bradley and Healy (2008) argue that the norms and values that rationalize and legitimate sexism

are enclosed in society and consequently reproduced in organizations, therefore it is important to change the organisation culture despite the realities and constraints in the organisation However, resistance progress in equal opportunities is expected both at the individual and group level(ibid). It was interesting to discover through this research that society norms and beliefs have an impact in the organisational structures but also affect how individuals are shaped their attitudes and perceptions towards fundamental issues.

In which ways do they experience and assess their work-related opportunities for promotion to higher hierarchical levels?

When female employees were asked to report their experiences of work-related opportunities for promotion in management roles they mentioned social, and organizational constraints that undermine their capacity to assess work-related opportunities and the perquisites to enter to these positions. Their experiences come from their own personal stories and how the environment around them supports them to take the lead and attain opportunities to advance to senior level positions. As it is supported in the literature, in male dominated workplaces women experience less work-related opportunities and that is considered to be a barrier for their career advancement and their promotion to senior management positions. The exclusion of women from resources and positions could be explain by the opportunity hoarding concept that points to sources and positions that can be accessed by people with similar characteristics, in this case male employees. Therefore, in a workplace where the majority of employees are men, women are being naturally excluded from opportunities to create valuable relationships and exchange work-related information. According to Oakley (2000) women that aspire to be promoted in higher positions, due to their outnumber status, they cannot access critical information or valuable networks, creating yet another obstacle in their way towards attaining senior roles. According to this, women have fewer developmental opportunities since companies typically offer opportunities for career advancement to male employees first. Female participants mention that they sometimes sense that their male co-workers are favored from other reasons not related to their professional skills when it comes to work-related opportunities. According to Rivera (2012), employers hire and promote candidates and employees not only based on their capabilities and skills but also because they are culturally similar to themselves in terms of leisure pursuits, experiences, and self-presentation styles. Therefore, if an organization on the top hierarchy featuring more men than women, females experience more difficulties to break the glass ceiling. This is mostly happened unconsciously since individuals get to top positions easily when they belong to particular groups, such as white, middle age males. According to social cognition research, people prefer in-group members to out- group members,

and favour them in evaluations and rewards (Brewer and Brown 1998).A study by Reskin & McBrier (2000), show thatopen recruitment methods are associated with women holding a greater share of management jobs, while recruitment through informal networks increases men's share. The researcher was keen to know how female employees react to these challenges and learn more about their experiences and their efforts to access work-related opportunities for promotion in senior management positions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, female employees refer to the stereotypes and double binds that they experience during their career. In particular, female employees found themselves adopting a male approach to fit in with the working environment. Female participants mentioned that adopting a male behaviour is a way to access work-related opportunities and get to higher positions. This is in line with the literature review that argues that there are prejudices toward female leaders and how people perceive inconsistencies between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002).This is also connected to the theory of opportunity hoarding, if women are perceived an out-group and are been excluded by career opportunities and promotions they put efforts becoming a member of an in-group. Rutherford's model of gender organizational cultures refers to the unconscious normative behavior sexist in organization culture and been disclosed by attitudes and informal practices. These unconscious behaviors underestimate women as professionals and questioned their abilities and skills, in particular when it comes to management positions. At many times these behaviours are convey sexual harassment towards women. Female employees reported feeling pressure by the stereotypes towards their gender and their feminine characteristics therefore they are not being themselves and they end up been perceived as untrustworthy and doubtful. Rutherford referred to the style of leadership and in which degree is associated with masculinity or femininity characteristics as one of the reasons that exclude women for reaching higher positions. According to female employees in lower organisational levels, women that hold senior roles are perceived as fake and they adopt male management styles and attitudes. Thus, female employees in junior positions felt less supported by female managers as well as less motivated to go for and take up higher positions. This was an important finding since a supportive environment and the importance of role models within a workplace could be perceived by female employees as influential to their career advancement. According to a study by Cohen et al (1998), women are more likely to be hired and promote into higher levels, when a higher proportion of women are already there. This is supported by several studies that referred to the importance of the role models (e.g. Singh 2006, Latu 2013, Brown and Treviño 2014, DeCastro, 2014). However, it's worth to mention that female participants mention that role models are meaningful if individuals with different characteristics, management styles and personalities hold senior management positions. Female employees are

inspired by women who hold senior roles and are being authentic in their role and at the same time have their own leadership styles rather that adopting the same leadership style that their male colleagues have. Female employees experience a combo of social and organizational constraints that undermine their capacity to assess work-related opportunities. Therefore, is important to look the social and organizational context to understand biases, barriers and challenges that female employees faces. Structures in society and within organisations provide sufficient explanations for women underrepresentation at senior management levels.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

_____

The final chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the main findings of the research as well as a discussion concerning the evaluation of the methodology that was applied. Furthermore, limitations of the current study will be mentioned as well as suggestions for further research and further recommendations for organizations.

Summary of the results

This study explored female employees' perceptions of the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, with the ambition of successfully meeting the aim of the study while answering all the research objectives. In accordance, it also brought new information about the subject under investigation to the surface. After a deep analysis and interpretation of the data the following findings were revealed; the traditional view of women, the different style of leadership, unconscious bias, sexual harassment, gender stereotypes and lack of self-confidence are the perceived challenges and barriers reported by female employees. Based on the findings, barriers, biases and challenges are shaped by socio-cultural differences. In particular female employees' perceptions about barriers and challenges that prevent them to promote are impacted by a country's history, work culture and by social prejudices towards the role of women. Thus, in multinational companies' issues concerning gender equality and gender in leadership are been shaped by the social norms of each country rather than companies' code of conduct. Although, there is one code of contact that ensures equal opportunities, the local environment, national laws, the culture, and society structures have an impact in the informal process and act as barriers to women advancement at senior roles. One example is, 'We have a different culture in US', explicitly implies that procedures which work in Sweden or Germany do not work in US. Therefore, although companies

follow theformal policies and practices, organisational culture is been shaped by the society structure and reflect on the informal rules and behaviours within work places. An example of informal behaviour within organization is informal networks. The existence of informal networks and particularly male networks is perceived by female employees as one of the main barrier that prevents them to promote in senior management positions. However, the old boys' network doesn't just discriminate women, it discriminates anyone that doesn't fit the ideal in-group. Networking within organisations is shaped by how society categorizes individuals to different groups based on their gender, ethnicity, class, age etc. Thus, people are been stereotyped based on their characteristics they bring with, as a result specific groups like women are been excluded from networks and are unable to access opportunities to advance and promote in senior level positions.

An interesting finding of the study is that female employees lack the confidence to take over higher positions and at the same time they spend time and energy establishing their credibility within the organization. One could argue that this might be an individual decision or that might be that they lack professional skills and capabilities. However, societal structure and social norms have an impact on the choices that women make. Female employees reported that their male colleagues usually are promoted based on their potential and not based on their qualifications, whereas they need to work harder to access opportunities in order to advance their careers. So, even if they have better professional qualifications and experience they still spend more time and energy to establish their credibility. Another important issue that was emerged during the research is the pressure between feminine characteristics and the stereotypes and norms that associate leadership with masculine characteristics. Female employees reported that adopting a male behavior is a strategy to access and promote to higher positions since it could be a way to fit in with the environment and be part of informal networks that are usually "boys clubs". However, women, who hold senior positions and adopt a male leadership style, are being perceived as not being authentic therefore they usually being criticized. Female employees look upon and admire people that are being portrayed in the leadership team with different leadership styles and personalities. Therefore, it could be said that employees value different forms of diversity.The researcher conclude that barriers and challenges interlinked with each other and create a domino effect that prevents female employees to assess work-related opportunities and consequently lead to their underrepresentation in senior management positions.

Methodological implications

The use of a qualitative method and more specifically the use of semi-structured interviews with twenty female employees, contributed to a deep investigation of the underrepresentation of women

in senior management positions. Therefore, the amount of the knowledge that was derived out was satisfactory and deep enough to fulfill the basic aim and objectives of the current study. However, an important issue that was taken into account is the lack of an intersectional approach due to time and length limitations of the current thesis. This approach includes a multidimensional analysis of power structures where individual experiences are based on multiple identities that can be linked to more than one ground of discrimination at a time. However, although a full intersectional approach has not been applied, the researcher used a limited level of awareness to other discriminatory strands such as marriage and civil partnership and cross-culturalism. In addition, despite the global context of the research sample saturation was achieved.

Suggestions for future research

Taking the results and the methodological limitations of the current study into consideration, some ideas for further research on the area of gender and leadership are proposed. As the current thesis was focused on female employees' perceptions about the barriers and challenges that prevent women to hold senior management roles, a research focus on male' thoughts about the same topic can enlighten the research area and can come to a contradiction or to agreement with females' statements about the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles. Taking into account both sides opinion will lead to a better comprehension of the situation. In addition, a future research on the specific experiences of men being marginalized by the same patriarchal structures and informal networks can be of great interest in the field of equal opportunities, gender equality and discrimination within the workplace. In addition, as the current thesis was a qualitative case study in one organization the researcher welcomes the compliment of a quantitative study with a bigger sample that potentially may contradict or confirm the findings.Apart from investigating a bigger sample of female employees it would be of a great importance to long-term study following female employees throughout their entire careers, potentially providing a more detailed and holistic description of career trajectories within this group.

Further Recommendations

Based on the overall findings of this study, the researcher comes up with some recommendations for organizations. The researcher recommends to HR professionals and managers to consider their biases when they hired and promote and aim for diverse teams and a diverse workforce in terms of gender but also age, skills, ethnicity and competences. In addition, processes could be implemented so all employees meet the same standards as they progress through their careers, which helps ensure they all get the same exposure to training and opportunities. At the same time, there are ways to ensure employees and high-potentials pipeline reflects diversity objectives. Furthermore,

organizations should encourage sensible discussions between managers and employees to understand if there are any existing challenges or opportunities. To conclude is important to take into account the impact of business decisions on gender, and the impact of gender in business decisions.

REFERENCES

Acker, J., 1990. Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. Gender & society, 4(2), pp.139-158.

Acker, J., 2006. Inequality regimes gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & society*, *20*(4), pp.441-464.

Acker, J., 2009. From glass ceiling to inequality regimes. *Sociologie du travail*, *51*(2), pp.199-217.

Ayman, R. and Korabik, K., 2010. Leadership: Why gender and culture matter. *American Psychologist*, *65*(3), p.157.

Badal, S. and Harter, J.K., 2014. Gender diversity, business-unit engagement, and performance. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *21*(4), pp.354-365.

Barreto, M., Ryan, M.K. and Schmitt, M.T., 2009. Introduction: Is the glass ceiling still relevant in the 21st century. *The glass ceiling in the 21st century: Understanding barriers to gender equality*, pp.3-18.

Bassett-Jones, N., 2005. The paradox of diversity management, creativity and innovation. *Creativity and innovation management*, *14*(2), pp.169-175.

Bell, M.P., McLaughlin, M.E. and Sequeira, J.M., 2002. Discrimination, harassment, and the glass ceiling: Women executives as change agents. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *37*(1), pp.65-76.

Berry, E.C., 2007, August. The ideology of diversity and the distribution of organizational resources: evidence from three US field sites. In *Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, New York*.

Boxall, P. and Purcell, J., 2011. *Strategy and human resource management*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Bradley, H. and Healy, G., 2008. *Ethnicity and gender at work: inequalities, careers and employment relations*. Springer

Broughton, A. and Miller, L., 2009. Women in senior management: Is the glass ceiling still intact. *Is, Guc: The Journal of Industrial Relations & Human Resources*, *11*(4), pp.7-23.

Brown, M.E. and Treviño, L.K., 2014. Do role models matter? An investigation of role modeling as an antecedent of perceived ethical leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *122*(4), pp.587-598.

Bryman, A. 2012.*Social research methods*. Oxford University Press, New York. Cedric Herring,

Budhwar, P.S., Saini, D.S. and Bhatnagar, J., 2005. Women in management in the new economic environment: The case of India. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, *11*(2), pp.179-193.

Center, B., Sessions, S.F.I., Learning, I.L., Leaders, M.A.R.C., Accord, C., Board, C.W.O., Signs, V., Catalyst, A., Serve, R.W. and Inclusive, B., 2017. The bottom line: Corporate performance and women's representation on boards (2004–2008). *Catalyst*.

Charles worth, S., Hall, P. and Probert, B., 2005. Drivers and contexts of equal employment opportunity and diversity action in Australian organisations. *Drivers and Contexts of Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity Action in Australian Organisations*, p.xii.

Christiansen, L. E., Lin, H., Pereira, J., Topalova, P., & Turk, R. 2016. Gender diversity in senior positions and firm performance: Evidence from Europe.*Journal Issue*, *2016*, 50.

Chung, C., Bozkurt, O., and Sparrow, P. 2012. 'Managing the duality of IHRM: Unravelling the strategy and perceptions of key actors in South Korean MNCs', *The International Journal of*

Cisco, 2011. Transitioning to workforce 2020: Anticipating and managing the changes that will radically transform working life in the next decade. (White paper). Retrieved from hXps://www.cisco.com/web/about/ac49/ac55/ docs/Workforce_2020_White_Paper_012411.pdf

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K., 2013. *Research methods in education*. Routledge

Cohen, L.E., Broschak, J.P. and Haveman, H.A., 1998. And then there were more? The effect of organizational sex composition on the hiring and promotion of managers. *American Sociological Review*, pp.711-727.

Cohen, P.N. and Huffman, M.L., 2007. Working for the woman? Female managers and the gender wage gap. *American Sociological Review*, *72*(5), pp.681-704.

Corley, K.G. and Gioia, D.A., 2011. Building theory about theory building: what constitutes a theoretical contribution?. *Academy of management review*, *36*(1), pp.12-32.

Credit Suisse .2012. Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance, Credit Suisse Research Institute

Daley, J., 2012. Game-changers: Economic reform priorities for Australia.

Dass, P. and Parker, B., 1999. Strategies for managing human resource diversity: From resistance to learning. *The Academy of Management Executive*, *13*(2), pp.68-80.

Davis, P.J., Frolova, Y. and Callahan, W., 2016. Workplace diversity management in Australia: What do managers think and what are organisations doing?. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *35*(2), pp.81-98.

DeCastro, R., Griffith, K.A., Ubel, P.A., Stewart, A. and Jagsi, R., 2014. Mentoring and the career satisfaction of male and female academic medical faculty. *Academic medicine: journal of the A*

Devoe, D., 1999. Managing a diverse workforce. San Mateo, CA: InfoWorld Media Group

DIMMAGGIO, P. and Powell, W., 1983. The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, *48*(2), pp.147-160.

Eagly, A.H. and Carli, L.L., 2003. The female leadership advantage: An evaluation of the evidence. *The leadership quarterly*, *14*(6), pp.807-834.

Eagly, A.H. and Carli, L.L., 2007. *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business Press.

Eagly, A.H. and Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C., 2001. The leadership styles of women and men. *Journal of social issues*, *57*(4), pp.781-797

Eagly, A.H. and Karau, S.J., 2002. Role congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders. *Psychological review*, *109*(3), p.573.

Eagly, A.H. and Sczesny, S., 2009. *Stereotypes about women, men, and leaders: Have times changed?*. American Psychological Association.

Eagly, A.H. and Sczesny, S., 2009. *Stereotypes about women, men, and leaders: Have times changed?*. American Psychological Association.

Esty, K.C., Griffin, R. and Hirsch, M.S., 1995. *Workplace diversity*. Adams Media.

European Commission, 2015, Gender balance in Corporate Boards, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/womenonboards/factsheet_women_on_boards_web _2015-10_en.pdf , Accessed 20 March.

Farndale, E. and Paauwe, J., 2007. Uncovering competitive and institutional drivers of HRM practices in multinational corporations. *Human Resource Management Journal*, *17*(4), pp.355-375.

Farris, S.R. and De Jong, S., 2014. Discontinuous intersections: second-generation immigrant girls in transition from school to work. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *37*(9), pp.1505-1525.

Ferner, A., Almond, P. and Colling, T., 2005. Institutional theory and the cross-national transfer of employment policy: The case of 'workforce diversity' in US multinationals. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *36*(3), pp.304-321.

Fitzsimmons, T.W., Callan, V.J. and Paulsen, N., 2014. Gender disparity in the C-suite: Do male and female CEOs differ in how they reached the top?. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *25*(2), pp.245-266.

Francoeur, C., Labelle, R. and Sinclair-Desgagné, B., 2008. Gender diversity in corporate governance and top management. *Journal of business ethics*, *81*(1), pp.83-95.

Gottschall, K. and Schaefer, A., 2016, July. Capturing Dynamics of Changing Gender Inequality: Regimes, Institutions and Indices. In *Third ISA Forum of Sociology, July* (pp. 10-14).

Guerrero, L., 2011. Women in Leadership. *Cases in leadership*.pp380-412, Sage.

Gwele, N.S., 2009. Diversity management in the workplace: beyond compliance: congress paper. *Curationis*, *32*(2), pp.4-10.

Hakim, C., 2000. *Work-lifestyle choices in the 21st century: Preference theory*. OUP Oxford.

Hakim, C., 2000. *Research design: Successful designs for social and economic research*. Psychology Press.

Hall, D.T. and Parker, V.A., 1993. The role of workplace flexibility in managing diversity. *Organizational Dynamics*, *22*(1), pp.5-18.

Haslam, S.A. and Ryan, M.K., 2008. The road to the glass cliff: Differences in the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in succeeding and failing organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *19*(5), pp.530-546.

Hastings, R., 2011. Study Cites Diversity Progress, Barriers. *Society for Human Resource Management.*

Hegewisch, A. and Hartmann, H., 2014. Occupational segregation and the gender wage gap: A job half done.

Herring, C., 2009. Does diversity pay?: Race, gender, and the business case for diversity. *American Sociological Review*, *74*(2), pp.208-224.

Hitchcock, G. and Hughes, D., 1995. *Research and the teacher: A qualitative introduction to school-based research*. Psychology Press.

Hoobler, J.M., Lemmon, G. and Wayne, S.J., 2011. Women's underrepresentation in upper management: New insights on a persistent problem. *Organizational Dynamics*, *40*(3), pp.151-156.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R. and Kolb, D., 2013. Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, *91*(9), pp.60-66.

Kakabadse, N.K., Figueira, C., Nicolopoulou, K., Hong Yang, J., Kakabadse, A.P. and Özbilgin, M.F., 2015. Gender diversity and board performance: women's experiences and perspectives. *Human Resource Management*, *54*(2), pp.265-281.

Kaplan, D.M., Wiley, J.W. and Maertz, C.P., 2011. The role of calculative attachment in the relationship between diversity climate and retention. *Human Resource Management*, *50*(2), pp.271-287.

Kelly, E. and Dobbin, F., 1998. How affirmative action became diversity management employer response to antidiscrimination law, 1961 to 1996. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *41*(7), pp.960-984.

Kelly, E. and Dobbin, F., 1998. How affirmative action became diversity management employer response to antidiscrimination law, 1961 to 1996. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *41*(7), pp.960-984.

King, N,. & Horrocks, C., 2010. *Interviews in Qualitative Research.* London: Sage Publications

Knorr, H., 2005. Factors that Contribute to Women's Career Development in Organizations: A Review of the Literature. *Online Submission*.

Kossek, E.E., Lobel, S.A. and Brown, J., 2006. Human resource strategies to manage workforce diversity. *Handbook of workplace diversity*, pp.53-74.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S., 2009. Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing. *Thousands Oaks: Sage Publications*.

Kvale, S., 1996. InterViews—An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing Sage Thousand Oaks. *CA Google Scholar*.

Laff, Michael, 2007. The invisible wall.(women's advancement in corporate ladder)(Cover story). *T D*, 61(3), pp.32–38,4.

Latu, I.M., Mast, M.S., Lammers, J. and Bombari, D., 2013. Successful female leaders empower women's behavior in leadership tasks. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *49*(3), pp.444-448.

Lee Cooke, F. and Xiao, Y., 2014. Gender roles and organizational HR practices: The case of women's careers in accountancy and consultancy firms in China. *Human Resource Management*, *53*(1), pp.23-44.

Liu, S., 2013. A few good women at the top: The China case. *Business Horizons*, *56*(4), pp.483-490.

Lorbiecki, A. and Jack, G., 2000. Critical turns in the evolution of diversity management. *British journal of management*, *11*(s1).

Lutter, M., 2015. Do women suffer from network closure? The moderating effect of social capital on gender inequality in a project-based labor market, 1929 to 2010. *American Sociological Review*, *80*(2), pp.329-358.

Makower, J. 1995, "Managing diversity in the workplace", Business and Society Review,, no. 92, pp. 48.

McKinsey, 2009. Women Matter 3: Women Leaders, A Competitive Edge in and After the Crisis.

Nonnemaker, L., 2000. Women physicians in academic medicine—new insights from cohort studies. *New England Journal of Medicine*, *342*(6), pp.399-405.

Oláh, L.S. and Bernhardt, E., 2008. Sweden: Combining childbearing and gender equality. *Demographic Research*, *19*(28), pp.1105-1144.

Omanović, V., 2009. Diversity and its management as a dialectical process: Encountering Sweden and the US. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *25*(4), pp.352-362.

Parker, B. 1999, "Strategies for Managing Human Resource Diversity: From Resistance to Learning", The Academy of Management Executive (1993-2005), 13(2), pp. 68-80.

Patton, M.Q., 1990. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, inc.

Peterson, H., 2016. Is managing academics "women's work"? Exploring the glass cliff in higher education management. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *44*(1), pp.112-127.

Powell, G.N. and Butterfield, D.A., 1994. Investigating the "glass ceiling" phenomenon: An empirical study of actual promotions to top management. *Academy of Management Journal*, *37*(1), pp.68-86.

Punch, K.F., 2013. *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Sage.

Purcell, J., 2003. *Understanding the people and performance link: unlocking the black box*. CIPD Publishing.

Razavi, S., 2016. The 2030 Agenda: challenges of implementation to attain gender equality and women's rights. *Gender & Development*, *24*(1), pp.25-41.

Reskin, B.F. and McBrier, D.B., 2000. Why not ascription? Organizations' employment of male and female managers. *American sociological review*, pp.210-233.

Richie, B.S., Fassinger, R.E., Linn, S.G., Johnson, J., Prosser, J. and Robinson, S., 1997. Persistence, connection, and passion: A qualitative study of the career development of highly

achieving African American–Black and White women. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *44*(2), p.133.

Rivera, L.A., 2012. Hiring as cultural matching the case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, *77*(6), pp.999-1022.

Rutherford, S., 2001. Any difference? An analysis of gender and divisional management styles in a large airline. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *8*(3), pp.326-345.

Rutherford, S., 2001. 'Are You Going Home Already?': The long hours culture, women managers and patriarchal closure. *Time & Society*, *10*(2-3), pp.259-276.

Rutherford, S., 2001. Organizational cultures, women managers and exclusion. *Women in Management Review*, *16*(8), pp.371-382.

Rutherford, S., 2011. *Women's work, men's cultures: overcoming resistance and changing organizational cultures*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ryan, M.K. and Haslam, S.A., 2005. The glass cliff: Evidence that women are over-represented in precarious leadership positions. *British Journal of management*, *16*(2), pp.81-90.

Sachs, J. and Blackmore, J., 1998. You never show you can't cope: Women in school leadership roles managing their emotions. *Gender and education*, *10*(3), pp.265-279.

Schein, V.E., 1973. The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of applied psychology*, *57*(2), p.95.

Schein, V.E., 2001. A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social issues*, *57*(4), pp.675-688.

Schwanke, D.A., 2013. Barriers for women to positions of power: How societal and corporate structures, perceptions of leadership and discrimination restrict women's advancement to authority. *Earth Common Journal*, *3*(2).

Scott, W.R., 1995. Institutions and organizations. Foundations for organizational science. *London: A Sage Publication Series*.

Scott, W.R., 2003. Institutional carriers: reviewing modes of transporting ideas over time and space and considering their consequences. *Industrial and corporate change*, *12*(4), pp.879-894.

Scott, W.R., 2014. *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities*.4thedn Sage Publications.

Aytemiz Seymen, O., 2006. The cultural diversity phenomenon in organisations and different approaches for effective cultural diversity management: a literary review. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, *13*(4), pp.296-315.

Shortland, S., 2009. Gender diversity in expatriation: evaluating theoretical perspectives. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, *24*(5), pp.365-386.

Silverman, D., 2013. *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. SAGE Publications Limited.

Singh, V., Vinnicombe, S. and James, K., 2006. Constructing a professional identity: how young female managers use role models. *Women in Management Review*, *21*(1), pp.67-81.

Starman, A.B., 2013. The case study as a type of qualitative research. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies/Sodobna Pedagogika*, *64*(1), pp.28-43.

Stone, D.L. and Deadrick, D.L., 2015. Challenges and opportunities affecting the future of human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, *25*(2), pp.139-145.

Strachan, G., French, E.L. and Burgess, J., 2010. The origins and development of managing diversity.

Stryker, R., 2000. Legitimacy processes as institutional politics: Implications for theory and research in the sociology of organizations. In *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (pp. 179-223). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Suchman, M.C., 1995. Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of management review*, *20*(3), pp.571-610.

Swartz, E., Amatucci, F.M. and Coleman, S., 2016. Still A Man'S World? Second Generation Gender Bias In External Equity Term Sheet Negotiations. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, *21*(03), p.1650015.

Teigen, M., 2012. Gender quotas for corporate boards in Norway: Innovative gender equality policy. In *Women on corporate boards and in top management* (pp. 70-90). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

The New Global Mindset: Driving Innovation Through Diverse Perspectives,‖ Ernst & Young, 2010. (This report is based on the Ernst & Young study ―Redrawing the Map: Globalization and the Changing World of Business‖), http://www.bc-ctem.ca/sites/default/files/thenewglobalmindset_driving_innovationthroughdiverseperspectives.pdf

Thomas, R., 2004. R. Jr.(2001). Elements of a successful" diversity" process. *The American*.

Tomaskovic-Devey, D. and Stainback, K., 2007. Discrimination and desegregation: Equal opportunity progress in US private sector workplaces since the Civil Rights Act. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, *609*(1), pp.49-84.

Tomaskovic-Devey, D., 2014. The relational generation of workplace inequalities. *Social Currents*, *1*(1), pp.51-73.

Toohey, T., Colosimo, D. and Boak, A., 2009. *Australia's hidden resource: The economic case for increasing female participation*. Sydney: Goldman Sachs JBWere Investment Research.

Toossi, M., 2002. A century of change: The US labor force, 1950-2050.*Monthly Lab. Rev.*, *125*, p.15.

Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C., 2011. *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

UN, 2015, The Millennium Development Goal Report, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf, Accessed 25 March.

Wang, A.C., Chiang, J.T.J., Tsai, C.Y., Lin, T.T. and Cheng, B.S., 2013. Gender makes the difference: The moderating role of leader gender on the relationship between leadership styles and subordinate performance. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *122*(2), pp.101-113.

Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2016 The business case for gender equality. Available at: https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/wgea-business-case-for-gender-equality.pdf

Ming-Yi, W., 2006. Perceptions about male and female managers in the Taiwanese public relations field: Stereotypes and strategies for change. *Public Relations Quarterly*, *51*(3), p.36.

Yin, R.K., 2013. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage publications.

APPENDIX

Interview guide (Semi-structure interviews)

* Formulated according to specific target group / kind of knowledge bearer

* Informing about approximate length and recording

* Informing about main idea of the interview, making sure the interview partner feels comfortable with it and her/his role in the project

* Informing about my role

* Informing about absolute anonymity and confidentiality

* Make it sure everything is clear and understandable

If these information is not come up during the interview, I would ask them in the end:

- Age
- Children and age

Interview Guide Female Employees

Female employees (low and middle org level)
Background Info

1. How many years you work in the company?
2. What attracted you to this company?
3. **What is your formal title?***(current position and current organizational level)*
4. How long do you hold your current position?
5. What are the rewards and challenges to this position?
6. What's your educational background?

Personal background

1. What is your civil status?
2. If you have children, have you experienced it influencing your position in the companies you have worked for or when applying for a job?
3. Has having children altered your career goals?
4. Have you or your partner had to compromise on your career target in order to balance work and family life?
5. How supportive and empathetic is your manager regarding your work life circumstances and your career progress?

Networking, mentorships and role model

1. Do you participate in social, career advancing activities (i.e networking) outside of the work setting with your colleagues and/or business contacts?
2. D**o** you have a person that you consider to be a role model in a top position in your organization? *(Note: What is the gender of this person?)*
3. How would you describe the attitudes of your male colleagues in your organization? How supportive do you think they are?

Career ambitious and perceptions

1. What is the highest organizational level position that you aim to achieve? (*Why or Why not*)
2. Are you willing to consider a job with more responsibility and higher pay?
3. Have you accepted or declined promotions in your current organization?
4. Do you recognize suitable/sufficient opportunities for men and women to apply for a higher level jobs?
5. In the case of you wanting to advance in your career and evolve, which difficulties could you encounter?
6. Nowadays, in general and in your company, do you think it is easier for a man to get promoted and access the highest positions than for a woman?
7. According to an enquiry conducted by Women Business Research Institute, many Swedish female employees consider that it is still easier for young men to get ahead with their careers than it is for young women. What is your experience or opinion about this? (*Have you experienced your gender/femininity to be in the way of your career development? Or has it helped?*)

Norms and beliefs

1. What does gender diversity mean to you? Do you consider the topic to be important for your company's success today?
2. Do you think that the unit you are working and the company in general is diverse in respect to the gender? (*Are they try to encourage women here?*)
3. What benefits or advantages do women bring to leadership and organizations, in your opinion? Or are there even any special advantages?
4. Do you consider men and women who have executive positions have more or less same characteristics?
5. In your working life, is there any situation, or has been, when you have reflected over being a woman? If yes, when?

Leadership Styles

1. How did you understand what a 'ideal' leader is?
2. What are the most important qualities and characteristics of a good leader?
3. Is gender relevant, when considering leadership and managers?
4. Do you think there are differences in the style of leading between men and women?
5. What is your perception of female/male leader's capabilities in any leadership role?
6. This is a part of an article published online could you read it please and tell me what is your opinion about this?

    "There is a mountain of research revealing unequivocally that what people want from their leaders today is changing, and changing dramatically. And the good news is, women have never been better placed to lead, as we transition from an old style of leadership based on command and control, short term thinking and aggression, to one that is more in tune with feminine sensibilities of relating and empowering, sustainable thinking, and collaboration………… Today's women are

re-defining traditional leadership tactics to come less from facts and figures and more from a heart-centered approach. This is a new paradigm of feminine leadership—and it works."

7. Anything else that comes to mind about women and/or leadership? Opinions, stories, notes....

Perceived Barriers

1. In your opinion, what are the most common obstacles in women's careers? (If there are any)
2. What are the barriers that may prevent females from emerging in to leadership roles?
3. Do you think it is easier for women to become managers at the moment and even more so in the future? Why do you think it is / is not?
4. Have you felt that being a woman has made it harder for you to get ahead in your career?

Conclude questions

1. Do you think is necessary to promote women's position in working life in certain ways, because there are other obstacles, which are not related to professional skills?
2. What do you think are the best tools to increase the number of women in leadership positions? *(For example, mentoring, general discussion, etc.)*
3. Is there anything else you wish to tell me, that I have not already asked you about?
4. Would it be okay if I contact you again with an eventual supplementary question?

Female Managers (high organisation level)

Background Info

1. How many years you work in the company?
2. What attracted you to this company?
3. What is your formal title? (current position and current organizational level)
4. What are the rewards and challenges to this position?
5. How long do you hold your current position?
6. Education? What was helpful for you? What would you like to change about the education ofgirls/women?

Family background

1. What is your civil status?
2. If you have children, have you experienced it influencing your position in the companies you have worked for or when applying for a job?
3. Has having children altered your career goals?
4. Have you or your partner had to compromise on your career target in order to balance work and family life?
5. In which degree do you believe that it is possible to combine being a mother, a top leader and having a social life? Is this more difficult for women than it is for men?

Networking, mentorships and role model

1. Do you participate in social, career advancing activities (i.e networking) outside of the work setting with your colleagues and/or business contacts?
2. What influences were most helpful? Difficult?Challenging?

3. Who were your role models?Why?
4. How would you describe the attitudes of your male colleagues in your organization? How supportive do you think they are?

Career ambitious and perceptions

1. Can you describe what it was like for you when you were first appointed to your currentposition?
2. Tell me about the stages of your career, and how you arrived at thisposition. *(Was genderimportant)?*
3. What elements did you identify as being important to establishing legitimacy and credibility?
4. How did you manage the established protocols and practices in yourprofession?
5. Were there any paradoxes that seemedcontradictory?
6.

Norms and beliefs

1. What does gender diversity mean to you? Do you consider the topic to be important for your company's success today?
2. Do you think that the unit you are working and the company in general is diverse in respect to the gender? (*Are they try to encourage women here?)*
3. What influence did gender have on your decisions and identity, on both a long-term and short-term, or even dailybasis? How did you navigate these as awoman?
4. In your working life, is there any situation, or has been, when you have reflected over being a woman? If yes, when?
5. Do you consider men and women who have executive positions have more or less same characteristics?

Leadership Styles
1. What is your perception of female/male leader's capabilities in any leadership role?
2. Do you think there are differences in the style of leading between men and women?
3. What benefits or advantages do women bring to leadership and organizations, in your opinion? Or are there even any special advantages?
4. This is a part of an article published online could you read it please and tell me what is your opinion about this?
   "There is a mountain of research revealing unequivocally that what people want from their leaders today is changing, and changing dramatically. And the good news is, women have never been better placed to lead, as we transition from an old style of leadership based on command and control, short term thinking and aggression, to one that is more in tune with feminine sensibilities of relating and empowering, sustainable thinking, and collaboration………… Today's women are re-defining traditional leadership tactics to come less from facts and figures and more from a heart-centered approach. This is a new paradigm of feminine leadership—and it works."

5. Anything else that comes to mind about women and/or leadership? Opinions, stories, notes....

Perceived barriers

1. Have you experienced discrimination in any form? What strategies did you deploy to manage/negotiatethis?
2. In general, do you think that women and men have the same opportunities when pursuing higher positions?

3. Do you think it is easier for women to become managers at the moment and even more so in the future? Why do you think it is / is not?
4. Have you felt that being a woman has made it harder for you to get ahead in your career?
5. Some senior women speak of the 'double-binds* for women in male-dominated professions. Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt this pressure?
6. Can you describe any challenging moments, or experiences, as a woman leader?

Conclude questions

1. Do you think is necessary to promote women's position in working life in certain ways, because there are other obstacles, which are not related to professional skills?
2. What do you think are the best tools to increase the number of women in leadership positions? (For example, mentoring, general discussion, etc.)
3. Is there anything else you wish to tell me, that I have not already asked you about?
4. Would it be okay if I contact you again with an eventual supplementary question?

Interview Guide Male Employees

Background Info

1. How many years you work in the company?
2. What attracted you to this company?
3. What is your formal title? *(current position and current organizational level*)
4. How long do you hold your current position?
5. What are the rewards and challenges to this position?
6. What's your educational background?

Personal background

1. What is your civil status?
2. If you have children, have you experienced it influencing your position in the companies you have worked for or when applying for a job?
3. Has having children altered your career goals?
4. Have you or your partner had to compromise on your career target in order to balance work and family life?

Networking, mentorships and role model
1. Do you participate in social, career advancing activities (i.e. networking) outside of the work setting with your colleagues and/or business contacts?
2. To what kind of social activities, loosely related to work, do you participate in?
3. Do you have a person that you consider to be a role model in a top position in your organization? *(Note: What is the gender of this person?)*

Career ambitious and perceptions

1. What is the highest organizational level position that you aim to achieve? (Why or Why not)
2. Are you willing to consider a job with more responsibility and higher pay?
3. Have you accepted or declined promotions in your current organization?

4. In the case of you wanting to advance in your career and evolve, which difficulties could you encounter?

Norms and beliefs

1. What does gender diversity mean to you? Do you consider the topic to be important for your company's success today?
2. Do you think that the unit you are working and the company in general is diverse in respect to the gender? (*Are they try to encourage women here?*)
3. What benefits or advantages do women bring to leadership and organizations, in your opinion? Or are there even any special advantages?
4. Is gender relevant, when considering leadership and managers?
5. Do you consider men and women who have executive positions have more or less same characteristics?
6. Do you think there are differences in the style of leading between men and women?

Conclude questions

1. In general, do you think that women and men have the same opportunities when pursuing higher positions?
1. What do you think are the best tools to increase the number of women in leadership positions*? (For example, mentoring, general discussion, etc.)*
2. Is there anything else you wish to tell me, that I have not already asked you about?
3. Would it be okay if I contact you again with an eventual supplementary question?