The “Top” woman in the Organization: an assessment of females’ current & future situation in high responsibility positions

Submitted by

Belghali Moulay Ghali
&
Samuel Olichon

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By

Dr. Philippe Daudi
&
Dr. Mikael Lundgren

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Summary

The problem for women in the work market has been and is still being widely studied from different domains and fields, there is however still countless fissures linked to it. Even though the gender equality has comprehensively increased in recent decades, it is still apparent in high responsibility positions. This situation caught our attention and stimulated us to analyse the women’s condition within organizations.

Scholars have developed different theories linked to organizations, but our complex and fast developing society has surpassed most of these classical theories, making them either partially or totally irrelevant. For instance standards such as hierarchical organizations, individualism and aggressiveness are no longer considered as the most efficient values.

This work investigates the barriers that women have to overcome in order to break though leading positions, as well as the identification of female and male leadership and their stereotypes’ consequences. Accordingly, we intend to propose solutions and new approaches liable to help integrating more women in high profile positions. We are aspiring to create a new trend representing successful leadership that is no longer correlated to the male stereotype.

The theoretical part engages in theories surrounding female gender leadership as well as gender related barriers, while the empirical method involves the conduct of semi structured interview with women in high management positions, with the aim of setting up a solid ground for analysis and discussion. Due to this fact, we believe that the woman is the future of the organization, therefore we firstly call for the implementation and the reinforcement of the female “role model” and secondly encourage companies to adopt and promote our new concept of “the ecological organization” in order to achieve a more flexible, balanced and sane organizational culture in a foreseeable future.
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1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the subject background and the thesis objective. The research question will be presented and the purpose of the study revealed. We will also explain the delimitations of our thesis before enumerating its outline.

1.1 Problem Background

“Whether there are innately female leadership styles... is not really the right question. It is more important to ask why there has been so little attention paid to women leaders over the years as well as why the styles of leading more often exhibited by women are particularly useful at this critical moment in history.” Charlotte Bunch.

Today’s organizations are working toward a more balanced gender repartition in high responsibility positions. Nevertheless, it still seems that the development is relatively slow in the majority of European multinationals, if not stagnating in most small and middle sized organizations. Even if women represent almost half of today’s global workforce and the amount of women in middle management is gradually rising, their share of top management positions does not exceed 20 % (Wirth, 2000) In political organizations, the situation is not more flattering either, as men are still enjoying a high dominance in European organizations.

In the last decades, more and more women have accomplished good progress in occupations which were previously reserved for men. Due to an increasing number of female graduates at colleges, universities and business schools, women have responded to the mixture of opportunities offered in the corporate environment because they have achieved educational levels comparable to men. Above and beyond improvement in educational credentials, labour norms have been developed around the male model where one could notice the partial or sometimes the total absence of problems related to maternity or other familiar responsibilities. (Wirth, 2000)

At a certain time of her life and due to the her biological responsibilities such as getting pregnant, giving birth and breast feeding, the woman is forced out of her work for relatively
lengthy periods. One should take this process into account since it certainly takes time, and above all, it sidelines the woman from her professional career and consequently provide men with an “unfair” advantage, especially regarding ambitious women willing to combine a fulfilling family life with a high responsibility career. In today’s competitive business environment, being away for some time could strongly hinder one’s opportunities of advancement within an organization, as the old proverb says: there is no such a thing as stagnating, when one does not progress, one automatically regresses.

One of the reasons why women are needed in “board rooms” is first for the sake of equality between men and women, since in a democratic world; everyone should have the same opportunities for career advancement including the fair access to leading positions. The second argument is emphasizing around the woman as an important part of the society. In a specific industry for example, a woman’s vision and input could be different, thus benefiting in other ways for the organization. Therefore, organizations should include women in a more efficient way. The last but not least, is the fact that men and women are influenced by different experiences, and that could definitely be a positive thing to combine them in order to broaden the range of alternatives, especially during decision making processes.

One of the most influential factors leading to the female suffering from gender discrimination in the organization is the labelling and branding of social roles based on gender. It is possible that gender related stereotypes play an important part in the under representation of women in high responsibility positions. For this reasons, we could enumerate a number of barriers that are impeding organizations from reaching gender equality.

Actually, scholars conducted many studies focusing on gender inequalities in the business world and most of them agree on the same thing. It appears that qualified and ambitious females who want to achieve the highest positions in organizations stumble on a large number of obstacles, which has a negative effect on the development of these women’s careers and for the organization in general because much talent is wasted. These gender related barriers, which prevent women from breaking through high responsibility positions are often referred to as ‘the glass ceiling’.
Going back only a half century ago, the principal debate in Europe was about whether women should engage in high professional careers or not. The contrast between the 60’s and today becomes more evident since the role of the woman in society is no longer restricted to her being a central key of founding a family. With this said, and underlining the quotation of Charlotte Bunch above, the debate today is more about the lack of attention attributed to women leaders and the fact that their styles of leadership could play essential roles in different types of organizations.

We were particularly motivated to engage in this thesis study because of the high profile interest of this subject in the media, especially that the focus is targeting discrimination as the main factor that is obstructing the development of the woman, and her access to leading positions.

**1.2 Objective**

Nowadays, effective leadership is paramount in order for an organization to first survive in this modern environment where competition is fierce, and second to achieve consistency and success gradually and for a long period of time. Even if women are represented in the business world for some time now, it is a fair statement to say that they are under represented in high profile and leading positions.

The main aim of this work is to study female leaders’ understandings and opinions about the current situation of the woman in high responsibility positions. We intend to explore the major differences between male and female leaders in organizations, and examine the reasons why women are so under represented in firms. The aim is also to gather enough information from females in leading positions in order to establish an analysis to be able to speculate about her future in organizational top management.

According to Philippe Daudi, people rather prefer male than female bosses, and it is more difficult for women than men to become leaders and to succeed in male dominated leadership roles.¹ Sweden is certainly one of the countries registering the best figures regarding male and female parity in the professional world. However we will underline, in this study, the main

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difficulties that women are facing in order to break through leading positions because of this existing preference to be led by a man rather than a woman.

Combining both classical and modern theories about leadership related to the female gender and with a comprehensive interview process with highly placed women as a practical basis, we will perform series of analysis with the goal of understanding, explaining and speculating around this actual subject of the woman’s progress regarding leading positions in the business world.

1.3 Research issue

“This is no simple reform. It really is a revolution. Sex and race because they are easy and visible differences have been the primary ways of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups and into the cheap labour in which this system still depends. We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned. We are really talking about humanism.” Gloria Steinem

We intend document and analyze the current situation of women in leading positions within organizations in order to propose suggestions liable to solve or at least improve their heavy under representation in such positions. In order to fulfil this goal, we will plunge in the field of leadership and sex and gender; introducing theories surrounding female gender leadership, exhibiting relevant statistical information and interviewing relevant respondent with the aim of setting up a solid ground for analysis and discussion.

1.4 Previous research

"The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other." Mary Wollstonecraft

Many gender studies have been made covering a comprehensive range of aspects of the issue and with different approaches to the subject. However, since it is a subjective area, it is difficult to find general theories describing the situation. Instead a great number of investigations that are made indicate different results. Apparent though is the fact that women are heavily under-represented in leading and decision making positions.
Only a few numbers of women have managed to become top leaders within European organizations. At the same time a lot of them are well educated, willing to have a career and not lacking ambition. The open debate is the question if women leaders will have the same opportunity as men in the near future. Therefore, their perception of their current situation within organization could prove to be paramount to how it will be in few years or even few decades.

1.5 Delimitation

“If you limit your choices only to what seems possible or reasonable, you disconnect yourself from what you truly want, and all that is left is compromise.” Robert Fritz

For the research for this thesis we will try to adopt a different approach by starting to analyse the chosen subject from a wide perspective that will tighten up gradually as the study develops. However, this work mainly focuses on the situation of the woman in the countries of Sweden and France since the time and resources are relatively limited for a wider geographical coverage. Nonetheless, we hope to be able to draw conclusions regarding the situation of female leaders throughout Europe. This thesis also disregards women who are content with their low or middle management positions, and concentrates essentially on females aspiring to leading positions and major career advancements.

It will be discussed that political issues could temper with the professional advancement of a comprehensive group of females, but all direct repercussions such as government policies regarding this matter will be ignored in order to conserve our neutral involvement in this theme. Finally, the type and size of organizations as well as the effect of organizational culture will be left out of the study with the purpose of strengthening the focus on the female gender leadership rather than her interactions within organizations, making the woman in the organization the essence of our study instead of the other way around.
1.6 Choice of words

“The ill and unfit choice of words wonderfully obstructs the understanding.” Francis Bacon

We have experienced the formulation to be of great matter when writing about gender. A small change of words could be of great meaning. We have therefore chosen to name people in leading positions both “women leaders”, “female leaders”, “men leaders” and “male leaders”.

We are well aware that the reader might find “female leaders” or “male leaders” to be more accurate, but in order to give a neutral approach to the subject, both formulations has been chosen. When using words as female and male, it could be interpreted as the difference between genders due to culture, instead of biological differences, but we intend to unmistakably explain and clarify this important issue in chapter 3.3

1.7 Outline of the thesis

Chapter one: introduces the subject background and the thesis objective. The research question is presented and the purpose of the study revealed. It also explains the delimitations of the thesis before enumerating its outline.

Chapter two: provides the methodological framework where we present and discuss the choice of our research approach, method and data assembling tools. We also present and justify the relevance of our participants before tackling the issues of data analysis, research ethics and sources criticism.

Chapter three: provides the reader with a selection of theoretical concepts and statistical facts used in this thesis. They are presented starting with a motivation of the chosen theories. The theories are relevant in order to get a deeper understanding about women in or aspiring to be in top positions, as well as their situation in organizations, whereas the statistical evidence is there to support some of the theories and refute others. This part of our work is laying a solid ground to support the analysis and discussion that follows.
Chapter four: supplies the reader with the information gathered from our own, plus other published interviews pertinent to our subject. The data is presented following the general setting of the theoretical chapter. This sorting provides our work with further coherence and consistency as we gradually introduce the themes and categories which have emerged in our data immersion. However, we also provide quantitative findings simultaneously when we judge relevant, either to confirm or refute our respondents perceptions, not to mention cross examine them with the theories that we developed in the previous chapter.

Chapter five: analysis chapters in this type of thesis projects is usually a link-chapter between theory and practical method or other empirical findings, where the authors try either to verify, confirm or refute their theories and assumptions, and maybe on a later stage discuss them as well. However, we decided to proceed differently as we do not seek to check on the veracity of the theories that we exhibited nor compare them to the perceptions of our primary and secondary respondents. In contrast with the empirical chapter where we followed the same pattern of the theory chapter, walking most of the gathered information and knowledge through a practical scope, we intend to only pick stand out points that we judge relevant to analyse and discuss, and that we believe are liable to improve the situation of females within organizations. Moreover, we will also adopt a more subjective approach in this part and give account of our opinions, ideas and reflections on the subject.

Chapter six: we consider this chapter to be the climax of our thesis. We use all pervious chapters where we examined, depicted, explored, analysed and discussed the current and future situation of the woman within organizations as a basis to reflect on what we can bring to the subject. Indeed, we will introduce new concepts under the form of propositions and suggestions such as the “ecological” organization concept, that we believe will help organizations improve the situation of women in top management positions and provide a brighter future for them in matters of future integration, we will also assess their feasibility and defend them cautiously.

Chapter seven: The objective of this study is to examine the situation of women in leading positions within organizations regardless of what kind of business, service or industrial sector. Now at the end of this work, we acquired much more understanding of the subject at hand; we even came up with our own suggestions for both the future well being of the woman and the organization. However, throughout the development of this work, we have been discerning several areas worth further investigation either as a master degree thesis or even as Doctor of
Philosophy degree project. This chapter provides the readers with our further research propositions.
2 Methodology

This chapter is concerned with the choice of our research approach and the specific characteristics that such an approach offers to our study. We also describe and explain the methods that we use in order to try to understand the subject under investigation. We further provide a detailed explanation of the choice of our data gathering tools, highlighting their advantages and disadvantages which have had an impact on our study. In this respect, we also present and justify the choice of our respondents before discussing the reliability, the validity as well as the ethical issues of this thesis. We even provide a description of how we went about the analysis of our data and justify the way of presenting and discussing the acquired information. Finally, we offer a critique of our methodology by looking at the potential flaws and the indispensable measures to avoid them.

2.1 Motivation & Justification of this study

“A civilization is a heritage of beliefs, customs, and knowledge slowly accumulated in the course of centuries, elements difficult at times to justify by logic, but justifying themselves as paths when they lead somewhere, since they open up for man his inner distance.” Antoine de Saint-Exupery

As graduate students of the master’s degree of Leadership and Management in International Context at the Baltic Business School in Kalmar, Sweden, we have taken courses in leadership and organization. The content of the majority of the courses that we took part in focused on leadership within multinational organizations. Moreover, the theoretical frame of references is largely about the development of leadership in time, within cultures, and above all about the input of several well established professors, authors and thinkers. This theoretical frame of references has captured our interest, and we were consequently motivated to make our own mark in this field and dedicate our time and energy to this subject.

Once we decided to write about this theme, we evaluated many areas within the field and tried to research a subject that is both interesting and actual for this beginning of the century and for the future. Moreover, we decided to choose a subject that we will both be comfortable
with as we have different educational backgrounds. M.G. Belghali has a bachelor in business and administration, while S. Olichon has a Master I in management and administration.

The study of the female gender leadership is both appealing and growing in interest in modern organizations. Furthermore, we believe that from a strategic perspective, the process of how the woman’s leadership contributes in creating competitive advantage for an organization is of immense importance. We intend to justify the core of our thesis by proving that the role and the impact of women in leading positions is something worth developing in the future to augment and maximize the success of the majority of modern organizations. In addition, by analyzing the efficiency of women’s leadership styles, we will at least make it knowledgeable for future purposes.

We will be very cautious in matters of giving personal recommendations or suggestions and we will be even more attentive to any political, social or gender side that we could be tempted to lean toward while developing our thesis. Nevertheless, we are more seeking to learn about the existing theories and document opinions, research relevant issues and develop them in order to be able to analyze the results of our findings and hopefully come up with constructive and consistent results. Moreover, because we have chosen such a relevant and actual subject, we were further motivated to produce a high quality work with the pretentious aim of presenting it to companies and organizations that could find it helpful for their future development. We are even approaching this study with the assumption that it could potentially be an asset for our respective professional careers.

2.2 Research approach

2.2.1 Empirical research strategy

“Every discourse, even a poetic or oracular sentence, carries with it a system of rules for producing analogous things and thus an outline of methodology.” Jacques Derrida

We believe that it is more appropriate to come within reach of a limited number of females acting in different domains in order to obtain a genuine perception of reality. This way, we will have a deeper understanding of how females in leading positions are coping with their respective situations and how they consider their future within the organizations that they are working in. Furthermore, this way will give us the opportunity to compare between different women in different positions, and therefore the prospect of targeting their main similarities
and differences. Those convergences and divergences will represent the heart of the empirical and analysis parts of this work without mentioning their importance vis-à-vis our speculations regarding the future of the woman in top management.

The choice of the number of people to include in a case study is also a challenge for us since it is in deed critical to the success of a thesis. Many researchers, such as Lundahl and Skärvard (1999), agree that the quality of a study increases when the amount of interviewed individuals or organizations decreases. Hence the real challenge is to find the right balance that will provide us with a comprehensive illustration of the female gender leadership within organizations, and in the same time increases the potential of generalizing our findings to a wider number of females in a wider number of countries and societies. We consequently chose to interview three primary respondents: Mrs Christel Daudi, Mrs Jannicke Jennsjö and Mrs Eva färnstrand who are all highly placed females in their respective organizations. In addition, we will use published interviews of several other “top” women in the business world in order to acquire broader insight about our study subject and to be able to carry an interesting discussion before drawing relevant conclusions.

2.2.2 The interpretive framework

“One, who is capable of interpreting the meaning of secret speech, becomes the first to come across the source of knowledge.” Atharva Veda

The orientation of this thesis is interpretive since it enables us to understand reality and others by interacting with them and listening to what they tell us (Terre Blanche & Kelly 1999). With other words, the central interest in the interpretive concept is to understand and to analyse through interpretation. In the same way, the main challenge is to consider our research contributors as research subjects and to investigate the meanings of their ideas and perceptions. As a consequence, by adopting the interpretive orientation, we, as researchers, become the principal tool for collecting and analysing information.

The result of implementing the interpretive approach is that our interviewed individuals were able to express their reality in terms of their perceptions of the situation and the development of the female gender leadership in the organization context. Furthermore, we believe that the participants, as female leaders, could also provide the experience of their leadership which leads to exploring new aspects of the female gender leadership. However, as Terre Blanche &
Kelly (1999) continue, one of the downsides of the interpretive approaches is that they become hermetically sealed from the world outside the participant’s theatre of activity; they put artificial boundaries around subject’s behaviour. Yet in our case, we are considerably aware of the context, which is mostly the female leaders within organisations, and that we consider it as one of the central points of our thesis.

2.2.3 Scientific approach

“There are two possible outcomes: if the result confirms the hypothesis, then you have made a discovery. If the result is contrary to the hypothesis, then you have made a discovery.” Enrico Fermi

The way of using theory determines the research design and the choice of research approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2003). In order to write a successful thesis, it is fundamental to master the positioning between the theoretical part and the empirical research, hence it is essential to choose the right scientific approach. Bryman and Bell (2005) explain that the theory in the inductive approach is developed after the collection of empirical research in order to understand the data. While the deductive approach uses the knowledge of an author/researcher within a certain field, as well as the theories surrounding the same subject, to establish hypotheses. The empirical data is gathered afterwards to test the hypothesis and look for similarities and dissimilarities in the theory. The deductive approach assumes that it is possible to manage the hypothesis, replicate the study and measure it in a quantitative way (Bryman & Bell, 2005). In this case, researcher uses general assumptions to explain the empirical observations that they collect.

We intend to conduct our study using an adductive approach, which is a blending of the deductive and the inductive approaches (Ejvegård, 1999). The adductive approach or the “golden middle way”, gives the possibility to switch between theory and empirical data as well as the opportunity of developing new theories (Bryman & Bell, 2005). We also intend to collect relevant theoretical material through a literature review that will lead us to the formulation of hypotheses. The theoretical findings will be used afterwards for the analysis of the results.
2.2.4 Qualitative & Quantitative

“The assumption must be that those who can see value only in tradition, or versions of it, deny man's ability to adapt to changing circumstances.” Stephen Bayley

The two fundamental data collection ways are quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The quantitative way is characterised by the use of some kind of measurement where the observations can be transformed to numbers that can be statistically tested to make general assumptions of a population (Holme & Solvang, 2001). The quantitative way reduces the researchers’ subjective interpretations of the results and also facilitate the possibility for the readers own evaluation of the trustworthiness of the study if the research and analyse methods are accurately described (Davidsson, 1997). This is clearly not the main purpose of our thesis as we intend to use the qualitative research which is aimed to give a deeper understanding of the subject of investigation (Holme & Solvang, 2001) and combine it with already established quantitative facts and any other relevant information in the subject of interest that we might access. The qualitative research method implicates that the researcher commences by formulating the objective of the study related to a relevant research subject as well as relevant interview persons. He/she subsequently uses the resulting facts to draw conclusions. (Bryman & Bell, 2005)

On the first hand, we are seeking to generate new theories and hypotheses, and we believe that a qualitative research will give us the possibility to become more experienced with the subject we are interested in. On the other hand, we need to achieve a deep understanding of the issues of female gender leadership and women’s under representation in leading positions. We think that qualitative research has special value for investigating complex and sensitive issues such as our issue, especially that it has a lot to do with documenting and examining people’s views and opinions regarding the development of women in leading positions. We are even willing to trade detail for generalization from quantitative sources and combine it with our own qualitative findings, since qualitative research certainly shines at generating information that is very specific. Of course, there are quantitative studies that are detailed also in that they involve collecting lots of numeric data and statistics. Nonetheless, detailed quantitative researches without any qualitative support tend to limit the analysis.

In this same perspective and in contrast with a pure quantitative approach, a combination between qualitative and quantitative methods is more appropriate for our thesis because it will
Belghali M. Ghali  
Samuel Olichon  
Baltic Business School, Kalmar, Sweden

enhance our ability to understand the participants way of making meanings of their experiences as well as how their understanding influence their behaviour. Moreover, it will improve our understanding of the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions. (Maxwell, 1996)

### 2.3 Data collection

“All information is imperfect. We have to treat it with humility.” Jacob Bronowski

There are obviously many ways to collect data and information in order to reach the targeted goals and to be able to answer all the research questions constructively. We gave great thoughts to determining which tools would allow us to acquire the most appropriate information in order to answer all our enquiries. Given that our main goal is to obtain the unique perceptions of each female in a leading position about her leadership and her role within the organization she is working for. However, any used tools ultimately depend to a great extent on how efficiently we will combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative interviews aim to capture the participant’s experience and his/her individual situation. This information becomes essential for the investigation and therefore very dependent of the source. It is gathered in a way which is as close to the ordinary everyday conversation as possible. (Holme & Solvang, 1991)

#### 2.3.1 Primary & secondary data

“The weaker the data available upon which to base one's conclusion, the greater the precision which should be quoted in order to give the data authenticity.” Norman Ralph Augustine

Data collection process could be divided in two categories; primary and secondary data. Primary data is the information that will constitute the base of a study and is resulting from the researchers own investigation process. With other words, it is resulting from the interviews that are conducted. The key point is that the data one collects is unique to a specific study, and therefore until it is published, no one else has access to it. Secondary data is constituted mainly from articles, books and web sites. It is the information that already exists and has been established by other recognized individuals in the field.
During our data collection process, we will conduct interviews (primary data) and utilize relevant books, articles and websites (secondary data). The purpose of pointing whether the data is primary or secondary is to be able to clearly establish the relation between the source of the information and its relevance to the study. Holme and Solvang (1991) corroborate this by suggesting that the meaning of the information increases proportionally with the increase of knowledge of the participant vis-à-vis his/her situation.

2.3.2 Interviews

As mentioned previously, our aim is to learn about specific number of women leader’s perceptions regarding the under representation of the women in decision making positions. Therefore, the best way of capturing their individual experiences is to use interviews. We use semi-structured interviews as we want to obtain our participants views on female leadership, females in leading position, what it mean for them to be in those positions and whether it influences them or not in the way they implement their leadership styles. The second reason for the use of semi-structured interviews is that the participants do not have the same perception of leadership; therefore even the order of the questions could differ from an interview to another.

Semi-structured interviews is a type of non-standardized interviews, where there is a number of pre-determined questions, and the answers will potentially lead to other improvised questions (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). They are also focused on asking certain questions with the scope for the respondent to express his- herself at length. The purpose with semi-structured interviews is to reinforce the meaning of the given information and to concretize the understanding of the subject on a deeper and more complete level. Through conducting interviews with persons that have a strong knowledge of their subject, the content of the study increases comprehensively (Holme & Solvang, 1991).

At the same time, we need to be free to explore answers in order to allow the emergence of new ideas and even new theories on the topic. In consolidation of our scientific approach, the interview manuals will therefore feature exploratory questions related to our research issues. These manuals will be slightly different from participants to participant since variable proprieties, such as the type of leading positions and the authority levels, will be taken into account.
The interviews will be tape recorded so as to allow us to focus on our respondents words and follow up on any ideas that we judge of major importance. Before conducting interviews, we will let our respondent choose if they want to disclose their identity or proceed in total anonymity. For further information regarding the interviews please check the appendix (chapters 9.1 & 9.2).

**2.3.3 Books, articles & websites**

“After all manner of professors have done their best for us, the place we are to get knowledge is in books. The true university of these days is a collection of books.” Albert Camus

Other data is extracted from books, articles and websites. In order to gain a richer understanding of the historical background of female leadership through different times and periods, we refer to relevant books and articles. The selected books will help us strengthen our knowledge of the subject, and enable us to construct a solid theoretical framework that we could connect to the reality of female leaders in organizations. They will even give us the opportunity to discuss these theories relevance in the modern organization and readjust some of them in the case where they are no longer valid today. Articles and internet sites will mainly provide us with much needed recent and actual information, setting up a good ground for future speculations regarding female leaders in future organizations. Finally, the combination of books, articles and websites as a secondary data will hopefully contribute a great deal to help us come up with new theories, hence make our own mark in this field.

**2.4 Data analysis**

"Common sense is not common but needs to be learnt systematically... A simple analysis can be harder than it looks... All techniques, however sophisticated, should be subordinate to subjective judgement." Chatfield

We reasonably assume that during the collection of data, several questions will emerge. Therefore, we feel that it is logical to follow up on them with added questions to our initially defined interview manuals. Because we believe that data presentation and analysis are two strongly related processes; we even believe that they are simultaneous processes that go hand in hand. This thesis will undoubtedly have the empirical part separated from the analysis part, where we will merge our chosen theories with our field findings. However there will be a
certain amount of pre-analysis already in the data presentation chapter. Since this simultaneous pre-analysis will enable us to discover further relevant data worth collecting and processing. Merriam S.B. (1998) confirms our position by suggesting that analysis is simultaneous with data presentation as it allows the researcher to make adjustments along the way, even to the point of redirecting data collection.

In order to reach the main goal of our thesis, we will compare the theories that we judge relevant to this work, with the empirical data resulting from our study cases. We will afterwards process the parts that we believe are the most significant with the purpose of laying out a good ground for the analysis chapter. The theory chapter combined with empirical and analysis ones, as well as all the comparisons we make, will enable us to conclude with drawing our own inferences and speculate about the future of the female gender leadership within organizations.

2.5 Reliability & validity

“We should never allow ourselves to be bullied by "either-or." There is often the possibility of something better than either of two given alternatives.” Mary Parker Follett

This chapter aims to provide the reader with a sufficient if not an elevated trustworthiness level regarding this thesis. We are aware that a high level of trustworthiness is complex to achieve given the fact that we deal with few actors, however in the same time, these actors provide us with deep information about the subject. In addition, the fact that we will also utilize well established quantitative information either to support or refute interview statement makes us confident to reach a reasonable level or trustworthiness. Moreover and in order to increase this work’s credibility, we will furthermore show a certain degree of criticism toward all the information we obtain during the whole investigation process. We will even compare all the acquired information with already well established facts in our topic.

In order to grasp the meaning of reliability and validity; it is paramount to present a certain number of definitions provided by many qualitative researchers from different perspectives. Patton (2001) states that reliability and validity are two factors that any qualitative researcher should be concerned with while designing, analysing results and judging the quality of the study.
2.5.1 Reliability

“The only lifelong, reliable motivations are those that come from within, and one of the strongest of those is the joy and pride that grow from knowing that you've just done something as well as you can do it.” Lloyd Dobens

Reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials. Without the agreement of independent observers able to replicate research procedures, or the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent measurements, researchers would be unable to satisfactorily draw conclusions, formulate theories, or make claims about the ability to generalize their research.² We ensure our readers that the quantitative data used in this work is highly reliable and sourced from very well established European reports.

Concerning the qualitative parts of this work, in order to ensure their reliability, examination of trustworthiness is essential. Strauss and Corbin (1990) carry on by suggesting that the usual canons of good science require redefinition in order to fit the realities of qualitative research. In addition, Rosengren and Arvidsson (2002) stress the importance of the accuracy of the measuring methods and instruments during data collecting processes, they also emphasize that the researchers should avoid variations and hazardous mistakes at all cost.

Moreover, there is an aspect that we unfortunately cannot afford to ignore and that could consequently damage the reliability our thesis. This aspect is the fact that the participants have different positions and experiences regarding female gender leadership. It is also plausible that some of the respondents are so engaged in their own leadership style that they unconsciously overlook some important weaknesses. It is of course unconceivable to state that something is totally reliable or completely unreliable. We rather believe that it is about a fictional scale where a method has relatively higher or lower reliability.

² http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/relval/pop2a.cfm
2.5.2 Validity

“The only relevant test of the validity of a hypothesis is comparison of prediction with experience” Milton Friedman

Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. While reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study's success at measuring what the researchers set out to measure.³

Validity is mostly about using the right thing at the right time. Within the academic world, validity is about précising in which situation and for which group the results are applicable. This notion is used in the research context when one is examining the information’s relevance from different sources. According to Jacobsen (2002), it is important that the interviewed person is able to provide a clear image of reality. We are therefore very cautious regarding our choices of participants. The respondent featuring in this study are all females connected to different levels of high management which will gives us a satisfying ground for good validity.

2.6 Ethical issues

"We try to choose someone who exhibits academic excellence, commitment to ethical leadership and a commitment to education. He will receive an honorary degree, but that's not something we give to everybody." Ken West

Ethical issues emerge at every phase of an academic work no matter if it is during the information collection, the execution or the composing stages. The first expectation from a researcher is to determine what has been done and reported in the open literature on the subject. This identification obviously results from extensive research in different available databases. Unfortunately, nowadays, we falsely assume that if a certain information or idea does not exist in the World Wide Web, it is likely that this same information or idea hasn’t been reported just yet.

³ http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/relval/pop2b.cfm
In this chapter, we want to assure our readers that we operated within the limits of our resources to define if any idea, conclusion or inference we come up with already exists, and if it does exist in deed, we automatically treat it as secondary data material with the appropriate reference quoting system that we are adopting with all other secondary data references.

Regarding our primary data collection, the information that we obtain is always collected without any preconceived notion of what it should appear. We cannot stress enough that no empirical information will be dropped just because it does not fit the theories we are trying to validate or refute. In case of doubt, we will re-contact the concerned respondent in form of email or telephone call in order to seek further clarification. In addition, we intend to report all our interviews in their most original form since we believe it is absolutely essential to achieve a trustworthy thesis.

Regarding anonymity, as mentioned earlier, we give the opportunity to every respondent to choose whether she wants to convey her identity or proceed under anonymity. However, concerning respondents who favour anonymity, we will distinguish among them by using initials while presenting and discussing the information provided by them.

2.7 Sources & references criticism

“Criticism may not be agreeable, but it is necessary. It fulfils the same function as pain in the human body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.”  Winston Churchill

Source criticism is an academic way emphasizing around how to assess and judge sources and references. However, there aren’t any strict and specific methods on how to proceed in reviewing the utilized sources. It is mainly about creating an objective perception about the whole context and subsequently demonstrate to which extend the sources are valid and reliable.

It is seldom to encounter a source that is specifically adjusted to the proposed research issue of the study. Sources are available for a totally different purpose. This is the reason why we will use many different sources to obtain relevant information with the specific meaning that we are seeking. (Holme & Solvang, 1997)
A comprehensive part of the theory chapter is based on academic literature published by writers, researchers and thinkers. Most of this information is fetched from Kalmar university library and the city library. The rest is either collected from literature that we either bought or accessed from other university libraries, such as the University of Paris, as well as the World Wide Web. This means that the reliability of the information varies from a source to another mainly because, for example, field researchers often demand more concrete evidence for their input than theorists, who often base their contribution on experience, inspiration and hypothesis “brain storming”. Therefore, we have cautiously chosen well established theories within the fields of female leadership and gender in order to strengthen the reliability of the theory part.

In addition, several books used in this thesis are originally published in Swedish and then translated to English either by editing companies or by us. Consequently, there is a risk of failing to reach total word accuracy that could lead to minor meaning deficiencies in the English counterpart words.

Moreover, this study aim to examine the situation of the woman in the Swedish, French and even European organizations, therefore, some literature from American or other origins could under these circumstances pose a threat to the validity of the thesis, because of the different perceptions of the female gender leadership in different continents and non-European cultures.

Finally, we have conducted semi structured interviews with subtle awareness of the disadvantages of this method. The participants could be led to different orientations resulting in focusing in different parts from an interview to another. However, we do not perceive this issue as a total disadvantage since it also gives our work the chance to be more polyvalent and thus cover a wider area of the studied topic.
3. Theory & statistical facts

This chapter provides the reader with a selection of theoretical concepts and statistical facts used in this thesis, starting with a description of the chosen theories. These theories are relevant in order for us to reach a deeper understanding about women in or aspiring to be in top positions, and their situation in organizations, whereas the statistical evidence is there to support some of the theories and refute others. This part of our work is laying a solid ground to support the analysis and discussion that follows.

3.1 Choice of theories

“There are two primary choices in life; to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them.” Denis Waitley

By way of introduction, we define leadership and its connection to the female gender before introducing the definitions of sex and gender and their importance for our thesis. We then bring in the phenomenon of the glass ceiling, it is about women and their conditions within organizations, and how these structural conditions are forming an invisible barrier that is hindering their opportunities to reach high responsibility positions.

Another relevant approach to be found in this chapter is the focus on the woman as an individual and in situations. This approach is not included in the glass ceiling but is ultimately connected to it in a way that the glass ceiling theory is composed from different aspects that are influencing the woman’s career development. The individual part of this approach concentrates merely on the woman as an individual and collects its arguments from her personality characteristics. On the other hand, the situation part focuses on the organizational structures and their influence on the advancement of women from power and opportunity angles.

Afterwards, we proceed with the other major “visible” barriers that are slowing and /or preventing women from accessing decision making positions such as discrimination, family
duties and the fair access to promotions. We then emphasize around the important of networks and networking before concluding with the introduction of the elite theory and its relation the outcome of gender diversification within modern organizations.

3.2 Leadership & female leadership

"All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership." John Kenneth Galbraith

A lot has been written about leadership; still scholars cannot concur completely on which roles a leader could adapt, even in cases where the features of the roles are comparable. Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to engage and satisfy the motives of followers in order to realize goals mutually held by both leaders and followers (Burns, 1978)

4 http://www.cartoonstock.com/newscartoons/cartoonists/jsi/lowres/jsin335l.jpg
The subject of leadership is ambiguous and there is not an ultimate theory of leadership. It is complex to define leadership qualities that directly can be associated with effective leadership (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2005). According to R. M. Cyert (1990), the definition of leadership congregates two main elements: Firstly, the leader must determine a vision and organizational goal. The leader should heavily influence the process of determining the goals of the organization. The leader needs to make sure that the organization of each unit must comply with the organization’s overall corporation because he/she cannot tolerate conflicting goals in the organization. Secondly, a leader must control the allocation of the attention focus of the followers in the organization. (Cyert, 1990) He emphasizes on the role of the leader vis-à-vis the follower by stressing that a leader must be able to modify the behavior of his/her followers in the organization. Yukl & Lepsinger (2005) agree with Cyert when they underline the difference between leadership and the position as a leader. The position is chosen for the person while leadership is how to manage in this precise position. They continue by stating that the number one issue for a leader is to transform the organizational visions and goals into tangible results with help from employees. (Yukl & Lepsinger, 2005)

3.2.2 On leadership styles

Leadership styles can be defined as a constant pattern of behaviour applied by the leader for his/her followers in the direction he wants. Indeed, the leadership style is a way for the leader to validate his vision among his followers and motivate them to achieve a specific goal. A leader has several styles of leadership at his disposal depending of the situations he/she encounters according to society values, the culture of organizations, nature of the task and the characteristics of followers (Yamam, 2004). The managerial grid of Blake and Mouton is based on two behavioural dimensions; we can identify them as the two major types of leadership that are addressed as recurrent and used as a basis for other leadership styles: "task-oriented" and "people-oriented". The “task oriented” leadership concerns the degree to which a leader emphasizes concrete objectives, organizational efficiency and high productivity when deciding how best to accomplish a task. The “people-oriented” means the degree to which a leader considers the needs of team members, their interests, and areas of personal development when deciding how best to accomplish a task.

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5 http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_73.htm
Using several recent researches on leadership styles, we targeted three essential points. There is no best or more effective style of leadership; the most effective style depends on the interaction between leader, followers and the situation. The second point resides in that no managerial leader has a single style; leaders adapt their style to the situation. Although they may have a typical style, today’s complexity of the business world make it unlikely for them to adopt one single style on a regular basis since, once again, it is heavily related the each situation. The third and final point is a combination between the facts that leadership styles can be learned; leaders are not born with a certain style, and on the other hand several styles can be equally effective in a specific situation (Moore & Vianello, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, we can state that there is not a leadership style that fits all situations; we could instead argue that different leadership styles are appropriate in different situations, and even assume that numerous styles of leadership can respond effectively to the same situation. The modern leader must therefore possess several leadership styles in his/her “repertoire” to fit the organization that is constantly changing, he/she must also be able to understand and influence all followers. On the other hand, most effective leaders, in situations where they are best monitored by their followers, practice a leadership style that focuses on both "task-oriented" and "people-oriented" (Albanese, 1981).

In recent decades, the situations faced by leaders are highly evolved and increasingly complicated, especially with the globalization that has made organizations more complex and competitive, in addition to the rapid development of technologies and teams being increasingly multicultural (Kanter, 1977). Nowadays, the “great man” leadership style no longer works efficiently. The effective leadership style is rather a leader who has similar qualities of a good instructor rather than an autocratic leader. In other words, organizations today are seeking contemporary leaders who have the ability to guide and encourage their teams efficiently (Eagly, 2007). This requires that the leader has a high competence in relation to communication, collaboration and listening skills. However, he/she must have the ability to motivate employees to give their best and be creative. A leader must also set an example in terms of behaviour and ethics, so that followers perceive him/her as a role model. A leader must know how to create and present a clear and accurate picture of the values and goals of an organization so that it can be shared by the entire team.
3.2.3 Women Leaders and female leadership

“Woman is opaque in her very being; she stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endued with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as self and as other, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences.” Simone de Beauvoir

To study the advantages and disadvantage of a female leader compared to a male leader, it is interesting to make a link with the stereotypes between the two sexes. Compared to the established stereotype, we can regard the man as someone ambitious, active, competitive, logical, risk-taking and productive. All values refer to the term “manager” while the woman is more oriented around the social values such as communication, cooperation, fairness, motivation, flexibility, emotional and compassionate (Sanchez-Apellaniz, 1997). Through these stereotypes, we can conclude that the man has better skills for a manager than the woman; however that does not mean that men are better leaders than women (Powell & Graves, 2003). It is necessary to make a distinction between a manager and a leader because there are usually confusions around the two words. A manager does not have to be a leader, as well as a leader does not need to have a function of manager within an organization. In other words, effective leaders are individuals who have the ability to influence their followers in their own way, but that have not necessarily the legitimate authority to do so, while managers are legitimized by the authority.

On the other hand, the female stereotype has many links correlated with the characteristics of an efficient modern leader. Indeed, the woman has the best skills to become a good leader through her communication, collaboration, flexibility and motivating skills. In other words, the statement of the man having better abilities to be manager and the woman being more competent to be a good leader is not completely false.

Furthermore, the research about male and female leaders can be divided in two parts. The first argues that there are no significant divergences between women and men leadership style wise. Scholars adopting this point of view rely heavily on quantitative studies. The other part argues that there is a difference between male and female leaders and therefore men and women are to be classified in different leadership styles (Alvesson & Due Billing, 1999). According to them, female leaders are seen as more adaptable, empathic and perceptive than men leaders. Nevertheless and generally speaking, autonomy and result oriented are two
The success of female leaders is closely linked to the context where they are acting. Indeed, according to the results of a study conducted by Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky (1992), the context has a strong influence on their success depending on whether the environment is male-dominated or women-dominated:

- Women were less effective than men to the extent that leadership positions were male-dominated.
- Women were less effective relative to men as the proportion of male subordinates increased.
- Women were less effective relative to men the greater the proportion of men among the raters of leader effectiveness.
- Women were substantially less effective than men in military organizations, a traditionally masculine environment, but modestly more effective than men in educational, governmental, and social service organizations.
- Women fared particularly well in effectiveness, relative to men, in middle-level leadership positions, as opposed to line or supervisory positions.6

### 3.3 Sex & Gender

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance." Kofi Annan

Throughout this thesis, the gender and gender relations notions will be recurrent. Because of this, we thought that it is appropriate to first define them and then differentiate them from the notions surrounding sex and sex relations, as it is a common mistake to assume that the two words are synonyms, especially in the context of our thesis. Moreover, we will introduce and

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explain the notions of homosociality and heterosociality as they are important in matters of describing both male and female organizational behaviour, especially regarding the issues of glass ceiling and networking.

### 3.3.1 Understanding gender & gender relations

According to the World Health Organization, sex refers to biological differences; chromosomes, hormonal profiles and internal and external sex organs, while gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture defines as masculine or feminine. Therefore while an individual’s sex as male or female is a biological fact that is the same in any culture, what that sex means in terms of one’s gender role as a man or a woman in society can be quite different cross culturally. In sociological terms gender role refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes. What it means to be a real man in any culture requires male sex plus what our various cultures define as masculine characteristics and behaviours; likewise a real woman needs female sex and feminine characteristics.

Researchers in the country of Sweden started to utilize the notion gender already in the beginning of the 80’s, and today the concept is used to underline its analytic side. The notion has been mainly promoted by established professor Yvonne Hirdman in 1988, as she states that men and women do not choose their respective roles freely. Instead, every human being is born and growing up in a gender system that has already defined what is masculine and feminine. She even chose to implement extreme comparisons, invoking a type of apartheid regime that is assigning women and men to different places, functions and proprieties.

Within organizations, relations between colleagues, work groups and/or workplaces could be defined as gender relations. One could assume that there are certain rules that guide these relations and it is not socially permitted to act outside the regulations. Human beings are steered by social structures that have been gradually implemented in their behaviour patterns as they were growing up to become socially aware adults. These social structures provide them with opportunities and consequences. According to R.W. Connell (2003), professor from the University of Sydney and a notorious researcher in the gender field, gender relations exist because we, as individuals and communities, desire to maintain them. The main reason

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8 [http://www.jamstaldhet.nu/jmst/maktkon/hirdman/hirdman.htm](http://www.jamstaldhet.nu/jmst/maktkon/hirdman/hirdman.htm)
is that it is essential for an organization to create and sustain its social sincerity. In addition, the social structures would not last if they are not maintained. Therefore it is absolutely paramount for the well being of an organization to preserve positive gender relations between its employees.

### 3.3.2 Homosociality & heterosociality

Homosociality describes same-sex relationships that are not of a romantic and/or sexual nature. For example, a heterosexual male who prefers to socialize with men may be considered a homosocial heterosexual. In other words, homosociality implies neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality\(^9\). Heterosociality is the opposite of homosociality and describes opposite sex relationships of nonsexual nature.

The homosocial theory has been first introduced by researcher Jean Lipman Blumen, where he explains the notions of homosociality and heterosociality. These notions can be used to describe the invisible structures within an organization (Lipman Blumen, 1996). According to Lipman Blumen, men are controlling the resources in the society and in social institutions, which lead to men identifying themselves with other men, resulting in men choosing men in the recruiting process. This behaviour can be branded as homosocial and means that men as a group tend to protect themselves. As a matter of fact, even women tend to identify themselves with men, hence heterosocial teamwork. He explains that this phenomenon exists because there is a power balance between men and women in the society and within organizations. In deed, women’s heterosocial teamwork is built on this power balance, enhancing their tendency to identify themselves with other men and distancing themselves as much as possible from women within the organization. (Lipman Blumen, 1996)

According to Wahl (2000), homosociality within the organization bares negative consequences for women such as finding themselves with much lesser opportunities than men. Moreover, women are often expected to act in a heterosocial way in their workplace, meaning that they are in deed socially oriented to men rather than women. It could be explained by the majority of women under valuing attributes that are professionally perceived as feminine.

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3.4 The glass ceiling phenomenon

3.4.1 Definitions

“Women whose math and physical science skills are marginal would choose to go into another school, whereas the women who are really strong in those areas are very confident and know they can compete, ... An awful lot of the glass ceiling is because women choose to stay away from the fields where they could excel. I think sometimes they might feel like they're going to fail and they don't want to set themselves up for that.” Walter Johnson

One of the main goals of this work is to determine some of the major reasons why women are so underrepresented in modern organizations. The glass ceiling theory that was developed by women in the American workforce in an article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in the mid 80’s, is one to take into account since it describes a very complex phenomenon that many researchers stagnated or even failed to describe accurately during the last couple of decades.

The term glass ceiling as it is illustrated in the figure below refers to situations where the advancement of a qualified person within the hierarchy of an organization is halted at a particular level because of some form of discrimination, most commonly sexism or racism. This situation is referred to as a "ceiling" as there is a limitation blocking upward advancement, and "glass" (transparent) because the limitation is not immediately apparent and is normally an unwritten and unofficial policy. The "glass ceiling" is distinguished from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience requirements.

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10 Breaking through the glass ceiling: Women in management, International Labour Office, Geneva
11 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glass_ceiling
Female careerists could climb the stairs of a given organization as long as they are perceived as non-threatening in matters of power and concurrence. However, they could often be hindered by invisible and indirect structures (Wahl, 2003). These structures are the main components of what Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt branded as the glass ceiling. Furthermore, women who manage to continue to climb through the invisible structures and obstacles will often experience additional pressures than their male counterparts, because they have to adjust furthermore to the norms of the organization’s culture.

The organization’s culture contributes a great deal in setting up the glass ceiling’s level. One could assume that this level varies from a given organization to another. But many researches indicate that the glass ceiling often exists at a much lower level than first thought. Muhonen (1999) suggests that the glass ceiling level could be very low, so low that one could say that women’s problem is the “sticky floor”

The sticky floor is another business expression that relates to the factors which keep women in low level, non-managerial and prevent them from seeking or gaining promotion or career development. This term may refer to barriers to the advancement of women such as family commitments, attitudes, stereotyping, and organizational structures but has also been used to

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focus on circumstances where women are promoted but do not receive commensurate wage rises.\textsuperscript{13}

One should acknowledge however, that there are women who deny the existence of the “glass ceiling”. These females believe that there is a sticky floor rather than a glass ceiling. They claim that if a woman is talented, ambitious and driven, she could achieve anything she wishes to. It is up to each individual to take the next step to further their career whether one is male or female, meaning that the advancement of women within organizations becomes a question of personal choices sooner than the influence of a heavily male concentrated business world. We could hardly agree with this assessment, this is why we will bring it up during our interviews in order to weigh up our respondents’ opinions and cross examine them with the reality in modern organizations.

3.4.2 The European Woman & the glass ceiling

“I don't think it is a glass ceiling. I think it is a barrier you have to break through, which I think every aspiring individual has to face in some way. It is just this very awkward odd times.” Kathy Sherbrooke

In his article “Breaking the glass ceiling: the effects of sex ratios and work-life programs on female leadership at the top”, George F. Dreher demonstrate that women in management are able to advance just so far in corporate hierarchies before encountering a “glass ceiling” that prevents or reduce the likelihood of reaching top management or executive status. The results of his study support the blending of a social contact theory perspective and a strategic human resource management perspective when explaining the glass ceiling phenomenon, and have important implications for managing human resources and individual careers.\textsuperscript{14}

The glass ceiling phenomenon will be important in our study since it is usually seen as relevant to women being recruited into senior management and executive levels. There is however other factors that operates to affect women’s career progression at much earlier stages of their lives. We will deliberately disregard them in this chapter in order to enhance the effect of the glass ceiling phenomenon and bring it up extensively in the empirical part.

\textsuperscript{13} http://dictionary.bnet.com/definition/sticky+floor.html
\textsuperscript{14} George F. Dreher, Breaking the glass ceiling: the effects of sex ratios and work-life programs on female leadership at the top, Volume 56, 2003
The report, Women and men in decision-making 2007 – analysis of the situation and trends by European commissioner Vladimir Spidla, shows that women are highly under-represented in economic decision-making. Across Europe, women account for an average over 44% of all workers but just 32% of those considered as heads of businesses (chief executives, directors and managers of small businesses). The under-representation of women at the top level is heightened in big business where men account for nearly 90% of the board members in leading companies a figure which has barely improved in recent years, as the share of women in top positions in the E.U. only grew by less than 2% in average in the last six years.

From the graph below, we could further notice that the Scandinavian countries and France are doing better than average compared with countries such as Italy and Portugal, all registering less than 5% women in managerial positions.

However, regarding the share of women members of the highest decision making body of the largest companies in each country between 2003 and 2007, the following graph underlines the striking gap between Sweden (2nd) and France (22nd) with more than 12% difference.

The case of leading country Norway is particularly interesting since it can be seen that the proportion of female board members has increased dramatically in a relatively short period. According to Vladimir Spidla, in 2002 the government required that all state owned companies should have at least 40% women board members within one year, and even

\[16\text{Ibid}\]
\[17\text{Ibid}\]
threatened to impose the same regulation on private companies if they failed to improve female representation to satisfactory levels through voluntary measures by mid 2005.

It is said that the majority of E.U. governments support the idea that it is in the interest of their respective economies to have diversified leaders in all types of corporations. There are of course clear advantages of having a diverse workforce at all corporate levels including the higher management ones. More mixed groups are more likely to cover extra angles and enhance the success of organizations both internally and externally. However, extreme measures such as the Norwegian case could prove to be as negative as the current under representation of women in decision making positions. Imposing such a measure means automatically that quotas will take place, and in some cases, undeserving females will be introduced in positions mostly, or even worse, solely based on their gender rather than their credentials or qualifications.

We are using the “Women and men in decision-making” report to translate the glass ceiling phenomenon’s repercussions in European countries into numbers, and thus make it more concrete to grasp for our readers. In deed, the three graphs introduced above clearly illustrate the demeaning situation of the woman in our so acclaimed democratic European societies. Nevertheless, the most worrying figure is certainly the first graph that clearly shows an almost stagnating progress, especially if one considers than more than half of university graduates in Europe are females. Their success is evidently not converted to the workplace, where there remains a significant gender imbalance in positions of responsibility.

This leads us to believe that the glass ceiling phenomenon could be constituted from all-round and complex barriers preventing women from reaching top level positions. After a comprehensive research, we identified some of those barriers that we will further develop in the analysis part. The first acknowledged barrier is obviously that men continue to prevail in top positions, and the gender balance transition would at least take a generation or two to reach absolute equilibrium in the most developed European countries such as France and Sweden. Secondly, women are often excluded from unofficial networks and channels of communication, in addition to the lack of female mentoring and/or female role models. Since the challenges facing female executives differ from those facing their male equals, role models who demonstrate their special achievements in meeting these demands could add significantly to the confidence and willingness of other women to perform better. The third
obstacle within the glass ceiling is the non-continuous availability of the woman throughout her carrier due to her family responsibilities such as maternity leaves.

Conversely, one shouldn’t totally ignore all the recent actions taken by companies to promote gender equality in the business world and in the same time, take a hard shot at the glass ceiling in order to “crack it”. According to the same report and regarding the previously mentioned barriers, the most noticeable and recent actions are the case of Vattenfall in Sweden that offers its employees, including the high management, one of the best parental leave packages in the market. IBM Europe is also organising top management change leadership and diversity training for leaders and managers in order to encourage them to act as role models. A more moderate case than the Norwegian one is witnessed in Italy, where public employers must draw up a three year positive action plan and are obliged to justify hiring a male applicant if an equally qualified woman applied for the same job.

3.5 Focus on the “Top” woman as an Individual & in situations

“There's a certain commitment females make in regard to their family that their male counterparts don't make as much. Some find striking balance in a leadership position tough to do.” Nancy Adams

There are many reasons that explain the fact that there are few women in top positions. It is said that family responsibilities is a strong contender amongst them, resulting in many females choosing to take care of their families ahead of their careers. It is also said that women are genetically predisposed to favour their families more than professional success. There are even scientific researches that demonstrate that there are differences in the brain of the man and the women that contribute to the fact that both sexes communicate differently and are efficient in different things. However, Muhonen (1999) divided the reasons resulting of such an obvious under-representation of the female gender in leading positions into two major categories. The first one is individual focused and the second one emphasizes around the woman in situations within the organization or even the society. It is relevant to study the two perspectives especially since Muhonen’s input is complementary to the glass ceiling phenomenon. The invisible ceiling often impedes women from reaching top positions more because of the structures’ influence on the woman rather that her own proprieties.
3.5.1 Individual related

"Men make the mistake of thinking that because women can't see the sense in violence, they must be passive creatures. It's just not true. In one important way, at least, men are the passive sex. Given a choice, they will always opt for the status quo. They hate change of any kind, and they fight against it constantly. On the other hand, what women want is stability, which when you stop to think about it is a very different animal.” Eric Lustbader

Female leaders’ traits of personality are interesting, since one could assume that these proprieties contribute to their career development (Muhonen, 1999). In a conference held and filmed in Rutgers University, New Jersey\(^\text{18}\), established anthropologist Helen Fisher, underlines the difference between the male and female gender traits and enumerate the different advantages of the female individual characteristics, as she believes they will be much needed in the work market, especially in decision making positions. She is convinced that communication skills come first and will benefit women in the new knowledge economy. According to her, women are better at reading emotions in faces and deciphering postures, gestures and voice inflections. These people skills are essential in decision making positions.

Her ideas are opposing Muhonen’s clarification of the reasons why women are so under-represented in top management. Muhonen suggests that the individual characteristics that are directly related to women’s career development are generally characteristics that are perceived as masculine. (Muhonen, 1999) For a woman to succeed in a leading position, she should usually get rid of the characteristics that do not meet the organization’s culture. In Fisher’s opinion, this statement will not be relevant within future organizations. While today many people regard men's linear thinking as the best business model, Fisher notes that there is a growing demand of web thinking, since the business world is also becoming more complex. In relation to that, female characteristics such as intuition, imagination, the ability for multitasking and tolerance of ambiguity will be very contributing to future organizations’ success, and the demand for these skills will grow as global trade increases.\(^\text{19}\)

The individual related approach could be criticized because it only focuses on the woman as an individual and ignore the environment (organization, society) influences on her.

\(^{18}\) http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/16
\(^{19}\) http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0DTI/is_11_27/ai_57475902
Nonetheless, it is essential to examine this angle since several quantitative studies demonstrate that women seldom plan their career in a longsighted future. Some researchers blame it on the fact that women does not expect major career advancements, or that they don’t have enough professional self-confidence to achieve them. However, Helen Fisher sees matters differently and mentions the drive to nurture as the main obstacle that could easily be reversed as a powerful asset. This nurturing instinct includes women's need to balance work and family and could be applied in the business life in terms of exploiting it in building long-term client relationships that require networking and nurturing friendships. Although she believes these skill areas are highly developed in most women, she acknowledges that not all women possess them, therefore, she hopes that by understanding these talents, women can recategorize perceived weaknesses as strengths. The individual characteristics will allow women to change their current situation in the business world.

Finally, the last component of the individual related approach is the work experience. Career development proves to be negative for women that experience discontinuous spells during their career time. Women tend to have many interruptions during their careers due to maternity leaves. Thus, this factor is considered to be a major reason behind the underrepresentation of women in leading positions. However, Muhonen refute this theory and stress that it has been demonstrated that the majority of females do not take especially long leaves when they have children (Muhonen, 1999) Wahl agrees with Muhonen’s refutation and when she writes that the majority believe that the hindered women choose to prioritize their families over their careers. A comprehensive number of these women feel that it is rather impossible to combine a highly successful career with a fulfilling family life and therefore think that the first alternative is not worth it.

3.5.2 Situation and structure related

“People often resist change for reasons that make good sense to them, even if those reasons don't correspond to organizational goals. So it is crucial to recognize, reward, and celebrate accomplishments.” Rosabeth Moss Kanter

The situation related approach emphasize mostly around the composition of the organizations’ structures. This approach includes the woman’s situation at home and in the organization, since her situation at work and at home could not be taken into account separately because
they are directly related. (Wahl, 2003) In order to explain why women are so underrepresented in leading positions, this approach focuses more on the role of the structures in the organizations and the society. Many researchers that are adopting the situation related concept, such as George F. Dreher (chapter 3.5.2) in his article “Breaking the glass ceiling”, refer to Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s (1977) social contact and opportunity structures theories as a frame of reference in their studies. Kanter advocates in “Men and women of the corporation” that the nature of work defines a human being, and therefore women generally access positions with little opportunities of advancement and even smaller amount of power. One could argue that this statement was issued more than three decades ago; however, it is almost reprehensible that it is still very up to date.

Within these theories, one could identify two types of people; individuals with high and low ambition levels. Persons with little opportunities to achieve advancement start to miss out on the ambition to climb the virtual stairs of the organization’s hierarchy, and thus automatically repulse any types of responsibilities or influences within their organisations; they even tend to be critical of the higher hierarchy. Moreover, this category of people is likely to suffer from low self esteem as well. In contrast, people that have access to larger opportunities have high ambition and high self esteem, they also tend to believe in their skills and competences. Furthermore, these individuals are often very engaged in their organisations, and work constitutes an important part of their lives. Typical traits of personality of people belonging to this category are that they are power and competition driven; besides, they are continuously striving for career advancement. In this respect, Kanter is associating this category of people to men while she connects the group with little opportunities to women.

The last issue attached to the situation related approach, that we would like to shed the light on, is the issue of vertical and horizontal career advancement. According to Oxford English Dictionary, career is a term defined as an individual's course or progress through life or a distinct portion of life. It usually is considered to refer to remunerative work and sometimes also formal education\(^{20}\). The general nuance here is that career advancement must not automatically mean that it is a vertical progression; it may as well be fulfilling to ensure a horizontal career expansion, for example changes of positions with the same amount of power and responsibilities within the same organization (internal switches), or accessing the same position in another organization (external switches). Young leaders often perceive the career advancement.

as a stairway that one is supposed to climb. However, there are horizontal stairways as well, and a leading position should also be available to an individual that has been advancing horizontally within an organization.

The connection between vertical and horizontal career advancements to women and leading positions resides in the fact that the work market is segregated both horizontally and vertically. (Muhonen, 1999) Horizontal segregation is the obvious and unfair repartition of men and women in different sectors. The majority of men are involved in private sectors, which means that the majority of women continue to work in the traditional “women’s work areas” within public sectors. In the mean time, Muhonen (1999) suggests that vertical segregating concerns the unfair repartition of women and men in higher positions.

Segregation related to high responsibility positions has been at the heart of debates about gender inequality. In the article “Explaining Gender Segregation”, issued by the British Journal of Sociology, Bishop Robert M. Blackburn suggests that the subject raises significant questions of social justice, of the efficient utilization of human resources, and of wider social aspects of work and family life. A new definition of vertical segregation was introduced, which provides a measure of occupational gender inequality; horizontal segregation is redefined as a dimension perpendicular to the vertical, and so measures difference without inequality. The research challenged the popular assumption that segregation always represents a form of inequality. Instead they argue that it is crucial to understand the context in which the gendering of occupations occurs with particular attention to indicators of reward, status and power that are associated with a particular position. Bringing Blackburn’s vision regarding vertical and horizontal segregation in the mix and adding it to Muhonen’s clarifications strengthens the importance of the situation related approach. Hence, we intend to focus on this angle while conducting our interviews in order to obtain further information about it and cross examine it with Blackburn’s new definitions.

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22 Ibid
3.6 Focus on the visible obstacles hindering the “top” woman

“Every company has two organizational structures: The formal one is written on the charts; the other is the everyday relationship of the men and women in the organization.” Harold S. Geneen

There is no typical linear career path or single career trend attributable to women. The business world is continuously changing and the trends are changing with it. Today Women are more present in leading positions in the service sector. The reason behind that is that women tend to be involved in industries where they have had direct experience, mostly in traditional fields. This explains the lack of women in high responsibility positions in non-traditional fields such as manufacturing (Larkin, 1993). Nonetheless, this is slowly changing and by no means does this mean that the changes are consistent. Instead, women have now reached satisfactory numbers in low and middle management in organizations regardless of which domain they operate in (chapter 3.4.2). Still we cannot assume that a specific market affects all of them similarly and that all women succeed or fail as an undifferentiated unit. However, even if the hindering factors related to each woman individually play a very important role in slowing or even preventing her from reaching top positions, (chapter 3.5.1) there are other visible barriers that are affecting women as a gender group.

Throughout this thesis, mention is made of assumptions and stereotypes about ambitious women that are seeking to be more included in high management positions. These assumptions include women having an affinity for certain domains of work, which explains their overrepresentation in some and under representation in others. The second one is that women, particularly those with children, are not as committed to their work practice as men. And finally, the false assumption that there are comprehensive numbers of women leaving their work earlier than men due to different reasons. However, we consider that all of these stereotyped assumptions as false. Instead, we will disregard any stereotyping in this chapter, and will merely focus on some of the visible gender related barriers that are slowing and hindering women from reaching high responsibility positions within organizations, namely discrimination, family responsibilities and self confidence.
3.6.1 Gender segregation & discrimination

“The failure of women to have reached positions of leadership has been due in large part to social and professional discrimination.” Rosalyn S. Yalow

Gender segregation has always existed from a work distribution point of view between men and women; although the perception of what is considered as male or female domain has changed with different periods of time. (Muhonen, 1999) Gender segregation has been at the heart of debates about gender inequality. High levels of segregation have been considered to be a significant factor in the difference between the wages of women and men, to impose constraints on careers, and generally to be at the root of gender inequalities (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Wahl continues by stating that work tasks in the country of Sweden are not divided fairly since one still find that women are heavily represented within the health sector and in the administration. The approximate estimation of female representation within these sectors is approaching 90 percent, while men are enjoying most of the top positions within the private sector. (Wahl, 2003)

23 http://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/h/high_achievers.asp
As for discrimination, there may be significant discrimination at all levels within organizations, especially when one approaches top management. However, while in recent years, discrimination decreased in lower and middle management levels as opposed to top management, study after study confirms women are not getting equal treatment in firms. Comprehensive numbers of women in middle and high management report discrimination difficulties. Many of them believe they faced gender discrimination when dealing with their male counterparts and bosses. Moreover, increase in working women hasn’t meant equal treatment, although feminism, civil rights and the progressive attitude of the last decade have helped improve sensitivity to gender issues, the numbers still show that we haven't changed as much as we think we have.

One can consider gender segregation and discrimination obstacles as the starting point of all barriers for women in their career and in its evolution, including industrialized countries of the European Union that are supposedly democratic. In this case, assuming that these barriers are ground zero for women’s career development within organizations, we tried to go back to the roots of the problem. And one plausible explanation that we support is the fact that in business schools and universities, that are the cradle of future corporate men and women, and where most of the future “board rooms” members are trained today, the male model of business is still being taught by the vast majority of professors. Examples of women entrepreneurs or in high responsibility positions are still left out of textbooks, and rarely is a business female used as an example or case study. Neither male nor female students are learning about the natural skills and talents women are using to be successful in the business world today. Unfortunately, without some very strong initiatives on the part of educators, the situation will remain the same for a long time. (Moore, Dorothy, Buttner, 1997)

Sweden is known for being one of the most egalitarian countries in the world and mainly on the issue on gender equality at work. Sweden was the precursor on the subject in matters of equal access for men and women to individuality through autonomy. The establishment of many actions by the Government of Sweden has enabled the country to be the first one in the world with the smallest gender gap. On the other hand, France is ranked at the 70th place. 24

With regard to the organizations, many of them continue to operate normally, knowing they operate informally discriminatory policies against women.

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3.6.2 Traditional view of women

“The modern woman is the curse of the universe. A disaster, that’s what. She thinks that before her arrival on the scene no woman ever did anything worthwhile before, no woman was ever liberated until her time, no woman really ever amounted to anything.” Adela Rogers St. Johns

Another important barrier faced by women in their career is the combination of work and family and domestic responsibilities. Many companies do not want to offer senior positions to women because they have a family orientation (maternity, child-rearing, organising family life, domestic tasks). Even if the woman has no children or she has a husband who takes care of the domestics responsibilities, she is still penalized because of the general perception. Once the opportunity of advancement comes, the hierarchy often do not find it compatible to have a position of high responsibility and combine it successfully with family obligations (Smith, 2002; Tharenou, 1999).

In recent decades, there has been a change in behaviour; men participate more frequently in the family duties to relieve women of this workload. However, tasks are still unevenly distributed, the woman devotes on average twice as much time as men to family and domestic tasks with 4 hours and 29 minutes per day (Exhibit - Eurosat), with Swedish women (+73 minutes) registering better figures than their French counterparts (+128 minutes) in the matter of the difference between men and women in domestic tasking, including child care and food preparing. Furthermore, we assume that as long as women have as high burden of domestic work, they cannot really progress within organizations and especially not access positions of responsibility which usually require high availability and geographical mobility.
However in the mid 90’s, there has been a very discussed question in Sweden about whether if the state should support working mothers hiring external help to take care of their family household or not. Economist Ann-Mari Pålsson started this debate in 1994, and her main arguments were that this initiative could be tax remunerated and obviously will offer more job opportunities. But most importantly according to her, it will encourage gender equality within firms and decrease black market work, not to mention an evident increase of the private sector. A recent opinion survey showed that more than 60 percent of women between 30 and 49 of age are ready to hire extra personal to help them with their household if it becomes tax remunerated. More than 50 percent of the population is supporting the initiative while the most negative group is men over 50 years of age. The new Swedish government is keen to follow the steps of its Finnish equivalent who successfully adopted this initiative in 2004, by submitting a detailed proposition of the project in 2008.

On the other hand, companies consider that the period during which an individual is likely to achieve his/her maximum career advancement resides somewhere between 30 and 40 years. Unfortunately, this period coincides with the period when the majority of women gives birth to their children and, therefore, could not dedicate 100 percent of their work time to their

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26 http://www.bang.a.se/klass/pig_text.html
27 http://www.yelah.net/yelah/
28 http://www.kommunal.se
organization. For example, 96 percent of women graduates from France’s elites Business School estimated that having a child is or is perceived as an obstacle for employers29.

3.6.3 Self confidence

“A lot of women are smart and capable. We have to give them opportunities so that they know they can succeed. It's about self-esteem. It's important for women to be confident.” John Franklin

The concept of self confidence corresponds to the self-insurance in personal value and ability to succeed. Self-confidence is a combination of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Neill, 2005). As a general rule, women have lower self esteem than men, which prevents them from reaching their full potential. The problem of self esteem for women usually starts from an early age at school and later at university. In fact, many studies have shown that female students had a lot of problems of self esteem during the course of their schooling compared to men. One of the studies points out that 30% of women are continuously questioning their ability to handle their work while only 15% of men do so. On the other hand, only 30% of women think of themselves as outspoken in classes, in contrast, 57% of men think otherwise. In addition, the same study shows that 33% of women opposed to only 9% of men admit their fears of making a mistake or show any kind of shortcomings. However, this apparent lack of self-esteem of

30 http://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/h/high_achievers.asp
female students is in contradiction with their academic performances because women score slightly better grades at school and university level. The study also indicates that men’s self confidence slightly increases during the university period, while the women's self confidence declines significantly31.

This decrease in self confidence could be a plausible explanation to the fact that less women graduates apply for high responsibility positions from the start of their professional careers. Even though they have the same capabilities and skills to succeed as their male colleagues, they tend to “over” question their capacities and often feel under qualified for the position, whereas less skilled male students would postulate without too many second thoughts. Moreover, throughout their careers, women tend to underestimate what impedes the development of their careers. This becomes even more accentuated in cases of women working in male dominated sectors, they start having lower prospects of success (Bridges, 1987).

In addition, women face many obstacles during their careers due to the inequality between men and women and must therefore have a strong self esteem and confidence to overcome all these barriers or at least most of them. Unfortunately, many women have low self-esteem and become discouraged in facing and dealing with all the visible and invisible barriers they encounter.

The lack of self confidence of women also has repercussions on their performance in their work. Many research projects have shown that self-confidence is a major psychological factor affecting the performance of the individual (Edwards & Hardy, 1996). Indeed, the impacts on the performances are considerable, if an individual expects to fail a task; he/she obviously has a greater chance to do so, and the unfortunate truth is that this behaviour becomes a vicious cycle which cause the effect that the person no longer trust on her skills.

3.6.4 Access to promotions

“Our struggle today is not to have a female Einstein get appointed as a manager. It is for a woman schlemiel to get as quickly promoted as a male schlemiel.” Bella Abzug

It is also relevant to consider the difficulty for women to have opportunities for promotion as a “visible” obstacle in their careers. It is necessary to achieve gender equality in the promotion process to have significantly more women accessing positions of high responsibility. While in recent times, more and more women are reaching positions in low and middle management, there are only few women accessing positions in top management. It can be seen that even in female dominated professions, such as the service sector, men on average receive more frequent work promotions that women with comparable experience (Kanter, 1975; Reskin, 1993). In addition, women should have a better education and a higher level of performance in their work to reach a higher management position in relation to men (Solotaroff, 2003). This not only confirms further the statement of Moore, Dorothy and Buttner (chapter 3.6.1) vis-à-vis the male model prevailing within organizations, but makes it valid even in female dominated sectors. In addition, given that the promotion process remains male dominated and knowing that people who received promotions are more likely to receive another promotion in the next five years (Blau & DeVaro, 2006), the woman encounters

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32 http://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/h/high_achievers.asp
greater difficulty in gaining access to top positions and consequently attaining her professional objectives.

On the other hand, a comprehensive quantitative study published in 2006 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions shows interesting results worth being taken into account. The goal of this survey, that included 1,004 economically active individuals (68% men, 31% women), is to support the development of strategies to increase the participation rates of women in decision making positions. The graph below indicates that men are slightly more interested in receiving promotions in their work than women are, although the difference is not relatively striking. When asked about their interest in being promoted, 57.9% of men expressed an interest in promotion compared with 53.9% of women.

**Percentage employees by sex and interest in being promoted at work**

As for the motivation reasons for being promoted, salary is the main motive cited by both men and women. However, women tend to place greater weight on job satisfaction as a reason for wanting to be promoted in their work, and about 35% of men and 33% of women believe that they have good prospects for future promotion in their current job.

Reasons for wanting a promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>Feel that it is primarily in the interest of colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better salary</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, when asked about the major obstacles faced by women in being promoted to decision making positions, 83.7% of women indicated childcare responsibilities as a barrier, while 82% of women cited the lack of partner support. More women than men stated that long working hours (75.8% of women, compared with 69.1% of men) and age (45.5% of women, compared with 38% of men) represent significant obstacles for women in their pursuit of posts with greater responsibilities. About 30% of the survey respondents believed that women were disadvantaged due to their sex; this reason was given more often by women than men.36

3.7 Female networks & the significance of networking & mentoring

“It isn't just what you know, and it isn't just who you know. It's actually who you know, who knows you, and what you do for a living.” Bob Burg

A network is a pattern composed of different social relations between people, which could expand to different shapes and purposes. It is paramount for members in organisations’ networks to represent different requirements so as to obtain as high quality outcomes as possible. It is therefore helpful to include both men and women in network groups since with their different proprieties, they will fill different needs. (Drake & Solberg, 1996)

34 Ibid
Social and personal factors have a prominent influence in matters of enabling a person to break through an elite position. In this chapter, we will explore the subjects of networking and mentoring and their importance for women in or aspiring to access top positions. In deed, women who belong, or seek to belong to the high spheres of business usually struggle more than men in similar situations in entering informal networks, even if they are already part of the elite (Kanter, 1977). Instead, they will find it easier to integrate formal networks within the organization, more so through mentoring practices than being directly incorporated to a male dominated informal network.

### 3.7.1 Networks

“The value of a social network is defined not only by who's on it, but by who's excluded” — Paul Saffo

Comprehensive researches have shown that social networking is one of the most efficient tools in matters of climbing toward top positions. The larger a network is, the more efficient it becomes, which automatically leads to a faster advancement inside hierarchy channels. Moreover, highly placed persons often enjoy large professional networks. According to social networks specialists Andrew Shipilov, Giuseppe Labianca, Valentyn Kalnysh and Yuri Kalnysh, the majority of leaders invest approximately 20 percent of their work time in developing and sustaining the essential networks that they possess. Leaders that are considered successful spend 70 percent more time in networking than the less successful ones. It is also important to mention that the informal and non-structured networks provide larger contributions to the social capital of corporate people compared with the formal and structured networks. Studies also show that individuals that are more “central” in a given network are the ones more likely to be promoted.\(^{37}\)

Further researches show that social networks become most important in the middle way of careers, since individuals who are working on building their network usually attain higher positions after they have spent a considerable amount of time in their initial or current position. Besides, the essence of a social network and its character are certainly people’s life experiences that help promoting opportunities to advance toward the top. It is also fair to

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assume that with increased work experience come an increased number of contacts, which leads to open doors in the work market.38

Social networks could also be considered as personal networks, which comprise relations between groups of people that meet informally through common interests. These gatherings usually happen in a mutual and spontaneous fashion and can be divided in private networks and professional networks. (Styrborn, 2000) Relations that build up between family, relatives and friends constitute private networks and are distinguished by a high support and security nature. These networks are developing over long periods of time, from birth to the adulthood; their stability and security provide support and facility of advancement in the professional life. Women at the top often have wider family and relatives networks than men in similar positions, and they use their networks in more social purposes that lead to increased fellowship and understanding from an outsider point of view. (Styrborn, 2000) In the other hand professional networks exist to promote the access to good education and high positions within organizations; they are characterized by meaningful relations in matters of competence and work related problem solving. (Drake & Solberg, 1996)

3.7.2 The significance of female networks & networking

“Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe or call it a family: Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.” Jane Howard

From a historic angle, women have been meeting under different social forms and actively taking part in various types of networks. Female support and strength is boosted within these networks and consequently help them to influence many changes in the society. (Lann, 1996) Female networks are usually constituted of women who have a family life and engage in a career in the same time, they become reciprocal role models within these networks. Furthermore, the existing female networks are mostly built around a certain branch or a similar work relationship. (Styrborn, 2000)

Female networks have several important purposes. They function as breathing channels for women seeking advice and support regarding their career advancement. Women tend to feel

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less “lonely” inside their networks, they can for example exchange experiences and opinions. It is also about bringing their ideas more attention and their creativity more credit which often suffers heavy inhibitions especially within traditional organizations. According to Lann (1996), women enjoy long discussions and exchanges of opinions and divergences inside female networks. These networks function as alternative channels for women to develop and strengthen their own personalities, especially when the focus lies on the work life rather than the private one. Through female networking, women have the opportunity to grow professionally because they help them to access information and knowledge, become more visible, penetrate channels that influence the higher management, obtain new ideas and contacts, show their competences and finally gain more power. (Lann, 1996)

3.7.3 Mentoring

“There are lots of opportunities out there for women to work in many fields. Girls just need support, encouragement and mentoring to follow through with their careers.” Sally Ride

Mentoring refers to a developmental relationship between a person who has more experience (mentor) with knowledge of the organization, a certain power and many relationships, and an individual who has less experience (mentee or protégé). The purpose of this relationship is to guide, provide advice and to support the protégé in the process of integrating the organizational structures in an optimal manner. There are two types of mentoring: formal and informal. Mentors are widely used within organizations to help men and women in their career advancement. However, it is significantly important for women to be mentored, since they have to overcome more obstacles than men, both social and professional, to attain positions of high responsibility (Burke & Mckeen, 1990; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

There is usually a mutual benefit for both mentor and mentee in this relationship. The mentor will invest his time and energy to grow his protégé, as well as give him all the keys and advices to enable it to achieve his/her objectives. Extreme situations sometimes involve mentors vouching for their mentees to achieve their goals and give them the opportunity to integrate the closed circle of elite at the risk of their reputations. In return, the mentor will pull personal pride, a bond of friendship and power with his mentors. Obviously for the mentee, the benefits are more visible in accelerating the advancement of his/her career and to be more visible within the organization. However, he/she is continuously facing tremendous amounts
of pressure, having to surpass his abilities constantly to not “disappoint”. Moreover, a mentee must always show gratitude and respect for his mentor. (Ragins & Cotton; 1999; O’Neil & Blake-Beard, 2002). It is a "win-win" relationship between both protagonists, which gives mentee the opportunity to significantly accelerate his career and enable him to attain hierarchical positions they would never have been able to achieve without such assistance.

Most of the mentoring happens between people of the same gender, and this fact itself adds an additional barrier for women who have more difficulty finding a mentor women especially in the male dominated sectors. Studies explain that the phenomenon goes like that because men and women have a different way of handling situations, and that their life is different (Kanter, 1977; O’Neil & Blake-Beard, 2002). However, mentoring between individuals of opposite sex exists, it is though more apparent in cases where the mentoring process does not take a relatively long periods of time, enabling the mentor to occasionally change his mentees.

The women mentors prefer to help in priority younger women since there is a sort of solidarity among women to help overcome the obstacles to break though leading positions. With that said, women in positions of high responsibility tend to help a greater number of mentees that men usually do (Fagenson & Jackson, 1994).

As women have more limited networks than men especially in the beginning of their careers (Moore and White, 2000). It is important for them to build relationships in a number of different sectors of society. Having multiple mentors in various areas such as politics and in business could provide a way for women to overcome the obstacles related networks and networking.

3.7.3 Differences between male and female professional and social networks

"\text{The best prospect is the client who has already dealt with you. The second best is the one referred to by a client who has dealt with you previously. The third best is the one referred to you by another trusted professional or friend.}\"
Marilyn Jennings.

To build a network is undoubtedly an important tool for both men and women with the ambition of climbing the stairs of hierarchy. However, there are certain differences between men’s and women’s work related networks, which leads to different work related
opportunities. Women have generally smaller and more limited networks compared to men’s large and business oriented networks. Female networks are usually composed of women with different personalities with strong bounds, whereas men continually choose to have social relations with other men with similar personalities, education and professional position. These large male networks are serving more practical purposes such as problem solving and career opportunities. (Bierema, 2005)

3.7.4 Some advantages & disadvantages of female networks

"Informal conversation is probably the oldest mechanism by which opinions on products and brands are developed, expressed, and spread." Johan Arndt

It is fair to state that our society is based on male norms and male hierarchical structures where men often set conditions of how the work life should function. The competition in the top business world is fierce for all men involved and even fiercer for women in high responsibility positions. In addition, failure is not perceived the same way from women involved in male dominated sectors by their men colleagues. The male organization’s culture makes it easier for men to find the right way through the “power game” since they originally know what it takes to have their voice heard. On the other hand, women in similar positions can use each others to learn from experiences, and become more skilled in this “power game”. Additionally, women in leading positions generally experience higher pressures than their male counterparts because they have the double task of living up to both the organization’s and their female colleagues’ expectations. Through support from female networks, women in high responsibility positions can live up to all expectations and in the same time decrease the feeling of being “alone”. (Lann, 1996)

Many of today’s organized female networks are composed of well educated, strong and result oriented women. These women are continuously expanding their networks by including more interesting women partly to help themselves and partly to help others working their way up in organizations and breaking the glass ceiling. (Drake & Solberg, 1996) Likewise, self confidence and the collective strength that women acquire through their networks help them to concretize changes in organizations. More often than not, women who choose to stay out of networks nowadays do so mostly because of the lack of time or because of their weak engagement in their careers. (Styrborn, 2000)
Nevertheless having networks strictly composed of women bare disadvantages as well. It could be that a large focus falls on the weaknesses that women have compared to men, and how it is a problematical to be a woman in the business world. It is paramount in these situations to give each others guidance to turn away this focus, and instead concentrate on the issues susceptible to ameliorate women’s situation in the work life. Another negative aspect with female networks could be the fact that they don’t generally promote individual growth, they tend to focus too much on “group” achievements. (Styrborn, 2000) Therefore it is important for women inside their female networks to respect and accept each other’s differences; it is also important that they don’t see each others as competitors and instead work freely around work related boundaries. (Lann, 1996)

3.8 Elite theory: the aftermath of gender diversifications

“The hard truth is that what may be acceptable in elite culture may not be acceptable in mass culture, that tastes which pose only innocent ethical issues as the property of a minority become corrupting when they become more established. Taste is context, and the context has changed.” Susan Sontag

The elite is a theme related to the core issues of social sciences. We can define it in the following way; the elite is a relatively small dominant group within a larger society, which enjoys a privileged status which is upheld by individuals of lower social status within the structure of a group. The position of a certain elite at the top of the social substratum is almost always in a position of leadership, and often subject to holders of elite status to the pressure to maintain their position as part of the elite. For centuries, the elite have always been regarded as a fiefdom male. In other words, they are political leader, entrepreneurs, union leaders, senior clergy, or intellectuals, but most importantly, it was implied that they were mostly men.

In this chapter, we will briefly examine the relationship between the female gender and the elite. We want to understand why the elite were and are always associated with men. Why most elite theorists do not address the issue of the absence of women among the elite except few of them such as Zweigenhaft and Domhoff in “Diversity in Power Elite: have women reached the top?” (2006).

Much has been discussed so far in this theory part regarding the under representation of women in high responsibility positions. One could logically agree that the situation should change. One could even assume that humanity has reached a stage of evolution where gender diversity should be considered as a must, especially in the business world that is the closest connection to globalization. However, there are researchers and theorists, such as Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, who show a rather reserved point of view in matters of the outcome resulting from a total gender balance in organizations, particularly in leading positions. In the concluding chapter of their book “Diversity in Power Elite: have women reached the top?” named “the ironies of diversity”, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff discuss that the movements that led to diversity in the power elite have succeeded to some extent, especially for women and minorities from privileged social backgrounds, but there has been no effect on the way the power elite functions or on the class structure itself. (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1999) They enumerate four processes that influence the successful assimilation of women and minorities. The most relevant ones to our thesis are the identity management; newcomers to the power elite must demonstrate they think and act like straight males. This statement confirms the theory of Muhonen (chapter 3.6.1) regarding the masculine characteristics that a women should adopt in order to reach high responsibility positions. The second applicable process is the importance of class; women and minorities in the power elite tend to come from
business and professional backgrounds. The last one concerns the importance of education; women and minorities who make it to the power elite are typically better educated than the white males who are already part of it. They also tend to have degrees from elite schools, which give access to memberships in elite networks.

With these processes taken into account, one could assume that the majority of people believing and calling for more gender diversity do not belong to the elite (the small dominant group), but rather to the larger society as it stands in the definition of the elite. Generally speaking, members of the power elite reluctantly accepted diversification as a goal for themselves, only because they had little choice.

As we discussed earlier, gender diversification could prove to be the key to further organizational success. This means that there is a will to change the current situation of females in organization, which consequently means that “board rooms”’ way of proceeding should positively change as a result of including more women in decision making processes. However, if we take Muhonen, Zweigenhaft and Domhoff theories and visions regarding the subject into account, one could understand that the woman somehow should masculinise herself to a certain extent in order to be included in “board rooms”. Women who join the elite have values and perspectives similar to the males who were there already (Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 1999). The point to prove would be that gender diversification has not necessarily resulted in new perspectives and might just not be sole key to future organizational success, if the woman is obliged to act and think as male in order to make it in the business world. With other words, Helen Fisher’s support for the female characteristics and her incitation for women to embrace them in order to offer something “different” (chapter 3.6.2) would probably be more efficient in the future of organizations.
In the preceding chapter, we provided the theoretical framework for this research, backed up with some relevant statistical facts. In this chapter, we will present and compose the information gathered from our own plus other published interviews pertinent to our subject. After giving much thought of how we will present this part, we decided that the most suitable way for us is to present the information following the general setting of the theoretical chapter. This sorting will provide our work with further coherence and consistency as we will gradually introduce the themes and categories which have emerged in our data immersion. Moreover, our aim is also to let the information “speak for itself” since we provide a human perspective of the female current and future situation within organizations. However, we will provide quantitative findings simultaneously when we judge relevant, either to confirm or refute our respondents perceptions, not to mention cross examine them with the theories that we developed in the previous chapter.

4.1 Presentation of participants

“One’s philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes... and the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.” Eleanor Roosevelt

Primary participants are the participants that we interviewed personally while secondary participants interviews are issued from published material of highly placed women in the business world, that we believe is relevant to our study.
4.1.1 Primary participants

“At least for me personally, I’ve always tried to do a really good job every day, with each interview, and treat each interview seriously, and make the person I’m speaking with feel comfortable, hopefully make it an ideal experience.” Katie Couric

Christel Daudi from Tetrapak

C.D: I am currently logistics manager at tetra Pak in Lund, Sweden. I am 50 years old, married since 1989 and I have three children (13, 15 and 17 years old). I have a bachelor degree in economics, with global procurement and ocean freight as my professional background. Before being appointed to my current position in November 2007, I have in my previous job shared responsibility with one other colleague for Tetra Laval’s (consisting of Tetra Pak, DeLaval and SIDEL) strategy and purchase of global ocean freight. If you look at the company structure in Lund in general, it is quite fairly split. But then again, if u look at leading positions, it is heavily male dominated. It is changing though, however slowly. I believe Tetra Pak need more women in leading positions.

Jannicke Jennsjö from Korsnäs

J.J: I am 54 years old; I am married and have two beautiful grown sons. My current position within Korsnäs is marketing director. I have a Master of Science degree in chemical engineering from the Technical University of Stockholm. I have been working with the forest industry since 1977 shortly after graduating. To become a chemical engineer, one has to study four years, and in the last year, one has to choose a speciality: I chose the most conservative and the less sexy one. In my level, there are only 2 women out of 10 members, so I would say that it is clearly a male dominated environment.

Eva Färnstrand ex-chief of Södra Cell
E.F: I am 57 years old born and raised in Stockholm. I am married and have two sons. I am a chemical engineer from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, I graduated in 1976 and I am a specialist in palpen paper.

Eva Färnstrand is the Ex-Chief of Södra cell. She is currently working as a consultant and sits in several boards. She is also chairman of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, Forest Technology Division. Some of her previous positions are President of Tidningstryckarna Aftonbladet Svenska Dagbladet, Business Area Manager for Tidningspapper and Marketing Manager for business area Tidningspapper, SCA Graphic Sundsvall.

4.1.2 Secondary participants

“The way I work, the interview never becomes larger than the person being interviewed.”
Ken Burns

Susanne Broman

Susanne is a leadership development director at ITT Flygt. She is a psychology graduate from the University of Stockholm in 1991. ITT flygt is the world leading pump producer and distributor with 4500 employees around the world, 1500 of them in Sweden. They only register 21% women employees and 15% female representation in leading positions.

Cecilia Carlsson

Cecilia is 46 years old and works in the structured finance/investment banking department of Carnegie. She is a economist and graduated 1984 from the university of Lund, Sweden. Carnegie is an independent Nordic investment bank that is operating within securities, asset management and private banking. The company has offices in eight countries and 800 employees, 300 of them in Sweden. 30% of employees and one quarter of the board members are women.

40 Interview published in Universum.se 2008
41 ibid
Helena Engström

Helena is 44 years old and C.E.O. of Epsilon. She graduated as IT engineer in 1993 from K.T.H. Epsilon is a service and concept company operating in the Scandinavian market, they are one of the largest consulting firms in Sweden within the field of advanced technical development, and are registering 950 employees. The low representation of women (15%) has recently pushed the company to take initiatives of supporting female leadership such as providing new female recruits with networks composed mainly of women or the establishment of enhanced goals to achieve gender parity.

Charlotta Johansson

Charlotta is 33 years old and an informant from AMF Pension. She graduated with a master in human sciences in 1999 from the University of Umeå. AMF Pension is one of the largest pension companies in Sweden with over 200 employees. It is also one of the most gender diversified organizations in Sweden registering a handsome average of 55% women, with 44% in top management positions and 27% female representation in the company’s board.

Briza Muniz Kronhamn

Briza is 32 year old and is a marketing development manager at British American Tobacco Nordic. She studied economy in the University of Linköping and graduated in 2003. British American Tobacco is the largest tobacco multinational operating in more than 180 countries with 97 000 employees globally, 130 in Nordic countries and 42 in Sweden. Of the 42 employees in Sweden, 10 are females and 2 of them are sitting in the company’s board.

Nadine Pichelot

Nadine Pichelot is a financial director of France and Spain at Dell since 2005. She is also a project coordinator of the diversity policy responsible of a mentoring program including 25 high-potential women mentored by executive managers. The objective of the project is to

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42 ibid
43 ibid
44 ibid
45 Interview published in website (www.journaldunet.com), 2007
reach more than 30% of women in leading positions within Dell Europe before the end of 2008.

**Véronique Préaux**

Véronique is 48 years old and works at Diafora consulting as associate director. She is a graduate of the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce of Paris. She created in 2002, the group GEF (Grande Ecole au Féminin) where she acts as the CEO. The group GEF meets members of associations of former pupils of 9 large schools: Centrale Paris, l’ENA, l’Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées, l’ESCP-EAP, l’ESSEC, HEC, l’INSEAD, les Mines et Polytechnique. Its goal is to build an observatory on the trail of women graduates and promote their access to positions of economical decisions. She is also the author of “La mixité, un enjeu stratégique” published in 2004.

**Gabrielle Rolland**

Gabrielle is a psychologist and is the vice president of the European Institute of leadership. She has given numerous conferences in France and abroad, for instance in ENA, Polytechnique and the World Economic Forum in Davos amongst others. Today, she is a private consultant and works with large companies such as LVMH. She is also the author of ”Les femmes marchent au super” and ”Le Temps du succès”

**Ann Kristine Wuopio-Mogestedt**

Ann Kristine is 46 years old and board member of Folskam. She graduated in 1986 with a bachelor in teaching languages and history from the University of Linköping. Folksam is an insurance company with over four million customers and 3300 employees. It is also one of the most gender diversified organizations in Sweden approaching 50% women at all levels of management.

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46 Interview published in website (www.linternaute.com), 2006
47 Interview published in website (www.cref-lr.com), 2006
48 Interview published in Universum.se 2008
4.2 Becoming a “Top” women: female leadership characteristics

“Empirical interest will be in the facts so far as they are relevant to the solution of these problems.” Talcott Parsons

4.2.1 Upbringing, career & way to the “top”

We discussed in chapter 3.5.2 the definition of career and both vertical and horizontal career advancement according to the Oxford dictionary and to scholars. Our respondents’ characterization of the word career converges a great deal with the scholars’ meaning, except that all our primary participants added other defining words to the academic definition.

**C.D:** Career is something that gives you enjoyment and fulfilment, and that you are seen in what you do, that you have the possibility to change, to interact, and you should feel that you get the benefit that you deserve financially but also emotionally.

**J.J:** The word career means to me, the ability to use your talent in a way that is profitable for the organization, and of course obtain some profit out of it, not only material profit, but also some satisfaction and appreciation from yourself and others.
E.F: Career means change in tasks and responsibilities, which leads the person to continuously progress professionally. Career is a development path, it is the process of acquiring more knowledge, more experience etc… it is the contrary of stagnating in the same position, and it is not necessarily about organizational levels, it is more about learning things and taking more responsibility.

We also mentioned in the theory part that childhood, adolescence and the beginning of the adulthood all play an integral role in forming a leader, and particularly a female leader in heavily male dominated sectors. To underline the importance of these steps in forming successful and strong women, we chose to briefly portray some key reminiscences of our three primary participants regarding their studying and early professional careers. As anticipated, we found very small dissimilarities in their professional characteristics, although we sensed very different personalities. All three women enjoyed high levels of parental support which helped them first to fulfil their studying goals, and later on their professional career goals. Christel, Jannicke and Eva all graduated in the 70’s, however, only Christel and Jannike agree that at that period of time, male students had higher ambitions than their female classmates, Eva, on the contrary, stressed that she and her female class mates had the same ambitions as their male colleagues.

C.D: I could honestly say that my female university classmates were less ambitious in terms of acquiring a specific title. For my parents it was quite clear, from a young age they encouraged me to obtain a university degree. However they did not push me toward a specific area. I was a very much driven person and of course they supported me, but they did not have any sort of specific career ambition for me. I don’t think that their ambitions for me would have been different if I was a man, since I have a younger brother, and I can’t honestly say that they treated him differently.

J.J: When I was young, I wasn’t as goal oriented as I am now of course. However, I always wanted to have a good job and be well paid. I always knew that I had a good talent; I wanted to be in a position when I could take important decisions. Nevertheless, I had a very vague idea about the nature of the industry that I would like to be involved with. People around me at the time taught me to
be more open minded in life, and to be ready to take whatever good opportunities coming in my way. My parents, especially my father, were my biggest supporters. I remember that not all my female colleagues were in the same situation as me. Many of them interrupted their studies already from the first year and decided to pursue more female oriented careers instead, others even settled for family and children. It was unfortunate since many of the females that interrupted their studies in our program were better than many male students that went through with it.

**E.F:** In the university, I had the same ambitions as my male class mates. We were one third female students in the promotion of my master degree in chemistry and we all felt strong about pursuing high professional careers.

Christel started working while she was a student, and was offered a job when she was ready with her university degree. She always worked within the transportation industry and climbed the hierarchical steps internally.

**C.D:** My last job corresponded very well with my ambition at the time, which was to be able to work internationally, and that really was the driving force for me.

Career progress has been similar for Jannicke since her father worked within the same industry. She started working during summer periods before beginning to enjoy it and thinking that it is something she would enjoy on a permanent basis.

**J.J:** I have been working as a project engineer with r. n. d and technical service many years, then moved on to marketing management before being promoted to director of sales and marketing. One could say that my development within this industry could be qualified as a transition from technical oriented to more commercial oriented.
Female leadership characteristics are often perceived as positive. However, as soon these same characteristics prevent women from becoming bosses, they become negatively perceived. Women who manage to overcome them and access top positions are often perceived as more interested in their careers than their household and family, which is not positive after all. Female gender and leadership, as well as everything that is seen as either feminine or masculine remain a contradiction, and norms indicate that bosses are men. (Wahl, 2001). We found many similarities in our three respondents trait of personality that they thought contributed a great deal in them becoming successful women, such as ambition and analytical abilities. Moreover, 46 years old Cecilia Carlsson from the finance and investment banking department of Carnegie added that women are better in communicating, multitasking and “reading between the lines”.

C.D: The major personality characteristics that contributed in me breaking through this leading position are the facts that I am ambitious and can work efficiently under a lot of pressure, it is also down to my ability to question things continuously and not taking them for granted, which is rather uncomfortable in some situations

J.J: I would like to believe that I always had this structure and logic in mind that gives me a relatively easy time to analyse things and situations. The main personality characteristics that gave me the edge over others in my career advancement would be my positivism, my analytical abilities and my good structure.

E.F: I am goal oriented and fairly analytical, it’s easy for me to see connections between different facts and factors efficiently, and of course I am a good manager.

However, Christel was more cautious in dividing personal characteristics to male and female, in the contrary, she believes in “good” leader characteristics regardless of the gender.
C.D: A leader must be able to speak out, to take unpopular decisions and to be firm. Now, if these attributes are seen as masculine, then yes I agree with the statement that women acquire certain male attributes when they break trough a leading position. However, I still find all the highly placed women that I know very feminine. In addition, attributes such as intuition, ability to handle ambiguous situations calmly and high sense of attention in conflict circumstances are in deed important in the professional life, especially in leading positions, nevertheless, I don’t think they are strictly female attributes, I believe you can find them in some good male leaders also. I most of all think that it is very dangerous when one starts dividing attributes and branding some of them as male and others as female.

Eva Färnstrand does not only agree with Christel, she even thinks that women’s leadership characteristics have the edge over the male ones. Therefore, she is calling for recruiters and head hunters to adopt a more objective attitude. She stresses that a recruiter has to look at the characteristics of female management candidates in a comparative way to male candidates. She is confident that employers will soon acknowledge that they are always ambitious; always goal oriented and always analytical.

E.F: When I look around, I see women that could be in much higher positions. I believe that if you want to recruit a competent manager, you should recruit a woman. I think we should promote as much women as possible in top positions. If we just open our eyes, we will see that they will do a better job than the less competent men that are already taking their position for granted. I do not believe there are significant differences between males and females in the board room, maybe differences in language and behaviour but definitely not in analysing and decision making.

Helena Engström who is herself a recruiter from Epsilon admits that women behave in a more timid fashion than men in employment interviews. She concedes that young women do not sell their positive attributes as strongly as they should. According to her, there are certain norms and structures within the society that are telling how a woman should behave. Unfortunately women continue to unconsciously comply with these norms, and that should change. In addition, a negative aspect that both Christel and Eva agreed on regarding female
traits is the fact that women tend the question their abilities too much. Ann Kristine Wuopio-Mogestedt from Folksam confirms their perception when she says that women are more cautious than men; they have the propensity to think about a promotion opportunity rather than take it immediately. Nonetheless, Christel does not only perceive the issue as just negative.

**C.D:** Men have easier time to access top positions from the start, unlike women that have to work their way up through promotions and vertical advancement, partly because women are naturally more cautious when applying for a position. Men tend to apply for a specific position just because it looks attractive and interesting without thinking too much whether they are qualified or up for it. Women tend to consider questions such as: would I be able to do this, do I have the right qualifications? Will I be able to combine this with my family life? I think it is probably a personality characteristic that women have within from the start and that will take time to change.

### 4.3 Perception of the glass ceiling & its consequences

Christel stresses that it is important for the work environment to have both females and males in leading positions even if she does not state that female leaders are better than male leaders or vis versa ca. According to her, it rather comes down to each person individually. Eva agrees totally and regrets the fact that it is mostly men who recruit to management positions. In relation to that, she believes that they are not always positively open to gender differences. It is very important in the formation of a management team to have as many different personalities, backgrounds and experiences as possible in order to be efficient and acquire different visions. Unfortunately not everybody share this opinion, and if one does not want to have a multitude of personalities in a management team, then it is more likely to recruit persons that look exactly like one’s self. Eva’s position is clearly more categorical and blames the under-representation of women in top position on corporate “stupidity”.

**E.F:** Companies are stupid not to use the competence that is available in many women, and instead making hard for them to access top positions and “board rooms”. Women have absolutely the ability to work in companies boards. I, for instance, sit in three companies’ boards and I know several of my female
colleagues that could be in companies’ boards. It is for non-rational reasons that women are under-represented in top management.

Without question, companies are an important organizational role model in our society, organizational behaviour and attitude toward gender and the existence of the glass ceiling can be crucial factors in the prevention of the invisible barriers. Several large companies are implementing measures and start to be more receptive to new purposes. For instance changes of schedules, paid permissions of maternity and paternity, reduction of the working day for women with young children etc… could all be considered as important steps toward creating a fairer environment that is allowing women to compete on the same grounds as their male counterparts in matters of career advancement. In addition, the flexibility measurements within organizations do not have to refer to women exclusively; they have to be focused on both male and female workers. Nevertheless, we have to be aware of when we talk about difficulties in the conciliation; we are talking about women. (Tharenou, 1999) Both Eva and Jannicke acknowledge the existence of a glass ceiling preventing women from breaking through top positions. However Jannicke does not restrict this invisible barrier exclusively to women.

**J.J:** Regarding the invisible glass ceiling, my opinion is still divided. I mean I agree that there is an invisible glass ceiling, but not necessarily concerning women as a group. During my years, I have seen that the elderly men stick together, and from that point of view, they create a glass ceiling for anybody who does not belong to this group. If you take a look at the forest industry, you will soon find out that elderly men are mentoring persons that they relate to, someone that maybe reflects their own image when they were younger. They are just starting to realize the huge potential young women could provide to the industry, hence now they are willing to explore this perspective further. I might be a little bit cynical about it, but it is the truth!

Christel sees things differently concerning this issue; she on the other hand never felt that being a female has been negative in any aspect. She concedes that being a woman in her industry often worked to her advantage since she always felt more seen.
C.D: In my own perception, I do not acknowledge the existence of an invisible glass ceiling preventing women from accessing top positions solely based on their gender. I instead encourage young ambitious women to use the fact that they are females, and there are fewer women in leading positions, able to offer something different to their own advantage. In my case, there weren’t any gender related obstacles slowing or hindering my professional advancement.

To our understanding, none of our primary participants have experienced a classic case of “glass ceiling”. Of course they all had different perceptions of the phenomenon, however, according to the definitions of the glass ceiling in chapter 3.4.1, all these successful women have already crossed it, thus their testimonies should be interpreted considering the fact that they are speaking from the other side of the glass ceiling. One couldn’t deny the fact that top management is male dominated. Men tend to identify themselves with other men, and this homosocial behaviour contribute comprehensively to the fact that men are controlling resources in the society and consequently in organizations (Limpman Blumen, 1996). On the first hand, this can prove that the glass ceiling is male made, since when a woman accesses a leading position and breaks this pattern, it is likely for men around her to feel lost and engage unconscious resistance vis a vis her career advancement. On the other hand, this can also prove that the glass ceiling is female made as a result of her the poor representation in high responsibility positions, as Michel Foucault once said, something start to exist the moment people start to talk about it. In the light of this comment, Christel’s position regarding the glass ceiling and her calling for young women to disregard it and “go for it” suddenly acquire higher meaning and relevance. It just might be the best way of breaking it, or rather walking through it…
4.4 Perception of visible obstacles

4.4.1 Gender segregation & discrimination

In our society nowadays, one often hears people debating and defending gender equality and fair treatment. According to various laws, it should be a natural ingredient within modern organizations. Moreover, for many people the good results of organizations that integrate women into their leadership provide a more compelling argument for non-discrimination than the legal argument that discrimination violates laws or the moral argument that is inconsistent with our society’s values. Psychology doctors Yvla Elvin-Nowak and Helene Thomsson⁵⁰, specializing in gender studies, say that on the surface this leadership philosophy seems to be positive, however they underline the fact that many organizations are using their females in high responsibility positions “just for show”, in order to prove that they are actively engaged in promoting gender equality and fair treatment, hence distancing themselves from gender segregation and discrimination practices. Prior conducting the interviews and being under the influence of our theoretical research, we were automatically assuming that all the participants would at least acknowledge the existence of gender segregation and discrimination in their work environment. Surprisingly enough however, the stand out statement of Eva suggests otherwise.

⁴⁹ http://www.cartoonstock.com/newscartoons/cartoonists/jsi/lowres/jsin211.jpg
⁵⁰ Interview published in dn.se 2008
E.F: I didn’t have any gender related obstacles during my career; I have been myself a pioneer. I was the first women marketing manager in the Swedish forest industry and the first one in the lot of other positions. It has been quite a natural advancement for me. I am happy that women, who are 10 to 15 years younger, have somebody like me that already eased the way for them a little bit, somebody to look up to.

Leadership developer Susanne Broman from ITT Flygt shares the same experience as Eva, she totally denies the existence of discrimination in her organization and believes that the hierarchy is keen on having more women in top management. On the other hand, they both concede that the majority of women face gender related obstacles during their careers and insist that the situation will develop positively given a relatively long period of time. According to Metz & Tharenou (2001), gender discrimination is one of the main factors resulting in women experiencing career advancement difficulties. Moreover, industrial companies have fewer female leaders compared to non-industrial organizations (Fields & Blum, 2003). The fact that two of our three main participants are operating in industrial companies that are heavily male dominated would explain their straight position regarding gender discrimination issue. However, Jannicke restricted discrimination to weaker male bosses and older generations, in the mean time she was full of praise of the younger male elite.

J.J: I only felt discriminated and left out by weak bosses who saw me more of a threat than anything else. My actual boss is 41 years old and belongs to a younger generation. For the first time in 30 years, I have a boss who understands me, supports me and who is not afraid of me. I think the younger male elite generation is comprehensively better than the previous one. They have a total different approach, a better one.

In relation to the discrimination obstacle, Northouse (2004) believes that female in leading position tend not to be taken as seriously as their male counterpart, indeed this feeling has been more or less confirmed by all our primary respondents. Furthermore, they all agree with Muhonen (1999) who says that women in top positions must produce superlative efforts since they are continuously facing more pressure than men in order to be fairly recognized as
“colleagues”. Eva Färnstrand reminisces about the situation 30 years ago and mentions “jealousy” as a major factor behind gender discrimination.

**E.F:** In the 70’s, just the idea of having a female manager was unconceivable and unreal. I was lucky enough to receive a considerable amount of encouragement from my managers since I was the only women. In the mean time, my being often in the spotlight caused some envy from male colleagues who competed for the same job. Sometimes, it was obvious that they were frustrated and annoyed by being surpassed by a woman. It was very difficult for them to accept that than being surpassed by male colleagues. However today, the situation has changed to a much lesser degree because of the fact that they are more and more women involved in the business.

**4.4.2 Self confidence, prioritizing & the traditional view of the “top” woman**

Our three primary respondents are the living proof of women being able to successfully combine a fulfilling family life and a career in top management. However, they all agreed that

51 http://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/m/male_and_female.asp
women still prioritize their family more than their career, and the statistical data that we are exhibiting in Chapter 3.6.4 confirms their perception regarding the prioritizing issue.

**C.D:** I think there are significant differences in prioritizing between men and women career wise, and I think it is the main reason why you see more men in leading positions. I believe women still value family more than career, of course not all of them, but the majority still do.

**J.J:** Women care more about their family, this statement has been valid then, and still valid today. But I don’t see it as negative, humanity needs children, otherwise we won’t be able to survive. What should be more implemented as seen as a necessity is fathers being able to take as much time to raise their children as women do. I also see that young women are becoming more and more ambitious, and employers are become more aware that they can get much more out of them than men. This argument is starting to play a more important role than the risk of giving a high responsibility job to a woman in her mid 20s or the beginning of her 30s, which increase the chances of her giving birth and becoming a mother, especially when you consider hungry women wanting to prove themselves in the business world. This is a clear competitive advantage valorising women and their access to high responsibility positions.

Jannicke also points at her founding a family has been a concrete challenge that slowed her career advancement to an important extent. She underlines that women often find themselves in awkward situations where their decision will be seen as wrong whatever decision they chose to take. In other words she explains that women that have children could have a bad conscience when they are at home about not being at work, and vis versa. She also argues in philosophical fashion that the best strategy for a woman is to learn the rules of the game and play by them instead on putting everything on her. In contrast, 32 years old marketing development manager Briza Muniz Kronhamn from British American Tobacco Nordic maintains that her being a mother for the first time is absolutely not interfering with her career advancement. She stresses instead that her bosses are hundred per cent behind her and that she already has cemented a solid place for herself in view for future career advancement. As for women’s extra household duties, all our participants believe that the majority women in high positions still do more work at home than their husbands or partners.
**J.J:** It is somehow wrong that it is taken for granted that women should do a little bit more at home and with the children. It is a major obstacle that the woman is still facing today in all fairness in matters of her being able to compete on the same grounds as the male competition. Then again, you will enter the debate about whether one should or shouldn’t hire extra help to take care of the household and children during working hours, freeing working women, and especially women in leading position from an added work load. Nevertheless, in my generation, women are used to take more responsibilities at home because it is just the way we were brought up, even if my husband is always willing to help it is just not in his traditions. I have to live with this, since so long in Sweden it hasn’t been possible to hire extra help, at least not legally.

**C.D:** I think that the family and the household remain the main responsibility of the woman somehow. Having said that, I do see among younger female colleagues that they are not sure whether they want to start a family, at least not for some years to come. They are instead more willing to work on advancing in their careers before settling for family and having children. There is indeed a change in society, but it’s definitely not something that happens overnight. It will be a long transition period. If you take a look at Asian companies, they came to a further stage today; many women are turning down the family life option in favour for high careers, maybe because these women feel that they will be unable to combine family and high career, since they don’t have the same facilities than European women.

### 4.4.3 Access to promotion

According to Yvla Elvin-Nowak and Helene Thomsson, several companies have realized that it is profitable to promote more women in leading positions; they however bring up the legitimate question of “why is this process so slow?” Helene ironically suggests to companies to just push as much women as possible in top positions and collect the good results before arguing that the problem is much more complex. She believes that power and status represent masculinity; at that point, women often find themselves in a sort of self-conflict situation since they are more interested in other things than power and status. Her colleague Yvla was
Belghali M. Ghali  
Samuel Olichon  
Baltic Business School, Kalmar, Sweden

not reluctant to bring up the female double status of a mother and a worker that is either self imposed or enforced by the traditions of the society. She bemoans the woman’s situation and compares it to a fox trap, meaning that if women in leading positions decide to embrace their female characteristics and use them for the profit of the organization, subsequently them being female bosses becomes under scrutiny with unnecessary amounts of mounting pressure. In the other hand if women behave “just like male bosses” the result is often their femininity being under scrutiny. Therefore, both Yvla and Helene agree that this awkward situation is one of the major reasons why women often decline attractive promotions. Now the decision being taken consciously or unconsciously in relation to the “fox trap” remains a situational matter and depends on each woman. Charlotta Johansson from AMF Pension adds that above all, many females prone to break through high management positions tend to focus more on what they cannot achieve rather than the things they are able to accomplish, and this self inflicted barrier also plays a considerable role in impeding women from being promoted. Christel concurs with Charlotta and gives a personal example.

C.D: A couple of years ago, my position became vacant. I didn’t apply for it even if I felt that it was an interesting position for me. The main reason was that I felt at the time that maybe I didn’t have what it took for it. In contrast, my male colleague applied for it without any hesitation, but ended up not getting it. Three years later I was asked if I was interested in it, and I accepted of course. And it points again that men see the opportunities in a much broader way than women do. Then again of course, one gets the position easier if one applies for it. My example is a cliché one since it comes up often when I speak to my female friends and colleagues. Yet I don’t regret not applying for my current position three years ago, since at the time, my old position was more important to me, and I didn’t feel that it was time for me to take a step forward yet.

Christel continues by being more optimistic about the access to promotion for women and believes that the process is heading toward the right direction.

C.D: Many years back, when it was still unusual to be a female working in high positions, some male looked at me as maybe a secretary or something similar. But it wasn’t only because I was a women, I was young too, so it was a combination. But when I grew older and more comfortable in my profession, I could not say
that I met any strange attitude or behaviour from my male colleagues and bosses. Even in terms of competition for promotions, I never felt that I was seen as a threat because I am a woman.

Finally, Eva Färnstrand does not agree about the fact that many a lot of employers are reluctant to promoted women in top position because they think that they have different views when we come prioritizing between family and career.

4.5 The significance of Networks, networking & mentoring

Our primary participants had different approaches regarding the topic of networks, networking and mentoring. All three women have social networks including contacts from their studying period, previous positions and other professional contacts. Eva is even taking part in a network solely composed of female bosses named Ruter Dam; it is in fact a mentor program for females aspiring to break through high responsibility positions.

All women that are included in this empirical part, whether primary or secondary participants, agree that networks are crucial for career advancement. According to Christel, her networks help her to make things happen further, faster and better, as well as to become seen within the organization. She continues by saying that networks acquire an even greater importance when a person starts in a new position, people need good connections to adapt easily and quickly. Moreover, it is also important for women to reach out to people who can positively influence what they do, and whom they can influence as well. Véronique Préaux, president of network GEF (Grandes Ecoles au Féminin), explains why female networks are so important.

VP : I believe that there is a critical point in a career where competences and professional qualities no longer serve as progress catalysts. Even if they are in deed indispensable, it comes down to the reality of being exposed, known and spotted. This is the main reason why these female networks have all the right to exist.

Gabrielle Rolland, associate director of Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, brings up the age factor to the network equation. She argues that if the thirties are the usual age of access to responsibility; it is arguably in the forties when a person is likely to break through leading positions. It is a period when women are usually less available since they do not comply with male rituals. The access to power goes through networks that are built already at 35 years of
Belghali M. Ghali  
Samuel Olichon  
Baltic Business School, Kalmar, Sweden

age, for example through young managers or old college contacts. Relieved from the private life registry, men tend to take time to construct these social networks by attending to informal meeting often judged unnecessary and uninteresting by women. The natural result is that female soon find themselves excluded from power networks thus in a much more difficult situation vis a vis promotions and career advancement. Gabrielle maintains that situation is not much more different for single women or without children, since the utopical idea of gender equality is so scattered in the countries of the European Union that women have already forgotten that they should fight for their places within the organization.

All our primary participants agree with the statement that their professional networks are more male dominated. The main reason is due to the fact that they are all involved in heavily male dominated domains. Nonetheless, this pattern could also be explained by their heterosocial professional behaviour, meaning that they are more male oriented, hence looking for recognition from men rather then women (Lipman Blumen, 1996). Eva notes however that her closest network is more female dominated because they have the same experience and interests. This confirms the study of Gwen Moore and Mino Vianello which includes 862 participants from the business world (299 women and 303 men). The study shows that women had mostly men as mentors (76.4%) whereas they are only 40.9% of them to have been women mentors (Exhibit below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Women and Men Mentors of different gender</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Mentors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Peers</td>
<td>25,6</td>
<td>28,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Peers</td>
<td>18,5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Superiors</td>
<td>63,2</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Superiors</td>
<td>15,1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-work Mentors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Friends, Colleagues</td>
<td>21,7</td>
<td>22,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Friends, Colleagues</td>
<td>15,7</td>
<td>6,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Others</td>
<td>34,9</td>
<td>28,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Others</td>
<td>14,5</td>
<td>22,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentors all Types</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Men</td>
<td>76,4</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Women</td>
<td>40,9</td>
<td>33,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(299)</td>
<td>(303)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Jannicke, her biggest network is composed of her mentors who are mainly her age or older. She explains that they have played a very important role in her career advancement especially in terms of supporting and advising. This enabled her to have a better understanding of how the business works in the company. As for Eva, she is participating in mentoring programs in order to help young women cope better with work life. However, she prefers more the spontaneous mentoring by supporting and helping them when they have questions or problems rather than following the formal steps of official mentoring networks. Unlike Jannicke who prefers mentoring younger women; Eva chooses the mentee according to his/her motivation, potential and personality rather than the gender. On the other hand, the table above shows that women prefer mentoring women rather than men, one could notice a stronger mutual aid and solidarity between women to have a more significant number of females in high responsibility positions.

Mentoring programs are developing more and more in companies across Europe with the aim of promoting young talent and particularly potential female leaders. For instance, Dell Europe has set up a program boosted by Paul Bell, former vice CEO Dell Europe, to foster diversity with the aim of finding competitive advantages. Project coordinator Nadine Pichelot explains the structure and the aim of the project.

N.P: we have identified 25 women with high potential at European level and we extensively mentored them via our European executive committee. The objective of the project is to reach more than 15% of women in leading positions within Dell Europe before the end of 2008. I believe a great deal in “role model” virtues, people who become a reference for the younger female generation; hence they project their aspirations on them continuously which is a strong motivation source. We have reached 13% already compared to 9% three years ago. These results have not only been obtained with the help of internal promotion, but also via recruitment of highly skilled women.

The Dell project is reported to be a success mainly because of high support by the executives that it is enjoying. With that said Nadine notes that some males within the organizations are showing signs of scepticism and few of them even have voiced their disagreement due to the “sexist” nature of the project.
4.6 Perception of elite diversification

Today, the symbolic metaphor of “the melting pot” has become truer than ever, it strongly states that the major problem organizations are facing is well functioning and compatible diverse personnel, with different economical status, beliefs, cultural backgrounds and of course different gender. For many years, researchers struggled with the concept of finding the perfect organizational structure to meet the need of the employee and the demands of society. However, research has consistently shown that people choose to interact more often with members of their own cultural groups or identity rather than their gender. Moreover, many companies realized that the inclusion of more women in top management is associated with stronger financial performance. However, in relation to the Norwegian case mentioned in the theory part (Chapter 3.4.2), all our primary respondents were against the idea of introducing special legislations to enforce the female presence in “board rooms” citing different reasons that would harm women’s chances of succeeding in the business world on a long term basis.

**C.D:** I am against introducing any kind of legislation supporting female quotas in top management. One should start to look at the problem from the beginning. You cannot force a 40% female quota only based on gender reasons. Instead one should have gender parity as an aim in the recruiting and promoting processes. It has to be a long time planning process. I believe that quota system is unfair, and I believe it would not give the best results. It could be that a 40 percent woman is fine, but it depends on how it looks. For example if you have 30 percent men working in the company, of course you shouldn’t have 40% women in top
management. I only have an experience in the private sector, but I believe that it should always be about finding the best suited person for the position regardless of the gender.

**E.F:** I am against the female quotas in top management because we have to recruit to the board position from the competences profile. The recruiter should take a look at the competences that are missing in the team, and from that point of view recruit the person that is best suited for the position regardless of the gender. And if you are objective, you will find that a lot of those competences you find them in women. You should not make any kind of legislation. I think it should up to the election committee of the board to decide, if they do that, and just that, they will end up with more women. I am now sitting in the board of Svea Skog, on that board there are 50 percent women for example. I would say that women on that board are more renowned for their competences and skills that men sitting in the same board possibly with the exception of the former prime minister.

**J.J:** I do not like the idea of implementing female quotas in order to introduce more women in leading positions, because it doesn’t solve any problem, I would say the quite opposite, it makes matters worse. Because the question is not about that, it is rather a matter of changing the mentality, and seeing candidates strictly from a skills and abilities point of view.

Since 2005, the Confederation of French companies (MEDEF) is moving towards that direction by adopting a “softer” quota policy. They first appointed Laurence Parisot, the first woman to head this confederation in an effort to change general attitudes of the whole employers and recruiters’ class. This step was essential to modernize MEDEF before putting in place measures to modernize companies adhering with MEDEF. Laurence disclosed, in an interview that we conducted with her, that she was about to introduce a charter for all companies of CAC4053 where they engage themselves to promote at least one woman in their board by summer 2008, and to endorse policies that encourage parity in high responsibility positions. This action is part of the observation that nine companies out of the 40 still didn’t count any women in their board rooms. According to Laurence, the other benefit of this action

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53 CAC40: 40 French companies that have the largest market capitalization
is the concerned companies are high profile organization representing the showcase of French businesses at international level; therefore it is important that they show an example in terms of equality that would very likely suggest to other French companies to follow the same direction. Having said that, she acknowledges that the path to achieve gender diversity in top management is still a long and arduous one, however with a successful charter project, more and more leaders will have become aware of this opportunity, and consequently integration of women within the Elite will happen rapidly.

As we discussed in chapter 3.8, elite groups are seldom willing to change their composition, trends and traditions. Jannicke does not only agree with this statement but also generalize it to all sorts of groups whether they are elite groups or not.

**J.J:** Groups by definition don’t like to be disturbed. They like to keep their routines as they are; change is never welcome within a group. So when confronted to a changing situation, for instance a new person that is thinking differently, that wants to have things done differently, regardless if male or female, the response is rarely positive.

### 4.7 Top women in the future

During our interviews, we wanted to learn about our respondents perceived the evolution of women in organizations for senior positions in the future. It seems us essential document the views of females who are already in top management on the future prospects of the next female generation. Christel is very optimistic about the future of women in top management and she even thinks that being a woman is an advantage when a group of candidates have the same experience and training.

**C.D:** I think women have a very bright future ahead of them. I don’t think there is anything hindering them as long as they are willing to put in the required energy. I also think that already now, in many instances, it might be an advantage to be a woman with the same education and experience since there is an obvious lack of women in leading positions, it would be easier for them to access them.
Véronique Préaux, president of network GEF (Grande Ecoles au Féminin) also think that the situation will change positively in the foreseeable future but remains vigilant because it will require the willingness of leaders to put in place policies and actions in this way and implement them properly.

**V.P:** The inescapable fact is that women are arriving in numbers, and this number is increasing over time. It is a fundamental trend that must be taken into account. Historically, the organization was based only on male models and attitudes, since there were only men. Today, women’s expectations and ambitions must be heard by companies if they want to integrate these females. This requires some changes in the life and culture of the company. And it will take time, because it calls into questioning things that are deeply rooted in the heart of the business world.

As Veronique suggests; the two very important facts that will affect women's access to top positions are that women are more and more pursuing high profile studies in management schools and they are increasingly likely to at least start in middle management positions once they graduate. In the course of 10 to 20 coming years, it is certain that there will be more women in boards acting as executive managers. However, today’s leaders must take greater account that the woman is an asset and is a competitive advantage for their companies and therefore must change their behaviour so that the culture of their companies evolves.

All the people we interviewed were in agreement on the fact that there will be more women in high positions in the coming years. According to Jannicke Jennsjö, the representation of women in top management positions varies significantly according the sector of activity.

**J.J:** I see more women in the paper and forest industry in the future. However, the fact those women tend to stagnate for long periods in a same position. You don’t see them entering fast progress areas such as Research and Development. I think that women are more represented in service sectors, because these sectors suit the female characteristics better than anything else.

The representation of women will advance in all sectors of activity but especially in sectors where characteristics of women are predominant, such as service sectors. Regarding sectors very strong male as the sector Jannicke Jennsjö (paper and forest industry), the fact is that
more women at the highest level of the company will have a greater impact on the female progress at all hierarchical levels of the organization. This will tend to balance the percentage of women compared to men in all sectors and will gradually remove the male dominating cultures within organizations.

On the other hand, Eva Färnstrand notes that women must make a sacrifice concerning their family if they want to reach that position, a sacrifice that men have already been making since a long time.

**E.F:** I think in the future, we will have more women in the top management. We are moving in the way where we witness more women in top management positions. But I have to point out, that men have done a better job in getting there so far. And if breaking through a management position is a young girl’s career goal, she has to know that it will take personal sacrifices to achieve it. It is about choices.

She continues by stating that, in relation to this, there are more and more women wanting to make the sacrifice especially among students in business schools. In addition, European governments put up more and more aids (child care, credit tax for home help) to enable women to concentrate on his professional life.
5. Analysis

The analysis chapter in this type of thesis projects is usually a link-chapter between theory and practical method or other empirical findings, where the authors try either to verify, confirm or refute their theories and assumptions, and maybe on a later stage discuss them as well. However, we decided to proceed differently as we do not seek to check on the veracity of the theories that we exhibited and compare them to the perceptions of our primary and secondary respondents. In contrast with the empirical chapter where we followed the same pattern of the theory chapter, walking most of the gathered information and knowledge through a practical scope, we intend to only pick standout points that we judge relevant to analyse and discuss, and that we believe are liable to improve the situation of the female within organizations. Moreover, we will also adopt a more subjective approach in this part and give account of our opinions, ideas and reflections on the subject.

5.1 The gender factor & other variables influencing the “top” woman’s success

We came to learn through our empirical study that the majority of women included in our thesis consider female characteristics as important. This causes us to think that independently of gender, men and women’s characteristics are considered important for organizational development. This is a plausible reason why the highly placed individuals in our study do not acknowledge representing either male or female characteristics, on the contrary, most of them insisted on utilizing a blend of efficient leadership characteristics far from any gender stereotype, hence they were all pleading for modern “non-gender” leadership. Since we couldn’t closely tie up their success only to the gender variable, we tried to find more determinant patterns around other kinds of variables and combine them with the gender variable instead, in order to provide a consistent discussion.
As far as the age variable is seen, we noticed that the senior categories of the participants (more than 50 years) display a greater preference by what many scholars define as masculine characteristics, and that we rather define as classical characteristics such as discipline, risk evaluation, competitiveness, control, ambition etc. It is the traditional model of leadership with slight influences of modernity, yet it still demands conformity and experience to prove successful. On the other hand, we noticed with the younger generation of female participants (less than 40 years) the constant presence of emotions and equality values. They are a category of females that consider more modern and non-gender labelled characteristics that could be possessed by both men and women. Moreover, they do not ignore that they have special traits of personality that they can “bring to the table” and that men are lacking, which put them in a more beneficial situation for the future once that the female model is cemented in the corporate culture. In the mean time, they seem to part more and more with the idea of gender related barriers, or at least they show a great will to part with it. Instead they accept that there is diversity between individuals regardless of their gender, and are willing to adapt this idea and incorporate it with the existing female stereotype qualities. We believe that in order to achieve a faster integration of women in high responsibility positions, it is necessary to incorporate the already existing perceptions of female qualities belonging to the feminine stereotypes within organizations to the new wave of non-gender related, efficient, modern and successful leadership.

Another variable that could help understand the success of our group of participants would be the time variable. The time spent in a top managerial position is undoubtedly influencing the behaviour of “top” women. The category with more experience seem to support the masculine values such as being attracted to power, self control and even conformism, while females with less experience give a lot of importance to the individuals surrounding them either personally or professionally, hence the networking importance. We think that their approach deems the human factor as more important for their career advancement and are consistently developing it by developing their networks. We are leaning and voting for the latter approach since we believe it is an approach that is serving both the organization and the individual’s interests, meaning that the result of employees developing larger and wider networks is only positive for an organization.

As for the level of studies variable, we could not establish it as a strong variable tied to the career advancement of our participants, having a prestigious degree might have given them
access to their early positions in the work life, however it is unlikely to be a solid reason for being promoted or recruited to higher positions on their later career stages, as we mentioned earlier that at a certain point of a career, education skills and competences do not longer play an essential role for an individual in matters of career advancement.

It could be argued that the age, time and level of studies variables are not directly linked to the subject of our study; however they help tremendously to explain or at least describe the success of our participants as females in top management. In addition these variables will contribute to add more information liable to give us more insight for our propositions and suggestions coming in “the authors input” chapter.

5.2 The impact of Stereotypes

While developing our study, we often stumbled on male and female stereotypes, and the issue itself being a barrier impeding women from advancing in their careers, since the man is the “norm” to follow and women are the under represented and turned aside minority. But is it objectively possible to prove that certain proprieties are male or female? It would be for example a relevant question to ask in an effort to squash these stereotypes. Actually we have been able to observe that very few studies could prove the same or at least very similar results regarding male and female leadership and leadership styles. Either they agree on some or many points and disagree on others, or they are totally conflicting each others. We admit that the gender leadership subject not being an exact science, even by business administration or human sciences standards, makes it easier for anyone to have a pretty much wild opinion about what should be branded as masculine or feminine. However stereotyping is more hurting the situation of aspiring women than anything else, thus it makes it a target to be eliminated in order to ease the way for the “top” woman. And the fact that women continue to be prominent in areas that are supposed to be feminine proves even further the danger of stereotyping.

We noticed that negative gender stereotypes occur in situations where women are in a conflict or a resistance situation. This could be explained by the fact that women’s duties and occupations still do not have the same value. It is also obvious that stereotypes tend to strengthen when a woman is pushing for a position that does not bare any female connotations. Even worse than the existence of the fact that “leadership” is masculine, is that women who manage to break thought leading position suffer more than their male
counterparts in the way and continue suffering even once they reach the coveted position. Stereotypes make it indeed harder for women to sustain their position since they always have to prove that they are worthy of it, hence the superwoman syndrome.

In addition to all the gender related obstacles, stereotyping make the odds even lower for women competing on fair grounds for top positions in general. However the dominance of women in the service sector is also a result of stereotypes and already built perceptions about this sector fitting female characteristics. In relation to this, we admit that we struggled to define this fact as positive or negative for the future of the women within organizations operating in other domains and industries. Our struggle is motivated by the balance factor; we do not believe that having women over represented in some sectors and under represented in others to be positive for a socio-economical progress point of view, although it is always comforting to see women succeeding in a specific sector. Even here, the strongest negative argument “forcing” us to brand this as negative is the fact that women being well represented in top management positions within the service sector proves that their success in this particular domain, that is a lot about personal and “customer” satisfaction, is the reflection of her position in her household: taking most of the household duties on her shoulders to satisfy “the customer”, in this case the customer would be the husband and children. It might seem cynical to consider the success of the woman in the service sector as a reflection of her role in the family disguised in organizational structures, however it is somewhat true. In addition, due to the homosocial tendencies of men operating in this sector, it still makes it hard for her to reach the top.

Stereotypes surrounding women have existed since so long that it makes them difficult to just sweep aside; nevertheless our analysis brings up concrete points and a new vision of the women and her ability to handle high responsibility positions that could be used as a “wake up call” for organizations. since only few decades ago, the woman had no choice but to accept her status of the “weaker” sex and make the best out of it, being home and taking care of her family, which leads us to call for the reinforcement of the “female role model” using the achievements of great women as an inspiration for all the young and ambitious women out in the society seeking to accomplish great things in their career.
5.3 Strengthening the Female Role Model

We obviously encountered highly placed females in the organization on both theoretical and practical levels of our thesis since the “top” woman is the heart of our subject. Ironically enough, when we take a look back at all the literature material from our Leadership and management in an international context program (books, articles, seminars, cases etc), we notice that only very few females were highlighted as leaders. The point is that the successful leadership model taught in business schools, universities and colleges is the “male” model.

Business schools such as ours as well as other types of educational institutions are undoubtedly the cradle of the future elite, who is supposed to take the reigns of organizations and “play” in the top society positions. It is therefore a pity to observe that all these institutions that are supposed to form future generations, are instead indoctrinating them to look up to the “male” model as the successful one. Moreover and in relation to sex and gender, ignoring and marginalizing many of the history’s great women will only encourage male homosociality and female heterosociality, which is very negative for organizations that are aiming to improve the under representation of women in high responsibility positions.

Having said that, we propose to reinforce the female role model in universities, business schools and colleges, we propose to promote great women’s achievements to students in order to rectify this “maybe unconscious act of organizational sexism”. Some pessimists could argue that our suggestion bare a sense of utopia connotation, they could stress that negative tendencies such as homosociality and heterosociality have are more complex and more deeply rooted in our society than on educational levels. We could defend our proposition by firstly pointing that there is always a start and we at least have targeted one. Secondly, we consider this solution as a short term one, meaning that by heavily reinforcing the female role model within the educational system, we will not only encourage young and ambitious women more and help them be more inspired and motivated to achieve better, but we will also initiate and offer the possibility for young men to maybe have a “female” role model to look up to, thus discourage gender related inspiration and motivation.
Moreover, while reinforcing and strengthening the female role model and incorporating it to the business culture, these high numbers of targeted young and already inspired women will start their professional life on such a “high” that hopefully, given a certain period of time will become themselves role models for the next generation. The major positive difference at that point would be that they will be much more “role” models in terms of numbers for the younger the generation to look up to, as many statistical studies confirm that for example there are more female graduates from business schools in Sweden than male graduates since the beginning of the new millennium.

In addition, even if this suggestion might seem as a “long shot”, implementing it would further help eliminate or at least comprehensively reduce many other visible and invisible barriers such as gender discrimination because of the fact that the male future elite would have been used to successful women already at a relatively early age.

Not to mention that strengthening the female role model will increase self confidence that is generally lacking in women compared to men. As we saw in chapter 3.6.3, the problem of self-esteem appears for women at an early age often during their school and university period. the fact of being familiar with successful women by learning about them in different kinds of academic studies and from different angles will help both male and female students to realize that know are as qualified as their male counterpart to reach high responsibility positions. Creating this “trend” would probably and gradually reverse the current reality of women’s self-confidence decreasing significantly during their university period contrarily to men’s self-confidence that increases slightly.54.

5.4 Crushing the glass ceiling

Before conducting our research, we perceived the glass ceiling as a concrete barrier that a vast number of ambitious women stumbled into on their way to top management positions. We were curious to find a logical explanation for it in order to reduce its density and making easier to break. We now realized that there are indeed many clarifications to why women are finding it so “hard” to advance in their careers; the issue itself is as multifaceted as the nature

of the glass ceiling. We could easily brand it as a glass “prism” ceiling since it is actually related to all the other gender related visible barriers, minor ones and major ones, creating so many angles, reflections and mirages in such a way that it becomes practically impossible for females to find a safe passage through it.

Some of our participants didn’t even acknowledge the existence of such a glass ceiling; others conceded that it was not strictly related to women as a minority group. One could hardly refute their testimonies since the glass ceiling does not officially exist, it is not mentioned in any official organizational policy nor described as a legitimate obstacle that organizations are “officially” fighting against. Then again, so many other negative “non-official” matters that are a reality in our capitalist society are not recognized neither. With that said, affected women are continuously suffering from its consequences, thus we came to the conclusion of not considering it as “invisible” anymore.

After contemplating all the visible obstacles’ theories that we exhibited and discussed earlier, we realized that they all could be included in this glass ceiling. They all could be categorized as layers part of it making the last one invisible, and most likely the hardest to break, with self confidence, gender discrimination, access to promotion and the traditional view of the women barriers with foreseeable solutions at best. In relation to this, we believe that the glass ceiling will disappear or at least become much easier to cross once all the other visible barriers are dissolved. In fact, the glass ceiling is a concrete culmination of all the other visible and recognized barriers that women are suffering from because of its tangible impeding to the woman’s access to high responsibility positions.

We would encourage organizations to acknowledge the existence of the glass ceiling and include it with other evident gender related obstacles in view of the fact that it will enable all the protagonists of the organization to visualize this phenomenon even if it is complex to assess or measure its consequences.

On the other hand, the existence of the glass ceiling creates a competitive advantage for women that have already crossed it. Speaking from the other side of the glass ceiling provide the “top” woman with a “plus”, especially 50 years old females and plus who belong to a generation where the glass ceiling was as hard to break as it gets. Younger women could use its existence as an additional motivation factor that will increase their professional and
competitive value in a male dominated business life. Logically speaking, since women are under-represented in leading positions makes the women who accessed these positions somewhat superior to their male counterparts who just followed their natural path of progress.

Effective networking could be a shortcut or even a “diamond razor blade” that could enable the top woman to cut through the layers of the glass ceiling. Young and aspiring women should include themselves more in informal male networks. We noticed that women tend to give more importance to formal networks, in this respect, we think that the new female generation should take the necessary time in developing informal social networks as our theoretical, statistical and empirical findings show that informal networks could prove to be as important or even more important than the formal ones. Today, recruitment and promotion to higher positions take place through personal networks, which makes it harder for females to be exposed to such opportunities due to their more formal networks.

We also noted our participants have common proprieties that helped them to break through high profile positions. Most of them exhibit proprieties such as curiosity, result orientation, strong drive, well built self confidence and the persistent will to change things amongst others. One could easily argue that these could be key proprieties that should be acquired, learned and developed in order to cross the glass ceiling.

5.5 Inclusion of the women in “top” positions & elite diversification

We have seen in the theoretical and empirical part that Norway had introduced policies and quotas to promote diversity within Norwegian companies. The Norwegian government has demanded that all government owned organizations must enforce a minimum of 40% of women board members and threatened to introduce the same legislations in the private sector as well if companies continue to fail in promoting women in top positions efficiently. However, we agree with all our participants and believe that this method is not the right solution to solve the issue of the under-representation of women in high responsibility positions. We certainly consider this method to be too radical if not plagued by a “sexist” nature; it will rather contribute in creating and sustaining more discrimination and segregation within organizations. Women finding themselves in top management will then have an additional task of proving that they are worthy of their status, and they are not there to “make the numbers”. Moreover, recruiting and promoting women to top positions on gender grounds more than competence and experience criteria to satisfy a certain quota will cause a loss of
efficiency instead of increasing it, hence a loss of competitiveness when the primary goal was to integrate more women in top management to create more value for businesses.

To remedy this situation, we advocate voluntary actions undertaken by the companies’ confederations or direct initiatives from companies rather than drastic measures imposed by national authorities. We believe that this alternative solution is far more effective in enabling companies to achieve gender parity in positions of responsibility. Indeed, the key to success would be for organizations to emulate programs such as the Dell Europe project. We believe that implementing these actions and make them become a future “trend” will contribute a great deal to change the attitude of both leaders and employees in a relatively short period of time, thus this could be a solution that will prove to be more efficient than the “Norwegian case”.

If conducted properly by organizations’ confederations, we can expect a fairly rapid democratization of the woman's place in organizations, and consequently edge closer to gender parity in all hierarchical levels. Nevertheless, this step could take a long time to expand within many organizations, but whoever is adopting it successfully will indeed increase the awareness of “the other”, and by the time it becomes an up and running common system, we will undoubtedly witness a fast integration of more women in top positions thus incorporating it to the corporate culture.
6. The authors’ input

We consider this chapter to be the climax of our thesis. We use all previous chapters where we examined, depicted, explored, analysed and discussed the current and future situation of the woman within organizations as a basis to reflect on what we can bring to the subject. Indeed, we will introduce new concepts under the form of propositions and suggestions such as the “ecological” organization, that we believe will help organizations improve the situation of women in top management positions and provide a brighter future for them in matters of future integration, we will also assess their feasibility and defend them cautiously.

6.1 The “top” woman is the future of men: the authors’ proposition

Why is the woman the solution for the organization? In order to proceed to answering this complex enquiry, we are adopting a systematic elimination process in order to target at least one relevant solution. What does the woman possess that the man is lacking? Well first of all the social status; in all domains, females are not equal to men, even in countries that are practising and enforcing human rights, political democracy traditions, political and social secularism and finally political will of modernity. Why emphasising around the existence of these four conditions? Well because we realized that even within industrial western countries, the status of the woman easily becomes compromised as soon as one of these conditions is missing. Some examples to defend this argument could be France, Italy and Spain that are not as developed as Germany and the Nordic countries concerning the political will to achieve modernity, while Bureaucracy, machism, archaism and corruption are still a dwelling cancer in Italy and even Spain, a country freshly Europeanized and still suffering from Catholicism’s sequels. With that said, women are still suffering from the consequences of this inequality in European countries even with their “western” status.

This introduction that could seem too political for a business administration oriented analysis is indeed necessary in order to understand the “roots of evil” that are handicapping the
promotion of women in high profile positions, even in supposedly modern and democratic countries. The natural continuation of this introduction would be to mention all the positive actions that European countries, especially Sweden and France since we focalized on them in our study, to change the demeaning organizational situation of the woman. But we already went through several initiatives, plans and programs in the theory and empirical chapters. We would rather bring up the two most important political decisions that went the woman’s way since World War II because they will help us edge closer to the solution. These decisions are first the emergence of the working law that is still in evolution, and the second one is the innovation of the idea about gender equality first in a political context, which later on have been translated to the work/business domain.

After the renaissance and the industrial revolutions that introduced the notion of “the working female” in a social structure under the influence of ideologies of religious and macho nature, not to mention the sexual connotations involved, one could argue that these revolutions came suddenly and in a time when the woman was “not ready yet”. This demonstrates that the woman inherited a special status mainly plagued by inequality, a status that is going to make her undergo “second class” worker social status for a long period of time. Moreover, these revolutions coincided with growing liberalism and capitalism movements that benefited this status more from a man’s side that a women’s point of view.

While developing our theories, we realized that motivation is the essential source pushing a person to pursue a career, to sustain long term assiduousness and of course ameliorate one’s situation. The downside is that those theories provide a vast and sometimes too complex field for recruiters to deal with, until they often become confused on which attitude they should adopt or which recipe to apply while promoting and recruiting. Worse than that is that several of those theories are conflicting and opposing each others and this fact itself doesn’t make things any easier for human resources departments in organizations.

We are aware that there is a political will to ameliorate the female’s situation in the European Unions countries, either by introducing new laws with the aim of protecting her and in the same time opening new horizons that has been strictly reserved to men until now, or via what is often called “parity”. Nonetheless, here again we learned about the limitations of theses measures that did not deliver satisfying results under a relatively long period of time. In the light of all this, we are proposing a new approach vis a vis the woman. We are proposing that
organizations start considering the woman as a new alternative herself, a new solution for a new breath within organizations as Aragon once said: the woman is the future of the organization. Picking up on this quote, we want to explain it and develop it in the context of our proposition.

First of all, organizations should start to be concretely aware of the human condition of the woman. It might seem a bit exaggerated, but we believe that the woman is barely escaping from a slave state nowadays, even in the most developed European countries. And by slave state we do not mean classical slavery where the slave is a none-free person, asset, merchandise or instrument liable to be bought and sold. We rather mean a modern slavery notion characterized by the female working under psychological menace, a situation that involves her being maintained in a psychological dependency state.

This compulsion state has indeed been defined by Friedrich von Hayek as a situation where the actions of an individual are serving the interests of another one. There are comparatively hundreds of thousands of working women in our European societies in an under level compared to men, and that is only mentioned seldom in the registers of inequality. This is literally a type of coercion composed of different social, economical, historical and political factors, which make of the aspiring and ambitious women a category that undergoes these facts more than any other minority group. According to Durkheim (1895), these social facts are consisting in the ways of acting and thinking of individuals that already acquired the power of compulsion and thus imposing themselves in a favourable position. This brings us to underline the symbolic violence involved. Pierre Bourdieu (1970) define the symbolic violence as following: it is the power that occurs in a situation where one has the possibility of imposing significations as legitimate because of the power that he/she possess. This type of power becomes violence since it is translated in a sort of imposition on the recipients.

In the context of the women within the organization, this symbolic arbitrary violence is heavily contributing to social and cultural inequalities favouring men, mainly founded on physiological and philosophical principals amongst other that are transcending individual

interests based solely on an individual’s skills and credentials. A neutral male should just consider the woman in these algorithms before realizing that she has always suffered from this symbolic violence.

Moreover, considering the “top” woman as an alternative solution for the future of the organization will involve companies thinking about the Habitus of Pierre Bourdieu. Habitus is a complex concept, but in its simplest usage could be understood as a set of acquired patterns of thought, behaviour, and taste. These patterns are the result of internalization of culture or objective social structures through the experience of an individual or group (Scott, John & Marshall, 1998). Bourdieu (1980) re-elaborated the concept of habitus and extended the scope of the term to include person’s beliefs and dispositions. According to him, habitus is the product of conditioning that could provoke the reproduction of social conditions in an imprevisible and unconscious fashion. For instance the inferior and unequal status of the woman is a direct effect of the functions of habitus.

In view of all these theoretical considerations, we could finally state that the woman is a “human genre” of its own kind, minimized in her social status, limited in her social and economical actions and discriminated in her work. Therefore we are calling for organizations to present this “special” individual with the chance of expressing her competences, talents and even her thirst of success freely, without any inequalities or discrimination. This way, she could finally cement her real place within the socio-economical structures of the organization, since according to many exhibited theories and many of our participants perceptions, it is fair to say that due to her under-representation in high profile positions, the woman’s motivation to achieve “better” things would be rather high in a scale compared to the man’s motivation, the man who already takes his career progress for granted.

6.2 The “top” woman is the future of men: the authors’ argument

In order to provide women with the necessary freedom, we targeted three vital reasons that are backing our suggestion to be the right move with the aim of ensuring a brighter future for the organization, these categories being the demographical constraint, a modern image for the organization and the woman as an “asset” for companies.
6.2.1 The demographical constraint

All statistical studies are predicting a demographical implosion in most of the European countries especially in northern countries, and in the same time a demographical explosion in southern countries. A recent United Nations study about the necessary immigrations, with future projection going as far as the year 2300, shows that at least 150 000 new immigrants are needed every year in most of the EU countries. Fecundity is decreasing in almost all northern countries where it will soon go under the 2.1 children mark in matters of generation replacement; in the mean time mortality rate is continuously diminishing. On the other hand, we notice that within top positions, the woman’s representation went from 14% in 1974 to 33% in 2006, and this progressive feminisation of high profile positions will continue to increase in the forthcoming decades since studies are showing the highest percentages of new entrants in the work markets will be indeed women. Organization should take these statistics into serious consideration since the presence of the woman in high responsibility position is becoming a socio-economical necessity. It is actually ironical that organizations are failing to imitate such behaviours already adopted by international agencies and associations.

Another demographical point worth mentioning would be the fact that European companies that are encouraging foreign head hunting from third world countries since several decades. There is even a rough competition between organizations to recruit brilliant but unsatisfied minds, either from their life quality or seeking more professional prestige. This proves that there is a lack of “brains” in organizations, therefore we are proposing to companies to encourage and consolidate the top level female local “population” that was impeded and still is suffering from tradition and cultural prejudices slowing its professional advancement. In addition bringing foreign brains does not come without different types of problems. It unnecessarily enhances competition for highly educated “locals” for instance, not to mention the integration problems of the brought population. This argument gives us another reason to advocate that the highly educated “local” woman could easily and in an advantageous fashion fill these top position gaps for organizations.

There is also a false paradox glooming over the European Union that we should discredit. Since the 1980’s, we notice that countries where the participation of mothers is important are the countries where fecundity is the higher. This fact goes definitely against the common prejudice, since inversely it is the countries with the lowest fecundity, such as Germany,
A better integration of the “top” woman is undoubtedly an advantage in terms of image and reputation of companies, it is a symbol of modernity and openness, it even constitutes a weighing argument in the perception of all actors involved with a certain organization whether it is internally or externally, or in the organization’s macro or micro-environment. Today, one must concede that a “sensitive” organization that is providing their “top” women with an environment where they can express the talents and skills that represent them aspire more “trust” to the people or organization dealing with it, it rather gives the impression of “trendy” firms, an image that is coveted nowadays if not important.

Therefore, we would like to introduce the **“ecological organization”** as a new terminology defining a well balanced organization, where a group of men and women meet everyday to execute certain task liable to ensure the survival and the success of a company under a long period of time. Indeed, we are suggesting extending the notion of “ecological”, which is normally used in the environment of nature, to the environment of the organization, since it is in fact a term that incorporate everything that is natural, sane and balanced. A normally balanced society counts men and women, a normally balanced family counts men and women, we could stress the same thing for every environment where the human being is growing, living and progressing. So why suddenly in the organization, this same man finds himself in a non-balanced environment first without the same amount of women and second without the same task diversity and responsibility? Were organizations ever sure that this “handicapped” environment is sane or normal? Therefore we are proposing for organizations to replace these terms by “ecological”. This new terminology will furthermore serve two purposes. It will endorse the common sense of “natural” and the sense of “trendy” that is more and more coveted in most of domains in our socio-economical life regardless of which industry the organization is operating in.

However, by promoting organizations that are encouraging women to access high responsibility positions as “ecological organizations”, “sane” and “self-recycling” hence “eternal”, we are aware that it is only the woman who is capable of bringing this new label
rich in modernity and baring the sacred values of life. It is the “top” woman and the “top” woman only who will bring a promising futurism to the organization, and we believe that it is the answer to all the breathless classical strategies of organizations.

However, we would like to stress that by introducing this new “ecological” concept, we are not defending women’s rights to access top positions. There are certainly political institutions as well working right associations that are supposed to just that. Instead, we are promoting the idea of using the best of the “top” woman’s talents and qualities for the best of both her situation as an individual, and above all for the better being of the currently “unbalanced” organization.

6.2.3 The “top” woman as an “asset” for the organization: the “ecological” organization will surpass the modern one

We presented in the theory chapter assumptions, suppositions and theories by well established scholars about what is branded as female characteristics, female professional advantages and female leadership. Some of them are corroborating each others and some of them are conflicting each others. We later on discussed these ideas with our primary participants and seek out more insight from secondary participants in the empirical part of our thesis. Once again we ended up with many perceptions and some of them are confirming each others while others are in direct conflict. However as far as we are concerned, the main point is not who is right or wrong in branding a given characteristic as a male or a female one, it is in fact more important to focus on the characteristics that women are capable to offer the organization. Therefore we are calling organizations to focus on this diversity that the woman could offer, and that is essential to create a well balanced environment within the organization.

While we admit that modernity has brought the woman to the organization, this same organization has reached her last breaths regarding the integration of the woman in high responsibility positions. It seems that even sophisticated strategies that are aiming to tackle her under representation in this “modern” environment are proving not to be good enough anymore. This convinced us that by promoting “the ecological organization”, organizations will create a “new” environment starting from “natural” bases. Now, our vision could seem too revolutionary, but we can draw many similar parallels in other domains, such as the modern medicine that abandoned “all-chemical” concepts while developing modern products,
a concept that was trendy just over two decades ago, or during the industrial revolution where modernity has defeated traditional archaisms. The same thing could be said about our new concept, where we are thinking about an ecological organization that will defeat the archaisms of the modern organization to **renew** it and consequently **surpass** it.
7. Further research propositions

The objective of this study is to examine the situation of women in leading positions within organizations regardless of what kind of business, service or industrial sector. Now at the end of this work, we acquired much more understanding of the subject at hand; we even came up with our own suggestions for both the future well being of the woman and the organization. However, throughout the development of this work, we have been discerning several areas worth further investigation either as a master degree thesis or even as Doctor of Philosophy degree project. The first idea that we taught about as a continuation of this work is to specialize in a specific area and conduct a similar yet more quantitative oriented study about it.

Due to the fact that women have been and are still discriminated, many of them are pushed to found their own companies. This issue could be another research proposition worth examining on deeper levels.

In “the authors’ input” part of our study, we introduced the new terminology of the”ecological” organization. This idea could be a further possible PhD project, where we could develop it further and even establish an implementation plan for it within organizations.
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9. Appendix

9.1 Participant’s profile sheet

NAME:

MARITAL STATUS:       CHILDREN:

AGE:

PRESENT POST OF RESPONSIBILITY:

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND:

YEAR OF APPOINTMENT TO PRESENT POST:

DID YOU OCCUPY ANY OTHER POST OF RESPONSIBILITY BEFORE?
9.2 Interview template

1. When you were a high school/university student, what were the career ambitions of your fellow female classmates? How would you describe them compared to your fellow male classmates’ ambitions?

2. What were your parents’ career ambitions for you to achieve?

3. Describe you career development:

4. What are your major personality characteristics that you believe contributed the most in you having this leading position today?

5. What is your point of view about the universal debate concerning women and their ability to have a career?

6. Do you believe that there is a significant difference in prioritizing between men and women career wise nowadays?

7. How does the gender repartition look like in your work place, environment? Specifically regarding leading positions in your organization.

8. Do you believe that your organization needs more women in leading positions? Do you believe that the society needs more women in leading positions? Why?

9. Do you acknowledge the existence of an “invisible” glass ceiling or obstacle for women who want to reach higher positions in organizations?

10. What do you perceive as the major obstacles that threatened/slowed/hindered you from reaching your current position?
11. What is the general attitude and behaviour that you experienced with/from men in your work environment and throughout your career, and did it influence your career?

12. Have some (important) individuals (for you) ever doubted your ability to be a good leader? Particularly your early career? (Hierarchy / subordinated / family)? Give the examples

13. How do you feel about promoting more women in leading positions, with the help of gender quota implementation (Norwegian case)? Do you think it would be unfair for male candidates applying for the same position, if we only consider qualifications? Do you see any advantage/inconvenient using this method?

14. What is the nature of your most important network? Did networking play an important role in your career? What is the influence extent of your most important network on your career advancement?

15. What is your ultimate goal regarding your career advancement? Where do you see yourself in X years? (Number of years depends of the age of the respondent)

16. How did your family, children and free time influence your career? (Family and children depending on the respondent)

17. Is it possible to combine a high career with a fulfilling family life? (optional question)

18. In your opinion, what is the most important attribute (both individual and situational) that played the most central role in you breaking into this leading position?

19. Define the word “career” and its meaning for you. According to your definition, do/did you have a Career?

20. How do you see women in organizations in...?10, 20, 50 years?

21. Is there any other issue that you spontaneously associate to women, career advancement and high responsibility positions?
22. To conclude, what is/are your pieces of advice to all the young and ambitious women who soon will start their professional lives and want to pursue high careers?