Conflicting Roles: Balancing Family and Professional Life - A Challenge for Working Women

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Subject: Business Administration
Level and semester: Master Thesis
Spring 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank and show my gratitude to all the people who participated directly or indirectly in this thesis.

First of all, my tutor Philippe Daudi who has been a huge support throughout this project. Indeed, without his feedback, advice and insights my thesis would not be what it is today. Even when it was not always easy, he always found time to converse and exchange ideas with me about my topic.

The thesis committee composed of MaxMikeal Björling, Mikael Lundgren and Björn Bjerke, provided me with their knowledge, experience and feedback and for this I am very grateful.

I would also like to thank the three female participants for their generosity and for giving me some of their precious time and very insightful comments: Ghislaine Travacchi, Ludivine Vonfort and Dominique Penaudin.

Thanks to my wonderful proof-reader Elaine Gibbon, who helped make some grammatical corrections and who kept me motivated through her daily emails.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support and especially my father for his marvellous contacts, my sister Andréa for her original and constant encouragement, and my boyfriend Pierre-Jean who has always been very patient and caring even in times of crisis!
ABSTRACT

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Purpose: This study aims to explore how women’s roles at work and home interact with each other and focuses specifically on role conflicts which may arise.

Research questions:
Primary question: When and why do role conflicts occur in women’s lives?
Secondary questions:
(1) What is a role?
(2) How do roles affect women’s lives?
(3) How do women cope/deal with role conflict?

Methodology: Qualitative research and interpretive approach

Findings: Theoretical and empirical findings state that role conflicts occur when traditional values, lack of time and unbalanced involvement interfere with how women fulfil their different roles. Moreover, this study analyses the ways that women might have to deal with such conflict by comparing theories and concepts from literature to empirical findings from interviews.

Keywords: leadership, women, gender roles, conflict, work and family, involvement.
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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Background Context

Aims

Research Question

Limits to Research

Thesis Overview
1. Introduction

In this chapter I will firstly explain why I came up with this thesis topic, and then proceed to present the research question and the aim of the study. The last part will be dedicated to the limits of this thesis and its framework.

1.1 Background Context

When we look at research, media and society, women in leadership positions seem to form a current concern. For instance, recently, Viviane Reading who is working for the European Union as a European Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship has underlined the fact that women were not present enough on boards of directors (Tribune, March 2012). Even if the number of women in the workplace is still on the increase, the number of women who actually sit on boards of directors remain low\(^1\), 16.1\% in 2010 compared to 14.1\% in 2006. Moreover, many studies which have looked at women and their leadership behaviours, seem to raise new questions: - “Are women better leaders than men?” (Study led by Hudson Company, 2009) - “Do we need to establish quotas?” - “Do women have to make more concessions than men to have a high level jobs? – “Do women need more training to become good leaders?” (l'Express, 2011). But for each study that says that women make more effective leaders another says that they do not (Barbuto et Al. 2007). The debate appears to be sensitive and controversial. However, even though I would be very interested in researching women’s leadership and efficiency, I decided to focus my thesis on a close but different topic. The research will not be on leadership but will be more concerned with how women successfully combine private and professional life.

1.2 Aims

The topic of my thesis is strongly related to society’s concerns and evolution. On the one hand, it is no a secret that women in leadership are becoming or trying to become more and more prominent. However, the apparition of women in leadership positions requires some adjustments

\(^1\) Source: Catalyst, 2011, Women’s Share of Fortune 500 leadership.
in their lives. Indeed, while men were monopolizing high level jobs, women embraced other kinds of leadership positions that have arisen in the private sphere. Thus women now have to deal with two different “roles”/“careers”: the one they have in their private life and the one they have in their professional life. As a consequence, women today are asking themselves how they can have the necessary resources to fulfil their various professional and private commitments while achieving satisfaction and success in every part of their life.

On the other hand, people’s priorities seems to have evolved and work is no longer central to their life. Even if work is still important it is perceived differently. Indeed, it seems that people do not only work to earn money and achieve a good standard of living but also through their job they want to find passion, to blossom and to be happy. “You have got to find what you love and that is as true for work as it for lovers. Your work is going to fill a large part of your life and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you have not found it yet, keep looking and do not settle. As with all matter of the heart, you will know when you have found it” (Steve Jobs, 1995, Stanford Commencement Address). Furthermore, current private concerns such as travel, spending time with family/friends and developing hobbies seem to take a larger place in people’s life and to counterbalance work.

My topic is a crossover between these two evolutions. That is why, in order to be more accurate and to reduce the large field of study, I have decided to focus my study on women (see section 1.4 Limits to the research). However, I am aware of the fact that the outcomes I might come up with, are not only specific to women and could also be applicable to men.

Women are willing to reach high job positions and to be leaders, but they are not willing to sacrifice their private life and all the associated happiness to achieve this. And, even if it is too soon to assume that it can be a problem, I can already introduce the term 'challenges'. Indeed, each different part of a woman's life such as work, family or community is related to different roles: organizer's role, leader's role, mother's role, wife's role, daughter's role, soccer team coach's role, sister's role etc. And when those roles interact with each other, conflicts can sometimes occur.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to understand how, by taking into consideration the current evolution in women’s lives, it is possible to combine work, family, friends, hobbies and fulfilment to achieve happiness and success in all aspects of their life.

Through this thesis, I hope to raise awareness for future women leaders about what they might have to face later on in their life. Indeed, I think that by being aware of the potential challenges, women could better prepare themselves to make the right and most effective choices.
1.3 Research Question

My research question has two dimensions:

Primary question: When and why do roles conflicts occur in women’s life?

Secondary questions that help me to answer to the main one:

(1) What is a role?
(2) How do these roles affect women’s lives?
(3) How could women cope or deal with role conflicts?

1.4 Limits to the research

At the beginning of my research I did not want to restrict my topic to one gender because I was frightened of missing something. But, after some research I concluded that by choosing one gender, I could make my thesis more accurate and relevant. So, as mentioned above, I will focus my research on women. The topic could also apply to men, but I think that the roles women have to embrace in their everyday life are more intense and interact with each other in more complex ways. For instance, a woman with a professional job who is pregnant has to assume her future role as a mother while she is still a leader in her organization. Besides focusing on women, I also focus on women who hold positions of responsibility and have a team to lead. I am not saying that women with low or middle positions do not have to face the same challenges but as I am currently following a leadership and management program I think that it is more pertinent to consider women who have leadership roles.

Besides, focusing on French women is a strategic choice as it is more convenient and accessible for me to obtain interviews with French leaders. Moreover, even though I decided to interview only French leaders (see section 2.1.3 Empirical Research Strategy), I did not restrict my literature research to the French field. Indeed, I have chosen to select literature from different countries such as the United States, Sweden, Norway and England amongst others, in order to get an international understanding of the topic.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I will firstly explain how I decided on this thesis topic. I will then outline the research question and describe the aims of the study. The last part will be dedicated to the limits of this thesis and its framework.
Chapter two: Methodology
This chapter aims to explain which methodology I have used throughout my thesis. To begin with I will present and discuss the choice of the research approach, and will then consider the different types of data collection. Finally, I will go over data reliability and validity. The purpose here is to give the reader a deeper insight by providing him or her with the groundwork of this thesis.

Chapter three: Theoretical Framework and Empirical findings
This chapter is a combination of two parts: the theoretical framework and empirical findings. The aim of the theoretical part is to provide the reader with relevant and theoretical knowledge that will help him or her to get a deeper understanding, and also to highlight the arguments drawn from literature. Finally, in order to illustrate these concepts, I will integrate empirical findings based on interviews I have conducted. This chapter is particularly important because it is the first layer of the analysis.

Chapter four: Conclusion
In this final chapter I will present the conclusion of my research by drawing on all the models and knowledge from the previous chapters. Moreover, I will also suggest some recommendations based on the analysis from the Chapter Four.

Chapter five: Further research question
I consider the whole process of writing a thesis like a Lego® construction, and I think that my work is just one building block of this construction and that someone could put the next Lego brick on it. Therefore, I propose some ideas for further research as a Masters degree.

Chapter six: References
This chapter encompasses all the literature I have read for my thesis.

Chapter seven: Appendix
In this final chapter, the reader can find the materials I have used to produce this thesis.

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2 http://www.lego.com/da-dk/
CHAPTER 2:

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

Data Collection

Reliability and Validity
2. Methodology

This chapter aims to explain which methodology I have used throughout my thesis. To begin with I will present and discuss the choice of the research approach, and will then consider the different types of data collection. Finally, I will go over data reliability and validity. The purpose here is to give the reader a deeper insight by providing him or her with the groundwork of this thesis.

Methodology gathers all the methods and processes used in a research study in order to solve a “problem”. Some researchers even define methodology as a set of guidelines to implement “strategy” in different situations. In my opinion, I consider methodology like the process through which I will be able to give my own understanding of my topic. There are different approaches and views that can be used to elaborate a thesis. The challenge here is to pick the right one/ones and make the most of it. However, the choice is not made randomly as “discourse is always realized in a particular context and for some particular purpose the will to explain is not innocent” (Daudi, 1986, a), the methods that will be used are crucial and will give direction, influence what we want to say, write or defend. Besides this, methodology also makes the thesis and the research “attractive”, to encourage people to read the thesis. To conclude, I would say that methodology provides structure to the research that would help to solve the “problématique” of my thesis. Methodology helps but also influences the whole process.

2.1 Research Approach

2.1.1 The Interpretive Framework

According to Walsham (1993), interpretive methods of research “start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies equally to researchers. Thus there is no objective reality, which can be discovered by researchers and replicated by others, in contrast to the assumptions of positivist science”. I decided to use this approach because the aim of my thesis is not to make sweeping statements about how role conflicts occur and how to solve them, but to understand and analyse
the link between what people know, what they think and how they act according to their knowledge and values. My thesis is based on my analysis of the data and research that I have collected through literature and interviews. One of my most important roles was to consider the respondents’ arguments (from my interviews) and to translate them into theories while remaining as close as possible to their original ideas. “Some interpretative researchers bring a tool kit of theories that they dip into to find frameworks to help them explain what their research has discovered” (Fisher 2004). This is exactly how I have proceeded. Indeed, in parallel to the research I have conducted I have used other theories from literature, in order to back up what I have discovered from my own study. Furthermore, the use of the interpretive approach for the interview will be explained later on (see section 2.1.5 Methodology for interviews).

2.1.2 The Qualitative Approach

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 17) describe qualitative research, as “any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons’ lives, stories, behaviours, but also about the organizational functioning, social movements or interactional relationship”.

As the nature of my research problem lies with people’s experiences about roles conflicts, the qualitative approach and focusing on the relationships seems to be more appropriate. My aim is to put more emphasis on words rather than numbers while I gather and analyse data. (Bryman and Bell, 2005). Moreover, I am more interested in interpreting people’s thoughts, perceptions and views of the reality than interpreting numbers and statistics.

2.1.3 The Empirical Research Strategy

According to Bjerke (2007), the main aim of an interview is “to collect factual data of an objective kind- to get a mirror reflection of the objective reality”.

During the literature review, the more I read about women and role conflict, the more I wondered if the theories and concepts were actually “true”, “up to date” and applicable in “real life”. Therefore, I decided to conduct interviews in order to compare the literature with the perceptions that women have about what they are experiencing in their lives. I have some regret about the number of interviews, I think more interviews would have added weight to my arguments. I am happy with the outcomes but I feel a bit frustrated as though I am missing something. As my topic is about leadership, women, conflicts between family and professional roles, I have decided to interview women with high positions who also have children. The requirement that they have to have children was important because the dichotomy between work
and family is much more marked. I also looked for women with different high level jobs and family models, in order to have a larger field of research. Therefore, I have interviewed:

- Ghislaine Travacchi
  52 years old
  Divorced
  Two Children
  Chief Editor of the “Mutualité Française” Website.

- Ludivine Vonfort
  27 years old
  Married
  One Child
  Managing Director of Decathlon

- Dominique Penaudin
  60 Years old
  Married
  Three Children
  Real Estate Agent of her own company

The methods used during the interviews will be explained in Section 2.1.5 Methodology for Interviews.

2.1.4 The Grounded theory

“Grounded theory methodology and methods are now among the most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research when generating theory is the researcher’s principal aim” (Fisher 2004).

I have used the grounded theory because my thesis started with “an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

“Grounded theorists suggest that people’s subjective understanding of their worlds should be theorised by studying the themes that people use in giving accounts of their lives and the world. Researchers look for these themes and categories in the interviews and observations collected during the research. The researcher then develops theories based upon these themes” (Fisher
Therefore, it is possible to identify different steps:

- The first step is to elaborate a theoretical framework in order to provide guidelines to the empirical study. “All kinds of literature can be used before research study is begun: both thinking about and getting the study off the ground” (Strauss and Cobin, 1990). Researchers have to have a certain theoretical sensitivity to their topic, which is the ability to filter and recognize the important data and to give it meaning. The degree of sensitivity depends on previous reading and experience with the area the researcher is studying. However, it is important that the researcher stays impartial in his or her empirical approach, that his or her theoretical background does not interfere, “you can use all types of literature judged as relevant, but must guard against becoming a captive of any of them” (Strauss and Cobin, 1990). I was afraid of this problem when I conducted my interviews, I did not want to over-use or wrongly use the knowledge I had already acquired during the literature reviews. But at the same time, prerequisite information was essential.

- The second step is to look for empirical data from the field of study. This consists of experiences from people who were/are concerned by the phenomena that the researcher is studying. However, even if my topic is focused on role conflict, I have widened the research in order to get a bigger perspective of the phenomenon.

- The last step is the conclusion. Key theoretical concepts and empirical data are analysed and interpreted in order to elaborate theories. That is where the name of “grounded theory” becomes relevant. Indeed, the emergence of theories is grounded on “real people’s life experiences”. In my case, it is based on women with high professional positions who have children. However, the analysis and the conclusion of my thesis might also be applicable to every one who combines family life with a job.

2.1.5 Methodology for interviews

I have used semi-structured interviews, “the interviewer has a schedule to remind them of the main issues and topics that need to be covered by the respondent. However, the respondent has much latitude to respond to the question in the ways that seem sensible to them” (Ficher 2004). I did not want to limit the interviews to my pre-prepared questions, as I wanted to encourage wide-ranging responses about their life experiences. For organizational reasons, each interview has been done differently: one on the phone, one on Skype and the last one face to face. This was my preferred interview, as in addition to the information the participant was giving me through her answers, it was possible to identify other emotions on her face. Moreover, I felt I was able to share something more than only questions and answers. To conduct my interviews, I
also used the interpretive approach:
- “Life histories: which is a useful technique for eliciting qualitative information. The respondents are asked to tell the story of how they got to where they are in their careers and organization”. I used this method at the beginning of the interviews in order to get a clear idea of their background and how they got where they are:
- “Critical incidents” (Flanagan 1954): “In a critical incident study the respondent is asked to think of occasions where they dealt with the subject of the research, and things went well, and other occasions when things went not so well” (Fisher 2004). That is exactly how I proceeded to ask them about role conflicts they might have in their lives and how they feel/felt about them.

The most difficult part was to “translate” the outcomes of the interviews into theory, by this I mean theory according to the definition of Watson (1999) - Are, in general terms, ideas about how phenomena relate to each other; - Are, more specifically, ideas about how particular events or actions tend to lead to others or are brought about by them- Are, generalisations”.

2.2 Data Collection

“Collecting research material is time consuming. Not just because it takes a lot of time to do the work but also because there will be lost time” (Fisher 2004). However, data are the essence of the thesis and collecting them is a very arduous task. Techniques for collecting and gathering data can be divided in two categories, primary and secondary data (Arbnor and Bjerke, 2008).

2.2.1 Primary Data

“Primary research generally refers to that research which involves the collection of original data using an accepted research methodology” (Riley et al. 2000). Therefore, primary data result from interviews, observations, conversations and dialogues, which are conducted by the author of the study on a specific research topic. I have decided to use primary data and more specifically interviews in order to get illustrations and up to date information about role conflict. The use of primary data is complex because its quality depends on the interactions between the interviewer and the respondent. Primary data are always more or less subjective as they are based on people’s perception of the reality. Therefore, reliability and validity have to be treated with caution.

2.2.2 Secondary Data

“Secondary data normally denotes an activity whereby no new original data is collected, where the research problem draws on existing sources alone” (Riley et al. 2000). In other words, it is all the knowledge and information which has already been written, that researchers can find in pre-
existing books, articles and websites. The major part of my thesis is based on the analysis of secondary data such as articles and books. I used them because I wanted to have a solid theoretical framework based on pertinent literature.

### 2.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are ways to evaluate the quality of the research. When researchers conduct a study they are looking for quality because “A good qualitative study can help us understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Golafshani 2003).

However, even if it is essential to examine the trustworthiness of qualitative data in order to be sure of their reliability, this is no easy task. Some researchers even question the use of reliability and its suitability in qualitative research (Cohen et al. 2007). According to Lincoln and Guba, (1985) researchers should look for “credibility, neutrality, conformability, dependability, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness and transferability” instead of reliability. Therefore, as it was difficult to evaluate the reliability of my respondent’s interviews, I have decided to focus on the credibility and the applicability of their answers by asking for details and examples. When I have used statistics, I assume that the reputation of the institutions that produced the reports was proof of their reliability.

According to Dul and Hal (2008) validity can be seen “as scores that can be considered to capture meaningfully the ideas contained in the corresponding concepts”. Therefore, validity represents the accuracy of the research and the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other populations, cases or situations (Cohen et al, 2007). In my thesis I have used the insights from literature to elaborate my theoretical framework and I hope that the statements of my respondents were as close as possible to the reality. However, as mentioned above, I think that I did not conduct enough interviews to justify generalizing my research to wider levels.
CHAPTER 3:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK &
EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Leadership Overview

Role

When Women’s Roles at Work meets Women’ Role at Home

Role Conflict Might Be Avoided
3. Theoretical Framework and Empirical Findings

The aim of this chapter is to gather different concepts, views and ideas that researchers have previously elaborated and to analyse them in order to get a deeper understanding of the topic. In parallel to all these concepts, I will present and analyse all the information and arguments I have obtained during my interviews. By proceeding in this way, I will be able to present coherent and consistent illustrations of the concepts that emerged from the theoretical framework.

In the first section, I give a definition of leadership. Even if my thesis is about women, I make the choice to give a general definition without focusing on women's leadership. Indeed, my aim here is not to distinguish male leadership from female leadership but rather to develop a neutral basis about what a leadership role involves.

Section two is about women’s roles and their defining process. As mentioned in the introduction, in their everyday life women have to juggle between different roles: leader, wife, daughter, team coach etc. Consequently, the aim of this section is to find out where these roles come from. In order to do this I will consider literature about gender roles, norms and stereotypes.

In section three, I go straight into my topic: Role conflicts. Indeed, after having identified how “roles” are elaborated and on what they are based, this next section is all about how they interact with each other and more specifically why they may lead to conflict.

Last but not least, the final section presents models and concepts from different literature and illustrations from my interviews which could be seen as solutions to solve or at least decrease the conflicts of roles in women’s life.
3.1 Leadership Overview

This section is dedicated to the definition of leadership. Firstly I will question the importance of defining women’s leadership. In the second part, drawing upon various literature, I will elaborate a unisex definition of leadership.

3.1.1 The Relevancy of Defining Women’s Leadership

Despite the fact that women’s leadership has been largely excluded from mainstream literature, there is a great deal of interest in female leaders (Stead and Elliot, 2009). And, even if women’s leadership has not created as much literatures as men’s leadership has, plenty of authors have written on the subject. For instance, Loden (1985) has developed a “feminine” leadership style model (Figure 1) based on interviews of women in middle and high job positions.

Figures 1: Loden’s Women Leadership Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach to leadership</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operating style</td>
<td>Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational structure</td>
<td>Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic objective</td>
<td>Quality output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving style</td>
<td>Intuitive/rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Characteristics</td>
<td>Lower control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaborative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, literature and research on leadership and gender provides proof that women manifest specific behaviours, such as communication, vision, caring, collaboration, trust, democratic and participative decision making and follower-centeredness (Helgesen, 1990, Roueche et al., 1989, Eagly and Johnson, 1990, Jacobs and McClelland, 1994) more often than men do. Besides, Tibus (2010) underlined the fact that those behaviours were consistent with the behaviours of transformational leadership (Figure 2). Much research qualifies women’s leadership as being largely inspired by transformational leadership.

**Figures 2: Transformational Leadership and Women’s Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational Leadership</th>
<th>Women’s leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour or Characteristic</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sashkin (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for followers</td>
<td>Bass (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bennis and Nannus (1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kouzes and Posner (1987)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tibus (2010), Transformational leadership and women's leadership.
However, this theory about women’s leadership and transformational leadership is just one example of many other theories that has been developed about women’s leadership. Therefore, it seems illogical to try to define women’s leadership in just one little section when it is obvious that this definition could be the basis of a whole thesis. Furthermore, in my thesis, making the distinction between male leadership and female leadership seems to be irrelevant for the two following reasons. On the one hand, researchers such as Dobbins and Platz (1986), Grant (1988), Eagly and Johnson (1990), Gibson (1995), Hengen et al. (2001) claim that there are little or no differences in leadership behaviour between men and women, “in short, the behavioural differences have been largely overstated” (Vecchio, 2002).

On the other hand, there are several researchers who believe that instead of gender, the type or organization in which leaders operate may explain their behaviour to a much larger extent. “Organizational differences and characteristics modify the phenomenon of leadership itself, which would explain the similarities of behaviour regardless of gender” (Andersen & Hansson, 2010). Moreover, Jogulu and Wood (2008) have claimed that national culture “manifests itself in the values, attitudes and behaviour, and is therefore likely to impact on the way both men and women behave in the workplace, particularly when roles of authority and power are evident”.

Therefore, behaviour of women and men who occupy the same leadership roles may appear very similar because clear guidelines typically exist for the conduct and behaviour of managers (Tibus 2010). Consequently, my wish to give a unisex definition of what a leadership role is appears to be more and more relevant. However, it is important to underline the fact that even if gender matters less than the context and type of organization in defining the role of the leader, when a woman (or a man) undertakes a leadership role, she brings in to this role her gender, the culturally defined female aspect, as an integrated part of her personal history and her profession (Lorenzen 1996). There is not a single leadership style for women, but every woman has her own leadership style according to who she is and the context she evolves in.
3.1.2 General and Unisex Leadership Definition

Leadership studies began early in the twentieth century by examining traits or personal qualities of leaders. A couple of problems with this approach were that there was little agreement about universal traits (Bird, 1940; House & Aditya, 1997), and that the list of traits gave little insight into what an effective leader actually does. That is why I have decided to review different literature from different researchers in order to get the largest and most pertinent definition.

In addition to all the skills that are required depending on their professional demands, leaders have to develop even more skills. Current leaders have to deal with the phenomenon of globalization. Even if some skills remain the same, they have to integrate some new parameters according to current challenges: “the ability to strategically find, motivate, and deploy a diverse group of qualified people geographically—whether through specialized skill sets for specific functions, through a process of increasing responsibility for wide-ranging business operations, or both simultaneously—and lead through them” (M, Ashby & S, Miles, 2002, p. 4).

However, globalization is not the only issue here. Human capital management is also a main concern for today’s leaders. Besides the fact that leaders should elaborate goals, have a vision and a mission, they definitely have to focus on human equation and management, “inspiring, influencing, setting the direction for, facilitating, coaching, mentoring, and developing their employees” (M, Ashby & S, Miles, 2002, p. 5). Indeed, human capital plays a major role in companies and in business. Competition is no longer created just with products or services but also through employees’ talent. On top of managing employees within the company, leaders have to be able to “attract, develop and retain the best people while continuously developing or managing out those who do not perform against the corporate objectives” (M, Ashby & S, Miles, 2002, p. 5).

From the notion of human capital management, it is possible to identify some general trends for today’s leaders' skills: - Empowerment – Team Oriented (“We” rather than “I”) – Management team achievement over Individual achievement – Compassionate leadership.

Moreover, M. Ashby and S. Miles (2002), identify three skills that serve as predictors for leadership success: - Capacity – Motivation – Authenticity.

Capacity includes knowledge, basic intellect and experiences. With this notion we touch the concept of ambiguity and the importance for leaders to cope with it, “Those who thrive on ambiguity are likely to be far superior at leading a corporation in today’s current environment” (M. Ashby & S. Miles, 2002, p. 11). In addition, motivation goes hand in hand with passion. And according to M. Ashby & S. Miles, (2002) it is possible to encourage motivation but impossible to
Besides, I see authenticity more like a “must be” than a skill. From my point of view, authenticity goes with trust; leaders and others members of the company should be authentic. Authenticity helps to guarantee credibility. Moreover, whatever field the area leaders are working in, they have to communicate. Communication skills are essential for leaders. However, regards leadership, it is not only about the art of talking but also “Active listening, an ability to understand and appreciate another’s perspective” (M. Ashby & S. Miles, 2002, p. 6). Communication goes beyond the simple notion of exchange with employees; leaders have to have the “ability to negotiate contracts, to build relationships with partners and even competitors” (M. Ashby & S. Miles, 2002, p. 5). In order to encourage communication, leaders have to work with technology: “It is absolutely essential that today’s leaders understand, advocate, invest in, and implement technology in every facet of their businesses” (M. Ashby & S. Miles, 2002, p. 6).

This definition is not exhaustive, but it gives a fair explanation of what is a leader’s role. Indeed, men and women who are leaders have to face all those challenges.
In order to wrap this section up, the figure below summarises in one schema the different the two possible ways of seeing women and leadership.
Figure 3: Women's Leadership Overview

Source: Made by the Author.
3.2 Role

The following section is about roles and their defining processes. As mentioned in the introduction, in their everyday lives women have to juggle different roles: leader, wife, daughter, team coach etc. Therefore, in this section I will consider how norms, status, gender and stereotypes influence the elaboration of roles. And, finally I will look closer at how roles can be enacted.

3.2.1 The Importance of Defining “Role”

The first definition given for “role” in the dictionary is “an actor's part in a play, film, etc”. However, even if sometimes the roles that women have to embrace in their everyday lives could be part of an action movie, this thesis is not about roles that actors play in theatre or cinema. The second definition from the dictionary “a person's or thing's function in a particular situation” is short and not very precise, but seems to make more sense regarding the topic of this thesis. To go further in defining “role”, additional research has been conducted. For instance, according to Dahrendorf (1958) “roles define the specific rights and obligations that are entailed in a social position”. However, after having looked for more definitions, one concludes it would be impossible to find a single definition, which would be pertinent and upon which all researchers can agree. Moreover, as later in this section the different origins of role will be presented, it does not appear essential to elaborate a straight and clear definition here. Indeed, understanding the origins of role seems to be far more interesting and relevant. Therefore, the purpose has moved from finding a universal definition, to developing a good degree of understanding of some meaning about what “role” is about.

With this in mind, a study from William (1960) and Merton (1957) appears to give a global understanding while leaving space for other interpretations. Indeed, according to William (1960), the social psychological conception of role is “derived from the theatre applied to everyday life; individuals are conceived as playing roles in society similar to actor upon a stage”. They (roles) provide us with a definition of the situation that sets the limits within which we may legitimately act.

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6 Source: http://www.wordreference.com/definition/role
7 Source: http://www.wordreference.com/definition/role
Therefore, for each role that individual will embrace, a specific behaviour is required and expected from other individuals, “each social position is associated with an array of role-specific forms of behaviour that together comprise a “role set” (Merton, 1957).

However in order to make the link between role, norms and status (the subject of the next section), it is important to consider Platt (2001) who explains “role is conceptualized as cultural norms, prescriptions and expectations associated with statuses such as those of fulfilling the achieved status of physician or the ascribed status of woman”.

### 3.2.2 Norms, Status and Role

#### 3.2.2.1 Norms and Role

According to Homan (1964) “A norm is a statement specifying how a person is, or persons of a particular sort are, - expected to behave in given circumstances/in the first instance, by the person that utters the norm. What I expect of you is what you ought to do”.

In addition, Homan (1964) refers to four dimensions:
- **Oughtness**: a norm is an expectation that some behaviour ought to be (or not to be) performed.
- **Conditional**: meaning that people are expected to behave in a certain way “in given circumstances”.
  For instance, a norm such as “you will not kill” applies only in certain circumstances or for some specific actor (example: soldiers are allowed and indeed may have to kill in time of war).
- **Behaviour**: Homan implies that norms refer to behaviour, not to beliefs or attitudes.
  In contrast, Morris (1956) includes beliefs and attitudes in his definition. Therefore for him, the fact that “one should believe in the existence of god” can be considered as a norm.
- **Actors**: who hold a norm are individuals.

Nevertheless, in addition to Homan (1964), other researchers have elaborated different definitions. Some of them focus on the notion of expectation. Morris (1956) for instance, defines norms as “generally accepted, sanctioned prescription....”. For him, “an expectation is only a norm if the expectation is shared by the members of some group”, and deviating from the expectation is sanctioned. Others have based their studies on a behavioural definition. They state that a norm exists if “there is a behavioural regularity and if ‘sanctioning’ occurs with some positive probability in the case of not performing the respective behavioural” (Opp, 2001). This definition is used to explain the relationship between norms and institution. As an institution “is a regularity of behaviour or a rule that is generally accepted by members of a social group, that
specifies behaviour in specific situation, and that is either self-policed or policed by external authority" (Rutherford 1996), it can refer to single norms. For that matter, Calvert (1995) states clearly “Institution often also denotes sets of norms as well as organization”.

Authors do not give reasons for preferring a certain definition over others (Opp, 2001), people have to choose depending on the topic of their research. However, in this thesis, there is no need to pick one definition over another because the purpose is to develop as much knowledge as possible in order to get the deepest understanding of the topic.

After having defined norms, we can consider the question “How can norms be measured?” There is no real tool available, except for the norm according to the behavioural definition. Indeed, in contrast to expectations, it seems possible to observe behaviours. However, the interpretation and explanation of those observations cannot be one hundred percent sure, for instance a shake of the head might express “no” but might also be sign of astonishment.

Leaving the measurement aside it seems interesting to look at the origins and the effects of the norms. There are different theories about the emergence of norms, which state various propositions and approaches. Nevertheless, a review of all this literature indicates that it seems to have one general idea that encompasses nearly all the explanations of norms, that of Instrumentality proposition (Opp, 1997). The idea is that “norms emerge if their emergences is in the interest of a collective of people.” Therefore, norms can be considered as instrumental to achieve public goals.

The next interrogation that follows is about effect, “What effects does the norm have on people?” An initial proposition is based on role theory and its postulate according to which norms are organized in roles that individuals take over. The figure (4) below gives a simplified illustration.

**Figure 4: Role Theory Postulate**

This theory reflects the concept of homo sociologicus (Biddle and Tomas, 1966), which states that individuals behave according to their roles. Nevertheless, this first proposition faces different
problems (Opp, 2001): - Behaviour that is not regulated cannot be explained. For example, there is no norm prescribing that I should go to the theatre instead of the cinema.
- People often deviate from the role expectations and such deviations cannot be explained
- Theory does not explain which expectation should dominate if there are conflicting roles expectations. This theoretical orientation is based on a basic assumption that “individuals are socialized into their roles and follow them blindly” (Opp, 2001), which is not always the case.
An alternative theory states that in a situation in which norms hold there is a choice to be made. People have at least two choices, to follow the norm or not to follow the norm. Of course, each option has some costs and benefits depending on the situation. For instance, breaking a norm that is internalized will confer to the “breaker” a bad conscience, which is a cost. On top of this, Epstein (1968), Hetcher (1984), Heckathorn, (1990), Posner and Rasmusen (1999) include the severity and probability of external sanctions as also being a cost.
However, it is important to underline the fact that when a person is often in the same given situation, she or he does not always consider their choices (for instance, to pay the fare to take the subway). Indeed, usually it happens that at some point the person makes a decision to act in a certain way and then performs the same action again without deliberating (Opp 2001). Therefore, this type of situation matches the situation that role theory seems to portray.
Moreover, when the effects of norms are considered, it is relevant to distinguish between two types of effects: - Conformity: the emergence of a norm means that more and more people will perform the same behaviour.
- Indirect effects: on society, economy etc… For instance, if government prohibits civil servants from smoking at their workplace, the norm will be to stop smoking at work, which will most likely have an impact on cigarettes’ sales and taxes.

To conclude, norms seem to have a strong impact on roles. The fact that people follow or do not follow such norms influences the roles they embrace. Moreover, regards the role theory, it is even possible to state that roles are the result of norms.

3.2.2.2 Status and Role
According to Platt (2001), “status is a term originally referring to legally enforceable rights related to societal position, such as the rights implied in the expression ‘the status of citizens’”. But, if one looks at social sciences, status has been used to refer to societal positions, such as ascribed (race, gender, age) and achieved statuses. Besides, researchers often associate status with role. According to Scott (2001), “role is conceptualized as cultural norms, prescriptions and
expectations associated with statuses such as those of fulfilling the achieved status of physician or the ascribed status of woman”. However, Linton (1936) was the first to explicitly link status to role. He theorized status as “ascribed and achieved societal position”. For Linton, attached to each status is “a role described as normative prescription (right and duties) expressing expected behaviours associated with the status that the role incumbent is obliged and committed to fulfil”. Therefore, he considered status “as a structural unit of society separate from the individual who fills it and role is social process”. Roles can be seen as the “dynamic” aspect of the status (Linton, 1936).

To conclude, each individual possesses his/her own status depending on her or his gender, age, etc. and each status is associated with a role. Thus, the role that individuals are expected to enact depends on the status he or she has. For instance, a teenager who has the status of the older sibling might embrace the role of being an example for her/his younger brothers and sisters.

3.2.3 Gender and Role

3.2.3.1 Gender Role and Socialization

According to researchers such as Sandra Bem (1993), when dealing with humans, one cognitive process that appears impossible to avoid is to divide people into groups according to different categories like age, race, religion and so forth. However, the main distinction between people is usually based on gender. This is no surprise as when two people meet another individual the first thing they determinate is the gender of their interlocutor. This process of categorizing others in terms of gender is both habitual and automatic (Crespi 2003). Therefore, gender appears to have an essential influence on how people consider each other and implicitly on how they expect them to behave. For instance, Lorenzen (1996) states that “from the very beginning of life the small child will be met with parental expectations- conscious as well as unconscious- that are directed toward the gender of the child”.

Consequently, it seems pertinent to look closer at gender role. Gender roles refer “to the set of social and behavioural norms that are considered socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex in the context of a specific culture, and which differ widely between cultures and historical periods”\(^8\). Regarding literature on gender role, it is possible to identify two major opinions. The first one affirms that gender role is a product of socialization, whereas the second opinion states that gender role is due to biological and physiological differences. In order to get a deeper understanding, this part will be dedicated to socialization and the following part to biological

\(^8\) Source: http://www.answers.com/topic/gender-role-2
differences. “How people learn to be masculine or feminine is believed to be the result of socialization” (Bern, 1981). For a number of researchers, the process through which the individual learns and accepts roles is called socialization. It is how children of different sexes are “socialised into their gender roles and taught what it means to be male or female” (Crespi, 2003). Gender socialisation starts from birth, and from the simple question “Is it a boy or a girl?”. Children learn their gender roles from agencies of socialisation, which are the “teachers” of society (Crespi, 2003). In Europe and the United States the main “teachers” are the family, peer groups, schools and the media. It is important to notice that gender socialization might sometimes reinforce gender stereotypes (see section 3.2.4 Stereotypes and Role). Moreover, socialization works by encouraging desirable and discouraging undesirable behaviour. Therefore, agents of socialization such as the family, schools and the media make it obvious to the child what is expected of him or her by society.

Ghislain. T. “I think the women’s roles come from education. I was born in 1960 into an Italian family. In my education, my parents taught me that women and men had very specific roles. Women should not study but have children. My parents and my grand-parents considered women who wanted to study as lazy or hiding to avoid work or having children. According to them, my role as a woman was to find a husband, have children, and stay at home to take care of them”.

Ludivine. C. “I think roles come from traditions and education - centuries of ‘women should cook, clean and take care of children while men should work and earn money’. But it is also about education. My parents for example were both shopkeepers and my mum had nearly the same duties as my dad, so in my education the woman’s role is not that different from the man’s role. And that is why I don’t agree with the “women should cook, clean and take care of children while men should work and earn money”. Thanks to the education my parents gave me I always knew that it was possible for women to have both work and family. Of course if you have a mum who is staying at home and telling you that dinner should be ready on the table for your husband every evening, the stereotype that society is portraying will probably be engrained in you more deeply”.

Dominique. R. “In our society, women have to be a good wife, a good mum, good worker in the same time and feeling happy about it”.

To conclude, according to the first opinion about gender roles, gender differences would result from the process of socialization, especially during our childhood and adolescence. For instance, when Grace Kelly stated, “women’s natural role is to be a pillar of the family”, it is
fair to suppose that in her process of socialization the women’s role that her peers, family and society taught her was more likely related to the household. Indeed, various researchers point out that from birth, boys and girls are exposed to different experiences at home and those are reinforced throughout one’s education and general life, thereby shaping their patterns of opinion and behaviour (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). Justin Aronfreed sum up the whole process about gender roles and socialization by “Why do girls and boys behave differently? Because we expect them to! Look at the education we give them”.

3.2.3.2 Biological Differences

A great deal of research has found clear evidence for the biological determination of differences between the sexes. Different genes, different hormones and different brain structure (Kimura, 2002, McCarty et al. 2002, Cahill 2005, Brizendine 2006) are the root of differences in personality and behaviour of men and women. Swaab’s research (2004) goes even further when it claims that the basis of differences in personality and behaviour between men and women are differences in brain structure between the sexes and functions whose differences originate in utero.

For instance, according to his research, in contrast to girls, boys have two periods with high testosterones levels, the first taking place halfway through pregnancy and the second during the first three months after birth. These two testosterones peaks, or the absence of them, determine the development of the brain for the rest of people’s lives. Male and female brains are organized differently with functions that are more compartmentalized in male brain and more globally distributed in female brains (Sax, 2005). And these gender differences in brain structure “are the basis for differences in drawing and play patterns of children, for gender identity, for our sexual orientation and for differences in behaviour” (Swaab, 2004). For instance, the hippocampus (the centre of emotion and memory) is larger in the female brain, as is the brain circuitry for language and observing emotions in others. This can explain why girls grow up more talkative than boys—men use about seven thousand words a day, as opposed to twenty thousand words for women.

In the meantime, there has been a surge of findings that highlight the “influence of sex not only on mating behaviour, but also on many other areas of cognition and behaviour, including memory, emotion, vision, hearing, the emotional interpretation of faces and the response to stress” (Cahill, 2005). Below are some facts to illustrate those differences:
- Spatial ability: it has come to light that men’s greater spatial ability compared with women is caused by hormones and not by gender role socialization (Saucier et al. 2002).
- Hearing capabilities: studies have been conducted (based on the measurement of the acoustic brain response and otoacoustic emissions) on newborn babies and teenagers, and there is a clear
evidence that women hear better than men (Cassidy, 2005). This difference in how men and women hear has major implications in how they interact with each other.

- The eyes of the beholder: girls and women interpret facial expressions better than most boys and men. Indeed, the results of different experiments (where several boys and girls were showed a woman's face which was smiling followed by a moving mobile in order to compare their reactions) suggest that girls are born pre-wired to be interested in faces while boys are pre-wired to be more interested in moving objects. The reason for that difference is linked with sex differences in the anatomy of the eye (Sax, 2005). These differences in the anatomy of the eyes are also responsible for the fact that girls are more sensitive to minor differences in colour, which explain why girls are better at drawing people with colours while boy are better at drawing actions.

- Feelings: the part of the brain which deals with emotions is not well connected to the part where verbal processing and speech happens in male brains. This is not the case for female brains (Sax, 2005). Therefore, expressing feeling for boys has nothing to do with practising. It is impossible to ask to a teenage boy to actually make a connection between two parts of his brain that do not normally communicate. It is therefore not a stereotype but a reality: women are more capable of speaking about their feelings.

- “Fight of flight”: women and men have different nervous systems that will make them react differently in situations of stress. In threatening situations or confrontation, men feel adrenalin and thrill while women will feel dizzy and yucky, (Sax, 2005).

To conclude, it seems that biology affects our perception and ability to function, thus men and women perceive the world differently (Brizendine, 2006). In other words, biological differences seem to be at the origin of certain different abilities and behaviours. However, some researchers agree with Hyde (2005) who concluded from her study on gender similarity “that males and females are similar on most, but not all, psychological variables”. From her meta-analysis it was shown that many gender differences found in earlier studies disappeared as soon as the context was neutralized, because “sex differences will only show up in contexts, which are appropriate to trigger sex specific behaviour”. Rutter (2006) defends a similar idea when he states that “to an important extent genes operate through the environment”, meaning that whatever biological predisposition there is, it is further modulated by the environment (Krüger, 2008). For example, the fact that a girl plays the piano can have a biological explanation: girls have good hearing skills, but could also be explained by her environment: musical parents
who own a piano at home. Therefore, “all behaviour is influenced by social context and social forces but that does not mean that it is not also influenced by genetic factors” (Rutter, 2006).

### 3.2.4 Stereotypes and Role

#### 3.2.4.1 Gender Stereotype and Role

Stereotypes “are representative of a society’s collective knowledge of customs, myths, ideas, religions and sciences” (Crespi, 2003). The way that stereotypes are learned, transmitted and changed is part of the socialization process and can be at the origin of “stereotypic” behavior (Crespi, 2003). Moreover, the culture of an individual, which is part of the socialization process, influences how the individual integrates stereotypes. Indeed, the information he or she receives from indirect sources such as parents, peers, teachers, political and religious leaders, and the mass media, are the basis upon which she or he constructs stereotypes. Nowadays, media plays an increasingly important role in influencing and reinforcing stereotypes. For instance, TV shows such as “The diner of love”, where four women are supposed to cook for a man, and at the end of the dinner the man has to choose only one woman according to the dish she has made, definitely emphasizes the traditional gender role stereotype of women cooking for men. In the case of gender stereotypes, it important to notice that as people have different expectations for female and male behaviour, gender stereotypes are related to cognitive processes. Moreover, the traditional gender role is often the origin of gender stereotypes and reinforces them, “such as that males are supposed to be adventurous, assertive aggressive, independent and task-oriented, whereas females are seen as more sensitive, gentle, dependent, emotional and people-oriented” (Crespi 2003). Jørstad (1996) states that when people speak about female and male qualities, they often describe stereotyped or traditional conceptions of sex roles. For example, men often describe themselves as being generally more rational, logical and objective than many women, while women describe themselves with relational personality traits, “such as understanding, caring, nurturing, responsible, considerate and sensitive” (Cross and Markus 1993).

Stereotypes shape people’s expectations and consequently the roles and behaviours that people are supposed to fulfil. For instance, stereotypes which state women are better able to take care of children than men, reinforce the idea that women should stay at home and take care of children.

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9 Stereotypic: lacking originality, banal
Source: http://thesaurus.com/browse/stereotypic?s=t
3.2.4.2 Stereotypes in leadership

Broadbridge and Hearn (2008) highlight the fact that gender stereotype play a significant role in preventing women from developing careers. Therefore, it seems pertinent to look at how stereotypes in leadership influence women’s leader role.

According to Gilman (1985) “stereotypes arise when self-integration is threatened. They are therefore part of our ways of dealing with the instabilities of our perception of the world. For Mitchell (2005) stereotyping is something more “secret”, “stereotypes can be taken for granted and become nearly invisible, ‘insinuating themselves into everyday life’ and are at the most effective when they remain: unseen, unconscious, disavowed, a lurking suspicious always waiting to be confirmed by a fresh perception”. In traditional and stereotyped sex role thinking, men are “strong” and women are “weak”. not only in the physical sense. Men are also traditionally considered as being ambitious and career-oriented and therefore attain leading positions more often than women. In contrast, women tend to shy away from new opportunities or extreme emotional experiences, but end up building deep relationships but develop a narrow network compared to men. Even if those stereotypes are slowly changing, it seems that typical male attitudes and values are still being reinforced in leadership roles in many organizations (Jørstad , 1996).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how stereotypes are associated with women’s leadership roles, it is essential to present three examples of stereotypical images of women leaders. Indeed, Ryan and Haslam (2007) state that those stereotypes “illustrate implicit theories about leadership and gender and general perception regarding the perceived incompatibility between views in what it is to be a leader and what it is to be female”.

- The mother (Kanter, 1977): The label “mother” implies that women leaders are considered as providing emotional support and care for the followers. In a private context, the role of a mother is major and has meaningful issues. In contrast, “The mother” does not have the legitimacy to be in the workplace. Indeed, much literature on leaders focuses on male qualities and behaviour, therefore typical behaviour of a mother -comforting and sympathising with colleagues - is not appreciated and valued in the workplace. According to Baxter (2010) “the problem with this role is that women may be associated more with socio- emotional than professional expertise”. He even states that the use of the words ‘motherly, maternal, soft, kind’ to describe women “invites suggestion that such women are potentially subordinate, and can be readily overruled by male authority”.

However, in some cases, female leaders can adopt “ The mother role” on purpose. For instance, head teachers in order to associate their role with their responsibilities of looking after children,
embrace gladly “The mother” role (Baxter, 2010 and Wodak, 1997).

- **The seductress** (Kanter, 1997): this second stereotype implies that “women leaders are primarily evaluated according to their sexual attractiveness and their interest in seducing men” (Kanter, 1977). The role is very problematic for the way in which women are perceived, and in extreme cases seductress can become “whore” (Kanter, 1977). Therefore, women have to be aware of the effects of their behaviour and act carefully. Moreover, it is essential to not disregard the risk for women of giving more attention to one particular man, as it can stimulate resentment and suspicion for the organization and she may be driven out (Baxter, 2010). Even if being smiley and enterprising can help things run smoothly with men, the danger of playing this role is to become the target of intentions which are more sexual than professional.

- **Iron Maiden** represents women leaders as people who take on and display masculine characteristics and traits in their practise of leadership (Stead and Elliott, 2005). The best example is Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1990, who was and is still known as the Iron Lady. She has been a “victim” of the press that depicted her as being more masculine than her male political colleagues and represented her in sadomasochistic images. According to this stereotype, the “woman leader as Iron Maid is not interacting in a way that is appropriate to their gender” (Stead and Elliot, 2005). This results, as demonstrated by the example of the image of Margaret Thatcher, “in enduring caricatures that not only render women as poor imitations of men but also serve to fix femininity as something that is inherently not suited to leadership” (Stead and Elliott, 2005).

To conclude, regarding stereotypes about male leadership and those three examples of women’s leadership stereotypes, it would seem stereotypes are more harmful to women leaders than to men. This can be explained by the fact that leadership qualities are more often associated with typical male qualities, therefore stereotypes that are based on female qualities will always appear wrong. In other words, people often assume a leader is male. Predictably, people think about leadership in mainly masculine terms. These mental associations shape stereotypes about leaders but also influence organizations norms and practise (Stead and Elliott, 2005). In associating women leaders with such stereotypes (“The mother” or “Iron maid”), women in leadership roles are often considered “out of place” (West and Zimmerman, 2007), as they are operating outside the narrow range of what is seen as appropriate female behaviour. Women leaders are therefore seen as unnatural inhabitants of leadership roles, as “travellers in a male world” (Marshall 1984).
3.2.5 Roles’ Enactment

3.2.5.1 Role Taking and Role Making
To the question, How is role taking possible?, Cicourel (1972) answers that “the taking and making of roles rests on a set of cognitive processes through which actors give meaning to the world and so sustain a ‘sense of social structure’”. Indeed, people do carry role information in their heads, but they must also be able to recognize when one particular position or role is relevant, and they must be able to infer what expectations others have of their behaviour. Members of a society must have “interactional competence” (Cicourel, 1972) to assign meaning to their environment. It is their practical making skills that allow people to use their knowledge of social norms to generate appropriate behaviour and thus enact their roles. Moreover, Turner (1962) states that individuals do not simply take over roles as templates for conformist behaviour. He holds that role taking always required “improvisory behaviour”. The role knowledge that individuals learn during their primary and secondary socialization does not cover all the unpredictable and unique situations they will find themselves in. For instance, in cases where the father leaves the family, the mother has to fulfil her role as a mother and possibly also as a father in order to fill the gap that children could feel. Therefore, in certain contexts, individuals might add functions to the original role or fulfil additional roles (see next section 3.2.5.2 Role Distancing and Role Embracing).

3.2.5.2 Role Distancing and Role Embracing
Goffman (1961) defines role in the same vein as Linton: “cultural prescription situated in statuses but also as typical real activities in which role players engage”. And, using the context of the dramaturgical metaphor, he theorizes “a conception of interactive performances in which every rule and practise used to define a situation are sociological features of role playing”. According to Goffman (1963), there exist two kinds of settings in which role playing occurs: focused interaction - unfocused interaction: this refers to the “myriad of trivial interchanges of daily life” (for instance, ordering drink from a barman). However, he considers sustained interactions as being more relevant and focused, and he identifies among them “organized work setting”. From this “work setting”, Goffman elaborates “the theory of the process of status and role” (1961) where he distinguishes two kinds of roles. Role embracing: “To embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation”… “the role incumbent has to act solely in terms of the normative demands upon someone in his position” (Linton). Role embracing may occur when the functions of the role matter more than everything else.
In contrast, there is role distancing: “The role incumbent, while engaging in the normative performances of the role will also perform activities that are not part of, or may even be inconsistent with, the role in order to perpetuate the organization work function”. In other words, the role incumbent places the interest of the organization before his or her own interest. Therefore, he or she fulfils additional roles to the one he or she is supposed to have.

3.2.5.3 The Effectiveness of Role Enactment

Role enactment was defined in the sixties by Sarbin and Allen as “a dependent variable, analysing the influences of independent variables that enhance or inhibit the effectiveness of a role display”. For them (1968), effectiveness, in the context of role enactment, “means motor and linguistic actions expressed in roles that are in congruent with the role’s expectation and prescriptions”. They provide six independent variables that impact upon the effectiveness of role enactment:

- Role expectations: validity of the role expectation held by the actor;
- Role location: accuracy in locating other and self in the proper role system;
- Role demand: sensitivity to “situationally” generated role demand;
- Role Skills: availability of specific and general skills for the role’s performances;
- Self-role congruence: harmony between the self and the role;
- Audience effects: role reinforcement properties of the audience.

Detailed analyses of these six variables have been conducted and indicated that “role incumbent possess differing linguistic, motor and emotional capacities furnishing them with wherewithal to perform roles more or less effectively” (Platt, 2001). Indeed, according to an individual's capacities, role incumbent performance can appear more or less convincing, appropriate or authentic (Sarbin and Allen, 1968). However, even if Sarbin considers individuals’ capabilities as being the main explanation for effective role enactment, his role theorizing is interactive. Indeed, according to him, role enactment always occurs in “social context with complementary roles”. In situations where leaders have to enact their roles, it is obvious that the nature of the role that their followers embrace will have an impact on leaders own enactment. For instance, looking back at the stereotype “Seductress” (section 3.2.4.2 Stereotypes in Leadership), female leaders have to take into consideration the role of their followers, in order to adjust their own performance.

To conclude, role enactment is far more complex than only doing what people expect of you. The way individuals enact their roles, influence who they are and the organization, institution and community they are involved in. For instance, people who are in “role distancing”, seem to care
as much about the organization’s interest as they care about themselves. Moreover, the effectiveness of the role that people enact does not depend only on people’s abilities but also on the environment. Indeed, even if individuals do their best to enact their role properly, sometimes “external individuals” (environment) with their own roles might interfere and deteriorate the quality of the enactment.

The concept of role appears to be a complex combination of different factors. The Figure (5) below recapitulates these factors. Moreover, it is pertinent to highlight three major facts. Firstly, not only socialization but also biological differences are at the origins of gender role. Secondly, stereotypes appear to do more harm than good for women where leadership is concerned. When it is about leadership. Finally, one individual has several roles and therefore various expectations to fulfil.
Figure 5: Role Overview

Source: Made by the Author.
3.3 When Women’s Roles at Work Meet Women’s Roles at Home

As mentioned in the previous section, in each of their relations, individuals encounter different expectations about their behaviour and must enact different roles. Gross et al. (1958) recognized that this produces varying degrees of strain or conflict in role expectation. Therefore, they have to negotiate the conflicting expectations held by others with whom they interact. Thus, this section is dedicated to understanding why conflicts may occur between the different roles women have.

3.3.1 Women’s Roles …

Work and family are the dominant life roles for most employed women in contemporary society (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). They will therefore be the focus of the next section.

3.3.1.1 … at Work

In contrast to family, which has always formed a major role in women’s life, work has been put aside for a long time. In France, women fought for the right to work for centuries. This historical overview of French state policies regarding the employment of women\footnote{Source: \(<http://felina.pagesperso-orange.fr/doc/femm/datesfemmes.htm>\)} gives a pretty clear idea.

- 1892: Women are allowed to work eleven hours a day, but they cannot work at night.
- 1907: Married women who are working have the right to dispose of their salary.
- 1909: Law creates maternity leave: eight weeks unpaid.
- 1920: Women teachers are paid as much as men.
- 1928: Law instituting maternity leave.
- 1932: Family allowance creation.
- 1945: Maternity leave becomes compulsory and is paid at 50%.
- 1946: The preamble to the Constitution asserts the principle of equal rights between men and women.
- 1965: Reform of the matrimonial regime: women can dispose of their assets; open a bank account and work without the authorisation of their husband.
- 1971: Law asserts the principle of equal wages between men and women for the same work.
- 1983: The Roudy Law prohibits any professional discrimination based on sex.
- 1999: Reform of the Constitution: the law “supports” equal access of men and women to the electoral mandates and the elective functions.


All these rights have been a huge support for women who wanted/want to work. For instance, the right to work without the husband's authorisation made/makes it easier for women to work. However, laws and rights are not the only explanation of women's work.

In France in 2011, the employment rate of women aged from fifteen to sixty four was 59.7%\(^{12}\).

It is logical to wonder why women work. There would seem to be two main reasons:

On the one hand, with the current economic context (unemployment rate, financial crisis, extreme competitiveness), it appears more cautious to maximize possible incomes for the family. The fact that the man and the woman of the family each provide a salary may ease financial pressures. This is especially true for single mothers with children. Indeed, over the last ten years, situations where women have to financially take care of the children alone are increasingly common.

Ghislain. T “From my own experience, I would say that women need to be independent and autonomous financially. That is actually one of the reasons why I work. I love my job but I work to be financially autonomous not for the glory.”

One the other hand, women work because they want to and more specifically they need to. This need is not financial but mental. Indeed, working activities seem to be good for “brain’s health”.

Ghislain. T “It is important to have “brain activities”, when I was still married, I did not work, and after one year I have realized that my brain was becoming “slow”. Of course I know that it is impossible but what I am trying to say is that in my case, I had the feeling that by spending my days at home with my children made my brain working slower, less lively. It is a bit like memory, you know, if you do not train it, you lose it”.

Through work, women feel useful, recognized, powerful, and all those feeling are source of fulfilment and happiness. According to Friedman (2000), “work is a self esteem builder because it provides the opportunity for self expression and development outside the home”.

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\(^{12}\) Source: Eurostat, 2011

Ludivine. C. “I work because I like it, it is challenging to know that you have responsibilities and that people are counting on you to achieve goals. Of course I love spending time with my son, but I don’t want to be only a mum, I want to have another role where I can use my intellectual capabilities”.

Even if it seems obvious that women have a place at work, it is less obvious, even impossible, to define precisely the roles they have. Indeed, every woman has her own role at work depending on the functions associated with her job position. Therefore, there are as many roles at work as women who work. Roles at work have to be seen as all the functions that an individual has to fulfil according to their job. In a leader's case, in addition to the role of a director, a CEO, a manager etc. she has to fulfil the leadership role (see section 3.1 Leadership Overview). However, even if it is impossible to define all the roles women have at work, Sievers (1992) gives one way to comprehend how roles at work can be perceived. For him, organizational roles can be seen from two different angles (figure 6). They can represent a set of organizational tasks, structures, expectations and cultures, or alternatively, the role performer’s professional skills and personal history will be an integrated part of the complexity within the organizational role.

Figure 6: The Perception of the Organizational Role

To conclude, the roles that women have to fulfil depend on their job, functions, hierarchical position and the whole organization (company).

3.3.1.2 …at home
The second major life role for women is family. Even if the traditional family model has moved from a single earner father and housewife mother, to a dual earner father and mother and sometimes a single earner mother, women still have a huge role to play in the family. Time management, expectations and general organization change but the role of the woman in the
family does not (Friedman, 2000). It is possible to label roles that women might have to fulfil at home: mother, wife, sister etc… Nevertheless, even if norms, status and stereotypes can help in some cases to describe what these roles entail, usually the role description and the role itself depend on the woman who is enacting it.

Ghislain. T “Women's role at home? There are so many that I can’t describe them but I would say that the one which encompasses all of them is to be able to multi-task. In my generation, women have to juggle between being a mum, a wife, a sister, a daughter etc… and multiple roles mean multiple specific functions. As a mother for example, I have to mother, to encourage my children. As a wife, I have to be a lover, feminine, supportive etc…”

Ludivine. C “Mum - Women - Sister - Daughter - Wife - Bookkeeper etc…. But I think that every woman has her own explanation about what it is to be a mum, women, sister etc… For me, for example, the perfect mum is not the mum who is always at home 24/7. It is the mum who knows when she should devote time to her child. When I’m spending time with my child, everything else is secondary”.

To conclude, as the woman’s role in the family depends on the woman herself and her situation (married, divorced etc…), it is an arduous and nearly impossible task to compile a list of precisely defined roles that women have to enact at home in their family. However, by looking at stereotypes, norms and gender roles we can elaborate some guidelines. For instance, if one looks at gender roles, one of the wife's roles is to give birth. But questions about reliability and veracity concerning those guidelines might arise.

3.3.2 Role Conflict Between Work and Family
In general, role conflict is a situation where an individual cannot properly enact two (or more) roles at the same time without facing problems. The word “properly”, in this context has two meanings. The first is that the expectations associated with the role are successfully achieved. The second is that the enactment of the role provides the role’s incumbent with happiness and fulfilment. Below are some clarifications about role conflict between work and family:
- a situation where the roles that a woman has at work cannot be properly enacted because of the roles she has at home;
- a situation where the roles that a woman has at home cannot be properly enacted because of the roles she has at work.
Role conflict is not an end in itself. But, I think that focusing on good interactions between those two sets of roles is less instructive. As I am a strong believer in “you learn from your mistakes”,
it appears necessary to look at where things do not work, in order to find solutions.

### 3.3.2.1 Traditional Values

The first obstacle that women meet is that traditional values continue to shape the division of labour at home and women are still expected to fulfil traditional roles within the private sector. It used to be that “men could give their individual attention, energy and time to their careers thanks to the full time support of their housewives (Friedman, 2000). However, even if roles are slowly changing, women remain in charge of most of the childcare and household responsibilities. Studies on women and their roles in the family\(^{13}\) found that “seven out of ten married parents believe child care should be shared equally, but two-thirds of the mothers said they mainly cared for children … women continue to spend about three to seven times as many hours as men on cleaning and laundry tasks”. The huge difference is that nowadays women work and those household activities can be considered as an exhausting “second shift” (Friedman, 2000). Therefore, the fact that women still have very intensive and time consuming family roles while they also have roles at work to fulfil seems to be one cause of role conflict. Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) introduce the concept of “Mother Vicious Circle” (Figure 7) to illustrate how the current women gender role based on traditional values is a source of career penalties and work/family stress.


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3.3.2.2 It Seems To Be a Matter of Time

According to literature, “time is not the only problem, not even the main one” (Friedman, 2000). The only link that Friedman and Greenhaus draw between time and role conflict is the “guilt argument”: women feel guilty if they spend time on their own leisure, because they feel more responsible for the welfare of their family. Therefore, when a particular task either at work or home may be pleasurable, guilt will occur and consequently both family and work roles will suffer.

However, if one looks at the outcomes from the interviews it is clear that time seems to be the main issue.

Gislaine. T “Now, as I have made it clear to my boss, that my family was my priority, I don’t have so much role conflict anymore, family will always come first. But at the beginning it was not that easy and problems with time and availability was a nightmare. Situations such as going to a parents’/teachers’ meeting or finishing my presentation was my daily dilemma”.

Ludvine. C “For me, a role conflict is when I fail to be a perfect mum, a perfect wife and a perfect director all at the same time. Or when my role as a director takes over my role as a mum and wife because of a lack of time”.

Domnique. R “For me the conflict comes from time, lack of time. I have a work meeting at 16h and I know that I have to pick my kids up at 16H30; of course I am late, frustrated and stressed out. Once at home, I already feel guilty but my children complain about the fact that I was late for the third time this month. Therefore, I have to justify myself when in reality I was just trying to do my job right”.

Moreover, even if the “technological boom” with its new ways of working (internet, email, conference call, telecommuting) seems to aid time management, the reality is far less bright. Indeed with these new ways of communication, people are supposed to be contactable everywhere at all times. Therefore the distinction between work and family becomes increasingly blurred and both roles may not be properly fulfilled.

3.3.2.2 Too Much Involvement Can Be Harmful

Managing involvement is complex, because if it is not done carefully, it can lead to conflicts. On the one hand, mothers who are highly involved in work enjoy greater self-esteem, competence and become a positive role model for their children. On the other hand, if this involvement is not
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balanced, it can become an addiction (Friedman and Greenhauss, 2000). Therefore, mothers spend more time at work and even once they arrive home they are not “psychologically available for their family”. In such cases, even if women enact perfectly their roles at work, their family roles are not fulfilled properly and conflicts might occur.

Ghislaine. T “At the beginning of the week when I’m still relaxed from the week and I am 100% available but more I go one in the week, more the work issues take over, and I become less available”.

Ludivine. C “I think that when I am at home I am mentally present. But, I have to admit that it is not always the case. I am very passionate about my job and very curious, so even during the holiday I have to check out things about work”.

Domnique, R “I am trying to be as much available as I can, but sometimes, I have to admit that I am so “in” my work that I have to talk about it at home, even during dinner when my children want to tell what happened at school”.

However, it is important to highlight the fact that too much involvement in family roles can also create problems (see figure 7: Mother Vicious Circle). Finally, too much involvement in both family and work can cause conflicts as well. Indeed in this situation, the time and the psychological availability of the roles incumbent are not enough compared to the demand that each role requires.

To conclude, non-balanced involvement might cause complete happiness in one role and feeling of failure or sadness in the roles that are deprived of it.

Finally, even if these reasons behind role conflicts differ between theories to practises, there seems to be enough evidence to back them all up. Moreover, additional consequences of conflicts within women's lives can be found: serious constraints on their career choice; limited opportunities for career advancement and success in the work place; the need to choose between opposites: active and satisfying careers and marriage and children and the growing feeling of frustration (Friedman, 2000).
3.4 Role Conflict Might Be Avoided

“Women today are wondering how they can find the time and the energy to fulfil their various commitments to work and family while achieving satisfaction and success in all the different facets of their lives” (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). The aim of this section is to look for “solutions” to avoid role conflicts between work and family roles. Researchers have developed different models or concepts to understand how people could manage the dynamic tension between the different roles in their life. This section considers some of them and gives empirical examples thanks to the interviews I have conducted.

3.4.1 Work/life Balance, Aiming for the Right Goal?

When people talk about their life, it is not rare to hear them mention the formula “work/life balance”. Work/life balance seems to be the ultimate goal to achieve in order to be comfortable with all the life roles. According to Hildebrandt (2006), social science literature identifies three major contexts of origin for the work/life balance formula: - “The growing importance of the compatibility of family and occupation”. This is particularly true for women as they are increasingly represented in the economically active population (Klammer et al. 2000).
- The value shift toward a “synthesis of duty and acceptance values and self realisation values” (Klages 1998). This shift enables people to have a wide range of life plans, a “culture choice” (Bude 2003).
- The emergence of corporate optional working time strategies in the framework of extended operation time, flexible capacity adjustment, and human resources management (Brake 2003).

Moreover, the work/life balance (WLB) formula encompasses fundamental development trends on an individual level, in family and at work. It is possible to enumerate systematic elements of this concept: - WLB refers to interaction between a person’s different spheres of life and their compatibilities (problems);
- Changes in the relationship between spheres of life are caused by shifts in the individual’s priorities and weighting. Those shifts can be imposed from outside (flexible working time, etc.) and do not always depend on the individual;
- The aim of balancing is to maintain or enhance the quality of life in subjective dimension (satisfaction) and in objective dimension (health, career, successful private life). “The concept of balance is accordingly always charged in the direction of ‘the good life’, life equilibrium. At the
same time, the concept of balance presupposed its opposite: balance is not a matter: the normal state off affairs is imbalance and instability” (Hildebrandt 2006);
- The precondition for an individual achieving balance is the development of specific, personal competences in dealing with disequilibrium, flexibility and discontinuity” (Hildebrandt 2006).

Looking at Hildebrandt, research on the concept of WLB appears to be “legitimate” as a goal that individuals have to pursue in order to avoid role conflict. However, WLB seems to be a wrong metaphor. Indeed, the image of two scales in balance suggests that people need equal amounts of competing elements to create equilibrium (Friedman 2008). Moreover, it signifies trade offs: gaining in one area at the expense of another. Even if sometimes this might be true, thinking this way is counterproductive and confuses people. “The best reward comes from integrating every area of your life rather than trading off between them” (Barsh and Granson, 2009).

3.4.2 Needs for changes in defining roles

As mentioned in the previous section (3.3.2.1Traditional Values), the persistence of traditional values and gender role stereotypes in the definition of women's roles might be the reason of role conflict. In general, tasks allocated primarily to women are typically lower in status than tasks allocated primarily to men and tend to be regarded as less desirable than men's work (Barnard 1981). Moreover, activities classified as women’s work tend to be seen as compulsory for women and undesirable for men (Fischer and Arnold, 1990). Nowadays, to deal with these conflicts, women have to make choices and create options in order to change those traditional gender roles: – less childcare and household responsibilities (Friedman 2000). Situations where women are supposed to take care of household activities after a day at work have to evolve towards greater equality. However, greater equality is required not only at home but also at work. Women should be able to reach top positions as men do. Being a mother should not be an obstacle for women's progress in the hierarchy. Employers should stop thinking that women will be less involved and available for the job because of their children or that it is not worth investing in women/mothers because they might leave their job at any time for family matters. Moreover, employers should be aware of the fact that women may be better adapted to jobs of the future. Indeed, success in the 21st century career will require the ability to handle ambiguity, to manage multiple-tasks simultaneously, to build networks of support at work and in the community. Women seem to be more skilled than men in those areas (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).
3.4.2.1 Support is Key

The factor that might significantly influence women’s life and help change their roles is support. Support comes from different sources such as family, partners and employers, and can take different forms: mental, financial, material etc. According to Friedman, women receive support from their partner under three primary conditions:
- When their support is needed to achieve important goals and value in life;
- When women deserve their support;
- When men are psychologically involved in family life.
However, those conditions are not exhaustive and can differ depending on the situations. For instance, a partner who is enacting a role that is traditionally reserved for women will make changes to his wife’s role. Therefore, she might be able to enact properly both her professional and family roles at the same time.

Ghilaine. T “Now, my children are old enough to help me with the household activities. But, I am missing talking to someone of my age which could understand what I feel about work, family etc… and support me”.

Ludivine. C “It is only thanks to my husband that it is possible for me to have a rich professional life and a rich private life. He is the one who has to do the things that I can’t do when I am at work. If my husband didn’t help with all the things that women are supposed to do, I could not have the job I have now”

Dominique. R “Even if my husband is not here to help me with the daily household activities, he tries as much as he can to help during his days off, and he is aware of the fact that family life would not be that smoothly if I would not make so much efforts: this is a sizeable mentally support”.

Support from the employer might also be very helpful. “Employers must strike to create a work environment that promotes integration by respecting the whole person and allowing for flexibility” (Greenhaus 2000). Family Friendly Companies seem to be a good example of win/win situations between employers and employees. The principles of such companies are simple, they offer: program and policies for flexitime; telecommuting; job sharing; childcare facilities; retirement planning; adoption assistance etc. Therefore, on the one hand the company is better “equipped” to deal with absenteeism, turnover, productivity losses and to attract and retrain talented employees and to build commitment. And the other hand, employees can manage their private and professional roles more easily. Moreover, employers should value what people bring
to their business roles from their other roles. Men and women face less conflict when they feel that their employers support their lives beyond work (Friedman 2000). However, even if employers provide support (e.g. childcare facilities) that might influence employees’ private life, boundaries between work and family must remain. It is essential that individuals protect one role from the interference of another and act in a way that is appropriate to the role they are in at the time.

In reality…

Ludivine. C “From 8 AM to 8 PM I’m a director. Of course I think about my family sometimes but I don’t show it. I think my personal life is no-one else’s business. I am a director, my role is to make the business work; my personal life must never interfere with my job. But inversely even if once I get home, I’m no longer a director; problems from work are still with me and I need to talk about it”.

Ghislaine. T “I don’t compartmentalize my work from my private life and I don’t want to. I can bring my problems from home to work and vice versa. In my company we know that people are not robots and that we have strengths and weaknesses. So, we leave space for discussion, it does not matter if the topic is personal or private. We also help people with personal problems by giving them less work for example. In our case, work can help the person to feel better at home thanks to the support from colleagues. But this is specific to our company and I guess it is not the same everywhere”.

Dominique. R “The only think I can say is that my children always complain about the fact that work is always why family dinners turn wrong”.

To conclude, in order to enable women to fulfil properly their roles at work, their roles at home must evolve from traditional to modern. Support from family, partners and employers might help, by providing facilities, and extra time etc. Nevertheless, when it comes to boundaries, literature and empirical finding disagree. The reason for this might be that every woman, family and company have their specificities and one cannot generalise.

3.4.3 Shaping Life Role Priorities

A life role priority is a measurement of the relative priority or focus attached to work, family and other roles. Greenhaus (2000) distinguishes four different groups:

- Career: people whose careers are clearly the centre of their lives. In general, women do not often fall in this category.
- Family: people whose life role priority focuses on the family.
In these two groups, people restrict their involvement in either family or work in order to anticipate and avoid role conflict. They resolve the dilemma by devoting substantial time to the role they hold to be the most important for their own happiness and fulfilment, and reducing involvement in other roles. Therefore family focused people focus on family and restrict their career commitment, while career-focused people do just the opposite (Friedman, 2000).

- Career and family: people who place about equal emphasis on the two domains as they juggle their work and family commitment. For them, work and family are essential to their self-identity, thus they focus on pursuing both roles with high intensity. Members of this group provide proof that it is possible to avoid role conflict while having a job and a family.

- Self-society: people for whom life role priority is neither career nor family but either themselves or society. Leisure or religious activities play the dominant role in their life.

Since the life role priority influences the choices that individuals make about their time and emotion management, it is important to understand how these priorities develop.

Firstly, it seems that demographic background such as country of citizenship, religion, race, political orientation, parent’s education and work experience do not distinguish people holding different life role priorities. However, gender and age do matter. For instance, women are more likely to be in the family focused group. Moreover, life role priorities should not be viewed as permanent characteristics of people that remain constant over time (Friedman, 2000). Indeed, changes in life circumstances may produce shifts in the level of involvement in career and family roles over individuals’ lifetime.

Secondly, personal values appear to have a huge influence. “What most strongly distinguishes each of us as members of a life role priority group is how we define and ultimately value success in our careers and in our lives” (Greenhaus and Friedman, 2000). Each individual has his or her own sets of values, which help her or him to make choices.

Finally, experiences at work are also related to life role priority. There is a connection between the kind of work people are experiencing and the importance that career plays in their life. For instance, if a woman is passionate about her job and appreciates her colleagues she might probably be part of the career focused or family and career focused group.

Setting life role priorities allow individuals to make choices about their life, to understand and to assume why they are making those choices, and finally to adapt their behaviour in harmony with their choices.

Ghislain.T “Now, as I have made it clear to my boss, that my family is my priority, I don’t have so much role conflict any more, family roles will always come first. The fact that I am not ambitious helps. Even if
tomorrow my boss were to offer me a promotion I would say no, knowing that my priorities would not be in line with this promotion”

Ludivine.C “I am very passionate about my job and very curious, so even during the holidays I have to check out things about work. I have also made the choice to work till 20h and to not stay at home on Wednesday afternoons that does not mean that I don’t love my son. But simply that I divide my time in order to get happiness from both sides of my life”.

Dominique. R “Sometimes, I have the feeling that I am sitting between two chairs. Till today, my priority was to make the business works but now I’m wondering if it would not be time to get a bit away from work and to make the family on the first plan. I don’t want to have regret about the time I would not have spent with my child”.

Role life priority must make sense to the individual. Barsh and Cranston (2009) state that meaning is what inspires “women leaders, guides their careers, their lives, sustains their optimism, generates positive emotions and enables them to lead in creative and profound ways”. Therefore, meaning appears to be a source of motivation. And once people recognize what is meaningful to them, “they can marshal all their talents and capabilities for greater achievement and joy”. Indeed, people will expend efforts when what they do makes them happy. Besides, studies have shown that happiness improves physical health as well as stamina and resilience, which can be a source of energy for women who are actually looking for it. However, it is important to specify that when Barsh and Cranston talk about happiness they are not talking about being cheerful and up beat. Happiness, which comes from meaningful choices about family and work, is deeper and more sustaining. Meaningful choices go hand in hand with “engagement” and “purpose”, involvement in a mission you believe in.

Finally, Rudermanand and Ohlott (2006) point out that “we all have our limits, and taking on too much can become stressful”. When individuals set their priorities they have to be aware of their limits and also of the fact that some research14 suggests that the “roles we play in our private lives can greatly enhance both our personal well-being and our effectiveness in the workplace”. Little involvement in family roles does not seem to be the only solution to fulfil professional roles better. Indeed, people who are able to see the divide between work and life as a channel rather

14 Source: Research conducted at the Center for Creative leadership (CCL) with practising managers (2004).
than a conflict will find that each side of their life “is filled with experiences that enrich and enliven the other” (Barsh and Cranston, 2009).

3.4.4 A matter of Resources, Involvement and Emotional Gratification

According to Friedman and Greenhaus (2000), it is possible to avoid role conflict if individuals manage three key components efficiently.

The first one is “resources”, which “is a supply of support or aid that helps to make people more capable of dealing with a situation or meeting a new difficulty”. Resources have different forms and can be more or less tangible: time, money, information, acceptance and self-esteem. People can find them at work and in their family. The principle is simple, “the resources provided within one role enables people to be more available, competent and to experience greater satisfaction in their other roles ” (Friedman and Greehauss, 2000). Therefore, as resources in one role can affect behaviour and feelings in the other roles, an abundance of them promotes work and family harmony.

The second one is “involvement” and refers to the time and psychological energy people devote to their various roles. Balanced involvement in both domains is a more likely source of possible avoidance of role conflict because people are more capable of applying the resources derived from one role to another. For instance, achieving success in a highly meaningful role is a powerful source of self-esteem, which can then be transferred to another role.

The last component is “emotional gratification”. In people's roles at work, emotional gratification is what they feel when they are satisfied with their jobs and careers. In their family roles, it is when they experience satisfaction with family life, when important social and emotional needs, values and goals are met at home. And the level of emotional gratification that people experience in one role directly affects the level in their other roles. However, the concept of emotional gratification is double-edged because where positive emotions can be transferred from one role to another, this is also true of negative emotions. For instance, dissatisfaction at work can cause frustration and stress at home.

To conclude, the fact that experiences and choices in one role affect the outcomes in another role should be seen as an opportunity for people to make the most of the benefits from one role to properly fulfil the others.
3.4.5 Better Professional Roles for a Better Life

In contrast to the concepts above, this part focuses on women’s roles at work and how improving their enactment might impact positively on their roles at home. Instead of focusing on family roles to achieve harmony between work and family, it would be interesting to focus on their roles at work.

Indeed, in the last twenty years, the field of study on work and family has expanded from including only researchers from “child development and organizational psychology” to labour economics law, business strategy, public policy, and international strategy” (Friedman 2008).

Friedman (2008) believes in the idea that by becoming better leaders, men and women can enjoy better lives. The idea emerged from two traditionally separate fields: the study of leadership and the study of how individuals can find harmony among the different parts of their lives. For him, leaders mobilize people towards values and goals, and if they can do it at work they can definitely do it within their families, communities etc. Friedman elaborates a concept which is based on three characteristics that should be typical of a leader:

- Real: the principle of being real, of acting with authenticity is “to know what you care about and then do your best to be true to these values and aspiration” (Friedman 2008, p 29). By making clear what matters to them, people should be able to identify gaps between what they value, how they are in their lives and how they interact with people they care the most about. Thanks to this identification, leaders might be able to realize which meaningful changes they should introduce. Clarifying what is essential “enhances your sense of authenticity, of being who you want to be. You can control and create for yourself a life where you do not always have to trade success and satisfaction in one domain for success and satisfaction in another” (Friedman 2008, p 69”). Therefore, if people use their authenticity (meaning that their values are aligned with their actions) to lead, it will be easier to get support from the important people in their lives.

- Whole: the principle of being whole, of acting with integrity is “to live a life in which all the parts are integrated in a way that makes sense and has coherence. The whole fits together elegantly” (Friedman 2008, p 73). However, recognizing and respecting all facets of life, does not mean removing boundaries between them, but “enabling productive effort in each domain while taking advantages of resources from one by applying it in others” (Friedman 2008, p78). In order to recognized and respect all facets of their lives, leaders have to know what other people expect from them and what they in turn expect from other people. Through exchanges about expectations leaders might see more clearly how their performance in one domain affects their performance in another. Consequently, it might be possible to elaborate a common ground.
Innovative: The principle of being innovative, of acting with creativity is “to adapt to new circumstances with confidence” (Friedman 2008, p 121). Changes to something new can take different forms: - “experiment’s action can take place in one domain and have indirect benefits in other domains”(Friedman 2008, p 123). For instance, changing jobs can improve an individual’s self esteem and maybe also improve his or her role within the family.
- “it can occur in multiple domains simultaneously and have direct impact on all of them”(Friedman 2008, p 123). For example, a mother trains with her daughter for a marathon that raises funds for her company. However, these experiments/changes do not have to be massive. Friedman (2008) states that the best experiments are those which provide an opportunity to try new ways to getting things done while minimizing the inevitable risk associated to changes. According to Friedman, by favouring their authenticity, integrity and creativity, leaders acquire greater focus and commitment which maximizes their chances for harmony in their different roles.

However, Friedman, Greenhauss, Barsh and Craston are not the only authors who think that women’s role conflict might be avoid by bringing to the work context new elements or ways to lead. Eagly and Carli (2007) elaborate different actions that should be implemented in order to improve women’s roles at work. But firstly, they (2007) highlight the fact that even if governments implement and enforce anti-discrimination legislation that require organizations to eliminate inequitable practices, “analysis of discrimination cases that have gone to court has shown that legal remedies can be elusive when gender inequality results from norms embedded in organizational structure and culture”. Therefore, according to them, the most effective approach is “to attack its many roots simultaneously”, by fighting at the same time for: - “Changing the long-hours norm”: “hours spent at work” should no longer be the prime indicator of someone’s worth to the organization. Productivity should be the focus, therefore women with family demands who work less hours but who are highly productive will be rewarded and encouraged.
- “Reducing the subjectivity of performance evaluation”: “To ensure fairness, criteria should be explicit and evaluation processes designed to limit the influence of decision makers who have conscious and unconscious biases”.
- “Avoiding having a sole female member of any team”: when there are many women in the same company, top management tends to divide them among many projects in order to introduce diversity to them all. But several studies have found that, outnumbered in this way, the women tend to be ignored by the men. When women are victims of ignorance their self-esteem is very low and might cause role conflicts.
- “Establish family-friendly human resources practices”: these may include flexi-time, job sharing,
telecommuting, elder care provisions, adoption benefits, dependent child care options, and employee-sponsored on-site child care (see section 3.4.2 Needs for changes in defining roles).

- “Allow employees who have significant parental responsibility more time to prove themselves worthy of promotion”: Rapidity should not be the only criteria to achieving top positions. Many women are capable of reaching that level of achievement; they just need extra time to get there, if they have many family commitments.

Early and Carli state that individually those changes have been shown to make a difference. Therefore, “collectively, we believe, they can make all the difference” (2007).

To conclude, according to the literature, there are ways of avoiding role conflict between work and family. The first action that must be done is to update women’s role by instituting more egalitarian values and norms. In order to do this, every individual who interacts with women must provide support. Researchers also underline the fact that women should transfer the benefits that they obtain in one role to their other roles. Finally, by improving the general work environment women are in and the functions they have at work, role conflict might be minimized or even uprooted.
CHAPTER 4:

CONCLUSION
4. Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated to the conclusion. It is now time to wrap up all the concepts, theories and findings, which are analysed in my thesis and to form a conclusion. First of all, I think it is essential to remind the reader of my specific research question: When and why do role conflicts occur in women’s lives?

I also have secondary questions that guided this research:

(1) What is a role?
(2) How do roles affect women’s lives?
(3) In which ways could women cope or deal with role conflicts?

Throughout this conclusion I will answer each of these questions.

Even if I consider that the notion of “role” is impossible to define, the process from where roles are elaborated is essential to understanding women’s roles. Norms, status, gender roles and stereotypes appear to be the main elements which explain roles and why women, rather than men, have to take of children for instance. Each role that women have to fulfil has its own set of expectations, from the woman herself and from others. Therefore, those expectations will influence and in some cases determine women's behaviour and emotions.

However, as there are as many expectations as there are roles, there is every chance expectations and roles will conflict, presenting women with many challenges. When I refer to conflicting roles that women might have, I mean that they cannot properly fulfil the different roles at the same time. Those role conflicts can occur within the same domain for example family, but the focus of my topic lies with conflicts between their roles at work and those at home (family). According to the literature and the empirical findings I have analysed, different questions of “why and when” rise. Firstly the fact that traditional definitions of women's roles at home and at work persist despite the fact that their situation and place in society have considerably evolved. Therefore, their priorities and behaviour are already shaped by old-fashioned values and when they want to escape from this archetype either at home or at work they will be confronted with role conflicts because their environment is not adapted. The second explanation in my thesis shows theory disagrees with practise. Indeed according to literature, time does not matter so much regarding role conflict while the three interview participants stated that lack of time was the major problem. My regret about not having done enough interviews to get more outcomes from empirical findings is even more intense in this situation. When the articles and books claim that time is just a question of organization, my respondents claim that “you can have the best organization you want it does not create time”. The last reason lies with the concept of
involvement and how by giving too much in one role, the other roles may be “neglected”. The lack of “psychological availability” that women might show in one role, illustrates how roles from one domain might “negatively” interfere with others.

It would appear role conflict is a reality in women’s lives. The further we progress through the twenty first century and its new values, the greater the need to take action to manage the gap between what women should do, can do and might do.

My findings about how women might cope with role conflicts in order to avoid them, is where theory and practise disagree for the second time in my thesis and my regret about the small number of interviews arises again. But at the same time, my respondents did not fully agree with each other either. The first claimed she doesn’t experience so much role conflict because her family is her priority and that she is lucky to have a high level position, which does not require too much work on top of regular working hours. The second participant states that women have to make choices between all their roles in order to avoid role conflict. For her it is clearly impossible to fulfil roles in both domains if you want to do them right. She is therefore thinking about leaving her job to dedicate herself to the home. She does not want to have regret being fully involved in the education of her children. The last participant reflects theories from literature and states that a large part of the role conflicts that might occur, are avoided thanks to the support of her husband. Moreover, in contrast to the two other women, she places equal value on family and professional roles. In addition to the notion of support from partners, family and employers, literature recommends different ways to take action. It is clearly necessary to change the traditional roles and expectations of women at home and at work and adopt a more contemporary approach that would notably include concerns and issues of today's society. For instance, by promoting even more the parity between men and women. Besides this, a number of researchers highlight the fact that one way to avoid role conflict is to focus on the roles and expectations that women have at work. The general idea is to improve their ability to fulfil their role at work, in order to gain time and availability. This would in turn develop happiness, fulfilment and empowerment through their work. The last possibility is to see the relationship between work and family roles as a channel and to transfer benefits from one role to others. For instance, a female leader who has high self esteem and gratification thanks to work should transfer those feeling to the roles she has to enact at home in order to feel content in both domains.

It could be argued that this is easier said than done, but it seems that some of these suggestions might actually work.
To conclude, as every woman has her own personality, family, job, environment and priorities, it is impossible to give an exhaustive list of what women should do to avoid role conflict. However, my research has shown that governments, institutions and organizations should help in the process of changing women's roles by promoting more egalitarian and modern values. If women are still willing to invest, the rest should follow.
CHAPTER 5:

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
5. Suggestions for Further Research

At the beginning of my thesis it was very difficult to narrow down the topic because there were so many interesting aspects, but which cannot all be covered in a master's thesis. This section puts forward some suggestions of further research:

- Role conflicts between work and family from a male perspective. Such problems are not limited to women and it would be interesting to consider men's coping strategies.

- Role conflicts between different roles within a company with a focus on leaders. In addition to the role of leader, leaders also have different roles such as manager, colleague and member of a team. Further study could look at how these roles interact with each other.

- Conflict about the values that each role promotes. For instance, with the current economic context, young graduates tend to accept the first job opportunity that a company may offer without closely considering the company’s values. Therefore, in some cases, individuals might find themselves faced with values they don't believe in, and feel forced to compromise in order to keep their jobs.
CHAPTER 6:

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CHAPTER 7:

APPENDIX
7. Appendix

7.1 Interview Templates

1) What do you understand by a woman’s role?

2) Where do you think these roles come from?

3) What do you consider a role conflict?

4) Do you think that you really have two distinct roles (work/family) in your life?

5) Do you think that these two roles are compatible?

6) Do you feel “psychologically available” once you come home?

7) Does the gratification you receive at work influence your “mood/welfare” at home?

8) It is possible to really compartmentalize work from home life? Do you forget about work issues when you leave work? Do you think about family issues while at work?

9) If so, how do you manage this? Do you have any advice or tips?

10) Have you already felt that you missed out on a promotion because of your personal life? (because of pregnancy for example).

   - When you decided to have children, did you think that your job was going to be a problem?
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